

**SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE: A  
SELF-STUDY OF A HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

**BY**

**SIZAKELE CHARMAINE MLAMBO**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE**

**OF**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION-TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT (TEPD)**

**IN THE**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
EDGEWOOD CAMPUS  
DURBAN**

**DATE: MARCH 2012**

**SUPERVISOR: DR. KATHLEEN PITHOUSE-MORGAN**

## ABSTRACT

In this personal history self-study research I have reconstructed and re-examined my past and current educational experiences in order to find out what effective strategies can I employ to support collaborative teacher learning as a Head of Department (HoD) in my school's Foundation Phase. My personal history self-study research is influenced by the theoretical perspective that learning is socially and culturally constructed. I am the main participant researcher who has also drawn on input from three female critical friends. For the data production process, I employed the qualitative methods of journal writing, written narrative descriptions, memory drawings and artefact retrieval of photographs and reports. From these data sources, I recalled and reflected on my lived experiences of my own educational journey. Next, I re-examined and interpreted my personal history to identify four significant themes: (1) the need for mentoring, (2) the value of peer teaching and learning, (3) the role of team teaching and (4) the importance of the learning environment. From these themes, four principles were developed to guide my practice. I consider these principles as part of giving deeper meaning to my educational experiences in order to inform my future practice as a HoD. Therefore, my personal history self-study research suggests that significant learning can be constructed from our lived experiences to inform our future practice and learning.

## DECLARATION

I, **Sizakele Charmaine Mlambo**, do hereby declare that:

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation is my original work, except where otherwise indicated.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at any other university.
- (iii) The dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- (iv) The dissertation does not contain other person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - (a) Their words have been paraphrased, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
  - (b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and completely referenced.
- (v) This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from online facilities, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the reference section.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation is submitted with / without my approval.

.....  
Dr. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Date: .....

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanking the Lord Almighty for his guidance as I undertook this voyage of my study. I would sincerely like to express my gratitude and my appreciation to my Supervisor, Dr. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan from the School of Education and Development, for her continued support and guidance. A special thank you to my critical friends for their support. A special word of gratitude to my family, my extended family and friends for their inspiration and motivation throughout my study.

## **ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

<b>ANA-</b>	<b>ANNUAL NATIONAL STATEMENT</b>
<b>BA-</b>	<b>BACHELOR OF ARTS</b>
<b>BEd. Hons-</b>	<b>BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (HONOURS)</b>
<b>CAPS-</b>	<b>CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT</b>
<b>FFL-</b>	<b>FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING</b>
<b>FP-</b>	<b>FOUNDATION PHASE</b>
<b>HoD-</b>	<b>HEAD of DEPARTMENT</b>
<b>MEd-</b>	<b>MASTER OF EDUCATION</b>
<b>NCS-</b>	<b>NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT</b>
<b>OBE-</b>	<b>OUTCOME BASED EDUCATION</b>
<b>RNCS-</b>	<b>REVISED NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT</b>
<b>SSA-</b>	<b>SUBSTANDARD A</b>
<b>SSB-</b>	<b>SUBSTANDARD B</b>
<b>SMT-</b>	<b>SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM</b>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING MY PERSONAL HISTORY SELF-STUDY: NOT JUST EXPERIENCES, BUT MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Focus and purpose of the study</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Rationale and theoretical basis for the study</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key Research Questions</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Methodological Approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY: THE ROUTE THAT I HAVE FOLLOWED</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Research participants</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Data production methods</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Data representation and interpretation</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Limitations and challenges of the study</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Trustworthiness</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Ethical Issues</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: ONCE UPON A TIME: THE VOYAGE OF MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>17</b>

<b>My lived experiences of teaching and learning</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: POSITIONING MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES INTO SENSIBLE INTERPRETATION</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>The value of peer teaching and learning</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>The role of team teaching</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>The need for mentoring</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>The importance of the learning environment</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: MOVING FROM REFLECTION TO PRACTICE</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>A reflective review of the study</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Recommendations based on the study</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: Foundation Phase Lesson Plan Template (Mathematics)</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Consent letter: Critical friends</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Consent letter: Principal</b>	<b>80</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	CAPTION	PAGE
FIGURE 3.1	“My living space in a township”: A memory drawing of my township	19
FIGURE 3.2	“Where it all began”: A photograph of my primary school buildings	20
FIGURE 3.3	“Sleepy teacher in a noisy classroom”: A memory drawing of my primary school teacher	22
FIGURE 3.4	‘Sounds’ under a tree”: A memory drawing of learning and teaching happening at my home	23
FIGURE 3.5	“Nobody taught me what the library was for”: A photograph of me in front of my schools’ office and library	25
FIGURE 3.6	“Many heads are better than one”: A memory drawing of a small group of students in a high school class	26
FIGURE 3.7	“My warm learning space”: A photograph of me at my college of education	28
FIGURE 3.8	“My stimulating and inspiring report”: A copy of my progress report from the in-service training course	34
FIGURE 3.9	“My high-quality results”: A copy of my HoD course results	35
FIGURE 3.10	“Young but inspired manager”: A photograph of me at my current primary school	37
FIGURE 3.11	“My current teaching environment”: A photograph of my colleagues with learners during assembly	38
FIGURE 3.12	“From classrooms to lecture halls”: A photograph of my university campus	41
FIGURE 3.13	“Interaction at its best”: A memory drawing of my group supervision meeting with our supervisor	45



**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCING MY PERSONAL HISTORY SELF-STUDY: NOT JUST**  
**EXPERIENCES, BUT MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES**

**Introduction**

In this personal history self-study research, I re-examine my own educational experiences to explore how I can effectively support collaborative teacher learning through my practice as Foundation Phase Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. In this chapter (Chapter One), I describe the focus and purpose of my study and explain the rationale and theoretical foundation for the study. I also clarify the research questions that direct my research and briefly describe the methodological approach that frames this study. At the end of Chapter One, I provide a detailed explanation of how the dissertation is structured. As is common practice in self-study research (for example, Makhanya, 2010; Pithouse, 2007) I will integrate my discussion of relevant literature throughout my dissertation, and therefore there will be no specific chapter assigned for literature review.

**Focus and purpose of the study**

The focus of this study is on supporting collaborative teacher learning in the Foundation Phase (FP) that is, reception class to Grade three. The purpose of this personal history self-study research is to explore how I can learn from my own lived educational experiences to better support collaborative learning through my own practice as Foundation Phase Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. According to Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004, p. 909), “personal history research [involves examining how] historical or life experiences [are] related to personal and professional meaning making for teachers and researchers”. Therefore, to achieve my purpose, I will explore my past and present experiences of collaborative learning in order to better understand my different perspectives on and interpretations of collaborative teacher learning. In addition, I will consider how I can use this deeper understanding of my past and present experiences to improve my day-to-day practice to support collaborative teacher learning in my school.

### **Rationale and theoretical basis for the study**

It cannot be disputed that post-apartheid South Africa has experienced exceptional political transformation (Johnson, Monk & Hodges, 2000) aimed at addressing the inequalities of the past to bring about change, especially in the education system. Therefore, since April 1994, the National Department of Education has introduced a number of curriculum policies aimed at transforming education in South Africa (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002). This began with the implementation of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), which was introduced in 1997 from Grade R to Grade nine. Then a Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) came into existence in 2002. Next was the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), incorporating Foundations for Learning (FFL) (Department of Education, 2009) and currently there is the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) being introduced in 2012. However, I have observed that these curriculum changes have happened without a comprehensive programme of teacher training where teachers can share their individual concerns about their past and current teaching practices. This lack of effective support for teachers to engage with post-apartheid curriculum change is also highlighted by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2009).

Therefore, confusion among teachers has mounted as they have faced various challenges in the implementation of the various curriculum policies. Teachers have experienced dilemmas in putting the theory into practice and have had to overcome many challenges and obstacles in dealing with the task of familiarising themselves with the new concepts and approaches required (Department of Education, 2009).

Thus, as part of my Master of Education (MEd) coursework in 2010, I conducted a small scale study that explored the learning of experienced teachers in the Foundation Phase in the context of the curriculum transformation. For this study, I interviewed two experienced Foundation Phase teachers from my school. One of the findings was that these teachers learn best when they work together with each other, formally or informally. In addition, I found that the once-off workshops organised by the Department of Education and facilitated by the Subject Advisors do not address the challenges and obstacles that teachers face with regards to the implementation of the prescribed curriculum. During the interviews, the teachers also mentioned that they learn best by sharing information through networking and interaction

with other teachers. Similarly, Evans (2002) explains that even if teachers do not benefit from the content of a workshop, conversations with other colleagues attending the workshop might be helpful.

As a HoD, I am obliged to support my colleagues in their teaching roles and to encourage ongoing teacher learning by maintaining up-to-date knowledge of developments in education. However, once-off workshops are generally ineffective in changing teachers' practice (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2008). For learning and teaching to be effective, it is vital that I, as a HoD, understand how to maintain and support meaningful teacher learning. Hence, I want to explore how I can enhance my practice by supporting collaborative teacher learning in my school.

Thus, the key concept that underpins my study is *teacher learning*. Middlewood, Parker and Beere (as cited in Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & Mckinney, 2007, p. 156) define teacher learning as a “process of self-development leading to personal growth as well as development of skills and knowledge that facilitates the education of young people”. These opportunities for self-development and personal growth can take place in schools, outside of schools through professional development workshops often facilitated by Subject Advisors from the Department of Education, and can also take place through formal courses in which teachers enroll to improve their qualifications. Thus, teacher learning can be formal or informal and planned or unplanned in schools or outside schools; can also take place through networking with other teachers from other schools (Fraser et al., 2007). These kinds of teacher learning may also often be driven by teachers themselves when responding to their own professional development needs.

The theoretical perspective that informs my personal history self-study is the *socio-cultural perspective* (Kelly, 2006). I am working from an understanding that as Butler, Lauscher, Selinger and Beckingham (2004, p. 438) explain, “individuals do not construct knowledge in a vacuum, their construction of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and skills are socially and culturally constructed”. This perspective acknowledges that cultural and social contexts play a vital role in teacher learning. Learning is understood as social because it happens through

experience and practice. “A socio-cultural interpretation of teacher learning and change ...is one that relies upon the assumption of individual autonomy within an environment characterized by collaborative, collective decision-making” (Fraser et al. 2007, p. 166). Likewise, Steyn (2011) contends that team work can enhance learning. In addition, Kelly (2006, p. 509) argues that “teachers construct their own knowledge base for teaching, in their own particular circumstances” and that, because learning happens through social participation, teachers learn best when they “have an active relationship” with one another and with what they are learning. Thus, this perspective supports the finding from my small scale study that teachers find it helpful to learn through sharing information, networking and interacting with other teachers. Similarly, Wenger (1998) believes that learning takes place through social participation.

In my view, collaborative learning means that groups of teachers work together locally, within schools or in cluster meetings, to develop new ways of teaching. In collaborative teacher learning, teachers share and reflect on other’s practices and experiences by talking, collaborating, observing and sharing resources (Knight, 2001). Thus, this learning can positively shape individuals’ opportunities to learn from their work with others and the interaction can trigger learning. As Meirink, Imants, Meijer and Verloop (2010, p. 161) claim, “teacher collaboration generally is regarded as a positive condition for teacher learning”. Hence, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DOHET) (2011, p. 49) has gazetted seven collective roles of teachers in a school which should be “understood as everyday functions of the collective of all educators at a school”. Significantly, these collective roles include the role of the teacher as “scholar, researcher and lifelong learner” (p. 49). Therefore, the DOHET (2011) has recognised that “ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth” (p. 52) is a collective process. The DOHET (2011) also highlights teachers’ collective responsibility to “respond to the educational and other needs of ...fellow educators” and to “develop supportive relations...based on a critical understanding of community” ( p. 53).

### **Key research questions**

The first key research question that I address in this research is: *What are my past and present experiences of collaborative learning?* Responding to this question allows me to gain insight into the influence of my lived experience on my perspectives on and practices of supporting collaborative teacher learning. It also allows me to reflect critically on these perspectives and practices.

The second research question that underpins this study is: *How can I learn from my experiences in order to support collaborative teacher learning in my day-to-day practice as a HoD?* To respond to this question, I re-examine and interpret my past and present educational experiences to establish themes, which I have shared constructively with my critical friends (see Chapter Two). From those themes, I develop principles to guide me as I endeavour to expand my day-to-day practice to support collaborative teacher learning as a Foundation Phase HoD in my school.

### **Methodological approach**

Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004, p. 905) describe personal history self-study as “an essential methodology towards teacher educators’ personal and professional growth and especially to improving their teaching practice”. Furthermore, Samaras et al. (2004, p. 907) contend that “personal history self-study enhances teachers’ personal and professional development”. Thus, through my personal history self-study research, my significant educational life events are reconstructed and reviewed to give meaning to my current experiences in order to improve my practice. Self-study methodology is differentiated from other research methodologies since it studies the self of the researcher with the intent of improving her or his own practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Loughran (2007, p.16) maintains that “self-study certainly has established methodological expectations that, when carefully and appropriately applied, illustrate the hallmarks of quality research”. Thus, a personal history self-study employs a wide variety of qualitative methods (Samaras et al., 2004) (see Chapter Two for detailed discussions of methods used). According to Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), self-study research does not mean working in isolation. Hence, I have also worked with three critical

friends (see, Chapter Two) who have offered constructive criticism and feedback on my research during our planned meetings.

In planning my personal history-self study, I have drawn on the interpretive theory of knowledge. As Merriam (1998, p. 38) asserts, the researcher developing an interpretive study “gathers as much information about the problem with the intent of analysing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon”. Additionally, Henze, van Driel and Verloop (2009, p. 187) contend, “qualitative or interpretative approaches in educational research inquire into the process of teaching and learning, primarily from the perspectives of the teachers”. Hence, I reflect on my own past and present experiences in order to better understand how I can improve my practice by supporting collaborative teacher learning.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shared my reasons for undertaking this personal history self-study. I have explained the main phenomenon that I will be addressing through this study, as well as my main aim which is to look at how I can better support collaborative teacher learning through my own practice as a Foundation Phase Head of Department. I have also discussed how this research emanated from the small scale-study which I did in 2010 as a first year Master’s student. I have explained the two key research questions that underpin my study and I have given a brief introduction to my methodological approach.

In Chapter Two, I discuss my methodological approach, which is a personal history self-study of educational practice. I also explain my role as the main participant and how I have drawn on my critical friends’ independent thoughts and constructive criticisms about my study. Furthermore, I clarify the data generation process and give details of the methods that have been employed in my personal history self-study. I also consider the limitations of the study, trustworthiness and validity and lastly, ethical issues.

My real journey begins in Chapter Three, where I give a detailed account of my educational experiences, from my primary school experiences, through to my experiences as a lifelong



learner in different universities. Through this account, I respond to my first key research question.

In Chapter Four, I address my second key research question. I identify and discuss themes which have emerged from my personal history as presented in Chapter Three. From those significant themes, I formulate principles which can serve as guidelines for the improvement of my day-to-day practice as a HoD.

Finally, Chapter Five is the concluding chapter, where I give a reflective review of my study and also make recommendations based on my personal history self-study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY: THE ROUTE THAT I HAVE FOLLOWED**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this personal history self-study is to re-examine and interpret my past and present educational experiences with the intention of improving my practice as a Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. In the previous chapter (Chapter One), I discussed my main reasons for doing this study. The focus and purpose of the study, the critical research questions and a brief description of the methodological and theoretical approaches reinforcing my study were also presented in Chapter One. Towards the end, I provided an overview of my study.

In this chapter, I give an account of my personal history self-study research process. I introduce the research participants (myself and my critical friends). Furthermore, I discuss the methodological approach that I have chosen and also give detailed descriptions of the data production methods which have been employed in my study. Thereafter, I examine my procedure of data representation, as well as coding and interpretation. Finally, I explore the limitations and challenges of my study, trustworthiness and ethical issues.

#### **Research participants**

I am the main participant in my personal history as I am studying my own educational experiences. However, as Samaras, Hicks and Berger, (2004, p. 910) point out, “the self-studier does not travel the road alone”. Personal history self-study is interactive since it requires collaboration with others in the practice and with texts (relevant literature) to expand interpretations and gain diverse perspectives (Samaras et al., 2004). Therefore, I have worked together with three critical friends, Ann, Lungi and Thandi (pseudonyms) who are all experienced female primary school Heads of Department in their respective schools and are my fellow Masters’ students, also doing personal history self-study research into different aspects of teacher learning. Costa and Kallick (1993, p. 50) define a critical friend as “a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend”. Likewise, Samaras et al. (2004, p. 910) believe that “personal history self-study entails the opportunity to disrobe, unveil, and engage in a soul-searching truth about the self while also engaging in critical conversations, and most importantly, continuing to discover the alternative viewpoints of others”.

Costa and Kallick (1993) believe that a critical friend should dedicate her/his time in order to comprehend the friends' perspectives on her/his work. As critical friends, we met every second week for about a year for almost one hour 30 minutes per meeting. Our meeting place was a university boardroom, which is a comfortable room with a stylish table and attractive chairs. In our meetings, we constructively critiqued each other's work and shared our thoughts, feelings and offered criticism and feedback where necessary. Our shared supervisor was present for many, but not all, of these meetings. Through our critical friends' meetings, we shared our experiences by reading each other's work and gave constructive contributions. For example, in one of our critical friends' session, Ann commented:

*“Siza, I have noticed that in your paper you have written number symbols in some numbers which are less than ten. You must always ensure that you do not write number symbols, but instead, write number names. And also, in your past educational experience, you mentioned that the Grade Two classroom had dirty books. How did you feel about that?”*

The comment made by my critical friend about the books evoked memories of sadness when I thought deeply about the learning environment that was not inspiring. This made me more aware of the importance of the learning environment (as discussed in Chapter Four).

### **Data production methods**

The self-study methodology employs a variety of techniques which can be utilised to collect data. Therefore, a personal history self-study can employ “a wide variety of qualitative methods ... e.g., narratives, journaling ... memory work, education-related life-stories, interviews, and multiple forms of artistic expression such as drawing, photography, poetry, and artistic installations” (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 912).

In this study, I have used qualitative research methods to produce and interpret data. My study is a personal history self-study of my educational journey from my primary school, to my high school, to my college of education, my experiences as a novice teacher, as a Head of Department and lastly as a lifelong learner in different universities. The use of a variety of methods enables self-study researchers to examine their selves and personal experience from a range of perspectives (LaBoskey, 2004). My data production methods are described at length as follows:

### ***Journal writing***

In 2009, whilst doing a module about Mentoring in Schools, I heard about journal writing for the first time in my entire educational life. However, since it was a short course, I could not clearly comprehend exactly what, when and how to use a journal. Fortunately, whilst conducting this personal history self-study, I have clearly been exposed to reflective journal writing because during our supervision meetings it was discussed in detail. I now realise that in a journal, one can write daily in response to one's life experiences and events. Moreover, Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009, p. 123) define a journal as, "a writing tool that offers a place for writers to expose their personal feelings and perspectives". Likewise, Varathaiah (2010, p. 16) is of the opinion that "journals ... provide a space for [people] to reflect, to record experience and to organise and clarify [their] thoughts".

Through my journal, I uncovered and produced knowledge of my personal history because I reflected on my thoughts and feelings (see Chapter Three) about my past and present educational experiences which related to collaborative teacher learning. In all my daily entries, I made a note of the date and time. Writing in my journal sometimes brought back memories which made me become very emotional. I sometimes stopped writing and opted for a short break to cool myself down. I remember that whilst reminiscing about my primary school experiences, I became very emotional, because I recalled my Grade Two classroom which had insufficient desks (see details in Chapter Three). Immediately, I reflected in my journal:

*"Sometimes, it does not matter where and how a person learns. What matters is the result of successful learning"* (Siza, journal entry, August 9, 2011)

I ensured that I wrote every day. I carried my journal with me every where. During the night, I placed it on the headboard next to my bed. Sometimes, I woke up during the middle of the night and made an entry and recorded even the time when the entry was made. Making entries in my journal has opened other doors in my personal and professional learning because, since I started writing in it in August 2011, I have never stopped reflecting on my current experiences. I now record my feelings and thoughts about everything that happens in my school context, especially in the Foundation Phase.

### ***Memory drawing***

Memory drawings are used “as a method for recollecting, representing, and examining” (Pithouse, 2011, p. 38) significant memories on a particular topic. Thus, I created memory drawings of my significant past and current experiences of collaborative learning, for example, my Grade two teacher who was always somnolent (See Figure 3.3 in Chapter Three). Using memory drawings brought back memories that I never thought I would recall. Memory drawings presented in my personal history self-study made me realise that emotions, painful and negative, as well as positive feelings can be developed through drawing. Pithouse explains:

Because drawing as a method allows self-study researchers to look at their personal experience in detail and from different vantage points, it can prompt them to become more aware of, and reflexive (or thoughtful) about, their own viewpoints, feelings, and actions and of the possible impact of these viewpoints, feelings, and actions on themselves and others (Pithouse, 2011, p. 42).

Thus, my memory drawings have helped me to develop different perspectives on my personal history which I felt I had to share with my colleagues to enhance our learning.

During my years in the teacher training college, I was categorised as an artist because during an Art class, I could draw people, plants or shrubs. However, when I opted to use memory drawing as a method of data production, I became very sceptical because I thought that the drawings should be perfect. Nevertheless, after it was discussed in our supervision meeting that it was not about producing a perfect drawing, I then became relieved. Thereafter, I started to draw what was in my memory (see Figure 3.3, 3.4, 3.6 and 3.13. in Chapter Three)

### ***Artefact retrieval***

To achieve the purpose of my study, I also used the method of artefact retrieval. Artefacts are historical objects or sources that lead us to relate to the past in a different way to other forms of evidence. Through artefacts, interesting reflections and discussions about our learning experiences can be evoked.

As Allender and Manke (2004) maintain:

the study of artifacts reveals that the products that make up our material culture in general, including the day-to-day work of teaching and learning, embody the full

range of what is taking place in the world we live in, a world made up of individual selves. (p. 20)

What I have learnt about artefact retrieval is that artefacts are substantial in our lives. As Varathaiah (2010, p. 24) contends, “when we look for artefacts, we must remember that many of the artefacts hold a very emotional, sentimental and important significance in our lives”. She further claims that retrieving artefacts means recovering memoirs that have been ignored. Artefacts can bring back memories which can either be good or bad because “as real physical objects, artefacts carry with them social and historical narratives” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 50). Furthermore, “[artefacts] have the potential to evoke and carry with them autobiographical narratives” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 50).

For my personal history self-study, I have retrieved artefacts that include my photographs, as well as my in-service report and HoD course result. Before I did my study, I was not a person who used to take my family albums to look at photographs. I think it was because the moment I saw a photo of a family member who has passed on, I quickly became emotional. However, through this study, I have realised that I can learn from these photographs. Reflecting on my reports, both the in-service report from facilitators (see Figure 3.8, Chapter Three) and my Head of Department course result (see Figure 3.9, Chapter Three), I just saw a great need for the Department of Basic Education to bring back all those courses or in-service training workshops which took the whole week and not these one-day or three hour workshops which are planned for professional development nowadays. My results stimulated my confidence because I now realise that positive results can enhance effective teaching and learning.

### ***Written narrative descriptions***

I explained my memory drawings and artefacts by means of written narrative descriptions in order to give more detail about the lived experiences portrayed in and evoked by my drawings and artefacts. Written narrative descriptions were employed by Derry (as cited by Pithouse, 2011, p. 38), who combined her memory drawings with narrative descriptions in order to generate more data on her research topic. Recalling some of my educational experiences was very hurtful but some brought back joyful memories. An example of a written narrative descriptions reflected in Chapter Three is where I described my memory drawing of the township I grew up in (see Figure 3.1, p. 3).

All my written narrative descriptions were recorded in my journal. Reminiscing about my historical and current significant educational experiences gave me ideas about how I can improve myself and my practice.

### **Data representation and interpretation**

Chapter Three of my study represents data that addresses my first key research question: *What are my past and present experiences of collaborative learning?* As explained above, the methods which I used in producing the data were reflective journal writing, written narrative descriptions, memory drawings and artefact retrieval of photographs and reports. In my journal entries, I wrote all my daily reflections about my personal and professional experiences relating to my study. Some of my daily reflections evoked emotional experiences. I also relied on my artefact retrieval to show how collaboration through in-service training and improvement aimed workshops can stimulate and enhance personal performance. Since this study is my personal history self-study, I felt honoured to share my in-service report and my HoD course results. I recalled all my educational past and present experiences relating to collaborative learning in order to reconstruct my personal history. These methods stimulated my thinking about how I can make meaning of my lived experiences to enhance learning among teachers in my school's Foundation Phase.

In analysing my personal history as represented in Chapter Three, I looked for similarities and differences in my educational experiences in order to develop major themes. These themes were built on patterns that emerged from my lived experiences and were aimed at responding to my second key research question. During our planned meetings with my supervisor and my critical friends, each person was given a chance to describe her lived experiences. From that description, the group was able to discuss the emerging themes.

According to Maree (2010), researchers in the interpretive paradigm mostly prefer inductive data analysis, which is more likely to help them identify the multiple realities potentially present in the data. In interpreting my analysed data I “[searched] for emerging patterns, associations, concepts and explanations” in my data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, p. 111). I therefore worked through my portrayal of my educational voyage (Chapter Three) to colour code similarities and differences in all parts of my educational journey. For example, a blue highlighter was used to highlight all those points related to the schools' and universities'

infrastructure. The green highlighter was used to highlight all those points (in all my educational journeys) which were related to team work among my colleagues or teachers or lecturers. I used a pink highlighter for all those experiences which were related to learning from peers or peer teaching. Lastly, I used a lime highlighter to draw attention to all those experiences which had to do with mentoring and induction. Using different highlighters was very helpful, in developing themes (see Chapter Four), to respond to my second critical question (see Chapter Four). As discussed in Chapter One, the theoretical foundation of my study is “learning as social participation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Therefore, the themes I identified related to my experiences of interaction or collaborative learning.

### **Limitations and challenges of the study**

As discussed in Chapter One, my research is only based on my personal history and my study is a small scale, in-depth study that has taken place in a particular context and time. Thus, I am aware that the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts or people. However, as the route that I have followed has been clearly discussed in this chapter, I hope that other researchers will be inspired by my personal history self-study to try this methodological approach for themselves for personal and professional growth. I also hope that the themes that I identify in Chapter Four can prompt other teachers and school managers to think about how they might better support collaborative teacher learning in their contexts. My enormous challenge in doing this personal history self-study was the concern that some people may feel offended by my personal history because they can recall some of the incidences which led to conflicts. Hence, in our group meetings, we shared how we can avoid issues that can result in conflict.

### **Trustworthiness**

As a researcher, I have had to keep the procedures that can be used for assessing the trustworthiness of the study in mind, for trustworthiness “is of the utmost importance in qualitative research” (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, p. 113). I have done this by generating data from different sources, for example, my journal entries, memory drawings and artefacts (Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). I have also used the inputs from my critical friends. Where they have “[pointed] to the same conclusions, [I have developed] more confidence in my results” (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, p. 113). Thus, interacting with my critical friends has enhanced the credibility of my findings because they are people who have a shared research interest and are well placed to comment on my research findings,



interpretation and conclusion. Additionally, to ensure validity and trustworthiness, as a researcher, I must strive to be clear and open about the methods used (LaBoskey, 2004), and my interpretations should be accessible to my readers. Hence, in this chapter, I have explained my methodological route in detail and in Chapter Four, I explain how I have made sense of my educational experiences.

### **Ethical Issues**

According to Maree (2007), the issue of considering ethics at all stages of research is important. One is not allowed to do any research without considering ethics, which have to do with moral aspects of research. But because my study is a personal history self-study, I am the main participant. However, I also drew on input from my three female critical friends, Ann, Lungi and Thandi. Their names are all pseudonyms. I did this to ensure confidentiality and their privacy. I gave my three critical friends consent letters which requested their permission to be able to refer to our discussions of our critical friends' meetings in my study. I explained to them that I will only use this data if I receive written consent from them (see, Appendix A). I asked my critical friends to sign the consent forms which I kept in a safe place.

In preserving confidentiality for people in my past, I ensured that I did not give any names or even pseudonyms. I only indicated the gender, for example, female principal. I also did not give the names of any schools or universities that I attended. I also gave a consent letter to my principal because it is vital that I get permission to use the photograph of my school (see Figure 3.11, Chapter Three). I chose that photograph because individual faces cannot be clearly seen (see Appendix A).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have given a detailed account of my personal history self-study research process. I have discussed the importance of using the methodology that I have chosen since my intention is to explore how I can successfully support collaborative learning in my school. I have also explained limitations and challenges of the study; the issues of trustworthiness and ethics have been detailed. Using the personal history self-study methodology has given me strategies for how I can reconstruct my personal history to enhance learning in my school context.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I look deeply into the past and present experiences underpinning my life as a teacher and my current experiences as a HoD in the Foundation Phase. My main intention is to gain a deeper insight into my personal history for enhanced improvement in my personal learning as well as my professional growth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ONCE UPON A TIME: THE VOYAGE OF MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

#### Introduction

Since April 1994, the National Department of Education has introduced a number of educational policies with the intention of addressing the educational imbalances of the past. Therefore, as a Masters' student in 2010, I did a small-scale study of teacher learning in the context of curriculum transformation as part of my coursework. My own interest in doing this study was driven by my experience of 22 years in teaching and 10 years as a Head of Department (HoD) in the Foundation Phase (Grade one to Grade three). As a HoD, I am required to support staff in their teaching roles and encourage professional development by maintaining up to date knowledge of developments in teaching and learning. Therefore, I explored the learning of two experienced Foundation Phase teachers from my school, through semi-structured interviews. One of my findings was that the teachers reported that they learned best through collaboration and interaction with each other and through networking with teachers from neighbouring schools. Hence, the purpose of the study presented in this dissertation is to explore how I can improve my own practice in order to support such collaborative learning among Foundation Phase teachers in my school.

In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I discussed my personal history self-study methodology and gave a detailed account of the research methods that I have employed. In this chapter, Chapter Three, I address my first research question of, "*What are my past and present experiences of collaborative learning?*", by revisiting my educational experiences from my early schooling experiences up to my present experiences as a post-graduate student. In order to reconstruct my personal history, I have recalled and reflected on my own past and present experiences. As Allender and Allender (2006) believe that much of the learning teachers' acquired as students has a positive or negative effect in their daily teaching. They further argue that "we realize that much of what we do and do not do is in reaction to those experiences". Thus, I believe that learning from my past personal and professional experiences can eventually improve my current and future teaching and learning and my own practice as a HoD in my school context.

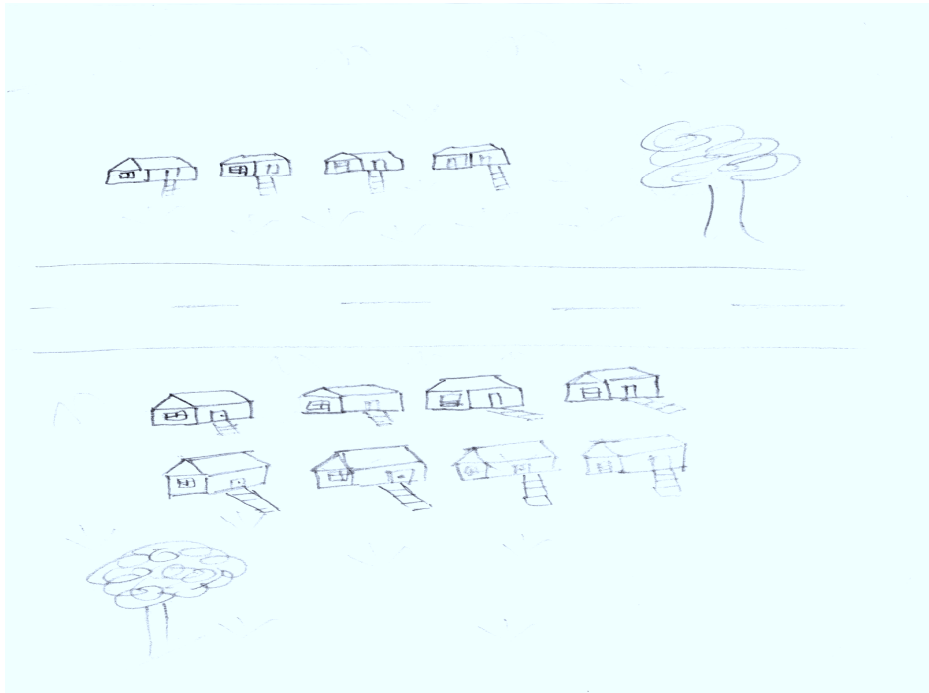
Therefore, this chapter presents a voyage of my educational experiences that moves from my primary school years to my high school years, to my experiences at the tertiary level, as

a novice teacher, as a HoD and, lastly as a post-graduate student at a university. Through my self-study research I am exploring how I can learn from my personal history to support collaborative teacher learning. Hence, Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004) acknowledge personal history self-study as a route that teachers can undertake in enhancing their knowledge and skills. The educational voyage presented in this chapter was constructed from data generated through my reflective journal writing and written narratives, my memory drawings and artefact retrieval of photographs and reports. (Refer to Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of these methods). These methods of data generation triggered my memories of how, what and when collaborative learning has happened in my own educational journey.

### **My lived experiences of teaching and learning**

#### ***“Dirty books and a somnolent teacher”***

I started my primary schooling in 1973. My primary school was not far from home. It was within walking distance, which was less than one kilometre. I lived in a semi-suburban area which was designated for Black Africans only. The Group Areas Act of 1950 ensured that all races were segregated in South Africa during the apartheid era. My school was in a Black African township where only four-roomed houses, called ‘matchboxes’ (because of their small size) were built. Some houses had no space to extend by building other rooms. This can be seen in my memory drawing (Figure 3.1):



**FIGURE 3.1: “My living space in a township”: A memory drawing of my township**

As a young child growing up in the township, I had no problem about where I was living. Maybe this was because I compared it to the rural areas where my grandmother lived. In the rural areas, most of the houses were built of mud and had thatched rooves which made them easily receptive to fire. The most important part for me as a child was that I had a solid roof over my head. There was also running water and later electricity was installed.

Schools in the township were built of bricks and later electricity was installed. They had not less than eight properly built classrooms. The structures of schools in the township were different from those in rural areas since most schools in rural areas were built of mud and the floors were made from cow dung.



**FIGURE 3.2: “Where it all began”: A photograph of my primary school buildings**

My primary school was situated in a township near Durban, South Africa. This township was formed by the apartheid state to house the mass resettlement of Africans that were living in Cato Manor during 1958-1965 and were forced to move by the Group Areas Act. It is the largest of three townships in the area. (The other townships are more rural with a lower population density). All primary schools in my township were built of bricks, had running water and later electricity was installed. All primary schools had two classrooms per standard. There was one office for the principal, a small staffroom and a store room. There was neither a library nor a laboratory. There was a large open space which was used as a soccer field. This open space was not properly maintained. It had weeds and some areas had no grass. During breaks, this ground was shared by both boys and girls. There were neither netball nor volleyball courts. We sometimes fought with boys because we sometimes rushed to the ground in order to book first. It was difficult to play or pass through the area during rainy days because it became very muddy. It was a painful experience because we often fell and became muddy.

I started Substandard A in 1973 and completed Standard two in 1976, which was the year of Soweto uprising. I can recall protests around the township schools. My brother, who was in high school, told me that the uprising was about Black African students defying the rule that

some high school subjects would be taught only in Afrikaans. That was the year (1976) in which, according to Wieder (2002) masses of Black teachers and Black students supported the political struggle.

The apartheid government had passed the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which formally and officially introduced Bantu Education in 1955 into schools for Black African learners. All government schools were controlled by the state and highly dependent on state funds. Therefore, the state took control of education “by transforming the basic curriculum and urged that African people remain connected to their own culture and thus required that schooling commence in an indigenous language” (Soudien, 2002, p. 213). Thus, in my primary school, we were taught in my mother tongue, IsiZulu. All subjects were taught in IsiZulu, except in Standard two, when we were introduced to English. However, the teachers still explained all the English words in IsiZulu. Because I was a child, I did not have any problem with being taught in IsiZulu. However, now, I think teachers should try hard to teach English as a first Additional language and not code switch between the mother tongue and English. Eventually, learners can grasp the foreign language. Learners who are taught English as a Home language are taught in English and no code switching is done. For me, what was important then was that I was being educated. However, as Kallaway (2002) believes that the language of teaching and learning in primary schools is the home language.

Our public school could not afford to buy enough desks for pupils to be comfortably seated at. In my class, we were more than 50! I can recall that there were few desks in our school, especially in the Substandard A and Substandard B classrooms. The desks were designed to seat two pupils, but due to the overcrowding in our classes, we had to sit in three’s or even four’s, instead of two pupils per desk. No one had a place of his/her own. There were a few benches in our classrooms, but still others had to sit down on the floor and there was no mat. The situation was difficult, but absencing oneself from school was not the solution. My parents were very strict. Nobody was allowed to stay at home during school hours unless the schools were on holidays. I was always in my school uniform, neat and tidy. My appearance motivated me to go to school. I was ready to explore and learn!

I remember that most of the classrooms’ windows were demolished. All the classes had one table and a shattered cupboard in most of the classes. The classroom walls had neither teaching aids nor pictures. The school did not have a library. In Substandard B, there were limited numbers of dirty books with no book covers, which approximately 50 pupils shared.

Almost five pupils were expected to read the same book! I can still recollect what happened during a reading period. We all used to rush to our teacher's broken cupboard (where books were always kept), so as to take the book. It was always 'first come first served'. I described my feelings about this memory in my journal:

*"It was painful since we all wanted to read the books even though they were dirty. I was eager to learn new words. For me, what was important was the knowledge that I wanted to gain. The inside is more of value than the outside". (Siza, journal entry, August 9, 2011)*

I recall that whilst I was in SubStandard B (Class A), the class teacher of Substandard B (Class B) class was always somnolent. She drank traditional beer continuously from Monday morning to Friday afternoon. As a teacher myself, I now realise that there was no effective teaching taking place in her class. This surely affected the learning of her pupils. Even communication between her and my class teacher was minimal. There could have been personal reasons which led to the drinking of the SSB teacher.



**FIGURE 3.3: “Sleepy teacher in a noisy classroom”:** A memory drawing of my primary school teacher

Surely, she needed assistance. I now see that the principal should have shown pastoral care towards her. I do not recall any teacher development initiatives nor staff meetings. The class and school meetings, if they were called regularly, might have helped her because she spent a great deal of time alone in her classroom. That gave her the opportunity to drink and sleep in class in front of the pupils! I reflected on this memory in my journal:



*What measures did the principal take to support the teacher? What efforts did her colleagues take to give assistance? Maybe, she could have improved her way of life. (Siza, journal entry, August, 9, 2011)*

I remember that, in my primary school, every day after school, pupils played “school” to teach one another, especially the sounds such as ‘bh’, for example, ‘ibhasi’ (‘bus’). I was fortunate to be elected a ‘teacher’. As neighbours, all doing Substandard B, we gathered together in my house. My grandfather bought me a small chalkboard. We used chinks which we took from our classrooms to write on. If there was no chalk, we used a soft stone which did not scratch the chalkboard. This informal learning boosted my self-confidence. I could communicate freely with other pupils in our school.



**FIGURE 3.4: ‘Sounds’ under a tree”: A memory drawing of learning and teaching happening at my home**

The inspectors seldom visited our school for school evaluation, monitoring and control. I can recall one inspector who came only after the school had won a choral music competition. Our principal liked choral music.

During my primary schooling, there were no Heads of Department in the school. The principal was the sole manager in the school. As I look back, I now see that if the principal had had other members of the School Management Team (SMT), they might have helped the SSB teacher together by referring her to relevant people, for example, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to get help. There was no collaboration between the SSB (A) and the

SSB (B) teacher. In fact, I did not witness any collaboration between teachers. Whilst doing Standard one and even Standard two, my teachers did not work as a team. If my class teacher was absent, we made noise and played for the whole day. There were no resources, but if teachers had been sharing ideas through meetings, they might have learned how to improvise and to make resources themselves by cutting newspapers and magazines and making story books themselves. The dirty books were the reflection of how the teachers themselves handled and managed the classroom. If the classes were managed properly, the few books that they had would have been maintained properly.

### ***“An assertive principal”***

By the end of the 70's, my primary schooling was over. It was in 1981 when I became a high school student. I was very fortunate to be sent to a boarding school in a rural area. Very few Black African parents could afford to send their children to a boarding school. I believe that this was because most of the parents were unemployed. The high school I attended was founded by one of the founder members of the African National Congress (ANC), Dr. John Langalibalele Dube. The school was surrounded by informal settlements. It was built of bricks and one of the dormitories was built of stones. There were more than 20 classrooms. The school started from Form one (now called Grade eight) to Form five (which was later changed to Standard ten or Matric but is currently called Grade twelve). The school had running water and electricity, but the road inside the school premises was made of gravel. The school had running water and electricity. The school had a library which was not fully maintained. Some books were scattered on the floor. There was no librarian. Nobody taught me how to look for books for particular subjects. Information was not dispersed to us as students. Nobody taught me what the library was for. I was also not developed into reading for pleasure or for finding information. I now feel that that was heartbreaking. My school was an immense school with soccer playgrounds and a netball court. All athletes used the same ground for other sporting activities such as playing baseball, which was also one of the prominent sport codes that was played in school. The school performed competently during competitions. My principal was a sports person and so he felt ecstatic. Likewise, all students felt ecstatic too.



**FIGURE 3.5: “Nobody taught me what the library was for”: A photograph of me in front of my school’s office and library**

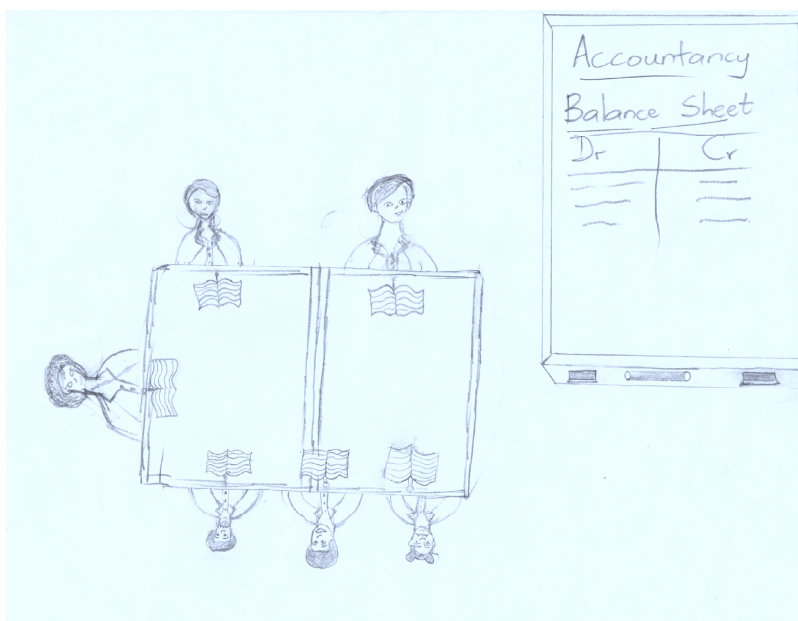
All my teachers were Black African, IsiZulu speakers and all learners were Black African, and were speaking IsiZulu, Xhosa and Sesotho. This mixture of the Nguni people inspired students as well as teachers to learn different Nguni languages. It was quite interesting even to learn about our different cultures from one another. Nevertheless, the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) was English, except during the IsiZulu and Afrikaans periods. The language of communication during or after school hours was also English. We were not allowed to speak IsiZulu or any other indigenous language. I think that the main aim of the school was to help us to improve our spoken English. However, I had mixed feelings about it, since at times, especially after teaching hours, I would have enjoyed the freedom of speaking my own mother tongue, which is IsiZulu.

My principal was a very assertive principal. He was an efficient manager who always led by example. When he talked about punctuality in morning prayers, after breaks and after lunch, he was exemplary because he was always on time. He was a person of order and discipline. Corporal punishment was still administered heavily, not only by the principal. In fact most of the teachers hit the students using a cane or a bamboo stick. Surely, being punished was painful, but that was the way in which we were brought up. We were punished severely

both at our homes and at schools. Definitely, it had a negative effect on us because some pupils left school and even their homes for the reason that they were afraid of being beaten. But then, it was part of our Black African culture, as well as part of the apartheid era school culture.

The principal sometimes visited the classrooms unexpectedly and asked questions relating to the subject. The teachers always seemed to feel uncomfortable and uneasy. Thinking of how the teachers froze when he entered the class, makes me think that his visits were unplanned. I now see that he should have made the teachers aware of his visits beforehand. During the principal's visits, all the students in class would keep quiet and not answer even one question. The students were afraid because they were also not prepared for a personal visit from the principal. As a school manager myself, I now see that teachers as well as students should have a plan of what, when, where and how things will happen in a school.

Our Standard ten Accountancy teacher sometimes swapped with the Standard nine teacher to teach different topics such as "Balance Sheet Statement". Our Accountancy teacher always encouraged us to work together in small groups, to teach and also to learn from one another. Being a 'teacher' in our group always boosted my self-esteem as a student. My listening skills, communication skills and problem-solving skills were developed since we made it our own 'culture' to learn in small groups.



**FIGURE 3.6:** "Many heads are better than one": A memory drawing of a small group of students in a high school class

We learned very well and most of us passed Accountancy in the Standard ten external examinations. I now believe that, as students, we learned best from one another because it was a small group and there was interaction amongst us. Together, we could learn or revise “how to do a Balance Sheet Statement”. There was individual attention and communication flowed between students and their ‘teacher’. Questions could be tackled and answered in our groups. Small group discussions allowed participation of everyone and students were often more comfortable in small groups.

During my primary school years, I was very good in Arithmetic (now called Numeracy in the Foundation Phase and Mathematics in the Senior Phase). When I got to High school, I continued where I left off. But things changed when I was in Standard eight and Standard nine. My Mathematics teacher was a diligent teacher, but had a problem of absenteeism. He was always absent on Mondays and Fridays because he drank alcohol often. Sometimes he would come to school drunk. But, other Mathematics teachers did not teach us if he was absent. This was detrimental to our learning in that the Matriculation examination papers were not set in our school but by the National Department of Education. This eventually could have affected our performance. Therefore, we resorted to peer teaching where we as students learned from and with each other through sharing our knowledge and skills. We imitated our teachers. This was very effective because as students we could communicate with one another closely, raise questions, discuss and clarify concepts to achieve the outcome. Thus, our communication skills, debating skills and listening skills were developed.

### ***“A welcoming school environment”***

After passing Matric in 1985, I had no idea of where I would further my studies. Unfortunately, in my high school, we had no career guidance teacher. He/she would have motivated us to apply to tertiary institutions during the course of the Matric year. However, I did a personal application for admission at a Teachers’ College at the beginning of the year. Luckily, I was accepted to study in one of the best colleges of education of our time.



**FIGURE 3.7: “My warm learning space”: A photograph of me at my college of education**

At the college, there were proper buildings, proper sanitation, electricity and running water. The classrooms were inviting and colourful with charts/pictures and lots of teaching aids. The college had resources such as typing machines, overhead projectors, wall charts and sufficient learning material for both the lecturers and student teachers.

Most of the lecturers were Whites and only a few were Black Africans. However, all students were Black Africans. The number of White teachers gives an indication that the language of communication during teaching time was English, except during isiZulu periods. Effective teaching and learning was taking place because all lecturers were dedicated to their work. However, there were students who were unable to communicate in English, let alone read an English textbook! When I was doing my first year, we had one female student who could not read the word ‘mother’. She pronounced it very badly by reading it as if she was reading an isiZulu word. Some students, including myself, became very embarrassed but laughed anyway. I have learned from that experience that it is never a good idea to laugh at others. As I reflected in my journal:

*English is not our mother tongue language. As students, we must give assistance where we can. Laughing at others is not the solution. Some students can react negatively and that could yield negative results or even bad behaviour. (Siza, journal entry, September 22, 2011)*

Unfortunately, that female student did not pass at the end of the year. She was also not allowed to repeat her first year. So, the college policy did not allow repeaters at any point in time. That was very hurtful, but there was nothing that anybody could do. Thus, she discontinued her studies because language became a barrier.

Three languages were offered at the college and all of them were compulsory. These languages were isiZulu, English and Afrikaans. Only Black African lecturers taught isiZulu. It was difficult to speculate on who my real isiZulu lecturer was in my first year, because two lecturers worked together during the same period, sharing the same lesson. I think it was only when I saw the signature on my report that I realised who exactly my isiZulu lecturer was. I also believe that I witnessed collaboration between my two isiZulu teachers. They were both very benevolent. When I started teaching in 1988, I saw isiZulu language books and found that they were both authors of the same book. They practiced collaboration even in writing books!

At the college, all lecturers were always on time, always present and teaching effectively. They were all disciplined. My marks were excellent. I always performed very well, especially in Mathematics. In my final year, I got a distinction in Mathematics! My Mathematics teacher always asked me to help my fellow students, sometimes in her presence. In addition, I made money by teaching experienced teachers who had come to the college to upgrade themselves. Those experienced teachers were called 'special' teachers. We, therefore, named them 'iziposholo'. Teaching 'iziposholo' did not only increase my income, but I was also intrinsically motivated to learn from their experiences because they were already practicing teachers. Moreover, they brought with them what they had learnt from their different schools for us to share. Learning from them boosted my self-confidence as a student-teacher.

I also observed that lecturers used and taught us different methods of teaching such as the telling method, question and answer method, the textbook method, and others. Through those methods, I learnt different teaching styles, methods and planning of work. The institution was organised for all kinds of learning (learning holistically), for example,

spiritual, academic, physical (sports) and so on. The aim was to develop all relevant skills needed for personal and professional learning. Even though I was not a sports person, I learned how to be an umpire and to referee sports such as volleyball, netball, basketball and even soccer.

There was order and discipline in my tertiary institution. Our lecturers met from time to time for what I think were planned meetings. We were always engaged in our classes. Our lecturers never left us unattended. That taught me that teachers should not leave learners without supervision, no matter what the circumstances. All lecturers were active and motivated to teach. That was a marvelous place to be taught! When I left the college after three years, I was very eager and motivated to start teaching.

***“From an authoritarian principal”***

I was intrinsically motivated to start teaching in January 1988. In my opinion, my motivation was due to the high standard of training I received from the college, which was at that time rated one of the best colleges of education in South Africa. After I got my results, I started to look for a teaching post, which I struggled to get until March 1988.

I was eventually employed in one of the primary schools in a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal. The school was built of bricks with eight classrooms. There was no electricity or running water. It started from SSA (now called Grade one) to Standard two (now called Grade four). All teachers were Black African females and all the learners were also Black African. Most of the teachers and learners were from the informal settlements around the school community. Their homes had neither electricity nor running water. There was a big water tank at school and a river nearby. The pupils were asked to fetch water from the nearby river, which the school shared with cows, goats and even dogs.

All grades had two teachers, that is, Grade one had two classrooms and two teachers and so on. I was employed to teach Standard one (now called Grade three). I remember how enthusiastic I was when I got the post. I wanted to show from the outset what I was capable of doing. I was very ready to apply what I had learned at the college of education.

Since I was intrinsically motivated to start teaching and exploring in my new school environment, I preferred to be punctual. Therefore, on my first day, I came to the school



early, at around seven o'clock. I was smartly dressed. When the female principal came, she called me by name and invited me into her office. She did not wear a smile. She told me that I would be teaching Standard one (now called Grade three). She gave me a two-quire exercise book and a register. She told me to write my lesson plans and record pupils' test marks. Unfortunately, she did not show me how it should be done. I immediately became devastated and overwhelmed. The principal showed me my classroom. She then introduced me to another Standard one teacher, who was an aged individual. The whole week passed, but the principal did not do any induction. When I got home, I could not tell anyone about my first day as an employee. I recalled this memory in my journal:

*I was very disappointed with the principal's behavior. I did a self-introspection. I was very dissatisfied with the principal's conduct towards me. However, I felt unwelcomed. (Siza, journal entry, September, 26, 2011)*

Thus, it did not take me months to see that I was not welcome in that school. First of all, when I arrived, the principal did not do any mentoring. I was not even introduced formally to other teachers, except my fellow colleague who was also teaching Grade three. Other staff members saw me by chance after school on our way to the bus stop. The principal did not even show me how to plan for a lesson or to mark a register! I learned the hard way! In those days there were no Heads of Departments in Black African schools! As I reflected in my journal:

*I think the college of education should have prepared us for this. I came to this school prepared to implement all that I had learnt. I felt very demotivated. This makes me think that there should be a continuous relationship between principals and tertiary institutions. Principals should also be trained continuously about changes in teaching methods and teaching strategies (Siza, journal entry, September 26, 2011)*

After two weeks, I was so frustrated and stressed since what I was expecting in a school situation was not what I experienced. Nevertheless, there was one female teacher who was teaching Grade four and who was maybe three or four years older than me. She explained the difficulties she had experienced since nobody had been willing to show or teach her anything regarding the school or any curriculum matters. Recently, she had found out that the principal together with the other six teachers were under qualified. She, herself, became a threat when she joined the school because she had a Primary Teachers' Diploma. After I

heard that, I then understood why I was not welcomed in that school. Nevertheless, it was still hurtful.

Consequently, I felt very uncomfortable. My principal's style of leadership was so autocratic that she did not allow for any staff meetings to take place. One of the reasons could be that she was challenged by my qualifications, since she was under qualified. When she wanted to say something, she would call a person privately in her office. There was no room for asking any questions. Communication was one-sided. Her approach was "Do as I say". Without any discussions, she expected all teachers to teach Arithmetic (Numeracy) every morning. Whereas, the teachers might have preferred to start with marking the homework given the previous day. There was no room for sharing ideas and establishing teamwork. Neither staff meetings nor any form of professional development was organised. One could only hear of the Department of Education's workshops through colleagues from other schools. From the time I joined the school, there was nothing communicated about attending a professional development workshop or any training organised by the Department of Education. There was no sharing of even resources! Therefore, as a beginner teacher, I collected all the teaching aids which we had produced from the training institution and brought them to school.

***"..... to a functional school"***

During the June holidays of 1988, I went to the local Circuit Office to apply for another teaching post. When the schools opened in July 1988, I was appointed as a temporary teacher in a school that was in a semi-urban area. The school was double-story and nicely built. There was electricity and running water and the school had a tarred parking area. It had resources such as typing machines, overhead projectors, charts and sufficient learning material for both the teachers and the students.

There was a drastic change in terms of leadership and the management of the school as compared to the previous school. Within a month, I became a member of the school community. Induction was done by the principal on my first day at the school. He did a proper introduction to all staff members, as well as all students during assembly. I felt very honoured and welcomed. Staff meetings for updates and reports from principals' meetings as well as staff development were organised monthly by the principal. He invited Subject Advisors from the Department of Education to capacitate all teachers regarding the

curriculum. Sadly, my appointment was terminated towards the end of November 1988. Fortunately, I was given a letter of appointment to a neighbouring school.

***“A meticulous and committed deputy principal”***

Before the end of 1988, which was my first year of teaching, I had been employed in three different primary schools. In November 1988, the letter from the Department of Education confirmed my appointment to a permanent teaching post. I was very excited. The school had proper buildings with sanitation and power supply. However, the playground was not properly structured. The grass had weeds and was not properly maintained.


The school was a combined primary, starting from Grade one to Grade seven. It had 20 classrooms, a staffroom, a principal’s office and a deputy principal’s office. There was a small kitchen with a table and a sink. There was no laboratory or library.

All teachers were Black Africans. The school had more than 23 teachers, including two Heads of Department, but excluding the principal and the deputy principal. Most of the teachers were females because only female teachers taught in the Foundation Phase. There were 12 classrooms in the Foundation Phase. I was the youngest of all teachers in my school. A few teachers lived around the area. Having teachers from the community was a blessing, because during the 80’s, there was violence around the vicinity. It was a relief because we believed that having those teachers at the school could protect us from gangsters. All learners were Black Africans from around the neighbourhood.

I felt welcomed and supported by all teachers in my school. My deputy principal was a very caring female who helped me adapt easily to the new environment. She was a very meticulous and committed individual. She showed me the whole school setting and she taught me how to do my job. She was very pleased with my performance. She motivated me to perform to the best of my abilities.

Within my two years of experience as a qualified teacher, teaching Mathematics and General Science (now called Natural Science) in Standard three, I was approached by my principal to attend a five day in-service training course on microteaching to promote competency in teaching. This course was held at Soshanguve in Pretoria. I did not have any idea what in-service training was, but because I was so assertive, young and energetic, I was eager to learn. The training I received in Pretoria was very informative. The facilitators wrote a remarkable report about my performance and sent it to the school.

*In-Service Training Courses*



**COLLEGE FOR CONTINUING TRAINING**

TEL: Private Bag Soshanguve 0152

Ref..... Enquiries. Date: 4 August 1989

**PROGRESS REPORT: IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

Salary no. 665-33-7-4 Student no. N30/89

NAME OF TEACHER (Surname and initials) N TALA, S.C.

SCHOOL NAME P.P. SCHOOL

ADDRESS Kwa Mashi POSTAL CODE 4360

REGION NATAL CIRCUIT DURBAN

COURSE NUMBER ATTENDED 386/89 DATE 31 JULY TO 4 August 1989

SUBJECT-CODE MIC TEACHING EXPERIENCE 14 years

QUALIFICATIONS: ACADEMIC STD 10 PROFESSIONAL PTD.

NOMINATED: Y/N

**EVALUATION**

Name of Module	Y/N	Name of Module	Y/N
ATTAINMENT OF MASTERY LEVEL		ATTAINMENT OF MASTERY LEVEL	
LESSON ONE		LESSON TWO	
- PREPARATION	Y	- PREPARATION	
- EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES	Y	- EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES	
- INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES	Y	- INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES	
- MASTERY OF LESSON CONTENT	Y	- MASTERY OF LESSON CONTENT	
- MASTERY OF TEACHING SKILL	Y	- MASTERY OF TEACHING SKILL	

KEY: Module mastered: Yes = Y  
Module not mastered: No = N

Remarks: Ours is a practical course. Much value is therefore placed on individual attention. Because of the number of teachers we had for the week (19, instead of 12), each teacher could only practise one teaching skill; presenting only one lesson

LECTURER: \_\_\_\_\_ RECTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

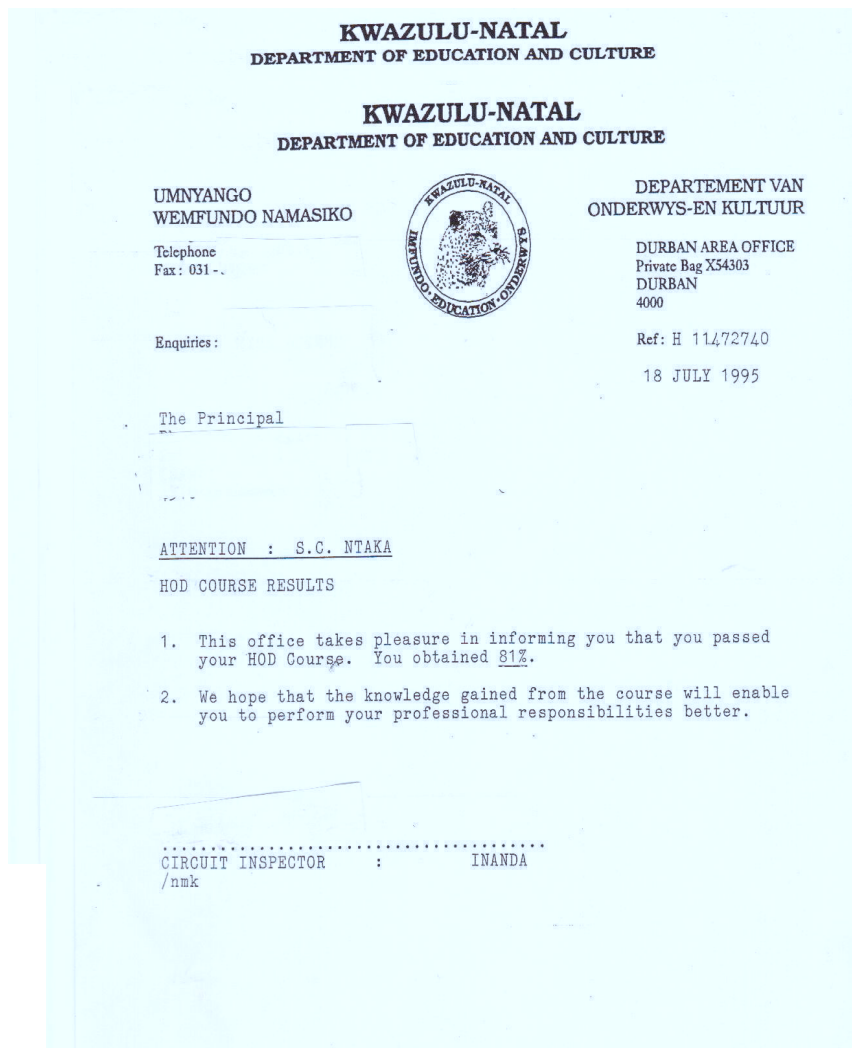
A talented teacher!

**FIGURE 3.8: “My stimulating and inspiring report”: A copy of my progress report from the in-service training course**

My principal was very delighted with my report. I became very proud of myself and was pleased with the report. I was motivated to learn and teach!

In the year 1990, there was a vacant acting post for a Head of Department (HoD) in my school. Most of the teachers, including the Deputy Principal, motivated and encouraged me to apply for the position. Even though I was skeptical, because I was still the youngest teacher in terms of age as well as continuous service, I applied for the post. To my surprise, after a week, I was called by the principal and was informed that I had been given the post. No interviews were done. I think the curriculum vitae was the only tool used for promoting the applicants.

I worked very hard in managing my department, networking with other schools and developing my team through staff development within the school. In 1995, still acting as a HoD, I was sent for an HoD course which was organised by the Department of Education and Culture for all teachers who were acting as HoD's in their respective schools. From that course, I gained knowledge which enabled me to perform my professional responsibilities much better. We were taught communication skills, listening skills and how to monitor teachers' work. On the final day, we wrote a test and I excelled in that test. I was happy that I gained that professional experience because I became very enthusiastic in performing my duties as a Head of Department.



**FIGURE 3.9: “My high-quality results”: A copy of my HoD course results**

Unfortunately, after acting as an HoD for 10 years, the acting post was frozen due to the decrease of learner enrolment. The decrease was caused by the expansion of another

primary school which was not too far from my school. I was very heart-broken because I knew that sooner or later I would have to leave the school.

During the first quarter in that year, 2000, posts were advertised. I applied to five schools around the North Durban Region. Interviews were done and after a week I received the letter from the Department informing me that I had a position. On my last day, the school came to a standstill! My colleagues, as well my grade seven learners, were crying literal tears! Emotions were high, but I valued them since I felt honoured. I categorised myself as a very distinguished human being. I was also very tearful and broken-hearted, but at the same time very ecstatic. Nevertheless, I had to leave the school. It was time to grow and meet new people to learn more and be developed personally and professionally in another school environment.

### ***“A joyful and contented Head of Department”***

Towards the end of the second quarter in June 2000, I started teaching in a new school. In this school, I was permanently employed as a HoD! The new school was in a semi-urban area, surrounded by informal settlements (called “*imijondolo*”). The school was approximately seven kilometres away from my home. All learners were Black Africans from the area. Only one teacher out of approximately 30 Black African teachers was from the area. However, that had no negative impact because we were all IsiZulu speakers. The school had poor infrastructure. It was built of corrugated iron, which was very hot in summer and very cold in winter. There was electricity and running water but there was no proper sanitation since only the teachers’ toilets had running water. The community around the school needed to be developed because they did not have proper sanitation and most of the houses did not have electricity.

I was very enthusiastic to start working in my new position as a manager in my phase. Even under those deprived conditions, the school was functioning properly. The principal was a very strict person. He was punctual and wanted order and discipline in the school. He was an authoritative principal who worked very well with the school management team. From the outset, I felt very passionate about my work. Meetings were called monthly. The principal, together with the staff, constructed a year plan, including all extra-mural activities. He ensured that learners were taught holistically including doing different sports and their skills were developed.

Unfortunately, I could not stay long because, during November 2000, just when I thought I had fully adapted to the current school, I received a call from the Regional office of the Department of Education. The caller informed me that I would soon receive a letter moving me to another school. However, I was told that the placement was not done according to my list of preferences. Within two days after the call, the school received a letter which placed me in another school. I was very disappointed by the Department's employees who had failed to do their work properly. Nevertheless, I had no choice and was forced to move to another school which was not too far away.

***“Antiquated and vintage teachers”***

During November 2000, I started in another school but was still occupying the same position as Head of Department (HoD). Currently, I am still working at this school. The school is a government primary school. It is in a semi-urban area. It is surrounded by informal settlements from where most of the learners come. The school is built of bricks. It has electricity, running water and proper sanitation for both learners and teachers. Some of the windows and doors are broken. The lawns are not properly maintained and they are not attractive. The lawns have few flowers. The school has a computer class with about 20 computers which were donated. There are 23 teachers and 728 learners from Grade R to Grade 7. Only Black African learners attend this school. The language of learning and teaching is isiZulu. Only Black African teachers teach the learners. Most of the teachers are above 55 years and have more than 30 years experience. Despite the age difference between these teachers and me, I was eager to learn, manage and teach!



**FIGURE 3.10: “Young but inspired manager”:** A photograph of me at my current primary school

However, being younger and a superior to older and more experienced teachers who always reminded me of their past working experiences with their ex-principals and ex-Heads of Department was a challenging task! From the outset, I had to teach my colleagues time management, in terms of honouring teaching periods in the morning as well as after break time. I soon made enemies but I told myself that I was not there to make friends but to work. I did not believe in cheap popularity. I had to practice my role as a manager!



**FIGURE 3.11: “My current teaching environment”:** A photograph of my colleagues with learners during assembly

Post 1994, new educational policies including Curriculum 2005 (C2005) have been developed. Although these educational policies have faced numerous challenges to their effectiveness, all teachers still need to adapt to meet the new requirements. My role as a HoD is to ensure that effective teaching happens through proper engagement of teachers in the process of the implementation of policies. Some of what I call the “antiquated and vintage teachers” did not want to transform to the changes. They always preferred their old style of teaching, for example, whole class teaching instead of small group teaching. I usually held monthly meetings with my team to share the challenges we were encountering,



especially the new Outcome-Based Education (OBE) terminology and the skills we had to master regarding the new teaching approaches, including the learner-centred approach and small group teaching. However, they still preferred having set syllabi for them to implement and teach as prescribed by the Department of Education (DoE). Teachers always complained that the workshops organised by the DoE were once-off workshops which dictated what should be done in schools. Although the Departmental professional development workshops were not enough, I now realise that as a HoD, I did not promote any form of peer learning. I now see that I should have discussed with my colleagues ways of helping one another, for example, organising peer learning per grade, that is, all Grade one teachers working together and so on. I believe that this form of learning would have enhanced our teaching.

### ***“Curriculum changes vs. Teacher professional development”***

I remember that in the late 90’s, all Foundation Phase teachers were invited to attend an in-service workshop which was organised by our Subject Advisor through the Department of Education. The main objective of the workshop was to promote reading. This was due to the fact that some teachers did not allow learners to read during reading time because they claimed that they had no reading books. Therefore, the workshop was arranged for HoD’s in our ward to create a story book. We were divided into groups according to grades. At that time, I was teaching Grade one. I can recall how our group planned the story line. We just created a story by basing it on our experiences of our learners’ lives in our schools’ environments. We eventually came up with a very interesting story. We used magazines to cut pictures and created a story of a boy whom we named ‘Mepho’. The story was about a boy who loved playing soccer, but could not play for the school because he had no soccer boots! I was appointed by our group to present our story book to the whole group of teachers. Even today, some teachers from that workshop still call me ‘Mepho’. The workshop was very useful, but I did not do this activity with the teachers in my school. I did not have any reason why I did not introduce it in my school. I now realise that I should have done this activity in my own school environment.

During the third term of 2009, all HoD’s in our ward were invited to attend a meeting which was called by our Superintendent of Education Management (SEM). We were asked to nominate representatives who would interact with Subject Advisors. I was nominated by HoD’s in my ward, as one of their representatives. We were told by the SEM that their aim

was to form a cluster of HoD's who would work hand in hand with the Subject Advisors to improve the reading and mathematical skills. They took our contact numbers and told us that we would be invited to a workshop before the term closed. Unfortunately, I was never contacted. I asked my Subject Advisor and her response was that she knew nothing about that cluster meeting. As Subject Advisors, they were not informed about that interaction with HoDs. That made me very sad.

Despite the lack of on-going professional development workshops organised by the Department of Education, intervention programmes have been introduced to improve Literacy and Numeracy in the Foundation Phase, for example, Annual National Assessment (ANA). All Foundation Phase HoD's in our ward were called to attend a one-day ANA training workshop towards the end of January 2011. ANA was conducted to assess Literacy (isiZulu) and Numeracy in Grade two and Grade three in February 2011. The aim of ANA was to test what learners knew and could do, and what teachers still needed to improve in their respective grades.

I accept the idea of the need for the intervention to improve reading, writing and arithmetic skills. However, the challenge is that teachers were not workshopped about ANA. They got information from principals or Heads of Departments who were also unsure of the expectations because they were also only called once to a workshop. During the facilitation of the ANA workshop, the facilitators emphasised the use of the prescribed workbooks for our learners to pass the annual assessment. Teachers were expected to produce good results, but the relevant resources, for example, the Department's workbooks for Literacy and Numeracy, had not been delivered in time. Some schools did not receive the workbooks at all, but other schools, including mine, did get some workbooks but these were not enough for all learners. It was also a challenge that the ANA test papers had many errors which took time to rectify. Some of the Numeracy terms translated from English to isiZulu were meaningless; for example, the translation of the term 'cube' to '*ikhubi*' in isiZulu was senseless when read in isiZulu. Even the Literacy (isiZulu) test papers had many spelling mistakes. Some of the language structures were incorrect and thus were meaningless. Hence, it was difficult for learners to read and understand the questions on their own.

No matter how committed one is, it is hard to work under conditions which always change time and again. During the third term of 2011, the schools received a circular asking teachers to state whether they would be available for a three-day workshop on the new

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which would be held at a private venue. Some Foundation Phase teachers were very excited because they thought that they would have enough time to explore and exchange ideas regarding the new CAPS. Unfortunately, after a month, another circular came which invited all Foundation Phase teachers to attend only a one-day (three hours) training workshop from 12h00 to 15h30. All teachers, including myself, were very frustrated and miserable. Nevertheless, we are expected to produce high-quality results at the end of the year (2012), including first-class passes (60%) in the Annual National Assessments (ANA) results for 2012. Nevertheless, despite the lack of professional development workshops from the Department of Education, some teachers improve their teaching and learning by becoming life-long learners.

***“Better be a life-long learner”***

I did my Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree part-time, through one of the universities in South Africa from 1990 until 1993. This was a Black university in the apartheid era. We were part-time students at a township. The design of the university’s buildings was different to the school buildings. I was used to classrooms, but here there were lecture halls with air-conditioners. Resources, for example, overhead projectors, and computers were available and accessible for all students. All lecturers had offices. A café was also inside the premises which catered for more than 500 part-time students. The classes started at 16h00 until 20h30 or 21h45, depending on the time table for a specific module.



**FIGURE 3.12: “From classrooms to lecture halls”: A photograph of my university campus**

Most of the students were Black African and a few were Indian. There were no White or Coloured students. This is probably because this was a Black university during the apartheid era. This limited my opportunities for collaborating with diverse groups of people. Most of our lecturers were White, but there were also Indian, Black African and Coloured lecturers. Effective learning was taking place. Lecturers were dedicated to their work. It was rare to find that the lecturer was absent. If the lecturer was absent, he/she would ask another lecturer in the same field to lecture on his/her behalf.

I cannot forget the two isiZulu lecturers who were efficient, dedicated and hard-working. One could observe their close relationship, during lecture times. They sometimes interacted by sharing their teaching in the same class during the same time. They reminded me of my two isiZulu lecturers at the Teachers’ College. Both these lecturers were very strict but very fair. They were always prepared for their lessons. One of them would only carry chalk and a duster, but we always wrote not less than five pages of lecture notes in our journals. He was able to impart his knowledge without even referring to the book. He was clear. He allowed questions to be asked during and after the lessons. Everybody was made comfortable.

After completing my B.A degree, I took a break from my studies. In 2002, I enrolled part-time through the same university but a different campus. I did my Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Honours (Hons), which I completed in 2003. We attended at a formerly ‘Indian only’ high school. The classes were held from 16h00 to 18h00, Monday to Thursday. The conditions of the classrooms where we attended were awful. Some of the windows were broken and there were neither air conditioners nor fans in the classrooms. When it was hot, we were forced to open all the windows and the door for a little bit of fresh air. If it was winter, we would all move away from the broken windows because it was really cold. It was sad that as post-graduate students, we had to learn under such conditions! Nevertheless, we had an aim and our main aim was to develop our knowledge and skills and be productive teachers in our respective schools.

The lecturers were Black African and Indians, but there were no White lecturers, which was also probably because it was a Black university during the days of racial segregation. The students were both Indians and Black Africans who were IsiZulu speakers. There was communication between the students of different races, especially during and after the lectures.

Most of our lecturers encouraged us to work in groups. However, it was sometimes difficult because students lived in different places. Still, peer learning took place. When it was presentation time, I was always chosen to present on behalf of the group. Sometimes I complained, but I now feel that doing presentations boosted my self-confidence and minimised any stage fright.

After I completed my BEd. (Hons), I did a part-time correspondence course in Sports Management in 2008 through a university which was based in Pretoria. I passed the course with distinction! Then in 2009, I did a Mentoring in Schools module in another university in KwaZulu-Natal. I heard about this module from a friend who was a post-graduate student. The module was funded and so we did not pay any fees. The module took almost three months. We were trained by facilitators who developed us on what mentoring entails. I was pleased with the knowledge I gained from that training. I learned how to mentor newly qualified teachers. It was a fruitful and a very productive learning experience.

After passing the Mentoring in Schools module with flying colours, I was prompted to further continue my studies in 2010 by registering for a Master's degree in the same university. The infrastructure of the two Universities where I attended was totally different. My current university campus is an ex-teacher training college which was for Whites only until the post-apartheid merging of the former university and the teacher training college. The lecture halls are all air-conditioned, clean and maintained regularly. The buildings, the surroundings and the lawns are well maintained.

It took me a while to adjust to the new setting, the post-graduate lectures and the intensity of work. During the first few months, I felt like an 'outsider'. The amount of work was overwhelming. Furthermore, in one module, we were more than 100 students! Two lecturers were co-teaching the same module at the same time. As a student, I could not know most of my fellow colleagues. It was difficult for even the lecturers to know us! They could only interact with few students. Some of those students were 'talkative' during the lessons. We learned under such conditions with two lecturers sharing the class and sharing

the same topic at once. One lecturer dominated over the other. Because the students were so many, the lecturers would divide us into smaller groups to work on particular issues and allow us to report back. The challenge in our class was that there were a few students who always dominated in all discussions. The lecturers tried, but sometimes failed to ignore them when they wanted to talk. I vented my frustration about this module in my journal:

*I have never felt such a strain in my life. I feel like a moron.* (Siza, journal entry, September 29, 2011)

For the first time in my life, I could not perform to the best of my abilities. It could have been caused by the number of articles that students were expected to read or maybe the work was beyond my capabilities. I nearly dropped out in my first year because of my lack of performance but I also had social problems. I will not forget my module coordinator who called and changed my mind. Deep down, I felt sincerely loved and cared for. I was motivated to continue with my studies. Hard-work paid off when I passed my first year.

In 2011, I registered for my second year as a Master's student. I soon experienced difficulty whilst doing a module preparing us for dissertation writing. It was challenging since we worked with module facilitators and our research supervisors at the same time and the module facilitators had different points of view regarding our research topics. I became very confused at the beginning, but my dedicated supervisor, who is always calm and focused, gave me the courage to carry on with my studies. My fellow students and I discussed our topics with our supervisor in our small group. She allows for interaction amongst the students to take place. As critical friends, we share our learning and help each other with ideas if necessary. There is peer learning through sharing of knowledge during group discussions. My supervisor always gives constructive feedback. No one feels offended. She gives assistance and allows for individual meetings.



**FIGURE 3:13: “Interaction at its best”: A memory drawing of my group supervision meeting with our supervisor**

Furthering my studies has impacted positively on my work as a HoD. Through our group supervision meetings, I have learned to interact positively with my fellow students and my supervisor through sharing and learning from one another’s strengths. I have also learned that during our phase meetings at school, I should allow time for constructive criticisms within my team, to listen to other teachers and give them constructive feedback. As I reflected in my journal:

*I have never felt so close to my colleagues or my supervisor in my entire teaching and learning career. I wish I could change my thinking by giving positive remarks where necessary, by acknowledging what others have done irrespective of how little they have achieved or gained. (Siza, journal entry, November 1, 2011)*

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter (Chapter Three), I have shared my educational experiences from my primary schooling up until being a part-time, second year Master's student at university. Looking back at my experiences, I have found that collaborative learning has happened formally and informally, has been planned and unplanned, but has enhanced my personal and professional growth. Reflecting on my past and present experiences has influenced my understandings of teaching and learning. I also believe that these reflections may enhance my future practice. I believe that I can, together with my fellow colleagues, establish an environment in which all members can feel comfortable, contented, sustained and valued.

In the next chapter (Chapter Four), I re-examine and interpret my past and present experiences to be able to address my second critical question with the hope of improving my effectiveness as a HoD in a primary school.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### POSITIONING MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES INTO SENSIBLE INTERPRETATION

#### Introduction

The focus of this study is on supporting collaborative learning among teachers in the Foundation Phase (Grade R to Grade Three). The purpose of this personal history self-study research is to explore how I can learn from my own lived educational experiences to better support collaborative teacher learning through my own practice as Foundation Phase Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. In the previous chapter (Chapter Three), I responded to my first critical research question, which is: *“What are my past and present experiences of collaborative learning?”* I generated the data that is represented in Chapter Three through my journal writing and through my written narratives, memory drawings, and artefact retrieval of photographs and relevant documents. In the Chapter Three, I recalled the voyage of my educational life, focusing particularly on my collaborative learning experiences from my primary school years, my high school years, my time at a college of education, as a novice teacher, as a Head of Department and lastly as a part-time postgraduate student at renowned universities.

My main intention in this chapter (Chapter Four) is to address my second critical research question, which is: *“How can I learn from my experiences in order to support collaborative teacher learning in my day-to-day practice as a HoD?”* To address this research question, I have re-examined and interpreted my past and present experiences (as represented in Chapter Three) to establish four significant themes. These four themes are: (1) the value of peer teaching and learning, (2) the role of team teaching, (3) the need for mentoring and (4) the importance of the learning environment. The themes that I have identified are my interpretations, which I have shared constructively with my critical friends (as explained in my methodology chapter, Chapter Two) during my study. As a self-study researcher, not only must I strive to be clear and open about the methods I have used to generate data (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Feldman, 2003), but my interpretations of this data should be accessible to my readers to ensure validity and trustworthiness. Hence, I agree with Suransky-Dekker (1998, p. 293) when she argues that the themes’ “value or truthfulness lies only in their persuasiveness and usefulness as perceived by

the reader.” Therefore, in this chapter, I show how these themes which have emerged from my lived educational experiences are relevant to the aim of my study. Furthermore, from these themes, I develop guiding principles to make my day-to-day practice as a HoD better in my professional context.

### **The value of peer teaching and learning**

The first major theme that emerges from my educational voyage (as represented in Chapter Three) is that there is value in peer teaching and learning. This is apparent in all my educational experiences. From my primary school years until the present time as a postgraduate student, it is evident that some form of peer learning has happened during and after formal teaching hours. This learning has happened through peer teaching formally in school under a teacher’s supervision or informally at home under a tree. Informal peer teaching at primary school level is evidenced in the following extract from Chapter Three:

In my primary school, every day after school, pupils played “school” to teach one another, especially the sounds such as ‘bh’, for example, ‘ibhasi’ (‘bus’). I was fortunate to be elected a ‘teacher’. As neighbours, all doing Substandard B, we gathered together in my house. My grandfather bought me a small chalkboard. We used chalks which we took from our classrooms to write on. If there was no chalk, we used a soft stone which did not scratch the chalkboard. This informal learning boosted my self-confidence. I could communicate freely with other pupils in our school. (p. 22)

Additionally, in my high school, more formal peer teaching took place:

Our Accountancy teacher always encouraged us to work together in small groups, to teach and also to learn from one another. Being a ‘teacher’ in our group always boosted my self-esteem as a student. (p. 25)

The value of learning in small groups is supported by Ash and Persall (1999, p. 18) who argue that “groups of people working together can be more productive than individuals working alone”. Correspondingly, Christudason (2000, para. 1) describes peer learning as “a form of cooperative learning that enhances the value of student-student interaction and results in various advantageous learning outcomes”. Likewise, peer teaching and learning during my schooldays enhanced my confidence as a learner and furthered my communication skills.

Peer teaching and learning did not only happen in my primary years and high school years. Even in my tertiary institution experiences, as a student-teacher (at a teacher training college), as a part-time undergraduate and postgraduate student (at different universities), there was working together and interaction between us as students. This is evident in the following extract from Chapter Three:

In my final year, I got a distinction in Mathematics! My Mathematics teacher always asked me to help my fellow students, sometimes in her presence. In addition, I made money by teaching experienced teachers who had come to the college to upgrade themselves. Those experienced teachers were called ‘special’ teachers. We, therefore, named them ‘*iziposholo*’. (p. 28)

In re-examining my tertiary institution experiences, I can see how, as fellow students, we learned best from one another because it was a small group and there was interaction amongst us. There was individual attention and communication flowed between students and their ‘teacher’. Learning was enhanced through our expression of ideas and sharing of our experiences and our understanding of the subject. As Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006, p. 1025) argue, “learning happens through reflection on experience and through interaction with others”. Therefore, we made use of peer teaching where we, as students, learned from and with each other through sharing our mathematical knowledge and problem-solving skills.

This sharing increased motivation and performance amongst us as students. As Spratt and Leung (2000, p. 220) contend, “peer teaching led to greater motivation, accuracy, involvement, sense of progress, and self-esteem”. This extract from Chapter Three describes my motivation:

Teaching ‘*iziposholo*’ did not only increase my income, but I was also intrinsically motivated to learn from their experiences because they were already practicing teachers. Moreover, they brought with them what they had learnt from their different schools for us to share. Learning from them boosted my self-confidence as a student-teacher. (p. 28)

Hence, we were able develop collegiality amongst ourselves. Longaretti, Godinho, Parr and Wilson (2002) support peer teaching as they also believe that it strengthens the exchange of knowledge and interaction amongst a range of people. The active engagement of people in groups is further encouraged by Wenger (1998, p. 7) where he argues that the “focus on participation for individuals means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities”.

Furthermore, peer teaching and learning is also evident in my university experiences as a postgraduate student:

My fellow students and I work together with our supervisor in our small group. She allows for interaction amongst the students to take place. As critical friends, we share our learning and help each other with ideas if necessary. There is peer learning through sharing of knowledge during group discussions. (Chapter Three, p. 43)

Costa and Kallick (1998, p. 50) describe a critical friend as a “trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend”. Therefore, critically assessing each other’s work can enhance learning. Accordingly, peer teaching and learning is encouraged through sharing of our indigenous knowledge in our supervision group. This sharing is evident during our group meetings with or without our supervisor. Peer teaching and learning is valuable because we have different educational and cultural backgrounds gained through our varied personal life histories and educational experiences. Thus, we gain diverse perspectives on our own educational experiences.

Currently, as a person who is in charge of the Foundation Phase in my school, I have to provide and co-ordinate guidance on the latest ideas on approaches to the subjects, methods, techniques, evaluation, aids, and so on (DoE, 1999). This extract from Chapter Three explains my role:

My role as a HoD is to ensure that effective teaching happens through proper engagement of teachers in the process of the implementation of policies. Some of what I call the “antiquated and vintage” teachers did not want to transform to the changes. They always preferred their old style of teaching for example, whole class teaching instead of small group teaching. I usually held monthly meetings with my team to share the challenges we were encountering, especially the new Outcome Based Education (OBE) terminology and the skills we had to master regarding the new teaching approaches, including the learner-centred approach and small group teaching. (p. 37)

Furthermore, as a HoD, it is vital that I learn from my peers who are also HoDs from the neighbouring schools, thereby forming a cluster or a community of practice. “Communities of practice represent a prerequisite for learning and are also at the centre of individuals’ meaningful learning” (Wenger, 2000, p. 229). Additionally, Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2008, p. 228)

advocate that “teachers be involved in learning communities, which develop over time, where professional knowledge is built in an open and professional way”. Therefore, as HoD’s we can bring with us all our skills and knowledge which we have acquired from our educational experiences. The peer learning that is attained should be significant. However, in my experience the ineffective implementation of the cluster group in our ward has made sharing of ideas impossible thus far, as revealed in this extract from Chapter Three:

During the third term of 2009, all HoDs in our ward were invited to attend a meeting which was called by our Superintendent of Education Management (SEM). We were asked to nominate representatives who would interact with Subject Advisors. I was nominated by HoD’s in my ward, as one of their representatives. We were told by the SEM that their aim was to form a cluster of HoD’s who would work hand in hand with the Subject Advisors to improve the reading and mathematical skills. They took our contact numbers and told us that we would be invited to a workshop before the term closed. Unfortunately, I was never contacted. (p. 38)

Thus, the failure of that cluster was caused by negligence from the authorities. According to James and McCormick (2009, p. 982), “opportunities for teachers to learn in these ways, through classroom inquiry and networking, depend significantly on organisational structures, cultures and leadership”. Therefore, the formation of clusters could make networking effective amongst peers if the authorities could monitor and control by visiting schools to ensure that clusters are efficient. Perhaps the cluster members could take it upon themselves to ensure that the cluster works effectively.

From this theme, which is ‘the value of peer teaching and learning’, I have developed the following principle to guide me in improving my day-to-day practice as a HoD: As a HoD in the Foundation Phase, *I can encourage peer learning to support collaborative learning.*

In 2010, I conducted a small-scale study in my school where I interviewed two experienced Foundation Phase teachers about their learning experiences in the context of curriculum transformation (as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Three). A key finding from that study was that once-off workshops are conducted by the Subject Advisors, and then the implementation of the curriculum is left entirely to the schools. As a HoD, I have then tried to close the gap by doing the work myself. I have designed all the templates for learning

programmes, work schedules and lesson plans. However, having re-examined my own educational history, I can now understand why some teachers took quite some time to understand what is to be written in the lesson plans. It is because they did not own the templates as they were not part of their formation. I did all the work by myself and they just accepted what I gave them without any criticism or analysis. Therefore, I have learned that I should rather allow teachers a chance to learn from and with their peers.

Before I conducted this self-study research, no formal peer teaching and learning had been introduced for teachers in my phase. Now, as a result of this study, I have allowed time for teachers in their respective grades to work together to design Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) lesson plans for all subjects, that is, Literacy (isiZulu and English), Mathematics and Life Skills. Next, a meeting for all Foundation Phase teachers was organised so that we could work together to come up with one lesson plan template which we are now all using (see Appendix B). For the first time in my experiences as a HoD, I have seen that my fellow teachers know how to use the lesson plan template effectively. As Eisner (2002, p. 578) contends, “the kind of schools we need would provide opportunities for members of subject-matter departments to meet to share their work, describe the problem, discuss achievements”. Furthermore, Putman and Borko (2000, p. 8) suggest that “when diverse groups of teachers with different types of knowledge expertise come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other’s expertise to create rich conversations and new insight into teaching and learning”. I believe that providing ongoing opportunities for meetings with peers in different grades will stimulate teachers’ creative skills, which could enhance their thinking and learning. Since teachers will be working together as peers, they can speak freely with one another. They will be discussing and sharing ideas not only on how they can design the lesson plan template, but also how they can make lessons more effective. Based on my experience, I believe that these discussions should also develop their communication skills.

Through re-examining my own educational journey, I have realised that peer teaching and learning is still profitable without a qualified teacher in front of the students. Peer teaching and learning can happen inside or outside the school. It can be planned or unplanned, formal or informal without any adult or management supervision. There is value in peer teaching because

there is individual contribution and interaction within the group. Collaboration with peers can yield positive results where there is active engagement and commitment of all stakeholders. Therefore, I will endeavour to foster a culture of peer teaching and learning among teachers in my phase. I will also organise meetings with neighbouring Foundation Phase HoD's in order to plan how we can encourage networking with Foundation Phase teachers around our area.

### **The role of team teaching**

The second prominent theme that emerges from my personal history is that team teaching can play a significant role in our learning as teachers. "Team teaching can be defined as a group of two or more teachers working together to plan, conduct and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of learners" (Goetz, 2000, para. 3). Quinn and Kanter (as cited in Goetz, 2000, para. 3) define team teaching as "simply team work between two qualified instructors who, together, make presentations to an audience." Likewise, Goetz (2000) shares the same idea of teachers collaborating. However, he uses the term collaborative teaching. He clarifies this term as follows:

Collaborative teaching: This academic experience describes a traditional team teaching situation in which the team teachers work together in designing the course and teach the material not by the usual monologue, but rather by exchanging and discussing ideas and theories in front of the learners. (Goetz, 2000, para. 5)

Therefore, team teaching and collaborative teaching involve lecturers or teachers working together with the main aim of educating the students in order to be productive and effective members of the society. Collaborative teaching can demonstrate effective sharing of knowledge to learners. Learners can benefit from this collaboration because learning will be more informative since teachers will be exchanging their ideas.

This team teaching or collaborative teaching does not only apply to experienced teachers. There could also be team teaching between the experienced teacher and the novice teacher. The novice teacher often brings with her new learning skills involving new technologies that could be applied in teaching to make the lessons more effective. Therefore, Rowley (1999) believes that "mentors and mentees can engage in team teaching or team planning" (p. 21). He further claims that "regardless of the nature of the experience, the purpose is to promote collegial dialogue

focused on enhancing teacher performance and student learning” (p. 21). Consequently, the purpose of the engagement in team teaching is to enhance learning for both teachers and learners.

Unfortunately, I did not perceive any team teaching in my primary school years. All teachers worked independently in their classrooms. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from Chapter Three:

There was no collaboration between the SSB (A) and the SSB (B) teacher. In fact, I did not witness any collaboration between teachers. Whilst doing Standard one and even Standard two, my teachers did not work as a team. If my class teacher was absent, we made noise and played for the whole day. (p. 23)

Nevertheless, whilst in high school, my assertive principal sometimes visited classrooms and took over whilst the teacher was in the classroom. This is conveyed in this extract from Chapter Three:

The principal sometimes visited the classrooms unexpectedly and asked questions relating to the subject. The teachers always seemed to feel uncomfortable and uneasy. Thinking of how the teachers froze when he entered the class, makes me think that his visits were unplanned. I now see that he should have made the teachers aware of his visits beforehand. During the principal’s visits, all the students in class would keep quiet and not answer even one question. The students were afraid because they were also not prepared for a personal visit from the principal. (p. 25)

My observation was that the teachers always felt defensive and uneasy. One of the reasons could be that there was no team teaching planned between the teachers and the principal. Thus, as Goetz (2000) highlights, team teaching should be planned so that it can enhance learning. It also needs both or all teachers to be active and willing participants, rather than one teacher just taking over.

Furthermore, in my educational voyage, peer teaching and learning did not only happen between us as students, even teachers themselves teamed up to make their teaching more effective. Contrary to my school days, as a student teacher, I witnessed team teaching between my two isiZulu lecturers in my teacher training college. Both lecturers were very cooperative. They worked together with the same group of students by exchanging and discussing ideas in one lesson. They gave each other a chance when discussing the same topic or elaborating on a



particular issue, for example, analysing the literature or poetry, which was very problematic for some students. This is apparent in the following excerpt from Chapter Three:

Three languages were offered at the college and all of them were compulsory. These languages were isiZulu, English and Afrikaans. Only Black African lecturers taught isiZulu. It was difficult to speculate on who my real isiZulu lecturer was in my first year, because two lecturers worked together during the same period, sharing the same lesson. I think it was only when I saw the signature on my report that I realised who exactly my isiZulu lecturer was. (p. 28)

Looking back, I can see that my educational experiences, from being a pupil in a primary school, to a student in a high school, as well as a student in a tertiary institution, were varied. My lecturers were more organised than the teachers in the primary school. Some lecturers taught the same group at the same time. This sharing of skills and knowledge generally enhanced students' learning. I now realise that it could have also built self-confidence among the team members and contributed to their learning.

Team teaching was not only evident in my teacher training college. As a life-long learner, I continued my studies and registered part-time for my Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree. Once again, my two isiZulu lecturers taught us during the same time, as this extract reveals:

I cannot forget the two isiZulu lecturers who were efficient, dedicated and hard-working. One could observe their close relationship, during lecture times. They sometimes interacted by sharing their teaching in the same class during the same time. They reminded me of my two isiZulu lecturers at the Teachers' College. Both of these lecturers were very strict but very fair and they were always prepared for their lessons (p. 41)

From the example of my lecturers, I have become aware of how team teaching can improve learning for both the teacher and the students because of the ongoing communication that arises through continuous interaction and support. Both Goetz (2000) and Buckley (1999) believe that through team teaching a helpful and caring atmosphere is created, which can lead to improvement in teaching and learning. Team teaching can also play a significant role in learning because the teachers' and learners' intellectual capabilities can be aroused which can boost confidence and encourage intrinsic motivation. As Goetz (2000, para. 37) argues, "hearing two or more perspectives in the classroom likely encourages intellectual stimulation, reinforcement

of new concepts, and openness to a variety of outlooks and interpretations, particularly as we recognize the need to respect the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of students”.

Nevertheless, team teaching can have disadvantages (Goetz, 2000; Buckley, 1999). For instance, difficulties can emerge when team teaching a large number of students. This manifested in the following extract from Chapter Three:

Furthermore, in one module, we were more than 100 students! Two lecturers were co-teaching the same module at the same time. As a student, I could not know most of my fellow colleagues. It was difficult for even the lecturers to know us! They could only interact with few students. Some of those students were ‘talkative’ during the lessons. We learned under such conditions with two lecturers sharing the class, sharing the same topic at once. One lecturer dominated over the other. (p. 42)

Thus, team teaching a large number of students could disadvantage some students as students bring with them different educational backgrounds and cultures. One must be active in one’s learning to ensure positive results. According to Shulman (2004, p. 514), “authentic and enduring learning occurs when the teacher is an active agent in the process not passive”. As Goetz (2000) argues, exposure to team teaching may cause incomprehension and disorientation for some learners. This could be true because the academic background and the capabilities of students differ from student to student and some may need more attention than others. My experience has also shown that it is imperative that when team teaching, teachers should thoroughly plan their roles during the lesson so that one does not dominate. Proper planning ensures that no one feels superior over the other.

From this second significant theme, ‘the role of team teaching’, I have created a principle to guide me as I endeavour to expand my day-to-day practice to support collaborative learning as a HoD in the Foundation Phase. This principle is: *to promote team teaching to support collaborative learning in my phase*. Although team teaching has never been introduced in my school, I believe that it is possible for future establishment. This can be effective since most of the teachers I work with have experience in teaching all grades in the Foundation phase. As a point of departure, I will organise a meeting with all Foundation Phase teachers. The aim of the meeting will be to share our educational and teaching experiences about team teaching. During our meeting, similar experiences regarding team teaching will be grouped together. Therefore,

we will plan together how we can effectively promote team teaching within the phase. Time will be planned to accommodate team-teaching. Discussions will be inclusive of the School Management Team. Eisner (2002, p. 228) maintains that “jointly [teachers] need to prepare thoroughly, conduct evaluation sessions after lessons together and record their learning reflections in diaries on collaborative teaching”. Therefore, all preparations for team teaching or co-teaching will be done thoroughly, so that the main aim of learning from each other can be achieved.

Through re-examining my educational voyage, I have understood that team teaching could be profitable or detrimental to the learning of teachers and learners. Team teaching can expand knowledge for both the learners and the teachers, but it must be carefully planned and both or all teachers need to be willing and active participants.

### **The need for mentoring**

South Africa is a global country which has formed partnerships with other foreign countries. A partnership was formed between Norway and South Africa (NTNU-Norway/UKZN-SA., 2005) regarding teacher education. In that partnership it was found that “teacher education internationally has been steadily moving towards a model that views the initial and on-going training and development of teachers as a joint responsibility between higher education institutions and the school where the teachers practice and continue to work” (p. 1). Therefore, a module in Mentoring in Schools was established. A few schools were selected to participate, and within those schools, not more than three teachers were chosen to attend. The programme capacitated all those teachers about mentoring in schools, as can be seen in this extract from Chapter Three:

Then in 2009, I did a Mentoring in Schools module in another university in KwaZulu-Natal. I heard about this module from a friend who was a post-graduate student. The module was funded, so we did not pay any fees. The module took almost three months. We were trained by facilitators who developed us on what mentoring entails. I was pleased with the knowledge I gained from that training. It was a fruitful and a very productive learning experience. (p. 42)

Hence, the third significant theme that emerges from my personal history as represented in Chapter Three is that there is a need for mentoring to encourage teacher learning. Mentoring is a process of learning which involves a succession of interactions between an experienced teacher (mentor) and a novice teacher or beginner teacher (mentee). One of the most crucial purposes of these interactions is to assist mentees in their endeavours of learning to teach. Cohen (1995, p. 15) understands mentoring “as a dynamic and interactive process that occurs within phases of an evolving experience for the mentee and mentor”. This process of interaction between the mentor and the mentee is a developmental process which encourages suitable actions to support individual growth. Therefore, the mentor and the mentee enter in a journey together. Awaya et al. (2003, p. 45) believe that “the journey involves the building of an equal relationship characterized by trust, the sharing of expertise, moral support, and knowing when to help and when to sit back”.

I believe that this relationship between the mentor and the mentee is essential since much of teachers’ actual learning starts in schools as novice teachers or beginner teachers are expected to explore and integrate the knowledge gained in their respective higher education institutions and apply it to teaching practice. Much of the learning happens not through books, but through real school situations, for example, marking the register. Thus, it is in schools where the novice teachers are expected to show their talent and their creative thinking to apply and extend their knowledge and skills gained during their initial teacher education.

As a novice teacher in 1988, I was very eager and ready to impart my skills and knowledge which I had gained at my teacher education institution. This extract from Chapter Three best explains my enthusiasm:

I was intrinsically motivated to start teaching in January 1988. In my opinion, my motivation was due to the high standard of training I received from the college which was at that time rated one of the best colleges of education in South Africa. (p. 29)

However, the teacher training college did not prepare me, as a newly qualified teacher, for what I would encounter in the actual teaching field. My expectations were different from what I perceived in my first few months of teaching as a novice teacher. Unfortunately, in my first

school, no form of mentoring was initiated by the school principal or any designated teacher.

This is apparent in this excerpt from Chapter Three:

Therefore, on my first day, I came to the school early at around seven o'clock. I was smartly dressed. When the female principal came, she called me by name and invited me into her office. She did not wear any smile. She told me that I would be teaching Standard one (now called Grade three). She gave me a two-quire exercise book and a register. She told me to write my lesson plans and record pupils' test marks. Unfortunately, she did not show me how it should be done. I immediately became devastated and overwhelmed. The principal showed me my classroom. She then introduced me to another Standard one teacher, who was a much matured and aged individual. The whole week passed, but the principal did not do any induction. (pp. 29-30)

From re-examining this experience, I can see how mentoring can benefit both the mentor and the mentee. As a novice teacher, I brought fresh ideas and energy from my teacher training college. I believe that these ideas could have been shared through "the building of an equal [mentoring] relationship categorised by trust, the sharing of expertise" (Awaya et al., 2003, p. 45). Mentors and mentees have different experiences that they can share by observing and discussing with one another. I agree with Orland and Hayuta's (2005, p. 558) claim that "mentoring should be regarded as a 'reskilling' rather than 'deskilling' practice". Since novice teachers bring their own practical knowledge to the schools, experienced teachers can also learn from them. Fairbanks, Freedman and Kahn (2000, p. 108) explain that "the collegial relationship [can allow] partners to learn from each other by asking questions, offering opinions, and providing suggestions". Therefore, this means that mentors can learn from their less experienced partners.

Even experienced teachers need regular support because of the ongoing changes in the curriculum which can confuse them. Hence, as Makhanya (2010, p. 42) contends, "teachers need support from Subject Advisors for mentoring and guidance and support". Likewise, Matoti (2010, p. 576) maintains that "educators need support from the principal and other departmental officials to be able to do their work effectively". However, the support from Subject Advisors is minimal in my school. They always tell teachers during professional development workshops that they are very few, but they have to service many schools within our ward. This extract from Chapter Three reveals the ineffective cluster formed in my ward:

During the third term of 2009, all HoDs in our ward were invited to attend a meeting which was called by our Superintendent of Education Management (SEM). We were asked to nominate representatives who would interact with Subject Advisors. I was nominated by HoD's in my ward, as one of their representatives. We were told by the SEM that their aim was to form a cluster of HoD's who would work hand in hand with the Subject Advisors to improve the reading and mathematical skills. They took our contact numbers and told us that we would be invited to a workshop before the term closed. Unfortunately, I was never contacted. That made me very sad. (p. 38)

From this theme of 'the need for mentoring', I have developed the principle that, as a HoD who wants to improve her day-to-day practice to support collaborative learning, *I can definitely find ways to develop myself as a mentor*. Since I was fortunate to have attended a Mentoring in Schools module in 2009, I will therefore aim to develop a systematic and well planned mentoring programme for all Foundation Phase teachers. I will start with the assertion made by Day (2007, p.1) that "teachers' intellectual needs-their knowledge of subject area and pedagogical content knowledge-are able to be refined and updated through formal programmes of CPD (continuing professional development) and in-school mentoring, coaching and critical friendship". These programmes could be effective since teachers can learn from one another.

Therefore, I will talk with all Foundation Phase teachers about mentoring. I will encourage teachers to share their experiences on mentoring. Together, we will design a formal mentoring programme agreeing on what will be done, by whom and when. Even experienced teachers will need to be mentored since there are ongoing curriculum changes from time to time. Through our formal mentoring programme, the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) that has been introduced this year (2012) can be unpacked to the satisfaction of all Foundation Phase teachers.

According to Awaya et al. (2003, p. 45), "mentoring is conceived as journey that describes a unique relationship between mentor and the mentee". This journey means engagement, working together and positive involvement which could build good communication skills, respect, trust and positive support for both the mentor and the mentee. As a HoD, I will ensure that the mentoring programme is structured such that all activities will encourage all teachers in my phase to be innovative and become efficient problem-solvers. My aim is that mutual commitment, communication and working interactively will maximise learning.

### **The importance of the learning environment**

The fourth important theme that emerges from my educational voyage as portrayed in Chapter Three is the importance of the learning environment. It is evident in my representation of my educational experiences that the history of our country has had an impact on the education system. Education policy in South Africa under the National Party government before 1990 ensured discrimination and oppression of particular racial groups. As Pithouse (2005, p. 207) points out, “the policy of separate education in South Africa ensured that a rigid hierarchy of educational privilege circumscribed all children’s school lives”.

However, after 1990, the new democratic South African government has to a certain extent socially transformed the country by introducing many educational policies to address the educational imbalances of the past. Nevertheless, the school learning environments under which I learned and have taught remain totally different to former ‘White’ schools which have proper infrastructure including libraries, laboratories, playing fields for all kinds of sporting activities and even swimming pools!

From my primary school years until my high school education, each school’s infrastructure was similar to the other. This extract from Chapter Three describes my primary school environment:

All primary schools in my township were built of bricks, had running water and later electricity was installed. All primary schools had two classrooms per class, that is, two classes for Substandard A, two classes for Substandard B, two classes for Standard one and two classes for Standard two, totaling eight classrooms. There was one office for the principal, a small staffroom and a store room. There was neither a library nor a laboratory. There was a large open space which was used as a soccer field. This open-space was not properly maintained. It had weeds and some areas had no grass. During breaks, this ground was shared by both boys and girls. There were neither netball nor volleyball courts. We sometimes fought with boys because we sometimes rushed to the ground in order to book first. It was difficult to play or pass through the area during rainy days because it became very muddy. It was a painful experience because we often fell and became muddy. (p. 19)

During the apartheid era, there was unequal distribution of resources amongst races. As Pithouse (2005, p. 207) explains, “while white schools received a disproportionately greater amount of government funding and had superior facilities and resources, ‘black’, ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’ schools were actively disadvantaged in countless respects”. This extract from Chapter Three further indicates the learning environment in my primary school days:

I can recall that there were few desks in our school, especially in the Substandard A and Substandard B classrooms. The desks were designed to seat two pupils, but due to the overcrowding in our classes, we had to sit in three's or even four's, instead of two pupils per desk. No one had a place of his/her own. There were a few benches in our classes but still others had to sit down on the floor and there was no mat. (p. 20)

In the same way, Makhanya (2010) shares a similar experience of a lack of resources (see also, Matoti, 2010), as she explains that during her primary school years the environment was not conducive to learning. She explains that “teaching aids never made an appearance; there were no resources” (Makhanya, 2010, p. 26). Nonetheless, in my experience, there was learning happening in our schools despite the schools being underresourced.

Likewise, in my high school, the school's infrastructure did not have what Pithouse (2005, p. 207) termed “standard features of white schools”. She meant that white schools had resources such as libraries, playing fields and swimming pools. This extract from Chapter Three describes the school infrastructure:

It was built of bricks and one of the dormitories was built of stones. There were more than 20 classrooms. The school started from Form one (now called Grade eight) to Form five (which was later changed to Standard ten or Matric but is currently called Grade twelve). The school had running water and electricity, but the road inside the school premises was gravelly. The school had running water and electricity. The school had a library which was not fully maintained. Some books were scattered on the floor. There was no librarian. Nobody taught me how to look for books for particular subjects. Information was not dispersed to us as students. My school was a very immense school with soccer playgrounds and netball court. All athletes used the same ground for other sporting activities like playing baseball which was also one of the prominent sport codes that was played in school. (p. 23)

Therefore, my observation is that there was slight improvement in the learning environment from the primary school to high school. In contrast to my primary and high school environment, my teacher training college's learning environment was exquisite and was conducive to teaching and learning. Through recalling this experience, I have become aware that the conditions under which learning takes place have an enormous influence on learning and teaching. Even though the teacher training college was meant for Black African students only, the learning environment was dissimilar to my primary school and high school. Most of the lecturers were White. The



learning environment was welcoming, attractive and friendly. The school infrastructure was ideal for effective learning and teaching to take place. This extract from Chapter three confirms this:

At the college, there were proper buildings, proper sanitation, electricity and running water. The classes were inviting, colourful with charts/pictures and lots of teaching aids. It had resources such as typing machines, overhead projectors, wall charts and sufficient learning material for both the lecturers and student teachers. (p. 27)

Moreover, as I progressed to study in universities, there was a change from attending in classrooms to sitting in lecture halls, as this extract shows:

The design of the university's buildings was different to the school buildings. I was used to classrooms, but here there were lecture halls with air-conditioners. Resources, for example, overhead projectors, and computers were available and accessible for all students. All lecturers had offices. A café was also inside the premises which catered for more than 500 part-time students. (p. 40)

However, the infrastructure of the two universities where I attended was totally different:

My current university campus is an ex-teacher training college which was for Whites only until the post- apartheid merging of the former university and the teacher training college. The lecture halls are all air-conditioned, clean, maintained regularly. The buildings, the surroundings and the lawns are well maintained. (Chapter Three, p. 42)

In the school where I am currently teaching, the learning environment is conducive to learning, but lacks proper maintenance as this extract shows:

The school is built of bricks. It has electricity, running water and proper sanitation for both learners and teachers. Some of the windows and doors are broken. The lawns are not properly maintained because they are not attractive. The lawns have few flowers. The school has a computer class with about 20 computers which were donated. (Chapter Three, p. 36)

In a study done by Matoti (2010) about the perceptions of educators regarding the state of education in South Africa, one of the findings was the adverse working environments under which many teachers work. He, therefore, contends that “unfavourable working conditions affect teaching and learning adversely” (Matoti, 2010, p. 576). Therefore, the conditions under which learning takes place have an enormous influence on learning and teaching. The learning environment should be conducive to learning.

Hence, I have identified the significant theme of “the importance of the learning environment”, which has been developed from my voyage of my educational experiences. From that theme, I have developed a principle which is aimed at the improvement of my day-to-day practice as a HoD. I, therefore, *can revitalize the learning environment in order to support collaborative learning*. As a HoD, I will encourage creative teaching strategies that will change the classroom environment to become inviting and welcoming. According to Simplicio (2000, p. 675) such “change must involve new and creative approaches to everyday classroom instruction”.

In addition, through re-examining my educational experiences, I have realised that, as teachers, we should be creative and design our own learning materials. This argument is supported by Kunene (2002, p. 142) as she claims, “teachers should have shown their creative skills by constructing reading materials”. Likewise, Morrow (2002, p. 6) advocates that “teachers themselves need to design learning programmes, sensitive to their learners and responsive to their contexts, and develop appropriate resources and other learner support material, in order to achieve the nationally mandated learning outcomes”. Therefore, teachers need to be creative by collecting waste materials such as newspaper articles and/or old magazines to design their reading books. Story books relevant to the lives of the learners could be created from these newspaper cuttings or magazines. This excerpt from Chapter Three gives details:

I remember that in the late 90’s, all Foundation Phase teachers were invited to attend an in-service workshop which was organised by our Subject Advisor. The main objective of the workshop was to promote reading.... We were divided into groups according to grades. At that time, I was teaching Grade one. I can recall how our group planned the story line. We just created a story by basing it on our experiences of our learners’ lives in our schools’ environment. We eventually came up with a very interesting story. We used magazines to cut pictures and created a story of a boy that we named ‘Mepho’. The story was about a boy who loved playing soccer, but could not play for the school because he had no soccer boots! I was appointed by our group to present our story book to the whole group of teachers. Even today, some teachers from that workshop still call me ‘Mepho’.(p. 38)

Therefore, I have realised that for learning to be enhanced, teachers have to use their creative skills. Regarding creativity amongst teachers, Morrow (2007) maintains that teachers should devise their own workbooks. He argues that “teaching needs to be freed from of the dominance of ‘textbooks’” (Morrow, 2007, p. 6). However, there has recently been an intervention

programme called the Annual National Assessment (ANA) which aims to improve reading and numeracy in primary schools. As part of this intervention, workbooks have been designed for teachers and we are required to use them. This extract from Chapter Three explains:

All Foundation Phase HoD's in our ward were called to attend a one-day ANA training workshop towards the end of January 2011. ANA was conducted to assess Literacy (IsiZulu) and Numeracy in Grade two and Grade three in February 2011.... During the facilitation of the ANA workshop, the facilitators emphasised the use of the prescribed workbooks for our learners to pass the annual assessment. Teachers were expected to produce good results, but the relevant resources, for example, the Department's workbooks for Literacy and Numeracy, had not been delivered in time. Some schools did not receive the workbooks at all, but other schools, including mine, did get some workbooks but these were not enough for all learners. (p. 39)

To foster creativity at my school, I have decided that, as a HoD, I will form a partnership with one of the formerly 'White' primary schools which is in our area. During my fourth year as a teacher, teachers from our school once visited this school and they showed us their classrooms and how they made their learning environments more stimulating and inviting. I will also invite experienced Subject Advisors (in Early Childhood Development) to share their strategies for developing creativity in our learning environments. This is supported by Horng, Hong, Chanlin, Chang, & Chu (2005) who explains that teachers could be more creative by interacting with others whose teaching approach is effective. "by joining workshops of creative teachers and creative teaching strategies" These creative teaching strategies will involve thorough planning and preparation of all the activities that will enhance learning and make the learning environment conducive to learning.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have given an account of how my lived experiences can become meaningful by giving details of how significant themes were identified from my personal history. These themes were informed by my past and present educational experiences. Since my intention is to support collaborative learning, I have also explained how guiding principles were developed with the intention of enhancing learning and teaching in my professional life. My personal history highlights how my lived experiences can positively contribute to effective teaching and learning.

In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I summarise my whole personal history self-study research by reviewing the dissertation and sharing my experiences of doing this self-study. I also give some recommendations for educational practice and further research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION: MOVING FROM REFLECTION TO PRACTICE

#### Introduction

The intention of my personal history self-study is to explore how I can support collaborative teacher learning in my schools' Foundation Phase. It is my goal not only to share my past and present experiences, but to reflect on my own educational experiences in hopes of improving my effectiveness as a HoD.

In this final chapter, Chapter Five, I conclude my personal history self-study with a reflective review of my study in which I consider how the study has responded to my research questions. Finally, in this chapter, I also offer recommendations based on the study and identify possibilities for future research that I would like to undertake.

#### A reflective review of the study

In Chapter One, I stipulated that my study would be a personal history self-study which focused mainly on supporting collaborative teacher learning in my school. My research emanated from the small scale study which I did in 2010. In that study, my findings were that in my Foundation Phase team, teachers learned best when working together. Therefore, as a HoD, I felt obliged to explore how I could effectively support collaborative teacher learning through my own practice. The first key research question that I have addressed in my study is: *What are my past and present experiences of collaborative learning?* The second key research question that I have addressed is: *“How can I learn from my experiences in order to support collaborative teacher learning in my day-to-day practice as a Head of Department?”*

The methodological approach employed in my personal history self-study research, as detailed in Chapter Two, has generated meaningful learning experiences for me. The data generation methods I used were very productive and profitable in recalling and re-examining my past and present experiences in response to my first key research question. I did not work in isolation. I used my critical friends' positive and productive feedback in seeking ways to improve my practice. Thus, I have learnt that constructive criticisms build up confidence and can boost the morale of teachers. Through my personal history self-study research, I have realised that being a HoD does not mean that I am an expert. Teachers have

knowledge and skills that they can share with each other. I can also learn from my fellow teachers as I have learned by sharing of ideas and knowledge with my supervisor as well as my peers in our supervision group meetings.

The data representation of my educational voyage (Chapter Three) and my interpretation of this voyage (as presented in Chapter Four) addressed my first and second key research questions. Through recalling my past and present experiences, I came to understand that I can learn significant lessons and teachings which I have overlooked for all these past years. My data production process has evoked memories which I never thought would become apparent in my current teaching context. Chapter Three re-examined my educational experiences from which my professional reflections began. Through revisiting my memories of my educational experiences to where I am today as a HoD and a postgraduate student in her final stages of dissertation writing, I have come to see the need for collaborative learning amongst teachers. Until I undertook this study, I was not aware of the positive impact that peer teaching and learning has had on my personal and professional life. Hence, I have become conscious that peer learning, team teaching or co-teaching can boost a person's confidence and simultaneously allow her to gain skills and knowledge. Re-examining my past made me think deeply about what I was not doing in my present context and what I want to achieve in the near future. By doing this personal history self-study, I have realised that I can draw on my past and current experiences to strengthen and sustain the working relationship that I have with my fellow colleagues.

Chapter Four highlighted four significant themes which emerged from my educational voyage: the value of peer teaching and learning, the role of team teaching, the need for mentoring and the importance of the learning environment. Therefore, I have realised that these themes which have been developed into principles to guide my practice could also bring changes to how my fellow teachers think about their collaborative teaching and learning. As Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006, p. 1025) point out, "teachers can shape their thinking about their teaching".

### **Recommendations based on the study**

#### **Encouraging peer learning through collaboration**

Teachers have different educational and cultural backgrounds that they have acquired in different contexts; hence, learning is socially and culturally constructed (Kelly, 2006; Wenger, 1998). That means that teachers have diverse skills, knowledge and values informed by their different perspectives on learning. As Samaras et al. (2004, p. 908) maintain, “teachers begin their work with vast amounts of personal history in their future workplaces”. A significant finding from my personal history self-study is that through peer learning, innovative practice can be promoted and be valued. Learning from peers can involve the establishment of clusters with my neighbouring schools. Kunene (2009, p. 146) defines a cluster “as a curriculum support forum comprised of a group of teachers from neighbouring schools that have mostly similar social, and economic contexts”. Through the formation of clusters, networking can also be promoted. Through exchanging and sharing ideas in networks of critical friends, teachers can improve their personal and professional learning through constructive feedback and criticism. As Franzak (2002, p. 259) contends, “Critical Friends Group (CFG) concept brings together teachers at all levels of experience to prompt and support one another’s professional growth”. Therefore, further research could explore the question, *“How can peer learning in cluster groups be supported in order to improve collaborative teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase?”*

### **Promoting and encouraging team teaching**

This study has highlighted how, through team teaching, new understandings, insights and practices can be shared meaningfully amongst teachers. Thus, as a team of teachers, we can learn to develop new skills, methods and techniques which can enhance learning and teaching to the benefit of both the learners and teachers within the educational organisations. I have realised that team teaching should become a positive learning experience where ongoing discussions, planning, open communication and relationship and team building can be promoted. Team teaching can enhance diverse teaching strategies, approaches and teaching styles.

Since team teaching will be introduced for the first time in my school context, I foresee challenges because some teachers can impose their ideas and some teachers can resist change. Therefore, proper training through staff development will need to be done in order to minimise obstacles. However, our intention will be to benefit both the teachers and

learners in the school. Therefore, further research could explore the question, ***“How can team teaching be successfully introduced into a primary school?”***

### **Developing a team of mentors**

Through my personal history self-study, I have realised that mentoring can provide opportunities for discussion, for guidance and support and decision-making for novice teachers as well as experienced teachers. I now understand that acting as a mentor requires commitment, skill and a great deal of energy as the mentor must structure and manage the mentoring programme which must be fixed into school times.

In my current school context, no formal mentoring structure has been formed. Therefore, I recommend that a mentoring expert be invited to my school to workshop the School Management Team (SMT), together with the whole staff members on what mentoring is all about. Thereafter, the school will design its own policy on School Mentoring. In my school context, master teachers or senior teachers can be identified and be trained, capacitated and be developed to become mentors. The design and implementation of a mentoring programme will be driven by the developmental needs that have been identified by teachers in our school context. Mentors can also benefit by improving their own professional competency. Therefore, further research could explore the question, ***“How can mentoring be effectively supported to enhance collaborative learning in a primary school?”***

### **Creation of a stimulating learning environment**

Through this research, I have become aware of how, through team work, teachers' creativity can be encouraged to enhance the learning environment. This will boost teachers' confidence because the learning environment will be conducive to learning, thereby improving the quality of teaching and learning. Forming partnerships with well-equipped and better resourced schools could help us to find ways to promote effective learning since the classroom should be the environment that supports learning. Additionally, we can work together as partners to design and create our own resources relevant to our learners' background and needs. As Erickson, Brandes, Mitchell and Mitchell (2005, para. 6) contend, as teachers we must “create a classroom learning environment that is both fruitful and enjoyable for all the participants”. Teachers can design creative teaching strategies in the form of lesson plans and meaningful learning materials and stimulating learning charts



can be created together. I now realise that creativity is a skill that can be developed and supported (Simplicio, 2000). Therefore, further research could explore the question, ***“How can teachers in a primary school work together to create an inspiring learning environment?”***

### **Conclusion**

My personal history self-study has created a platform for me to think deeply about the positive and the negative influences that my past and present experiences have had on my educational life. I have realised that people can learn from their lives through re-examining their personal histories. Recalling my lived experiences has changed the way I think as a Head of Department. However, my personal history self-study has only focused thus far on my own past and present experiences. For future research, I would be interested in learning more about my fellow teachers’ past and present experiences of collaborative learning.

My reflective journal, narrative writing, memory drawings and artefact retrieval evoked emotional experiences. Through a systematic coding and interpretation process, I was able to coalesce my lived experiences into holistic themes which I also developed into principles with the intention of improving my practice. Through working with critical friends, I have learnt that collegial support helps sustain learning which is enhanced by working together and learning from each others’ views and ideas.

Doing this personal history self-study research has changed my attitude towards other teachers. I feel empowered to listen to their voices to instill motivation that can boost their self-confidence. My self-study research has allowed me to explore how my lived personal experiences, my cultural and historical background, and my learning experiences can inform my teaching. My study has brought a positive change in my personal and professional life.

## REFERENCES

- Allender, J.S., & Allender, D. (2006). How did our early education determine who we are as teachers? In L.M. Fitzgerald, M.L. Heston & D.L. Tidwell (Eds.), *Collaboration and community: Pushing boundaries through self-study. Proceedings of the sixth international conference on self-study of teacher education practices, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England, July 30-August 3* (pp. 14-17). Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa.
- Allender, J. S., & Manke, M. P. (2004). Evoking self in self-study: The analysis of artifacts. In D. L. Tidwell, L. M. Fitzgerald & M. L. Heston (Eds.), *Journeys of hope: Risking self-study in a diverse world. Proceedings of the fifth international conference on self-study of teacher education practices, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England, June 27 - July 1* (pp. 20-23). Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa.
- Ash, R.C., & Persall, J.M. (1999). The principal as chief learning officer. National Association of Secondary School Principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 84(616), 15-22.
- Awaya, A., McEwan, H., Heyler, D., Linsky, S., Lum, D., & Wakukawa, P. (2003). Mentoring as a journey, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(1), 45-56.
- Buckley, F.J. (1999). *Team teaching: What, why and how?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Butler, D.L., Lauscher, H.N., Jarvis-Selinger, S., & Beckingham, B. (2004). Collaboration and self-regulation in teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(5), 435-455.
- Cohen, N. (1995). Mentoring adults. In N. Cohen, *Mentoring adult learners: a guide for educators and trainers*. Malabar, Fla: Krieger.
- Christudason, A. (2003). Successful learning: Peer learning. Retrieved from <http://www.cdntl.nus.edu.sg/success/sl37.htm>
- Costa, A.L., & Kollick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership*, 51(2), 49-51.
- Day, C. (30 April, 2007). A passion for teaching. Public lecture: General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland. Retrieved from <http://arrts.gtnci.org.uk/gtnci/handle/2428/11439>.
- Department of Education (DoE). (1999). *Personnel Administrative Measures*. Pretoria: Government Press
- Department of Education (DoE). (2009). *Report of the task team for the review of the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement*. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DOHET). (2011). *The minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications*. Pretoria: Government Press.

- Eisner, E.W. (2002). The kind of schools we need. *Phil Delta Kappan*, 83(8), 576-583.
- Erickson G., Brandes, G.M., Mitchell, I., & Mitchell J. (2005). Collaborative teacher learning: Findings from two professional development projects. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(7), 787-798.
- Evans, L. (2002). What is teacher development? *Oxford Review of Education*, 28(1), 123-137.
- Fairbanks, C.M., Freedman, D., & Kahn, C. (2000). The role of effective mentors in learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 5(2), 101-112.
- Feldman, A. (2003). Validity and quality in self-study, *Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 26-28.
- Franzak, J.K. (2002). Developing a teacher identity: The impact of critical friends practice on the student teacher. *English Education*, 34(4), 258-280.
- Fraser, C., Kennedy, A., Reid, L. & McKinney, S. (2007). Teachers' continuing professional development: contested concepts, understandings and models. *Journal of In-service Education*, 33(2), 153-169.
- Goetz, K. (2000). Perspectives on team teaching. A semester 1 independent inquiry. *A Peer Reviewed Journal*, 1 (4). Retrieved from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~egallery>.
- Henze, I., Van Driel, J.H., & Verloop, N. (2009). Experienced Science teachers' learning in the context of educational innovation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(2), 184-199.
- Hoadley, U., & Jansen, J.D. (2002). *Curriculum: from plans to practices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hornig, J.-S., Hong, J.-C., Chanlin, L.-J., Chang, S.-H., & Chu, H.-C. (2005). Creative teachers and creative teaching strategies. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 29(4), 352-358.
- James, M., & McCormick, R. (2009). Teachers learning how to learn. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(7), 973-982.
- Johnson, S., Monk, M., & Hodges, M. (2000). Teacher development and change in South Africa: a critique of the appropriateness of transfer of northern/western practice. *Compare*, 30(2), 179-192.
- Kallaway, P. (2002). *The history of education under apartheid 1948-1994: The doors of learning and culture shall be opened*. Cape Town: Pearson Education.
- Kelly, P. (2006). What is teacher learning? A socio-cultural perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 505-519.
- Knight, P. (2002). A systemic approach to professional development: learning as practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(3), 229-241.
- Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2006). Developing fundamental principles for teacher education

programs and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 1020-1041.

- Kunene, A. (2009). Learner-centeredness in practice: Reflections from a curriculum education specialist. In K. Pithouse, C. Mitchell & R. Moletsane (Eds.), *Making connections: Self-study & social action* (pp. 139-152). New York: Peter Lang
- LaBoskey, V.K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J.J. Loughran, M.L. Hamilton, V.K. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.) *International handbook of self-study of teacher education practices* (pp. 817-869). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Lieberman, A. & Pointer Mace, D.H. (2008). Teacher learning: the key to educational reform. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(3), 226-234
- Loughran, J. (2007). Researching Teacher Education and practices: Responding to the challenges, demands, and expectations of self-study. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 12-20.
- Longaretti, L., Godinho, S., Parr, G., & Wilson, J. (2008). *Rethinking peer teaching*. Retrieved from [www.aare.edu.au/02pap/lon02122.htm](http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/lon02122.htm).
- Makhanya, H. (2010). "Preparing for the implementation of foundations for learning": A self-study of a subject advisor. Unpublished Med dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Maree, K. (Ed.). (2007). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers
- Matoti, S.N. (2010). The unheard voices of educators: Perceptions of educators about the state of education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(4), 568-584.
- Meirink, J.A., Imants, J., Meijer, P.C., & Verloop, N. (2010). Teacher learning and collaboration in innovative teams. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 40(2), 161-181.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass
- Mitchell, C. (2011). *Doing visual research*. London; Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morrow, W. (2007). What is teachers' work? *Journal of Education*, 41, 3-19.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2010). Analysing qualitative data. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 98-122). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- NTNU-Norway/UKZN-SA. (2005). Enhancing Teacher Education through a university-school partnership model.
- Orland, L., & Hayuta, Y. (2005). Sometimes a novice and sometimes an expert: mentors' professional expertise as revealed through their stories of critical incidents, *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(4), 357-578.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice*. Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer.

- Pithouse, K. (2005). Self-study through narrative interpretation: Probing lived experiences of educational privilege. In C. Mitchell, S. Weber & K. O'Reilly-Scanion (Eds.), *Just who do we think we are? Methodologies for autobiography and self-study in teaching* (pp. 206-217). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Pithouse, K. (2007). *Learning through teaching: A narrative self-study of a novice teacher educator*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Pithouse, K. (2011). Picturing the self: Drawing as a method for self-study. In L. Theron, C. Mitchell & J. Stuart (Eds.), *Picturing research: Drawings as visual methodology* (pp. 37-48). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Pithouse, K. (2011). "The future of our young children lies in our hands": Re-envisioning teacher authority through narrative self-study. In C. Mitchell, T. Strong-Wilson, K. Pithouse & S. Allnutt (Eds.), *Memory and pedagogy* (pp. 177-190). New York: Routledge.
- Putman, R.T., & Borko. H. (2000). What do new views on knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15.
- Rowley, J.B. (1999). Education Leadership: The Good mentor. *Supporting New Teachers*, 56(8), 20-22.
- Samaras. A.P., Hicks, M.A., & Berger, J.G. (2004). Self-study through personal history. In Loughran, M.L. Hamilton, V.K. LaBoskey & T. Russell (Eds.), *International Handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 905-942). Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Shulman, L.S., & Shulman, J.H. (2004). How and what teachers learn: a shifting perspective. *Journal of curriculum studies*, 36(2), 257-271.
- Simplicio, J.S.C. (2000). Teaching classroom educators how to be more effective and creative. *Education*, 120(4), 675-680.
- Soudien, C. (2002). Teachers' responses to the introduction of apartheid education. In P. Kallaway (Ed.), *The History of education under apartheid 1948-1994: "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened"* (pp. 211-223). Cape Town: Pearson Education.
- Spratt, M., & Leung, B. (2000). Peer teaching and peer learning revisited. *ELT Journal*, 54(3), 218-226
- Steyn, T. (2011). Implementing continuing professional teacher development: policy and practice. *Acta Academia*, 43(1), 211-233.
- Suransky-Dekker, A.C. (1998). Portraits of Black schooling in South Africa. *International Journal of Qualitative studies in Education*, 11(2), 291-301.
- Varathaiah, B.A. (2010). *Exploring the relationship between teachers' experiences and evolving teacher identities in post-apartheid South Africa.: A narrative inquiry*. Unpublished Med dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization, SAGE Social Science Collection*, 7(2), 225-246.

Wieder, A. (2002). Informed by apartheid: Mini-oral histories of two Cape Town teachers. In P. Kallaway (Ed.), *The History of education under apartheid 1948-1994: "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened"* (pp. 197-209). Cape Town: Pearson Education.

**APPENDIX A**  
**FOUNDATION PHASE LESSON PLAN**  
**MATHEMATICS**

**GRADE:** .....

**WEEK/S:** .....

**WHOLE CLASS ACTIVITIES**

Counting	
Mental mathematics	
Independent activities	
<b>Group Teaching Counting and Estimated Skills</b>	
Group 1	
Group 2	
<b>Concept Development</b>	
Group 1	
Group 2	
<b>Problem solving</b>	
Group 1	
Group 2	
<b>Written Recording</b>	
Group 1	
Group 2	
Assessment	
Resources	
Date Completed	





## APPENDIX B

C830 Ntuzuma Township  
P.O. KwaMashu  
4360

Tel: 031509 2888  
Cel: 083 595 5439  
Email: 209541090@ukzn.ac.za

10 October 2011

Dear Critical friend

### **REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM DISCUSSIONS IN CRITICAL FRIENDS' MEETING**

Supporting collaborative learning in the Foundation Phase: A self-study of a Head of Department.

The purpose of this study is to explore how I can learn from my own lived educational experiences to better support collaborative learning through my own practice as Foundation Phase Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. To achieve my purpose, I reflect on the voyage of my educational experiences (with special references made to my experiences of collaborative learning) from my primary school years, to my high school years, my time at a college of education, my experiences as a novice teacher, as a Head of Department and lastly as a lifelong learner at renowned universities. These memory journey experiences are important for this study as they form part of my practice and thus form the data for the personal history self-study research I am engaged in. The data production methods include my reflective journal writing, my memory drawings and artefact retrieval of photographs and reports.

Through re-examining and interpreting my educational life, I will explore how I can use this deeper understanding of our lived experiences to improve my own practice to better support collaborative teacher learning in my day-to-day practice as a HoD.

This study is supervised by Dr Kathleen-Pithouse Morgan who is a senior lecturer at the School of Education, UKZN. Dr Pithouse-Morgan can be contacted telephonically at 031- 260 3460.

In this study, I will also gather information through group discussions with critical friends. The critical friends meetings will take place during our group MEd supervision meetings and will not require any additional time from you. I will take notes during the discussions.

I hereby request permission from you to refer to our discussions of our critical friends' meetings in my study. I will only use this data if I receive written consent from you.

If I receive your consent, I will use this data in a way that respects your dignity and privacy. My notes on your inputs to the discussion will be securely stored and disposed of if no longer required for research purposes. Your name or any information that might identify you or your school will not be used in any presentation or publication that might come out of the study.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution to research on teacher development.

I also wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the study and may withdraw your consent at any time if you feel the need to. If you withdraw your consent, you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If you have any questions relating to the rights of research participants, you can contact Ms Phume Ximba in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 3587.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely  
Sizakele Charmaine Mlambo

---

**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

TITLE OF STUDY: *Supporting collaborative learning in the Foundation Phase: A self-study of a Head of Department.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_

Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this study, and do consent to participate in the study.

I understand that I am free to leave/withdraw from the study at any time if I want to without any negative or undesirable consequences to myself.

I consent to the following data collection activities (please tick):

	YES	NO
Critical friends' discussions		

.....  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

## APPENDIX C

C830 Ntuzuma Township  
P.O. KwaMashu  
4360

Tel: 031509 2888  
Cel: 083 595 5439  
Email: 209541090@ukzn.ac.za

10 October 2011

Dear Principal

### **REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE THE SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPH IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Supporting collaborative learning in the Foundation Phase: A self-study of a Head of Department.

The purpose of this study is to explore how I can learn from my own lived educational experiences to better support collaborative learning through my own practice as Foundation Phase Head of Department (HoD) in a primary school. To achieve my purpose, I reflect on the voyage of my educational experiences (with special references made to my experiences of collaborative learning) from my primary school years, to my high school years, my time at a college of education, my experiences as a novice teacher, as a Head of Department and lastly as a lifelong learner at renowned universities. These memory journey experiences are important for this study as they form part of my practice and thus form the data for the personal history self-study research I am engaged in. The data production methods include my reflective journal writing, my memory drawings and artefact retrieval of photographs and reports.

Through re-examining and interpreting my educational life, I will explore how I can use this deeper understanding of our lived experiences to improve my own practice to better support collaborative teacher learning in my day-to-day practice as a HoD.

This study is supervised by Dr Kathleen-Pithouse Morgan who is a senior lecturer at the School of Education and Development, UKZN. Dr Pithouse-Morgan can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2603460.

In this study, I would like to use the school photograph as a data source. I will only use this photograph if I receive written consent from you. Copies of our school photograph will be securely stored and disposed of if no longer required for research purposes. If I receive your consent, I will use this data in a way that respects your dignity and privacy. Names of teachers, learners or any information that might identify members of our school will not be used in any presentation or publication that might come out of the study. However it is possible that people who are familiar with those in the photographs might recognise them.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution to research on teacher learning and professional growth.

I also wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the study and may withdraw your consent at any time prior to the completion of the dissertation if you feel the need to. If you withdraw your consent, you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If you have any questions relating to the rights of research participants, you can contact Ms Phume Ximba in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 3587.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely  
Sizakele Charmaine Mlambo

---

**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

TITLE OF STUDY: *Supporting collaborative learning in the Foundation Phase: A self-study of a Head of Department.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_

Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this study, and do consent to participate in the study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent prior to the completion of the dissertation if I want to without any negative or undesirable consequences to myself.

I consent to the following data collection activities (please tick):

	YES	NO
Photograph		

.....  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE