

**MENTORING NOVICE TEACHERS IN LEARNER  
BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT: A DEPUTY PRINCIPAL'S  
SELF-STUDY**

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## DECLARATION

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As the candidate's supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis

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Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Date: 4 December 2020

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## ABSTRACT

I am a deputy principal and seasoned teacher in a multicultural urban South African school. I observed the many challenges that novice teachers encounter with compassion, and I understood their anguish when battling to manage learner behaviour in their classrooms. As I often wondered whether their plight was related to a lack of mentorship in the school, this self-study project focused on my own mentoring practice as a seasoned teacher and a deputy principal. Hence, the study's purpose was to explore how I could improve my mentoring practice to guide novice teachers appropriately. To achieve this purpose, I sought the participation of novice teachers who were employed at my school. I also worked closely with three fellow doctoral students as my critical friends. A sociocultural theoretical perspective was foundational in the study because it was the platform from which I embarked to understand the phenomenon of novice teachers and how they should function and be supported in a school. My first research question was: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* In responding to this question, I recalled my own experiences of supportive and unsupportive mentoring. Addressing this question helped me evaluate the role I played – and should play in the future – concerning mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support. My second question was: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* In response to this question, I engaged novice teachers in creative and participative discussions. By sharing our knowledge and ideas and giving feedback on the challenges and joys that the novice teachers experienced in their classrooms, I was able to put myself in their shoes. In this manner, I developed into a better manager and mentor as I understood novice teachers' plight. Involving myself in self-study as a mentor and deputy principal enabled me to share my successes and frustrations regarding the induction of novice teachers into a school. My study offers a unique and motivational example of a senior teacher's endeavours in self-study research.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

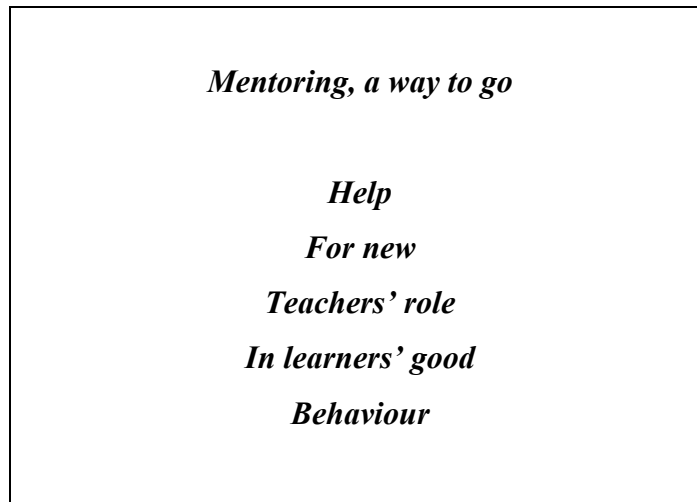
### **MENTORING – A WAY TO GO**

#### **1.1 Introduction: Change Begins with Me**

I am a deputy principal and seasoned teacher in a multicultural urban school that accommodates learners and teachers from diverse backgrounds. I started working as a professional teacher in a primary school in 1994. I was transferred to another primary school in 2003 where I was promoted to the position of Head of Department (HoD) in 2005. I filled this position until 2013, when I was again transferred to the school where I am currently employed. I have been working with teachers from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds since 2003.

I observed the many challenges that novice teachers encounter with compassion and I understood their anguish when they battled to manage learner behaviour in their classrooms. As I often wondered whether their plight was related to a lack of mentorship in the school, the focus of this self-study project was on my own mentoring practice as a seasoned teacher and a deputy principal. I thus intensively and honestly explored my endeavours to assist and guide novice teachers to manage learner behaviour.

My desire to mentor novice teachers stemmed from my memories when I was a novice teacher myself, and I particularly recalled how I battled due to a lack of appropriate mentoring by more experienced teachers at the school where I had been assigned in my early years of teaching. My interest is put sharply into focus by a lantern poem that I composed on mentoring novice teachers in my school. A lantern poem is a five-line verse shaped like a Japanese lantern with a syllabic pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4, 1 (Pithouse-Morgan, Deer-Standup, & Ndaleni, 2019). Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) explain that a lantern poem can enhance numerous elements of story work. It reflects how the composer interacts with and responds to varied and related human memories, insights, and perceptions in inventive ways that can open up new avenues across contexts. My research supervisor asked me to compose the poem in the introductory stages of my study to help me identify the focus and purpose of the research I would engage in.



**Figure 1.1: The mentoring journey**

As expressed in the Japanese lantern poem above (Figure 1.1), I was inspired to learn more about how I could use my position as a deputy principal to mentor and support novice teachers in their efforts to cope with learner behaviour. When I composed this poem, it evoked memories of my early teaching experiences and how dire my own needs had been for support to understand and work with the young minds that had been entrusted to me.

The title of the poem, *Mentoring, a way to go* underscores the fact that any school management team (SMT) must ensure that mentoring is provided not only for novice teachers in a school, but for newly appointed and seasoned teachers as well. For example, mentoring is vital for teachers who come from a high school background and find themselves teaching in a primary school, or for teachers who come from another province or country. A teacher's role and impact are vital if learners are expected to behave well, as only then will potent learning occur. I believe that, as a deputy principal, it is vital that I stimulate a positive school culture through encouragement, a high self-esteem, trustworthiness, and my belief in the value of every novice teacher who works at the school. Spooner-Lane (2017) constantly reminds me that, to make teaching a treasured career that entices the best in every teacher, superior mentoring and compelling professional development are essential.

Chapter One presents the focus and purpose of my research. The chapter title, *Mentoring, a way to go* reflects my endeavours to help and mentor novice teachers in my school. The phrase *a way to go* is particularly poignant as it implies a journey of progress and change, which was what I experienced on my journey to guide and support novice teachers to better manage their classrooms.

To commence my reflections of this journey, I introduce my self-study methodological approach and I explain how earlier scholarly investigations and theorising shaped the study. I also discuss the background to the study and present the rationale for the research by elaborating on the importance of the research topic. I explain why I adopted a sociocultural perspective and clarify my understanding of the pivotal concepts of mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support. In conclusion, I recap the chapter by providing an overview of the thesis.

## **1.2 Focus and Purpose of the Study**

The focus of my study was on my efforts as a deputy principal to mentor novice teachers and to guide them in managing learner behaviour. I explored possibilities for mentoring novice teachers as I intended to enhance effective classroom management to ensure positive learner behaviour in my school. The purpose of the study was to explore how I could improve my mentoring practice as a deputy principal so that I would guide novice teachers appropriately. To achieve this purpose, I sought the participation of novice teachers who were employed at my school.

I assumed that most of my deliberations with these novice teachers would be centred on learner discipline. Field (2005) confirms that discipline and classroom management are the two most pressing concerns that novice teachers have to face. Furthermore, many novice teachers feel that it becomes difficult to teach and learners cannot learn if learner behaviour and classroom management are not supported in a school (Field, 2005). Against this background, I explored and shared various strategies with the novice teachers that might be employed to curb learner misbehaviour in- and outside the classroom.

I anticipated that discussing learner behaviour and learning support with the novice teachers would enhance the teaching and learning milieu in my school. According to the Department of Basic Education (2007), the term ‘learner behaviour support’ implies the development and management of positive relationships among learners and between learners and teachers. Furthermore, learner behaviour support is based on mutual respect, caring, knowledge of one another’s feelings, and one’s willingness to take responsibility for one’s actions and deeds (Volshenk, 2007). Likewise, McIntosh et al. (2011) describe learner behaviour support as a system-level tactic for constructing an encouraging school milieu that uplifts pro-social synergy

and permits productive guide and learning to occur. Additionally, Venter (2010) notes that learner behaviour support can help novice teachers and learners to offer and receive positive social recognition, which will then increase social involvement and constructive communication. On the other hand, a lack of positive learner behaviour support may manifest in aggressive, obstructive behaviour that can negatively influence interactions between novice teachers and learners and may prevent the effective management of learner behaviour in the classroom (Venter, 2010). Hudson (2012) argues that, through positive mentoring, novice teachers can develop a repertoire of problem-solving strategies that will help them manage learner behaviour. These authors motivated me to hope that problem-solving strategies could be devised through continuous discussions between the novice teachers and myself as their mentor.

I devised this research topic as I had been aware for a long time that novice teachers lacked the skills to manage the behaviour of their learners in my school. I was concerned that this could lead to persistent low learner academic attainment and an increase in novice teacher attrition. As Algozzine, Wang and Violette (2010) explain, it is strenuous to teach when more time needs to be spent on discipline-related interactions than on interactions associated with academic content. Hence, as Melnick and Meister (2008) recommend, I set out on a course to assist the novice teachers in my school in the hope that my endeavours would yield the desired academic outcomes for the learners. The focus of this journey was thus to assist novice teachers to manage learner behaviour in their classrooms, while I also explored my own practice as a mentor of novice teachers. I thus wanted to explore the challenges and joys of embracing mentoring as a new teacher development phenomenon in my school. I realised that I might uncover some (if not all) of my weaknesses or flaws as far as mentoring was concerned. I anticipated that, by engaging intensively with these novice teachers and their challenges, I would go a long way in helping them to address classroom learner behaviour. My intention was thus to collaboratively design strategies that would stimulate and encourage novice teachers to view learner behaviour in the classroom from a different perspective as the one they had become accustomed to.

### **1.3 Methodological Approach**

I chose a self-study methodological approach for this research project (see Chapter Two). As explained by Samaras and Roberts (2011, p.15), “self-study teacher research is an empowering research methodology for teachers that holds much promise for educational reform”. Samaras and Freese (2006) argue that the goal of self-study is primarily self-improvement. This requires evidence of reframed thinking and transformed practice. I therefore anticipated that self-study research would help me develop as a more prudent mentor and school leader. Furthermore, Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1231) maintain that self-study “...urges teachers to find their voice, to improve their practices, to extend their relationships, and to discover and document their potential as leaders of change”. According to Samaras and Freese (2006), self-study in the educational context allows a researcher the scope to scrutinise the challenges of teaching and to find resolutions for those challenges. This means that, through self-study, a teacher is guided through meaningful inputs in his or her teaching practice. I thus hoped to improve my practice as a deputy principal by positioning myself as a mentor and thus getting to know and understand my novice teachers better. Only through this improved understanding could I assist these teachers in managing learner behaviour in their classrooms for the benefit of the school and the community.

Another fundamental aspect of self-study is the crucial role that critical friends play through the contributions they make in the study process. As Samaras and Roberts (2011) explain, self-study allows teachers “to work with critical friends in an intellectually safe and supportive community to improve their practice by making it explicit to themselves and others through critical collaborative enquiries” (p. 43). LaBoskey (2004) clarifies that self-study research is not only for the self, but it pushes us to communicate our learning and it thus makes it accessible for critical observation and further reflections. What I found most motivating about self-study was that it offered me the opportunity to do introspection through engaging in dialogue with teachers and learners. Only then could I develop myself by reflecting on the mistakes I might have made or the flaws I needed to correct.

## 1.4 Background Information

Corporal punishment was widely used in the apartheid South African education system to maintain discipline in schools. In 1996, the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996b) abolished corporal punishment in schools. Payet and Franchi (2008) affirm that the prohibition of corporal punishment was a sign of the political break with the former apartheid system which had rewarded dictatorial educational practices. Currently, the post-apartheid constitutional rights of each South African learner have to be seriously considered in light of the national rule of law. However, Mulaudzi and Mudzielwana (2016) argue that teachers in South Africa are becoming increasingly distressed by the manifestation of learners' behavioural problems in schools, more particularly as corporal punishment has been outlawed by legislation. Oosthuizen, Wolhuter and du Toit (2003) attest to the fact that corporal punishment is still used in schools even though it is outlawed. They argue that this is because teachers lack alternative strategies for positive behaviour support. Govender and Sookrajh (2014) also observe that, for many South African learners, corporal punishment remains a typical part of their school experience. Furthermore, Payet and Franchi (2008) emphasise that even some learners "...justify corporal punishment on the basis that it seems to them to be a fair and effective way of maintaining peace and order in the classroom in the face of certain disruptive behaviour" (p.162). In my view, this means that some learners themselves have accepted the use of corporal punishment as a means of curbing unwarranted behaviour on their part. However, I think that corporal punishment is not a solution to unwarranted learner behaviour as unruly behavioural tendencies persist even when corporal punishment is administered in a school.

One observation that haunted me was that novice teachers in my school battled to maintain discipline and manage learner behaviour. Dicke et al. (2015) concur, as they indicate that novice teachers perceive learner disruptive behaviour as their greatest teaching challenge. They further comment that novice teachers feel incapacitated and helpless about dealing with learner misbehaviour in their classrooms. When corporal punishment was outlawed in South African schools, my school struggled to devise a comprehensive classroom behaviour management alternative for novice and seasoned teachers alike and teachers, parents, and learners seemed uncertain about what was permitted and what was forbidden by the new legislative framework for schools.

The Department of Basic Education expects schools to establish a positive learner behaviour support system with the formal involvement of parents in their children's education through the establishment and functioning of school governing bodies. A school governing body is a group of elected parents, teachers, non-educators and learner representatives (in high schools only) to assist with the governance of schools. These people are elected for a period of three years. Morrell (2001, p. 293) argues that parents thus play "a [pivotal and] critical role in school disciplinary policy". Likewise, Oosthuizen et al. (2003) stress that parents, as the primary educators of their children, are also accountable for the discipline their children receive. Morrell (2001) states that, when discipline is absent or limited at home, it impacts disruptive behaviour in schools. Many learners thus come to school displaying unruly behaviour, which makes it hard for novice teachers in particular to maintain classroom discipline. There is therefore a fine line between accommodating learners' right to freedom of expression and discipline, and educators should be tolerant of different opinions, creeds, and cultures. The Centre for Justice and Crime and the Department of Basic Education (2012) assert that a positive behaviour model in schools will enhance a culture of individual rights according to which both learners and teachers are guarded against injustice and are accorded dignity and appreciation. Therefore, Northfield and Sherman (2004) contend that open discussions about the ways we communicate with one other in society, as well as the things we need to feel certain about when relating to one another, can advance the type of relationship in the classroom that generates a caring and tolerant atmosphere.

In my experience, one's initial years of teaching are critical and vulnerable times; hence this seems to be a phase in one's professional development that requires close attention by the school management team. This view is corroborated by Sunde and Ulvik (2014). At the conception of this study, I was unaware of schools that offered a formal mentoring programme for novice teachers. Therefore, as a school manager, I felt that I should provide novice teachers with the necessary support to manage learner behaviour in their classrooms. I thus realised that I needed to learn how, through my own scholarly endeavours, I could and should develop my own mentoring skills in order to assess novice teachers' progress and support them in their effectiveness in as far as learner behaviour support in their classrooms was concerned.

## 1.5 Rationale

The purpose of my study was to explore how I could utilise my experiences as a seasoned teacher and a school manager to assist newly qualified teachers in coping and dealing with learner behaviour support in their classrooms. Spooner-Lane (2017) advises that seasoned teachers should not only be proficient as teachers, but they should also be competent mentors. As a seasoned teacher and a deputy principal, I thus felt that I should play a pivotal role in mentoring novice teachers in my school.

I believe that embarking on this study was crucial because I hoped to contribute to the development of happy, dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who would always teach their learners with vigour and confidence. My Master's dissertation, titled *Stimulating school-wide positive learner behaviour support* (Luthuli, 2016), was the foundation for this doctoral study. It is vital that newly qualified teachers play a significant role in the management of learner behaviour and learner support in their classrooms. Therefore, by providing novice teachers with emotional and psychological support and by helping them feel welcome, accepted and included, I could spearhead a profound level of self-belief and confidence in novice teachers, as proposed by Hobson et al. (2009).

When I contemplated the research topic, I could not recall receiving any formal mentoring in my early years of teaching. I feel that, in the first five years of teaching, I could have been assigned a mentor to guide me and listen to the frustrations and joys that I encountered in the classroom and the school community at large. Boreen (2009) reminded me that, if I became a mentor, it would allow me as an experienced teacher to spare newly qualified teachers some of the negative and painful experiences that I had encountered in my early years of teaching. Bleach (1999) stresses that recently qualified teachers often face the fear that their learners – or a significant group of learners – will be impossible to control. I thus felt that I needed to learn how to provide the necessary support for novice teachers to overcome these fears and to equip them with the necessary skills to maintain order and discipline. As a school manager, I thus felt that novice teachers should develop a community within and outside their classrooms that would include learners, parents and other stakeholders as swiftly as possible. I had observed that when teachers developed cordial relationships with learners and their parents, they were

able to focus on the core business of teaching and learning rather than on disruptions in the classroom.

Scholars such as Boreen (2009) have expressed concern about the growing number of novice teachers who abandon the teaching profession because they feel depressed and discouraged. Novice teacher attrition can be linked to feeling isolated in the classroom and having to deal with all sorts of challenges without being able to turn to anyone for advice, support and guidance. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) attest to the fact that there is an increase in the list of things beginner teachers are expected to know and do currently without the attendant support. According to Shulman and Sato (2006), the emotional and technical support novice teachers require should never be ignored. More particularly, I noticed how much anguish novice teachers in my school experienced when they struggled to manage their learners' behaviour in their classrooms. As a school manager, I thus had to address learner misbehaviour in novice teachers' classrooms more often than in experienced teachers' classrooms.

As a school management team, we seemed to expect novice teachers to know instinctively what to do and we thus neglected to provide them with the proper support (Boreen, 2009). For example, in the first six months of the year before I commenced this study, newly qualified teachers in my school were under particular stress and managing the behaviour of learners in their classrooms was a challenge. Cross (1995) recommends that all staff members must be encouraging and supportive during this period to gain the trust of their new colleagues. Moreover, Sunde and Ulvik (2014) advise that novice teachers must be inducted into the profession as effortlessly as possible to avoid early attrition. They further point out that the school management team is in a position to make decisions that influence novice teachers' first year of teaching, particularly because the latter perceive their mentors as a crucial source of support during this period (Richter et al., 2013). For example, I experienced that novice teachers frequently visited my office to seek clarity or advice on issues about learners and even personal matters. It is therefore my responsibility as a mentor and manager to support novice teachers and to guide them in positive classroom management.

Oliver and Reschly (2007) advocate that teachers need to thoroughly plan and think clearly to manage their classrooms and promote positive learner behaviour. It is an undeniable fact that highly productive teachers construct their classrooms to diminish the likelihood of inappropriate learner behaviour. This increases teacher-learner interactions and ensures

successful teaching and learning practices (Oliver & Reschly, 2007). The sooner teachers – especially novice teachers – can instil appropriate behaviours in their learners, the sooner they will gain their attention and trust. Fisher (2012) also stresses that it is important that newly qualified teachers should manage their learners’ behaviour through clear expectations, set routines, clear rules, and unequivocal consequences. They should also use praise and rewards as positive classroom management techniques to reduce disruptive behaviour. By familiarising themselves with the school’s positive behaviour support policy, novice teachers will contribute positively to a disciplined and well-run school with fair rules and routines that will minimise disciplinary problems. Oliver and Reschly (2007) support the notion that the proper application of rules and routines will enhance classroom management and discipline.

Against this background, I anticipated that my involvement in novice teacher mentoring in my school would assist these teachers to be more effective in managing learner behaviour which, in turn, would increase positive learner-teacher engagement. Sunde and Ulvik (2014) view mentoring as a mechanism for change in the teaching profession as it rejuvenates seasoned teachers, supports novice teachers, and will ultimately lead to successful schools. Additionally, Richter et al. (2013) advocate that, through mentoring, opportunities that foster growth and development are provided that allow teachers to interact with novices in a way that supports inquiry. This enables all teachers to learn from their interactions and experiences as members of a team who have the well-being of their learners in mind. Another important reason to develop my mentoring practice was to support beginner teachers to make a successful transition from teacher students to teachers in practice (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Only then would they be capacitated to manage learner behaviour successfully.

In my view, a mentor-mentee relationship is mutually beneficial. According to Bleach (1999), mentoring is a two-way process as a mentor and a mentee learn from each other’s experiences when they engage in a collaborative learning environment. I thus aimed to share my teaching experiences with novice teachers while, through collaborative engagement, I also learnt from them. Spooner-Lane (2017) reassured me that, through reflective conversations, I would assist novice teachers in establishing clear professional development goals and help them become effective teachers. To achieve this, I needed to create a respectful and trusting relationship with the novice teachers in my school.

One of the fundamental aspects of professional development is that of self-reflection. According to Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000), novice teachers who have not developed the habit of reflecting on their teaching require a mentor who models self-reflection. For instance, the novice teachers in my school were given leeway to be innovative concerning their approach in teaching subject content. However, I noticed that they tended to play it safe by teaching rigidly according to the prescribed textbooks. To address this, they needed to be guided to reflect on their successes and the learners' response to this method of teaching.

By reflecting on my own practices, I learned that respect for learners and colleagues is paramount in creating positive learner behaviour. Learners and teachers come from diverse ethnic, socio-economic and cultural environments and therefore novice teachers must appreciate others' beliefs, norms, religions, and traditions. For example, Muslim girls in my school always cover their heads with scarves, and this practice needs to be respected. Other learners come to school wearing cow hide strips on their wrists, which is a Zulu tradition. Unfortunately, one newly qualified Indian teacher once sent a learner out of the classroom because other learners resented the unpleasant odour that came from the cow hide bracelet he was wearing. This was deemed disrespectful on the teacher's part. For teachers to earn learners' respect, they first have to show respect. O'Grady (2015) defines respect as "a social construct that it is dependent on one's interactions with others" (p. 168). New teachers – in fact, all teachers – have to adapt to cultural diversity in schools. Beginner teachers thus need mentors who will acquaint them with the various cultures represented in a particular school. When they understand this diversity and respect it, they will have time to pay more attention to curriculum matters and classroom management. However, Englehart (2012) stresses that teachers tend to have theories about learner behaviour based on the experiences that they had, and calling these theories into question is often perceived as a personal attack on their value system and principles.

On conceptualising the study, researchers such as Jonson (2008) reminded me that learning was a continuous process not only for the novice, but also for the most experienced teacher. I had observed that one common mistake beginner teachers in my school made was that they tried to be perfect in everything they did. However, new teachers do not need the pressure of trying to be 'super teachers'. This only makes them feel despondent when they fail to handle learner behaviour and they may end up experiencing anxiety when they cannot control disruptive learners (Jonson, 2008).

## 1.6 Research Questions

The research questions that guided my study were as follows:

1. *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?*

In responding to this question (see Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis), I recalled my own experiences of supportive and unsupportive mentoring and, by doing so, I learnt about mentoring novice teachers to better equip them in terms of learner behaviour support. Addressing this question also helped me to evaluate the role I played – and should play in the future – in as far as mentoring novice teachers in my school is concerned.

The use of artefacts in responding to question 1 allowed me to uncover memories of the past that had lain dormant in my mind. Kortjass (2019) believes that the use of artefacts brings powerful images, memories and feelings to mind. For example, in Chapter Three I uncover my memories by using artefacts such as a photograph of the first class I taught as a novice teacher and a photograph of myself in professional attire. The latter reminded me of a former high school teacher. I also refer to a three-legged pot as a metaphor for the three components that form the foundation of effective teaching and learning. In Chapter Four, I refer to a tree as a metaphor that illustrates the working relationships between the school and the community within which it is located. Kortjass (2019) argues that a human-made object is normally one of cultural or historical interest. Thus the use of a man-made shield that had been used by Zulu warriors in battles was an opportunity to relate an artefact to the daily lives of novice teachers, with particular reference to their encounters in their classrooms.

2. *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?*

In response to this question (see Chapters Six, Seven and Eight), I engaged novice teachers in discussions on mentoring for learner behaviour support. This was done through creative and participative discussions with selected novice teachers. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) maintain that, although self-study methodology is centred on the

researcher's professional practice and learning, it requires interaction with others to benefit from diverse viewpoints. For example, during these interactive deliberations we discussed the stressors novice teachers regularly encounter in their classrooms. We also discussed different methods that novice teachers can use to succeed in the classroom and, in this manner, we learned from one another.

By deliberating with the novice teacher participants on learner behaviour support in their classrooms, a learning curve was created that enhanced both my mentorship and managerial skills. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) attest to the fact that self-study makes one aware of how teacher learning occurs when teachers interact and share ideas in their quest for knowledge. Therefore, by sharing our knowledge and ideas and giving feedback on the challenges and joys that the novice teachers experienced in their classrooms, I was able to put myself in their shoes and, in this manner, I developed into a better manager and mentor as I came to a better understanding of the plight of novice teachers.

## **1.7 A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective**

Employing a sociocultural perspective is helpful in qualitative self-study research because it allows individual teachers to understand their learning that was embedded in their personal and social experiences. According to Samaras and Freese (2006), self-study is personal because it is not only constructed from knowledge that is gained from everyday practices, but also from scholarly theories that apply to these practices. In my view, a teacher develops his or her teaching philosophy based on his or her social development and behaviours.

Learning is acquired when people interact on a daily basis. Gerhard and Smith (2008, p. 50) maintain that a sociocultural perspective is grounded in the belief that learning is not an individual activity but a social experience. Similarly, Samaras et al. (2014) assert that learning is active and social and that interchange shapes individuals' mental capacity. Likewise, McMurtry (2015) observes that social interaction can assist teachers in adjusting and restructuring their understanding of the context in which they function. He further points out that a sociocultural perspective on learning concentrates mainly on how learning occurs when people interact with one another. In fact, it is concerned with both cultural and social

surroundings. I therefore anticipated that taking a sociocultural approach when engaging with novice teachers from diverse sociocultural backgrounds would facilitate interesting and valuable interactions based on personal experiences as well as social and cultural relationships. As Easton (2012, p. 50) affirms, "...learning means that we work with people, encouraging discoveries, learning from mistakes, [and] helping everyone to find what works". In my view, this means that learning is lifelong and that we learn through interacting with others. However, along this learning journey we are bound to make mistakes, but we learn better through the mistakes that we as well as other people make and this helps us to make valuable discoveries.

I believe that what learners and teachers learn from their communities could also infuse the school community with a sense of positivity that will enhance both teaching and learning outcomes. Banks et al. (2001) advise that if teachers are to create learning options for all learners, they must be enlightened about the communal and educational aspects of teaching and learning. Similarly, John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) maintain that learning and growth take place in collectively and culturally constructed surroundings. Moreover, John-Steiner and Mahn (1996, p. 193) affirm that "human functioning is tied to cultural, institutional, and historical settings [as] these settings shape and provide the cultural tools that are mastered by individuals to form this functioning". Northfield and Sherman (2004) attest that our actions and the way we perceive ourselves and treat one another spring from the values and beliefs we develop as we grow in relationships with others. This means that the things we do together, and the way we talk about them, become the basis for our later individual thinking (McMutry, 2015). I thus realised that I could improve my practice as a deputy principal by getting to know and understand novice teachers' cultures, backgrounds, beliefs, and daily habits so that channels of communication between and among us could be unblocked.

I envisaged that a sociocultural perspective would assist me in guiding novice teachers to understand how certain learners behave the way they do. According to Gerhard and Smith (2008), a sociocultural perspective is a lens through which what learners do and who they become can be examined and this allows us to see how teachers, learners, content, and context are complementary and associated (Gerhard & Smith, 2008). Murphy and Ivinson (2003) also assert that knowledge that is acquired through participation in a range of contexts impacts processes of schooling and provides learners with diverse prospects for accessing knowledge that is valued and constituted by teachers and schools. This means that the lack of high morals and values that is sometimes displayed by society impacts learners and their schooling

negatively (Lewis, 2001). For example, I observed on numerous occasions that learners from the same underprivileged socioeconomic locations manifested similar unwarranted behavioural patterns. I wondered whether this behaviour was a manifestation of the conditions in their communities, as children from the same community were often caught stealing items such as sweets, biscuits, cold drinks and more from the mall near the school.

My understanding of a sociocultural perspective allowed me as a manager and mentor to ensure that the learners in the care of novice teachers would be nurtured and developed holistically. Northfield and Sherman (2004) argue that sociability best occurs in a classroom environment where learners understand the concept of belonging. Schools should thus ensure that a relationship of trust exists between teachers and learners to sustain the socio-emotional growth of the latter (Northfield & Sherman, 2004). Banks et al. (2001) note that it is imperative that teaching is "...culturally responsive to learners from diverse racial-ethnic, cultural and language groups" (p.197). This means that schools should act as a cultural repository to ensure that learners gain knowledge that they understand and behavioural patterns that are positive, regardless of the community they come from or the colour of their skins.

In my view, if novice teachers infuse their learners with a social consciousness, the latter will cooperate in the classroom. Northfield and Sherman (2004) suggest that teachers need to continue to strive for an environment that fosters sociability within a social context, particularly that of a classroom community. During the discussion sessions with the participating novice teachers, I stressed how important it is that teachers establish values, standards, norms and pro-social skills such as caring, volunteering and helping. When learners embrace these values, the extent of the disruptive behaviour in their classrooms will be diminished. Murphy and Iverson (2003) note that, when social norms and values are adopted by learners, it influences their negotiations and management of their participation which, in turn, impacts their learning in classroom settings positively.

### **1.7.1 Mentoring novice teachers**

In my view, mentoring occurs when one offers guidance, nurturing, support, sharing, positive viewpoints, and advice to others in either official or unofficial settings. Yarci (2017) defines mentoring as the support offered by seasoned professionals who share the same occupation to less experienced workers in support of their progress in terms of planning, application, and

evaluation. Mentoring is usually offered to subordinates by their seniors. I must acknowledge, though, that peer mentoring is also valuable and that senior teachers can often learn from junior teachers. As a school manager, I felt it was prudent to build a working relationship with the novice teachers at my school by providing continual support through a form of mentorship that took cognisance of their sociocultural backgrounds. According to Sowell (2017), to retain novice teachers, schools should support them, minimise their anxieties, and establish a reward system for good teaching. Mentors should thus offer support to novice teachers regarding classroom management as well as their personal growth as professionals within the first five years of their employment. Meyer (2002) refers to the importance of teacher support for novices in the first two years of their careers.

### **1.7.2 Developing a professional relationship between the mentor and the novice teacher**

I was aware that I should develop a sound working relationship with the novice teachers I mentored. I hoped that, in so doing, we would establish a relationship of mutual trust. Trust is one of the fundamental components of maintaining a positive working relationship. Jonson (2008) argues that mentors should create a relationship of trust with novice teachers and that they should remain with the mentees as they evolve. Teachers spend most of their working day at school and therefore the element of trust is vital.

Beginner teachers should feel comfortable sharing their frustrations and joys with others at school. New teachers may find themselves sharing personal matters with their mentors because of the trust they have in one another. For this reason, among others, one of the most positive aspects of mentoring can be the relationship that is established between a mentor and his or her learners (Bleach, 1999). Sunde and Ulvin (2014), for instance, also highlight the need for leaders' supportive attitude towards new teachers and mentoring, stating that these have a positive impact on teachers' professional potential.

I knew that, as a mentor, I had to ensure that my mentoring involved guidance, support, and capacity building among the novice teachers in my care. Cross (1995) clarifies that a mentor's function is not only to transmit knowledge and provide experience, but he or she should also update the mentee regarding the rules, beliefs, and ethos of the school and bolster the confidence of the mentee through inspiration and appreciation. In my engagement with teachers as a school manager, I had already learned that developing trust yields positive outcomes with regards to

building the culture of a school. This needs to be done without any reservations or favour to achieve a confident and motivated staff cohort. According to Jonson (2008), mentors in a school setting should develop a relationship of trust with novice teachers over time. In my view, the principal function of the mentor is to create a relationship with newly qualified teachers based on mutual trust, respect, and collegiality. Through the sharing of joys and frustrations, new teachers come to understand that challenges are normal and this can help build their confidence.

In my opinion, it is of vital importance to look after a novice teacher's well-being. Scharz-Oppeneheimer and Dvir (2014) state that the first three years of teaching "can lead to an extreme feeling of helplessness, loneliness, foreignness, alienation, insecurity, obscurity, and ambiguity" (p. 149) on the part of novice teachers. As a school manager and a mentor, I thus felt that I could be a vital source of support and guidance to alleviate the fears and anxieties that novice teachers might feel following their appointment at the school. I also knew that I needed to help these teachers to develop techniques that would enhance their proficiency and resilience. Teaching has its highs and lows, but learning from these incidences is paramount (Long, 2009). Novice teachers should be made aware that they will make mistakes from time to time; however, they should not despair because making mistakes is part of learning.

### **1.7.3 Mentoring as a gateway for promoting collaborative learning**

Collaboration is a vital component of the mentoring process as mentoring is a tool for promoting collaborative learning (Fletcher & Mullen 2012). As a member of the SMT, I knew that I needed to contribute towards creating a school community where experienced and novice teachers were flexible and capacitated with professional knowledge as well as social and emotional capital in their quest for learning to occur (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). I was aware that a supportive school culture is imperative for the smooth transition of new teachers into an unfamiliar school environment. Sunde and Ulvin (2014) maintain that "the influence of mentoring depends on the quality of mentoring and support from the school [community] and school management" (p. 285). Kerry and Mayes (1995) point out that there is a need for deliberate socialisation. They further acknowledge that newly qualified teachers are often left to socialise haphazardly into the profession through trial and error (Kerry & Mayes, 1995), which is undesirable.

Mentoring is also about being a lifelong learner. In the teaching profession you learn every day, whether you are a mentor or a mentee. It is therefore crucial that teachers – novice teachers in

particular – participate in teacher development programmes to gain more confidence in the delivery of lessons as well as in classroom management. Both developing and encouraging newly qualified teachers are viewed by Cross (1995) as the most relevant features of staff development and management programmes within a school. An essential part of being a mentor involves ensuring that new teachers are allowed to reflect on their teaching. When novice teachers are asked to give feedback on what they think they did well in the classroom and the challenges they encountered, they become more knowledgeable about the possibilities for creating conducive conditions for their own and their learners’ learning (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). Reflection is necessary if teachers are serious about not repeating a mistake.

I believe that listening is a fundamental element of development as it enables a mentor to communicate with novice teachers. Jonson (2008) emphasises that seasoned mentors consider listening as the most essential skill when serving as a mentor. In most cases, listening is coupled with giving adequate support and therefore a mentor must make time to listen (Johnson, 2008). Novice teachers often need to talk to someone and reflect about what happened during their engagements with learners in their classrooms. By listening to their concerns and considering their questions, mentors might guide novice teachers and offer possible solutions for what may seem to be insurmountable problems. Bleach (1999) states that listening will not only enable the mentor to hear what is said, but will also help him/her to understand the issue that may have caused conflict. In this manner, the mentor will demonstrate that the novice teacher is valued as a person and a professional colleague. Any teacher is valued when he or she is being listened to.

#### **1.7.4 Sharing of ideas through collaborative discussions**

My interest in mentoring novice teachers stemmed from the excitement I always felt when I worked in collaboration with them and allowed an exchange of information and the sharing of experiences in a professional manner. Mentoring, as Bleach (1999) puts it, should not be regarded as a one-way process. It was therefore imperative that I saw new teachers as equal partners who had come to the teaching profession to add value to the school community. Moreover, an outstanding mentor will learn and accept advice from a novice teacher as well. Alber (2017) advises that a way to intensify our connection with mentees is to share a bit about ourselves with them and allow them to share the same with us and with one another. Moreover, Samaras and Freese (2006) claim that “collaboration helps us move beyond our personal views

by hearing other perspectives” (p. 58). Listening to and embracing other people’s viewpoints are often essential for developing new knowledge, whether one is an experienced or inexperienced teacher.

From my reading, I was also aware that I should encourage new teachers to be involved in what is referred to as ‘a community of teachers’ within the same phase or grade. As Song (2006) explains, novice teachers need to participate in a group and interact with other teachers who share the same interests. Salleh and Tan (2013) similarly argue that "teachers who collaborate are more likely to have the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills and problems that arise during their professional development experiences” (p. 158). I was aware that novice teachers might sometimes feel uncomfortable about discussing certain matters with me as their mentor, and therefore I knew that they might feel more at ease sharing their thoughts with their peers who taught in the same phase or grade as they did. I was also conscious of the fact that peer mentoring would have far-reaching results.

### **1.7.5 Mentoring as a tool to prepare novice teachers for professional learning**

In my view, ongoing professional learning occurs through experiences that teachers encounter in their engagement with learners and their fellow teachers in a school community. These experiences range from how they interact with learners and colleagues to how they present their lessons, conduct themselves within the school, and how they familiarise themselves with the school culture. Easton (2008) argues that teachers should become learners themselves and also be developed intrinsically. In teacher professional learning, teachers are encouraged to take an active part in activities that could enhance their growth and improve their teaching practices. Kuriloff (2015) attests to the fact that any teacher with the determination to learn can become an excellent teacher. This means that a novice teacher should have the right attitude and inclination before he/she will become a significant teacher.

In my view, a teacher’s professional knowledge is the knowledge that he/she gains through interacting with learners, other teachers, parents, and his/her engagement in professional learning. For example, when a teacher has acquired a deeper understanding of curriculum content knowledge and the knowledge of learners’ qualities, professional knowledge has been acquired. Therefore, professional teachers need to be well-informed and should purposely use a knowledge base to sustain sound teaching practices (Rusznyak, 2018). Koehler and Mishra

(2009) suggest that teacher professional knowledge includes knowledge of learner judgment and learning, knowledge of subject matter, and knowledge of the required skills. In the same way, Van Driel and Berry (2012) view teacher professional knowledge as the educational content knowledge that includes teachers' perception of how learners learn – or fail to learn – particular subject matter. This means that a teacher with professional knowledge should acquire a deep understanding of subject content and learners' capabilities, while at the same time finding strategic solutions for engaging learners in processes of learning.

Teacher professional development thus occurs when teachers engaged in professional learning opportunities by, for example, attending workshops, collaborating in seminars, and participating in any other professional engagements. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) see effective teacher professional development as planned professional learning that revolutionises teacher practices and enhances learners' learning results. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), teacher professional development focuses on teaching strategies that are specific to curriculum content and that supports teacher learning in the classroom context. It thus encourages teachers to engage in designing and trying out diverse teaching strategies.

Furthermore, teacher professional development also creates a space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning. It provides teachers with a clear vision of what best practices are, supports the sharing of expertise about content, provides built-in time for teachers to think about the input required, and helps them to make changes to their practices through reflection. It also provides teachers with adequate time to learn, to practise, and to implement and reflect upon new strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, Kyndt et al. (2016) perceive teacher professional development as development that does not only employ formal learning activities, but also offers informal learning opportunities that are characterised by a low degree of planning and organising in terms of learning context, learning support, learning time, and learning objectives. This means that teacher professional development also occurs when teachers learn and adapt to the values, norms, practices and beliefs of the school community. This is for instance reflected in teachers' conduct, attitude, language use, and the way they dress.

In my opinion, mentoring primarily occurs when a more experienced teacher gives support, guidance, and direction to a lesser and/or newly qualified teacher. Ambrosetti (2014) views mentoring as the development of a connection between a mentor and mentee, which in turn

offers the foundation for the development of the mentee's abilities. Additionally, Brobst (2019) argues that when teachers mentor novice teachers, they draw on their own wealth of skills and knowledge to provide the novices with guidance and suggestions about approaches that they have found to be successful. Mentoring is also said to present mentees with the scope to expand their personal and professional selves through reflection (Ambrosetti, 2014).

It is crucial for novice teachers as well as a mentor to take the mentoring process seriously. Mentoring, according to Salleh and Tan (2013), could assist novice teachers to use their practice as a site for learning when they work collectively with seasoned teachers in co-thinking relationships. Salleh and Tan (2013) state that the mentoring process can be implemented in two main ways: (i) one-on-one mentoring, and (ii) group mentoring. However, many novice teachers choose the latter because one of the primary objectives of group mentoring is to expose them to alternative theories on teaching practices that promote novice teachers' thinking, professional standards, and quality of teaching (Salleh & Tan, 2013). This offers novice teachers opportunities to learn from a mentor or peer so that they could develop their professional practices with less stress. Pogodzinski et al. (2013) found that novice teachers who regularly worked with peers in the field were much more likely than other new teachers to report a pleasant practice. They also aimed to remain at the same school. This means that working collaboratively by sharing knowledge, arguing, debating, seeking help and listening to one another could facilitate a positive working climate and the swift acquisition of knowledge that novice teachers in particular could exploit in their teaching practice.

I anticipated that, through collaborative engagements, I would be aiding the novice teachers to experience the classroom environment as dynamic. Colleen et al. (2009) warn that novice teachers should recognise that every situation in a classroom is different. They must thus adopt diverse perspectives and imagine various possibilities to apply their professional knowledge. In my view, professional learning is versatile and differs from one teacher to the other. For example, one novice teacher in my school was interested in engaging with her learners in her classroom so that she could learn and adapt to their philosophies and ways of doing things. On the other hand, another novice teacher felt content when she interacted with other teachers so that she could acquire the necessary skills to better engage with the learners in her classroom.

### **1.7.6 Positive behaviour support**

In my view, positive behaviour support is a concept that should not be dealt with in isolation. Therefore, by taking a sociocultural theoretical perspective, I was assisted to understand that I could become a better manager and mentor if I took cognisance of the novice teachers' sociocultural backgrounds. In this context, I anticipated that the novice teachers would deal with learner behaviour support in their classrooms in different ways because they had all been brought up in diverse social and cultural environments. I also expected that collaborative interactions with the novice teachers would help to develop a shared school culture of learner behaviour support. In my view, this would stimulate positive behaviours in the novice teachers, their learners, and ultimately the entire school community.

Positive behaviour support is an approach that educators provide to encourage learners to behave in an acceptable and disciplined manner. Lassen et al. (2006, p. 702) describe positive behaviour support as "an approach to dealing with learner behaviour that includes a collection of universal and individualised policies [that are] intended to improve individual [*sic*] quality of life". According to Tyre et al. (2017), positive behaviour support promotes a positive school climate in which all learners are actively skilled with behavioural expectations and are recognised for their acceptable behaviour. Likewise, Grey et al. (2018) perceive positive behaviour support as an approach that comprises two primary objectives. First, it lessens incidences of challenging behaviour and, secondly, it advances quality of life and improves the skill set and liberty of the individual who engages in such behaviour. In my view, positive behaviour support is the manner in which support is given to a learner or a teacher that encourages acceptable social behaviour and curbs unruly learner behaviour.

I was concerned that some learners persistently displayed disruptive behaviours such as fighting, bullying, and disturbing teachers and peers during academic contact time, especially during novice teachers' lessons. Such unruly behaviour resulted in the loss of instructional time as learners were often referred to my office by novice teachers for different types of misbehaviour. Lassen et al. (2006) observe that, because disruptive behaviour typically results in lost instructional time, it compromises learning. The latter authors argue that "...interventions that recover and maximise instructional time by keeping learners in class should produce improvements in the academic area" (p. 703). Novice teachers recorded their concerns in as far as learner behaviour in my school was concerned. Although the school had a positive behaviour

support policy in place, newly appointed teachers still found it a challenge to maintain consistent and positive control of learner behaviour in their classrooms.

I was aware that the novice teachers needed to embrace the school's positive behaviour support policy and that the school needed to identify gaps and establish rules in conjunction with evaluating the school's improvement plan (Kincaid et al. 2007). I also understood that the policy needed to be updated annually to suit both learners and teachers.

### **1.7.7 Novice teachers and classroom management**

In my view, classroom management is a set of expectations for learners and teachers that includes rules and requires adherence to a positive school culture and routines. Deaton (2013) defines classroom management as “anything a teacher does to promote learner learning and instruction through organising learners, material, time, and space” (p. 141). Mokhele (2006) argues that newly qualified teachers often find classroom control the most demanding aspect of their new profession. Likewise, Sowell (2017) believes that novice teachers often battle with classroom management owing to a lack of self-belief. As a school manager, I had to closely monitor the level of learner behaviour in the classrooms where newly appointed teachers operated.

I often observed disruptive behaviour patterns in the classrooms of novice teachers. Disruptive classroom behaviour, according to Fisher (2012), is a severe challenge for most beginner teachers who need to deal with learners' behavioural difficulties. Deaton (2013) also states that novice teachers often find it difficult to manage learner behaviour and argues that many spend more time on managing learner behaviour than on teaching. Learner misbehaviour can at times negatively affect the smooth running of a schools and can even compromise the safety of teachers and learners (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Brown (2004) therefore suggests that novice teachers should quickly understand how to successfully build mutual respect and cooperation in a classroom if they plan to impact learners' learning positively and continue on the path of their chosen profession.

I often noticed that beginner teachers did not anticipate behavioural digressions and were not prepared for the many behavioural challenges that occurred in their classrooms. Many felt helpless and did not know what to do when they were confronted with misbehaviour. Jonson

(2008) points out that novice teachers may feel ineffective when they do not know how to deal with misconduct and they may then experience anxiety when they cannot control disruptive behaviour. According to Greenlee and Ogletree (1993), teachers are concerned about learner distraction because it prevents them from executing their duties. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson that novice teachers should learn is that their preparation for teaching did not adequately prepare them for handling disruptive behaviour (Sylwester, 1971). It therefore becomes a learning curve when novice teachers face reality and learn how to deal with disruptive behaviour in their classrooms.

## **1.8 Discipline and Punishment**

Discipline is not the same as punishment. According to the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2012), discipline is the practice of teaching a person to obey a code of positive behaviour consistently. Punishment, on the one hand, is meant to control learners' behaviour whereas discipline, on the other hand, is meant to develop their behaviour (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2012). Involving learners in the establishment of rules and facing the consequences if they do not could help them to act more responsibly and take ownership of their behaviour. Similarly, as the Alternatives to Corporal Punishment policy document (2000) stresses, in a corrective measures approach learners attempt to adhere to the rules because they have been discussed and agreed upon. According to the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2012), a positive approach towards discipline aims to build a culture of human rights where learners and teachers are protected from harm and are treated with dignity and respect. Likewise, support for learners' positive behaviour in my school aims at building learners' strong points rather than highlighting their weaknesses.

Managing learners' behaviour is an essential aspect of maintaining a highly productive learning environment (Deaton, 2013). I observed with concern, as did Baker (2016), that novice teachers tended to place emphasis on teaching content knowledge at the expense of managing their classrooms effectively. I noticed that these teachers often tended to ignore planning for classroom management in favour of content preparation (Baker, 2016). I also observed that, more often than not, newly qualified teachers in my school barely finished their lessons without disruptions. They also resorted to sending misbehaving learners out of the classroom in order to continue with a lessons, which is not acceptable.

In my view, school rules and policies are crucial for sustaining school discipline. A well-managed school is one that can formulate policies and establish rules that are entrenched in the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996b). Alber (2017) advocates that novice teachers should familiarise themselves with a school's code of conduct, its policies, and school traditions as soon as they are appointed to the school. Additionally, Roffey (2011) advises that, in terms of classroom rules, teachers should give attention to what they want and not what they do not want. I noticed that, when I visited novice teachers' classrooms, the classroom rules they adhered to focused more on what learners should not do (see Figure 1.1) instead of on constructive and positive rules. In my experience, teachers who focus on positive behaviour rather than on misbehaviour have fewer disciplinary problems in their classrooms (Breux, 2003). If teachers want to establish a positive atmosphere in their classrooms, they must begin by modelling positive behaviour themselves and look for positives in their learners (Roffey, 2011). Teachers have the responsibility to be living examples of kind and nurturing behaviour (Alternatives to Corporal Punishment, 2000). All teachers (senior and junior) should exhibit acceptable behaviour, which often begins with neat attire and a respectful attitude towards their learners.

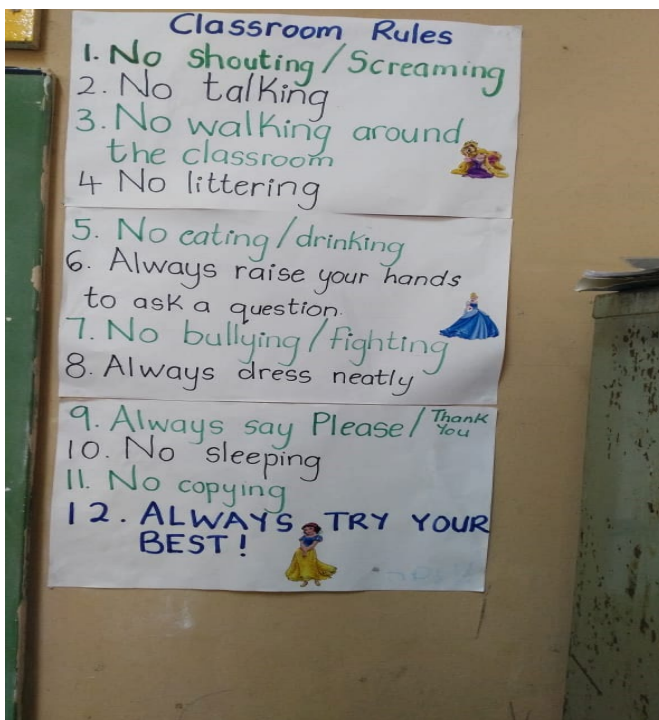


Figure 1.2: Classroom rules displayed on a bulletin board in a novice teacher's classroom

## **1.9 School Management in Support of a Positive School Culture**

### **1.9.1 The role of teachers**

It is my responsibility as a school manager and a mentor to be instrumental in establishing a positive school culture. Peterson and Deal (1998) remark that school managers are central to constituting school culture because they should transmit fundamental beliefs in their everyday work environment (Peterson et al., 1998). School leaders and teachers in my school are encouraged to communicate positive behavioural patterns, attitudes, opinions, customs, and practices to learners and encourage them to act responsibly in as far as behaviour is concerned. When applying the school rules, all role players must strive to create a culture of reconciliation, teaching, learning, mutual respect, tolerance, and peace (Roos, 2003). A positive school culture exudes a sense of what is right. It encourages a collective mind-set of caring and concern and facilitates a common sense of responsibility to help learners learn and behave well (Kent et al., 1998). As a case in point, my school formulated a positive behaviour support policy that was in line with the school culture in 2017. This project was propelled by the results of my Master's research and intended to address the unwarranted behaviour of many learners in my school. I felt that it would be essential to address the significance of a positive teacher-learner relationship as a key to reinforcing acceptable behaviour among learners. O'Grady (2015) describes how positive teacher-learner relationships can facilitate the most favourable environment for learning experiences in the classroom. In other words, the better a teacher gets along with his or her learners, the more the learners will respect such a teacher and exhibit pro-social behaviours. Brown (2004,) comments that much of the contribution of novice teachers to a positive school atmosphere rests on their capability to manage classrooms in socially responsive ways. Positive teacher-learner relationships have the potential to create a conducive learning environment in the classroom (Mokhele, 2006). A positive teacher-learner relationship also elicits mutual trust between a teacher and his/her learners and helps learners to feel at liberty to confide in their teachers when they are concerned or abused. Learners who experience relationship-based discipline in a classroom tend to act more responsibly (Roache & Lewis, 2011). However, prior to my studies, I noted that new teachers were sceptical of encouraging learner-teacher relationships as they feared the total loss of authority in their classrooms.

Roache, Edmund and Ramon (2011) emphasise that recognising and rewarding positive learner and class behaviour can have positive benefits for building relationships between learners and teachers. The school management team must always ensure that learners are taught something new and that they are positively reinforced every time they behave in an acceptable manner (Wheldall & Merrett, 1984). Nelsen (2011) points out that praise may inspire some learners to improve their behaviour. Almost everyone responds well to positive feedback (Roffey, 2011) and learners, just like novice teachers, need to be convinced that they are valuable. Brown (2004) argues that gaining learners' support in a classroom involves instituting a classroom environment in which novice teachers are aware of and attend to learners' cultural needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs. Similarly, Wood and Freeman-Loftis (2012) suggest that, by using positive language to communicate trust in learners' abilities and intentions, a teacher will assist learners in internalising positive identities and building their knowledge and self-control. Learners must be acknowledged, encouraged and praised for any exceptional deed. However, Nelsen (2011) warns that too much praise could encourage learners to develop self-concepts that are completely dependent on the opinion of others.

### **1.9.2 The role of parents in their children's behaviour at school**

An important component of learner behaviour support is parental involvement and the positive role parents play in their children's education (Mestry & Grobler, 2007). Parents are required to share responsibility for their children's education and to ensure "...the active promotion of the culture of learning and the goal of [achieving] educational outcomes of the highest standards" (Mestry & Grobler, 2007, p. 177). According to Mestry and Grobler (2007), there is "a beneficial relationship between parental involvement and learner variables such as academic achievement, learner attendance, learner attitude towards learning, learner behaviour, as well as educational aspirations" (p. 177). A learner whose parents have a sound relationship with the teacher often displays more acceptable behaviour than the one whose parents are critical or absent in this relationship.

The school management team needs to manage a truthful ideology of parent-teacher partnership to encourage the school community to become actively involved in their children's learning (Mestry & Grobler, 2007). Calderhead (1984) explains that it is difficult to curb a learner's disruptive behaviour if it originates from conditions at home. Masuku (2018) argues that learners are highly susceptible to societal ills and, as a result, those who come from unruly

homes, a culture of violence, and/or a drug-infested population will bring those communal ills to school. Therefore, as a mentor, I needed to ensure that newly qualified teachers were knowledgeable about the home backgrounds of their learners so that they would understand and pre-empt learners' negative behaviour before they misbehaved.

The school management team can play a significant role in the lives of teachers and learners in terms of behaviour support management. Oliver and Reschly (2007) argue that the absence of professional development in the critical competencies of behaviour management significantly reduces the effectiveness of new teachers. Therefore, a school management team should be at the forefront of mentoring, monitoring and assisting teachers to control the behaviour of their learners. According to Roffey (2011), "...the best school leaders can have a profound effect on school morale" (p. 74). Against this background, I was aware that my role as the school's deputy principal would be to provide novice teachers with comprehensive support in terms of classroom management and positive learner behaviour.

## **1.10 Conclusion and Overview of the Thesis**

The purpose of **Chapter One** was to introduce the study and to explain the focus and purpose of my research. I also briefly introduced the self-study methodological approach that I employed. I then contextualised my study by briefly discussing the history of learner discipline in South Africa and I provided details about my motivation for undertaking the research. I presented the research questions as points of reference for the study. Next, I explained why I utilised a sociocultural theoretical perspective and how I understood the core concepts of mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support in the context of my study.

In **Chapter Two**, I clarify why I adopted a self-study research methodology and present the context of the study. I explain my position as a researcher as well as a participant and give details of how other participants enhanced my study. I thus clarify the function of critical friends, who were my fellow PhD students. I then give an account of the data generation practices I employed and how meaning-making would occur. I give details of how I addressed ethical issues and ensured the trustworthiness of the data. Additionally, I illuminate the research challenges that I encountered that could have impeded the study and I explain how I addressed these issues. In conclusion, I discuss the key learnings that informed this self-study project.

**Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five** respond to my first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by recalling key memories?* In response to this research question, I reflect on my own experiences of supportive and unsupportive assistance when I was a novice teacher. I recall the positive influence my family had on my development and I also recall incidences of both uncertainty and development that I experienced at the primary school where I taught for the first five years as a novice teacher. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my core learning experiences that were elicited by supported and unsupported experiences.

In **Chapter Six, Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight**, I respond to the second research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school community?* To respond to this research question, I engaged novice teachers in discussions about their views and experiences. They answered questions and they honestly shared their views of their classroom experiences with me. I conclude by reflecting on what I learned from these discussion sessions with the novice teachers.

In **Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten** I engage in in-depth reflections on my research by revisiting key aspects of previous chapters (Chapters Three to Eight). I analyse the data and comment on the key findings. These findings are enhanced by reflecting on the insights that I gained as a mentor of novice teachers and a key member of my school's management team. These insights affirm my learning about the mentorship responsibilities of the SMT, with specific reference to learner behaviour support in the classrooms of novice teachers.

In **Chapter Eleven**, which is the concluding chapter, I revisit and consolidate all the earlier chapters of this thesis. I explain how the study influenced me personally and professionally. I also consider the methodological approach I employed and reflect on what I gained from my conceptual and theoretical learning. I conclude this chapter by explaining what I plan to do differently in the future as a consequence of this study, and I offer concluding remarks that I hope will encourage future studies in this field.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AN INQUIRY OF SELF

#### **2.1 Introduction: Self-determination**

In undertaking this self-study research journey, I drew on my earliest experiences as a novice teacher by recalling how I had either been supported or not supported as a novice teacher and recalling what these experiences had taught me about mentoring novice teachers in the classroom. I undertook this journey of learning and discovery as a seasoned teacher and the deputy principal of a multicultural primary school. In Chapter One, I introduced the study by clarifying the focus and purpose of my research. I also positioned my research in the broad context of dealing with learner discipline in South Africa and narrowed it down to the situation in novice teachers' classrooms. I expanded on my reasons for undertaking the research and listed the two research questions that had given impetus to my study. I also shed light on why I had adopted a sociocultural theoretical perspective and described my interpretation of two key concepts, namely 'mentoring novice teachers' and 'learner behaviour support'. I then gave a brief introduction to the self-study methodological approach and concluded with a brief overview of the thesis chapters.

In the current chapter (Chapter Two), I explain my choice of a self-study research methodology and expound the concepts of memory-work, an arts-based approach to research, and collective self-study research methods (Samaras, 2011). I continue by describing the context in which my study was conducted and explain my dual position as a researcher and a research participant. I also illuminate how the study participants enriched my study and I describe the role of critical friends in my research. This is followed by a description of the data generation methods I employed and how I consolidated my learning. I also address the ethical requirements that I adhered to and explain how trustworthiness was attained. I list the challenges that could have hampered my study and refer to the study limitations. In conclusion, I elucidate the most important points of learning that emerged from the data and I explain how self-study research methodology enriched this learning.

## **2.2 Research Methodology**

The methodological approach that I employed in this research project was self-study (Samaras, (2011). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) describe self-study research in education as a methodological approach for teachers who wish to pursue superior knowledge about their practices, settings, and their work in their quest to improve both teaching and learning. Furthermore, Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) define self-study as “...the study of an individual, the individual’s ideas, as well as the ‘not-self’” (p. 236). They explain that it draws on an individual’s life – but it is more than that, as it includes a reflective look at texts, events, people, and concepts. Moreover, LaBoskey (2004) affirms that self-study aims at improvement, as one wishes to transform oneself to be better situated to inspire change in others, and to change one’s setting (i.e., a school) and the environment in which it is situated for the better.

In my view, self-study allows teachers to think and teach beyond curriculum prescriptions as it propels them to engage in various teaching techniques. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) view self-study as a research approach to educator teaching practice that targets matters within that specific person’s professional domain. Samaras (2011) advocates that, through self-study research, teachers can improve their expertise to positively impact learners’ learning while they can also impact policy decisions and the education system. Hamilton et al. (2008) highlight that self-study research contributes to the professional learning of teachers and creates a deeper understanding of the educational world.

I embarked on this self-study research journey because I wanted to improve my practice as a deputy principal as I wished to influence constructive change in my school. My attention focused on mentoring novice teachers to help them cope in terms of learner behaviour support. I also envisaged that the study would capacitate me to share my learning about mentoring novice teachers and that this learning would result in improved learner behaviour and classroom management. I also hoped that I would be able to assist my colleagues and, ultimately, the Department of Basic Education in the field of learner behaviour support and improvement.

Using the memory-work self-study research method (Samaras, 2011), I was able to recall and explore my experiences of either being supported or lacking support during the first five years

of my teaching career. The use of artefacts assisted me in answering my first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* By writing letters to and receiving letters from a former colleague and high school teacher as well as using artefacts to refresh my memory, I was able to recall the times when I was supported as well as the times I lacked support as a novice teacher. For example, a photograph of my first class at the first school where I taught (Chapter Three, Figure 3.1) reminded me of the day when a Grade 5 boy came to class under the influence of alcohol. I recall and evaluate the impact this incident had on my learning as a shocked young teacher.

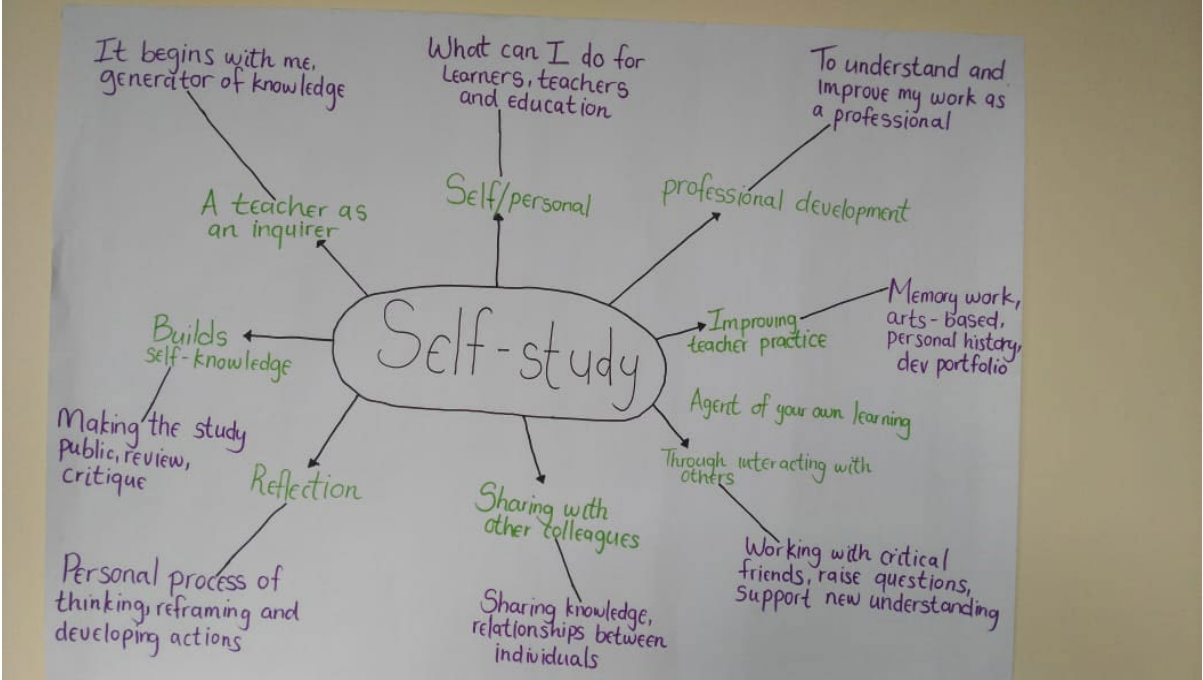
Samaras (2011) explains that using memory-work as a self-study method serves to unearth events that established the foundations of who we are today. Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Pillay (2012) emphasise that memories play a pivotal role in the thoughts and actions of teachers, and they argue that cautious memory work helps teachers to become alert to and to intervene creatively in patterns of undesirable behaviour.

In addition to using memory-work, I also engaged in arts-based self-study. Samaras (2011) maintains that the arts-based self-study method helps to stimulate and elicit self-reflection through the arts. Furthermore, LaBoskey (2004) advocates that arts-based self-study is holistic and that it thus allows researchers to reflect on unique aspects of their educational experiences. Similarly, Weber (2014) iterates that an arts-based approach can increase our learning through “often neglected, but important, ways in which we construct meaning through artistic forms of expression” (p. 10). Samaras (2011) convinces us that self-study researchers can use a variety of art forms to portray events, interpret their meaning, and convey their learning as they make it public. It is for these reasons that my participants and I used visual arts-based materials such as drawings and photographs to generate data in response to the first and second research questions that guided the study (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four).

Samaras (2011) advises that, as a self-study researcher, one may choose a collective self-study approach. One thus studies an issue or topic by establishing a team or group that helps one to collaboratively explore the role one plays within that group. I thus engaged a group of four novice teachers to assist me in my response to the second research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school community?* According to Austin and Senese (2004), self-study pushes teachers to discover their voice, advance their practices, expand their relationships, and

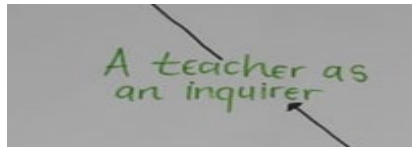
improve and document their potential as agents of change. I thus envisioned that my engagement in discussion sessions with the selected novice teachers would result in effective change in their classrooms. I was also hopeful that my impact on the novice teachers would positively permeate the classrooms of other teachers in the school.

### 2.3 My Understanding of Self-Study Methodology



**Figure 2.1: Self-study methodology concept map**

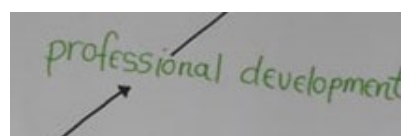
I was inspired to develop a concept map during discussions with my research supervisor and critical friends. A central theme in the initial discussions was how we could best present our understanding of self-study as a methodological approach. Hawkins et al. (2019) describe concept mapping as a method of arranging data diagrammatically by creating interconnections among similar and related concepts. Kinchin and Gravett (2020) declare that concept mapping is a means by which individuals come to know more about an event and themselves. The input of critical friends helped me to formulate my thoughts and narrow them down to essentials. The result was a concept map that clearly contained the key concepts I wished to explore in this self-study project. For example, the concept ‘a teacher as an inquirer’ (top left, Figure 2.1) means that the journey of self-discovery and learning had to start with me as an individual – that I would be the generator of the knowledge and insights I acquired.



**Figure 2.2**

After intensive scrutiny and vigorous reading of various articles such as *The nature of self-study of teaching* (Samaras & Freese, 2006), *Practicing self-study of teaching* (Samaras & Freese, 2006), *The future of our children lies in our hands* (Pithouse, 2011) and books such as *Self-study teacher research* (Samaras, 2011), I realised that self-study research methodology comprises components that are interlinked. Self-study is a personally situated inquiry (Samaras, 2011) during which a teacher becomes an inquirer. Therefore, as a teacher, I had to ask questions about a particular aspect of my teaching practice that I had to investigate. For example, my research about mentoring novice teachers in my school was prompted by my concerns about the lack of support they received and the struggles that novice teachers faced when learners persistently misbehaved in their classrooms.

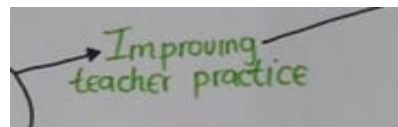
Self-study allows a researcher to embark on a research journey of his or her own choice. Samaras and Freese (2008) argue that self-study “...provides fertile ground for investigating and developing your knowledge about teaching with evidence that is immediate and personal” (p. 43). As a creator of knowledge, I asked myself what I could do for novice teachers and my school in terms of classroom management and, more specifically, in terms of learner behaviour support.



**Figure 2.3**

By engaging in a self-study investigation, I was able to improve my work and develop professionally. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) argue that self-study should be centred on the researcher’s professional knowledge in a particular situation and the ramifications thereof to improve educational practice and gain deeper insight into the world of teaching. Therefore, by interacting with novice teachers on a scholarly footing and discussing issues that were of concern to all of us enhanced my professional insight. As a school manager and a teacher mentor, I realised that I needed to be a primary source of influence for positive learning

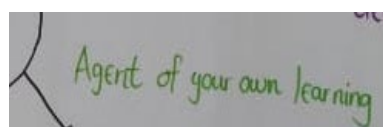
outcomes by spearheading and contributing to programmes that would increase teacher-learner, teacher-teacher, and teacher-parent relationships. One of my critical friends emphasised the importance of teacher development. This means that, by developing ourselves as researchers, our learning also rubs off on our colleagues and teachers from neighbouring schools during our engagements on various platforms.



**Figure 2.4**

Another vital aspect of the self-study approach is that we improve teacher practice and learning. Samaras (2011) reiterates that self-study researchers work towards validating and advancing their efforts as professionals. Learning about different teaching strategies could thus increase one's confidence when one engages with disruptive learners. Self-study allows the teacher researcher to use diverse teaching strategies such as memory work, personal history, and an arts-based approach to learning. For instance, the novice teacher participants had to draw pictures of their experiences to reflect on what worked and what did not work for them when they tried to manage their classrooms (see Chapter Six).

For learning to occur, teachers must utilise different methodologies. Samaras and Freese (2006) propose that teachers should honestly share their encounters, achievements and trials with others. I thus employed memory work to address research question 1: "*What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?*" This process evoked many memories that had lain dormant for years. During my discussions with the novice teachers, we encouraged one another to utilise these and other methodologies in our engagements with learners (see Chapter Seven). Because we teach learners with different learning capabilities, the use of diverse methods is important as some have the gift of telling their stories while others may be too shy and prefer to express themselves through drawings or role-play.



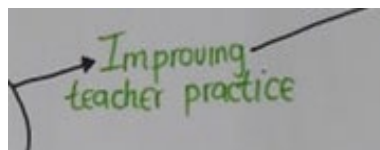
**Figure 2.5**

In the self-study approach, one becomes an agent of one's learning through interacting with others and, being part of discussions where one interacts with others, allows knowledge acquisition. Samaras and Freese (2006) confirm that self-study is "...interpersonal, interactive, and collaborative" (p. 50). Self-study methodologies allowed me to acknowledge and embrace other people's points of view as we normally differ in the way we perceive things. However, we learnt from one another as we engaged in discussions and while we *listened*. My critical friends were not only there to critique my research efforts, but they also played a crucial role by supporting and guiding me and sharing their thoughts with me about my study. Samaras (2011) explains that the role of critical friends "...is to provoke new ideas and interpretations, question the researcher's assumptions, and participate openly" (p. 75). I learnt a lot through their active participation and their willingness to make a meaningful contribution to my study. Learning does not happen in isolation as the thoughts of various people elicit robust learning.



**Figure 2.6**

Self-study also allows the researcher to be reflective and to be able to build self-knowledge. Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) attest to the fact that reflection helps one make sense of one's social world and promotes a particular understanding of it. Self-study also allows one to display one's work for public scrutiny and peer review. Teachers possess knowledge that influences others. For example, my school was capacitated to develop a positive learner behaviour support policy based on the research that I had done for my Master's degree (Luthuli, 2016). It is also important that we as teachers constantly reflect upon our positive and negative encounters and this improves our decision-making skills and allows us to never repeat our mistakes.



**Figure 2.7**

We can improve our teaching practice by learning from our own experiences and those of others. According to a critical friend, we are all vulnerable when we engage in self-study. Not only do people critique our studies, but the researcher also opens a door for others to identify any shortcomings in a study. Another critical friend stressed the need for honesty in our work. Samaras (2011) argues that self-study researchers seek to make their research accurate for

themselves and others. Moreover, as a researcher one needs to embrace constructive criticism to develop and improve one's teaching practice.

My supervisor highlighted the link between professional development and being an agent of one's own learning. According to her, self-study researchers often think that professional development is something that someone else needs to do for us, but she argues that, in the self-study approach, we get the opportunity to choose our research topic and find the people we want to work with. We also find ways to complete our work without waiting for others to develop us. However, self-study does not happen in isolation – but because it is self-initiated, our motivation is much stronger than when we are invited to a professional development workshop where we have to listen and are expected to implement the knowledge we gained afterwards. Self-study is not about success or failure, but it is all about learning.

## **2.4 The Research Setting**

This study was conducted in an urban primary school that is situated in the heart of the central business district of the city of Durban in Kwa-Zulu Natal. At the time of the study, it was a well-resourced school with a library, laboratory, and electronic devices such as televisions and video facilities that were used for educational purposes.

Because of its central location, the school attracted learners from various racial and socio-economic backgrounds. When the study was conducted, there were approximately 850 enrolled learners at the school. Of these, about 70% resided in the city of Durban while the remaining 30% came from various townships around Durban. Most learners travelled to school by taxi or train. Approximately three-quarters of the learners were foreign nationals who came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Available data revealed that the majority of the parents of these children were literate.

The school was categorised as a public school that was financed by the state while parents were also required to pay school fees as determined by the Governing Body. The Department of Basic Education categorised this as a quintile 5 school. This means that the school educated a significant number of learners whose parents could meet the school's financial requirements

every year. Some learners came from poor socio-economic backgrounds and were part of a school feeding scheme that was run by a non-government organisation (NGO).

The teaching staff was multiracial as 90% was South African Indians and 10% was African. No Coloured or White teachers were employed at the school at the time of the study. The teacher to learner ratio was 1:36. Of the 19 teachers employed at the school, four were novice teachers.

## **2.5 The Research Participants**

Because this was a self-study research project, I was the principal participant. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) describe self-study research as the scrutiny of a professional person in action, and they argue that this generally occurs in educational contexts. Furthermore, they claim that self-study researchers concentrate on their work by scrutinising their unique values and professional practices (Hamilton et al., 2008). Against this background, it is important that I introduce myself. I am Khulekani Luthuli. I was born in Durban 51 years ago. I am a Zulu and I speak IsiZulu as my home language. I attended primary and high schools near the village where I grew up as a child. I also went to a teacher training collage. I have been teaching for 24 years and hold a Master's degree. I offer a more detailed account of my professional career and experiences in Chapter Three.

Table 2.1 lists the four teacher participants who assisted me in generating data to answer the second of the two questions that informed my research. Pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants.

**Table 2.1: Biographic information of the study participants**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Grades taught</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Highest Qualification</b>
Miss Mashobane	1 year	5 and 6	African	Post level 1	B.Ed. degree
Miss Mthethwa	2 years	1-3	African	Post level 1	B.Ed. degree
Miss Mabunda	4 years	6 and 7	African	Post level 1	B.Ed. degree
Miss Zwide	2 years	3	African	Post level 1	B.Ed. degree

Four post level 1 novice teachers were employed at my school and I decided to recruit all four to participate in the study. They represented the junior, intermediate and senior phases of schooling in a primary school in the South African context. A post level 1 teacher is a teacher who is employed at the base of the professional teacher hierarchy. The junior phase in the school covers Grades R to 3, the intermediate phase covers Grades 4 to 6, and the senior phase in a primary school covers only Grade 7. For the purpose of this study, a novice teacher is defined as a teacher who has been employed by the Department of Basic Education for up to 5 years.

**Miss Mashobane**, an African teacher, taught IsiZulu in Grades 5 and 6. She was 27 years old, had one year of professional experience, and had taught IsiZulu for one year in the intermediate phase. She held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.

**Miss Mthethwa** was 28 years old. She held a B.Ed. degree and had two years of teaching experience in the Foundation Phase. She taught IsiZulu in grade 6 and 7.

**Miss Zwide** was also 28 years old and taught Grade 3 in the Foundation Phase. She held a B.Ed. degree.

**Miss Mabunda** was 32 years old. She held a B.Ed. degree and taught IsiZulu in Grades 6 and 7.

## 2.6 Critical Friends

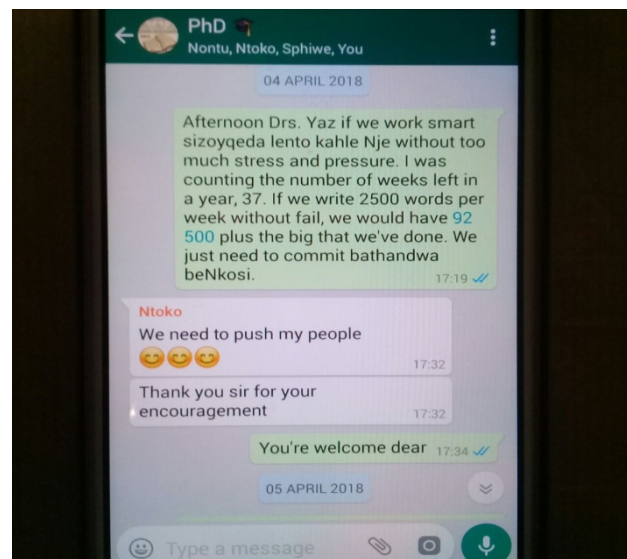
One of the most important characteristics of self-study research is that it allows the flow of critical and collaborative enquiry (Samaras, 2011). Lunenberg and Samaras (2011) are adamant that self-study research should be open to collective viewpoints. According to Samaras and Freese (2006), self-study requires collective participation for the construction of new conceptions through discussion and appraisal.

In my experience, the role of critical friends was not only to constructively critique my work, but also to guide and add value to my study. Hiralaal et al. (2018) argue that critical friends can contribute exhilarating and thought-provoking ideas and offer propositions that enrich one's research. Schuck and Russell (2005) describe a critical friend as a trusted person who asks thought-provoking questions, offers another perspective, and critiques one's work as a friend. Furthermore, critical friends encourage and seek respectful questioning and offer opinions that reveal different standpoints (Samaras, 2011). I worked with three critical friends who I knew would be helpful, reliable and trustworthy. I considered my critical friends trustworthy because we were all driven by the same purpose and passion, which was to complete our doctoral studies and add value to our teaching environments.

The purpose of the involvement of critical friends was to guide me and give direction to the study through offering their opinions and ideas. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) claim that critical friends can work together to exchange ideas, come to new understandings, and listen to and reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions. Furthermore, Samaras et al. (2014) describe the roles of critical friends as: eliciting new concepts and expositions; questioning the researcher's speculation; and supplying open, honest, and positive views. My three critical friends and I thus shared ideas and learned current information by engaging in open and frank discussions about our work.

My three critical friends and I are all African and speak isiZulu as our home language. At the time of the study, we were all school teachers who had chosen to conduct self-study research in the primary school context. We met at least four times and even more often in a month, depending on the amount of work we needed to cover at that particular time. We were often joined by our research supervisor, but we also met independently as a group of students.

Through discussions and dialogue, the critical friends' points of view helped me to constantly refine and restructure my research endeavours. Evans, Ka'Ōpua and Freese (2015) claim that collaborating with critical friends allows one to share one's ideas and beliefs and to better understand and critically reflect on one another's viewpoints. I managed to progress in my study by embracing and understanding my critical friends' perspectives through discussions, debates, and dialogues. Due to the digital age in which we live, we also texted one another regularly using WhatsApp (see Figure 2.1). For example, we would debate on how one should approach the writing of a particular chapter based on the research question one was attempting to answer. I also shared readings that were relevant to my critical friends' research studies by printing them out because I had access to the internet at my workplace. Hiralaal et al. (2018) iterate that belonging to a supportive learning environment provides space for a student to share ideas, ask questions, and alleviate doubts. Thus, the involvement of critical friends in my study helped me to continuously adjust and readjust the way I collected my thoughts, processed their feedback, and asked questions that would be beneficial to my research study.



**Figure 2.2: Example of critical friends' encouraging remarks on WhatsApp**

My interactions with my critical friends created enough room to minimise mistakes, and I thought more broadly about my research topic because of the different viewpoints that were expressed by these critical friends (see Chapter Three and Chapter Six). Moreover, my critical friends played a significant role in making sure that my study was well structured and had value as we engaged in multi vocal discussions, shared our challenges and ideas, and strove to

improve our professional practice. For example, we discussed the strategies I could use in the first activity I would do with my participants. My critical friends advised me to start by narrating the fears I had in my early years of teaching before I asked them to discuss their anxieties in a group. Samaras and Freese (2006) state that "it takes practice being the supportive collaborator who encourages, while at the same time being a critical friend asking probing questions and critically analysing the issues" (p. 59). By engaging with these critical friends through oral communication and text messages, they opened new horizons in my mind that I had not previously considered. They played a pivotal role in maintaining a constructive tone, sharing their views, and asking provocative questions that shaped and gave direction to my study (Samaras, 2011).

## 2.7 Data Generation

Data were generated using six main research activities. (1) I worked with photographs. I retrieved old photographs and these prompted various memories that had lain dormant. The novice teachers also took photographs of current events and areas where learner misbehaviour occurred in our school. (2) I engaged in social networking (mainly WhatsApp) discussions with the new teachers in our school. (3) I wrote to and received letters from the novice teacher participants, and I also exchanged letters with a former mentor and class teacher. (4) I made audio recordings of conversations with the novice teachers. (5) The novice teachers and I created drawings from memory. (6) I consistently recorded my thoughts in a reflective journal.

**Table 2.2: Data generation tools**

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Self-study method and data generation activities</b>	<b>Participant/s</b>	<b>Data sources</b>
<i>What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?</i>	a) Writing in my reflective journal about my memories of mentoring experiences b) Memory drawings c) Audio recorded discussions during meetings and or sessions with critical friends and my supervisor	a) Me b) Me c) My critical friends, my supervisor and I.	a) Journal entries b) Drawing c) Audio recordings

	<p>d) Retrieval of old photographs</p> <p>e) Letter writing activities involving a former high school teacher, my grandmother, my sister, and my unofficial mentor</p>	<p>d) Me</p> <p>e) Me</p>	<p>d) Old photographs</p> <p>e) Letters</p>
<p><i>What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school community?</i></p>	<p>a) Writing in my reflective journal on my observations and reflections on learner behaviour support for new teachers</p> <p>b) Data were generated using audio recordings, discussions, and sharing ideas with novice and experienced teachers on mentoring and learner behaviour support.</p> <p>c) Data were generated by means of WhatsApp discussions.</p> <p>d) Novice teachers pictured their experiences of learner behaviour support through drawings.</p> <p>e) The novice teachers took and analysed photographs.</p> <p>f) The novice teachers wrote letters.</p>	<p>a) Me</p> <p>b) Me</p> <p>c) Novice teachers</p> <p>d) Novice teachers</p> <p>e) Novice teachers</p> <p>f) Novice teachers</p>	<p>a) Journal entries</p> <p>b) Drawings</p> <p>c) WhatsApp messages</p> <p>d) Drawings</p> <p>e) Photographs</p> <p>f) Letters</p>

## 2.8.1 Working with photographs

### 2.8.1.1 Photographs as tools to rekindle forgotten memories

In my view, looking at old photographs stimulates thoughts and stirs up memories of forgotten events of the past. I retrieved old photographs of my class in the first school where I taught as

well as one of myself dressed like a teacher, Mr Mthembu, whom I had always looked up to (see Chapter Three). These photographs prompted my memories to address question 1 and question 2. Taking photographs had meant very little until I looked at these old photographs. I felt excited as I studied these photographs and memories came flooding back about events associated with them. My excitement was sometimes overshadowed by my memories of the challenges I had encountered in my early years of teaching, such as a confrontation with the parents of a learner I had taught (see Chapter Five). Mitchell, Weber and Pithouse (2009, p. 127) point out that “looking, gazing, seeing, noticing, gathering evidence and evaluating are at the heart of any self-study, especially those using photography-based methods”. I put this to the test and, by merely looking at a photograph, I could swiftly recall memories that had lain dormant in my mind. I thus acknowledge that photographs can be meaningful tools to arouse memories of the past. In a study on cultivating intrinsic motivation for learning Technology, Magubane (2014) noted that when photographs were used as artefacts, they elicited emotions as well as scholarly viewpoints. Using the photographs of my former class and that of myself dressed like Mr Mthembu enabled me to recall deeply-rooted memories.

### ***2.8.1.2 Novice teachers and photograph taking***

I invited the novice teachers to take photographs of areas where learner misbehaviour usually occurred in our school. We used these photographs to evoke memories of misbehaviour when they themselves were learners and we also discussed strategies to support positive learner behaviour. Cole (2011) argues that sharing forgotten memories as a group often stimulates another teacher’s unremembered memories. Mitchell et al. (2019) concur, and argue that photographs are not only powerful instruments for recalling the past, but they are also future oriented. Being future oriented means that the photographs the novice teachers took reminded them of future events that might occur in the areas that they had photographed. For instance, they understood then that they needed to be forewarned and be more vigilant when they took a class for Physical Education in the school parking lot where unruly learner behaviour was likely to recur.

The novice teachers each wandered around the school and took photographs using their cellular phones of areas that they felt were ‘hot spots’ for learner misbehaviour, such as the learners’ toilets, the school parking area, and the back of the school hall where many misbehaviours had originated in the past. They then explained in writing why they felt those were hot spots where

problem behaviours were likely to emanate. These narratives were used to prompt discussions on possibilities for learner behaviour support. Mitchell et al. (2019) state that taking photographs allows participants to formulate their comprehension of developments and attribute importance to these events. Thus taking photographs and reflecting on their meaning enabled the participants to open new doors for discussions and come to meaningful conclusions about what the photographs meant about the past and might predict about the future (see Chapter Eight). It is noteworthy that they also remembered similar areas where they used to display unruly behaviour when they were school learners themselves. In the process of memory recall using photographs, I ensured that no learners' or teachers' faces or the name of the school were visible in the photographs.

### **2.8.2 Discussions with novice and experienced teachers using social networking**

WhatsApp is a cheap and popular social networking platform that is used worldwide. WhatsApp was used by the novice teacher participants and myself to discuss their experiences of learner behaviour support. Magubane (2014) suggests that using a social network such as Facebook can help generate data from participants without having to meet in person if one has an idea in mind and one has no one present to share or debate it with. The novice teacher participants would type their responses, share their feelings, and ask questions on anything related to school matters. For instance, one novice teacher asked if they could meet independently as novice teachers before and after our usual discussion meetings. She said they also needed to identify the positives and the flaws in their classroom practice to rectify or talk about these when we met. I agreed to her request unhesitatingly.

There were times when I could not convene a meeting with the novice teacher participants due to time constraints. I then found it easy and time-saving to communicate my thoughts and to relay messages to the participants using WhatsApp. For example, I reminded the participants to prepare answers for our next discussion session (see Figure 2.3). I saw no need to call a meeting as relaying the message through WhatsApp was easy and every participant received the message timeously.



**Figure 2.3: Swift communication using WhatsApp**

## **2.8.3 Letter writing**

### ***2.8.3.1 Exploring in-depth meaning through letter writing***

In my opinion, letter writing allows one to pour one's thoughts and feelings out on a piece of paper in a meaningful and sequential way. Nyholm and Lindstrom (2018) argue that, as a research method, letter writing offers opportunities for deep understanding of human beings and the world of caring. Correspondingly, Samaras and Sell (2013) remind us that letter writing is a remarkable self-study research tool because it helps articulate our thoughts on paper. Using self-study methodologies, I was thus given leeway to write letters to my former class teacher and unofficial mentor in which I thanked him for his guidance and support (see Chapter Three). I also expressed my appreciation to him for being my role-model whom I emulated along my journey of becoming a teacher. I felt that writing letters to my former class teacher and my unofficial mentor would be more significant than conveying what I felt in spoken words. Kirkhorn and Airth-Kindre (2010) observe that letter writing serves as a stimulant that helps to kindle remembrance that highlights the meaning of life. This means that letter writing enhances an individual's carefully chosen expressions when addressing another individual. For example, the letter I wrote to my sister served as a constant reminder to always observe, pay attention, and assimilate the value of the exceptional deeds of other people that would, in turn, promote my professional growth.

### ***2.8.3.2 The overwhelming experience of being the recipient of letters***

In the initial stages of my research, I showed the novice teachers a letter I had written to a former colleague who had acted as my mentor in the first school where I had taught. We then agreed that it would be a worthwhile exercise if they wrote me letters to tell me what they thought of me as their mentor.

In my view, receiving a positive comments elicits feels of contentment, joy, and exhilaration in the recipient. This also allows the recipient to occasionally take a pause and go back to read more. Moreover, the joy of receiving positive feedback in writing from the novice teachers went a long way to establishing the necessary rapport between us (see Chapter Six). Rautio (2009) acknowledges that receiving a well-constructed letter may serve as a means of counselling and psychotherapy. For example, some of my attributes that the novice teachers commended were that I was humble, kind, respectful, honest, approachable, loyal, supportive, and genuine. Knowing that they saw these attributes in me was a source of therapy and I constantly reread these letters to reboot my self-esteem. Nyholm and Lindstrom (2018) argue that a kind letter sends an essential message from one individual to another and can be a momentous gift that can be savoured for many years. I felt that writing and receiving letters encouraged me and capacitated me with a positive mind-set.

### **2.8.4 Audio recordings of meetings and discussions**

Audio recordings of the discussions and meetings with the participants assisted me in capturing and storing all the relevant data. Masinga (2012) points out that, by using an audio recorder, one can gain further insight into the entire data generation process as one can go back and listen to how one engaged with others and how one responded to the situations that arose during the process of data generation. The audio recordings allowed me to listen attentively to every participant's input. They also helped me to generate more questions or to ask for clarity. By listening to the audio recordings, I sometimes felt that I had asked questions that made them feel somewhat uncomfortable. For example, I asked if the behaviour of today's learners was worse than that of their generation. The answers they gave did not really relate to the question I had asked as they deviated and addressed different issues. Afterwards, I felt that I should have rephrased the question.

I determined the dates that the novice teachers and I should meet to engage in deliberations on assisting one another in terms of mentorship and support for new teachers who had to deal with disruptive learner behaviour in the classroom. I audio recorded these sessions. I usually commenced by engaging the participants in deliberations on the challenges and joys they encountered when trying to manage subject content and learner behaviour at the same time (see Chapter Seven). For example, I asked them questions and they poured out their concerns. We then discussed how they could overcome these challenges. After that, I discussed some valuable points of concern and critique with the school management team without referring to the participants by name. Below is a list of the discussion questions. Some were adapted from Deaton (2013) whose work assisted me to generate the required data. I used the questions below as prompts to start a conversation with the novice teachers. However, I did not rigidly adhere to these questions but allowed the discussions to flow in related directions. There were also follow-up questions that emanated from the dialogues I had with the novice teachers.

## **2.9 The Discussion Schedule**

### **2.9.1 Questions for Discussion – Term 2**

1. What do you find stressful in your classrooms?
2. What do you think leads to lack of learner discipline in your classrooms?
3. In your view, how can you minimise learner misbehaviour tendencies in your classrooms?
4. How do you experience teaching learners who come from multicultural backgrounds?
5. How do you feel about your role of being a class teacher?
6. Have you ever had joyful moments in your classrooms?
7. How would you describe learner behaviour in your classrooms?
8. What are your reactions towards those learners who still display misbehaviour at some point in your teaching programme?

### **2.9.2 Questions for discussion – Term 3**

1. How has learning about the responsibilities of a teacher changed your outlook on learner behaviour support?
2. How do you think your classroom environment and your learners' behaviour will change when you integrate different teaching practices? How can this be accomplished?
3. Which personality traits that you possess do you believe will contribute to your success with certain classroom management practices? Why?
4. Which classroom management issues do you think are the hardest for newly qualified teachers to deal with?
5. What do you think aggravated the kind of misbehaviour you wrote down?
6. How do you manage learners who display the same kind of behaviour you exhibited during your schooling years?

### **2.9.3 Questions for discussion – Term 4**

1. Do you think today's learners are worse than your generation in terms of behaviour? Why/Why not?
2. Using drawings, explain what you think worked and what still poses a challenge in terms of classroom management and learner behaviour support.
3. What has worked for you in terms of classroom management and learner behaviour support in particular?

## **2.10 Drawings**

### **2.10.1 Drawings versus spoken words**

In my opinion, a drawing often has more meaning than spoken words. Literat (2013) notes that participatory drawing is a research practice that is suited for work with participants of any age and across various cultural backgrounds. Additionally, Literat (2013) articulates that, through participatory drawing, one can communicate feelings that are difficult to express verbally or in writing. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) acknowledge that drawings create understanding about teaching practice and, through a repeated process of consideration, they unveil numerous layers

within teaching that aid and inform change. Therefore, I encouraged the novice teachers to use the expressive avenue of drawing to voice their inner stories regarding learner behaviour support.

One is at liberty to view and interpret a drawing any way one sees fit. Pithouse (2011a) argues that drawing allows one to look at one's own experiences in-depth and from different standpoints. Drawings can evoke opinions, emotions, and behaviour and can elicit consideration of their effect on the opinions, emotions, and behaviour of oneself and others. She also states that drawing is a technique that can depict or connect with emotions that offer life to individual experiences, yet it is regularly disregarded in public accounts and research (Pithouse, 2011a). I thus used this research approach with the novice teachers as I thought they might sometimes find it challenging to explain their emotions and frustrations verbally. For example, I asked the participants to use drawings to discuss what they thought worked for them and what still posed challenges in terms of classroom management and learner behaviour support (see Chapter Eight). One of the drawings was of a subject committee meeting that endorsed collaborative learning. The drawings were mostly a stark reminder of what the participants needed to do in their classrooms to ensure positive learner behaviour.

### **2.10.2 Evoking memories through drawings**

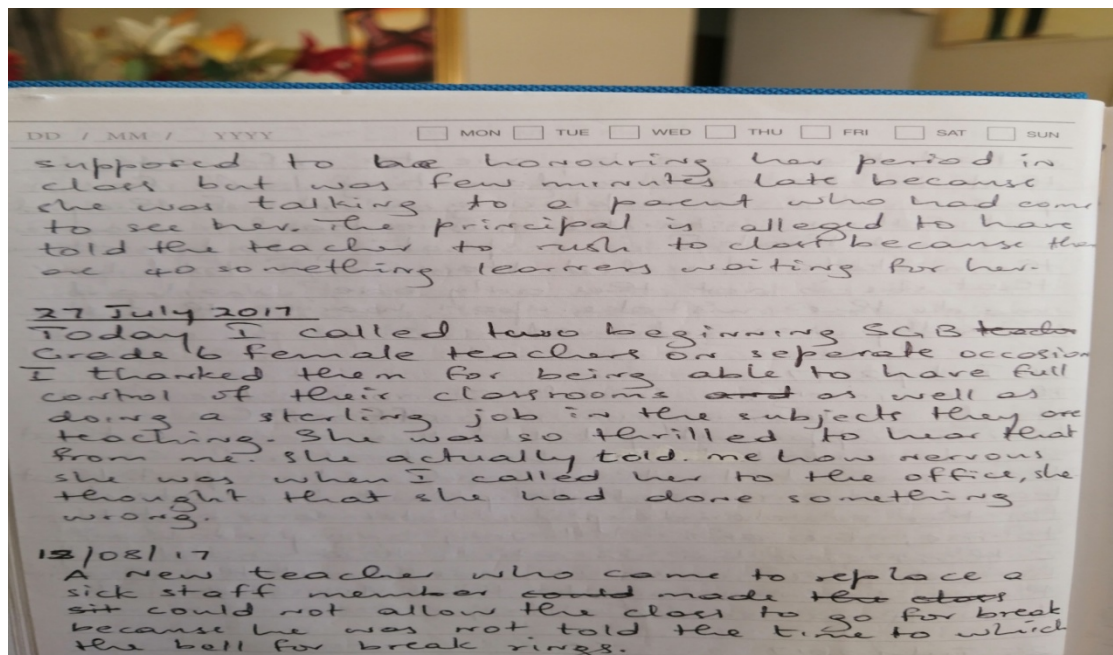
In my view, memory drawing is an essential tool that enables one to discover hidden thoughts and events of the past. I also did memory drawing as part of my memory-work. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) contend that reflective memory drawing can assist us to recall our past and to appreciate and cope with the future. They also claim that memory drawing enables us to tell our personal stories (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). Therefore, memory drawing allowed me to recall incidents and impressions I had forgotten. For example, a metaphoric drawing of a three-legged pot served as a reminder of a process I experienced as a novice teacher in my first five years of teaching (see Chapter Three). Looking at this and other metaphoric drawings illuminated my understanding of Ubuntu, or as we say, "Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu" (meaning a person is a person through other people. The three legs of the pot support the deep bowl where the stew boils and simmers. Without these legs that support the cooking process and allows space underneath the pot for the fire, the food cannot be cooked. In the same manner, people depend on the 'fire' of their environment and circumstances to be able to enrich and improve their lives. Creating this metaphor was a thought-provoking experience because I could

relate my learning to an everyday artefact, and this illuminated how the school environment moulded me to become both a better person and teacher.

## **2.11 Reflective Journal Writing**

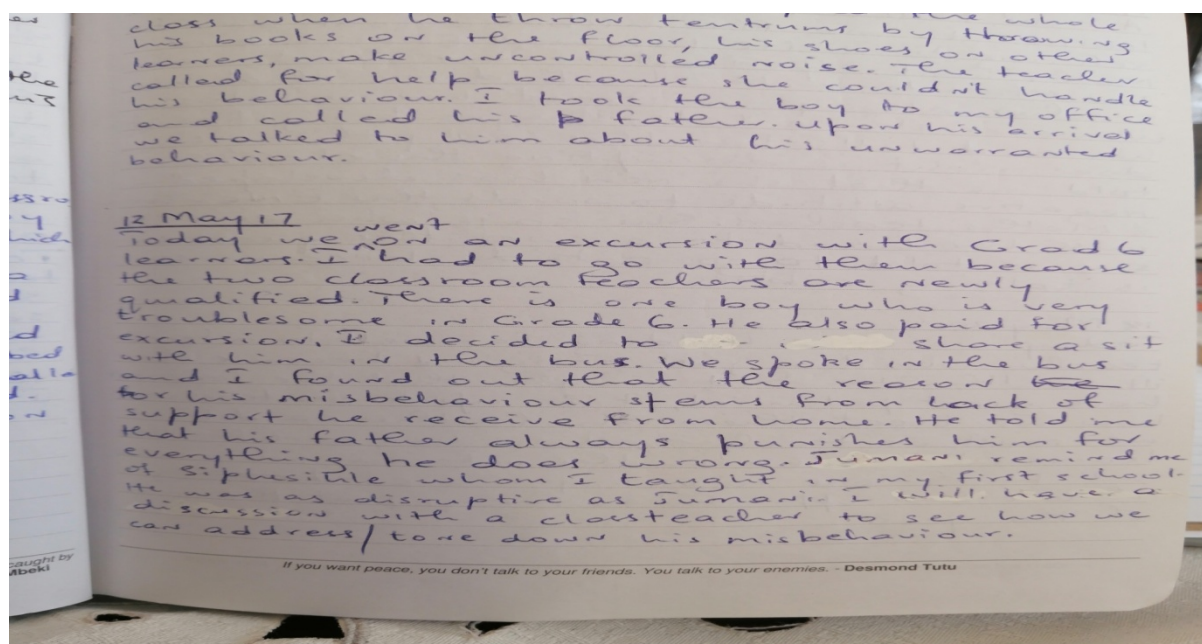
As the main participant and the researcher, I kept a journal throughout the research process. Masinga (2012) explains that keeping a reflective journal allows deep reflection and can enhance the interpretation of all aspects of the experience gained from each data generation session. She explains that it further assists the researcher to make each session more educative (Masinga, 2012). Meyer and Willis (2019) suggest that “reflection entails looking back on experiences to make meaning of the past” (p. 579). Additionally, Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) describe journaling as an everlasting document of reflections and adventures as well as a means of building and preserving relations with others. I used reflective journal writing to capture the critical moments of my research (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008). For example, I recorded my impressions of a novice teacher speaking at the top of her voice whilst delivering a lesson in a Grade 5 class. During a private meeting with the novice teacher, I thanked her for presenting a planned and interactive lesson. I also told her that her voice seemed to drown out those of her learners. By making detailed notes and observations in my journal, I could refer to such incidents during our discussions and seek solutions. I also made a point of recording incidents that the novice teachers would find cheerful.

I articulated during our discussion sessions that my mentoring was not a fault-finding mission but that it was intended as a process that would allow us to learn from one another (see a journal extract in Figure 2.4). Samaras and Freese (2006) iterate that when we regularly engage in reflection, we replicate what went well, what did not, and what transformation could occur to advance ourselves professionally. Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) also note that, through reflection, researchers “may develop the capacity to understand their feelings, beliefs and behaviours while they are occurring, and ultimately learn to expand their behavioural repertoire in the here-and-now” (p. 72). Reflective journal writing thus helped me learn more about the common problems that a mentor faces during engagements with novice teachers.



**Figure 2.4: Helping novice teachers to gain self-confidence**

I recorded reminders in my journal that would address both research question 1 and question 2. For instance, some incidents in my school reminded me of similar experiences in my early years of teaching. I also resolved some issues by referring back to decisions taken during my early years of teaching. For example, I gave a novice teacher advice using the same tactic I had employed when I combated the unruly behaviour of a mischievous boy (see my journal entry, Figure 2.5).



**Figure 2.5: Reflecting on past experiences to solve problems**

## 2.12 Making Meaning: Data Analysis and Interpretation

I understand that data analysis is a process according to which generated data are lodged under relevant categories or themes to make meaning and lead to findings that address the objectives of a study. Braun and Clark (2006) view thematic analysis as a process for pinpointing, interpreting, and communicating themes that emerge from data. Using the thematic method helped me to coordinate and outline the data set in detail. The themes that were generated thus synchronised with captured data. Scharp and Sanders (2018) stress that, when identifying themes, the researcher needs to gather initial codes and arrange them into potential themes. This means that all the data that are relevant to a particular theme are collated. When I adopted this process, the themes that were developed responded to the two research questions as they addressed what I could learn about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories, and also what I was able to learn about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support when I engaged with them in my school. As Braun and Clark (2006) suggest, a theme captures an important aspect of the data regarding the research questions and constitutes some level of outlined response or meaning from the data set.

I used inductive qualitative content analysis. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) contend that analysis is a method that may use either qualitative or quantitative data and that it may be used in an inductive or deductive way for similar events. For example, Chapter Three to Chapter Eight are grouped to address one topic for meaningful interpretation of the data.

Coding is a process of identifying an idea in a passage that relates to another and, together, they create new meaning. Niewenhuis (2010) explains that inductive analysis or coding is "...a process of reading carefully through your transcribed data and dividing it into meaningful analytical units" (p. 105). In this way, the data that had been generated were coded and whatever emerged made up the framework from which I built new meaning and understanding of the topic under investigation (Niewenhuis, 2010). For example, I made meaning of extracts presented in Chapter Three to Chapter Eight where the themes were strongly linked to the data I had collected. Part of my study involved novice teacher participants' discussions on the challenges they experienced in terms of classroom management and learner behaviour in particular. The participants' views varied based on the grades or phases they were teaching. These interactive discussions were recorded and then transcribed. I reproduced spoken words,

sounds, laughter, giggling, and body language. Inverted commas and italics are used to indicate the direct words of the participants.

I familiarised myself with the data by rereading the responses of the participants and the letters written by my former mentor and class teacher, and the participants. I listened attentively to the audio data and revisited the various drawings, photographs, and my journal entries. I also used hard copy data for coding extracts to be inserted under the relevant themes. “Codes identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research questions” (Braun & Clark, 2019, p. 61). The themes were generated through a coding process that ultimately led to the sifting of relevant extracts that elicited meaning about the data. Braun and Clark (2019) contend that the process of developing themes incorporates gathering codes that seem to share the same merging features so that they reflect and describe a consistent meaning pattern in the data. Therefore, the data were coded according to themes that addressed the topic of my research, namely *Mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support: a deputy principal’s self-study*. As Braun and Clark explain (2019, p. 83), this “this form of thematic analysis is data-driven”. Nevertheless, as these authors point out, “data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). Therefore, I was aware that my socio-cultural theoretical perspective strongly influenced this data-driven meaning-making process.

Critical friends played a pivotal role in the data analysis process. Samaras (2011) explains that critical friends provide alternative viewpoints to enhance the trustworthiness of a research project. The discussions and deliberations I had with critical friends contributed to my deeper thinking and re-framing the themes. Critical friends also shed light on new ideas and elicited understandings that had often been present all along, but had not been evident or visible to me alone (Samaras, 2011). For example, the critical friends advised me to combine some interlinking concepts to form one concept that would better support understanding of mentoring (see Chapter Nine).

## **2.13 Ethical Considerations**

In my opinion, adherence to ethical considerations is vital when the researcher may impact the behaviour of others. The novice teachers were not expected to consent to participating in the study before knowing what they were agreeing to do. My focus was on the protection of the

participants to ensure that they would not be exploited or harmed in any way. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) warn that harm can be caused by inappropriate research methods such as in-depth interviewing. I thus informed the novice teachers that they were not compelled to participate in the discussions or answer questions that might make them feel uncomfortable.

I initially called an information sharing meeting with the novice teachers to explain the reason for this research and the procedures that would be followed during my engagements with them. As Graham and Powell (2015) elaborate, “procedural ethics, such as ethical guidelines [and] code of ethics review processes, can offer important support and guidance, as well as helping to prevent poor research and to safeguard research participants” [*sic*] (p. 332). Therefore, I ensured that the participants were aware of the guidelines and procedures that would apply before the commencement of the study. According to Locke et al. (2013), the researcher must be transparent in respect of the assumptions he or she brings to the research, with special focus on the topic and all aspects of the research design. My participants were thus assured that their contributions would be of benefit to the entire school community and would contribute to their professional growth.

Considering the potential for power dynamics in the relationship between me as a deputy principal and these novice teachers as participants, I was careful to reassure them that they were under no obligation to participate in the research. I also assured them that their decision to participate or not participate would not affect my relationship with them. I informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Locke, Alcorn & O’Niell, 2013). I adhered to what Locke et al. (2013) describe as the theory of straightforward talking as I communicated with the participants in a way that would be easily understood.

My participants came from diverse backgrounds but were of the same gender. Etherington (2007) cautions that the researcher needs to be aware of cultural differences and gender sensitivities. I was conscious of the fact that these female participants might have been made to feel that they were inferior to their male counterparts, as women’s voices are still taken lightly compared to those of men in most communities. I thus needed to be a researcher “who the women [participants] would want to talk to and I needed to create an atmosphere where they could speak openly, knowing that they would be heard” (Mitchell et al., 2019). I thus ensured the novice teachers that we were equal partners in this project and that everyone’s voice was as important as that of the other.

I also had to show respect to the participants so they would respect one another in turn. There was a subtle competitiveness among the participants because they had studied at various institutions of learning. This rivalry was exacerbated because of a complaint raised by senior teachers to the school management team as they felt that ‘the quality’ of student teachers differed among three higher education institutions. Seasoned teachers thus specifically wanted to know from which institution each novice teacher came. I sensed the tension among the novice teachers at the beginning when we had curriculum meetings. I also had a record in my journal of a novice teacher’s complaint that another novice teacher was undermining her. Mitchell et al. (2019) warn mentors that, if they fail to take essential precautions, they “...may find [them]selves causing more harm than good” (p. 181). To ease these tensions before they grew out of hand, I had to assure the participants that they were valuable to the school in their own, unique ways. I also had to remind them that their contributions would benefit every one of us and, ultimately, the entire school community.

## **2.14 Trustworthiness**

In my view, the trustworthiness of a study refers to the intensity of using diverse sources of data as well as the methods to ensure the quality of the study. Samaras and Freese (2006) explain that, to conduct valid self-study research, one needs to know how to regularly gather data using various sources and how to analyse these data using suitable methods. Additionally, Creswell (2009, p. 190) argues that qualitative trustworthiness “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures”. This is achieved, inter alia, by documenting the research process in as much detail as possible. Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of my study, I collected authentic data from selected research participants who complied with inclusion criteria. I also used my own journal entries and utilised recorded conversations with my supervisor and critical friends that had been meticulously transcribed.

I believe that the trustworthiness of my study was strengthened by the richness of the data I had gathered and my rigorous data analysis approach. Creswell (2009, p. 190) points out that trustworthiness “is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers”. In the same way, Feldman (2003, p. 27) suggests that we can enhance the

trustworthiness of our self-studies “by paying attention to and making public the ways that we construct our representations of our research”. In my study report, this is done by providing a comprehensive and detailed narrative of how the data were generated, how I built representations from the data, and the manner in which I provide evidence of the value of the changes my understanding and practices of teacher mentoring brought to my school and teaching community. Furthermore, by engaging in meetings, discussions, and deliberation on issues of mentoring novice teachers to manage positive learner behaviour, I used various approaches that also involved my fellow PhD students (critical friends) who helped me elicit alternative perspectives to enhance the trustworthiness of my study.

## **2.15 Research Challenges**

One challenge that I encountered was that two of the novice teacher participants were temporary governing body employees and they therefore had to leave the school as they were employed as full-time state-paid teachers at other schools. One novice teacher took a teaching post in the province of Gauteng and the other found employment in Cape Town. To overcome this challenge, I had to recruit two other novice teachers who were employed at my school.

I initially asked seasoned teachers to be part of the research and they agreed. However, it was apparent that the novice participants were not keen to work with seasoned teachers which was a concern they addressed in a separate meeting I had with them. I had anticipated the inclusion of experienced teachers as their insights would have played a significant role in understanding novice teacher mentorship. Unfortunately, I had to change my mind about including seasoned teachers as research participants. I overcame this challenge by allowing experienced teachers to be chairpersons of subject committee meetings where they would ensure that the novice teachers were guided in a positive direction. The seasoned teachers I had approached agreed that the novice teachers might feel intimidated and be hesitant to air their views freely if they were present at discussion meetings, and they willingly withdrew.

I was promoted to the position of principal of another school in a different location in the latter part of my study. Fortunately, this occurred after I had completed the data generation process. However, it was a mammoth task to adjust to the culture of the new school, coping with the demands of being a new principal, and completing the thesis. My studies were momentarily

halted until I found my footing again. This affected the momentum and the effort I had to exert to complete this study. To overcome this challenge, I sought help from my critical friends. We started to meet more often before the usual sessions with our supervisor. I was compelled to discuss my work with them before we met our supervisor, and this forced me to refocus and rapidly balance my responsibilities as a principal and a researcher.

Another challenge was that my cellular telephone broke. Unfortunately, I had stored all my audio recordings, the photographs taken by the novice teachers and myself, and the WhatsApp conversations with and questions by the participants on it. I could not recover some valid information and I found it difficult to revisit or insert photographs of my memories that I thought I had forgotten in some parts of the chapters. To overcome this challenge, I sought help from the participants who emailed or sent photographs to me via text or WhatsApp messages to recover the lost information.

## **2.16 Conclusion**

I commenced the discourse in this chapter by discussing the relevance of using self-study as a research methodology. I described the context in which the research was conducted and explained why and how I had selected the participants. I also explained the role played by critical friends in my study. A discussion of the data generation methodology and how I aimed to consolidate my learning followed. I then explained how I addressed ethical issues and ensured the trustworthiness of my study. The chapter was concluded by a frank discussion of the research challenges that I experienced and my acknowledgement of the limitation of the study.

Samaras and Roberts (2011) explain that self-study teacher research needs to be planned to inspire teachers to be agents of their learning and growth while working jointly with others. Feldman (2003) argues that teachers do not simply want to study their practice, but they also want to improve it in a way that will affect what happens in their schools positively through self-study methodology. I envisaged that this self-study project would allow me as a researcher, mentor, and school manager to be the source of positive change in my school. I knew that I, as a mentor, had to strive to lead the novice teachers from the front and be an example to them in

the manner in which I communicated with them, involved them, listened to them, and gave them opportunities to express their thoughts.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I respond to the first research question: *What can I learn about mentoring novice teachers from my memories?* I walk down memory lane and explore my first years of teaching. I also recall the influences of the people I encountered who played a significant role along my journey of becoming a professional teacher. I also reflect on the positive inputs of my family and revisit the door they opened for me through which I could step to embrace my future. I finally recall the massive influence my unofficial mentor had on my learning.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GOING BACK TO WHERE IT ALL STARTED

#### **3.1 Introduction: Revisiting the Past: People who Influenced my Life**

Memories are an essential part of our daily lives. Cole (2011) reminds us that, by using our memories, one can explore a variety of experiences and emotions that would inform our destiny. Likewise, Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Pillay (2012, p. 1) highlight the importance of memory work as follows:

"Memory work is underpinned by the premise that memories play a fundamental role in current individual and collective patterns of thought and action and that we can consciously work with memory to become aware of and intervene creatively in these patterns."

In the same vein, Brunke (2018) maintains that "re-membering is self-work: it is the work that must be done on oneself and by oneself, and as such each must come to it on their own" (p. 24). In my view, recalling memories is the foundation of how we behave and react to present situations. Hence, by choosing self-study as my research methodology, I intended to explore my memories to assist me in learning about mentoring novice teachers in my school. Chapter Three therefore aims to answer the first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?*

In responding to this question, I recall past my own past experiences of either being supported or not by using memory-work. Haug (cited in Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014) advocates memory-work and writing as a strategy in which "each participant writes a brief, individual memory account of an experience, an event, or a scene in response to the research question" (p. 93). To rekindle past experiences of support, I created memory drawings, metaphoric drawings, and I also scrutinised photographs that reminded me of some of my experiences as a novice teacher. I also wrote letters to my grandmother and sister as well as a former high school teacher. I provide a brief description of the background of the first school where I taught and I explore my memories of being supported as a novice teacher in my school. I recall memories of a lack of support in Chapter Four.

### **3.2 Background Information on the First School Where I Taught**

Upon graduating from a teacher's college in 1993, I found a position as an English and Natural Sciences teacher in a primary school which I shall refer to as Vuka (a pseudonym). This school was located in a township. There were two other primary and three high schools in the same area. This township had been built during the apartheid era and catered for Black underprivileged children. The township was approximately 45 kilometres from the central business district of Durban city where most of the residents worked. The township was located in an impoverished area for Black people. Most of the work the township residents did ranged from domestic work, security guards, petrol station attendants, to factory workers. Some residents earned a living by selling fresh vegetables from their gardens to the community. Initially, the government of the day built only two-roomed houses for each family. The residents could then extend the houses depending on their needs and income. Vuka (a primary school) was situated approximately 12 kilometres from my childhood home. The school had an enrolment of just under one thousand learners when I started working there. It offered education to learners from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Each grade had three classes with a teacher-learner ratio of 1:45. It was a fairly modern school built of bricks and had flushing toilets and parking bays for teachers and visitors. The school had a small, bare playground that was used for all types of sports such as soccer, athletics, netball, and volleyball. All the learners were Black and came from the same township. Although most learners came from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, their parents had managed to register them in a pre-school that was a few metres away from this school. This means that, although the learners came from underprivileged backgrounds, their parents managed to send them to pre-school to learn the basics of elementary school learning which has been encouraged by the new democratic government since 1994.

I was one of 33 teachers and there were also one administration clerk and a security guard. All the teachers at the school were Black South Africans and the teaching staff was dominated by females. Of the 33 teachers, only seven were male, including the principal and myself, who was a newly qualified teacher.



**Figure 3. 1: Photograph of my first experience as a class teacher (1994)**

**(I am seated to the left in the front row. The lady seated to the extreme left was the deputy principal of my first school I taught at.)**

I chose this photograph (Figure 3.1) because it was a reminder of the first class I was assigned to teach when I became a teacher. This artefact symbolises unity and the rapport I had with my learners. The teachers and learners are sitting and standing closely together, and it represents the support we and the learners gave one another. I am sitting at the same level as my learners which suggests that, as a teacher, I involved all my learners equally in a culture of teaching and learning. It reminds me how I embraced my task and involved everyone in my class. This culture elicited the values of tolerance, trust, support, empathy, and responsibility. The two teachers sitting on either end of the row symbolises how we protected our learners. The learners came from different home environments and therefore being surrounded by teachers who always provided the necessary support was paramount.

The rows in the artefact symbolise learners coming to class with different academic capabilities that needed to be addressed by the teacher. Every learner in the class was a piece of a puzzle, and the puzzle was not complete with one piece missing. The involvement of the parents of the learners depicted in this artefact memory was also crucial. Parents' role is to ensure the safety of their children in comfortable and happy homes. Their influence in supporting their children

is important because a learner who comes from a stable home is most likely to perform and behave well in school. It is the teacher's responsibility to play the role of a parent if a learner does not come from a stable home. Learners need to receive warmth, comfort, and protection from their teachers.

Every time I look at this photograph I feel anticipation and joy. At the beginning of every school year I wait in anticipation for learners who will bring life into the classroom environment. I recalled how my eagerness created a feeling of excitement. Working with learners who came from different homes and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds evoked joy in me for I always looked forward to learning and be a part of the development of every learner who was my responsibility. This emotion, which I experience to this day, was generated in the days when few I was at primary school and few teachers in my life seemed excited about teaching or engaging with us as learners. For example, I remember how I was scolded and punished for asking the IsiZulu word for the Afrikaans word 'vuurhoutjies' (matches). This was after my Afrikaans teacher had written down words on the board we had to use to write an essay on how to prepare a birthday party. It was therefore difficult for me as a learner to be in a constructive teacher-learner relationship – a relationship that needed to encourage confidence and trust in my teachers and enjoyment of learning.

### **Reflection**

My reflection on myself as a novice teacher as depicted in this photograph inspired me to map a way to assist novice teachers by mentoring them. It was vital to acknowledge that novice teachers' approach to classroom management would be diverse. I thus needed to be cognisant of their character traits such as their attitudes, mannerisms, respect, and more. I realised that, whenever I engaged with novice teachers in classroom management activities, I should consider these factors and be able to create a conducive environment for each. Wexler (2019) lists numerous practices that mentors are involved with in support of novice teachers who need to learn to manage their classrooms, such as collaborative planning, observing, and providing feedback. Scrutinising this photograph and reflecting on its meaning made me mindful of how building a relationship of trust and tolerance with novice teachers could be of benefit to both the them and myself. To achieve this, the focus had to be on the manner in which they could be guided to manage their classrooms with confidence.

### 3.3 Adhering to a Formal Dress Code Speaks Volumes



**Figure 3.2: Looking like the teacher I always wanted to become**

Source: This photograph was taken by my wife, Nozipho, in 2015

I chose the photograph (Figure 3.2) as an artefact because it reminded me of the kind of teacher I always envisaged becoming. In my view, formal dress is the most acceptable way of dressing to exude professionalism by teachers. This artefact symbolises the way I wished – and still wish – to be perceived by the school community. I feel that it is important that my dress code sets the tone for learners as well as novice teachers whenever I engage with them at school. Hayward (2015) argues: "If a teacher is neat and looks professional, such a physical appearance gives guidelines to learners [and] the teacher has a sense of self-respect and self-worth" (p. 2). In my view, being formally dressed at school gives me dignity and a sense of purpose.

In my traditional Zulu culture, we tend to respect a person who is formally dressed. When we go to formal functions such as weddings, funerals and even attending church on Sundays, we must dress formally. For example, we are expected to wear a formal pair of trousers, shoes, a shirt, a tie, and a jacket when we attend a function. The school culture, as well as the Department of Basic Education, also endorse a formal dress code guidelines for teachers. This is because learners need to look up to teachers as their role models with whom they spend most of their time during the day. A formal dress code thus symbolises the respect I have for the teaching profession, the learners I teach, and the community I serve. Hayward (2015) acknowledges that

“the clothes [that] one wears is [*sic*] a powerful statement of who you are” (p. 2). This artefact therefore represents the character, attitude and uniqueness that I want my learners to understand about me. It also encourages learners to pay attention to what I have to say. I also want to show respect to my learners by coming to school dressed professionally.

The photographs also reminded me of my former high school class teacher, Mr Mthembu, (I have his permission to use his real name) who used to come to school formally dressed at all times. I used to respect everything he said because of the professional way he presented himself. I aspired to become a teacher like him and to look presentable in the workplace, just as he did. He was a role model for most boys at my school because we would talk about his dress code as well as the male perfume he wore at all times. Ndibalema (2019) argues that school-based educators should emerge as character role models to learners and other teachers and be their inspiration. Apart from his dress code, Mr Mthembu would also arrive early at school. He would often come to school carrying learner teaching materials such as charts and sometimes an artificial human skeleton to teach us Science. I marvelled at Mr Mthembu’s organisational ability in as far as lesson preparation was concerned.

This artefact thus elicited feelings of self-belief and pride and were generated by memories of my former high school teacher who always walked the corridors with his head held high. As learners, we admired him and gave him accolades for his dress code and general tidiness. Kashem (2019) advises that the image that a teacher builds embeds an educational consciousness in the minds of learners at first glance. I believe that my former teacher’s ability to teach with confidence and vigour was enhanced by his appearance in the presence of learners.

Below is the letter I wrote to my former high school teacher who inspired me to become a teacher. Pithouse-Morgan (2011) reminded me that it was imperative to write letters to teachers whom I honoured for their contribution to learner support and who thus had an impact on my teaching practices. Writing a letter to Mr Mthembu served as a reminder that exhibiting good deeds could not be erased from their learners’ memories.

### **Reflection**

I felt that I should leave a positive mark on the novice teachers in terms of how a professional teacher is expected to dress at work. Kashem (2019) stresses that a teacher “...should dress professionally enough to establish authority and to maintain professionalism” (p. 1). In my

view, novice teachers would model what I did as a mentor, be it positive or negative. Therefore, it was my responsibility to exhibit immaculate and consistent behaviour patterns that could be emulated by the novice teachers.

*Dear Mr Mthembu*

*My name is Khulekani Luthuli, better known as Ballentine during my schooling days. You were my class teacher in standard 7, now referred to a Grade 9, in the early 1980s. I am writing this letter to let you know of the positive memories you left in me as my class, the English language as well as a male teacher in the school. Firstly, I never realised the importance of looking presentable in front of learners, colleagues, and the community until I had to become a teacher myself.*

*You are one teacher who showed me how a teacher should dress for work. I always looked forward to coming to school just to admire the way you were dressed. By doing so, I gradually developed a love for the subjects you taught, such as English and General Science. Your dress code (formal dressing) was one of the reasons for me pursuing the teaching profession because I wanted to emulate everything you were doing. You were also influential in my choice of taking English and Science as my major subjects at teacher's training college because of the confidence you unknowingly instilled in me.*

*Today I am proud to inform you that I am in the second year of my PhD in Teacher Development Studies because of the positive influence and the confidence you brought to my learning. You did not only transmit knowledge to me, but you also left good memories and an unforgettable impression of an ideal teacher that one is pleased to pass on to the next generation. Your professional ethics have left a positive mark on me that I need to share with the ones I get into contact with and you as well. The study I am embarking on has evoked memories of you (my secondary school class teacher) as my role model and a teacher I looked up to during my schooling days. I always want to do all the right things so I could walk on the same path as you. The highest position I ever obtained in academic achievement was in Grade 9 when you were my class teacher. In my view, it takes one act of goodwill to change the life*

*of another person. A researcher has emphasised that if teachers dress sloppily and look unkempt, they should not be surprised if the learners mirror that in their behaviour and work. Coming to school dressed professionally and the pleasant smell of your perfume were enough for me to believe that what you came to school to do was legitimate. I wish you to know that you are one of the few teachers who played their part in inspiring me despite the riots and learner uprising that we experienced during our schooling days. Quitting school because of the unrest in our communities was an option I could easily have taken. However, I were determined to become a prominent member of society because I had an unsung hero in you to look up to.*

*Thank you.*

*Your former learner*

*Khulekani Luthuli*

Upon hand-delivering the letter to Mr Mthembu, he was kind enough to also write a letter responding to the one I had given him. I had left my email address in the envelope if he wished to reply. The letter below is the response I received from Mr Mthembu via email.

2018/04/23

**BALLENTINE KHULEKANI LUTHULI :**

How thoughtful you are! Please forgive me for my late response to you , not that I forgot to respond promptly ; its just that I am preoccupied with something. My apologies a thousand times.

It was such a great honour hearing from you after so many years , and now that you are doing good for yourself. Certainly it was not easy but here you are now completing your studies with such great achievements.

The Almighty God does help those who help themselves and I am happy and proud to say that

I pride myself and very glad to be part of your motivation and inspiration , because in life those are two things that assist to keep consistence. Surely consistence is power.

You have outdone yourself , not only have you made me proud but also your family in particular knowing that you are about to take full responsibility for yourself and your siblings who knows you might ever start making your own family sooner or later.

The road to success is never easy but keep the faith. Being your exemplar really makes me feel good about myself. I walk tall as a result knowing that someone is doing good for himself because of me. Thank you once more ! I pray one day you become ten times a leader I ever was to you.

Keep up the excellent work . You are divine, Remember your parents who were there for you when you had nothing to feed yourself.

I urge you to go out there and be the best Educator thus a leader that we need most in our country. You are a person of good character with impeccable integrity. Always wearing a smile on your face and has a happy disposition having a high sense of value and person of above average in intelligence. In fact it was good to have you in my class. I am happy and proud to your happy nature .

Hoping that you will make a success to your tuition and or career you are pursuing.

May God Bless you and your bright future. Hoping to here from you soon my BOY.

**THANK YOU.... THANK YOU.... THANK YOU!!!**

Regards.

V.E. MTHEMBU



(FORMER TEACHER-BHEKISISA SECONDARY SCHOOL 1980s)

It was interesting that Mr Mthembu used the name 'Ballentine' as the official name I had used at school. However, 'Ballentine' is not my original name. My baptism certificate indicates only 'Khulekani'. I remember vividly when my Grade 1 teacher told me to come back with an English name because I could not use my IsiZulu name, Khulekani. I was also pleased that I would be using an English name like the other learners. All my peers had two names: an IsiZulu one and an English one that was used at school. My Grade 1 teacher told me that I was the only one with only an IsiZulu name, and therefore I should ask my parents what my English name should be. I then went home to report that my teacher needed an English name for me. My grandmother worked away from home as a domestic worker and would only come home at weekends. Thus, my uncles and aunts took care of me during weekdays. I then reported the matter to my uncle who took a pen and wrote the name on a piece of paper. He then put the piece of paper in the pocket of the trousers I was going to wear the following day.

The next morning I gave the teacher the piece of paper and that is how I got my second name. 'Ballentine' is the name of a brand of whiskey! I was puzzled and annoyed when some male teachers asked if my father drank alcohol, but understood when I found out that my uncle had named me after the whiskey he used to drink. I became very famous, particularly in high school, because I was the only learner with such a name. Every learner and teacher in the schools I went to knew who Ballentine was and I accepted and even appreciated the name Ballentine even after I had found out that it was synonymous with whiskey. Although the name then stuck to me like glue, I managed to introduce myself to people using my real name, Khulekani, particularly when I was at higher education institutions. I like my real name because it means 'let us pray' in English.

### **3.4 The Positive Influence my Family Had on Me**

My grandmother had seven children. She told me that she had been married to my grandfather who had passed on while she was pregnant with the seventh child. My grandmother had five daughters and two sons. Our mothers gave birth to us out of wedlock and there were 13 children altogether. My mother had four children and I was the last born. Of my grandmother's seven children, three became teachers. Five of the 13 grandchildren also became teachers, of which I was one.

I remember how my grandmother would call her grandchildren and talk to us about respect. She would always stress that we needed to respect the jobs that God blessed us with, “...*for there are other people out there who do not have the privilege of going to school,*” she said. My grandmother also encouraged us to never stop learning. She also told us that she sent us to school so we could all be independent and protect the legacy of our family. My grandmother was very fond of dedicated, passionate, honest and caring people and that is what she instilled in me and her other grandchildren before she passed on. I developed the capacity to listen to and act upon the advice that my grandmother always gave me. My siblings also emulated that passion for sharing their positive thinking with others.

I remember that, at my graduation ceremony from the teacher’s training college, my grandmother told me to be the kind of a teacher God would be proud of. She said that there might be too many teachers in the world, but that I should be that kind of a teacher who would always be remembered by his learners and colleagues for being unique. I should contribute positively to the education of learners. I remember that she told me to respect learners, parents as well as my colleagues in the workplace. She also advised me to always seek the Lord’s intervention in everything I was doing because He would always lead us in the right direction. I therefore felt that it would be prudent to write a letter to my grandmother. Although she would never get a chance to read the letter as she had passed on, I believed she would be proud of my achievements. The letter below demonstrates the eternal attachment that exists between my grandmother and myself.

*Dear Granny*

*I am writing this letter with a lump on my throat. I wish I were a poet so I could express myself by arranging words in a particular rhythm so you could feel what is in my heart. First, I would like to thank God for letting you be part of my life.*

*I would also like to say thank you for taking good care of your children even when the odds were against you after the passing of your husband. You remained resolute in building a warm home for them, educating them, sending them to church, and teaching them to become responsible citizens. As an adult myself, when I look back I can imagine how difficult it must have been for you to raise seven children on your own with a meagre domestic salary.*

*Thank you again for being a mother to 13 of your grandchildren. You were a very tough woman. There are so many things I learned from you as a young boy. To me, you played the role of a mother and a father for I grew up without one. I learned that a person could possess all the attributes that we envisage from a human being; that of being kind, humble, caring, loving, fair, responsible and, most of all, God-fearing.*

*Thank you for sending me to school. You sacrificed the little that you had to ensure I had a bright future. Your passing was too soon to enjoy the fruits of your labours. However, I console myself with the knowledge that you left us, your grandchildren, with a sweet scent that still smells pleasantly in our lives.*

*I know that you would have been very proud of the man I have become as well as the achievements I have attained so far. I know that all these accomplishments are not of my making, but God has made it all possible for me, just as He did for you. In conclusion, I would like you to know that I am proud to have been brought up by a very wise, principled and God-fearing woman. If I were given another opportunity to choose a grandmother of my choice, I would never hesitate to choose you.*

*Your loving grandchild*

*Khulekani*

## **Reflection**

Sullivan (2019) contends that novice teachers who receive superior backing perform exceedingly well and remain working in the teaching profession. In the same way, An and Naidoo (2019) argued that parents are presumed to provide their children with valued backing and also cherish high expectations of their children's achievements. The memories of my grandmother thus aided me to become a mentor and, against this background, I strove to leave a positive mark on the novice teachers and any other person I encountered within the school community. In fact, I still endeavour to do so. My grandmother always emphasised that I should respect both young and older people. I thus respected the novice teachers and supported them in managing their classrooms to the benefit of the school community. My grandmother told me that there was no substitute for learning and that the sky was the limit for me in terms of furthering my studies. Likewise, I felt it was my responsibility as a mentor to encourage novice teachers to develop their teaching practice by enrolling at teacher education institutions to further their learning.

### **3.5 My Sister's Positive Influence on Me**

I remember that one of my older sisters, who was a primary school teacher, shared a story of buffalos while we were sitting under a tree one summer holiday. I had just finished the first year of my teaching career. My sister told me that I should learn to treat my learners the same way the buffalo family conducts itself in the wild. This is how my sister related the story of the buffalo family:

*“Buffaloes are social animals and live in groups called herds. They have strong bonds. Buffaloes are very protective of one another and always take care of the sick and old members of the herd, shielding them from predators. The protection of the species allows for weak individuals, such as the blind or three-legged members, to survive. Buffaloes will also respond to distress calls, especially those made by the calves. They always follow the leader for the herd relies on him for guidance and protection. If one individual buffalo is attacked, the entire herd will defend it. When chased by predators, a herd sticks close together and makes it hard for the predator to pick one member. They engage in mobbing behaviour when fighting off predators.*”

*Buffaloes also exhibit a symbiotic association with birds, such as oxpeckers, which pick off and eat lice, ticks, fleas and other parasites that the buffalo may be infested with. The birds get food and the buffalos get cleaned up.*

I related this story to the kind of classroom climate I longed for when I became a teacher. The wild, the habitat of the buffaloes, represented the vulnerability our learners are facing every day in the classroom environment. Learners learn everything about surviving in this 'jungle'. They learn how to deal with behaviour, how to relate to fellow learners, how to focus on academic demands, and more. The herd of buffalos is the learners who come from diverse walks of life and gather in the school community for one purpose, which is to learning. Just like buffaloes in the wild, learners do not only need to achieve academically, but they also learn how to accommodate one another, how to behave and follow the rules, how to take care of their peers, and how to offer assistance and embrace those who need help along the way.

The pivotal part of the story for me was that the herd of buffaloes ensures that they follow the leader – an adult and wise buffalo – and that they keep the family a close-knit unit in the jungle. A leader buffalo makes certain that no buffalo goes astray for they are then in danger of falling prey to wild cats. In the same way, as a leader of the learners in my classroom, I had to demonstrate leadership and ensure that my learners received my optimum support and guidance. Learners relied on me as a teacher to steer them in the correct direction by making each of them feel a valuable member of a positive school climate. Brown (2004) also stresses that attaining learners' cooperation in the classroom requires a classroom environment in which teachers address learners' cultural, ethnic, social, emotional, and cognitive needs.

As a novice teacher in 2015, this story made me realise that it was incumbent on me to ensure that each learner in my classroom received adequate attention, for they all came from various home backgrounds and possessed different academic capabilities. Goh, Yusuf and Wong (2017) observe that novice teachers can empower their learners in the learning process if they understand the different learning capabilities their learners possess. I therefore looked forward to creating a classroom environment the following year that would resemble the life of buffaloes in the wild. I was more than prepared than ever to give my learners a platform that would help them demonstrate their capabilities while I acted as the leader buffalo by guiding, protecting, supporting, and leading them to become responsible citizens with excellent academic results. As a class teacher, I had learned that I had to lead by example – that is, I had to exhibit

professionalism at all times. Goh et al. (2017) allude to the fact that being responsible, punctual, and versatile in one's duties as a teacher lead to professionalism in teaching.

I also embraced other metaphors associated with buffaloes. For instance, establishing a library in a corner of my class was just like the birds feeding on the insects on the back of a buffalo as this was going to have a positive effect on my learners. I adopted the idea of having a 'corner library' from a Department of Basic Education English workshop that I attended in 1994. When I recalled this, I realised that I could advise the novice teachers in my school that a collection of newspapers, magazines, and books in a corner library in each classroom could play a significant role in promoting a culture of reading among their learners. I anticipated that the learners would then be exposed to a variety of information that they would gather by reading different genres and sources.

The fact that I had an elder sister who would tell me stories about her learners and school did not only make me develop a love of teaching, but it also gave me tips about managing my learners and establishing cordial working relationships with my colleagues. It was for this reason that I wrote a letter to my sister, thanking her for her continuous contributions towards my professional development (see Figure 3.5 below).

*Dear Sister*

*I am writing this letter to thank you for all the stories you used to tell to me about your learners in your classroom as well as the activities in your school. I am writing to you because you might not realise the impact the stories you used to tell me had on my teaching career. The way you narrated the events that happened in your classroom left me wanting to hear more. I had no doubts about why your learners loved you so much as you are the most loving, caring, and accommodative person I know. This is obviously evident when learners visit you, even during school holidays.*

*The passion for teaching that you have shown throughout the years has not waned. You are still as enthusiastic and excited about your profession as before. Your stories have had a positive influence on how I view myself, my learners, and the entire school community.*

*I used to be very envious when you came home with heart-melting messages from your learners on special days such as your birthday or when the school closed for the holidays. Some would thank you for being there for them during trying times. Others would thank you for taking the time to listen and later offer advice. You have taught me that humility is one of the greatest attributes one can possess.*

*I think that being raised by a wonderful woman has had an immensely positive impact on how you carry yourself as a woman. The teaching profession requires people who will go beyond the call of duty – people who will work with children as if they are their own. You have been a true ambassador of the teaching profession throughout these years, and I once again thank you so much for having a sister like you.*

*Thank you.*

*Your brother*

*Khulekani*

Arroyo et al. (2019) state that novice teachers often require deep knowledge about teacher-learner engagement techniques. By reflecting on the memories of the dialogues I had with my sister about classroom management, I developed as a mentor of novice teachers in my school. As my sister advised me on how I could become an effective teacher in my classroom, I also envisaged establishing a formidable team of novice teachers who would enjoy their autonomy and contribute positively towards collaborative teaching practices. As a mentor, I anticipated that I would be able to provide the necessary protection and guidance to the novice teachers. I recalled the metaphor of the wise buffalo leader who would protect weaker or frail buffaloes. These memories reminded me to be the kind of a mentor who is always open to learning from others. It is undeniable that my passion for mentoring novice teachers was enhanced by my memories of the stories my sister used to share with me.

### 3.6 The Learning Curve: Opening Doors for Learning



**Figure 3.3: A three-legged pot: Metaphor drawing to illustrate the potential of novice teachers to learn and improve**

The drawing of a three-legged pot (Figure 3.3) is a metaphor and constant reminder of the processes that I had to experience as a novice teacher. I started teaching in the early 1990s. Each element of the pot symbolises an experience or encounter that had a positive influence on my development as a novice teacher.

First, the three-legged pot is a reminder of my traditional Zulu culture. We always used a huge three-legged pot to cook for many people when there was a function. During the 1990s, my home was host to my extended family at least once every month. It was here that the elders of the entire family gathered to discuss important matters. The gatherings would be held at my homestead which was pivotal to the family. Every member of the three family households would attend these gatherings and this forged strong bonds among the children, old and young.

I remember how I used to watch my grandmother taking her time to prepare food using the three-legged pot (“potjie” in Afrikaans) for the entire family. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002), a ‘potjie’ is a round-bottomed cast iron pot, often three-legged, that is used to cook food over an open fire. The pot was descended from the Dutch who brought the concept from the Netherlands to South Africa in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was used in the homes and villages of people throughout southern Africa. This pot is heated using wood, charcoal, twisted grass, or even dried animal dung. One has to wake up early when one prepares food using a three-legged pot for one needs to take one’s time to make certain that the pot is heated adequately.

The three legs of the pot support the deep bowl. The pot cannot stand on its own if it does not have all three legs. Metaphorically, these three legs represent the teachers, the learners, and the parents in the educational context. Because of its delicate balance, the pot is stored on a level surface in a safe place, such as a storeroom, with its legs facing upwards to avoid them from breaking. It becomes difficult to use such a pot if one of its legs is broken. In the same way, parents, teachers, and learners need one another for teaching and learning to occur without any hindrances. Aqeel and Anjum (2016) argue that learners require adequate support from their families and schools for optimal educational improvement. If one of these components is reluctant or absent, teaching and learning will collapse. These three legs have the same weight and height to enable the pot to stand properly. Similarly, parents, teachers, and learners have an equal responsibility to ensure that teaching and learning take place in schools.

The fire (Figure 3.3) is a metaphor for the unofficial mentor who took the initiative to guide me in my first three years of teaching at Vuka primary school. Cakmak et al. (2019) agree that sustenance and supervision from mentors are two of the most important components for the optimal development of novice teachers, just like fire is an essential feature in the cooking process. Just like a fire provides heat, my unofficial mentor kept supplying me with the support that I needed to teach my learners in the classroom. Wexler (2019) observes that certain mentoring undertakings, when approached in an informative fashion, are crucial for the development of novice teachers. The cast-iron three-legged pot thus represents the novice teacher. The pot needs adequate heat to help cook the food inside while the deep sides serve as the protection that learners need. So, just like a pot protects what is being cooked inside, the learners are protected by the shield that a teacher builds around them.

It takes some time to heat the pot, but with consistent heating, it eventually becomes hot and ready to cook the food. I remembered the first day that I filled in the ‘assumption of duty’ forms. At that time I was an empty pot that had not received enough heat to cook the food well because I was new from college. I was very inexperienced in as far as teaching learners in a formal school was concerned.

The burning wood (Figure 3.3) represents seasoned teachers who had the potential to become mentors at any given opportunity. Cakmac et al. (2019) maintain that veteran teachers can play a pivotal role in the development of novice teaches. They should provide the necessary empathy and offer suggestions that will assist novice teachers and lessen their tension. Just like wood

has potential energy to give off heat that will cook the food, so my unofficial mentor became the wood that provided the necessary support and guidance that I needed as a novice teacher. She was the most enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well-mannered teacher I had come across.

The spices that my grandmother would put in the pot to flavour the food may be seen as a metaphor for the teacher development workshops that were held to support novice teachers. These workshops that I attended were organised by the Department of Basic Education and were held at the Teachers' Centre in Durban in 1994. These workshops helped me gain confidence and the courage to continue my teaching career. The food inside the pot represents the learners that I taught. Raw food was put into the pot and needed adequate heating to be cooked well. One amazing characteristic of the three-legged pot is that it can regulate and maintain heat once it has been fired. I remember how my grandmother would remove the wood after several minutes of cooking to allow the pot to cook the food using the heat it had absorbed. In the same way, after receiving sufficient mentoring from my mentor for a few years, I was able to absorb the pressure and able to maintain a culture of teaching and learning in my classroom.

The steam that comes out of the pot (Figure 3.1) suggests that the food has been well cooked and ready to be served. This steam is a metaphor that represents the end product (the learners) of the work accomplished by the teacher through support, guidance, motivation, and sound teaching. I always looked forward to eating the delicious food that had been cooked in the three-legged pot because of the precision, patience, and time it took to prepare it. Likewise, it was a fulfilling experience to see my learners overcoming their obstacles and discovering their potential.

### **Reflection**

The metaphor of the three-legged pot means that, as a mentor, I should always remember that I was once a novice teacher who made multiple blunders. I overcame the most common mistakes with the support and guidance of my teacher mentor. In the same way, I needed to keep the fire burning under the pot (the novice teachers) so it can ultimately regulate its heat. Spooner-Lane (2017) argues that, when a mentor has contemplated his or her responsibilities as an agent of change, novice teachers are likely to heed their advice and adhere to sound classroom management approaches. This metaphor thus prompted me to take stock of my practices and reflect on my mentoring journey involving novice teachers. Just like the pot, I as the mentor

needed strength, balance, love, zeal, and compassion when I mentored the novice teachers in my school.

### **3.7 My Unofficial Mentor**

I started teaching at Vuka primary at the beginning of the school year in 1994. I was very excited yet scared to be part of the teaching staff at this school. I remember that, after filling in the ‘assumption of duty’ forms, I was formally introduced by the school principal to my colleagues as well as the support staff. I observed that there were many experienced teachers in the school, judging by their ages. Every staff member welcomed me warmly and wished me a successful stay at the school.

I joined the staff on the first day of the academic school year. The school management team comprised of the principal and the deputy principal. No heads of the department had been employed at the school at that time. However, the school had one experienced teacher who was in charge of the junior primary phase and two teachers who were responsible for the senior primary phase. Miss Ntaka was in charge of Standards 2 and 3 (now Grades 4 and 5) whereas Mr Nzuzza was in charge of Standards 4 and 5 (now Grades 6 and 7). Miss Ntaka was in her early 30s. She was an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well-mannered teacher and she taught Mathematics and Afrikaans in Grade 5. Afrikaans is one of the official South African languages and is generally spoken by White Afrikaners who originated from the Netherlands and settled in South Africa in the 1650s.

I remember that Miss Ntaka asked me which subjects and grade I preferred to teach for we were going to draw up a school timetable later that day. I told her that I would be quite comfortable if she placed me in Grade 4 or 5 and if I had to teach either Natural Sciences, English or Mathematics because they were my major subjects for my qualification. She informed me of the times that the school started and closed and the times for recess. A while later I was told that I would be teaching English in Grade 4 as well as Natural Sciences in Grade 5. I was a Grade 5 class teacher.

There were three Grade 5 classrooms and my class was next to that of Miss Ntaka as she was also teaching the same standard (or grade). Desimone et al. (2013) stress that allocating a

mentor with experience who teaches the same grade as a novice teacher fosters a productive mentor-mentee relationship. Correspondingly, Brock and Grady (1998) argue that the mentor "...should be experienced, teach in the same content area, and be able to provide suggestions, discuss experiences, and just listen" (p. 182). I was also the only male teacher in Grades 4 and Grade 5. The rest of the male teachers taught in Grade 6 and Grade 7. Perhaps the male teachers were allocated to these more senior classes so that they could monitor the level of learner discipline. There is also an unconfirmed assumption that most male teachers do not have the same patience as female teachers have when it comes to caring for young learners.

I remember that, after a few weeks of school, Miss Ntaka observed that I was very formally dressed. This was because my grandmother stressed that I needed to look presentable at all times when I went to my workplace. Hayward (2015) warns that if teachers dress sloppily and look unkempt, they should not be surprised if their learners mirror that in their behaviour and work. I did not know that Thursdays were sports days and that the teachers would come to school dressed more casually or in sports attire. Miss Ntaka informed me that I was allowed to wear casual or sports clothes every Thursday. According to Hobson et al. (2009), mentors have been found to play an immense role in helping novice teachers to adapt to the norms, standards, and expectations associated with teaching. Miss Ntaka played a large role in this regards as she would find the time to inform me what was expected of me. The manner in which I was expected to behave around the learners and my colleagues was also highlighted. Ferguson-Patrick (2011) alludes to the fact that novice teachers often have inadequate knowledge of the school context and are often ignorant of important sociocultural factors.

As a Grade 4 and Grade 5 teacher I had to attend numerous subject meetings to discuss the progress and challenges that we encountered in our classrooms. I remember that, in my first year of teaching, I submitted a half-year (June) examination question paper for General Sciences of a total of more than 100 marks. There were no heads of department (HoDs) at that time, so I was ignorant of the specific requirements. The Grade 4 and Grade 5 teachers nominated two other teachers to assist Miss Ntaka in the moderation of examination question papers. Because it was my first year of teaching, I wanted to impress Miss Ntaka and those colleagues I was sharing classes with. Therefore, I made certain that my questions papers were the first to be submitted and that I wanted Miss Ntaka to see that I had covered a significant body of work that I was going to examine. She thanked me for my dedicated work but reminded me to make sure of the scope and mark requirements of each paper and grade. Consuegra (2016)

states that teacher collaboration fosters professional learning, and the guidance I received from Miss Ntake was the first of many such experiences.

I remember that the principal called me into his office to commend me for a job well done. I was taken aback as he had never formally observed my teaching in a classroom environment. However, he assured me that he always received positive feedback about my conduct and progress from Miss Ntaka. He also offered me some constructive advice about classroom management. He knew that I was a novice teacher and that I had learned new and innovative teaching strategies during my training. He gave me the autonomy to try anything that would benefit and develop the learners in my care. For example, he showed me an unused classroom that could be utilised for co-curricular activities such as storytelling, Natural Sciences and Mathematics Olympiads, and cultural activities. Such activities were encouraged by the Department of Basic Education and needed to be implemented at all primary schools in the area.

Miss Ntaka persuaded me to join a teacher union that would not only legally protect me, but also develop me professionally. She always accompanied me to developmental workshops that were organised by my teacher union. Not only did these workshops cover subject content, but they also taught me how to manage my classroom and maintain good relationships with the school community. For example, I attended a workshop where we were reminded that we should create a legacy every day when we came to school. The facilitator told us never to give up on learners and that we should at all times be mindful of our learners' concentration span. An important lesson I learnt was that the activities my learners were required to do should be equal to their concentration level. Ferguson-Patrick (2011) observes that the ongoing professional development of novice teachers is crucial in ensuring positive impacts on curriculum and pedagogy. Miss Ntaka reminded me in those early days of the importance of paying attention to everything that was discussed at these workshops because I would later apply them in my teaching.

I relied heavily on Miss Ntaka's the lessons I learnt and how Miss Ntaka's teaching experience assisted me whenever I had a problem with subject matter. Fairbanks, Freedman and Kahn (2000) suggest that helping novice teachers survive their first teaching experience forges strong bonds based on discussions, reflection, and the construction of professional affiliations. For example, I once had to introduce prepositions to Grade 4 learners. I did not have any idea how

I could best broach this topic. Although we did not teach similar subjects, I approached Miss Ntaka because I had now developed trust in her. Upon learning of this challenge, she asked an experienced Grade 6 teacher to help me introduce prepositions to the class. I then had the privilege of observing and learning from my colleague about strategies for introducing a new topic to learners. For example, she came to class with flashcards of prepositions that she had developed herself. It was a marvel to watch the learners participating her lesson. Each learner picked up a flashcard and modelled the correct situation in which it should be used. One learner took a flashcard with the word ‘under’ written on it, and he crawled and sat under my table. Another learner picked a flashcard with ‘on’ written on it and she placed her bag on the table for every learner to see. This experience taught me that one can also use learners’ physical activities as well as creative materials to introduce or teach a new concept.

Ferguson-Patrick (2011) alludes to the fact that novice teachers must be supported as early as possible to devise their own innovative teaching skills. I learned that it is crucial to always seek help and advice from those around me, especially if I were to benefit positively from them. Miss Ntaka not only became my unofficial mentor, but she also became a friend in whom I confided and with whom I shared my frustrations. I was not scared to share my mistakes with her. According to Boreen (2009), a flexible, open-minded mentor encourages mentees to explore – even if they make mistakes – new classroom activities. She was very consistent with the way in which she treated me and the other teachers in my school, which is why I have valued her friendship to this day.

A critical friend suggested that I should write a letter to my unofficial mentor to let her know how I valued the role she had played in my first five years of teaching. Below is the letter I wrote and emailed to her just after I had started my doctoral studies. She kindly responded to the email I had sent her.

*Dear Miss Ntaka*

*I am writing this letter to inform you of the positive influence you had on me as a novice teacher at my first school. I recall the joys and the challenges I encountered in my early years of teaching and I would like to acknowledge and thank you for the support and the leadership skills you showed me on my journey to becoming a confident and supportive teacher myself. I*

*remember the assistance you gave me in my first few weeks when I was acquainting myself with the school culture. Things worked out well due to the learners, management and, the school community at large. You always stressed the way I was expected to behave in the school community.*

*Although I could not wait to implement what I had been taught at the teacher's training college, your guidance showed that there was a big difference between teaching practice and actual classroom management. Not only did you make my life easy by helping me to manage my classroom, but you were also instrumental in building my confidence and reinforcing the passion I still have for teaching. You made me realise that teaching is not only about subject content, but that it also incorporates many other aspects of life that develop a learner into a responsible citizen.*

*I remember how I marvelled at the way the learners responded to you whenever you engaged with them. I was also touched by your sense of humour you exhibited towards me and other people. I would also like to thank you for taking the time to listen to everything I needed to share with you, whether it was school related or personal. You always gave me good advice without being judgemental. I learned that an experienced teacher can also learn from a newly qualified teacher. There were times when you took my suggestions to heart and constructively implemented them, and that boosted my confidence in a way you cannot imagine.*

*You are such a very humble person. We have developed a long-lasting relationship because you are a trustworthy mentor. I am certain that your mentoring came from a willing and a good heart. This is evident because we still keep in contact and talk about issues that are related to teaching as a profession. I once again wish to thank you as my unofficial mentor for being there for me through my trying times as a novice teacher.*

*May God bless you abundantly.*

*Your mentee*

*Khulekani*

This is what Miss Ntaka (her maiden name) wrote in her email response:

23 April 2018

Dear Khulekani

*Thank you, my colleague, friend, and confidante. You know I must start by thanking you for showing a sign of humility and humanity. I believe that we have so many people in our lives to express our gratitude toward, but we rarely find the time and occasion to express our sincere thanks. Right now, as I am responding to your letter, I am reminded of Mrs Gcwensa (our former Deputy Principal at ... Primary School). She contributed a lot to my learning journey. I believe that she capacitated me well because I was also able to impart my knowledge and share my experiences with others. In IsiZulu we say, "Lento iyisondo iyajikajika". In other words, what I did was to pass the baton.*

*I am humbled, and it means so much to me. However, I will always cherish those precious moments with you and our friends Thembinkosi and Sbo. I cannot forget the time when we disciplined one of our friends when he was lazy to teach or mark the students' work. We were so good together. I remember very well that you believed in me. You trusted me! However, I must thank you as well for sharing your knowledge and experience with me. Remember that you were fresh from college. You brought what you learnt as well. I recall that you were always very professional. You respected everybody, whether older or younger than you. I believe that that is why you became my friend. Lastly, take note that you also allowed me to be what I am today. Guess what, I am still learning.*

*Thank you for your thoughtfulness.*

*Regards*

*Siza Mlambo*

## **Reflection**

Reflecting on my initial years of teaching when Miss Ntaka was my unofficial mentor made me realise the significance of a mentor in the lives novice teachers. This memory-work encouraged me to be a mentor who would always prioritise the interests of novice teachers in my care. Just like Miss Ntaka helped me to quickly align myself to the school culture, I also aspired to be a trusted mentor that would provide positive feedback and sound advice and assistance to novice teachers. This memory-work also reminded me that, as a mentor, I should promote collaborative teaching practices among novice teachers.

### 3.8 Conclusion

I commenced this chapter by reflecting on the value of recalling my memories as a novice teacher. I first had to give a brief background of my first school. I then recalled my first day of teaching and reflected on the importance of being professionally dressed for work, even if it entailed wearing less formal sportswear on occasion. I reminisced on the positive influence of my family members and the opportunities I had to learn classroom management skills through observation and collaborative learning. I concluded the chapter by explaining the relationship I had with my unofficial mentor.

Looking back at the memory-work that I engaged in, I realised that I should always establish a respectful and trusting relationship with novice teachers if I were to be an effective mentor. This might also encourage novice teachers to display positive attributes that would engender disciplined learner behaviour in their classrooms. Spooner-Lane (2017) states that a mentor should not only be a proficient teacher, but he or she should also be knowledgeable about mentoring. Memory-work also reminded me to be a mentor that would lead from the front. I understood that I should model exceptional characteristics in the presence of both novice and experienced teachers. The memory work I engaged in highlighted that being compassionate, loving, empathetic and trustworthy were attributes of my role-models that, should they be reflected in me, the novice teachers under my care would also appreciate and respect. By reflecting on my memory-work, I also understood that I could be a useful mentor if I allowed collaborative and reflective dialogues to help the novice teachers cope with the classroom management challenges they experienced.

In the next chapter, I shall continue to address research question 1: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REVISITING ALMOST FORGOTTEN MEMORIES

#### **4.1 Introduction: Eliciting the past through memory-work**

In Chapter Three, I recalled some memories of my earliest days as a novice teacher to address question 1 of the study: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* I commenced by giving some background information about the first school where I was employed. I then described some experiences and responsibilities I had been entrusted with as a form (or class) teacher. I reflected on what I had learned about being a professional in the classroom and I recalled the influence some family members had on me. I concluded by reflecting on the impact of mentoring that a seasoned, unofficial mentor had on my development as a teacher and my insights as a mentor myself.

In this chapter, I continue to explore my journey as a novice teacher and unearth some positive memories of my earlier experiences in my quest to address research question 1 above. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) state: "Remembering the past experiences in our lives can contribute to understanding who we are as teachers and what shaped us to do things the way we do" (p. 63). This means that I could become a better mentor and school manager if I reflected on how I had been mentored as a novice teacher and by comparing my insights with how I mentored novice teachers in my school as a seasoned teacher myself. I could learn by recalling my experiences and impressions and my insights could help me assist the novice teachers in my care to minimise the mistakes their former teachers had made when they had been taught by them in school.

I begin by exploring my first challenging six months of teaching. Next, I recall how I became a member of the School Governing Body (SGB) and how this helped me gain confidence in my abilities as a teacher. I then reminisce on how my confidence grew as I utilised my organisational capabilities and achieved various successes. This is followed by my narrative of how I became involved in activities that boosted and lifted my morale. I next present and discuss a metaphor drawing about the school community and collaborative learning. This is followed by my reflections on shielding and guiding future leaders and opening up a world of possibilities for them. To illuminate my insights, I use the metaphor of a traditional Zulu shield that I drew

on paper. To conclude, I present a summary of what I learned in order to address the first research question.

## **4.2 Humbling Experiences: Challenges in my First Six Months of Teaching**

### **4.2.1 Establishing a working relationship with my learners**

I remember that I was advised at the college of education about cultivating a sound relationship with my learners. However, I found the first six months of my teaching a very challenging period, particularly concerning the relationship I had with my learners. My biggest problem was that I was uncertain how to engage with my learners without forfeiting my dignity and authority as a teacher and adult. Mokhele (2004) notes that some teachers “...are afraid to encourage personal relationships with their learners, fearing that this would lead to a loss of authority in the classroom” (p. 149). Moreover, I needed to establish a positive atmosphere for curriculum coverage and learner development by engaging them in a non-threatening learning milieu. I was scared that my learners would take advantage of me if I showed any kindness and compassion towards them. However, I understood that the ideal relationship with my learners would be one of mutual trust, respect, and openness. Greenlee and Ogletree (1993) explain that a well-behaved class is one where learners are considerate of the rights and needs of others, and not as a result of fear of the teacher.

Building a sound relationship with the learners took more time than I had anticipated. Initially, I thought that it would be easy to create the desired relationship with my learners if I came to class thoroughly prepared for my lessons. However, I did not realise that coming to class prepared was just one of the aspects of building a positive relationship with learners. I remember that I involved the learners in activities that stimulated their thinking and encouraged learning through play. The lesson preparations for General Sciences (now referred to as Natural Sciences) also incorporated English skills such as debates. For example, one day when we were dealing with nature conservation as one of the topics in Natural Sciences for Grade 5, the learners had to answer questions on a case study in their textbook about people living on the outskirts of a city. These people solely relied on nature for survival. For instance, they drew water from a flowing stream, grew crops in their gardens, foraged fruit from the forest, and kept livestock such as pigs, cattle, chickens and goats. I then created a scenario in which a well-

known company convinced the chief of the village to build an industry that would alleviate poverty in the area by employing people of the village. However, the industry would emit poisonous gases into the atmosphere and also deposit waste in the only stream that served as a source of water for the village. In return, the company would ensure that the people of the village benefited by employing them in this industry.

The learners had to debate the advantages and disadvantages of establishing this industry in the area. They had to pretend that they were members of this community and one side supported the establishment of the industry near their village and the other side was against it. Goh et al. (2017) claim that using diverse techniques in teaching is imperative to strengthen learners' interest. In a build-up to that much-anticipated debate, learners from both sides came to ask some questions and raised some concerns about the information they had collected regarding the topic. Wubbels (2011) observes that when learners are capable of mapping and carrying out their learning, they are well equipped for their part in society later. Furthermore, Wubbels (2011) states that a teacher's efficiency in classroom management and learners' supposition of accountability strengthen each other mutually. Back to the debate: all the learners were fully focused on making certain that they would do whatever it took to make their respective teams and their teacher proud. After the debate, I realised that I could build a valuable relationship with my learners by engaging them in a series of exciting and unexpected lesson activities in which they took charge of their learning. Heikonen et al. (2017) maintain that teachers who can create and sustain positive relationships with learners are more likely to stay motivated, enjoy their work, and commit to the profession.

The relationship I had with my learners was not only based on how I prepared my lessons and how the learners responded to the strategies I implemented, as I also had to establish a relationship with those learners who had a low self-esteem because of their poor academic achievement. Goh, Yusuf and Wong (2017) stress that the quality of teachers and the success of learners are linked to the competency of teachers. I wanted to get close to the learners and make each feel as important as the others. I gave the learners who tended to achieve poorly academically specific responsibilities that I thought would boost their confidence. For example, I gave a very disruptive boy the task of fetching and distributing English textbooks. Breaux (2003) claims that learners long for teachers' attention and that they will gladly do whatever it takes to get be noticed and appreciated. Although his academic achievement did not improve much, this boy's behaviour was tolerable after he had been given this responsibility.

I needed to constantly remind myself that, with a little compassion, love, encouragement, and support, I could build relationships that would be beneficial to both the learners and myself. It took time to get to know each learner better. One strategy was to use their birth dates to get to know them better. I would group all the learners who were born under the same horoscope together and I would make each write something about another learner. According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2013), the term 'horoscope' refers to predictions about what may happen to a person based on the position of the stars and planets at the time of that person's birth. Once my learners had finished this exercise, they compared similarities and the differences that had been revealed. We would also write birthday messages on cards designed by the learners and myself. The learners looked forward to receiving birthday wishes coming from their peers and teacher. I also bought a cake at the end of each month and the learners shared it equally. This activity created a bond among the learners and between the learners and me. After a while, most learners effortlessly shared their thoughts, miseries and joys with me.

I had anticipated having disruptive learners in my class and I had been concerned that dealing with learner misbehaviour was going to be a challenge because I was a novice teacher. I was also sceptical about seeking assistance from the veteran teachers because I felt that they would think I was not ready to be a professional teacher if I could not deal with learner misbehaviour in my class. I then decided to try to identify all the learners that were disruptive. For example, some of them wanted to go to the toilet more often than was required. Other learners would disturb their peers and me by making unnecessary noises even when they had work to do. I gave each one of them some responsibilities they had to perform in class.

I once gave a disruptive boy, Siphesihle, the responsibility of being a class monitor. Siphesihle was older than the rest of his classmates because he had repeated Grade 5. He had never taken his learning seriously until I made him a class monitor. I realised that he had been seeking attention because he would, without fail, ask questions that were not relevant to the content I was teaching. At times he would pick unnecessary fights with his peers in class. When I realised that he was seeking attention, I gave him responsibilities such as unlocking and locking the classroom, distributing English readers to his classmates, and making him the leader of a reading team. These actions not only changed his behaviour, but his academic achievement also improved. He stopped fighting and making noises in class and started paying attention. His

attitude towards other learners also changed for the better. I also made it a point to acknowledge and praise him for good deeds. I remember how excited he became when he was commended and handed a certificate by the principal during assembly for being one of the learners whose behaviour had taken a dramatic turn for the better in the school. I was told that the issuing of the certificate to learners at school had been introduced by Mrs Mbokazi, one of the Foundation Phase teachers, whose child had been attending a former model C school that would reward learners who had displayed positive behaviour and/or had performed well academically. Model C schools are public schools that were reserved for White learners in South Africa before 1994. Fortunately, these schools are now fully multi-cultural as they have embraced the principle of a non-racist South Africa.

### **Reflection**

By engaging in memory-work, I resolved to create a platform for the novice teachers that would allow them to meet, engage in discussions, and evaluate their tactical and technical acumen regarding the management of learners. Interactions with the novice teachers about their conduct in the classroom also enhanced my ability to mentor and manage my school productively. As I strove to be a passionate, loving, encouraging, and supportive teacher and mentor, I believed that these attributes would inspire the novice teachers in my school.

#### **4.2.2 Becoming a member of the School Governing Body**

I was elected by the teachers as their educator representative on the School Governing Body (SGB) when I was in my third year of teaching. The new democratic government was trying to correct the mistakes of the former apartheid government. Before achieving democracy in 1994, South Africa was governed by a White minority government using the apartheid system that oppressed Black people by limiting their access to quality education, healthcare services, proper housing, freedom of choice, and more. The education system was divided into different departments that served respective racial groups. For example, there was the House of Assembly that catered for Whites, the House of Delegates for the Indians, the House of Representatives for Coloured people, and the Department of Education and Culture and the Department of Education and Training for Black schools.

When the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996b) was adopted, it provided for a uniform education system for the organisation, governance, and funding of

schools, thus bringing to an end the past system based on racial division and segregation. Currently, all public schools (Grade R to Grade 12) fall under the Department of Basic Education. The governance of these schools requires the active participation of parents of learners of a particular school, teachers, learners, workers, and other members of the community. According to the School Governance Starter Pack (1997), some of the responsibilities of the SGB are to promote the best interests of the school and to ensure that the learners at the school receive the best education possible. The SGB also decides on the school policy such as school hours, the language of teaching and learning, religious matters, the dress code of the school, and more. School development is supported by a school development plan, partnerships with the community, sound administration, and the management of the school's finances.

Being elected by my peers to serve on the SGB made me feel confident that I could face any challenge that might come my way. I remember that the principal asked the teachers to motivate their nomination, and a Mr Cele, who had nominated me, told the staff that I was very dedicated to my work and that I attended school regularly. He also stated that I contributed to, promoted, and supported my school's values, principles and programmes and he was convinced that I would take my role in the SGB seriously. Mr Cele also mentioned that I was trustworthy and that I contributed fully in meetings and made constructive contributions that propelled the school forward.

Being a member of the SGB motivated me to work even harder, for I wanted to make full use of the opportunity the teachers had entrusted to me. Moreover, some teachers would come with complaints or recommendations to me to take to the SGB for deliberations. I also had to give feedback to them on what had transpired during SGB meetings. Furthermore, I established a good working relationship with the parent SGB component. I started to realise the important role the parents played in making the school an effective institution. I also learned that having a good relationship with parents could help address learner misbehaviour, especially in my classroom. I used my position to demonstrate new methods of dealing with learner behaviour to the parents and teachers and I introduced some untested, innovative classroom activities that I had learned about at college. For example, I paid a visit to each of my learners' homes and got to know their parents personally. The learners were surprised but thrilled that I was getting along with their parents and they therefore tended to behave well in the classroom. Wubbels (2011) stresses that, when concentrating on communal emotional learning, self-discipline and

self-control are advanced through the development of emotional competence. Strong bonds were forged when the parents and learners saw me attending community gatherings. I attended a church that was located in the area of the school and I made time to socialise with the parents and learners of my school informally. Soon the parents and learners learnt to trust me. Brown (2004) believes that one has to create an exciting (but professional) relationship with learners to get inside their heads.

### **Reflection**

The memory-work that I engaged in reminded me that I had the responsibility to persuade novice teachers to be more involved in activities inside and outside the classroom that would promote their self-concept. In this manner they would add value to the school community. This memory-work also helped me as a mentor to share ideas and information with the novice teachers about building relationships with their learners in order to create a vibrant classroom atmosphere that would permeate the school and result in generally acceptable learner behaviour.

#### **4.2.3 Gaining confidence in my organisational capabilities**

When I was in my fourth year of teaching, I organised an excursion for the learners for the first time in my teaching career. At this time I had gained enough confidence to initiate activities that I felt would be of benefit to the learners. The sports committee had expressed the desire to compete against at least one school in that year. My school offered soccer for boys and girls, netball for the girls, and volleyball. We used to have inter-house competitions every year to keep learners engaged in sport. As a sports master, I hired a municipality stadium in the vicinity of the school where the learners competed. Learners, teachers and parents always looked forward to these sports days.

However, the school had never taken learners on a long-distance excursion before. The sports committee decided that year that the learners had to be exposed to a long-distance trip to compete against another school. A friend from college, Mr Biyela, and I had become friends in our first year as student teachers. We were in the same class and majored in the same subjects. Mr Biyela lived in Pongola, about 500 kilometres from my school. Mr Biyela taught at a school close to his home. We had kept contact although we lived some distance from each other. We would also spend time together whenever he visited his sister, who still lived in Durban, on numerous occasions.

I called Mr Biyela, and he and his colleagues agreed to host my school in the third term of the school year. There are four terms in the school calendar. The first term for South African public schools is generally from January to March. The second one starts in April and finishes in June. The third term starts in July and ends in September, and the fourth one begins in October and finishes in December. As a sport convenor himself, Mr Biyela had to first have a meeting with his colleagues and later let me know of what had transpired at that meeting. After some time Mr Biyela called to report that the committee was looking forward to our visit to his school. However, he suggested I write a formal letter to that effect. After informing the principal and the entire staff about the proposed visit to a school in Pongola, I wrote a letter to request permission to visit the school. I stipulated the sporting codes that we offered in our school and matches were arranged for soccer and netball, but not for volleyball. However, we also arranged for a debating competition on the same day.

I had to complete an excursion form for the principal to send to the Department of Basic Education for permission to undertake the excursion. Of the many details I had to provide were the name of the bus company, the names of the drivers, the number of learners, the number of teachers, and the names of parents who would accompany the learners. The dates and the name of the person who was responsible for the learners' safety also had to be provided. After the Department of Basic Education had granted permission, I announced the planned excursion to the learners. I wrote a letter to the parents detailing the dates, the cost, and the activities of the two days we would spend away from home.

The excitement among the learners and the teachers as the time was drawing closer to the date of departure was tangible. The sports committee and the principal were very supportive. The parents also played their part by signing a consent letter for their children on time and returning it to the school. The School Governing Body also decided to buy fruit for all the learners that were going to be part of the excursion. I had earlier written a letter to the SGB to ask for fruit and a first aid kit. The SGB also assigned four parents to accompany the learners to Pongola.

When I embarked on this project, I had no idea how strenuous the organisation of it would be. I realised that one could never organise an event of that magnitude without the support of others and I learnt that people could achieve a lot by working as a team. After many discussions with teachers, learners and parents, we had a pleasant excursion. It was first time in their lives that

most learners travelled such a long distance. It was thrilling and fulfilling, in the end, to see the hard work coming to fruition and knowing that I had played part in bringing joy to learners in such a manner.

### **Reflection**

I believe that being organised is a fundamental attribute of a successful mentor. The memory-work that illuminated this insight proved to be very valuable as I might never have enlightened my understanding of this role so clearly. I therefore resolved to introduce novice teachers to as many managerial aspects and responsibilities as possible. I came to understand that if my organisational skills were developed through active engagement in as many areas as possible, I could also motivate novice teachers to improve their organisational skills and, in this manner, encourage and enhance positive learner behaviour in their classrooms.

#### **4.2.4 Activities that boosted my morale**

I had grown to such an extent by my third year of teaching that I became involved in activities that lifted my morale and that of other teachers in the school. For example, I was elected as the chairperson of the ‘secret pal’ game that involved the teaching staff, administrators, as well as school support staff. This ‘secret pal’ game had been devised by some female staff members to strengthen the collegial relationship between the workers and teaching staff. To play this game, the chairperson wrote each name of the participants on a piece of paper. As the chairperson, I called each person to pick a name out of a hat. The name of the person you picked then became your secret pal. We decided on a date and the venue when we would reveal the secret pal. Each person would write his choice of gift down on a piece of paper and his/her pal would then buy this gift of a predetermined amount. A member could also spoil his or her secret pal on special dates such as a birthday without revealing him- or herself to the recipient.

I had decided that I would grab every opportunity to become a teacher my family and community members would be proud of. I thus embraced the opportunity I was offered to become an inter-school coordinator as I had gained confidence in coordinating and organising activities for team building in my school. I was requested by the principal to become the coordinator to arrange team-building events between my school and Durban Seminary for Girls, a reputable school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### 4.2.5 Liaison with Durban Seminary for Girls

Durban Seminary for Girls, which was founded in 1853, is situated approximately five kilometres from the school where I taught as a novice teacher. Even today it is still the only independent Christian boarding school in Inanda Township and has acquired a proud reputation for educating Black South Africans who went into the world exemplifying the school motto: "*Shine where you are*". The school has produced prominent figures such as a former deputy president of South Africa between 2005 and 2008, and many past and present cabinet ministers and business people. The school attracts predominantly Black South African learners who come from all walks of life. As Durban Seminary is a secondary school, it caters for learners from Grades 8 to 12.

Although Durban Seminary is a private institution, it receives grants from the local government. For example, the school gets free stationery as well as textbooks from the provincial Department of Basic Education. Over the years, the local community felt that the school did not benefit the children of Inanda and surrounding areas and hence local business people started supporting the school financially. The socioeconomic status of the Inanda community is dire and therefore the community cannot afford the exorbitant boarding fees that the Seminary demands.

Although this is a high school, it launched a full Saturday programme for Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and English classes for primary schools' disadvantaged learners in the greater Inanda area in 1997. This programme was supported by local business people in collaboration with Durban Seminary. The organisers invited public school principals and coordinators to identify learners who showed potential in the subjects I have mentioned. These learners attended classes every Saturday and during the winter holidays at Durban Seminary. All the public primary schools in and around the Inanda area were invited to a meeting to discuss the launch and the procedures that needed to be followed. Coordinators from each school played a pivotal role in the smooth running of the programme. For example, I transported learners from school to Durban Seminary and ensured that we were on time and that learners wore a neat, full school uniform. I was also a facilitator of lessons in the three subjects from time to time.

A handful of schools did not heed the call to enrol learners who had the potential to perform well for extra tuition as they reportedly felt that it would be a waste of time as there was no

remuneration attached for coordinators who worked on Saturdays and during the winter holidays. However, I felt that this would be an opportunity for me to learn from other teachers who taught the subjects that I did (Science and English). I was also convinced that this programme would benefit our learners more than anything else. The transport fees to and from Durban Seminary were paid by the sponsors who had initiated the programme. I also thought that a change of scenery and healthy competition from other learners would do wonders by elevating my learners' self-esteem.

The principal of my school took a keen interest in the learners whom I had selected to attend the programme. He called me in from time to time to ask about the learners' progress and enquired if the programme was of benefit to me as well. The principal provided active support as he attended every Saturday morning to ensure that all the learners were at school on time and were ready to learn. The parents of these learners also showed tremendous support for they would accompany their children to the school in the mornings. They even thanked the principal and me for taking care of their children. I also felt that I did justice to these learners and myself for taking the time to assist in every way I could. It was enough 'remuneration' for me to see the joy in the faces of my learners' every time they went to the Durban Seminary for tuition and I could feel that this was their dream school. They would talk incessantly about the beauty of the school, the teachers (most of them were White) that taught them so well, and the relaxed atmosphere in the classrooms. There was no township public school that was privileged enough to have teachers from different racial backgrounds other than Black. It was therefore seen as an extraordinary opportunity by the community for learners to be taught by White teachers because the community believed that their children stood a better chance of speaking fluent English when they were taught by a White teacher. Another reason was that the perception existed that White people had received a superior education compared to any other race group in South Africa during the apartheid era. Therefore, having a White teacher teaching Black learners in a township was viewed as a blessing and a privilege.

A total of 55 Grade 7 girls participated in the programme. I selected nine girls who had displayed great academic potential in the previous years and who were still performing above average in Grade 7. In the fourth month of the programme, the deputy principal of Durban Seminary, who was in charge of the programme, visited my school to talk to the principal and me about bursaries they had received from one of the biggest companies in Durban. The bursaries were to be granted to girl learners who came from disadvantaged socioeconomic

backgrounds. The deputy principal invited all nine girls as part of the other 55 invitees for the interviews that took place at Durban Seminary School. Any successful interviewee would be admitted to the school from Grade 8 until Grade 12 with a full bursary. The only thing the parents were required to do was to buy linen and a blanket for their child.

As the coordinator, I had to inform the parents of the learners who had to go for the interview. Their consent was required before we could forge ahead and prepare the learners for an opportunity of a lifetime. The parents were so thrilled by the news that they pleaded with me to ensure that their children would get all the help they needed to do well in the interviews. I had already informed the learners but had to be very cautious of the way I explained the process to them. I told them that they would be facing a steep challenge as their peers from other schools had also been invited. We needed to prepare very well for the written and the oral interviews later in the week.

Two weeks after the interviews, I received a call from the deputy principal of Durban Seminary School who informed me that all nine our learners had been accepted as they had performed extremely well and had achieved in the top ten positions of the twenty learners they had invited to join the school the following year. She further told me that the letters of acceptance would be forthcoming as soon they had informed the sponsors. I then notified the principal of the good news and he was overjoyed. He thanked me profusely for my dedication and willingness to spend so much time helping our learners to overcome their fear of the interviews. We could only inform the learners after we had received the confirmation letters from the school. As soon as the acceptance letters arrived, the principal called a staff meeting to formally inform the teaching staff of our learners' achievement. The principal also said that he had received a call from the Durban Seminary School principal who commended the learners for their performance during the interviews. He encouraged us to keep up the good work as the children could not have done it without the effort the teachers had exerted in the classrooms.

The next day the principal made an announcement to the entire school about the opportunity our learners had just received. He further advised all learners to always take education seriously and to grab every opportunity with both hands. The parents of the nine learners were also present at assembly to congratulate their children. They were very grateful to the school for the prospect of their children attending a school with a great reputation. They further said that they could see the future of their children becoming brighter by receiving the best education they

could not afford to pay for. This was one of the best highlights of my teaching career, particularly as I was still regarded a novice teacher. I was happy that I could assist these learners to be enrolled at an institution they admired. This experience taught me that nothing is as fulfilling as my contribution to a smile on my learners' faces.

I recently had the privilege of making contact via Facebook with one of the nine learners, Nonkululeko, who furthered her studies at Durban Seminary School. Facebook is a social networking website and service where users can post comments, share photographs, and link news or other interesting content on the web. Nonkululeko told me that she had further received another bursary to study towards a BSc in Biochemistry and Microbiology at a South African university. She was working for one of the biggest companies in Johannesburg. I then asked Nonkululeko to write a letter about her feelings when she got the news that she would be enrolled at Durban Seminary School. Below is the letter Nonkululeko wrote and emailed to me:

*Dear Mr Luthuli*

*They say "feeling gratitude and not expressing it, is like wrapping a present and not giving it". On my way to work this morning, I got a chance to reflect on some of the things I'm grateful for and some of the most amazing people I have met along this journey of life who have had a tremendous impact on my life – and you are one of them.*

*Coming from a township with no access to great opportunities that were out there for us growing up, we lost our ability to dream and have aspirations like other more privileged kids, because sometimes we thought there was nothing more for us out there, beyond the township. But because of teachers like you, I've had a great privilege to access opportunities I never thought would be possible for me. I remember being told we were going to be having Saturday classes at Inanda Seminary for Math, Science, and English. I didn't know at the time that this was the beginning of something big. I knew I loved Science at that time, but meeting other kids from the schools who loved it as much as I did and who also wanted to pursue a career in the Sciences made me feel like we weren't so different besides our economic backgrounds.*

*After seeing the school and everything it had to offer, it became a dream for me to study at such a school. But those dreams seemed far-fetched because I knew very well that my parents could not afford to enrol me at such a school. Through amazing teachers like you, my dream became a reality and I received a bursary to attend Inanda Seminary. When I reminisce about the moment I received the news, it still brings tears to my eyes. It's one of those moments when you pinch yourself because it seemed surreal. The school gave me the skills I required to face the real world, and when I got to the university I was able to finish my B.Sc. Degree in Biochemistry and Microbiology.*

*Right now I'm working on one of the biggest Pharmaceutical companies in Johannesburg. I believe I owe all my success to you and I believe I'm where I'm today because of you. It is because of you that I have been granted such opportunities which were able to shape and make me the person I am today. The passion you have for your students and the work you do is truly remarkable. Your work goes beyond the classroom as you can reach out to the community and touch lives. You have truly impacted my life and for that, I'm eternally grateful.*

*Your former student*

*Nokwethemba Shoba*

## **Reflection**

I must admit that I shed a little tear after reading the letter Nonkululeko had written. The content of the letter made me realise that teaching is indeed a noble profession. Nothing is more fulfilling than hearing or seeing a happy learner because of what I said or did for him or her. I had always wanted to be the kind of teacher who brought hope and courage to every learner I came into contact with. Letters such as these were a testimony that I had had a positive impact on some learners throughout my teaching career. I also felt that being acknowledged by a learner in my early years of teaching was a highlight I needed to cherish. I learned that no amount of money could buy the happiness that I always felt when I put a smile on the face of a learner.

Today I believe that mentoring is about discussing and sharing meaningful issues of learning and teaching and should become a natural process in all schools. In my discussion meetings with the novice teachers, I always highlighted how giving one's best is so rewarding. I also encouraged

them to devise innovative ideas without fearing to be judged. I explained that the teaching profession is the mother of all professions and that we should not expect to be rich in terms of material possessions. Our wealth comes from the contributions that we make to our fellow human beings for their prosperity. Our reward as teachers comes when one learner thanks you for being part of his or her success journey. We then find solace and experience a sense of fulfilment that no one can take away from us. We also draw inspiration from the accolades we receive from our learners, and that is what kept me loyal to the teaching profession for all my years as a teacher.

### 4.3 Collaborative Learning



**Figure 4.1: A metaphoric drawing: Growing a sound working relationship between the school and the community**

To describe the relationship that should exist between the school and the community, I expressed this concept as a metaphor in a drawing. A good relationship is like a tree: each visible component of a tree (the leaves, fruit and branches) can only exist and thrive if it is supported and fed by the soil and the roots. The soil from which the tree draws water also supplies it with the necessary nutrients. This represents the community in which the school is located. The soil allows the tree to spread and attach its roots deep in the soil (school culture and Department of Basic Education policies), away from the threatening wind. In the same way, I as a mentor drew my strength from my foundations of faith and integrity and this enabled the process of teaching and learning in my school to take shape and our learners to be successful. In this metaphor, the trunk of the tree represents a mentor. The main purpose of the trunk of a tree is not only to support the branches and give them shape, but it also supplies nutrients to all

the branches, leaves, and fruit of the tree. Likewise, the mentor provides novice teachers with the necessary love, support, hope, and wisdom. These attributes should ultimately be transmitted to the learners in the classroom. When I was a novice teacher, I drew strength from my unofficial mentor who offered me guidance, support and advice, and who thus helped me manage my classroom.

The branches are a metaphor for the novice teachers. The branches (novice teachers) of a tree are attached to a stem (a mentor). This means that the stem supports the branches to grow strongly, and only if they grow together will the tree stand firm. Likewise, the mentor could learn a lot from interacting with novice teachers. As much as the branches of a tree do not take the same shape and are unequal in size, so should novice teachers' approaches to their classroom management also vary to result in effective development. The branches (novice teachers) are the last vessel that nutrients pass through to reach the fruit (the learners). Therefore, proper guidance and the presence of a mentor will allow novice teachers to impart knowledge instead of worrying about learners' unwarranted behaviour.

The fruit of the tree that is full of nutrients is the end product of the mentor's and the teachers' endeavours. The fruit represents the learner in this metaphor drawing. Therefore, just like a ripe fruit is full of goodness and health, learners should demonstrate self-control, independence, and thrive on their journey to adulthood through responsible behaviour. As a product of a mentor's efforts and guidance, novice teachers should progressively acquire confidence and the ability to manage their classrooms independently for positive learner behaviour support. The tree is unable to bear fruit if it is not firmly grounded in the soil by the roots. In the same manner, a sound working relationship among the community, teachers, and learners is required for the school community to be successful.

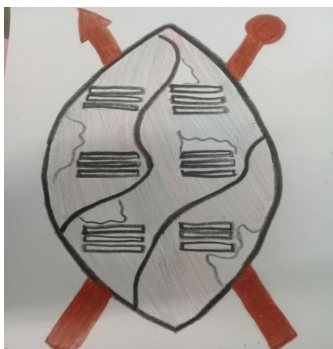
A school culture that embraces mentor-mentee relationships plays a significant role in this metaphor drawing. This metaphor demonstrates that a dedicated, foresighted and zealous mentor could encourage novice teachers to instil a vibrant atmosphere of teaching and learning. For example, if I exhibit appropriate behaviour and display honourable manners within the school community, novice teachers are likely to reciprocate and instil such values in their learners as well.

This metaphor of the tree elicits a sense of unity. This emotion was generated during my primary and high school days when the majority of teachers who taught me lived in the community where the schools were located. The level of discipline was acceptable because the teachers knew our parents and where we lived. They therefore treated the learners as their children and, likewise, we viewed our teachers as members of our families.

As I reflected on this metaphor drawing, I realised that asking novice teachers to do metaphor drawings (see Chapter Nine) could help me understand what my mentorship meant to them. Such an activity could also build learning communities in which teachers could share their experiences through discussions and drawings. I understood then that this activity could serve as a platform from which novice teachers could be encouraged to shape their teaching practices. They could learn to make use of every learning tool at their disposal. It was also my task as a mentor to allow novice teachers to celebrate and embrace diverse classroom management techniques while also attending to individual learners' needs.

I learnt that, by devising metaphors and creating drawings to illustrate them, I could help novice teachers to reflect on their own practices and identify techniques that might enhance their professional development. Also, by interacting with novice teachers on the issue of positive engagement, I came to understand that learning is a process and a journey that should be embraced with delicacy and care.

#### **4.4 Shielding and Guiding Future Leaders to the World of Possibilities**



**Figure 4.2: A metaphor drawing: Protection, the key to learning and teaching**

I drew a traditional African shield as a metaphor for protection and care. In traditional conflicts, a shield was pivotal in the protection of warriors in a battle. This metaphor drawing depicts me

as a shield that needed to protect the novice teachers of my school. Just like a shield, mentors should play a significant role in supporting novice teachers early in their teaching careers. Many challenges faced by novice teachers could lead to early attrition, especially if there are no mentors to support them. A traditional Zulu shield has an oval shape and is tall enough to cover the body. It is constructed from cured cow hide in such a way that it deflects a spear and prevents it from penetrating the shield. The oval shape of the shield is like the overall protection that a mentor provides. Novice teachers experience challenges – such as learner misbehaviour – that impede teaching and learning and result in their low self-esteem. However, if they are shielded, they build confidence and skills to deal with the challenges in the classroom.

The shield is a traditional weapon that was used by warriors during conflicts decades ago. It is still treasured in African and Zulu communities. Similarly, mentoring has played a crucial role in building mentees' self-image and confidence. This metaphor depicts a culture of self-belief, strength, and the protection a mentor gives a mentee. The shield also reminds me of the role of the principal of a school. The second school where I taught had learners and teachers from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. The principal acted as my shield by providing all the protection I needed to become acquainted with the school culture. First and foremost, he played the role of a father as he would give me advice on how I should conduct myself in front of people as a professional. He also encouraged me to use any talent I had to benefit the learners of the school.

The metaphor drawings depicted above gave me the insight to understand how I could influence novice teachers to embrace mentorship as process that would give them room to grow, the ability to share ideas, and the fortitude to face hardships and achieve success. I thus established learning communities that allowed the novice teachers to share stories about their experiences and challenges in the classroom, and to learn from one another.

It was my responsibility as a mentor to ensure that the novice teachers were familiar with the notion of interacting with other education stakeholders to better manage their classrooms. The metaphor drawings reminded me that, as a mentor, I should offer nurturing, appreciation, professional support, and encouragement to the novice teachers at all times. In turn, I could also learn from the novice teachers as we responded collaboratively to innovative techniques for classroom management.

One of a mentor's tasks is to protect novice teachers. The metaphor drawings affirmed that, if I wished to become a useful mentor, I needed to put myself in the shoes of novice teachers. Thus, by leading by example from the front, I was able to serve as a shield to protect the novice teachers. From this position I could establish an environment that would stimulate confidence in their classroom practices. In return, the novice teachers could emulate my role for the learners in their classrooms. I also needed to alleviate any fears that could hamper the novice teachers' courage to attempt diverse classroom management strategies.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I reminisced on my experiences as a novice teacher. I recalled the role played by the community to help me get acquainted with the school culture. Brown (2004) advocates that "...culturally responsive teachers use communication processes that reflect learners' values and beliefs ... about learning, the responsibilities of teachers, and the roles of learners in the school setting" (p. 267). I also reflected on the positive relationship I had with the learners in my classroom. Furthermore, I recalled and evaluated my experiences and the insights I had gained by becoming a member of the school governing body and an inter-school coordinator.

By revisiting my memory-work and the metaphor drawings I had done, I realised that my earliest experiences as a novice teacher had a positive impact on my mentoring insights and skills. Reliving these memories was valuable as I realised that reflective work would enhance my mentoring skills when I engaged with novice teachers about issues of learner behaviour. This also allowed me to explore and analyse the viewpoints of other people on how I could best become a useful mentor. Revisiting old memories and metaphor drawings enabled me to respond to my first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* These learnings were elucidated above and will be summarised in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

In the next chapter, I shall recollect my memories of a lack of mentoring support during the first five years of my teaching career, and how this impacted my learning as a novice teacher mentor.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TRUSTING THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

The title of this chapter, *Trusting the unknown future*, reflects my uncertainties about the unknown of the teaching profession that I was entering into. However, because of my passion for teaching, I had to trust that I would be successful in this profession.

#### **5.1 Introduction: Situations as they Unfolded**

Regardless of the successes and joy that I experienced in my first years of teaching, I could also recall many unpleasant memories of this time. I believed that, during my tenure as a novice teacher, I needed to be surrounded by supportive colleagues and a school community that understood and tolerated my shortcomings. Hudson (2012) reminds us that novice teachers desire a school culture that supports them with vigorous consideration while they develop in their teaching, acquire instructional knowledge, and improve their skills in learner behaviour management. Sowell (2017) also maintains that schools should retain novice teachers by efficient support and minimising the frustrations they experience through a positive reward system. It is, however, part of human nature to be reminded of the stressors one encountered during one's initial years of teaching.

In the previous chapters, Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I offered a detailed narrative of experiences when I was supported as a novice teacher. In the current chapter, I recall some awful experiences that have been embedded in my memory for many years. Rekindling these memories allowed me the space to envision myself mentoring novice teachers who could be confronted with similar conundrums in their teaching practices. These memories also prompted memories of how I overcame these challenges and how I could support novice teachers in similar situations as a mentor and school manager. Chapter Five also responds to my first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers from my memories?* Brunke (2018) advocates that “memory work is rather like peeling away the layers of an onion that has no core” (p. 25). My memories of a lack of support first focus on unpleasant encounters with learners' parents. I then reflect on the impact of corporal punishment on the learners, followed by my memories of the impact of learner misbehaviour. I also engage in memory-

work on the lack of support from colleagues and a circuit management team that visited the school. I conclude with my memory of the day I had to prove my worth.

When I embarked on the process of recalling my memories of a lack of support as a novice teacher, I realised that several incidents in this vulnerable time were trapped in my mind, and I had to dig deep to recall them. When I faced these memories, I envisaged that the lessons I had learned would pave the way to helping novice teachers whom I had to mentor in their plight. In this process, I realised that I would have to offer them my support, guidance and care, and I knew I could create a sound working relationship with them through offering my professional advice. I also hoped that, by evoking and facing these unpleasant memories, I would strengthen my own confidence and self-concept to be able to listen to and enhance a sense of self-worth in the novice teachers (Richter, 2013).

## **5.2 My First Unpleasant Encounter with Parents**

In my first year of teaching I was assigned to be a Grade 5 form teacher. I had 43 learners in my class – 20 boys and 23 girls – of relatively the same age. My classroom was the first in the block that faced the main road. It was also adjacent to the administration block where the principal's, deputy principal's, and the administrator's offices were located. My class was big enough to accommodate these 43 learners. It had adequate windows and one door. The floor was covered with a type of plastic tiles. Each desk seated two learners. The desks were arranged in traditional rows, similar to all the other classrooms in my school. I had one big desk and a comfortable chair in the corner next to the cupboard where the textbooks were kept. The classroom had one big chalkboard at the front and a bulletin board at the back.

The first thing that came to mind when I entered this classroom the first time was the advice I had received from a college lecturer, which was to establish a flawless relationship with my learners. I felt that, before I could create such a relationship, the learners first had to understand my personality. I observed some excitement on their faces when I informed them that I would be their class teacher and they listened to me attentively when I introduced myself. I could not figure out whether they felt fear or excitement at the knowledge that they were going to be taught by a male teacher for the first time in their schooling experience.

I shared my expectations of them, stating that they should be well behaved and be responsive to their peers and teachers. I also assured them of my intention to offer them the respect they deserved as human beings. Wood and Freeman-Loftis (2012) note: "With our words, we convey our assumptions and expectations about learners which, in turn, influence learners' assumptions and expectations about themselves" (p. 1). I also shared my likes and my dislikes with the learners. The learners then took turns to introduce themselves. I had written on the chalkboard that they should include their family members in their introduction. As the learners were introducing themselves, I took notes in my journal of information that I felt would be significant to remember. For example, some learners shared the same birth dates or were born in the same month. I also noted that many of my learners were raised by single parents. I was quick to learn about every learner's family background. I observed that most were well looked after although they were raised by single parents. The evidence for that was the high level of hygiene displayed by most learners, their full lunch boxes, as well as the clean school uniforms they wore throughout the school week. However, there was one boy (I shall refer to him as Xolani) who always came to school barefoot. Over and above that, I noticed that he also wore a white shirt that was too small for him and his grey shorts were torn. I remember that, during learner introduction, Xolani told everyone that he lived with both his father and his mother. He also related to the class that he had two siblings and he was the eldest.

Observing Xolani, I remembered when I was in primary school in Grade 5. I was embarrassed when I compared my school uniform to those of my classmates as my uniform was incomplete. I only wore short grey pants and a white short-sleeved shirt. Other boys wore the same uniform and shoes during spring and summer. However, in winter, the boys wore long grey pants and white shirts, but I was not in a position to change my uniform. I also remembered that the other learners teased me for not having school shoes. I noted in my Master's thesis (Luthuli, 2016): "We would be the laughing stock [for not wearing a complete school uniform] even during lunchtime" (p. 49). The situation was also exacerbated by my teacher who would punish me because I did not wear a complete school uniform.

I never anticipated that, after so many years of trying to bury those unpleasant memories, they would resurface when I observed one of my learners in the classroom. I had a private conversation with Xolani and asked him if his parents were employed. Burke (2002) highlights that teachers need to notice when their learners experience trauma and they need to innovatively implement resources and strategies to address the social and emotional wellbeing and

development of their learners. Xolani told me that his father was unemployed and his mother went from one household to another, washing and ironing clothes for her neighbours. His mother would sometimes be remunerated with food that fed the family for a day or two. Xolani's story reflected Burke's (2002) argument: "Learners bring all their lived experiences within themselves as they enter the classroom each day" (p. 110). When I realised that Xolani was suffering emotionally because of his poverty-stricken situation, I decided to buy him a full school uniform so that he would look the same as the other learners in the class. I also narrated the story of Xolani to my mother and the decision I had taken to buy him a new uniform. My mother was pleased with my decision and told me that it was the right thing to do.

I clearly remember the day I handed the uniform to Xolani. I called him to the printing room in the morning just after the morning devotions. The reason for taking him to the printing room was that I was still a novice teacher and did not know how the other teachers would react if they saw me giving a learner a school uniform. I also did not want to embarrass Xolani in front of the other learners in the class. Xolani was delighted. He even asked if he could put the uniform on there and then, and I agreed. He quickly rushed to the tap, washed his feet, and returned to try on the shoes, the long grey pair of trousers, a vest, and a white shirt. I had bought him three white shirts, two grey pairs of trousers – a long and a short one – two pairs of grey socks, and a pair of black shoes. Xolani thanked me and immediately hurried into the classroom. I assumed he wanted to show his classmates his new look. At that moment, looking at how excited Xolani felt, I had to hold back the tears because I was reminded of my own situation when I was approximately his age. Xolani's classmates were also pleased for him.

The next morning – it was a Tuesday – I was called to the principal's office as there were parents who wanted to talk to me. Upon entering the office, the principal introduced me to Xolani's mother and father. I greeted them. I soon realised that their faces were not as cheerful as I had anticipated they would be. The principal asked what I had done for Xolani the previous day. I narrated Xolani's situation the way I saw it and I also told them I had felt I could assist Xolani by buying him a new school uniform because I wanted him to look the same as his peers. Xolani's father was furious. He asked if he looked like a person who could not take care of his family. He then accused me of having a romantic affair with his wife and shouted that I should keep the clothes I had bought for Xolani. He placed the uniform in a plastic bag on the principal's table and immediately ordered his wife to leave. Xolani's father looked as if he was under the influence of alcohol and the smell of alcohol filled the room as he was talking. The

principal tried to calm Xolani's father down. He apologised to the parents on my behalf and said that what I had done had been out of the goodness of my heart. The boy's mother also apologised about her husband's behaviour. She thanked me for what I had done for her son and told me that she would come back to collect the uniform after she had convinced her husband that they needed it for her son.

I had never felt so embarrassed in my life. I could not find any words except to apologise to the principal and the parents. I cannot recall what was said after Xolani's father had accused me of having a romantic affair with his wife who was old enough to be my mother. All that I was thinking of at that time was that I had brought the school into disrepute and that I was not ready to be a teacher. There I was, a 25-year-old novice teacher who had recently been appointed, sitting in the principal's office and being accused of wrongdoing. Momentarily, thoughts of leaving the teaching profession crossed my mind. I was convinced that my act had come from my heart that the parents would not mind if I gave Xolani a uniform. After the parents had left, the principal told me that what I had done for the boy was sincere and that I should not mind Xolani's father. He assured me that I still had many years in the teaching profession and I would face incidents similar to the one that had just occurred more often, and that I should not despair. Brock and Grady (1998) maintain that, to give the necessary support and direction to novice teachers, principals need to be aware of the challenges they face and understand the importance of their role to guide novice teachers through such situations. Although the principal's words found a place in my heart, I told myself that I would not want to find myself in a similar situation again. I could not even relate the story to my family because I felt so ashamed and embarrassed. I also felt terrible for Xolani who had to go back to wearing the same old uniform that did not fit him properly.

### **Reflection**

This memory-work made me realise that it was my duty as a mentor to remind the novice teachers that they would encounter challenges in their quest to become successful teachers. Being supportive of novice teachers in the same way that my former principal had been of me would help them overcome most of the challenges they encountered. My support and understanding would ease unpleasant experiences. I thus needed to engage compassionately with the novice teachers when learners misbehaved and refocus their energy on supporting their learners academically and emotionally. This memory-work also taught me that incidents that test novice teachers' character are inevitable. As a mentor, I then knew I needed to stand by

traumatised novice teachers and let them feel that they mattered, had value, and that I had to comfort them with the message that everybody learns by making mistakes. I was reminded that we find strength in the mistakes that we make.

### **5.3 The Impact of Corporal Punishment**

I started my teaching career in 1994, which was also the year of the new dawn in the history of South Africa. This was the year that a new democratic dispensation was introduced for the first time in the history of South Africa. A new South African Constitution that would embrace the diverse racial and cultural heritage of all the people of this country had to be developed from the interim Constitution that had been negotiated. Therefore, the transition of the South African education system was also imminent. Schools across the Republic were now open for learners of all races and cultural backgrounds. Two years later, the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996b) stipulated in no uncertain terms that no teacher or any other person may administer corporal punishment at a school.

When I started teaching at Vuka, I copied the classroom rules from classrooms of seasoned teachers next to mine. Corporal punishment was administered regularly in my school. Naong (2007) states that, at that time, the South African education system was in a period of change from the apartheid education system that supported corporal punishment and endorsed a merciless retributive philosophy. As a novice teacher, I was sceptical of using the cane because I always thought that there were other options for maintaining order in the classroom. I did at times use corporal punishment because that was the dominant method of discipline I had grown up with and it was still used in schools. Although there were discipline and order in the school because of the use of corporal punishment, I also felt that the learners adhered to school rules not because they knew it was the right thing to do, but because they were fearful of corporal punishment. Many were terrified of some of the male teachers who administered corporal punishment even on behalf of other teachers. Some male teachers were notorious disciplinarians in my school but they did not forge positive teacher-learner relationships.

I remembered that some male teachers advised me not to be friendly towards the learners as they would then not respect me. However, I was overwhelmed by the memories of my experiences as a learner in a primary school where corporal punishment was at the order of the

day. I remembered how I had hated my teachers for administering corporal punishment and the verbal abuse they had meted out to me. I promised myself that I would never deliberately inflict pain on any learner for I had been through the same ordeal myself when I was a learner in primary school.

I remembered how heartbroken I was when learners were sent to Mr Cele (a pseudonym) for minor incidents that could have been overlooked. Mr Cele was the most dreaded teacher in the school. I often watched in anguish and anger when Mr Cele took pride in ‘disciplining’ learners. I remembered the incident of a boy who had stolen money from a teacher’s purse. Mrs Ngema had left her purse in one of the classrooms and, during recess when most learners were playing outside, Jabu entered the classroom and stole a R100 note from Mrs Ngema’s purse. No learner was allowed in a classroom during break time. Jabu then bought food at the tuck shop using the R100 note. The tuck shop owner was suspicious and reported Jabu to his class teacher. By that time, Mrs Ngema had already alerted all the teachers that someone had stolen her money. Jabu was interrogated by Mr Cele and admitted that he had stolen the money. He was never given a chance to explain but was summarily beaten. Bown (2004) argues that listening is an important way of forging a respectful relationship with learners. This did not happen in this case. Jabu was made to lie down over the table and Mr Cele beat him until he soiled himself. I felt very sorry for Jabu and I blamed myself for not doing anything to stop this merciless form of torture.

After this incident, we attended development workshops where we were informed of the abolishment of corporal punishment as well as other new educational developments that impacted teachers. These development workshops were collaboratively organised in 1996 by the Department of Education, NGOs, and teacher unions. I also remembered a policy handbook for educators (1996) that included topics such as information about national education policy Acts, the South African Schools Act, the Employment of Educators Act, the Education Labour Relations Council, and more. That meant that the school had to develop a new code of conduct for learners that would be corrective and non-violent. The principal called a staff meeting after attending a meeting for principals and informed the teachers that it was now a dismissible offence if they physically and verbally inflicted pain on learners. The principal thus outlawed what Naong (2007) lists as offenses: “...hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, shaking, shoving, choking, use of various objects (wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins, or others), painful body postures (such as placing the child in an enclosed space), use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drills, or prevention of urine or stool elimination” (p. 185). The principal then left it to

the teachers to develop their own classroom rules that would be supportive and promote positive learner behaviour.

For all the teachers at my school, and probably those in all township schools in the area, the concept of positive discipline was new and hence I did not know what steps I should take to maintain discipline in my class. This was a challenge as there was no official school policy or procedures regarding the management of delinquent learner behaviour in my school at the time. Thus the use of corporal punishment by teachers such as Mr Cele did not cease immediately. Morrell (2001) argues that the persistent and unlawful use of corporal punishment was often due to the absence of awareness of other options. I was also aware that learner misbehaviour in classrooms never ceased regardless of the use of corporal punishment, and I thus questioned its validity and welcomed its abolishment.

Sometimes I did not blame the teachers in my school who administered corporal punishment because that was the only punitive measure we all knew. Moreover, we were not aware of alternative measure to address misbehaviour effectively. As a school, we tried to devise alternatives to corporal punishment and adopted measures used at other schools. For example, we tried to implement detention as an effective punishment for learners who had misbehaved. This meant that a teacher had to supervise learners who had misbehaved for two hours after school on particular days. This form of punishment proved to be detrimental to many female teachers because they were vulnerable and without protection at school after hours. Unfortunately, some fell victim to robberies that were committed by members of the community who lived near the school. These incidents caused the staff to fear staying after school. Moreover, most of the teachers lived far from their workplace and that meant that they arrived home late, long after the learners had reached theirs.

### **Reflection**

By recalling and reflecting on my memories I learnt that, as a mentor, I should always be conscious of the significance of collaborative learning. I learnt that inviting mentors from affluent schools to share their successes and dilemmas regarding classroom management and novice teachers in my school could yield positive results. Having the discussion workshops with novice teachers about learner behaviour support also gave me the opportunity to pay attention to their woes in their classrooms. I could also arrange meetings with novice teachers of other schools and mine for discussions on learner behaviour support. This could culminate

in my school modifying its learner behaviour policy to suit the current misbehaviour patterns in novice teachers' (and even in more experienced teachers') classrooms. `

## **5.4 Learner Misbehaviour**

After the promulgation of the Bill of Rights (South Africa, 1996a), the abolishment of corporal punishment was welcomed with mixed feelings by the different sectors of the government. The South African Constitution was made available and accessible to all government institutions, including public schools. Teachers were also required to teach learners about their rights and responsibilities.

I observed that most learners in my school did not heed the call to embrace responsibility in conjunction with enjoying their rights. For example, every child has the right to basic education, but it is the learner's responsibility to do homework and behave in a respectful manner. The Department of (Basic) Education and Social Welfare jointly gave learners the green light to report teachers via a toll-free number who physically, verbally or emotionally abused them. This measure suddenly left teachers with limited authority in their classrooms and many were afraid of being reported and facing disciplinary action or even expulsion from the school. It was evident that some learners took advantage of the situation and their behaviour deteriorated instead of improved. It was as if they now had a hold over teachers that nobody could question.

Moreover, violence and riots were still rife in the townships around Durban because of the feud between two political organisations, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). This political unrest had started way back in the early 1990s. The school had learners who came from both IFP and ANC stronghold areas. Therefore, in my view, the root course of misbehaviour of learners at that time was orchestrated by the community whose aggression and intolerance filtered into the school through the learners.

I remembered that this intolerance manifested in violence that often led to the senseless killing of prominent community members. Learners of my school, the boys in Grades 6 and 7 in particular, came to school carrying dangerous weapons such as knives, screwdrivers, and home-made short spears to protect themselves when fighting erupted between supporters of the two political parties. These boys ended up fighting because of their families' affiliation with either

of the two political parties. A Grade 7 boy, Musa, stabbed another with a knife in full view of other learners in class as well as a student teacher who was there to do his practice teaching. This incident created pandemonium in the classroom that drew the attention of Mr Nzuzza, who was teaching in an adjacent classroom. While learners were running, screaming, out of the classroom, more teachers arrived and one took the boy with the stab wound to the local clinic. Mr Nzuzza confiscated the knife from Musa and administered corporal punishment for this deed. Musa was sent home with a letter informing his parents to attend school the next day.

Musa's father and that of the boy who had been stabbed were able to resolve the matter amicably. Musa's father agreed to pay the boy's medical bills, but he then threatened to open a case against Mr Nzuzza for punishing his son so severely that he had had to rush him to the doctor for treatment. He reminded Mr Nzuzza of the abolishment of corporal punishment and that it was an offence for teachers to administer it. Mr Nzuzza tried to explain why he had punished his son, but the parent did not accept Mr Nzuzza's explanation. Musa's father demanded that Mr Nzuzza pay him R5 000 if he still wanted to keep his job as a teacher.

The principal then convened a meeting to warn teachers to refrain from administering corporal punishment because some parents had found a way of blackmailing teachers. After this incident, learner misbehaviour ran riot in the school. Learners started to have fancy hairstyles, never finished their homework, were absent from school, and the level of noise in the classrooms and the disrespect for teachers increased. Parents started deregistering their children because there was no discipline in the school anymore. The result was that ten teachers, including me, were transferred to other schools because the teacher-learner ratio had declined in terms of the personnel provisioning norms (PPN).

### **Reflection**

This memory-work illustrated that mentoring of novice teachers should cover a wide range of factors associated with classroom management. I then understood that external influences – such as the political affiliations of parents and violence in the community – could destabilise the smooth running of a school. In such circumstance it becomes the role of a mentor to establish and maintain exceptional relationships with parents, fellow teachers, learners, and support staff. Such level-headedness could also aid novice teachers with opportunities to invite parents to discuss, among other things, the behaviour of their children. For instance, I later organised a

fun walk in which parents, learners, and their form teachers participated. I believed that this would ultimately increase learner behaviour in my classroom.

## **5.5 Lack of Support from my Colleagues**

The teaching staff at Vuka primary school comprised 33 teachers of which seven, including the principal, were male teachers. I was the youngest of the male teachers. Three of the seven male teachers were in their late 40s and the remaining three were in their 30s. The principal asked where I would like to fit in regarding the extra-mural activities that were offered at the school. I noticed that each male teacher was responsible for a sport, except netball. Two male teachers were responsible for athletics, one was responsible for the school choir, one was the head coach for volleyball, and one was the head coach for soccer. I then opted for soccer for which I still have a passion as I also played it. I was eventually appointed as the sport convenor for all the sport activities at the school.

I took charge of the boys' and girls' soccer teams without any help from my colleagues. Hudson (2012) advises that school staff should induct beginner teachers into the profession by providing on-going support. Conversely, Mr Ngcobo, who had been head coach of the boys' soccer teams, made it clear that he no longer wanted to coach the teams because he was old and tired. Mr Ngcobo had the courtesy to show me where the soccer kit and the balls were kept, and he told me that I was now fully responsible for coaching the boys' and the girls' teams on my own. I could not argue with Mr Ngcobo because I was still a novice teacher and the age difference between us did not make my position conducive for an argument.

I remembered the difficulties I encountered when I had to attend sports meetings at schools that were far away. The school had insufficient funds for sport and therefore I had to pay from my own pocket if I attended any sport meetings. Although I did not care much about spending money to show up at these meetings, they would be held far from my school, which made it hard for me to get to those meetings on time and get back home safely because I was using public transport.

I once attended a sports meeting at a school that was about 45 kilometres from my school in a remote area, and finding transportation was awkward. The meeting finished only around 17h00. Most of the teachers who attended the meeting had their own cars. After the meeting they drove

away, leaving me alone in a place where transportation was hard to find. I was attacked by hooligans and robbed of my wallet, sunglasses and shoes while I was waiting for transport. I directed my anger at Mr Ngcobo because I felt that I would not have been robbed if he had been considerate enough to attend the meeting with me. Moreover, he had a car and also knew that the school was far and in a deep rural area. The principal only expressed his sympathy when I narrated the incident to him the following day.

At times it was difficult to be in charge of 30 soccer players when we had to honour a fixture that we had to play against schools far from ours. Once I took the boys' and girls' soccer teams (under 13) to play against another school in a different township. I hired a local minibus and I was the only teacher responsible for all those learners. I felt that another teacher should look after the girls while I was coaching the boys, and vice versa. On our arrival at the school of our opponents, I noticed that the playing field was not in a suitable condition to play good soccer, but it was in a better condition than the one at my school because that one at least had grass. Although the grass was long and came up to just above the ankles, I thought we would be able to adjust.

The first game was between the two girls' sides. It went smoothly up to the end. The girls' team played for 30 minutes each half. The second game for boys under 13 would last 40 minutes each half. While the game was underway, I heard a scream of pain from one of the players. Sandile was lying on the ground with his hands covering his face. He had broken a leg falling into a hole in the field. The game had to be abandoned as I did not have a first aid kit and Sandile had broken a leg. He was in excruciating pain. I immediately instructed the players to get into the minibus so I could rush the boy to the local clinic near my school. I then asked the driver of the minibus to drop all the players at school because the majority of them lived near the school. I had to wait for Sandile's parents to arrive at the clinic as I had sent another player who was his neighbour to report the incident. Few people had cellular telephones in those days.

I only reached home around 19h30 that evening. I also had to carry a big bag of soccer kit and two footballs. I could not give these to the learners because I was responsible for the equipment I had taken from school. The following day I had to report the incident to the principal and I had to describe the measures I had taken until the arrival of Sandile's mother at the clinic. I could not hold my tears when I was narrating the story to the principal. I expressed my anger at my colleagues for their lack of support and the manner in which I had been left to attend to

soccer all by myself. Later, I was overwhelmed and disgusted by the reactions and questions from my colleagues because we had not won a soccer match.

### **Reflection**

This experience of feeling abandoned and alone taught me the importance of having a mentor. This particular aspect of my memory-work assisted me in fine tuning my mentoring prowess in terms of constructing working relationships with novice teachers. This memory also reminded me that, as a mentor and school manager, I should always treat novice teachers with dignity. I should also be mindful that being a seasoned teacher would not necessarily make me an effective mentor. In fact, I know now that it takes hard work to guide and support those who are less experienced.

## **5.6 Obnoxious Circuit Manager's 'Team Visit'**

I anticipated that my second year of teaching at Vuka primary was going to be far better than the previous year. I was beginning to gain confidence because I would even participate in staff meetings by asking questions, voicing my opinions, and contributing to solutions. I had begun to feel a sense of belonging to the school and its culture. This was the year I thought I was ready to do what I had to without seeking assistance from my colleagues. I had gained confidence in conducting prayers on my own as well. I would motivate learners during assembly without fear. I also dared to convene sport meetings to convey important messages to the teachers. I was beginning to enjoy being one of the teaching staff at Vuka primary. Parents began to notice my efforts and treated me as one of their children and a valued member of the school community.

In the second term of my second year at the school, the principal informed the teaching staff of an imminent three-day visit by a circuit management team to the school. The principal spelt out a list of things the circuit management was expecting to find when they evaluated teachers and the school management team. One aspect was class visits, and they specified classrooms management, file management, as well as evidence of curriculum coverage. The principal told the teaching staff to be well prepared for the visit as the team could select any teacher to visit in the three days that they would be spending at the school.

I could recall the panic and the concern that erupted. As a novice teacher, I did not find the strength to ask what the circuit management team would expect of a novice teacher because I could sense that all the teachers and the principal were devastated by the news of this visit. Every morning during devotions the principal reminded the learners how they were supposed to behave in front of strangers. He pleaded with the learners and the teachers to come to school on time for he would be held accountable for anything that the circuit management team found lacking or inappropriate. I had already stressed the importance of displaying good behaviour to the learners should a circuit manager choose to visit my class.

The date for the visit arrived. It was a Monday and, as was normal, I was the first person to arrive at school, followed by the principal. However, on my arrival at the school on that fateful Monday, I was greeted by three Department of Education vehicles in the car bays from which thirteen officials disembarked. After I had greeting them, they asked to be escorted to the staff room. I did this and also signed the register. I then invited the team to sit while they waited for the principal to arrive. I was fearful of being in the same room as these officials and opted to wait in my classroom for the bell to ring.

It became clear that these officials were at the school on a fault-finding mission. This was evident when I spotted them in every corner of the school. As Goh et al. (2017) claim, most educational stakeholders think that the quality of teachers and the accomplishment of learners in schools are associated with the proficiency of the teachers. The team separated and visited all the strategic points in the school, from the assembly area to the main gate where learner latecomers would arrive, to the learners' toilets and, ultimately, the classrooms. An official (let us say a Mr Khan) was waiting for me and my learners in the classroom immediately after the morning assembly. I was terrified when I entered the classroom. Goh et al. (2017) point out that novice teachers are concerned when they are observed and evaluated in the classroom. I did not know whether I was supposed to greet Mr Khan again because I had seen and greeted him that morning before the bell rang. He was sitting on my chair. Mr Khan then asked me to show him my lesson plan in the teacher's file of the English lesson I was about to teach. As English teachers at school, we had agreed that we would use one lesson plan for a two-week cycle. For example, I would indicate the parts of speech that I would teach for two weeks as well as the methods I would use to teach. Therefore, I had already introduced adjectives in my previous lesson. When I started the lesson, I thought it prudent to remind the learners of the function of adjectives and to provide more examples on the chalkboard. I then distributed English textbooks

and read a comprehension passage. As I was still engaging the learners in the lesson, the official called me. He started by asking why was I teaching a lesson I had already taught and asked why I was reading. He asserted that I had to let the learners read on their own. I tried to explain that I was reinforcing what I had taught in the previous lesson because it linked to that day's lesson, but Mr Khan told me to take a seat and observe him teaching. I could hardly hold back the tears as I observed Mr Khan taking over my class. I did not have the courage to look at the learners while Mr Khan was teaching because I felt that they sensed I was aggravated by his insensitive behaviour. In my view, it was rude and embarrassing when he took charge of my lesson in such an arrogant manner. Breaux (2003) advises: "If we had no faults of our own, we would not take so much pleasure in noticing those of others" (p. 77). This clearly applied to Mr Khan. I believe that he could have waited and talked to me after I had finished what I had prepared for the learners that day. I felt that his main purpose was to humiliate me in front of my learners. I felt like quitting the teaching profession then and there because I felt I was not competent enough to teach my learners. I felt that I had let my family, school and myself down. The confidence that I had gained in the past year rapidly diminished.

Mr Khan left a report in the principal's office with findings and recommendations. He commented that I should learn to speak up, execute my lesson with confidence, and engage learners in my lesson. I could not find the words to express my emotions when I had to give an account of what had transpired in the classroom based on the report in the hands of the principal. I just apologised to the principal for letting him and the school down. However, I sensed that the principal was also furious about this report and Mr Khan's behaviour and attitude.

### **Reflection**

This memory-work illustrated that I needed to take interest in the emotions and feelings of novice teachers in my school. Remembering this incident confirmed that one of a mentor's responsibilities is to reassure novice teachers of their worth in the teaching profession, and this was what I decided to aim to do in my school. I could do this by commending novice teachers for their work and by encouraging them to do better if some areas needed attention. I understood that it would also be my task to give advice in the hope that it would lift their spirits in cases where they erred.

## **5.7 The Day I had to Prove my Worth**

When I was in my second year of teaching, I was again allocated to teach English and Natural Sciences in Grade 6. This was the year I promised myself to be one of the best teachers in the school. I was eager to use every opportunity to compete against other schools in extra-curricular activities such as spelling bees, Maths and Science Olympiads, creative writing, and other cultural competitions. Upon joining the school the previous year, the teachers had been reluctant to partake in such competitions, stating that it was a waste of time and energy on their part. However, I was anxious to gauge my learners' and my own skills against those of learners and teachers of other schools because I had grown up in a home where positive and healthy competition had been encouraged all the time.

My passion and my love for and belief in my learners made me want to try anything to improve my learners' knowledge and skills – particularly if I could do so by allowing them to compete against other schools. Although the school was challenged by insufficient resources, it did not dampen my spirit because I had been taught that teachers should always be innovative.

The Department issued an invitation to primary schools to participate in a Science Olympiad during the third term of that year. The third term in South African schools begins in the third week in July and lasts to the first week in October. The participating schools were then supposed to fill in forms detailing what they were going to exhibit on the day and send it back to the Department. The principal called the teachers who taught Natural Sciences and showed us the letter. A similar invitation had been issued the previous year but the Natural Sciences teachers had decided not to enter the competition and they had stressed that it was not compulsory. Three teachers taught Natural Sciences in the senior primary. Mr Mbatha taught Grades 4 and 5 and Miss Ndlovu taught Natural Sciences in Grade 7, while I taught Grade 6. They were seasoned teachers with experience in teaching the subject. We had never had a meeting together as Natural Sciences teachers to discuss or plan approaches to empower our learners in innovative ways. Consuegra and Engels (2016) argue that teacher collaboration is associated with nurturing and teacher professional learning. It was the first time that year that we met to discuss whether we should enter the Science Olympiad or not. There were clear instructions in the letter stating that the school would have to design, make, evaluate and present any scientific model associated with the curriculum for each grade. I told the two teachers that I was willing to

participate with my Grade 6 learners using one of the topics that we would be dealing with in the third term. I could sense that the two teachers did not like the idea of my participation in the competition. Mr Mbatha even mentioned that I was still new in the school and I should at least first attend the competition and see what it entailed before I could enter. However, I was adamant to expose my learners to competitions like this so they could also gauge themselves against learners from other schools. I told the two Natural Sciences teachers that entering the competition was not for me but for the learners in particular. I then reported to the principal that I was willing to enter my learners in the competition. The principal warned me that teachers before me had entered but the learners could not proceed to the next round. They thus felt that it was a waste of time and money to participate in such competitions. I stressed the point that I aimed to see my learners given a chance to participate just like I had done when I was in Grade 10.

I was overwhelmed by the excitement of my learners when I told them of the competition. I gave a brief explanation of what we needed to do. The competition required the grade to come up with any innovative scientific project related to the syllabus that would prove their understanding of the topic. We decided that the project would address the topic Energy and Change as we were dealing with that theme in that term. The learners had already learned about the simple electrical circuit, conductors, insulators, devices, and the symbols used in the circuit diagram.

When I asked for input on the project from my fellow Natural Sciences colleagues, they told me that there was nothing they could do to help me for they had warned me not to bother entering the competition. They informed the principal that I would make a mockery of our school if I entered the competition. Many of my colleagues advised that I should withdraw before it was too late. Not one teacher asked me what project I was planning and how they could assist us. I also began to doubt myself when the principal raised his concerns about the competition and I felt intimidated as I was still a novice teacher. He warned me that a lacklustre performance would never attract the attention of departmental officials and that it would be detrimental to our learners' confidence. Because I had promised my learners that we were going to the competition to learn from other learners, I decided to persevere. I was encouraged by my family, and that was all.

We decided to make a model of a wired car. We elected five learners to represent the grade. The team comprised of three boys and two girls selected from the three Grade 6 classes. We first had to investigate the problem by identifying the issue that needed to be addressed. Next we had to identify the electric circuit that could solve the problem. We also needed to know the material and electrical components we would need and the time it would take us to finish the project. One of the boys, Siyanda, was very good with his hands and his task was to make a rough and a neat sketch of a complete model with a circuit diagram. We asked all the Grade 6 learners to bring materials that we would need to finish the project. The class selected Nosipho to do the presentation. Nosipho was a very confident and outspoken girl. She was never easily intimidated by anyone because she knew that she was an academic high flyer.

On the day of the competition, we submitted a wonderful sketch of a model car with an electric circuit. We had constructed a remote controlled car with electric connections and devices. One learner had brought a motor and a remote control for his toy car that had broken. We used that motor to propel the car. We had to do a demonstration in the presence of all the teachers before we left for the competition. Nosipho gave a fascinating and educational presentation that left the teachers amazed. I was pleased with the efforts of all the learners and their enthusiasm to make the project a success. We came back with a trophy and certificate for second place and Nosipho was awarded an individual certificate for the best presenter in the competition. I was thrilled that I had listened to my heart and trusted the learners' ability to complete this project. Although I did not receive the kind of support I had envisaged from my colleagues, I had to soldier on with my learners. I learned that I might be new in the teaching profession but I also had the impetus to contribute positively to learners' academic attainment and self-belief. I also learned that one can never go wrong if one believes in what one is doing.

### **Reflection**

This memory-work taught me that novice teachers could be capable individuals with dreams that can be achieved. I understood then that, being a novice teacher mentor, I should always remember that some novice teachers might be innovative and possess higher order thinking skills beyond my own. As a mentor, I should embrace each novice teacher's ideals and help them manage their classrooms in innovative ways. Although there are many textbooks on teaching, nothing can replace experience and passion. Also, I learned that I needed to encourage novice teachers to devise diverse strategies and solutions to curb unruly behaviour in their classrooms. As a mentor, I now understand that involving learners in co-curricular activities,

particularly when one is still a novice teacher, could enhance harmony and cooperation in the classroom.

## **5.8 Reflecting on and Consolidating my Thoughts on the Impact of Support and the Lack of Support on Novice Teachers**

After recalling my memories of times when I lacked the support of my colleagues – and even that of the principal – when I was a novice teacher, it was prudent that I reflected on how these memories could aid me in becoming a useful and effective mentor of novice teachers. An important insight I gained was that I should develop a strong character that would enable me to withstand the storms that erupt not only when one is a novice teacher, but also when one mentors these young people in their first years of teaching. Additionally, I was reminded that I should allow myself to be vulnerable at times. I therefore learnt to understand the value of being supportive of vulnerable novice teachers who try to do new things but who may be miserable if they do not receive the necessary support.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

This part of my investigation responded to the first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support from my memories?* In this chapter, I gave a detailed account of some humiliating experiences that I had encountered as a novice teacher. I described and deliberated on my first unpleasant encounter with parents, the effect of corporal punishment on my learners, learner misbehaviour, and the lack of support from a circuit management team as well as from my colleagues. It was fundamental to evoke these veiled memories for they aided me in my response to the first research question. I learned that I needed to embrace every situation that I was faced with as a mentor and school manager, whether they were pleasant or unpleasant. I also understood that both mentors and novice teachers made mistakes now and then. Therefore, as a mentor, I should embrace the habit to learn from every situation – even a traumatic one – that occurs in a school. I also learned to persevere in situations that were overwhelming and often beyond my control.

In the next chapter (Chapter Six) shall explain how I engaged with novice teacher participants to answer research question 2: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner*

*behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* The novice teacher participants and I discussed and deliberated on issues pertaining to their experiences in the school where we were employed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### WRITING A NEW SCRIPT FOR MY ENGAGEMENT WITH NOVICE TEACHERS

#### **6.1 Introduction: Viewing Mentoring through the Lens of Novice Teachers' Experiences**

In the previous chapter, I concluded my response to the first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* To answer this research question, I recalled my experiences as a novice teacher when I was supported and also when I lacked support. The memory-work of lack of support aided me to reflect on myself as a mentor and school manager who had to guide novice teachers in my school. Such memory-work enabled me to refocus and face my mentoring responsibilities head-on. In the current chapter, I narrate the manner in which I engaged with novice teacher participants to assist me in addressing research question 2 of my self-study: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* Samaras (2011) states: "Self-study entails an ongoing dialogue about your research with others to better understand it yourself (p. 13)". I thus explore, exemplify and reflect on my learning through my exchanges with four novice teacher participants. I begin Chapter Six by describing the first formal meeting I held with the novice teachers. I then explore various narratives about strategies to succeed in learner behaviour support in the classroom, followed by examples of and discussions on learner behaviour as the novice teachers encountered it in their classrooms. I also present conversations in which the novice teachers divulged their experiences of embarrassing moments in their classrooms. I finally expand on my learning by reflecting on these conversations.

Some of the discussions were in IsiZulu to emphasise a particular point. We used IsiZulu because all the participants and I are Zulus and we generally speak IsiZulu when we are together.

#### **6.2 Perceptions of my Character and Skills as a Mentor (20 April 2018)**

Because I would embark on a study to explore mentoring novice teachers to improve learner behaviour support in my school, I requested four novice teachers to participate in my study. They agreed and also signed consent forms confirming their availability (see Appendix B).

They were assured of their anonymity and that their identities would not be revealed in any way.

I asked the novice teachers to write me letters to tell me what they thought of me as a deputy principal and a mentor to novice teachers. Although I had not yet begun the formal self-study research engagement with them, I had been mentoring them on an ad hoc basis. I hoped that their letters would help me to understand how they perceived my character and skills as a mentor from our informal mentoring interactions prior to the study.

I first showed them a letter I had written to my own unofficial mentor in my early years of teaching (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.1). The key message in that letter was to express my thanks to her as she had acted as my unofficial mentor and had provided support, guidance and protection during the first five vulnerable years of my teaching career. I needed to write a letter to let her know about the major role she had played in my development at that time. I showed the novice teachers the letter after they had agreed to be participants in the study and requested them not to exceed an A4 page. I also asked them to type the letters using the Times New Roman font. I urged them to be truthful as it would be in the interest of the study if they wrote about my true character as they perceived it. I explained that, for me to improve as a mentor, they should not be tempted to write ‘nice’ things simply because I was their deputy principal.

Nyholm et al. (2018) emphasise that a letter transmits essential meaning from one human being to another and is written for and addressed to a chosen reader. Below are copies of the letters that the novice teachers wrote and submitted to me. Most of the letters were sent to me via e-mail and one was hand-delivered. Pseudonyms were used in all the letters that are presented verbatim for authenticity. They were thus not edited in any way, except to leave out/change names that could compromise identities.

*Dear Mr K. Luthuli*

*I hope u doing well. I'm writing this letter to let you know about how inspirational you are to me. It would be impossible to count all the ways that you inspire me with and how good a mentor you are in my career. You've been such a good mentor and a role model to me. I remember when I*

*came to ... School in 2015, you took me under your wings and guided me. You made sure that I adjusted well in a new school.*

*You are my Senior but you treated me then and continue to treat me as equal. Your leadership skills are very rare to find. Sometimes I asked myself how you maintain this good character of yours. Then there is only one answer to that because it can't be that you put a mask for all these years I've known you. You are genuinely a nice, good and caring person. You want to see your juniors succeed.*

*You are consistent almost every day in the work ethics, wearing a smile regardless of circumstances. I've learnt the most important aspect of you:*

- ❖ Humbleness*
- ❖ Kindness*
- ❖ Respect*
- ❖ Tolerance*
- ❖ Do good to others*

*In closing, please note that it's a privilege to work with someone like you Sir, who inspires me every day. In you, I've found a big brother. One day I hope to inspire someone else as you are inspiring me.*

*Thank you so much Sir and may you continue to be such a good leader and stay blessed.*

*Yours in profession*

*Mrs Nomathemba Mabunda*

## **Reflection**

Respect, tolerance, kindness and humility are indispensable traits a manager and mentor should possess. When I commenced the study, I believed that these attributes could also be promoted in inexperienced teachers, particularly through mentoring sessions with them. As a mentor, I needed to encourage these novice teachers to exude some of these attributes in their classrooms. In turn, they would then exhibit humanity and thus enhance their learners' positive behaviour.

The second letter was written by a novice teacher and sent via email. Miss Mashobane had started teaching twelve months before the study and was in her second year of teaching.

*To my mentor*

*If I had to write everything on how I feel about you as my mentor, I would probably run out of ink. Mr K Luthuli, you are probably one of the best mentors I have come across. Your hard work, punctuality and disciplined nature make you the best mentor. You are professional and strict but still approachable. You make an individual want to dig a little deeper within themselves to be the best.*

*The amazing thing about you as a mentor is that you do not hold back information but you share it with others for them to perform their best. You allow the next person to hold your hand so that they reach their full potential. You let others blossom with you. Your supportive nature and the ability to address an individual whether they have done something wrong or good is most admirable. When feedback is to be given, you make sure that you give positive feedback while pointing the person to the correct direction. It helps that you have the "my door is always open" policy, therefore one is bound to come and ask for guidance.*

*The way that you hold your head high with so much confidence shows that you have been in the field for long and that has helped me build my confidence in the workplace. Your advice to always take on work with a smile makes it easy to work with less stress and therefore work is completed on time.*

*I didn't know how not to work hard but your strategies of how to work smart and not hard are really helpful since I have started implementing them. I may not be perfect at work as you are yet but with you a mentor on my side I can only promise not to disappoint. I wish you growth and that you share with others the skills that you share with me.*

*A great mentor makes work "fun" and, trust me, you are one of those mentors. Your positive energy has rubbed off on me. You are always working one would swear that you do not know the meaning of the word "break". Though this is good to keep your brain active and in the growth of your knowledge some advice from a mentee "do take a break sometimes".*

*Your mentee*

*M. Mashobane*

## Reflection

I realised that it was fundamental for me as a mentor to model behavioural practices such as punctuality and consistency when dealing with the novice teachers. Yirci (2017) reveals that the attributes of a successful mentor include having the capacity to motivate and encourage novice teachers and excelling at time management. Mentoring these novice teachers impelled me to be consistent and fair. I learned to be mindful of exuding a positive behaviour and attitude in the presence of these novice teachers, which they I hoped they would notice and emulate to inspire their learners.

The next letter was written by an Indian novice teacher who was later deployed to another school in Durban. Mr Chetty was temporarily employed as an educator by the School Governing Body.

*Dear Mr Luthuli*

*The future of any novice teacher in my school depends on the qualities and dedication of a remarkable mentor, Mr K. Luthuli. You have a special influence in modelling your subordinates, our features, character, abilities and knowledge. You share with us your vision about reality and your love for mentoring and humanity by challenging our creative spirits.*

*Your humour and good nature make long nights and tough deadlines much easier on your team. I believe that one of the most endearing qualities that you possess is genuineness. You cross all barriers and can connect with others and radiate great empathy.*

*You are a very admirable and alluring individual, still on better acquaintance after getting to know the true depths of your character you are a warm-hearted and intelligent person, a person who values education in one's life that plays a fundamental role in the development of any being. The kind and compassionate actions are the real you as a true humanitarian. You are an archetype and a model in everyday reality – an inexhaustible generator of consciousness for the new generation.*

*Your mentee*

*K. Chetty*

## Reflection

I learned that, as a mentor, I should have a positive influence on novice teachers. I learned that novice teachers' capacity to work collaboratively with one another would enhance positive learner behaviour. Gholam (2018) stresses that novice teachers and their mentors should share their struggles and successes. I also learned that opening a platform for sharing ideas and challenges would optimise their learning about classroom management.

I received the letter below after Ms Shenge had found a permanent teaching position in Gauteng province. Ms Shenge was employed in my school by the School Governing Body as a post level 1 teacher. She was employed immediately after completing her qualification at a university.

*Dear Mr Luthuli*

*I am writing this letter to thank you for being the kind and patient mentor that you have been to me. I remember my first day I came to school I did not have any clue how to manage a classroom. I was so scared of failing to do what was expected of me by the employer and also by learners. The school environment was different from my familiar environment which was varsity since I was newly appointed.*

*Everything was so difficult for me. I remember I could not even manage the classroom but things started to change after you took me under your wing. You taught me all that I needed to know about being a teacher. You taught me how to behave as a professional teacher in the school environment, what was expected of me and how to manage my classroom. Your leadership skills were key to boosting my confidence as a new teacher and to strive for what I wanted to achieve in this profession. Today I am glad you were my mentor because all that you taught me and what I have been coping from you I am implementing it in my new school.*

*Your mentorship did not only stop at the school level but even when I needed personal advice you were there for me to give it. It felt so easy to talk to you because of your advice without judging. I will always miss that about you. Your advice came from a warm, fatherly heart as well as that of a friend. I also like to thank you for standing up for us new teachers when others treated us unfairly. Not many people can do what you were doing for us. Truly, you were a Godsend. You are such a humble and loyal person. I am certain that your mentoring*

*came from a willing and good heart. I promise that all that you taught me will not go in vain and I will make you proud.*

*I wish you all the best throughout your career and life in general. May the good Lord bless you and keep you as you care for others who will come after me.*

*Your mentee*

*Nokubonga*

### **Reflection**

This letter reminded me that a high-quality mentorship relationship is fundamental in a school community. Building trust is a vital component of mentorship and key to making a professional relationship blossom. Gholam (2018) maintains that mentors must develop wholehearted relations with novice teachers. In the same way, novice teachers should establish trusting relationships with their learners which will culminate in effective classroom management.

The last letter came from Miss Mthethwa. She joined the school to do her practical in-service training in Grade R. After the in-service training, she was employed by the school to teach IsiZulu in Grade 1 to Grade 3. She had been in the school for two and a half years at the time of the study.

*Dear Mr K. Luthuli*

*It has been a pleasure to talk to you. This has been long overdue. I want to thank you for all your support and so I write this letter to tell you how much I appreciate the positive influence you have in my life.*

*When I first came here to do my practice and begin my journey in teaching, I was nervous and did not know what to expect and how to prepare lessons and guide the new learners I was assigned to. And I remember how to impress your confidence in me as you welcomed me to the school and my class. You spoke to me as a parent and that allowed me the confidence to approach you with any problem and you were always happy to assist me and you advised me that I should never worry about what people think.*

*In all the time I have known you, you've been humble and approachable and this has taught me the humility I use in my classroom and to listen and to be open to all my learners and give them the patience I learned from you.*

*Teaching for me has been more than a calling, as I am coming from a family background of teachers. I used to listen to my parents as they passionately talked about their learners and how proud they were of their achievements. This at times made me feel jealous of that relationship they had with their learners, and from your passion about teaching, you remind me and show me the love of teaching is deep and I feel that intense passion as I pass on my knowledge, guiding the next generation.*

*They say the best news about the person is read in his eulogy, but I want to take this opportunity to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for all that you have given me and I hope you can give others the same inspiration you have given me.*

*Kind regards*

*Nozuko Mthethwa*

## **Reflection**

It is always a remarkable feeling to learn of the appreciation another person feels for having received one's support. This letter reminded me that I should instil a sense of confidence in the novice teachers so that they would know that they could be successful in managing their classrooms. Wexler (2019) states that mentors present emotional backing and help novice teachers tackle every instant classroom management demand. Commending novice teachers for everything they do well could result in a competent and joyful teacher who manages her classroom with great zeal. I learned that positive compliments always bring out the best in a person. This is what my supervisor, Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, always did. She always showered me with compliments that boosted my self-esteem and lifted my spirit.

***Reflective journal entry (16 March 2018)***

*After reading all the letters that the novice teachers had sent me, I felt humbled and overwhelmed by what they had had to say. It is always a good feeling for the next person to describe your character and personality the way the novice teachers described mine. I also felt that everything the novice teachers wrote in those letters came from their hearts. Their letters lifted my confidence ... and would like to do more of the things they mentioned. They made me feel special. Although I appreciate everything that the novice teachers wrote about me, I should not get big-headed and think that I am the best teacher and mentor or that I have the greatest personality. I believe that it is people you meet and associate with that make you a better person. I also believe that the community played a significant role in shaping me to be what people think of me. I hope that these attributes will help to positively build my character and make me a better mentor.*

**6.3 The First Tentative Steps: Discussing ways to succeed in a classroom environment (06 April 2018)**

I met with the novice teacher participants for the first time in an unused office attached to the administration block. I felt it would be proper to meet in that office to avoid tensions that might have been caused by meeting in my office where teachers might have visited me for various reasons, such as explaining subject improvement plans.

I had earlier asked the novice teachers if they would mind if we were joined by two seasoned teachers who would also contribute to this study. The novice teachers stated that they would feel more comfortable if they met with me on their own. This request stemmed from the treatment they had received by some of the more experienced teachers. I then assured them that our first engagement would be exclusive.

Four novice teachers agreed to participate in the study. However, one participant took four months maternity leave and would only be back just before the second term June examination started. I asked the three novice teacher participants individually to have the first meeting on a Friday, to which they all agreed. I targeted a Friday because the school closed early every Friday. The school hours were determined by the School Governing Body and that Friday happened to be a short school day.

I was already awaiting the arrival of the participants in the office. They arrived together and sat on the chairs surrounding a table in the middle of the floor. The office was big enough to accommodate four people. It was well furnished with a round table and several chairs around it. It also had a cabinet and a small table with a kettle, cups, and utensils. Because of its location in the administration block, there was not sufficient sunlight or fresh air, and therefore we switched on the electric lights. An air conditioner and a newly fitted carpet made the office a suitable and comfortable place to work in. I provided stationary such as charts, marker pens, and a recorder that I thought we should use to record the discussions.

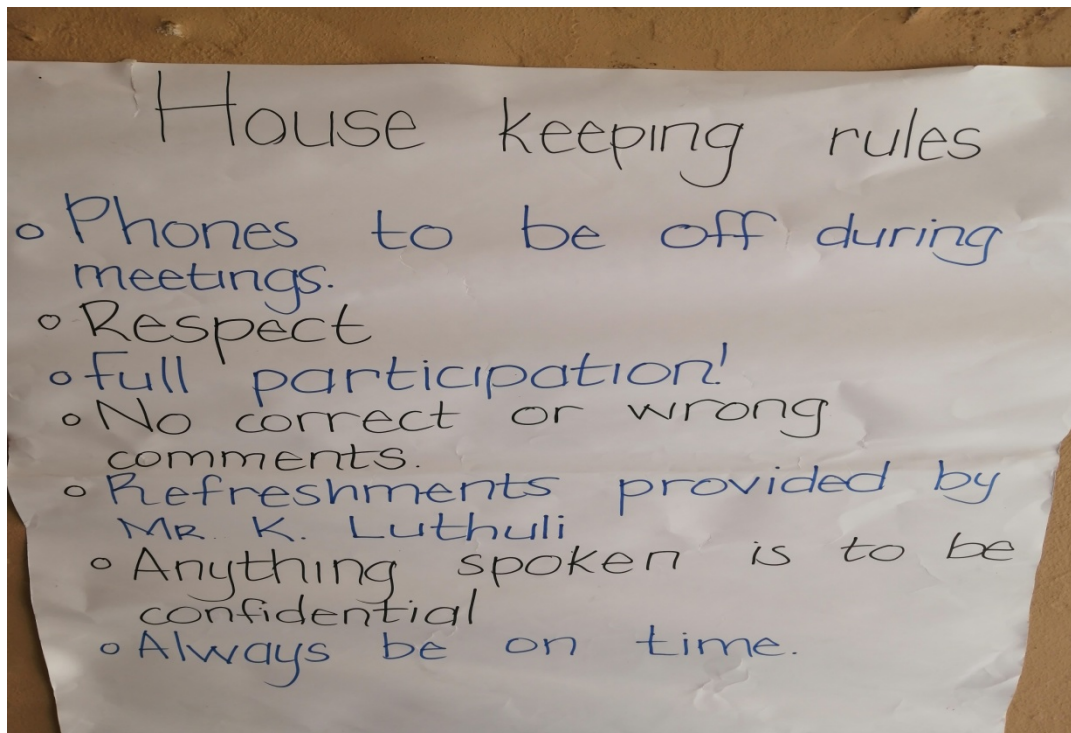
First, I greeted the three participants who seemed to be ready to get things started. I felt that it was essential for me to try and change the way the participants perceived me as their senior. I wanted them to feel free to air the fears and joys they encountered in the school and their classrooms without any reservations. Sowell (2017) points out that building a relationship with novice teachers enhances the mentor's capacity to work with and positively support them. Next, I offered them tea and biscuits. Afterwards, I discussed the purpose of our meeting and reminded them that the meeting had been convened on the strength of the agreement they had signed to be part of the research study that I was undertaking.

I then formally introduced myself to the participants. The reason for my introduction was that the participants might have wanted to know more about me. Apart from reiterating my name and surname, I also told them I had been born in Inanda, one of the oldest villages to the north of Durban. Durban is one of the biggest cities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The village was populated by ten families at the time I was born. Soon after my birth, my family relocated to a newly developed township nearby, namely Ntuzuma. I started school when I had been in Ntuzuma for five years. I spent my primary and high school life attending schools in Ntuzuma. After I had matriculated, I went to do my Primary Teachers Diploma at Ntuzuma College of Education. I also told them that I was married, had one child, and lived in Hillary. I finally informed them that I had been teaching for 24 years and that our school was the third school where I had been employed.

After this introduction, I felt that I had broken the ice. I then allowed each participant to introduce herself to everyone. There was a 3-minute debate about who was going to be first, until Miss Mabunda agreed to start. Miss Mabunda seemed the most mature of the three

participants because she was a bit older. She was followed by Miss Mashobane who was bubbly and an inquisitive young woman. She was the youngest of the three participants. She had joined the school a year before straight from college. The last participant to introduce herself was Ms Mthethwa. She was shy and the type of person who only spoke when spoken to.

After getting acquainted with one another, I proposed that we formulated 'housekeeping' rules for whenever we gathered for discussions. Miss Mashobane volunteered to be the scribe, stating in jest, "I have a better handwriting than any of you". As she took a chart and a marker to begin writing, Miss Mabunda suggested the first rule: "Guys, the first thing has to be the switching off of cell phones or be put in silent mode". I was intrigued that the fourth rule was that I should provide refreshments every time we met without fail. We all laughed when this rule was confirmed with aplomb.

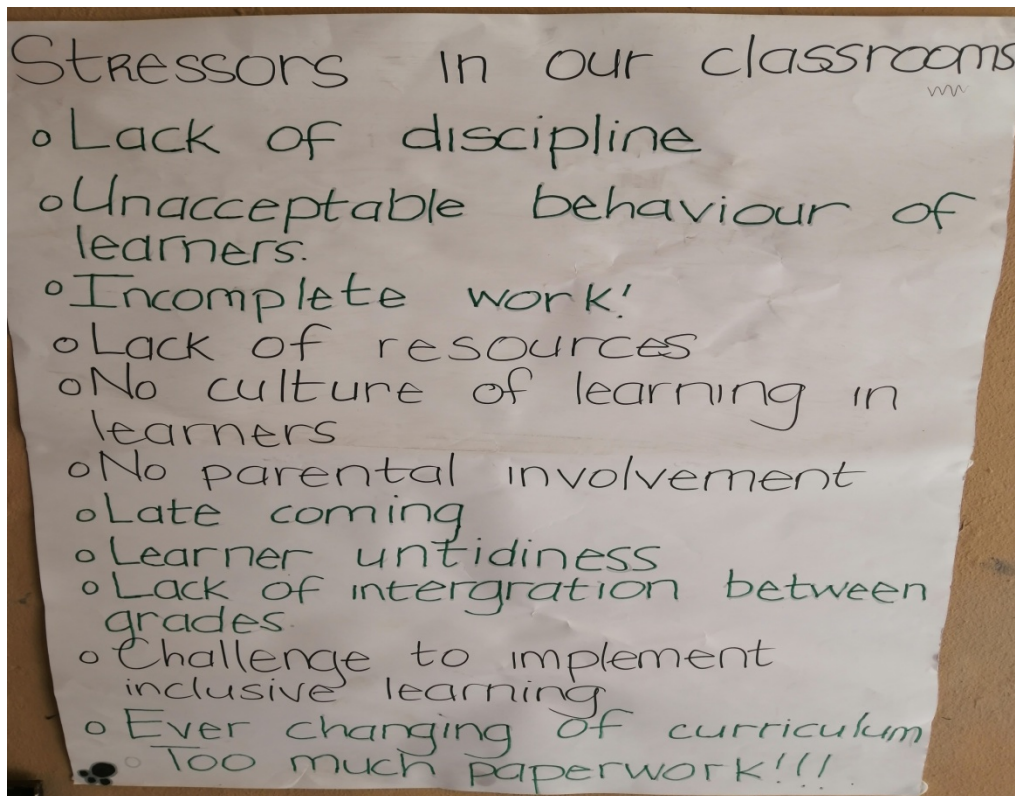


**Figure 6.1: Housekeeping rules proposed by the novice teacher participants**

Before we came to the gist of our meeting, I informed the participants that they were at liberty to address one another in a language of their choice – thus either IsiZulu or English. My school officially used English as the language of teaching and learning. However, our mother tongue was IsiZulu. This language is spoken by Black Zulu people who are originally from the province of KwaZulu-Natal but it is also spoken across South Africa.

I then posed the question, “*What do you find stressful in your classrooms?*” I had not planned to ask this question, but I posed it as I had observed some tense situations the novice teachers had faced whenever I had walked past their classrooms. At times the noise level from their classrooms had been too high and learners would only quiet down when they saw me standing in the corridor facing the class. I thus thought that this question would be relevant.

The participants then had time to discuss the issues that seemed most stressful in their classrooms, and thereafter summarised them on the chart provided (Figure 6.2). The first point of discussion was the learners’ lack of discipline. They had to take a brief pause to think of other issues as well. After some time, other points were also listed. Because we had agreed on a time limit for each session, I thanked them when the time had expired and we agreed to continue the discussion on their stressors next time we met. I then closed the session.



**Figure 6.2. Chart depicting stressors in novice teachers’ classrooms**

***Reflective journal entry (20 April 2018)***

*I learned a lot from my first meeting with the novice teacher participants as we had engaged at another level. First, I was surprised by the level of commitment and the manner in which they approached their participation. All three participants yearned for assistance and looked forward to dealing with the matters that bothered them in their classrooms. I was also excited to hear one of the participants indicating that it was about time to release the tension they experienced in their classrooms. I thought that it was important to give them a platform for sharing their frustrations and joys so that they would overcome some anxieties they experienced in the classroom. Palumbo and Sanacore (2007) argue that becoming a successful teacher is an exclusive journey and classroom management is only one major factor that can make the journey more successful for everyone. I also felt that the discussion sessions could serve as a form of therapy for the novice teachers and myself.*

**6.4 Second Session: The Crux of Learner Behaviour in Novice Teachers' Classrooms (07 May 2018)**

On this occasion the discussion meeting was held on a Monday. We had initially agreed to hold our sessions on Fridays but there had been a special staff meeting that had taken too long, and so we had agree to meet on the Monday. The fourth participant, Miss Zwide, had returned to school and I briefed her on what we had done in her absence. Miss Zwide was enthusiastic and eagerly wanted to contribute to the study. She said: "*I think this study will go a long way to help me gain confidence and the knowledge to deal with learner behaviour as well as to evaluate myself in my teaching.*"

We met in the same office where the first meeting had taken place. I had to be very diplomatic and cautious about how I conducted this discussion because of an earlier incident involving one of the participants. One parent had come to school to complain about her as she had alleged been continually hurling insults at and mistreating a Grade 7 child. The parent further reported that this trend had been going on since Grade 5. I had had to call the teacher concerned in to try and resolve the matter in an amicable manner. Ultimately, the parent had seemed happy about the outcome of the meeting. She had also tendered an apology to the teacher on behalf of her

child for misbehaving in class. However, I was not convinced that the teacher had really accepted the apology.

After we had had the refreshments I had been compelled in good spirit to provide, I posed a few pre-prepared questions that each one of us had to answer as an ice breaker. An ice breaker usually eases tension and diminishes anxiety. It also helped the participants to get to know each other not only on a professional level, but also on a personal level, as they shared information such as their nicknames, hobbies, and more. I also felt that the ice breaker would ensure optimal participation and that it would be fun. I had obtained these questions for the ice breaker from the internet.

I first asked each participant to choose any one of us as his or her partner in this game. First, Miss Mabunda selected Miss Mashobane, who in turn chose me as her partner. I then chose Miss Mthethwa. Miss Mthethwa chose Miss Zwide, and lastly, Miss Zwide chose Miss Mabunda. Every time a teacher picked another, she would take a folded paper that had a question. The trick was that the teacher who had chosen a partner would be allowed to ask him or her the question she had in her hand. The partner would have to answer that question in the presence of the group.

The first question from Miss Mabunda that was directed at Miss Mashobane was: "*What was the most embarrassing moment in your teen life?*" It was as if Miss Mashobane had seen the questions before our meeting for she instantly narrated a story from her life as a teenager:

*"It was a very hot day. My friends asked me to go to a swimming pool in my neighbourhood for a swim. We all jumped into the pool. I made a mistake of jumping into the deep end knowing very well I could not swim. I started to panic because I was under the water for a moment and I could not lift my head above water. I had heard that if you relax your body you would be able to swim. However, I managed to get to the edge of the pool and that is where my fun stopped. I could not go back to swim again."*

Everyone laughed at Miss Mashobane's story and it was her turn to ask her partner a question: "*How do you like to spend a rainy day?*" This question was directed at. I replied: "*I like to spend my rainy days in the kitchen cooking samp and ox tripe. It takes a lot of time preparing that kind of food. This food needs to be prepared at low heat and one has to have the time and passion to cook it. It is my favourite dish, I must say.*"

The next question that was directed at Miss Mthethwa was: *“If you could turn the ocean into a liquid other than water, which one would you pick?”* Before Miss Mthethwa could talk, Miss Mashobane murmured: *“Apple juice, Sir. Mmmm, that juice clears my mind every time I drink it.”* There was laughter in the room. Miss Mthethwa simply said:

*“It would have to be tea. I love tea a lot. I drink it three times or more a day”.*

I was very interested to hear the responses and the reactions of the participants to the next question: *“Who was the worst grade-school teacher you ever had?”* It was directed at Miss Zwide. My interest emanated from my memories of every negative incident in my childhood years at school. I could still recall teachers who had not done justice to my efforts to gain knowledge. When Miss Mthethwa posed the question, I observed the participants’ faces. I could sense that they did not have to give it much thought before they would answer the question. Miss Zwide simply said:

*“It has to be my Grade 9 Science teacher. That teacher was a loafer, and when she decided to come to school she would always be late. What irritated me the most about her was that she would come to class with a cane and test work she had not taught. She was so mean towards me and the rest of the class. I do not remember anything constructive she did or said to me since....We all have these teachers that we do not want to remember because of the way they treated us in class. I feel that some teachers of yesteryear got away with crimes if you look at the way they punished us.”*

I thought that we had dwelled enough on the question of worst teachers. The last question was: *“Did you ever do something wrong but managed to pin it on your siblings?”* As we were waiting for Miss Mabunda to respond, we all noticed Miss Zwide trying to control her laughter. She chipped in:

*"We were visited by a cousin who was seven years younger than I was. We shared the bed at night when we went to sleep and when I woke up I realised that I had wet myself. I quickly got up and put on some dry clothes. I then had to pour water on my cousin’s clothes to look like she was the one who had messed up. I then went on to report that she had wet the bed that night."*

Miss Zwide was very amused when she narrated the story. The other three participants were laughing at her and at the same time admonishing her for being stone-hearted. In the end, Miss

Mabunda did not get a chance to answer the question because time had run out. The participants enjoyed the activity and Miss Mashobane wanted to know how I had thought of such questions for an ice breaker. I confessed that I had found them on the internet. I shared the idea that teachers should bring such exciting activities into their classrooms before the start of a lesson and then observe how the rest of the lesson unfolded. I explained that, just like teachers, learners like to engage in fascinating, exciting and thought-provoking activities. I also urged them to let their learners describe their ideas and feelings about an ideal teacher in drawings or writing tasks. Miss Mthethwa said that she had never attempted to do anything like what we had just done. She said she had found the activity very amusing and would like me to help her look for ice breakers that would be suitable for her Grade 3 class.

Our next activity was to discuss the list the participants had drawn up about what they found most stressful in their classrooms. The chart was already pasted on the wall to remind the participants of what they had written down the previous week. Miss Zwide read the points for the first time. I asked the participants if they had written those points down in the order of importance, but they had not. *“But Sir, the first one, lack of discipline from learners, is the core in my view. All the other points we wrote on the chart are closely related to the main point of learner discipline,”* said Miss Mabunda in a very serious and worried tone. However, Miss Zwide questioned the validity of the points on the chart. She said:

*“The points on the chart were developed by teachers. The reason I say this is that each one of them says ‘learner this’, ‘learner that’. If learners were also given the same opportunity they would point a finger at their teachers as well. How interesting! As teachers, we also need to judge ourselves. For instance, do I arrive early for my lessons or do I come ten minutes late?”*

Palumbo and Canacore (2007) state that, to solve learner misbehaviour before it explodes, the teacher is supposed to commence teaching on time. Miss Mthethwa said:

*“For me, the main point here has to be the lack of resources. If I come to class without chalk or if I walk into the class of 35 learners with only ten readers, already that creates a problem. True, we as teachers are the ones who perpetuate learner misbehaviour. I think at times we take these learners for granted. You find a male teacher dressing as if he is going to the beach. I do not think that learners would take that teacher seriously.”*

Hayward (2015) notes that “the clothes that teachers wear are a powerful statement of who they are” (p. 2). In my view this is true as, discipline begins with us. If a teacher looks professional and behaves accordingly, then the chances that learners might misbehave are slim.

These comments led to my next question: “*What do you think leads to a lack of learner discipline in your classrooms?*” Miss Mabunda was the first to associate lack of learner discipline with learners’ background:

*“The learners that we teach come from diverse cultural backgrounds and that makes it difficult for me to handle some of their behaviours in my class. Our main job is to impart knowledge to these learners, but at times we find ourselves becoming what we were not trained to be – police, social workers, priests, nurses, and so on.”*

Gholam (2018) observes that novice teachers discover many things that test them in the classroom, including understanding differentiation. Miss Mashobane understood this, and also commented:

*“I feel that parents have to be fully involved in their children’s lives and should not let the teachers see what they can do with their children in terms of discipline. My take on this is that lack of discipline among learners begins with us, the teachers. I believe that learners come to the classroom as clean slates and it is up to the teachers to mould learners to what they want them to be. Learners have to adapt to the culture of the school that embraces everyone, regardless of their race, culture and heritage. Learners should behave exactly the way you expect them to. Although I am a beginning teacher in the school, I have noticed that learners have this tendency of weighing teachers. If one teacher enters the class, then it is free for all for the learners, but if another comes into the same class, the learners are ready to be engaged in learning.”*

Hayward (2015) states: “Learners might have behaved badly in one class, but when they arrive outside those [disciplined] teachers’ classrooms, their behaviour somersaults from shocking to splendid” (p. 1). In this context, Miss Zwide commented as follows:

*“I believe that if I keep the learners occupied at all times, we may experience a decrease in learner misbehaviour. One more thing, if we make sure that we are at the classroom door five minutes before the lesson commences, learners will get used to that reality and will have no time to misbehave. It all boils down to self-discipline. Teachers must learn to be consistent in the way they conduct themselves in front of learners. We shall all*

*have pleasant classrooms to go to if we first optimise the level of professionalism in ourselves.”*

I asked the participants: *“In your view, how can you then minimise ill-discipline tendencies in your classrooms?”* There was a moment of silence. I thought that perhaps the novice teachers did not have any strategies in place to curb ill-discipline in their classrooms, or they were too shy to share their ideas because they might think they were not yet good teachers. I reminded the participants once more that discussions of this nature were very important to each of us and that every participant’s opinion or suggestions could benefit all of us. That was when Miss Zwide spoke up:

*“Sir, you (as a manager) gave us disciplinary guidelines that we use in our classrooms for misbehaving learners. I think that the book is a waste of time because our learners are not worried when we record what they have done wrong in that book. Sending them to the office after three incidents of misbehaviour does not yield a positive outcome; instead, learners become more unruly and this makes one very despondent.”*

Mrs Mabunda corroborated this view and added in a stressed tone:

*“We are not even allowed to raise our voices at the learners any more. If you do so, they use ‘emotional and verbal abuse’ terms. We do not know what to do and it is frustrating, to say the least!”* She further stressed the issue of learners’ background: *“We never tried to be silly at school during our schooling days because we knew the consequences of misbehaviour once it reached our parents’ ears. Our parents would reprimand us in front of other learners and you would end up being embarrassed.”*

Miss Mashobane cut in:

*“Even more so, we would never dare misbehave anyhow because of the corporal punishment meted to us by the teachers themselves.”*

I felt that we had spent a lot of time deliberating the points on the chart as stressors these teachers faced in their classrooms. I then asked the participants to consolidate what they had written on the chart by summarising their views. Miss Mashobane did not mince her words:

*“For me, the issue of integration is very important. I must be aware of the behaviour, academic attainment, and learners’ state of health as well as the involvement of parents in their children’s education. Teachers should talk about learners’ progress and their*

*state of social behaviour. Each teacher has her own culture of teaching and learning. Therefore a learner might miss the culture of learning and teaching that happened the previous year.”*

I posed another question: “*How do you find teaching learners who come from diverse or multicultural backgrounds?*” Miss Zwide responded in a trembling voice:

*“I had a learner in my class who looked down on other learners. I noticed that he was very reluctant to be part of the group whenever they had to do work in groups. When I asked him why he did not want to be with his peers, he simply told me that his mother said he should not mix with children who were not like him. This was evident when his mother came to school and asked for her child to go to an Indian teacher’s classroom. Next thing, I saw him in my Indian colleague’s classroom with no one explaining why he had moved from my class. To tell you the truth, I was very angry. I may be a beginner teacher, I may be Black, but that does not mean that I am less human or less of a teacher? These are some of the things that demoralise us, Sir.”*

Miss Mthethwa supported this argument and said:

*“As you know, I am an IsiZulu teacher in the Foundation Phase. It is a very difficult task for me to deal with learners who have an attitude about the language. You find parents complaining to the principal about IsiZulu. One parent instructed me to teach her child in English. I had to remind the parent that the IsiZulu language is a subject and has to be taught in IsiZulu. However, I do code switching now and then to accommodate those learners whose mother tongue is not IsiZulu. The majority of learners in the classes I teach are foreign nationals. These learners come to school at the start of the school year not knowing the IsiZulu language, but because they are determined, they master it. Their parents also never come to tell the teacher what to do, but if or when they come to school they ask what they can do to help their children learn IsiZulu.”*

We had to stop there for the day for one hour had passed. I then thanked the participants for their inputs.

***Reflective journal entry (09 May 2018)***

*I believe that this was a very informative and interesting discussion with the participants. They raised a variety of important aspects of teaching that proved to be stumbling blocks in the transmission of knowledge to learners. I also learned that, as a teacher, I should try to do the right thing all the time. People will always remember those teachers who did not do justice to them during their days of schooling. From these thought-provoking comments, the participants could also learn from one another as very important points had been raised regarding learner behaviour and discipline that is dependent on teacher's fairness and professionalism.*

**6.5 Third Discussion: Embarrassing Revelations in a Vibrant Atmosphere  
(28 May 2018)**

On this day we met in my office. The reason for this change of venue was that the other office was temporarily used by students from social welfare development. The participants had no objections. My office was smaller than the one we normally used and it was further away from the classrooms as it was situated on the upper floor of the school building. My office was located in the central part of the school facing the assembly area. We would not be disturbed by learner movements in the corridors because the classrooms were in the two blocks attached to the school hall. My office was furnished with a medium-size round table and four chairs. My chair was the one side on one side of the table. There were enough chairs and light refreshments were again provided.

As soon as the participants arrived, they made tea and had some biscuits. For the ice breaker, I passed around a roll of toilet paper and invited the participants to take as much as they would need 'to get the job done'. After everyone had had a good laugh about the size of the paper they had taken, I told them that, for every sheet of toilet paper they had ripped off, they had to tell the group one thing about themselves. They all laughed aloud as they counted the number of sheets they each had taken. This ice breaker idea had also been found on the internet.

Miss Mashobane started. She had ripped off about five sheets of toilet paper. She started by saying "*I am beautiful, I am intelligent, I am sometimes lazy, I am polite, and very inquisitive.*"

It was then Miss Zwide's turn who had jokingly ripped off a handful of toilet paper. She did not even count the pieces. She said: *"For me, I would say I am humble, down to earth, I am also intelligent, I am an extrovert, I love sport, and I think I should stop there for now."* We were not pleased that Miss Zwide would not provide as much information as the sheets of toilet paper in her hand, but Miss Mthethwa was ready to tell us about herself. She had ripped off two sheets of the toilet paper and everyone had had a good laugh about it. She said: *"I am a good-hearted and forgiving person."* Miss Mabunda had four sheets of toilet paper and she said: *"I am a straight-forward person, not easily intimidated, I am also friendly and easy-going."* I had ripped off seven pieces of toilet paper and this is what I had to say: *"I am a tolerant person, am very considerate, I have a good heart, I am trustworthy, I am also responsible, I am a passionate person, and I am also loving."*

I felt that I needed to do this ice breaker because I needed to get to know my participants' characters on a personal level. I also thought that this was a perfect opportunity for the participants to get to know my personality traits as well. I felt that ice breakers like these created a positive bond among colleagues in the workplace. I observed that the ice breakers made the participants feel at ease and they facilitated more serious deliberations on matters of concern during the gatherings. In this instance, the ice breaker revealed much about ourselves as all nodded as a sign of approval every time a participant described herself, and also when I did so.

One of our discussion questions for this session was: *"How do you feel about your role of being a class teacher?"* Momentarily, all the participants looked as if they did not understand the question. Miss Mabunda smiled cautiously and asked me to repeat the question, which I did. Miss Mabunda responded first:

*"Mina ngesingami, Sir, [in my view, Sir] my role of being a class teacher is that the kids are a handful and very challenging. It is also a handful in the sense that there are many roles that a class teacher has to perform. You see, I have to become a manager, psychologist, law enforcer, and more. Having to be all of these is too much because you are also expected to deliver subject matter. We then get physically and emotionally drained at times. As a class teacher, I also have to play the role of a parent to my learners who come from different backgrounds and that is strenuous on its own. For me, being a class teacher is challenging because you are expected to be in class teaching, assessing, and doing paperwork."*

Richter et al. (2013) argue that the first years of teaching “...are frequently described as especially stressful in the socialisation of novice teachers” (p. 1).

Miss Zwide was next:

*“I also agree that as class teachers we have to execute our roles adequately. But first and foremost my role is to teach. Teaching is the act of imparting knowledge and skills to learners. This process ideally is not a challenge. However, the receptive end [the learners] can be a challenge. They are not stagnant but social, which means they are not the same. The ever-changing concepts and ideas that a teacher is to impart knowledge into these non-stagnant learners is a challenge.”*

Miss Mthethwa responded in a concerned voice:

*“All these roles that a teacher has to play in the classroom as a class teacher make me regret becoming a teacher. I am saying this, Sir, because I am still young myself and do not have a child of my own, but I am expected to perfect the task of being a mother to these learners who come with different attitudes to my class. I have now been teaching for two years and I am not so sure that teaching is my ideal career choice. What frustrates me the most is how the Department of Basic Education policies are drawn up. I sometimes feel that the powers that be did not take into cognisance that teachers are also human beings, they have emotions just like everyone else.”*

I then asked Miss Mthethwa what had made her raise the issue of policies. She said:

*“Besides ensuring a culture of teaching and learning in my classroom, I feel that, as my colleagues have said, I have to bond with my learners. I spend a lot of time with learners and for me to play other roles satisfactory I must be given the leeway to do so. I feel that some of the policies constrain us from perform our duties to the fullest.”*

I asked Miss Mthethwa to give an example of policy constraints. She continued:

*“I remember when one of the learners in my class was in serious pain from a toothache. I had pain tablets to administer but could not because you had warned us, Sir, never to give learners any medication, no matter what. Now, how would I completely be of good service to my learners if I am forbidden to perform some of my roles freely? As I had mentioned before, we also have emotions as teachers. We become angry with learners at times. However, I am not allowed to scold learners if they have done something*

wrong. If I do so, then I have violated children's right in the South African Schools Act, but what about my rights as a teacher? What about me being a parent to this child? I think that is what frustrates me the most. This leaves a question in my mind which says, is education what it is supposed to be in terms of discipline and the amount of work we have to cover?"

Morrell (2001) points out that teachers are often expected to execute more roles than required and cope with circumstances beyond their control. Miss Mashobane responded to the question as follows:

*"First of all, I believe that teaching is a calling. I think if one has that calling, which I think I have, I do not feel the burden of being a class teacher. My main role is to teach and I also accommodate other learners that slack behind. I treat my learners as my children in such a way that I even share my lunch with a learner who does not have money to buy his or her lunch. Mina ngiyakhuluma nezingane zami [I talk with my learners] about anything and I think that is why we understand one another."*

Miss Mabunda cut in:

*"I understand what you are saying, Miss, but at times you become wary of offering a learner anything to eat. Should a learner become sick, a parent would come running to report you and you may find yourself kicked out of the system for merely trying to be a parent to a learner."*

Miss Mashobane stated reflectively:

*"I think you are correct there, Miss. You know, I believe that our hands are tied. Certain people out there conduct research studies just like you, Sir, and they are not in our shoes. They do not feel what we feel. These people never come and get true perspectives at grassroots level. This leaves us teachers useless, unwanted and a mockery in comparison to other professions. This even boils down to learner subject content. As a teacher, I feel I am restricted to teach according to learners' strengths as I see fit. We teach learners with different learning capabilities. It is important that, as a teacher in my class, I cater for every learner in terms of his or her academic attainment and potential. I am also a new teacher and I feel that teaching is not as exciting as I thought it would be."*

Miss Zwide remarked:

*“I do not think that the red tape attached to our working programme these days was in existence in the old days. Most of the teachers who taught us had love of teaching at heart. They even enjoyed the support that came from our parents. I remember my high school teacher who acted as a parent and supported me throughout my high school life. I would always come late to class for her subject, Accounting. She asked me the reason why I was always late to class and I told her that I walk over seven kilometres to and from school since my parents were unemployed and could not afford my bus fare. From that day my teacher gave me money for transport. She would sit me down and talk to me about improving my marks in her subject. I managed to get very good results in all subjects in Grade 12 and she paid for my registration at university as well as my transport fees the following year. That is the kind of teacher I want to become to my learners. I also want to change at least the life of one learner each year because I know how it feels to be loved and cared for by your teacher. You even work hard in your studies not to disappoint your teacher.”*

Miss Mashobane corroborated these views. She stated:

*“This shows that we also have to care for these children even when they are not performing according to our desired standards. Our acts in class might have a negative or positive impact on the lives of these children in the distant future. I would not want to be one of those teachers that did not contribute positively to the lives of my learners. We also fail to realise that some of the disruptive learners in class are capable of doing well academically. They might need just a little attention to find their groove.”*

I then asked the participants if they had ever had joyful moments in their classrooms. They all nodded as a sign of agreement. Miss Mashobane immediately said:

*“I was just sharing with Miss Mthethwa a joyful moment I had in my class today. There is this boy who is struggling in my class. I was so shocked when he got a seven out of ten for an English activity. I made him stand in front of the class and learners clapped hands for him. I could also see that he was so thrilled and liked the attention he was getting from me and his peers. What made me so happy is that we are there as teachers to impart knowledge to our learners. There is nothing more pleasing to realise that what you have taught has managed to get through to your learners.”* She continued excitedly: *“Playing with my learners gives me such delight in my heart. I also think my learners*

*understand me better when we play. As we all know, most of these learners have a negative attitude towards the IsiZulu language that I teach. I try and change my teaching strategies every time I teach a lesson.”*

I then felt that we had spent enough time deliberating the role of being a class teacher and posed the next question: “*How would you describe learner behaviour in your classrooms?*” Miss Zwide was the first to answer:

*“For me, my learners behave very well. I only give them work to do and they know that I expect them to be engaged in their work without misbehaving. I must confess, Sir, my learners only begin to behave after some intimidation!”*

I asked Miss Zwide to give me one example of how she usually ‘intimidated’ misbehaving learners. She said:

*“I just tell them that if you misbehave in my class, ngiyakugqubuza bese ngikuyisa kuthishomkhulu [I just knock you down and then send you to the office]”.*

I asked if they behaved well by choice or if they were scared of being knocked down. She replied:

*“I think it is a combination of the two, Sir. It might be that they are scared of my intimidation, but because it works for me I will continue using it in my class. I felt bad, though, when one girl wet herself because I think she was afraid of asking to go to the toilet. I realise that I have to loosen up a bit since these learners are still trying to get to know me better after returning from maternity leave. There are those learners who are behaving well, though.”*

Miss Mabunda was also quick to respond as follows:

*“I try so hard not to let the learners do as they please when I am in the classroom, but it is difficult. I think learners take advantage of us because we are new in the school.”*

Jonson (2008) warns that one of the biggest sources of teacher disquiet and the challenges they experienced in terms of classroom management is the continuing task of maintaining control in the class. Miss Mthethwa offered the following comment:

*“If you are strict as a teacher, learners will do their work without any mishap. However, if you become stricter, learners become self-absorbed and are scared to speak to the teacher, hence the problems of finding a learner having wet herself in the classroom.”*

Miss Mashobane made the following suggestion:

*“Learners must get to understand your character as a teacher, I would say. They must know when it is time to play and when it is time to be serious. Other teachers are complaining that my class only shows respect to me because I am a form teacher but they misbehave towards other teachers. I think this is caused by the level of understanding between my class and me. Other teachers do not have that bond that I share with my class. I so wish I was assigned to teach all the subjects to my class and I do not have to move from one class to another.”*

Miss Mthethwa joined in, saying:

*“I think no matter how strict you are as a teacher, learners also need a breathing space. I see that when they make soft noises when I am busy marking their books. I allow that to happen because they acknowledge that there is a teacher and they should not disturb me by speaking at the top of their voices. I also do not want to use the word ‘strict’. I think the appropriate word to use here is ‘drawing the line’. As a teacher, I must make my learners know when to draw the line.”*

I then asked the participants: *“What are your reactions towards those learners who still misbehave even after you have drawn the line?”* Miss Mashobane answered as follows:

*“I have a group of misbehaving learners in my class. I put them in one group as a seating arrangement. I made the most mischievous boy responsible for the group. For example, he makes sure that all the work is finished on time. He also collects books and submits them to me for marking. Although they are still misbehaving, they know they do not have to disturb the class during teaching and learning.”*

Miss Zwide said:

*“I am dealing with younger learners, Grade 3s. I only speak about behaviour in the whole class. It only becomes serious when I have to call a learner individually to my desk. They then become aware that they should stop misbehaving straight away. It works for me because I always tell them that if it happens that you are called to this table*

*because of misbehaviour, then you are in serious trouble. I think it is easier to curb misbehaviour in the Foundation Phase than in the Intermediate and Senior phases.”*

I asked if it had ever occurred to them that they might be the cause of learner misbehaviour at some point during the teaching programme. I observed that Miss Mashobane was eager to answer. She thought for a moment and then said:

*“Mmmmh, Sir, this question makes me think of my first year here at the school. A few months ago, when I was asked to teach Maths in Grade 6, there was this one section I hated even when I was still a learner myself - the long division method. Because I was fairly new in the school and I was scared of asking my HoD, or any other teacher for that matter, for assistance, I told myself that I was going to find a good method for teaching the long division from books. Little did I know that I knew nothing about long division. I only realised that when I got to class and could not even understand my own explanation of steps for long division. The level of noise from the learners was uncontrollable. I kept on looking at my watch, eagerly waiting for the bell to ring so I could get out of the class. I was saved by Obinna who asked if he could do one sum I had written on the board. [Obinna is one of the learners in Miss Mashobane’s classroom]. He went on to teach the class the quick and easy steps to do long division. Whilst Obinna was explaining to the class, I was also paying attention to what he was saying and that is how I managed to get to class and teach long division the next day.”*

We could not stop laughing at Miss Mashobane story. Her honesty gave other participants the courage to come up with their own stories of embarrassing moments in their classrooms. For example, Miss Zwide narrated the following story:

*"I also tried to teach fractions in my grade. At times you just get to the class having not done enough preparation for the day and that is exactly what happened to me last Wednesday. I was not convinced of what I was trying to deliver to the learners. I ended up shouting at them, telling them to keep quiet because I thought they could see I was not confident about how I was teaching them. Mind you, these are Grade 3 learners. What I am trying to say, Sir, is that going to class not fully prepared might cause learner disruptive behaviour.”*

Looking sad, Miss Mabunda said:

*“I am happy and a bit relieved, Sir, that we can talk about these things. Although they are a bit embarrassing I think they make us grow. It happens to all of us, Sir. I once told learners to write three paragraphs about their favourite animal. I had not planned anything for IsiZulu that day and I wanted to keep them busy. Pandemonium started when the learners asked me the names of their favourite animals in the IsiZulu language. I could not answer as I did not know. I then asked the prefect to write down the names of animals learners had chosen to write about. I then went to the staff room to Google the names of all those animals but I could hear the noise from the classroom as I was still writing them down. That day I felt like I had cheated on my learners and the profession itself, and I decided never to go to class unprepared.”*

To close our discussion, I shared my view that we often caused learner misbehaviour in our classrooms. I reminded them of the stories they had shared and focused on the behaviour pattern of learners every time a teacher would not be fully prepared for a lesson. We discussed the issue of feeling isolated in a classroom. It then became apparent that subject committees for teachers who taught the same subject were not effective in my school as they did not seem to support those who experienced challenges regarding a certain topic. I also mentioned that it was time teachers met to discuss strategies in various subjects to avoid being a lone individual who might ultimately end up hating the teaching profession because of unresolved challenges. At the end of the session, I thanked the novice teachers for the inputs they had offered so wholeheartedly.

***Reflective journal entry (29 May 2018)***

*During this discussion session the participants were brave enough to reveal their innermost secrets and narrate embarrassing events that had occurred in their classrooms. I learned a lot from the way they described the difficulties they had sometimes encountered. Clearly, they were often on their own and had no one to share their anxieties with. I felt that, as a manager, I had not been doing enough to induct them as novices as smoothly as possible. I also felt that coming together to talk about issues that posed challenges in their teaching career – particularly learner misbehaviour – could go a long way in helping us reflect on and rectify our mistakes in the future. Sokal, Smith and Mowat (2003) suggest that novice teachers’ conundrum is their incapability to manage learner behaviour. This is exacerbated when they are unsupported by school management teams. I was excited to learn that the participants looked forward to these sessions*

*because they felt comfortable airing their views without being judged, ridiculed, or misunderstood by others.*

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described how I collaborated with novice teacher participants in response to the second research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* We discussed ways in which novice teachers could employ successful classroom management strategies, with particular focus on learner behaviour support. To conclude, the novice teachers narrated some challenges they had encountered in their classrooms.

In my reflections on the letters and conversations that were presented in this chapter, I discovered that, as a mentor, I had to forge solid working relationships with novice teachers as this could help optimise positive learner behaviour in their classrooms. This could be done by spending time with novice teachers and discussing classroom management issues relating to positive learner behaviour. I came to understand that uninterrupted lessons by novice teachers would lead to meaningful teaching and learning. I also realised that, by interacting positively with novice teachers on issues related to classroom management, I could help ease the tensions that arise due to learners' unruly behaviour. Moreover, by spending time and interacting with these four novice teachers, my own learning was enriched.

In Chapter Seven, I shall extend the discourse on what I learned about mentoring novice teachers in my school. I shall further articulate my hopes for them in terms of their classroom management practices and describe my efforts to assist and support the growth of these novice teachers.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WE LEARN AS WE GO

#### 7.1 Introduction: A Journey of a Thousand Memories

In the previous chapter, I described how I collaborated with the novice teacher participants in response to my second research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* My main focus was to first congregate formally with the participants and hold discussions on what to expect in our forthcoming sessions. We then discussed diverse classroom techniques that novice teachers could employ to succeed in learner behaviour support. They also shared narratives of learner misbehaviour and challenges that they had stumbled upon in their classrooms. We concluded our discussions (Chapter Six) by uncovering distressing moments that exacerbated learner misbehaviour. My most important learning was that I needed to create a positive relationship with all novice teachers and facilitate robust interactions with them. I learned that continual dialogue sessions with novice teachers could aid me in supporting them to find ways of dealing constructively with unwarranted learner behaviour in the classroom.

In this chapter, I narrate how I further engaged with the novice teacher participants in multiple discussions about their experiences, dilemmas, anxieties, and the joys they experienced. I describe how I continued to collaborate with the participants to address research question 2: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* I first present the novice teachers' comments about their responsibilities in terms of learner behaviour support. Their words are presented verbatim as far as possible. I also discuss their views on the integration and use of multiple teaching methods to curb unruly learner behaviour in the classroom. Next, I present the novice teachers' reflections on their character traits that supported their management of learner behaviour, and I present their written narratives of their own experiences of misbehaviour when they were at school. Photographs that had been taken by them were used to stir their memories. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my overall learning based on the highlights presented in Chapter Seven.

I chose the title *We learn as we go* for this chapter because I believe that we can acquire knowledge and improve our practice by engaging in dialogue with others about our work and responsibilities on a daily basis.

## **7.2 A Vibrant Session with Novice Teacher Participants: Tying up the Loose Ends (23 Julie 2018)**

Term three is one of the shortest terms in the school year. My school offered most of the extra-mural activities that we organised, such as a fun walk, Grade 6 and Grade 7 excursions, and a market day, in the third term. This affected my data generation plans because most of the Fridays in term three were no longer available for discussion sessions. However, one Friday was available and we agreed to meet on this day (see date above). There was no time to commence our discussion with an ice breaker and I started immediately with the questions I had prepared.

The teacher participants looked eager to begin the discussions. As this was already the third term of the school year, I assumed that they would have learned a lot more about their responsibilities as teachers. I thus asked: *“How has learning about the responsibilities of a teacher changed your outlook on learner behaviour support?”* There was a moment of silence until I was asked by Miss Mthethwa to repeat the question, which I did. There was still silence. I observed the participants gazing at one another as if each was waiting for another to start talking. Miss Zwide responded first:

*“I remember when I first came to the school, Sir, (sighing). My responsibility was to teach and ensure unity in the classroom at all times. I have now learned that I need to accommodate each learner in my class without focusing on their behavioural patterns or their academic attainment – or lack thereof. I have observed that I have to take every learner with me because if I focus more on certain individuals, others will be left out and then begin to disrupt the entire class.”*

Miss Mabunda commented in gentle tones:

*“... I have learned that I always have to play the role of a mother for my learners. Some of these learners, Sir, come to school carrying heavy burdens on their little shoulders. I am saying this with a heavy heart, Sir (sighing). I once reprimanded this one particular*

*boy who wet himself for two days in succession in the classroom. What aggravated me was that he came to school without finishing his homework and he would not give me a sound explanation for why he did not attempt to do his homework. After some time I learned that he had been molested by his stepfather on several occasions. This boy's mother would leave him with his stepfather at night as she was working night shifts. The mother told me that the boy was taking HIV medication because the stepfather had been diagnosed with it a while ago."*

I could see tears rolling down Miss Mabunda's cheeks as she narrated the story. The rest of us could not meet her eyes, for we were all in tears. After some time Miss Mabunda continued:

*"I think that was the day I learned that I should put myself in the shoes of these learners before I became angry about their behaviour."*

Miss Mthethwa responded in a sombre voice:

*"My story covers the aspect of nurturing my learners, Sir. Learning about the responsibilities of a teacher has taught me to be more engaged with my learners on a personal level. I thought that it would be prudent if I first became vulnerable to my learners by revealing my upbringing, my fears, my uncertainty and devastations when I was their age. I could also feel that some of them related to what I was saying. For example, I told my learners that I had a spelling problem and that it had made me feel uncomfortable when I had to submit my work to the teachers. My English language teacher, in particular, would always make fun of me; so much so that I ended up fighting in class with some of my peers because they would not stop teasing me. I have taken time to allow my learners to open up so I could understand where the behaviour of each learner emanates from."*

Miss Mashobane responded to the question by commenting as follows:

*"There was a reason why we studied Psychology before we could become teachers, Sir. It is psychology that helps us, as teachers, to rapidly understand our learners' needs. We take care of over 40 learners in our classrooms and therefore it is my responsibility as a teacher to get to know why each learner behaves the way they do. I learned that I have to take interest in each learner in my class and, by so doing, could curb unruly behaviour because they can sense that I have their best interests at heart. In my class, I instil a culture of equality among the learners. I must be honest, Sir, although I always*

*tell my learners that I have no favourite and try to display that by treating every one of them the same, I must say that I have one or two favourites. I have also learned to give learners with unwarranted behaviour more responsibilities. For example, a very troublesome girl who always picks fights with other learners now has the responsibility of clearing my table and putting the things in their places. I have also moved her to sit just next to my table and that has curbed her aggression.”*

Miss Zwide stated:

*“I have also realised that it helps to prepare as many activities for my lessons as possible. I have this very sharp learner in my class. I must say that I found it very hard to handle her at first because she would finish her class work within five minutes and I could see that she was bored. I would even get intimidated if I introduced a topic that I was not comfortable with. I remember trying to introduce fractions in Mathematics. My first point of departure was to familiarise them with the words ‘denominator’ and ‘numerator’. This girl raised her hand and told me before I could teach the entire class and that irritated me a lot. It is now a pleasure to have her in my class because I have learned that I could also use her to explain some aspects of a lesson her peers do not understand. I am trying to accommodate her by giving her extra activities that I prepare beforehand. Some learners in my class are now emulating her in demanding more work.”*

Miss Mashobane also offered the following:

*“Ake ngithinje mina, Sir. [Let me just say, Sir.] One of the responsibilities I learned towards learner behaviour was to change my attitude. I came to school as a novice teacher with the attitude of minding my own business and getting into the classroom to teach. My attitude has now changed drastically since I was allocated a class. I soon realised that I was working with human beings who have feelings like me and therefore I should treat them the same way I would have liked to be treated if I were in their shoes. I think I have even changed the way I present myself to the learners. I take short intervals during the lesson to do something else and that has helped my learners to be focused at all times. Learners get bored easily; their concentration span equals the age they are in. Therefore, I may lose the majority of my learners if I spend the whole hour teaching without taking short breaks in between my lessons.”*

I felt that it was time to move to the next question: “*How do you think your classroom environment and learners’ misbehaviour will change through integrating teaching practices?*” By integrating teaching practices I meant incorporating or putting together different teaching methods. Without hesitation, Miss Mashobane responded as follows:

*"With the assistance that I get from my colleagues, I have started blending other teaching methods that accommodate almost all the learners in my class. Recently, I asked my learners to bring anything electric, from copper wires to electric devices such as switches, bulbs, buzzers, motors from old toys or machines, remote controls and batteries if possible. Ever since I started the theme of Energy and Change and Systems and Control in the Natural Sciences and Technology subject, I felt it would be better if learners would be given more responsibility to bring the tools for their learning to school. I was amazed at how my learners, especially the mischievous ones, have taken a keen interest in their learning since they have been allowed to convert electrical energy to light, movement or sound energy. I was also intrigued by the level of commitment from those learners who had usually produced lacklustre academic performances. They were able to do the connections with excellence and were the first to convert electrical energy into light, sound or movement energy. I must say that the level of misbehaviour in my class has decreased tremendously."*

Miss Mthethwa offered her comments in a gentle, soft voice:

*"I sat down and did introspection about the strategies I used in my teaching. I discovered that I had used the same kind of method for every lesson, and this was not fair to my learners. Because I am still new in this field, I make use of subject committee meetings to seek new methods with regards to some aspects of my teaching. I even decided to change my dress code so that I look more professional. I think in time I shall see some positive outcomes. I remember that we said during one of our discussion meetings that we should take our learners seriously at all times and they will reciprocate by modelling their best behaviour on you as their teacher."*

Miss Mashobane added:

*"I have taken the stance to become interested in my learners’ social wellbeing and I am gradually winning them. The other day I asked my learners one by one about their career choices. This emanated from a lesson in Social Sciences, particularly a history section about the life of Nelson Mandela. You would have been amazed how interested*

*they became when I arranged their seating according to their career choices. I further asked them to get more information about what they wanted to become when they grew up. I allowed them to interview any person they knew who was currently in the field they would like to pursue later in their lives. My learners have gone all the way to enlighten others about their choice of careers. I think it also helps with their behaviour because I now arrange their groups according to the professions they have chosen. They have taken it upon themselves to reprimand one another if one member is not behaving. Integrating diverse teaching strategies in my view requires teachers who are highly dedicated, have a will to learn, place the interests of their learners above their own, and strive for the pursuit of academic excellence.”*

Looking at the charts posted on the wall, Miss Zwide stated her point:

*“I have taken it upon myself to make optimum use of support materials in every lesson that I teach. I sometimes come with objects from home just to make the lesson more appealing and interesting for the learners.”* I then asked Miss Zwide to give one example of a lesson for which she had brought some objects from home. She continued: *“I wanted the learners to talk about one of the happiest moments in their lives; that is, for them to remember a day they did not wish to forget easily. I told the learners that they would come forward and talk about one of the happiest moments in their lives. However, I told them that I was going to be the first one to tell them about my happiest moment. I then decided to bring my photo album to school. I first had to show them the photographs of myself when I was their age. The photograph is of my mother and me with my new bicycle. The learners were so happy to see me as a young girl in the photograph. They were eager to know what was special about this photograph. I then started to tell them about the joyous moment when my mother bought me a new bicycle. The questions that the learners asked me after narrating the story were astonishing. One learner asked if I had learnt to ride a bicycle before; another asked if I allowed my friends to ride it. I then realised that if I could use different teaching techniques I would create a harmonious classroom atmosphere and curb learner misbehaviour.”*

Miss Mthethwa added:

*“I wish I could bring objects like a television set to class to teach a particular aspect of my lesson and see how much attention learners would pay. I agree with everyone when*

*you say we teachers are mostly the reason why some learners misbehave in class because of the way we present our lessons.”*

The third question I asked the participants was the following: *“Which personality traits that you possess do you believe will contribute to your success with certain classroom management practices?”*

Clearing her throat (she had just taken a bite of a biscuit), Miss Zwide stated:

*“I am a very strict person. I think that learners have picked that up and have to study the mood I am in that day. It is not easy to maintain a consistent level of tolerance towards these young children; they are human beings after all. However, since I came to this school I have tried to show seriousness towards my work, my learners and the school management team. Being strict and consistent means that I should always come to school before the learners. I need to model what I preach about punctuality to my learners. I am also mindful of the way I dress in front of the learners. I guess all these attributes play some role and contribute to my success regarding certain classroom management practices.”*

Miss Mashobane had this to say:

*“My facial expression works wonders for me, Sir. I would say that I am moody, but when I come to the classroom to introduce a new lesson, for example, the learners change. Learners easily read your mood. They tend to test you as soon as you enter the room. The first five minutes in the classroom is enough for learners to get into a learning mood or become unruly. Learners can easily pick up when I come to the classroom more relaxed and in a jovial mood. Sometimes they take advantage of my lighter moods and become unruly. At times I just stand there in silence and wait for them to keep quiet. There are those learners who even disturb me while I am teaching. I do not give them the joy of stopping the lesson to reprimand them. I simply walk and stand next to them so they will know that I have noticed their behaviour [and disapprove].”*

Contrary to what the other participants had said about employing rather intimidating tactics to achieve classroom control, Miss Mthethwa stated:

*“The love that I try to show my learners at all times contributes a lot to the success of managing my classroom. I always believe a little bit of caring and appreciating learners*

*for what they do go a long way towards making learners feel part and parcel of the classroom community, if I may put it that way, Sir. I do not know whether it is because I am class-based and also teaching the young ones in junior primary, or if the love I display for my learners enables them to talk about their concerns and what bothers them with ease. If you give children love, I am certain they will give back the same love, and more.”*

Miss Mabunda, who always wore a smile every time she aired her views, stated:

*“Time management is one of the key personality traits I possess. At a young age, my father taught me to do things on time. I used to marvel at him when he used to host men from the neighbourhood for community development meetings. I think I take after my father because I am very meticulous in preparing my lessons on time. Learners do not find time to make noise when I am in class because I always have activities ready for them. If I have a one-hour period for a particular class, then my preparation and activities go beyond the stipulated time so that the learners do not find themselves doing nothing. Some of my learners used to complain about the amount of work I gave them, though, but now they are used to the way I do things.”*

At this point I observed that we had exceeded the time we had agreed upon for our discussion meetings. I then asked for an extra 30 minutes to finish the last question that I had prepared for my participants. The final question of this session was: *“Which classroom management issues do you think are the hardest for newly qualified teachers to deal with?”*

Unhesitatingly, Miss Mthethwa stated that it was classroom discipline. The others nodded their heads in agreement. Miss Mthethwa further stated:

*“As much as we have classroom rules and a policy for positive learner behaviour and support, I find it hard to deal with the behaviour of some learners in my classroom. I envy some experienced teachers whose classrooms are so disciplined, even if there is no teacher. I feel that it is an extra burden to record a misbehaving learner in the discipline book because learners know what they are here for. Our learners do not even care when you scare them with the discipline book or by sending them to the HoD for serious misconduct. The only time they begin to get frightened is when you invite their parents to see you for their misbehaviour.”*

Miss Mthethwa agreed and added:

*“Another challenge is not being able to cover the scope of work for a particular term. This worries me a lot because I have to explain to my HoD why I could not finish some sections of my work. The thing is, Sir, I always want to be thorough in every lesson that I present to my learners and therefore find myself going through one section for the whole week until I am convinced that the learners have understood the work.”*

Miss Zwide complained about filing and paperwork that gave her sleepless nights. She said:

*“I am not fond of writing to start with. Then we are given a lot of unnecessary papers, in my opinion, to fill in and file. If we can speak the truth, Sir, a teacher who has an up-to-date file with all the paperwork covered – trust me, his or her work is scrappy. I rather get to class and teach learners instead of worrying about an up-to-date file. I am aware that I should have my lesson preparations done, but there are other documents that I feel are unnecessary.”*

I asked Miss Zwide to give one example of paperwork that she thought was not necessary. She said:

*“Subject and class analysis. Why should I do that for my class? We have the computerised programme that covers all those aspects of the curriculum? I feel that those should be printed out for us teachers so that we can have enough time to engage learners in teaching and learning.”*

Miss Mabunda said, frowning:

*“My main concern is dealing with learners who have been abused at home. As you saw, I could not control myself earlier on when I was narrating the story of that learner who had been sodomised by his stepfather. It is because I grew up under the same conditions at home, although mine was not sexual abuse. Whenever a learner or a parent comes to report such cases to me, I cannot control myself. I know that I should be strong for the learner or the parent; I should play the role of a social worker, a priest, as well as a psychologist. All the memories of abuse that I endured from my father come flooding back because I had no one to share them with at school. I remember we were very scared to talk to teachers about anything that would implicate or paint a wrong picture of our parents. I therefore feel that I am not the right person to talk to when you talk about*

*those matters and it is hard for me to deal with them in class because they still haunt me.”*

The extra 30 minutes that I had requested had lapsed. I then thanked the participants for making time to ensure that we would meet as a group for the last time.

***Reflective journal entry (25 July 2018)***

*We had come to our last topic of discussion as a group. I felt that the participants had poured out everything they thought were bothering them as well as those aspects that were beneficial to their teaching. This discussion session reminded me that teachers have a crucial responsibility to treat all their learners the same. No matter how young learners are, they are human beings and therefore should be listened to at all times. I also learned that it is vital that teachers know their learners personally. They should know what interests them, their family backgrounds, and what keeps them going. I was surprised by the extent to which the participants were able to self-evaluate their teaching. This is a phenomenon that, in my view, reduces unnecessary mistakes and opens teachers to constructive criticism. The nature of the concerns that the participants raised about using diverse methods of teaching learners was, in my view, an indication that they wanted to make a positive impact on the learners by imparting knowledge appropriately. Roffey (2011) states that successful teachers employ a variety of teaching techniques to engage learners and to thus make learning more meaningful.*

### **7.3 Experiences of Lack of Support: Eliciting Memories through Photographs (12 November 2018)**

#### **7.3.1 Photographs of areas in the school where misbehaviour was likely to occur**

This session was held on a Monday because there were fewer learners at school and classes would be combined, allowing us the time to meet. We held this session in a novice teacher's classrooms (Grade 5). I had earlier asked them to take photographs (see Chapter Two) of areas in their classrooms or on the school premises where they felt misbehaviour occurred regularly. I then asked them to discuss those photographs and to describe normal incidences of learner

misbehaviour that they had witnessed or experienced themselves. Without hesitation, Miss Mabunda produced a photograph and, with a sad smile, shared the following:

*“This photograph (Figure 7.1) is of the area where I usually take my learners for PE [Physical Education] periods. Because our school does not have a playground, we take them to the tarred parking lot for PE. There is not much a teacher can do on a tarred surface with regards to the physical training of learners as it often requires doing exercises on the ground. You therefore often find learners getting out of control when they play soccer or netball.*



**Figure 7.1: Hard at training on a tarred surface during a Physical Education lesson**

I then asked Miss Mabunda to describe the misbehaviour patterns the learners displayed during the PE period. She said:

*“They get over-excited to such an extent that they often kick the ball hard towards teachers’ cars. If not that, the boys play a chasing game that leads them to the toilets. It is hard for me to take charge of the whole class because I have to concentrate on one particular group of learners at a time. No matter how hard I try to give other learners some activities to do unmonitored, learners are reluctant to follow instructions. I do not know whether it is because I am a new teacher or that these learners misbehave because*

*this is the only opportunity for them to play apart from recess at lunchtime. Lunchtime is also not enough time for them to play because it is short – it only lasts 30 minutes.”*

Miss Mashobane nodded in agreement. She elaborated on her views of why learner misbehaviour occurred:

*"Whenever I have to change classrooms between lesson periods, misbehaviour erupts. One thing I have noticed is that the few minutes teachers take to move from one class to another also gives learners a chance to be unruly. There is this tendency among teachers [sighing] to spend a few minutes chatting with another teacher between classes. To be honest, I have done this... I have observed that this sometimes leads to learners making a lot of noise and this results in extra time being wasted before everybody gets back to the normal learning routine."*

Miss Zwide cut in with a question:

*"If that is so, Miss, what is stopping you from doing the right thing, which is being in class and starting to teach as soon as possible without entertaining your colleague?"*

Before Miss Mashobane could say anything, Miss Mthethwa was quick to answer. From her facial expression, I could tell that she was perturbed by the question. She said.

*"You know very well, Miss, that we are newly appointed teachers here in the school. Do you think it would be easy for us to just ignore a seasoned teacher when they talk to you? No. Even if you see that they are the ones who initiate these annoying conversations in between the lesson periods, there is nothing you can do because you do not want to be labelled after all. At times you try to be early in class to avoid learner misbehaviour only to find a seasoned teacher still engaged with learners during your lesson period and you have to wait outside for that teacher to come out. There is this one seasoned teacher whom I encounter every Thursday during the fourth period. The fourth period is her free period and therefore she should leave for the staffroom when I arrive in the class. However, she chooses to remain in class while I am teaching. Not only does she sit there, but she also disturbs me and the entire class with her interventions and this causes some learners to misbehave. I am very scared to tell her how I feel about her interference and her being in the classroom while I am teaching. This is a dilemma we find ourselves in as novice teachers, Sir."*

Miss Mthethwa also verbalised her concern about learner misbehaviour when she said:

*"As far as I am concerned, Sir, the unwarranted behaviour of our learners begins way before the first period. Have you ever noticed the chaos that happens when we have combined assemblies on Fridays?"*



**Figure 7.2: The assembly area for the Foundation Phase learners in my school**

The Foundation Phase usually had assembly on Mondays and Wednesdays. The Intermediate and Senior phases had theirs on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The whole school would then have assembly in the school hall on Fridays. Miss Mthethwa further stated:



**Figure 7.3: Pandemonium that is created by unsupervised learners when they enter or exit the hall during the assembly**

*"I am very distressed about the undisciplined way learners enter the hall without being monitored by us teachers, especially the Senior Phase learners. Some teachers often stay in their classrooms and rely on school prefects to supervise learners on their own,*

*which I think is unfair to everyone. The level of misbehaviour increases even when learners are supposed to be led by their teachers to their respective classrooms.”*

Miss Mashobane, who was now sitting on the edge of her chair, corroborated this frustration:

*“Sometimes assembly will take too long and last into the second period. Sir, I feel that we should do away with assemblies. I think it would be best if the form teachers conduct prayers with their learners in the classroom and then have combined assemblies only on special occasions. Not only are these assemblies the cause of learner misbehaviour, but teachers and learners also lose out on precious teaching and learning time. The learners tend to deliberately drag their feet on their way to the classrooms and, at times, a quarter of them divert to the toilets, thus derailing teaching and learning on purpose. If you want to get things started as a teacher, most learners are not in the classroom. In this way, they disrupt the whole class on their way back from the toilets.”*



**Figure 7.4: The toilets area where learners take time to get back to classrooms**

I then asked the participants to go down memory lane and talk about incidences of misbehaviour that stood out about their own school days when they looked at the photographs they had taken. Brunke (2018) affirms that “memory-work helps us discover what we need to heal” (p. 36). There was a momentary pause, until Miss Mashobane broke the silence. Smiling awkwardly, she said:

*“To be honest with you, Sir, I do not feel comfortable to discuss incidents of misbehaviour that are in my mind right now, because they are too embarrassing or*

*awful to speak about in front of you. Is there any other way we can do this without discussing it openly, if possible?"*

Miss Zwide cut in, saying:

*"I think you will get some interesting feedback from me as well because I have just recalled the primary and high school areas where we did all the wrong things as girls and got away with it. I am also ashamed to recall some memories in your presence, Sir, but you should also understand that those incidents happened when I was still immature."*

I understood their hesitation and asked if it would be possible to write about their memories of misbehaviour anonymously on a piece of paper. Miss Mabunda stated: *"I do not have a problem writing my name after I have jotted down my memories, Sir."* In the end, the participants agreed to write recall and write about their experiences of misbehaviour when they were still at school, and to give their writings to me the following day.

### **7.3.2 Recalling childhood memories through photographs (13 November 2018)**

The next day, all the participants handed in their written recollections of misbehaviour when they were still at school. Miss Mthethwa pointed out that the photograph she had taken (Figure 8.2) reminded her of an area behind the school hall where she and her friends used to go. It was here where they were quite mischievous. Her narrative read:

*"When I was in Grade 6, we used to have free periods between contact time on our timetables. These free periods were not monitored by any teacher. It was during this time that we would cause havoc in the classroom by making intolerable noise or aimlessly walk the corridors. I remember that my friends and I saved our lunch money to buy benzene which we set alight and smoked during these free periods behind the school hall."*

According to Concise Oxford Dictionary (1964), "benzene is a mixture of liquid hydrocarbons got from mineral oils and used for removing grease stains". Miss Mthethwa also wrote:

*"We would do this at least three times a week until we got caught by one of the teachers. My friends and I were punished severely and we decided never to smoke benzene again, at least not on the school premises."*

Reading this story made me realise why the novice teachers were reluctant to talk openly about their past unwarranted behaviour as learners!



**Figure 7.5: ‘Puff and pass’:** It was in areas such as this that the novice teachers and their friends misbehaved

Miss Mthethwa also wrote the following:

*“Some teachers allowed us to have our lunch in their classrooms on rainy days. I was in Grade 10 and felt that I was mature enough to have a boyfriend. I remember how we used to sit among the boys, having our lunch. Some boys made us feel special by proposing love to us. Sometimes we even kissed in the classroom. The classroom would be a love zone during the lunchtime that lasted 45 minutes. We would do this [kissing and touching] in the knowledge that all the teachers were sitting in the staffroom. Even the school prefects were into this game. Being attracted to boys in my class was somewhat disconcerting because I was now afraid to raise my hand to answer a question...”*

Miss Mthethwa provided thought-provoking insight into how teachers’ actions – or lack thereof – could play a major role in evoking learner misbehaviour. She used a photograph (Figure 7.6) as an example of an unmonitored classroom where misbehaviour could readily occur during her high school years.



**Figure 7.6: An unmonitored classroom: A paradise for young love**

Miss Mabunda shared the following:

*“I used to express my feelings by writing nasty things on the toilet walls. Although corporal punishment was still rife during my primary school years, it did not stop me from writing what I felt about some of the teachers I hated in my school. I would insult or draw ugly pictures of people, especially teachers who I felt were cruel and unfair towards us learners. I used to sit at the back of the class when I was in Grade 7. My school was offering Afrikaans as a second additional language. Most of us hated the language together with the teacher who was teaching it. I would then bring magazines to the school and look at them during Afrikaans periods. I would put the magazine inside the exercise book as if I was doing my work.”*

The photograph in Figure 7.7 by Miss Mabunda depicts writing on toilet walls as typical of the misbehaviour that she engaged in during her primary school years.



**Figure 7.7: Walls of naming and shaming: This is where I expressed my feelings about an individual**

Miss Mabunda wrote:

*“I remember that I brought a pornographic magazine to the classroom. That day I asked my friend to be my desk mate. We had been looking at the magazine since the morning until one of the boys got a glimpse of the content. He then went to inform the teacher. I tried to hide the magazine as soon as we realised that we had been reported, but it was too late. I was sent to the office. The principal, after confiscating the magazine, made me choose between him informing my parents or corporal punishment. I chose the latter. After the punishment, my teacher had a field day calling me names and mocking me. She mentioned the incident every time I made a mistake for months. I retaliated by writing abusive things either in the textbook or on the chalkboard when nobody was looking.”*

Miss Mashobane shared the following:

*“There was this male teacher in Grade 10 who never liked me. He could not hide the fact that he hated my personality. It was unfortunate that he was also teaching us Accounting. I ended up hating him and the subject he taught as well and that prompted me to be disruptive every time he was in the classroom teaching us. I deliberately passed nasty comments when he was teaching because he would also do the same to me at every opportunity. I remember saying that he had a big butt and that he talked like a woman. One day those who had heard me could not stop laughing and he wanted to know what was going on. He then went to fetch a cane to punish those who were laughing. One learner told him what I had said about him. I was beaten so severely that day that I was admitted to hospital for a whole week. On my return to school, I was forced to apologise to this teacher.*

*There was also a teacher in high school who always came to school under the influence of alcohol. He had lost our respect because he would tell some girls that he wanted to have sex with them. One day he invigilated in my class during our Grade 11 final examination. I was writing Mathematics. I started cheating by copying from a boy I was sitting next to in front of him and he could not do anything. I ask for answers from other learners as well. There was chaos in the class until the principal had to substitute Mr Mbatha [pseudonym] with another teacher.*

*I remember being a bully when I was in Grade 7. I had friends in class who were older than I was. They also happened not to be very clever and they would rely on me for the answers when we were writing a test. I would snatch other learners' lunchboxes because of the protection I had from my older friends. This went on until I was beaten by a parent of one of the learners whose lunch I had eaten.”*

***Reflective journal entry (13/11/18)***

*After recording and reflecting on the participants' written narratives, I felt that we should have a session to reflect on their memories of misbehaviour when they were still at school. Samaras and Freese (2006) advocate that reflection is a crucial component of teachers' professional growth. It is paramount for a teacher to remain a professional at all times when he or she is in engagement with learners. From what I gathered from the participants with regards to discipline, the classroom is the teacher's domain and so he or she has to work at maintaining discipline in this crucial space where learning must occur.*

**Reflection**

Several points stood out when I reflected on what had emerged from the discussion sessions with the participants. It was apparent that they were eager to manage their classrooms with fewer learner disruptions. For example, they were keen to employ diverse teaching methods not only to curb learner misbehaviour, but also for the benefit of their learners' development. The novice teachers reminded me of the importance of applying a variety of teaching techniques as this tends to engage learners in multiple learning activities and thus minimise misbehaviour. Hosseini, Nasri and Afghari (2017) note that teachers' manner of managing a class, their teaching techniques, their use of multiple activities, and their positive relationship with learners can activate development and motivation to learn whereas a negative relationship could stimulate and exacerbate rude and disruptive learner behaviour.

I learned that, as a mentor, I should always emphasise the different roles that novice teachers should play when they engage with learners. Narratives of the sense of rejection that some participants felt that manifested in misbehaviour taught me that novice teachers should embrace every learner in his or her classroom despite their background or academic capabilities. In the same manner I, as a mentor, should treat each novice teacher in my school equally.

The point that novice teachers are faced with learners from diverse sociocultural backgrounds was again sharply in focus in this chapter. What emerged from these sessions was that I should involve novice teachers in making them aware of the significance of understanding dissimilar social upbringing and the diverse backgrounds from which learners come. Understanding learners' sociocultural backgrounds could enhance learner attitudes and behaviours for the

better in novice teachers' classrooms. Understanding and being sensitised about the background and experiences of the abused boy was a case in point. Brown (2004) notes that culturally responsive teachers employ communication methods that reflect learners' ethics and values about learning, the roles of teachers, and the responsibilities of learners in the school context.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I described what I could learn by listening to and reading about novice teachers' experiences in their own classrooms as well as when they were still at school. They shared their memories of unruly learners' behaviour by referring to pertinent photographs. In conclusion, I reflected on my overall learning through the data that emerged and were explored in Chapter Seven.

Overall, I learned that the significance of teacher collaborative learning, particularly among novice teachers, should never be underestimated. During the discussion sessions it emerged that sharing and talking about their learner behaviour dilemmas could stimulate fascinating discourse that, when explored in depth, will assist in curbing learner misbehaviour. I learned that it is my responsibility as a mentor to make time available for discussions on classroom management with novice teachers. Such meetings, where novice teachers share their most shameful or gruesome experiences, could ultimately elicit valuable support and inputs that could help to address and eventually curb learner misbehaviour successfully.

In Chapter Eight, I shall continue my exploration of the participants' memories of the unwarranted behaviour they exhibited in their primary and high school years. Drawing will be used to elicit insights about these experiences and to illuminate my learning.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **BECOMING WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO BE**

#### **8.1 Introduction: Photographs: The Past, Present and Future**

In this chapter, I describe my continued engagement in collaborative, interactive discussion sessions with the novice teachers in response to research question 2 of my study: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* We engaged in three interactive sessions which I discuss in detail. First, I recount the novice teachers' elaborations on what they had written about the lack of support they experienced during their schooling days (see Chapter Seven). Next, I relate the strategies that the participants and I discussed for the enhancement of learner behaviour support in their classrooms. Furthermore, I narrate our evaluation of the drawings the participants had done to illustrate what worked for them in their classrooms. This discussion is followed by my reflections on what I learned from my engagement with the novice teachers as narrated in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. I also expound my hopes and wishes with regards to the mentoring of novice teachers.

#### **8.2 Mapping the Way Forward for Learner Behaviour Support (20 November 2018)**

On this day (a Tuesday) we met in Miss Zwide's classroom because form teachers had to remain in their classrooms due to the limited number of learners who were coming to school these days. Learners' parents refused to send their children to school as the transport costs were too high. Learners had finished writing their final examination and all the continuous assessment tasks (SBA) in the Foundation Phase had been completed, and parents thus saw no reason to send their children to school.

This discussion session thus took place at the end of the year. I first explained that I felt it would be wise if we gathered and discussed what the novice teachers had given me in writing the previous week. I mentioned that, based on the reading and transcription processes of their responses, I had a few questions that I would like them to answer. They agreed to discuss their

written responses, although it was a sensitive issue for them. But putting that aside, they were eager to discuss various techniques to support positive learner behaviour afterwards.

I read their responses and asked: “*What do you think aggravated the kind of misbehaviour you had written about?*” Miss Mthethwa was the first to respond:

*“When I look at it now that I am a teacher, I realise we had so much time to do misbehave when teachers were not in the classroom. Teacher-learner engagement was very minimal in my high school life. I think it was because my school would always host SADTU [South African Teachers Union] meetings and we would be released before normal school closure time or be kept in our classrooms while our teachers were in the school hall attending a union meeting. At times, teachers would not honour their lesson periods and that would give us ample time to misbehave.”*

Miss Zwide added:

*“Most of the teachers in my school were Indians. I must say we had very little respect for Indian teachers. I do not know whether it was because of the influence we got from society that had negative stereotypes about Indian people or that we knew that corporal punishment was long forbidden in South African schools. For me, Sir, it was all about the teacher’s attitude towards the subject. There was this teacher who would come to class, write notes on the board, and sit on his chair while we copied from the board. He would do this without fail. I would make sure that I copied the notes fast so I could find time to misbehave. At times, Sir, the teachers were the ones who caused chaos in the classroom because of the methods they employed when teaching the learners. In other instances, I would finish copying work from the board and ask to go to the toilet. Sometimes the teacher would only allow us to leave the room as soon as you had finished copying the work from the board. I would spend as much time as I wanted in the toilet because I would become bored in the classroom with a lack of activities that would keep us on our toes concerning academic excellence.”*

Miss Mashobane said:

*“I still remember that I would display misbehaviour patterns towards teachers I felt did not like me. When I was in high school particularly, I could easily notice a teacher who did not like me. I would then reciprocate by being nasty and disrespectful towards him or her. I would simply voice out without any fear of what was bothering me so that the*

*teacher concerned would know my stance about him or her. Mrs Ngcobo was one teacher who was always on my case about how I was attracting male teachers by wearing a short skirt to school. I ended up responding in a very disrespectful manner by telling her that no one was stopping her from wearing a short skirt herself and that she was jealous of my body. Since then I would pass remarks, such as she was ugly, every time she entered the classroom. Therefore, sometimes teachers themselves are the cause of learner misbehaviour."*

I then asked the participants: "How do you manage learners who display the same kind of behaviour you exhibited during your schooling years?" Miss Zwide was quick to respond:

*"By keeping your lessons exciting at all times, Sir, though it is not possible to always come up with top-notch performances as a teacher when you teach learners. Maybe it is a matter of reflecting on our ways of doing things in the classroom. These kinds of discussions help, Sir, because right now I can see that we are making the same mistakes our teachers made when we were learners ourselves. In this discussion, the fingers are pointing at teachers as those who contributed to our misbehaviour. My worry right now is that I have learners in my class who are unruly and I wonder if it is because of me that they are behaving this way."*

Miss Mashobane cut in:

*"I think Miss Zwide is spot on, Sir. I always like to use the group teaching method to curb learner misbehaviour in my classroom. With group teaching, I separate the class in two groups and give them appropriate activities to do. I find it easier to explain a new concept to a smaller group of learners than to the entire class. While I am busy with one group, the other group is engaged in another activity and so I can manage them. Although I still have learners who misbehave when I am in the classroom, I think I sometimes manage to keep the entire class constructively occupied for the duration of the lesson. I think one part I have not done is to looking at myself and do proper introspection as to why I still experience unwarranted behaviour by the learners in my classroom."*

Miss Mashobane stated:

*"The group teaching method does not always work – or should I say it is not always the solution to managing learners with discipline problems. I think it boils down to the*

*attitude a teacher has towards his or her learners. We have our work cut out to be consistent in everything we do or say. I still remember how much I hated Sandra who was my teacher's favourite in class. It was apparent to everyone in the class that Mrs Chauke liked Sandra more than the rest. Mrs Chauke would always send Sandra to fetch the class register and she made her the class monitor. Sandra's seat was next to her table and she was really teacher's pet. I feel bad because I find myself doing the same thing that we hated Mrs Chauke for doing. As much as I try to treat all the learners in my class the same, I cannot help going back to the habit of preferring some learners above others. I feel I am in an awkward position right now. After all, we are aware of these things [not treating all learners equally] because we always talk about them in our discussions, but I keep doing this."*

Looking worried, Miss Mthethwa said:

*"This is a very worrying topic we are talking about today. I know that there is still a lot to learn in this profession, Sir. However, I am worried if I would ever find a winning formula for learner behaviour. As we are talking, my mind rushes back to this one boy, Bandile, who is so disruptive in my class. I used to have sleepless nights when I knew I had to go to class the next day and he would be there. This was until I sat down with him and asked about his background. I tried to forge a positive teacher-learner relationship with him, Sir. That was when I discovered that he lives with his step-parents. His mother passed on when he was a toddler and his father got married to another woman, his stepmother. Years later, his father passed on, leaving him in the care of his stepmother. Right now Bandile is living with his stepmother who is married to another man, his stepfather. The step-parents have children of their own. I then started to feel for Bandile. The negative attitude I had towards him changed for the better. His behaviour also started to change. Although he still shows signs of misbehaviour, particularly when there is another teacher in the classroom, his behaviour has since improved."*

Miss Zwide reminded us of one of our mentoring sessions when we discussed "... treating our learners like they are our children. She continued:

*"I feel that taking the role of being a parent is very important in as far as learner behaviour is concerned. In my experience, children will do their best not to disappoint their parents. In the same way, if we as teachers treat these learners as our children, I*

*think we will not encounter so much misbehaviour in our classrooms. There is a tendency among teachers to send learners outside the classroom every time they start misbehaving. That to me does not show any love for a learner – instead, it worsens the situation. We are challenged to understanding every learner in our classroom."*

Miss Mabunda added:

*"Sometimes little things like praising these learners go a long way. Praising a learner in front of the class not only boosts his or her confidence, but it also encourages other learners to give of their best in what they are doing because of the extrinsic motivation from the teacher."*

I then posed the last question on this topic: *"Do you think today's learners are worse than your generation in terms of behaviour, and why?"*

Miss Mabunda responded unhesitatingly:

*"No Sir, I think learner misbehaviour is still the same. I am saying this because regardless of the fear of corporal punishment we still misbehaved. In my view, today's learners display misbehaviour because they know that their rights that are enshrined in the South African Constitution are being protected. In other words, children tend to abuse the rights that are meant to protect them. Moreover, it seems as if unruly behaviour among learners has increased nowadays because of social media."*

Miss Zwide shared her concerns as follows:

*"The education system is the cause of learner misbehaviour in our classrooms. I say this because teachers do not get sufficient training at university as far as learner behaviour is concerned. Teachers only get real experiences when they are newly appointed at a particular school. Secondly, in my opinion, there are learners in the mainstream who are not meant to be studying towards a university degree because of their academic capabilities. These learners often find ways of disrupting other learners and teachers in the classroom. It is also not fair to judge their actions because they become frustrated with the subject matter. I feel that education is failing these learners as well as the teachers. We tend to reprimand a learner who engages in drawing whilst we are teaching. Most learners who have learning difficulties are very good at expressing themselves in art. I then feel that it is our responsibility as teachers to*

*encourage and inspire learners to reach greater heights in whatever they are good at doing.”*

Miss Mabunda corroborated this view and offered her suggestions:

*“That is why we should have had a period for craft work when we were at school. Most learners with learning difficulties in my class used to collect very good marks because of the handwork they produced during art periods. They even excelled in gardening and we always wanted to be in their group when we were doing gardening. I think, Sir, this shows that we are all capable of showcasing our talents in different ways. I also feel that we as teachers are the architects of the change we need to facilitate in our classrooms.”*

Miss Zwide said:

*“My brother has a hearing problem. He found it difficult to succeed in mainstream schools. My parents enrolled him in the school for the deaf. It is in that school where teachers identified his potential for fixing things. Today my brother can sustain himself as a qualified plumber. Teachers in the school for the deaf ensure that learners are driven to succeed by acknowledging their talents.”*

I felt that the participants were not directly responding to the last question I had asked. However, I had to let the discussion flow as I sensed that they were expressing their innermost feelings about the causes of learner misbehaviour.

Miss Mthethwa told us about her mother’s version of learner behaviour:

*“My mother is a retired high school principal. She would tell us stories of learner misbehaviour that were appalling and scary. She once told us that a Grade 10 learner chased a male teacher with a knife after he [the teacher] had revealed the learner’s marks aloud in front of everyone in the class. The learner had failed the test and felt that the teacher was trying to humiliate him before his peers. I think today’s learners are worse than those of our generation in terms of behaviour. I feel that the current crop of learners is even dangerous to themselves because they act before they think. My mother used to tell me that they would never talk back to a teacher, which is something I never did during my school days.*

I felt that we had come to the end of our discussion on participants' responses regarding learners' misbehaviour in their classrooms and I thanked the participants for their valuable inputs.

**Reflection (27 November 2018)**

*I think this was a very important discussion. Each of us had to reflect on our past experiences to correct our current mistakes. It came to light that teachers are often at the centre of misbehaviour as it is they who cause disruption in the classroom. I learned through our discussion that one becomes a better teacher if one refrains from emulating one's own adverse experiences of the past. Teachers should reflect on what they learnt as a learner, heed those lessons, and try to make a positive change in the lives of the learners of today. I also learned that teachers should always be consistent in the manner in which they administer and require discipline, and particularly in the manner in which they conduct themselves in the presence of learners.*

**8.3 We Learn Every Day (07 December 2018)**

In this discussion session, I continued to evoke the participants' memories of the misbehaviour they had displayed during their schooling years. The purpose was to unveil their thoughts about what constituted minimal behavioural disruption in their classrooms. We agreed that sound and positive discipline began with teacher preparation for successful lesson delivery.

This session was held in my office to discuss classroom management related issues for learner behaviour support. This meeting was held near the end of the academic year and we had ample time to plan our classroom management strategies for the following year. The teachers were waiting to issue report cards to learners. Our agenda for this meeting that had been provided by the participants was to focus on the multiple methods we could use to sustain learner engagement in a lesson and to keep them constructively occupied all the time. This time the participants could ask me questions regarding classroom management. Miss Mthethwa asked: "*How do I ensure full learner participation and enjoyment during a lesson?*" As I was about to answer the question, Miss Mashobane reminded us of the reason we had subject committees: "*It is important that we make use of these committees, particularly when we do our lesson planning. However, seasoned teachers pose a challenge when it comes to these subjects*

committees.” I asked Miss Mashobane to elaborate on the challenges she referred to regarding experienced teachers, which she explained as follows:

*“In my experience, seasoned teachers are quite reluctant to demonstrate how one can introduce or come up with interesting activities that learners will enjoy to enhance their learning. I sometimes feel that, maybe, they are intimidated by us asking lots of questions, or maybe they feel that we think we know better because we studied at universities whereas they studied at teacher training colleges.”*

Miss Mabunda shared the same sentiment. She said:

*“Sometimes the experienced teachers are the ones who ask us about new and innovative ways of teaching. They often complain that what they were taught at college does not have any significance in today’s classroom. We are then forced to go into the classroom without being fully convinced of our teaching prowess for that particular lesson. In short, Sir, there is minimal learning for us as novice teachers during those subject committee meetings.”*

I took cognisance of these comments and closed the discussion. I then introduced a new topic: proper planning for the year ahead. I shared my knowledge of various teaching activities. This was done so that we could approach our lessons with confidence when the school opened the following year. Regarding Miss Mthethwa’s earlier question, I reminded the participants that it was of utmost importance for teachers to work collaboratively on anything that had to do with classroom management. I also emphasised that our teaching should not always be informed by what is in the textbook. A textbook is just a resource that helps us to structure our lessons, but sourcing and working from multiple resources is very important.

Miss Zwide asked:

*“Can you give us an example of a lesson where you filtered your activities, Sir? I think we must understand how to think beyond what the textbooks have to offer.”*

Miss Mthethwa agreed, saying:

*“I think it will be significant if you model how you incorporated and related your thinking of activities in the lesson – that is what I need to ascertain here.”*

All the participant nodded as they were eagerly waiting for some demonstration from me as a mentor and a seasoned teacher. I knew that a positive demonstration would encourage them to become more innovative in their teaching. I would have loved to do a demonstration lesson in a classroom full of learners so that they could observe the limited level of learner misbehaviour when they were fully occupied throughout a lesson. However, this was not possible at the time, and I verbally shared my methodology of a Grade 4 history lesson in Social Sciences on the topic 'Communication through time'. Social Sciences is one of six subjects offered in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) and is a combination of history and geography.

The focus of the topic was how communication evolved while various forms of communication stayed the same. I proceeded to share my insights:

*“My point of departure was to come to class with five big photographs. The photographs were of a person telling a story and the other one listening to the narrative – someone whispering a secret, people dancing, people communicating in sign language and touching. The learners verbally shared their ideas on what they saw in the photographs and what they thought the photographs meant, and I then explained that communication involves sharing information in many ways. I divided the learners into groups and tasked them to discuss and write down diverse forms of communication that we use every day in the classroom – excluding digital technology. I explained that the group that finished first with most forms of communication recorded would have the right to choose any form of communication they would like to role-play.*

*Most of the groups wrote down communication forms for classroom interaction such as speaking, art, dancing, body language, movement, sign language, writing, and singing. I pinned the charts they had made on the board, and compared the number of the forms of communication they had written down. I then gave the groups three minutes each to choose and discuss one form of communication they could role-play in the classroom. One group chose sign language. Each group had five minutes to convincingly role-play the form of communication they had selected. To be convincing, they had to show that they understood one another and that the entire class would also follow what they were doing.*

*The learners waited eagerly for the group that had to role-play sign language as they wanted to see if they could come up with a convincing demonstration. I was also eager*

*to see what they would devise and share convincingly in five minutes without saying a word."*

Miss Mabunda interjected: *"How long was this lesson, Sir?"* I explained that I had planned the lesson to last for one hour, but that it had taken us longer and into the next day to complete the activities. I reminisced and shared my thoughts, such as that I had not minded spending that time as I had wanted the learners to understand the concept and, at the same time, enjoy the activity. I told them that I believed that learners learnt better if they learnt through play and that they became more interested in what they were learning if they were involved hands-on and were part of the lesson. I stated that, most importantly, no learners had misbehaved during that lesson or the role-play activities.

At one point in my reflections, Miss Mashobane raised her hand and said: *"I am sorry, Sir, could you please carry on telling us about the lesson?"* Everyone laughed and I continued:

*"Everyone now sat glued to their seats, waiting for the sign language group. They had prepared a wonderful short family story that was fascinating to watch. This family comprised of a mother raising her children on her own. The story started with one of the children holding her arms wrapped tightly around her body, showing that she was cold. The child of the family was rubbing his stomach in a circular motion and the class could see that he was hungry. The mother, wearing a refuse bag apron, showed the kids that the food was almost ready while she used her right hand to stir the food in the pot. She used her other hand to taste the stew and she nodded her head to confirm that the food was ready. We also saw them washing their hands by rubbing them against each other and they used an imaginary towel to dry their hands. We also saw the family sitting together, eating their food by using their hands and chewing the food.*

*The class was fascinated by the storyline, but the allocated five minutes was about to expire. When the family had finishing eating, one of the children placed two hands together against an ear and we could see that he was sleepy. The mother indicated that they should first pray before they fell asleep. We could see the family putting their hands together, pointing at the sky. At last, they all hugged one another as a sign of saying goodnight."*

I admitted that one hour had been very short for the lesson and some groups thus had to do their role-play the following day. I also informed them that the children had been eager to watch all the groups and they had negotiate with the next teacher to continue the activity during the following lesson, but they had to wait until the next day. I stressed the point that time constraints should not impede knowledge and skills transfer.

With a smile on her face, Miss Mashobane said:

*"I think it will take me some time to be innovative and play around with what the textbook has to offer. As you have earlier mentioned, Sir, we need to resuscitate the subject committee meetings to strengthen our knowledge and gain confidence in our teaching."*

Miss Mthethwa also added:

*"Moreover, Sir, meeting on numerous occasions could do a lot of good for us novice teachers. I must say that I have gained and grown a lot from these sessions, but I feel that they will never be enough for me."*

Miss Zwide maintained:

*"I feel free to air my views when we are gathered as novice teachers and with you, Sir, without any fear of being labelled, scolded or laughed at by other colleagues. I want to try and engage my learners throughout the lesson as I find it difficult at times to keep them busy for the duration of the entire period."*

I assured the participants that, in my experience, learners will always exhibit acceptable behaviour in the classroom when they are fully involved in a lesson. I admitted that various methods for curbing misbehaviour in the classroom could be employed, but that I firmly believed that involving learners in their learning took centre stage. Miss Mthethwa asked: *"How then do you keep the momentum of getting lessons more interesting for learners, Sir?"* I answered:

*"It does not happen all the time. Sometimes you will come across a topic where you have to revert to rote learning. However, if the opportunity avails itself to be innovative, I grab it with both hands."*

Miss Mabunda pleaded for another example of how to make a lesson interesting. I said:

*"I remember when we were comparing old and new kinds of communication. I had previously asked my learners to ask their grandparents how they used to communicate with their loved ones long ago. A common response was that they had used the postal system. Although the learners also mentioned other forms of communication such as the telegraph, the radio, early typewriting and more, I decided to focus on the postal system to make the learners experience the joy of receiving and reading a letter from another person. I knew that learners nowadays make use of technology such as cellular telephones and emailing from their personal computers to communicate, and therefore they seldom write or receive letters from their loved ones.*

*Using modern technology such as emails and texting, most learners do not know what a stamped letter looks like. I then brought an example of a stamped letter to the class. I also highlighted that a letter must have an address on the front of the envelope and a return address on the back. I explained the task of sorting mail correctly at a post office. The most interesting part was when each learner had to write a letter to another learner in another class in the school. I tasked the learners to post their letters in a post box I had created. I then assigned four learners (two learners from each class) to sort and to deliver the letters to gain a basic understanding of the postal system we had learned about.*

*It took two days for the letters to reach the recipients. I was amazed at the level of excitement and anticipation for the arrival of the letters that would be delivered by the two 'postmen'. Friday was the day when each 'postman' delivered the letters to the recipients. I ensured that the delivery and reading of the mail would occur during my lesson in that particular classroom. I must say, I was taken aback by the joyous mood the learners were in when they eventually received the letters with their names and addresses on the envelopes. I then gave them 15 minutes to read the letters and thereafter tell us what they felt about the experience. One learner told the class that he had always observed with envy when his mother opened her letters in a relaxed mood on the sofa and read them. Another girl mentioned that she was going to keep her letter in a safe place so that she could read it every time she missed her friend."*

I then thanked the novice teachers for their participation in this session. Although the session lasted for more than an hour, it did not impede on any teaching time. We now had ample time to prepare for the year ahead as the participants had asked me to help and guide them in this process.

***Reflection (11 December 2018)***

*I think that this session was important for both the novice teachers and myself. One of the lessons I learned was that learner misbehaviour could be caused by our failure to plan adequately for our lessons. I also felt that collaborative teaching was essential if I were to make sure that novice teachers acquired the skill to devise innovative methodologies to ensure positive classroom management.*

#### **8.4 Novice Teachers' Reflections through Drawings (01 February 2019)**

This was the final discussion session that the novice teachers and I would have as a data collection tool for my study. We started the session on a positive note as it was the beginning of a new academic year. Sadly, one of the participants had been transferred at her request to another primary school which was closer to where she lived.

During the previous meeting, I had asked the participants to create drawings to illustrate what they felt worked for them, but also what still posed a challenge in terms of classroom management and learner behaviour (see Chapter Two). The current session was held in an unused office adjacent to mine. My request came after a discussion on successful methods and on challenges in the classroom. They had access to plain white A4 paper, pencils, rubbers and crayons for their drawings.

Miss Mashobane asked:

*"I do not know whether we should first discuss and then draw what we felt was common for each one of us in our classrooms, or do we do this activity individually? The reason I am asking is that what worked for me in my classroom last year could be different from Miss Mabunda's."*

Miss Mthethwa also raised a concern,

*“I am not sure if I am able to draw. I would prefer to first discuss it with you ladies because I cannot draw. I do not have the skill for drawing.”*

I then explained that any drawing would be acceptable as this was not about being an artist but about expressing one’s feelings. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) advise that drawing can be employed to reveal and connect with emotions that offer life to personal and professional knowledge. The aim of drawing as a data generation practice is not necessarily to produce skilful artworks. I thus told the novice teachers that they could first discuss what had worked and what had not yet worked for them, and thereafter one of them could present their insights in drawings. This process would also address the principle of collaborative learning.

Miss Mabunda was quick to respond, smiling pleasantly: *“Miss Mashobane can draw exceptionally well. She can then rescue us in terms of drawing”*. Miss Mashobane agreed and accepted the responsibility for executing the drawings.

I then asked the participants: *“What has worked for you in terms of classroom management – and learner behaviour support in particular”*? Miss Mthethwa responded in a cheerful voice:

*“These sessions have opened my eyes with regards to how I should manage my class. We talked about many aspects that could assist us to maintain discipline and increase the level of confidence among our learners and within ourselves. I feel I have changed for the better in terms of learner behaviour in my classroom as the year progressed and after implementing some of the methods we had deliberated on during our sessions. For example, I made it my mission to get to know each learner by name. I could see that it made a great difference in how they responded to me and other learners in the classroom. I also observed that most learners started to do their work diligently, which compelled me to write positive comments in their workbooks. I feel that it was important that I utilised some of these aspects with the new learners in my classroom and I feel confident that I will manage my classroom better this year than the previous year”*.

Miss Mashobane concurred, and stated:

*“First, I would like to thank you, Sir, for making it possible for us to meet with you as novice teachers to discuss matters that are of concern to us. Although I realise that this is your research study, you could not have done it at a better time as we needed to*

*express our fears, frustrations, anxieties as well as our joys and excitement about our profession. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow novice teachers for the dedication we showed by setting aside some time to meet on our own to discuss pertinent classroom management issues that pose a threat to our teaching profession.”*

Miss Mabunda interjected: *“Please tell us what has worked for you, Miss.”* We all laughed and I asked Miss Mabunda to exercise patience as her turn would come. Miss Mashobane continued:

*“I remember one day when we discussed that learners are not one-size-fit-all with regards to academic achievement. I must confess that I struggled to make certain that learners of different academic capabilities found joy in my classroom. I now have confidence to meet with other teachers who teach the same subject [Social Sciences] as I and to discuss with them how we could cater for all learners in our classrooms. The idea to always have extra activities for intelligent learners who finish the work before the others has started to work for me. The level of noise in my classroom has diminished.”*

Miss Mabunda said: *“I have been in the profession longer than the two of you,”* and pointed her finger Miss Mashobane and Miss Mthethwa. She continued:

*“Sir, when we met here for discussions I always got back home and reflected on how best I could improve my teaching practice. I have always admired the way learners respond to the way you treat them.”*

Miss Mashobane interjected:

*“I always see you, Sir, taking high fives with learners during break time and I think that alone has impacted positively on the behaviour of learners towards teachers.”*

Miss Mabunda continued:

*“That is exactly what I am talking about. After doing soul searching, I realised that I only went to class as a teacher. I never took my time before to know my learners better; their concerns, frustrations, what makes them happy or whether they live with their parents. After trying to make time to get to know my learners, I could gradually feel a change in the way learners responded to me. I must say that I cannot wait to come to school and listen to the joys and the dilemmas of my learners just before we start a*

*lesson. I have used this as an ice breaker idea, Sir, and it is working for me. I even find myself telling my learners about my ordeals as well."*

I then asked Miss Mabunda to tell us one of the stories she had shared with her class. She stated:

*"I recently shared a joyful moment with my class by telling them that I was happy that my daughter had been accepted at one the universities of technology in Durban."*

I then asked the participants to illustrate what we had discussed in terms of their successes and challenges by creating drawings. I explained that I wanted to print these drawings, laminate them, and pin them on their classroom bulletin boards as a constant reminder of their mission to rejuvenate their classroom management practices. Miss Mthethwa suggested that the drawings could also serve *"...as a barometer to gauge the level of growth in terms of managing our classrooms. Drawings displayed in our classrooms could be a constant reminder that could assist us to raise the bar of managing our classrooms effectively."*

The participants worked together in an unused office adjacent to mine. Miss Mashobane was responsible for all the drawings. However, the other participants offered suggestions about what needed to be reflected in the drawings. The discussion and the execution of the drawings took just over an hour. They were keen to pin the drawings on a wall as a reminder of positive learner behaviour support in their classrooms. Five drawings were finally submitted.

Figure 8.1 symbolises teachers who teach the same subject and who engage in collaborative planning and discussion about accommodating learners with multiple capabilities. The novice teachers realised, based on their insights as discussed in this chapter, that they could not teach in isolation. The drawing illustrates how they should come together to discuss ways in which they could deliver subject matter to their learners in a way that would enhance their confidence and continuous learning.



**Figure 8.1: A source for learning: Subject committee gatherings**

Source: Miss Mashobane, a novice teacher participant

The caption in Figure 8.2 urges that novice teachers should engage their learners in various approaches of teaching. In my interaction with the participants, I demonstrated how one could expand learning activities outside the content of a textbook.



**Figure 8.2: Diverse teaching techniques a key to learner positive behaviour patterns and academic achievement**

Source: Miss Mashobane, a novice teacher participant

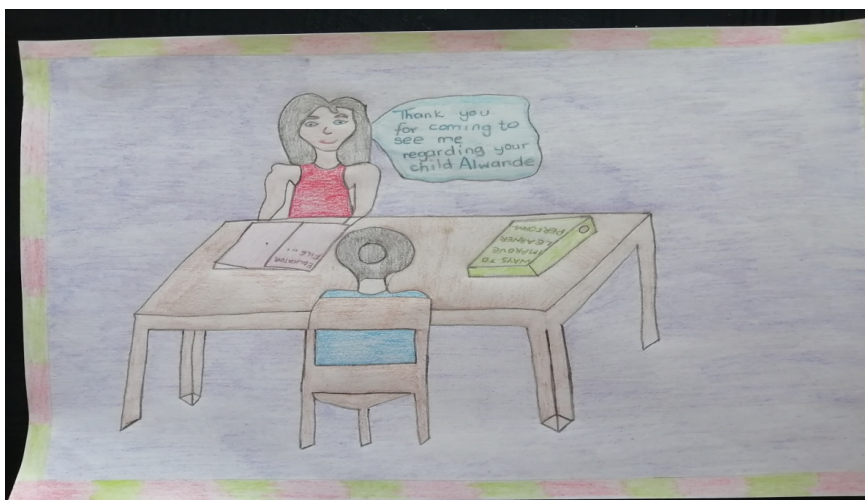
Miss Mashobane was the first to admit that applying various teaching methodologies was a challenge. She stated:

*“For me, Sir, I would say using various teaching techniques still gives me sleepless nights. I remember sometime last year when you talked about a Grade 4 Social Sciences lesson in which you used diverse methods for learners to understand the content. I imagined learners owning their learning by doing those demonstrations for everyone. I think that is what is missing from my teaching. I always find myself working hard instead of working smart. I need to get to grips with how I can involve learners more actively in my lessons.”*

Embracing different cultures in the classroom was one area Miss Mabunda highlighted as a major challenge on her part. She said:

*“Sir, I was raised by a very strict family where values and morals were paramount. I now find it very disturbing if a child is cheeky and talks back to me. I feel it is very rude when a learner did not hear what I said and, instead of saying ‘Excuse me, Madam’, she just says ‘Huh?’ I have also observed that some learners, particularly the Indian learners, do not give you time to finish talking. They tend to interrupt while you are still talking. Raising their hands is a tall order for them. Maybe I have to adjust and move with the times as an adult and a professional.”*

The novice teachers realised that parents could play a significant role in minimising learner misbehaviour in their classrooms. Figure 8.3 depicts communication between a parent and a teacher. In Chapter Seven, I discussed the importance of involving parents in their children’s education.



**Figure 8.3: Parent-teacher relationship: a recipe for acceptable learner behaviour**

Source: Miss Mashobane, a novice teacher participant

Commenting on this illustration, Miss Mthethwa said:

*“For me, the relationship that I have to build with the parents of my learners is vital. I must confess that I usually do not have time to properly communicate with parents of learners in my class, especially the naughty ones. I often take my anger about my learners out on their parents who come to enquire about their children. I think I must learn to bond with these parents to gain my learners’ trust. I have seen this with Mrs Maharaj [pseudonym for a seasoned Foundation Phase teacher] who takes the opportunity of a parent visit to build a sound relationship with both the parent and the learner.”*

I then asked Miss Mthethwa what she had observed about Mrs Maharaj. She said:

*“Mrs Maharaj decided to invite Thabiso’s mother to school because of his behaviour in class. Mrs Maharaj praised Thabiso for a few good things that he had done in class. Thabiso was also present at that meeting. Mrs Maharaj then highlighted that if Thabiso could improve his behaviour, he would obtain good marks. I found that to be a strategic way of curbing misbehaviour by a learner. I am looking forward to emulating what Mrs Maharaj is doing in her classroom.”*

At this point I felt that the participants had exhausted their ideas. I thanked them profusely for the time they had sacrificed and the contributions they had made. The session was then concluded.

***Reflection (13 February 2019)***

*I am pleased about the way the novice teachers have approached this academic year since it started. I have had the privilege of visiting two of the novice teachers in their classrooms this year at their request. I have seen much improvement in how they manage behaviour in their classrooms. I am also pleased that they now feel free to invite me to their classrooms and observe their lessons as it shows that I might have mentored them appropriately and effectively. This also gives me the opportunity to learn from them during their engagement with their learners.*

*Teachers were eager to discuss what had worked and that had not yet worked for them in terms of classroom management. It is also amazing that some of them observed and are now*

*emulating other teachers in the school who are doing right things. For me, this proves that we learn from one another and that teaching is not a profession where one has to isolate oneself.*

*Every time we meet for discussions, I become optimistic about the future. Each one of us learns something new from the other. This strengthens my hope that the novice teachers in my care will take my advice seriously. I am saying this because two of the novice teachers registered for an Honours Degree this year. One of them told me that she had been inspired by the passion I had shown in my studies as well as my work ethics as a school manager.*

## **8.5 My Learning at This Point in the Study**

In this section, I step back to reflect on my overall learning from the discussion sessions presented in Chapters, Six, Seven and Eight. The self-study reflection prompts that I use in this section were adapted from Samaras and Freese (2006).

I undoubtedly learned a lot during my interactions with and reflections on the discussion sessions I had had with the participants. It was crucial for me as a school manager and a mentor to be involved in sessions where novice teachers could freely air their views. They also expressed their innermost emotions about their daily classroom experiences and this enhanced my insights into their world and mine as a mentor of novice teachers. I also gained deep understanding of their feelings about their more seasoned colleagues and school managers.

### **8.5.1 What I learnt about myself from the discussions with the novice teachers**

By working closely with these novice teachers, I realised at the time that I was a good listener and that, by listening intently, I had become more sensitised to their challenges. As a consequence of the impact of this self-study research, the novice teachers now came to me to ask advice about troubling matters that they encountered in their classrooms or in the school. I learnt that I had to take time to listen to what they had to say without showing any signs of disgruntlement or irritation. Yarci (2017) states that the attributes of a superior mentor are that they are high-quality listeners, have the capacity to inspire others, and possess the power to spread their influence positively. I concur with these notions. For example, during the final stages of my research study, a novice teacher informed me that she was filing for divorce. Her

husband of two years had been physically and emotionally abusing her and she could no longer tolerate such treatment. She told me this after I had noticed that her behaviour had changed somewhat. Her mood swings were beginning to worry me and other teachers as well. I therefore listened attentively to her and showed empathy for what she was going through. Alber (2017) claims that revealing our humanity to a novice teacher in pain allows us to be human and not mere colleagues. I thus learned that I always needed to be sincere and empathetic when a novice teacher – or any other teacher for that matter – was confronted with life's challenges.

I now also understood the importance of valuing other people's opinions and ideas. My engagement with the novice teaches about issues of classroom management compelled me to appreciate and respect each individual's point of view. In this context, Samaras and Freese (2006) argue that collaboration assists teachers to look beyond their own views and to understand the views of others. For instance, I learned to appreciate diverse perspectives when I asked the novice teachers in our second discussion session to write about and further deliberate on what they found most stressful in their classrooms. They each came up with a different viewpoint that enriched our discussions. I thus learned that every person's ideas were valuable and therefore required full consideration.

Transparency was another character trait that I recognised in myself during my engagement with the participants. I managed to gain their trust by being open and approachable. I was, for example, not shy to share embarrassing moments of my own teaching career with them. Alber (2017) comments that showing vulnerability as a mentor encourages novices not to be afraid to make mistakes and to understand that they can learn from and rectify them. For example, when the novice teachers were recalling and discussing embarrassing moments in their classrooms (Chapter Six), I told them about an incident when a learner had asked me what the difference between an earthquake and a tsunami was. I had asked the learners to list examples of natural disasters as an introduction to a Natural Sciences lesson under the theme Earth and Beyond. Earthquakes, volcanoes and floods were some of the examples the learners provided. The learner then caught me off guard and I could not provide a satisfactory answer to his question as I had not prepared well enough to find more information about tsunamis in particular. The participant and I all laughed at my embarrassment. In my view, being frank and truthful helped me to forge strong bonds with these novice teachers. This happened because, upon reflection, I realised that the novice teachers were at the most sensitive and fragile stage of their professional

careers and should never be lied to. Being bold, truthful and frank with novice teachers could prevent them from making unnecessary career-threatening mistakes.

I learned that continuous and collaborative learning occurred every time I engaged in dialogue with the participants. I also learned to be committed to every task that was my duty to perform. I learned to be humble and to value and appreciate other people's ideologies, beliefs, uniqueness, and the way they perceived other people and themselves.

I learned that, as a mentor, I could make a difference in the professional lives of novice teachers. All teachers are in a position to contribute positively to and impact policy development and the school culture. Coming fresh from university, novice teachers in particular could contribute new and rejuvenating ideas to old and outdated elements of the school culture. I also learned that I should pay close attention, be supportive, and give feedback to new teachers. I should also guide novice teachers to utilise their expertise and to gain the necessary skills in as far as developing a positive classroom ethos was concerned. When I followed this approach, they responded enthusiastically and a great deal more effectively to the many challenges associated with learner behaviour support.

### **8.5.2 What I was still struggling to understand about myself and others concerning novice teacher mentoring**

However, at this crucial point in the study I was also uncertain if my mentoring endeavours would have the necessary impact on the professional ethos of the novice teachers. At times I felt that I was not doing enough to intervene in the struggles they experienced. I was conscious of Sowell's (2017) warning: "Mentors who do not have knowledge about current mentoring practices may be limiting their mentees' opportunities to succeed in the classroom" (p. 129). For example, a novice teacher participant continued to find it a challenge to stamp her authority in her classroom and to curb unwarranted learner behaviour. Because of this, I had to resolve learner misbehaviour occurrences in her classroom on numerous occasions. I thus sometimes doubted my mentoring abilities when this particular novice teacher reported learner misbehaviour at every opportunity.

I also struggled to understand why, at times, I became irritated with novice teachers' lack of consistency in adhering to prescribed curricular obligations. I sometimes became frustrated when novice teachers' curriculum coverage did not meet the required standards of the school.

Instead of showing support and giving advice, I tended to become aggravated and intolerant. Sowell (2017) points out that mentors should have the ability to mould novice teachers so that they are lifelong learners who “...continually reflect on and improve their practice” (p. 134). For example, I once collected teachers’ files for routine control of curriculum coverage. Two of the novice teachers’ work was way behind what the annual teaching plans required. I then called them in to find out what had caused this. One of the reasons they gave was that it took them very long to explain certain concepts because they felt that they should be thorough before they moved on to another topic. Another excuse was that they had to assist learners who often did not complete their tasks for various reasons and, by doing so, they could not to keep up with the pace the curriculum required. I had to insist that the Department of Basic Education, as well as school management, expected every teacher to adhere to the pacesetter of his or her subject and to complete topics in time for assessments. I also told them that we needed to meet more often to tackle and discuss matters that might hinder their teaching and make them lag behind in terms of curriculum coverage.

At the time, I battled to offer professional advice to the novice teachers. I tended to wait for a teacher to approach me regarding their concerns before I would offer my advice. My dilemma stemmed from my reluctance to become involved in the private lives of novice teachers. For example, a teacher from another school once asked me to link her with any teacher in my school who would be willing to do a cross-transfer with her as she was working far from where she lived and my school would be closer for her. A novice teacher (Miss Zwide) who had been working in the school for two years lived very close to where Miss Cele worked. I therefore had to intervene in the private lives of these teachers by arranging a meeting to talk about the issue of a cross-transfer between Miss Zwide and Miss Cele, which was a task I did not relish at the time.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed my learning based on my continued engagement in interactive dialogue sessions with novice teacher participants. I learned that, as a mentor, I should ensure that I reflect on my interactions with novice teachers and that they should also reflect on their engagement with their learners in the classroom. Steeg (2016) maintains that teacher reflection is one of the most vital means that teachers should employ to observe and modify their

professional selves and their practice. I learned that, when novice teachers reflect on their strengths and limitations, when they care for every learner and understand their learners' sociocultural backgrounds, and when they embark on collaborative and multiple teaching strategies, they could curb the disruptive behaviour of learners. Evidently, as a mentor I should open doors for dialogue with novice teachers at every opportunity as this will enable them to reflect on and deal with challenges in their classrooms.

More particularly, I reflected on my learning that stemmed from my discussions with the novice teachers as presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. These reflections prompted a short summary of my aspirations for and wishes about mentoring novice teachers in the future. I also revealed what I had learned about myself after reflecting on the discussions I had had with the participants. I frankly narrated the struggles I encountered at that stage of the study in my efforts to understand my role as a mentor of novice teachers. I concluded by expressing my expectations with regards to the mentoring of novice teachers.

In the next chapter, Chapter Nine, I shall extend the discourse about my learning by elucidating the components of mentoring that were milestones in my study.

## CHAPTER NINE

### ILLUMINATING THE JOURNEY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

#### **9.1 Introduction: In-Depth Reflections on My Learning**

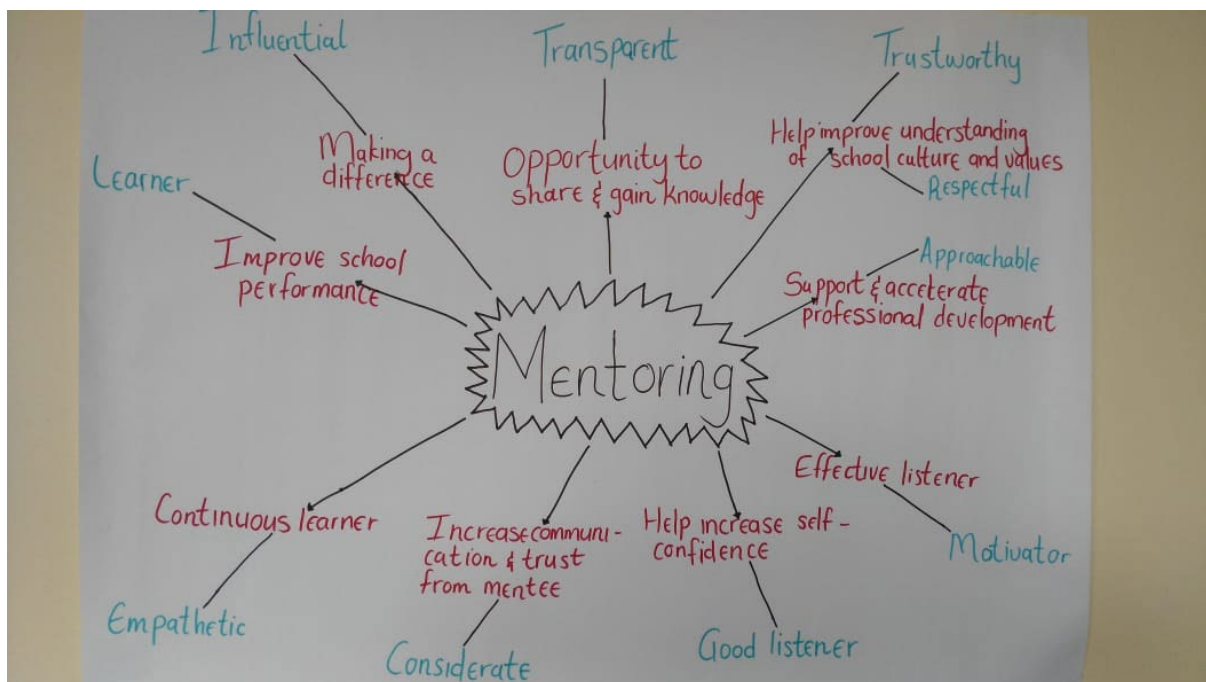
In this chapter, I reflect on my experiences of mentoring as a significant learning curve that I experienced along my journey as a veteran teacher, a deputy principal, and a mentor of novice teachers in my school. Trevethan and Sandretto (2017) view mentoring as “...a process that has the potential to afford significant learning opportunities for teachers as well as their mentees when the mentoring relationship is conceptualised in collegial ways” (p. 130). Keeping this sound advice in mind, my participation in a series of dialogues with novice teachers opened up opportunities for learning in and about the teaching profession that profoundly impacted both the novice teachers and myself.

The discourse in this chapter responds to both the research questions of my study: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* In this chapter I illuminate what I learned about the process of mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my own experiences as a novice teacher and a mentor. I then discuss new knowledge as it emerged from themes associated with my learning that was elicited by my memory-work as well as my discussions with the participants.

I commence the discourse by exploring the theme: *Mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of professional knowledge*. As explained in Chapter One, I understand professional knowledge as the knowledge that a teacher gains through interacting with learners, other teachers, parents, and his/her engagement in professional learning. For example, when a teacher has acquired a deeper understanding of curriculum content knowledge and the knowledge of learners’ qualities, professional knowledge has been acquired. In unpicking this theme, I connect my learning from my memory-work to my interactions with the novice teachers. The discourse is presented under the following sub-themes: (a) *Mentoring facilitates sound learner-teacher relationships*; and (b) *Mentoring enhances the support and guidance offered by veteran teachers*. I conclude with a summary of what I learned from my memory-work and the discussions with the novice teachers.

More themes for the construction of new awareness of mentoring outcomes also emerged through concept mapping. I thus also explore the themes: *Mentoring encourages sharing for the acquisition of professional knowledge. Mentoring supports and accelerates teachers' professional development; Mentoring promotes collaborative parent participation; and Mentoring encourages a positive school culture.*

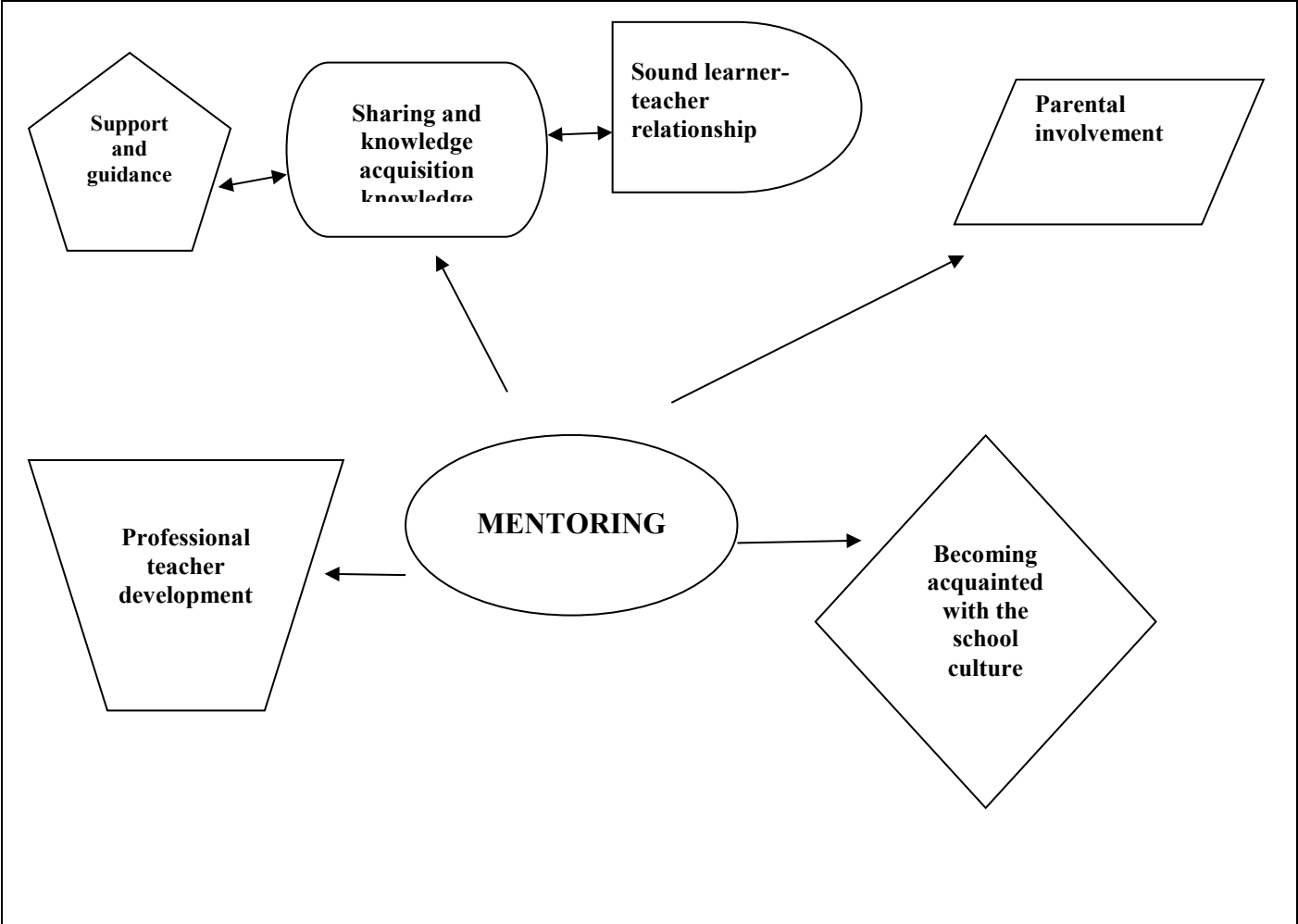
In Chapter Nine, I explore the first theme: *Mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of professional knowledge* and its two sub-themes: (a) *Mentoring facilitates learner-teacher relationships through sharing.* (b) *Mentoring enhances the support and guidance offered by veteran and mentor teachers through sharing.* I discuss the remaining themes in Chapter Ten.



**Figure 9.1: A concept map of the components of mentoring**

I initially explored my learning from my experiences of mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support through concept mapping. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) point out that concept maps allow the designer to value compound occurrences at a glance and to make new connections, build new knowledge, and/or analyse complex topics. During a contact session attended by my supervisor, critical friends and I, we agreed that I should condense the mentoring components to a maximum of six. It was felt that other elements that I had proposed interlinked and it would therefore be prudent to combine them to form one set of mentoring elements that would answer the two research questions. Below is the concept map that displays

the aspects that responded to the two research questions. Thereafter, I explain my learning under the themes that emerged from the concept map. These themes are supported by excerpts from my memory-work and my discussions with the novice teachers.



**Figure 9.2: Mentoring aspects that emerged from the research**

**9.2 Themes**

**9.2.1 Theme 1: Mentoring can encourage sharing and the acquisition of knowledge**

Rekindling my memories of my earliest teaching experiences and reflecting on my learning based on active engagements with novice teachers enhanced my insights into learner misbehaviour and what is required to curb it. In this process, I illuminated important aspects of mentoring and was able to construct what I believed to be the cornerstone of *effective mentorship* and *learner behaviour support*. Two conditions of sound mentoring are *sharing* and

*acquiring knowledge* (or knowledge acquisition). Bleach (1999) points out that there must be an element of support to propel mentoring such as shared power, a mutual exchange of information, evenly divided and active responsibilities, concerted learning, and common reflection. Sharing and acquiring knowledge are interlinked with a sound learner-teacher relationship as well as guidance and support from veteran teachers. Embarking on this journey of knowledge sharing with novice teachers undoubtedly made me a better manager, particularly in terms of my contribution towards more effective classroom management by these teachers. The journey started when I recalled experiences of my earliest years of teaching that were both positive and negative. For example, I reflected on what my sister, also a teacher, had taught me. Here are my thoughts:

*“Through my initial teaching experiences, I was motivated to encourage learning and instil positive values in novice teachers. I now know that my aspirations to encourage novice teachers came from the motivational narratives that my sister, who I look up to as a teacher, shared with me. For example, my sister helped novice teachers at her school to do lesson preparations and to employ diverse teaching techniques. I learned that collaborative learning and mentoring one another are essential in the development of each teacher (p.174).*

The many stories that various people shared with me enabled me to gain knowledge on how I could *increase social involvement and positive interaction* in my classroom. It was when I started engaging in positive interactions that I was provided with opportunities to navigate various classroom management techniques that would intensify and ensure maximum teacher-learner engagement. Reinke (2018) attests that teachers learn vital classroom management expertise through dialogue, observation of classroom situations, role-play, and verbal and written assignments. Cheon et al. (2019) also propose that, when they are motivationally accommodating, novice teachers create classroom environments that cultivate learners’ motivational wealth that is linked to prosocial behaviour. My sister’s story of the buffalo herd and its leader (Chapter Three) made me realise that it is vital that the learners in my classroom should receive equal and sufficient attention as they all come from diverse backgrounds and have different academic capabilities. I recorded her story as follows:

*I therefore looked forward to creating a classroom the following year that would resemble the life of the buffalos in the jungle. I was more than prepared to give learners the platform to demonstrate their capabilities while acting as a lead buffalo in guiding,*

*protecting, supporting and leading them to future responsible citizens as well as ensuring excellent academic attainments. As a class teacher myself, I learned that I had to lead by example; that is, I had to exhibit professionalism at all times towards my learners (p. 73).*

At first, I perceived myself as the only source of knowledge and understood that the novice teachers would be the recipients of the knowledge I shared with them. I wanted these teachers to implement what I thought would work for them. To my dismay, I now realise that I was erroneously under the impression that I had more knowledge than the novice teachers. As we engaged more deeply into our discussions, I realised that I was not the only one who had answers to the challenges that the teachers were facing in terms of classroom management. For example, in Chapter Six, I reflected in my journal on this issue:

*...People will always remember those teachers who did not do justice to their learning during their schooling days. The participants could also learn from one another about all the things that came out of our engagement in the discussion meeting (p. 144).*

We deliberated extensively on learner behaviour support in novice teachers' classrooms. For example, one of them shared the following:

*"I believe that if I keep my learners occupied at all times we would experience a decrease in learner misbehaviour.... One more thing, if we make sure that we are in the classroom five minutes before the lesson commences, learners will get used to that reality and will have no time to misbehave (Chapter Six, p. 142).*

By deliberating on the matters that the novice teachers could attend to in order to deal decisively with learner management in their classrooms significantly decreased the frequent reporting of unwarranted learner behaviour by the novice teachers. I thus believe that, together, we acquired vital knowledge during our interactions that resulted in an increase in their confidence to handle various learner issues in their classrooms. For example, I recorded the following comment in my journal (Chapter Six) to illustrate the point above:

*I felt that, as a manager, I had not been doing enough to induct them as novices as smoothly as possible. I also felt that coming together to talk about issues that posed challenges in their teaching career – particularly learner misbehaviour – could go a long way in helping us*

*reflect on and rectify our mistakes in the future. Sokal, Smith and Mowat (2003) suggest that novice teachers' conundrum is their incapability to manage learner behaviour. This is exacerbated when they are unsupported by school management teams. I was excited to learn that the participants looked forward to these sessions because they felt comfortable airing their views without being judged, ridiculed, or misunderstood by others (p. 153).*

Cakmak et al. (2018) note that novice teachers can develop teaching expertise by engaging with, participating in, and sharing their experiences by trying to meet learners' different learning needs, by understanding learners' perceptions, and by grounding their understanding in what it means to be a teacher for real. The participants thus helped me to understand that everyone learns from others during a mentoring process. I understood that the smallest act of goodwill by a teacher could change learners' attitudes and behaviour positively. Cheon et al. (2019) observe that, when socially structured, teachers display compassionate and courteous behaviour to build learners' social abilities and relationships with the school community. For example, the story below that was shared by one of the novice teachers (Chapter Six) made me believe that teachers could play a pivotal role in nurturing, moulding, and instilling confidence and love in their learners:

*"I remember my high school teacher who acted as a parent and supported me throughout my high school life. I would always come late to class for her subject, Accounting. She asked me the reason why I was always late and I told her that I walked over seven kilometres to and from school since my parents were unemployed and could not afford my bus fare. From that day my teacher gave me money for transport. She would sit me down and talk to me about improving my marks in her subject. I managed to get very good results in all my subjects in Grade 12 as she paid for my registration at the university as well as my transport fees the following year. That is the kind of teacher I want to become for my learners. I also want to change at least the life of one learner each year because I know what it feels like to be loved and cared for by your teacher. You even work hard in your studies not to disappoint your teacher" (p. 148).*

By rigorously sharing our ideas about classroom management, I learned that it would take a compassionate, caring, loving, considerate and understanding teacher to maintain classroom discipline at all times. Rucinski (2018) articulates that a high level of emotional support is usually associated with high levels of kindness, values, positive attitudes, teacher compassion and awareness, and a learner-centred focus. I knew instinctively that it would be vital to meet

with the novice teachers to share our experiences of classroom management in order to learn from one another. Moreover, it was also imperative that the novice teachers emulated what we had shared in their classrooms. To illustrate, a participant later shared how she controlled her classroom:

*"The love that I try to show my learners at all times contributes a lot to the success of managing my classroom. I always believe a little bit of caring and of appreciating learners for what they do go a long way in making learners feel part and parcel of the classroom community, if I may put it that way, Sir. I do not know whether it is because I am class-based and also teaching the young ones in the Junior Primary phase, or if the love I display for my learners enables them to talk about their concerns and what bothers them with ease. If you give children love, I am certain they will give back the same love, and more"* (Chapter Seven, p. 161).

Mentoring novice teachers in my school also assisted them in sharing personal matters that could hinder effective teaching in their classrooms. In my view, a teacher may not perform at his or her best if he or she has unresolved personal problems. Therefore, sharing your woes with your mentor not only helps you to deal with the obstacles in your path, but it also establishes a long-lasting relationship that is built on trust. Schuck et al. (2018) articulate that, as incoming members of the school population, novice teachers are required to build personal relationships with their mentors. For novice teachers to focus on advancing their awareness and expertise to proceed with their job commitment as well as professional growth, they need to resolve their problems by sharing them with people they trust. For instance, an excerpt from Chapter Three relates to the importance of sharing confidential matters with a mentor, as I stated in my journal:

*"I learned that it is crucial to always seek help and advice from those around me, especially if I were to benefit positively from them. Miss Ntaka not only became my unofficial mentor, but she also became a friend in whom I confided my frustrations. I was not scared to share my mistakes with her"* (p. 82).

Talking to a person you trust about any challenge you are facing as a novice teacher could release frustrations and this release could, in turn, impact learners in the classroom. Kardos and Johnson (2010) warn that it is imperative to pay consideration to novice teachers and their struggles. I observed that giving novice teachers the space to discuss what hindered their attainment of positive teacher-learner interactions helped them to face their challenges head-

on. Richter et al. (2013) note that novice teachers regard their mentor teachers as their most significant foundation of support during their initial years of teaching. To illustrate, one of the novice teachers shared her deepest misery with me (Chapter Eight):

A novice teacher came to inform me that she was filing for divorce because her husband of two years had been physically and emotionally abusing her. She told me this after I had noticed that her behaviour had somewhat changed. Her mood swings were beginning to worry me and others. It was therefore crucial that I listened attentively to what she had to say and also show empathy for what she was going through (p. 195).

Our knowledge of learner misbehaviour was enhanced when we discussed the novice teachers' memories of their own ill-discipline in high school. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) advocate that recollections of past experiences in our lives may contribute to accepting who we are as teachers and what influenced us to do things the way we did. This was an extensive discussion because the novice teachers could relate their own experiences to those of learners in their classrooms. For example, one of the novice teachers admitted that sharing their experiences would assist them in combating learner misbehaviour:

*“These kinds of discussions help, Sir, because right now I can see that we are making the same mistakes our teachers made when we were learners ourselves. In this discussion, the fingers are pointing at teachers as those who contributed to our misbehaviour. My worry right now is that I have learners in my class who are unruly and I wonder if it is because of me they are behaving this way”* (Chapter Eight, p. 178).

Sharing information about diverse teaching strategies also proved to be a catalyst for effective classroom management. In my view, our discussion on diverse teaching approaches allowed us to explore ways of engaging learners in compelling and innovative methods of teaching and learning. Goh, Yusuf and Wong (2017) explain that using diverse techniques of teaching becomes essential when we want to elicit learners' interest. For instance, one of the novice teachers (Chapter Eight) highlighted the value of utilising a variety of teaching methodologies to stimulate learners' minds:

*“I always like to use the group teaching method to decrease learner misbehaviour in my classroom. With group teaching, I separate the class into two with regards to activities I had planned to give them. I find it easier to explain a new concept to a group*

*rather than the entire class. While I am busy with one group, the other group is engaged in another activity and so I can manage them. Although I still have learners who misbehave when I am in class, I think I sometimes manage to keep the entire class occupied in the lesson for the duration of my period” (p. 178).*

At times, sharing knowledge by means of a demonstration lessons helps facilitate engagement with learners and results in the reduction of misbehaviour on their part. It was crucial that I constantly demonstrated how a particular lesson could be presented using a textbook as well as learners’ and my own prior knowledge. Reinke et al. (2018) observe that teachers learn fundamental classroom management competencies through discussion, scrutiny of video-recorded examples of classroom positions, role-play drill, and oral and printed assignments that are reviewed and returned. Similarly, Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer (2004) note that the quality of the time that teachers spend on learner engagement in learning activities increases the level of prosocial behaviour. To illustrate, in Chapter Eight I narrated a lesson in history that I had taught using innovative ideas that engaged learners to the extent that they looked forward to the culmination of the topic the next day:

All the participant nodded as they were eagerly waiting for some demonstration from me as a mentor and a seasoned teacher. I knew that a positive demonstration would encourage them to become more innovative in their teaching. I would have loved to do a demonstration lesson in a classroom full of learners so that they could observe the limited level of learner misbehaviour when they were fully occupied throughout a lesson. However, this was not possible at the time, and I verbally shared my methodology of a Grade 4 history lesson in Social Sciences on the topic ‘Communication through time’. Social Sciences is one of six subjects offered in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) and is a combination of history and geography (p. 184).

If seasoned teachers do not share their knowledge with novices, it could be detrimental to their growth and development. Austin et al. (2004) note that veteran teachers are often unwilling to share their knowledge with novice teachers, yet they want learners to work collaboratively and share their knowledge. In my opinion, novice teachers are justified in relying on veteran teachers to advance their teaching practice. In Chapter Eight, for example, one novice teacher expressed her irritation about a lack of shared knowledge by veteran teachers:

*“Seasoned teachers are very reluctant to demonstrate how one can introduce or come up with interesting activities that learners will enjoy to enhance their learning. I sometimes feel that maybe they are intimidated by us asking lots of questions or maybe they feel that we know better because we studied at universities whereas they studied at colleges” (p. 183).*

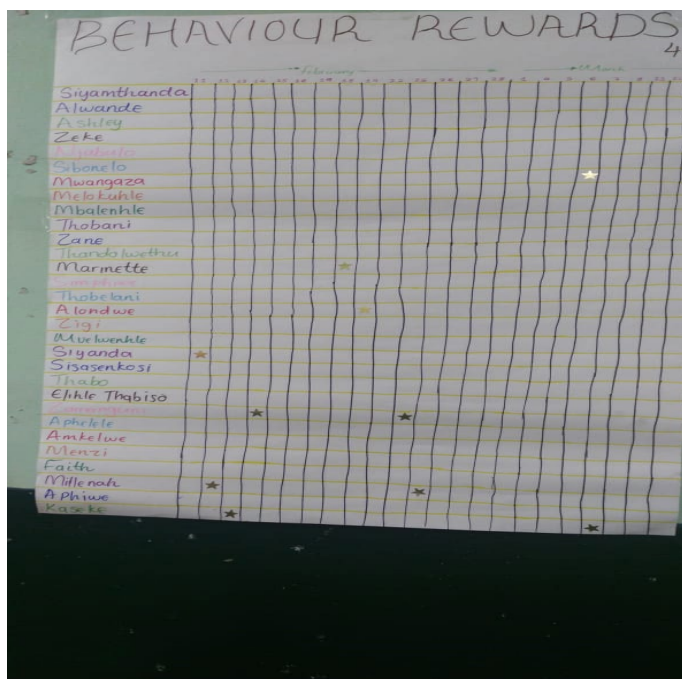
Reflecting on the theme *Mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of knowledge*, I formulated a slogan that illustrates my belief in myself as an effective mentor and manager who is approachable:

***Social interaction: A prerequisite for effective mentoring***

By engaging in discussions and shared narratives with relevant people in my profession, I have learned that sharing knowledge amongst colleagues does not only improve teacher-learner engagement in the classroom, but that it also establishes a collegial climate in a school. It facilitates the swift acquisition of background knowledge of the school for novice teachers in particular. As a mentor I provided, and am still providing, platforms for interactions with novice teachers through discussion meetings. These pave the way towards gaining in-depth understanding of classroom management without untoward barriers.

Since the start of my interactions with the participants, there was a notable improvement in learner behaviour in their classrooms. This demonstrated that a mentor has to pay attention to even minor challenges that novice teachers’ experience. Similarly, the discussions with my supervisor and critical friends equipped me with the understanding that my interventions in the professional lives of the novice teachers in my school would be vital then, and will be even more so in the future.

Mentoring is not static and should be an ongoing process. I learned that novice teachers will view such discussion meetings as a platform for acquiring knowledge that will be of benefit in their classrooms. For example, after our interactions, a novice teacher developed a chart with the names of learners on which she acknowledged and praised learners who displayed positive behaviour by putting a star next to their names. This shows that our discussions yielded positive results in as far as classroom management and learner behaviour support were concerned.



**Figure 9.3: A chart that encourages positive behaviour in a classroom**

Samaras (2011) acknowledges that meaningful learning occurs when self-study is a collective effort. I thus learned that "teaching is a socio-ethical act" (Samaras, 2011, p. 79). This means that teachers who embark on self-study research should respect moral values such as diversity, dignity, honesty, fairness, and the rights of every member in the school community. Interacting and sharing knowledge with novice teachers thus enabled me to make sense of my mentoring and teaching practices and to understand myself and others better.

### 9.2.2 Mentoring facilitates teacher-learner relationships

My involvement in different activities during my early years of teaching as well as my engagement with novice teachers in discussions on learner behaviour enhanced the relationship of trust that we forged – and this spilled over into their classrooms. In my opinion, if teachers develop close-knit relationships with the learners in their classrooms, they will experience vigorous teaching and learning that are free from learner ill-discipline. Northfield and Sherman (2004) advocate that teachers should ensure that consistent, caring relationships are forged in the classroom to support the socio-emotional development of learners. Moreover, Alber (2017) stresses that a way to deepen our relationship with learners is to share a bit about ourselves with them and create opportunities for them to share who they are with us and one another. For instance, in Chapter Four I indicated the importance of generating bonds with learners in the classroom:

We would also write birthday messages on cards designed by the learners and myself. The learners looked forward to receiving birthday wishes coming from their peers and teacher. I also bought a cake at the end of each month and the learners shared it equally. This activity created a bond among the learners and between the learners and me. After a while, most learners effortlessly shared their thoughts, miseries, and joys with me (p. 89).

Learners come to class with different academic capabilities. They also come from diverse cultural, socioeconomic and, in some schools, racial backgrounds, as was the case in my school. Therefore, learners at times exhibit multiple behavioural patterns that could become a stumbling block in their academic attainment and could also cause tensions with teachers. Natalya et al. (2014) indicate that “the relationship between teacher and learner is paramount to the academic and socio-emotional success of learners throughout their educational experience” (p. 294). To illustrate, in Chapter Four I highlighted the relationship I had with all the learners in my classroom despite their academic achievements, or lack thereof:

The relationship I had with my learners was not only based on how I prepared my lessons and how the learners responded to the strategies I implemented, but I also had to establish a relationship with those learners who had a low self-esteem because of their poor academic attainment. I wanted to be closer and make them feel that they were as important as the other learners in the classroom. I gave learners with poor academic achievements some responsibilities that I thought would boost their confidence (p. 88).

One is bound to encounter one or two learners in one’s classroom that challenge one’s patience. They misbehave persistently and sour their relationships with the teacher and even other learners. Breaux (2003) claims that teachers who hope for faultless behaviour by all learners are extremely naive and invite intense disappointment. I learned as a novice teacher that it is a mammoth task to create a sound relationship with a learner who is always disruptive. This will last until the teacher has ascertained the root cause of the learner’s misbehaviour. Learner-teacher relationships are not built in one day. Roffey (2011) warns novice teachers that relationships with learners are built over time and that every bit of communication a novice teachers has with individual learners is significant. For example, in Chapter Eight a novice teacher shared a story of one unruly boy in her classroom:

*“This is a very worrying topic we are talking about today. I know that there is still a lot to learn in this profession, Sir. However, I am worried if I would ever find a winning formula for learner behaviour. As we are talking, my mind rushes back to this one boy, Bandile, who is so disruptive in my class. I used to have sleepless nights every time I had to go to class the next day because of him. This was until I had sat down with him and asked about his background, trying to have that teacher-learner relationship with him, Sir. That is when I discovered that he lives with his step-parents. His mother passed on when he was a toddler and his father got married to another woman, his stepmother. Years later, his father passed on, leaving him in the care of his stepmother. Right now Bandile is living with his stepmother who is married to another man, his stepfather. The step-parents have children of their own. I then started to feel for Bandile. The attitude I had towards him changed for the better. His behaviour also started to change. Although he still shows signs of misbehaviour, particularly when there is another teacher in the classroom, his behaviour has since improved” (p. 179).*

Strong learner-teacher relationships could also be forged through positive relations with learners’ parents. If a parent of a learner frequently communicates with the teacher, or the other way round, the chances are that learners will respect the teacher and some may even see the teacher taking on the role of a parent. Boonk et al. (2018) advise that parents who are active participants in their children’s education promote their children’s social, emotional and academic development. When novice teachers get to know and form a professional relationship with parents in their initial years of teaching, it will support their efforts to better manage their classrooms and increase prosocial behaviours among the affected learners. To illustrate, in Chapter Four I indicated how I managed to win over some of the learners in my class by getting to know their parents and where they resided:

For example, I paid a visit to each of my learners’ homes to get to know their parents personally. The learners were surprised and thrilled that I was getting along with their parents and therefore they tended to behave well in the classroom. Stronger bonds were forged when the parents and learners of the school saw me attending some community gatherings. I used to attend a church that had a branch around the area where the school was situated. I made time to socialise with the parents and learners of my school informally and that led to an increase in the trust among us (p. 91).

In one of the discussion sessions with the novice teachers, it emerged that having a motherly or fatherly relationship with learners could establish strong bonds. If we teach our learners the same way we would teach our own children, we could experience much joy in our classrooms in as far as learner behaviour and academic achievement are concerned. Additionally, Northfield and Sherman (2004) stress the importance of teachers treating learners as if they are their own so they could give their best in as far as caring for them is concerned. For example, one of the novice teachers (Chapter Eight) explained the importance of such a relationship:

*“We spoke about treating our learners like they are our children. I feel that showing the role of being a parent to learners is very important in as far as learner behaviour is concern. In my experience, children will do their best not to disappoint their parents. In the same way, if we as teachers treat these learners as our children, I think we will not encounter such high levels of learner misbehaviour in our classrooms. There is this tendency of taking learners outside the class every time they start misbehaving. That to me does not show any love for the learners; instead, it worsens the situation. We are challenged to understand every learner in our classrooms” (p. 180).*

Relationships are built on the positive attributes teachers transmit and model. Learners are fond of getting recognised and praised by their teachers for the exceptional deeds they exhibit in class. It becomes more significant if a teacher acknowledges a learner’s outstanding accomplishments in the presence of other learners. Every learner, just like every novice teacher, now and then relishes approval from his or her teacher (or mentor). Breaux (2003) advises that novice teachers should share their keenness for teaching and their pleasure about having each learner in their classrooms with the learners. For instance, in Chapter Four I referred to a boy who displayed disruptive behaviour in my classroom. This rapidly changed because of the strong bond I managed to forge with him:

Allowing Sphehile to take charge of some of the tasks in class did not only change his behavioural outlook, but his academic achievement also improved. He stopped fighting and making noises in class for he was always paying attention to what he was doing. His attitude towards other learners also changed for the better. I also made it a point of recognising and praising him for his good deeds. I remember how excited he became when he was commended and handed a certificate by the principal in assembly for being one of the learners whose behaviour had taken a dramatic turn for the better... (p. 89).

At times, novice teachers could gain a lot of insight through negative teacher-learner experiences. I learned that a teacher could create an amazing culture of teaching and learning in the classroom if positive rapport exists. However, the lack of rapport, even with a small group in the class, could increase the level of learner misbehaviour. Botha and Kourkoutas (2016) advise that some novice teachers lack a range of expertise and methods. These are required to meet learners' needs and to deal constructively with their unruly behaviour. For instance, in one of the discussion meetings (Chapter Seven), a participant revealed her dislike of a former teacher:

*“There was this male teacher in Grade 10 who never liked me. He could not hide the fact that he hated my personality. It was unfortunate that he was also teaching us Accounting. I ended up hating him and the subject he taught as well and that prompted me to be disruptive every time he was in the classroom teaching us. I would deliberately make certain that I would pass nasty comments when he was teaching because he would also do the same to me at any given moment”* (p. 173).

There are therefore instances when teachers are the cause of learner misbehaviour in their classrooms. If a learner notices that a teacher has a negative attitude or shows some kind of dislike in him or her, it is highly likely that the learner will reciprocate and show the same hostility towards the teacher. McManus (1989) explains that if learners think teachers are hostile towards them, this influences learner co-operation. For example, one of the novice teachers (Chapter Eight) explained the reason for her dislike of a teacher:

*“When I was in high school particularly, I could easily notice when a teacher did not like me. I would then reciprocate by being nasty and disrespectful towards him or her. I would simply voice out without any fear of what was bothering me so that the teacher concerned would know my stance about him or her. Mrs Ngcobo was one teacher who was always on my case about how I was attracting male teachers by wearing a short skirt to school. I ended up responding in a very disrespectful manner by telling her that no one was stopping her from wearing a short skirt herself and that she was jealous of my body. Since then I passed remarks every time she entered the classroom, such as that she was ugly. Therefore, sometimes teachers themselves are the cause of learner misbehaviour”* (p. 178).

Upon my reflections on this sub-theme (*Learner-teacher relationships*), I formulated a principle that should guide novice teachers and myself to ensure that our learner-teacher

relationships are based on shared respect and positive expectations. As a mentor in my school, I strive that novice teachers will:

***Acknowledge learners as partners in the education process.***

Mokhele (2006) advises that "teachers should work together with learners from a position of social equality" (p. 150). In my view, positive learner-teacher relationships will emanate from novice teachers' understanding of their learners' social circumstances.

If I hoped that the novice teachers would foster healthy relationships with their learners, I first had to establish such a relationship with them as their mentor. I learned through our discussions and by recalling memories of my early years of teaching how I could create relationships with learners that would enhance collaborative teaching and learning. I thus embraced every opportunity to model my relationship with learners in the class on extra-mural learning situations as well. I thus often reminded the novices that it was crucial to get to know their learners by name and to greet them every time they entered the classroom. Furthermore, starting a lesson with an ice breaker, understanding learners' social backgrounds, and listening to their troubles would encourage sound relationships.

I also learned how one could create a relationship with learners through lesson presentations. I learned that teachers needed to make their lessons appealing by using real-life examples to demonstrate learning content. I believe that if teachers, particularly novices, strive to create a bond with each learners, they could effectively maximise their teaching. Mokhele (2006) maintains that "positive teacher-learner relationships have the potential of creating a conducive learning environment in the classroom and will determine whether or not a learner can benefit from the teaching-learning situation" (p. 149). In my experience, learners who have sound relationships with their teachers often make certain they model acceptable behaviour in the classroom environment.

### **9.2.3 Mentoring enhances the support and guidance novices receive from veteran and mentor teachers**

The support and guidance I received from my principal, experienced teachers and my unofficial mentor encouraged me to become more interested in my teaching practice as a novice teacher.

Hudson (2012) stresses that mentors can induct novice teachers into the profession by offering them consistent support to minimise their ordeals and predicaments. I also believe that the discussions I had with the novice teachers were beneficial to all of us. We addressed various topics that required my support and guidance as a mentor. These interactions also equipped the novice teachers with skills to overcome some of the challenges they encountered.

As a novice teacher, I expected some support and guidance from people and professional bodies inside and outside the school premises. Hudson (2012) states that through quality mentoring, novice teachers can develop a range of problem-solving techniques for dealing with the realities and difficulties related to difficult school and teaching circumstances. I realised that I needed to pay attention to my senior teachers and others that I came into contact with regularly. To illustrate, in Chapter Three I highlighted the guidance that my sister offered me unwittingly through a story she told me:

Having a sister who told me stories about her learners and school did not only make me develop a love of teaching, but it also enabled me to learn tips for managing my learners as well as establishing cordial working relationships with my colleagues (p. 74).

Receiving adequate support from veteran teachers helped me as a novice teacher to improve my teaching skills. Sánchez Solarte (2019) highlights the importance of supporting novice teachers because their wellbeing and their effectiveness in handling the classroom ultimately affect learners. Hearing words of support and encouragement from the principal was overwhelming because, as a novice, I still doubted myself. For example, the words of my principal (Chapter Three) fell on my ears like rain in the desert:

My principal then told me that he always received positive feedback about my behaviour, my conduct and lesson presentations from Miss Ntaka. He also gave me advice and strategies about classroom management. For example, he advised me that he knew I was a novice teacher, and that I had learned new and innovative ways of teaching at college. The principal gave me the autonomy to try anything that would benefit and develop the learners in the school. For example, he showed me an unused classroom that could be utilised to prepare co-curricular activities such as story-telling, Natural Sciences and Mathematics Olympiads, and cultural activities (p. 81).

In my view, veteran teachers in a school should play a pivotal role in providing the necessary support and guidance to novice teachers. If this happens, novice teachers will contribute positively to school activities and finally act with autonomy. Cakmak, Gunduz and Emstad (2018) note that novice teachers “need to receive not only professional support, but also emotional support from family, friends, co-workers and other teacher educators” (p. 2). To illustrate, in Chapter Four I stressed the importance of supporting one another in all our tasks:

When I embarked on this project, I had no idea how strenuous the organisation of it would be. I realised that one could never organise an event of that magnitude without the support of others and I learnt that people could achieve a lot by working as a team. After many discussions with teachers, learners and parents, we had a pleasant excursion. It was the first time in their lives that most learners travelled such a long distance. It was thrilling and fulfilling, in the end, to see the hard work coming to fruition and knowing that I had played part in bringing joy to learners in such a manner (p. 93)

Novice teachers should always receive support and guidance from the school management team whose members are their mentors on their journey to becoming effective teachers themselves. I believe that for novice teachers to swiftly get to grips with demanding teaching expectations, they require all the support they need, as well as proper guidance. Gholam (2018) states that mentors should support and guide novice teachers to be able to establish a classroom atmosphere that encourages hard work and is supportive of learning. The support and guidance of the senior teachers should result in a sound culture of teaching and learning on the side of novice teachers. For instance, in Chapter Three I emphasised how important the guidance was that I had received from my unofficial mentor when I was a novice teacher:

I then submitted my examination question paper to Miss Ntaka. The next day, just before a Grade 4 and 5 teachers’ meeting, Miss Ntaka called me in to thank me for taking the time to cover all the aspects of the subject when setting the examination papers. However, she reminded me that I should always ensure to count the marks for which I set my examination paper and that my General Sciences question paper exceeded the required mark allocation by over one hundred marks (p. 80).

Offering support and guidance to novice teachers could enhance the collegial climate between them and the mentor. As a mentor, I know that it is my responsibility to lead from the front and to clear a positive path for novice teachers. Richter et al. (2013) stress that mentors should “interact with their novices in a way that supports inquiry and that enables them to learn in and from their practices” (p. 169). For example, in Chapter Eight I offered some guidance on how teachers can incorporate their thinking to make a lesson enjoyable:

I told the novice teacher participants that I would demonstrate using one of the lessons I had taught in Grade 4 the previous year. As indicated, the topic of the lesson was ‘Communication through time’. The focus of the topic was how communication evolved as well as various forms of communication that stayed the same (p. 184).

Sometimes, it is due to a lack of support and guidance from veteran or mentor teachers that novice teachers are unable to perform their duties with excellence. A novice teacher could sometimes be so overwhelmed by the lack of support and proper guidance from their senior counterparts that they become lonely and vulnerable. Williams (2018) sees the need for the “urgency of schools [to launch] support programs to guide novice teachers in teaching, surviving, and becoming successful” (p. 11). For instance, in Chapter Five I stressed the lack of support I had received from a colleague whom I had trusted to help me when I was still a novice:

I once attended a sports meeting at a school that was about 45 kilometres from my school in a remote area, and finding transportation was awkward. The meeting finished only around 17h00. Most of the teachers who attended the meeting had their own cars. After the meeting they drove away, leaving me alone in a place where transportation was hard to find. I was attacked by hooligans and robbed of my wallet, sunglasses and shoes while I was waiting for transport. I directed my anger at Mr Ngcobo because I felt that I would not have been robbed if he had been considerate enough to attend the meeting with me. Moreover, he had a car and also knew that the school was far and in a deep rural area. The principal only expressed his sympathy when I narrated the incident to him the following day (p. 115).

I also experience a lack of proper guidance from people for whom I should have had the utmost respect because of their high ranking in the Department of Basic Education. Williams (2018) points out that a critical objective of mentoring is to retain teachers and provide support based

on the needs of individuals. To illustrate this point (Chapter Five), I expressed my anguish at the lack of guidance and support by a circuit manager:

As I was still engaging the learners in the lesson, the official called me. He started by asking why was I teaching a lesson I had already taught and asked why I was reading. He asserted that I had to let the learners read on their own. I tried to explain that I was reinforcing what I had taught in the previous lesson because it linked to that day's lesson, but Mr Khan told me to take a seat and observe him teaching. I could hardly hold back the tears as I observed Mr Khan taking over my class. I did not have the courage to look at the learners while Mr Khan was teaching because I felt that they sensed I was aggravated by his insensitive behaviour. In my view, it was rude and embarrassing when he took charge of my lesson in such an arrogant manner (p. 119).

A novice teacher could easily be demoralised by inadequate support and guidance they get from their veteran colleagues who are supposed to be acting as their mentors. Novice teachers could become reluctant to try new activities that could enhance learner academic development as well as teacher confidence. Williams (2018) stresses that supporting novice teachers at the commencement of their profession is vital as it provides a positive base for valuable teaching insights that will enhance the achievement of learners. For instance, in Chapter Five I mentioned an incident when senior teachers did not provide support and guidance when I needed it the most:

When I asked for input on the project from my fellow Natural Sciences colleagues, they told me that there was nothing they could do to help me for they had warned me not to bother entering the competition. They informed the principal that I would make a mockery of our school if I entered the competition. Many of my colleagues advised that I should withdraw before it was too late. Not one teacher asked me what project I was planning and how they could assist us. I also began to doubt myself when the principal raised his concerns about the competition and I felt intimidated as I was still a novice teacher. He warned me that a lacklustre performance would never attract the attention of departmental officials and that it would be detrimental to our learners' confidence. Because I had promised my learners that we were going to the competition to learn from other learners, I decided to persevere. I was encouraged by my family, and that was all (p. 121).

A lack of support by senior teachers could also emotionally disturb a novice teacher. In my experience, most novice teachers are keen to engage in various activities offered at a school. However, they should not be left to figure things out themselves. Cakmak, Gunduz and Emstad (2018) note that novice teachers try to cope with their challenges by asking for assistance from seasoned colleagues, but they often do not get any support. To illustrate this point in Chapter Five, I indicated my frustrations concerning the non-existence of support by teachers I should have looked up to:

I remember taking the under 13 boys' and girls' soccer teams to play against another school in a different township. I had hired a local minibus to take us to that school. I was the only teacher taking care of all these learners. I felt that I needed another teacher to look after the girls while I was coaching the boys, and the other way round (p. 116).

Upon reflecting on this sub-theme, *Support and guidance from veteran or mentor teachers*, I developed a principle that may serve as a reminder to senior teachers and mentors to provide the necessary support and guidance to novice teachers. The principle is:

***I can give support and proper guidance to novice teachers through regular discussions***

Rucinski et al. (2018) emphasise the significance of supporting novice teachers by not only persuading them to remain in the profession, but also by guiding them to become successful teachers. Similarly, I learned that providing support and guidance to novice teachers in my school contributes to their ability to manage discipline in their classrooms, which helps their learners achieve academically.

My respect for the novice teachers' opinions improved incrementally as I continued my engagements with them. For instance, they once requested me to table a proposal at a management meeting that teachers should be classroom-based instead of roving. After discussing the matter with management, we presented the idea to the staff, who agreed that it was viable in the Intermediate Phase where learners are offered only six subjects. In Grade 7, however, which is in the Senior Phase, learners have nine subjects which would make the proposal difficult to implement in this phase. All parties agreed that it would be feasible to

implement the new system the next year as we had an extra class in Grade 7. However, that year (2020) the third class in Grade 7 had to be phased out and there were not enough staff members to make this change possible. The novice teachers were pleased that their proposal had at least been considered.

In the next sections, I describe the most useful discoveries pertaining to the two research questions: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* I also describe the new insights I gained in relation to my research topic: *Mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support: a deputy principal's self-study*. I then narrate what I realised about my role as a deputy principal and mentor for novice teachers. This is followed by how a sociocultural theoretical perspective aided me to understand and discuss the themes. I conclude by expressing my learning about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school.

### **9.3 My Most Useful Discoveries Concerning the Research Questions**

To explore what discoveries I made concerning the two research questions, I associated the questions with the theme: *Mentoring can encourage sharing and the acquisition of teachers' professional knowledge*. Linked to this theme are the following sub-themes: *Mentoring facilitates learner-teacher relationships through sharing* and *Mentoring enhances support and guidance by veteran and mentor teachers*. By exploring these themes, I was able to identify useful discoveries that should strengthen my abilities as a mentor and a school manager.

One of the discoveries is the value I add to novice teacher's experiences of the school culture and classroom teaching practices. As I was walking down memory lane by recalling my first years of teaching, I discovered the value of the significant role a mentor plays in the teaching career of a novice teacher. I realised that novice teachers need a mentor who will communicate with them continually, mostly on school-related matters. It is undeniable that managing a classroom often becomes a challenging experience for novice teachers because of learner misbehaviour. I learned that discussing issues of learner behaviour with novice teachers was

gradually bearing fruit in as far as the maintenance of and managing the levels of learner behaviour in their classrooms were concerned.

Furthermore, I discovered that acting as a shield as a provider of support and the necessary guidance to novice teachers facilitated their growing self-confidence and self-reliance. They soon learnt to make sound judgements and find solutions on their own. Through experience, I discovered that support and guidance by mentor teachers enable novice teachers to speedily familiarise themselves with the culture of the school where they teach. This is so because, among the many issues that novice teachers discuss with their mentor teachers, are their expectations in terms of learner conduct, classroom management, and teacher professionalism, such as the dress code of the school or their time management.

I also discovered that novice teachers must build relationships with their learners both inside and outside their classrooms. I enjoyed teaching because of the positive relationships I forged with my learners. This discovery prompted my interactive discussions with the novice teachers regarding the creation of strong bonds with the learners in their classrooms. I also learned that if teachers portray love and respect and exert themselves to be protective, to guide and nurture their learners and care for them, and to listen to their learners, they will teach happy learners who will reciprocate these sound values.

### **9.3 New Insights in Relation to the Research Topic**

I gained new insights regarding the research questions: I observed that mentor teachers are expected to fully dedicate themselves to the process of mentoring novice teachers, particularly in terms of classroom management. In my experience, novice teachers gain a lot by observing how mentors and even veteran teachers manage their classrooms on a daily basis. As a novice teacher, I observed the manner in which senior teachers presented their lessons and how they conducted themselves in the presence of learners, colleagues, and other members of the school community. I also closely watched in what manner they interacted with these role players.

Another new insight that I gained about the topic is that a mentor of novice teachers should focus on deliberations on classroom matters and learner behaviour. However, each individual novice teacher adapts and adjusts to his or her classroom setup in a unique way. I learned that

if a novice teacher displays a lack of belief and confidence in learners, this attitude also has a negative impact on them and could thus serve as a stumbling block in the way of a sound relationship with learners.

I also learned that novice teachers who have good rapport with their learners should interact regularly with their mentors. Inquisitive novice teachers in my school who asked questions, got involved in discussions, and also provided solutions to problems experienced less learner disruptive behaviour than their peers because they applied what had been discussed at meetings.

Another new insight is that, when novice teachers have discussion sessions on their own, they share information and strategies and acquire skills to maintain control in their classrooms. I learned that allowing the novice teachers to discuss and take decisions on matters regarding learner behaviour independently enhanced their class management practices and also boosted their self-confidence.

#### **9.4 Enlightening my Role as a Deputy Principal and a Mentor of Novice Teachers**

One thing I realised as a mentor is, that if novice teachers are to experience a smooth transition from teaching practice to the realities of the classroom, this cannot occur without supervision. Experience has shown that all novice teachers, just as I did, need a mentor who offers guidance to properly handle learners in the classroom.

I also realised that a mentor should exert positivity. I always strove, and shall do so in the future, to show a positive attitude towards the support, guidance, love, patience, caring, nurturing, listening and respect I show novice teachers. Thus, if these attributes and skills are well modelled, novice teachers will emulate them in their classrooms. Every manager likes to work with teachers who look forward to coming to school because they know that they are appreciated. If teachers are happy and content, it will rub off on their learners.

I also realised that teachers who respect their learners always behave in an acceptable and appropriate manner. Thus classroom discipline begins and ends with a teacher's attitude. My role as a mentor is therefore to engage with novice teachers in discussions and to deliberate on

issues that are of concern to them in their classrooms. This is done to resolve issues and ensure that teachers come to class with a positive mind-set and respect for their learners.

I realised that I have a responsibility as a mentor and a school manager to motivate novice teachers to upgrade their academic qualifications. Improving one's qualifications enhances both knowledge and insight and elevates one's teaching practice. I believe that it is my role as a mentor to convince novice teachers that their effectiveness is not limited to the classroom, but they can go all the way to positively contribute towards enriching and, where necessary, changing the education system of South Africa.

### **9.5 What I Learned about Mentoring Novice Teachers in Terms of Learner Behaviour Support by Engaging with Them in my School**

The most fundamental lesson I learned is the necessity for patience. During my discussions with the novice teachers, I discovered that not all the aspects that were raised about behaviour support would be exhausted. I understood that the participants had diverse approaches for engaging their learners and I thus learned that it required different lengths of times for these novice teachers to implement effective learner discipline and for it to come into effect in their classrooms. Therefore, I learned to exercise patience and tolerance and that the learners would adapt to them each at a different pace.

I discovered that the skill of listening to novice teachers' challenges and joys without immediately offering my own interpretations and proposals was paramount. In my view, it is crucial that a mentor pays attention to the 'little things' as much as to the bigger issues in terms of learner behaviour support. I believe that one acquires more wisdom by listening than by speaking. I therefore learned that engagement with the participants in discussions regarding learner behaviour support made me an effective and sensitive listener.

I also learned to be more supportive of novice teachers' decisions about their classroom activities and the manner in which they applied learner behaviour support in particular. I learned that novice teachers encountered learner behaviour challenges in their initial years of teaching and that they needed a support system in the form of a mentor to give them the courage to soldier on and never to give up.

## **9.6 How the Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective on Learning Helped me to Understand and Discuss these Themes**

Murphy and Iverson (2003) point out that, according to a sociocultural perspective on learning, thinking happens because of the relationship between a person and his/her surroundings. In my view, sociocultural theoretical perspectives on learning reflect the processes that individuals use to share their perspectives and engage in debate and/or dialogue. Through these interactions, as well as through various channels through which knowledge is accessed in the school environment, learning and development occur.

By adopting a sociocultural perspective on learning, I was enabled to understand and discuss the themes that emerged from the data. This theoretical lens allowed me to immerse myself in discussions on diverse issues that impacted the participants' classroom practices, especially those associated with learner behaviour support. According to researchers such as Gerhard and Smith (2008), a sociocultural perspective is embedded in the principle that learning occurs through shared knowledge. This means that coming together as novice teachers and a mentor to share our learning allowed us to look at our respective teaching practices from different dimensions and from various individual perspectives as social beings who came from particular social environments and influences.

## 9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and analysed data that responded to the two research questions and the topic of my study. I formulated an overarching theme to consolidate the main data, which is: *Mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of teacher professional knowledge*. For focused discussions, this main theme was divided into sub-themes, namely: *Mentoring forges learner-teacher relationships* and *Mentoring encourages/requires support and guidance from veteran and mentor teachers*. I listed and discussed the new insights I had gained through my engagement in interactive dialogues with the novice teachers and by recalling incidences of my earliest years of teaching. Upon reflection, I realised that I would be a useful mentor if I created social coercion by instilling positive school values among the novice teachers and, ultimately, the entire school community. I learned that it would be my responsibility as a mentor to unveil, encourage, and embrace the new knowledge that the novice teachers brought to the school. I also became conscious that I should cultivate collegial professional relationships with novice teachers within my school. Doing so would culminate in healthy relationships with learners. Hence, positive learner behaviour support could be maintained in novice teachers' classrooms.

In Chapter Ten, I continue to respond to the two research questions by exploring three related themes: *Mentoring can support and accelerate teacher professional development*, *Mentoring can promote collaborative parent participation*, and *Mentoring can encourage a school culture for positive learner behaviour*. I conclude by providing a comprehensive overview of that chapter.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE ULTIMATE OUTCOMES

#### 10.1 Introduction: Nourishing a Germinating Seed

In Chapter Nine I described how I reflected on mentoring as a considerable learning trajectory in my position as a school manager and mentor for novice teachers in my school. Chapter Nine also responded to the two research questions: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* I explained how I used mentoring components to illustrate what I had learnt about the process of mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my experiences as a novice teacher and a mentor. I then described how I built new knowledge by creating themes that would support my learning through memory-work and discussion sessions with novice teacher participants. I then narrated how I considered the theme: *Mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of professional knowledge* by making connections between my memory-work and my interactions with the novice teachers. Discussions of the sub-themes: (a) *Mentoring facilitates learner-teacher relationships through sharing and teachers' professional knowledge*, and (b) *Mentoring enhances support and guidance from veteran and mentor teachers through sharing and teachers' professional knowledge* then followed. I concluded Chapter Nine by describing my overall learning from my memory-work and discussion sessions with the novice teachers. My overall learning entailed my understanding that I need, at all times, to be a supportive, caring and nurturing mentor for novice teachers in my school. I also learned to be patient with novice teachers as each is unique and requires individual attention as well as collaborative learning experiences.

In this chapter, I deal with the last three themes that shed light on my two research questions stated above. I also respond to the themes: (1) *Mentoring supports and accelerates teacher professional development*; (2) *Mentoring promotes collaborative parent participation*; and (3) *Mentoring encourages a conducive school culture* to further analyse the data generated by this study. In closing, I recap this chapter by providing an overview of the main findings.

## 10.2 Themes

### 10.2.1 Mentoring supports and accelerates teacher professional development

I believe that professional development begins when an individual teacher interacts with his or her colleagues for self-improvement and the improvement of the entire school community. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) note that professional development leads to increased teacher knowledge and could also lead to changes in their teaching practices. In my personal context, professional development should begin with me as a mentor and a deputy principal. For instance, I should have the courage and insight to organise developmental workshops for novice teachers at my school. However, in my experience teachers, did not necessarily find workshops that had been organised by the Department of Basic Education really beneficial. Based on my observations, teachers who attended such meetings were merely told what was expected of them and no interactive learning occurred. Some attendees would claim that there was insufficient time to share their thoughts with the facilitators and other colleagues. Easton (2008) advises that when attending workshops, teachers become active participants. As a school manager and mentor, I could thus request proficient teachers from other reputable schools to conduct workshops in my school where teachers could be given the opportunity to become active participants. These workshops could also aid novice teachers to learn how to manage their classrooms and they could then ultimately develop more passion for teaching. Novice teachers may also later become mentors for other newly appointed novice teachers. To illustrate, in one of the sessions we had with my supervisor (Chapter Two), she mentioned the following about teacher development:

*“We often tend to think that professional development is something that is done to us by someone else, but in self-study we get the opportunity of choosing our topic to research, we find people to work with, [and] we find ways that work rather than waiting for others to develop us” (p. 37).*

The Department of Basic Education invited teachers regularly to attend developmental workshops during my initial years of teaching. Some of these workshops were aimed at bridging the gap that had been created by the different education systems for racial groups in South Africa before the new democratic dispensation. Baker et al. (2016) suggest that novice teachers should attend workshops that focus on the creation of a nourishing classroom environment that

is based on mutual respect and trust. Classrooms and schools should thus be places of emotional security. As a mentor and deputy principal, I should open opportunities for novice teachers to attend as many workshops and seminars as possible to enhance their skills and knowledge and thus cultivate their professional growth. For instance, in Chapter Five I commented on the importance of getting to grips with the changes that culminated in a new dawn for education in South Africa:

Subsequently, teachers were sent to developmental workshops where we were informed of the abolishment of corporal punishment as well as other new educational developments for teachers. I also remember receiving a policy handbook for educators (1996) that included topics such as a national education policy Act, the South African Schools Act, the Employment of Educators Act, information about the Education Labour Relations Council, and more (p. 111).

Professional development also occurs through lesson demonstrations by proficient teachers at a school or during a workshop. In my view, teacher professional development happens whenever teachers acquire new knowledge that assists them in implementing their teaching practice effectively. It is pivotal that I as a mentor is instrumental in demonstrating as many ways as possible of presenting lessons to novice teachers. I could inspire novice as well as seasoned teachers to also share information about beneficial and effective practices with one another. As Boreen (2009) puts it, collaboration is a productive method to support and maintain professional development. Correspondingly, Easton (2008) advises that “the least [novice teachers] can do is become learners themselves by engaging in a process of professional learning” (p. 761). For example, in Chapter Three I mentioned a scenario where I was uncomfortable about introducing a certain topic in the English language and I had to observe a colleague teaching this topic on my behalf:

I then had the privilege of observing and learning from my colleague about strategies for introducing a new topic to learners. For example, she came to class with flashcards of prepositions that she had developed herself. It was a marvel to watch the learners participating in her lesson. Each learner picked up a flashcard and role-played a situation in which it should be used correctly. One learner took a flashcard with the word ‘under’ written on it, and he crawled and sat under my table. Another learner picked a flashcard with ‘on’

written on it and she placed her bag on the table for every learner to see. This experience taught me that one can also use learners' physical activities as well as creative materials to introduce or teach a new concept (p. 82).

Engaging novice teachers in professional development activities as a manager and mentor may help them become experts in nurturing vulnerable learners in their classrooms. This could also address learner misbehaviour as the teacher will put him-/herself in the shoes of the learners in the classroom. This notion is supported by Alber (2017), who states that showing our compassion as teachers permits us to be human and not just teachers. For example, I described in Chapter Seven, in one of our discussion sessions, how a novice teacher accepted an unfamiliar responsibility and how she had to learn along the way, which demonstrated her development as a professional:

*“For me, learning responsibilities of a teacher has taught me to be more engaged with learners personally. I thought that it would be prudent if I first became vulnerable to my learners by revealing my upbringing, my fears, my uncertainty and devastations when I was their age. I could also feel that some of them related to what I was saying. For example, I told the learners that I had a spelling problem and that it made me feel uncomfortable when I had to submit my work to the teachers. My English language teacher, in particular, would always make fun of me to the point that I ended up having a fight in class with some of my peers because they would not stop teasing me. I have taken time to allow my learners to open up so I could understand where the behaviour of each learner emanates from”* (p. 157).

Novice teachers could face a steep challenge if they cannot deal with learners with different learning capabilities. However, the novice teachers in my school focused on learners who showed patterns of misbehaviour as they talked more about unruly learners during our discussions than about those who had learning challenges. However, they admitted that, at times, it was difficult to deal with ‘high flyers’ in their classrooms. In my view, teacher professional development is enhanced through practical experiences in the classroom. Oliver and Reschly (2007) argue that ongoing professional growth in classroom management is critical for novice teachers. It is thus also my role as a mentor to focus novice teachers' attention on the multiple academic capabilities they could encounter in their classrooms. To illustrate, in Chapter Seven a novice teacher highlighted her initial frustrations about a highly gifted learner in her classroom:

*“I have this very sharp learner in my class. I must say that I found it very hard to handle her at first because she would finish her class work within five minutes and I could see that she was bored. I would even get intimidated if I introduced a topic that I was not comfortable with. I remember trying to introduce fractions in Mathematics. My first point of departure was to familiarise them with the words ‘denominator’ and ‘numerator’. This girl raised her hand and told me before I could teach the entire class and that irritated me a lot. It is now a pleasure to have her in my class because I have learned that I could also use her to explain some aspects of a lesson her peers do not understand. I am trying to accommodate her by giving her extra activities that I prepare beforehand. Some learners in my class are now emulating her by demanding more work” (p. 158).*

I learned that even the way we dress for work could not only enhance our professional development, but could also be a factor that motivates the children as well as novice teachers who just joined the school. As a mentor I have to be a role-model in the way I dress. In my experience, it takes less effort for learners to pay attention to a teacher who comes to school appropriately dressed. Hayward (2015) attests that the outfits teachers wear are a powerful proclamation of who they are. To illustrate, in Chapter Three I indicated how Mr Mthembu’s dress code motivated me to follow in his footsteps:

Excerpt from letter to Mr Mthembu:

*You...showed me how a teacher should dress for work. I always looked forward to coming to school just to admire the way you were dressed. By doing so, I gradually developed a love for the subjects you taught, such as English and General Science. Your formal dress code was one of the reasons why I pursued the teaching profession and I wanted to emulate everything you were doing (p. 66).*

Conversely, a teacher’s unprofessional manner of dress could perpetuate unwarranted behaviour in learners because they may not take a teacher seriously and this could lead to ineffective classroom management. As a mentor, I need to understand that my appearance plays a pivotal role in how novice teachers perceive me. However, novice teachers’ dishevelled physical appearance could set the tone for wayward behaviour among learners. Boreen (2009)

observes that novice teachers may not realise the effect of their appearance and it is the task of mentors to reveal this concern, especially if they witness behaviour that will reflect negatively on their relations with learners. In one instance (Chapter Seven), a novice teacher highlighted the issue of dressing professionally as fundamental in increasing positive learner behaviour in her classroom:

*“I even decided to change my dress code to look professional. I think in time I shall see some positive outcomes. I remember that, during one of our discussion meetings, we discussed taking our learners seriously at all times, and they will reciprocate by modelling us and demonstrating their best behaviour”* (p. 159).

Attending workshops organised by the Department of Basic Education, teacher unions, as well as the ones that were organised within the school also facilitated my professional development. Richter et al. (2013) suggest that mentors offer prospects that promote growth and development. By attending different teacher workshops, novice teachers are thus capacitated to grow professionally. I thus need to expose all the novice teachers in my school to workshops, whether outside or within the school. In turn, they could give feedback on what was discussed at those workshops. I should also assist novice teachers to implement their new knowledge in the classroom. To illustrate, in Chapter Three I highlighted the importance of attending workshops as one of the main features in teacher professional development:

The spices that my grandmother would put in the pot to give the food its taste and aroma represent the teacher development workshops that were held continuously for novice teachers. These workshops helped me gain confidence and the courage to continue with my teaching career. The food inside the pot represents the learners that I taught. Food would enter the pot raw and needed some heating to be cooked well (p. 78).

Professional developmental workshops for teachers proved to be one of the support structures that I needed as a novice teacher to boost my confidence and enhance my teaching practice. In my opinion, attending as many developmental workshops as possible when I was a novice teacher did not only stimulate my proactive thinking skills, but also provided me with confidence in as far as classroom management was concerned. Exposing novice teachers to developmental workshops within and outside the school is thus paramount, and this is a task that I as a manager and mentor should embrace with alacrity. Yirci (2017) suggests that developmental workshops "can help to alleviate the isolation that novice teachers experience at

the beginning of their profession" (p. 41). This means that teacher developmental workshops could instil confidence in novice teachers. For instance, in Chapter Three I referred to one of the teacher workshops that I attended as a novice:

Miss Ntaka persuaded me to join a teachers' union that would not only legally protect me, but also develop me professionally. She always accompanied me to developmental workshops that were organised by my teacher union. Not only did these workshops cover subject content, but they also taught me how to manage my classroom and maintain good relationships with the school community. For example, I attended a workshop where we were reminded that we should create a legacy every day when we came to school. The facilitator told us never to give up on learners and that we should at all times be mindful of our learners' concentration span. An important lesson I learnt was that the activities my learners were required to do should be equal to their concentration level (p. 81).

In my engagement with the participants, I realised that they had not made full use of the developmental workshops that had been organised within the school, particularly those that addressed subject matter. It is thus my duty to resuscitate the effective use of subject committees in my school. To illustrate, in Chapter Six I commented on the lack of full subject committee workshop participation:

We discussed the issue of feeling isolated in a classroom. It then became apparent that subject committees for teachers who taught the same subject were not effective in my school as they did not seem to support those who experienced challenges regarding a certain topic. I also mentioned that it was time teachers met to discuss strategies in various subjects to avoid being a lone individual who might ultimately end up hating the teaching profession because of unresolved challenges (p. 152).

Reflecting on the theme *Mentoring supports and accelerates professional development*, I created the following principle to facilitate continued professional development:

***Professional development is the cornerstone  
of successful teaching***

I learned, as a mentor and manager, that teacher professional development is not only about the knowledge of subject content or human resource management, but it is also about the way one conducts oneself in- and outside the school premises. McCormack et al. (2006) remind us that, as novice teachers make the transition from university to school, they face numerous new challenges and responsibilities and must find their professional position within the school culture. Furthermore, Rucinski et al. (2018) argue that teacher professional development aids both academic ability and the improvement of teachers' professional identities. In my view, teacher development does not come in the form of a teacher's qualification certificate, but it is about acquainting yourself with the school culture and actively involving yourself in teacher developmental workshops and activities. It is the willingness to learn from seasoned teachers and/or one's peers which is part of a teacher's professional development.

By reflecting on my learning, I realised that my own professional development had been enhanced in many instances by engaging in discussions with colleagues. Most importantly, I understood the positive alignment of the culture of teaching and learning, which is our ultimate core-business.

### **10.2.2 Mentoring promotes teacher-parent collaboration**

In my view, the involvement of parents in their children's learning is a fundamental factor that improves and supports positive classroom management. If teachers, especially novices, establish a cordial working relationship with parents, they will confront a well-behaved class that is willing to take the teacher's teaching and their learning seriously. Inviting parents from time to time to be involved in their children's education could encourage novice teachers to do likewise. Novice teachers could also be motivated to initiate constructive dialogue with parents regarding their children's behaviour when necessary. As Wang (2018) puts it, "Parents who are involved in their children's academic lives are most likely to detect changes in their behaviour and mood, as well as in other negative life events" (p. 297). To illustrate, I mentioned parental involvement in Chapter Three as a crucial aspect of sound classroom management for teachers:

The involvement of parents of learners in this artefact memory is also crucial. Parents' role is to provide for the safety of their children in comfortable and happy homes.
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Their influence and support of their children is important because a learner who comes from a stable home is most likely to perform and behave well at school. It is the teacher's responsibility to play the role of a parent if a learner does not come from a stable home environment (p. 62).

Parents who visit their children's school from time to time could ease the tensions and challenges when their children disrupt the classroom. I observed that learners whose parents frequently visited the school in support of their children normally behaved well. Aqeel et al. (2016) argue that parents, more than teachers, are ultimately responsible for their children's behaviour in- and outside the school. It is my responsibility as a mentor to foster supportive relationships among novice teachers and the parents of their learners. For instance, in Chapter Three I highlighted the role parents play as equivalent to the one played by both teachers and learners in the school community:

It becomes difficult to use a pot if one of its legs is broken. In the same way, parents, teachers and learners need one another for teaching and learning to occur without any hindrances. If one of these components is reluctant to play his or her role, teaching and learning will collapse. These three legs have the same weight and height to enable the pot to stand properly. Similarly, parents, teachers and learners have an equal responsibility to ensure that teaching and learning take place in schools (p. 77).

A school is built and functions in a particular community. It is therefore vital that the community becomes involved in school governance. Calderhead (1984) advises that the help of parents may be required to manage learners' behaviour in schools. Therefore, I, as a mentor, must ensure that teachers, as well as other relevant members of the school community who have come to render their services, are familiar with the members of the community they serve. For example, in Chapter Four I discussed the important role that parents play in the education of their children:

I started to realise the important role the parents played in making the school an effective institution. I also learned that having a good relationship with parents could help address learner misbehaviour, especially in my classroom. I used my position to demonstrate new methods of dealing with learner behaviour to the parents and teachers and I introduced some

untested, innovative classroom activities that I had learned about at college. For example, I paid a visit to each of my learners' homes and got to know their parents personally. The learners were surprised but thrilled that I was getting along with their parents and they therefore tended to behave well in the classroom (p. 91).

Meeting and forming close working relationships with parents could stimulate positive learning outcomes and high academic attainment as well as acceptable behaviour outcomes for learners. Encouraging novice teachers to work closely with the parents of their learners could be a critical solution to learning achievement as well as the positive behaviour of their children, as this will demonstrate parents' support for school initiatives. As Mwangi et al. (2017) state, parents who are active participants in their children's education promote their children's social, emotional and academic development. To illustrate, in Chapter Four I made mention of the links that I forged with the parents of learners in my class when I was a novice teacher:

Meeting parents and learners outside the school environment engendered trust and a feeling of oneness. I found it easier to relate and socialise with parents in informal settings than when they came to a formal school teacher-parent engagement. The level of discipline among those learners whose parents were close to me seemed to change for the better. Looking back, I can also see that, knowing learners by their names and also their dates of birth, engendered positive class discipline. This also applies to novice teachers. In my opinion, a mentor must get to know novice teachers well because that could set the tone for a healthy and trusting relationship (p. 92).

In the same way, the relationship that parents and novice teachers share should benefit the learner. I believe that teachers should make it their priority to recognise that parents are really important stakeholders who also promote a harmonious relationship with the school. Mestry and Grobler (2007) observe that vigorous parental involvement improves learner performance, decreases drop-out rates, causes a decline in law-breaking, and encourages a more positive outlook towards the school. To illustrate, in Chapter Three I stressed the positive outcomes of parent-teacher relationships:

The stronger the relationships between teachers and the parents of their learners, the better they will combat learner misbehaviour. Building a relationship of trust and tolerance with

learners could be of benefit to both the learners and novice teachers for the focus would be on the delivery of lessons rather than on the management of learner behaviour in classrooms (p. 63).

Parents should also be a motivating factor in the education of their children. Aqeel et al. (2016) argue that parents have the responsibility to care for, encourage, and motivate their children. When parents are more involved in their children's education, then learners will be more interested in learning, and they will achieve better (Mestry & Grobler, 2007). In my view, the presence of parents in their children's schooling helps children to pay more attention to their learning and they thus gain a positive outlook on their education. For example, in Chapter Four I expressed my support for the involvement of parents in making certain that their children are encouraged to do their best in the projects they undertake:

The parents of the nine learners were also present at assembly to congratulate their children. They were very grateful to the school for the prospect of their children attending a school with a great reputation. They further said that they could see the future of their children becoming brighter by receiving the best education they could not afford to pay for. This was one of the best highlights of my teaching career, particularly as I was still regarded a novice teacher. I was happy that I could assist these learners to be enrolled at an institution they admired (p. 98).

As part of mentoring, I must keep demonstrating to novice teachers that they could experience less stress if they treat the learners in their classrooms as they would their own. The more teachers display compassion, care, love and empathy towards their learners, the more learners will positively reciprocate by demonstrating more commitment, trust, contentment, and love in the novice teachers' classrooms. Povey et al. (2016) assert that the level of parental engagement appears to become elevated when teachers have an encouraging relationship with the child, care about the child's educational development, and are seen by parents as friendly and eager to communicate. For example, in one of the discussions that I referred to in Chapter Five, a participant spoke about playing the role of a parent in learners' lives:

*“First of all, I believe that teaching is a calling. I think if one has that calling, which I think I have, I do not feel the burden of being a class teacher. My main role is to teach and I also accommodate other learners that lack behind. I treat my learners as my children, in such a way that I even share my lunch with learners who do not have money*

*to buy their own lunch. Mina ngiyakhuluma nezingane zami [I talk with my learners] about anything and I think that is why we understand one another” (p. 147).*

Conversely, a lack of parental support could demoralise a child and yield undesirable outcomes for teachers and learners. For instance, in Chapter Five I explained my disappointment in a parent for being admonished when I tried to show compassion towards his child:

The principal asked what I had done for Xolani the previous day. I then narrated Xolani’s situation to both the principal and the parents the way I saw it and I also told them I felt I could assist Xolani by buying him a new uniform because I wanted him to look the same as his peers in the school. Xolanis’ father was very angry at me. He asked me if he looked like a person who could not take care of his family. He then accused me of having a romantic affair with his wife and shouted that I should keep the clothes I had bought for Xolani. He placed the uniform in a plastic bag on the principal’s table and immediately ordered his wife to leave. Xolani’s father looked like he was under the influence of alcohol and the smell of alcohol filled the room as he was talking (p. 108).

Parents could also be part of the reason for the misbehaviour of learners in the classroom. Sometimes parents undermine a class teacher’s authority and this culminates in learners displaying a negative attitude towards the teacher. It is my role as a mentor to make novice teachers aware of the disappointing attitudes of parents they could encounter. I could help novice teachers to deal with such experiences to prevent them from becoming demoralised. As Jonson (2008) puts it, some parents complain about having their children educated by novice teachers, which jeopardises novice teachers’ authority. Similarly, Lewis (2001) observes that the lack of ethics and morals demonstrated by many in society has infiltrated our classrooms. To illustrate, in one of the discussions (Chapter Six), a participant highlighted her anguish because of a parent:

*“I had noticed that he was very reluctant to be part of the group whenever they had to do work in groups. When I asked him why he did not want to be with his peers, he simply told me that his mother said he should not mix with children who were not like him. This was evident when his mother came to school and asked for her child to go to an Indian teacher’s classroom. The next thing I saw, he was in my Indian colleague’s classroom with no one explaining why he had moved from my class. To tell you the truth, I was*

*very angry. I may be a beginner teacher, I may be Black, but that does not mean that I am less human or less of a teacher” (p. 143).*

Working collaboratively with parents in making school an institution where learners do not only learn subject content but also morals and values could yield positive outcomes for learners. Povey et al. (2016) note that optimal child learning outcomes are achieved when the significant educators in a child’s life, namely parents and teachers, form deferential and collaborative partnerships and work towards common aspirations. I believe that parents should be the first to model acceptable morals in the presence of their children so that they will emulate them. To illustrate, in Chapter Four I narrated an incident that culminated in a parent blackmailing one of the teachers in my school:

Musa’s father then threatened to open a case against Mr Nzuzza for punishing his son so severely that he had to rush him to the doctor for treatment. He reminded Mr Nzuzza of the abolishment of corporal punishment and that it was an offence for teachers to still administer corporal punishment. Mr Nzuzza tried to explain the reason for punishing his child, but it seemed that the parent was not convinced of Mr Nzuzza’s explanation. Musa’s father demanded that Mr Nzuzza pay him R5 000 if he still wanted to keep his job as a teacher. The principal then convened a meeting to warn teachers to refrain from administering corporal punishment because some parents had found a way of blackmailing teachers to pay some money for their enrichment (p. 114).

Novice teachers themselves could be the stumbling block in forging sound working relationships with the parents of learners in their classrooms. Sometimes novice teachers become overwhelmed and feel threatened by parents’ involvement in their children’s education because they might get exposed due to a lack of knowledge. Mestry and Grobler (2007) remind us that some of the obstacles to efficient parental involvement are limited communication from schools and inadequate guidance for teachers on how to reach out to parents. For example, in one of the discussions with the novice teacher participants (Chapter Six), one of them admitted that she battled to develop a sound working relationship with the parents of her learners:

*“For me, it is the relationship that I have to build with the parents of my learners [that is a challenge]. I must confess that I usually do not have time to properly communicate with the parents of the learners in my class, especially the naughty ones. I often take out*

*my anger against my learners out on the parents who come to enquire about their children. I think I must learn to use the parents to gain the learners' trust"* (p. 194).

### **10.2.3 Mentoring encourages a conducive school culture**

A school culture is infused with the values, attributes, and principles that novice teachers should adopt. I should thus familiarise novice teachers with these values that should be co-shared by teachers in their classrooms for the promotion of positive learner behaviour. Banks et al. (2001) suggest that [novice] teachers must obtain information about the cultures of the different racial, ethnic, and language groups in their school. In the same way, Lynch (2016) claims that mentors are there to support novice teachers to swiftly become accustomed to the culture and norms of the school. For instance, in Chapter Three I stressed the importance of observing and implementing the values that support learner behaviour and effective learning and teaching:

In this photograph I sit at the same level as my learners, which suggests that, as a teacher, I should involve all learners equally in creating a culture of teaching and learning that they will embrace and that will involve everyone in my class. This culture requires tolerance, trust, support, empathy, and responsibility (p. 62).

A school culture should respect learners' cultural, socioeconomic and different learning capabilities. These are aspects that novice teachers and I should discuss for their induction into the school. Banks et al. (2001) note that, "if teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all [learners], they must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning" (p. 197). This means that it is the responsibility of teachers to understand learners' predicaments that could hinder their academic or social progress. To illustrate, in Chapter Three I referred to the importance of novice teachers getting to know and understand the backgrounds of their learners:

It is also important that novice teachers acknowledge all the learners in their classrooms. Novice teachers should be aware of the different capabilities of their learners as well as their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Whenever they engage with learners in classroom activities, novice teachers should consider these factors and should be able to create a conducive environment for each learner in their care (p. 63).

A novice teacher must get acquainted with the culture of the school and the community where the school is situated. As was stated before, one of my responsibilities as a mentor is to facilitate the swift induction of novice teachers into the culture of the school. Alber (2017) claims that novice teachers should be familiar with the rules, policies and the school culture immediately they are appointed to the school. For instance, in Chapter Three I explained my adaptation to the norms and expectations associated with the school where I was employed at the time:

Additionally, Miss Ntaka would find time to state what was expected of me, from the principal to the community around the school, and the way I was expected to carry myself around the learners and my colleagues was also highlighted (p. 80).

In the same way, it was vital that I adapted to the school culture by embracing teachers and learners who came from diverse racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Being in a different school environment, I needed to observe and speedily adhere to the school's norms, attitudes, and beliefs to fit in properly. A major purpose of the constant meetings with novice teachers was for their rapid adaptation to the school environment. Moreover, I needed to understand how the school culture could be adapted to be more inclusive of what the novice teachers brought with them. For example, in Chapter Three I discussed the support I had received from my former principal for my own induction into the school culture:

The shield also reminds me of the principal of the second school where I taught. It was the first time that I taught in a school with teachers and learners coming from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. The principal acted as my shield by providing all the protection I needed to be acquainted with the school culture. First and foremost, he played the role of a father when he gave me advice on how I should conduct myself as a professional in the presence of people. He also encouraged and gave me leeway to use any talent I had to benefit the learners of the school (p. 103).

In my opinion, I should positively contribute by offering the necessary guidance to novice teachers in as far as their respect for and adherence to the school culture are concerned. For novice teachers to contribute positively to the success of the school, they need mentors who will encourage and give them direction to swiftly understand this culture and, against this backdrop, manage their classrooms efficiently. Lynch (2016) affirms that novice teachers who have had the support of a mentor maintain superior classroom management skills, stay in the

teaching profession longer, and sustain their original passion longer. To illustrate, in Chapter Four I mentioned how seasoned teachers could help induct novice teachers into the culture of the school:

I learnt that seasoned teachers need to mentor novice teachers. This is because novice teachers are still overwhelmed by coming to grips with the school culture as well as different teaching strategies that they have to employ in different teaching situations in their classrooms. I also learnt that one develops the courage to be innovative and to face challenges if one is in a position to make positive contributions to school development (p. 104).

During one of our discussions, a novice teacher mentioned how learner behaviour could be enhanced in the classroom. It is crucial that I, as a mentor, constantly remind novice teachers to enforce the culture of the school. A culture that encourages positive behaviour, trust, tolerance, humanity, respect, and caring should infuse the learners' consciousness and should be reflected in the community as well. Cheney et al. (2009) advise that, to counteract anti-social behaviour and academic problems, it is vital to reinforce desired social behaviour in learners and to minimise misbehaviour in schools. To illustrate (Chapter Five), one of the novice teachers observed that the maintenance of the school culture was paramount in her classroom:

*"I believe that learners come to the classroom as clean slates and it is up to the teacher to mould learners to what she wants them to be. Learners have to adapt to the culture of the school that embraces everyone, regardless of their race, culture and heritage. Learners should behave exactly the way you expect them to"* (p. 142).

Conversely, if novice teachers do not acquaint themselves with the school culture, it could manifest in unwise decisions in their classrooms. In my view, it is paramount that I, as a mentor, discuss this issue with novice teachers and explain how they could accommodate each learner's social background. They should put themselves in the shoes of learners who behave in direct contrast to the desired school culture. Sowell (2017) maintains that novice teachers require numerous forms of support. For instance, as discussed in Chapter Six, one of the novice teachers spoke about misjudging a learner because she did not understand the school culture:

*"Some of these learners, Sir, come to school carrying heavy burdens on their little shoulders. I am saying this with a heavy heart, Sir [sighed]. I once reprimanded this one particular boy who wet himself for two days in succession in a classroom. What*

*made me more aggravated was that he would come to school having not even finished his homework and would not give me a sound explanation as to why he did not attempt to do his homework. After some time I learned that the same boy had been molested by his stepfather on several occasions. This boy's mother would leave him with his stepfather at night as she was working night shifts. The mother told me that the boy was taking HIV medication since the stepfather had been diagnosed long ago. I think that is the day I learned that I should put myself in the shoes of these learners before I would become angry about their behaviour (p. 157).*

Novice teachers need to familiarise themselves with the culture of the school because they could find themselves thinking and acting contrary to the values associated with the school culture. It is my responsibility as a mentor to make certain that novice teachers are not left to figure things out on their own. They need my guidance to avoid making unnecessary professional mistakes in their teaching practice. Banks (2001) advocates that novice teachers should have appropriate knowledge of their learners' ethnicity and background as a foundation for inquiry. For example, one of the novice teachers (Chapter Seven) spoke about her experiences in her first year of teaching:

*"I remember when I first came to the school, Sir [sighing]. My responsibility was to teach and ensure unity in the classroom at all times. I have now learned that I need to accommodate every learner in my class without looking at their behaviour patterns as well as their academic attainment – or lack thereof. I have observed that I have to take every learner with me because if I focus more on certain individuals, others will be left out and then begin to disrupt the entire class (p. 156).*

Understanding the culture where learners come from as well as that of the school, is crucial for the effective induction of novice teachers. Learners' social backgrounds play a significant role in the development of the school culture that has to be adhered to at all times. Learners could come to class with different social issues that could perpetuate misbehaviour unless they are courteously handled by their teachers. Hamilton et al. (2008) advise that novice teachers should assist their learners to learn about the principles adhered to by most cultural groups such as justice, fairness, independence, empathy, and charity. If novice teachers are aware of the school culture and respect it, they will create positive learning opportunities for their learners.

### **10.3 The Most Useful Discoveries Concerning my Research Questions**

In this section, I consolidate the discourse in Chapter Ten with an overall overview of what I learned. I illustrate my learning based on the three themes that I elucidated in Chapter Ten with reference to guideline questions that I adopted from Samaras (2011). Several very useful discoveries emerged from these data that addressed both the research questions of this study: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?*

One learning is the importance of teachers' collaborative learning. Collaborative learning occurs when teachers come together and discuss and share their knowledge on curriculum-related issues. As an integral part of this self-study research, I collaborated with both novice and seasoned teachers (my critical friends). I also shared my experiences of classroom management with the novice teachers who participated in this study. Shared knowledge can enhance teachers' professional growth and also increase novice teachers' confidence. Collaborative learning also allows novice teachers to observe veteran teachers in their classrooms and thus enhance their knowledge and skills.

Through my interactive engagement with the novice teachers, I discovered that teachers who have a trusting and supportive relationship with the parents of their learners develop a love for teaching. I noticed that the novice teachers were beginning to create bonds with the parents of their learners, and this markedly diminished learners' misbehaviour in their classrooms. The trusting and supportive relationships the novice teachers shared with parents also resulted in positive outcomes regarding relevant learners' academic achievement. When the discipline in these classrooms was under control, it enabled me as a school manager to concentrate on other managerial and mentoring matters in the school. I also gained in-depth insight into what worked and did not work for these teachers when they tried to apply the suggestions that we discussed.

I undoubtedly learned new things every time I engaged in discussions with the novice teachers. These discussions thus confirmed that learning does not happen in isolation. I discovered that when teachers discussed the challenges of learner behaviour, they became creative in the ideas that they shared. For instance, I picked up innovative ideas about stimulating learners with high academic potential. Novice would prepare more challenging activities for highly gifted learners

in their classrooms. Over and above that novice teachers would blend these learners with the academically challenged ones to assist them in group activities.

#### **10.4 The New insights I Gained in Relation to My Research Topic**

One of the new insights I gained was that misbehaviour would diminish dramatically if novice teachers were sensitised to the principles of collaborative learning, active learning strategies, and the importance of respecting diversities in the classroom. When the novice teachers started viewing their learners as their children, learner behaviour generally changed for the better. Moreover, a decline in the unwarranted behaviour of the learners could also have been caused by the confidence the novice teachers now started exhibiting in resolving matters related to classroom management in general, and learner behaviour in particular. For instance, fewer cases of learner misbehaviour were reported to me by these novice teachers since we started our discussions on interactive classroom management.

Another positive was the sound relationships the novice teachers were beginning to develop with the parents of their learners. I noticed that the novice teachers increasingly invited the parents of their learners to the school to discuss their concerns with them. They followed the prescribed procedures by filling in a standard invitation slip that was used by all the teachers in the school. When I asked, they indicated that they tended to invite parents of learners who behaved well as well as those who demonstrated unruly behaviour. Parent visibility in the school also meant that the children behaved in a more disciplined manner in the classroom and achieved better academic results.

I also observed that the novice teachers started to actively participate and contribute to subject committee meetings. These meetings were generally spearheaded by veteran teachers and were held in various offices at different times. I took time to attend some of these discussions. It was pleasing to see the novice teachers airing their views and even making presentations regarding a particular topic. Their participation and contributions thus culminated in better time management and learner motivation. If teachers manage their and their learners' time and utilise every minute of a lesson period, positive learner behaviour patterns are the result.

## **10.5 Learning about Myself and My Role as a Deputy Principal and Mentor for Novice Teachers**

I learned that, as a deputy principal and mentor, it was my responsibility to offer my support on a daily basis to every novice teacher in the school. I learned that novice teachers do not only require relief from their classroom stressors, but that they might also require support in some personal matters. Therefore, a fatherly attitude and compassionate advice will boost novice teachers' morale when their burdens have become very heavy to bear.

The outcomes of this study inspired me to understand that a deputy principal, who is also a mentor, should listen to novice teachers and heed their needs. Then, when these novices have become sensitised to the school rules and culture, they will contribute innovative ideas that may even enhance the culture of the school. For example, based on our interactive discussions, the novice teachers took it upon themselves not only to engage their learners in improved content teaching, but they also started to reinforce desirable social skills such as good manners, empathy, and courtesy.

The study also confirmed my earlier conviction that a manager's meticulous appearance and time management are a source of motivation for novice teachers. I learned, as I had always emulated, that action speaks louder than words. I had always persisted in dressing professionally for work and being punctual. The novice teachers soon emulated me in focusing on a professional appearance and in meticulous lesson preparations for each day. In the words of a participant: *"This works for me!"*

## **10.6 A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective: A Strong Foundation for this Study**

In my view, a sociocultural theoretical perspective comes into play when two or more people interact with one another and learning occurs. Knowledge is gained through the sharing of ideas. Likewise, by meeting and conversing with these novice teachers who came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the sharing of our knowledge and the debates we had about issues that were of concern to us regarding our teaching practices, enabled me to explore the themes that emerged from the data in depth. For example, the theme of cultural diversity emerged when a

novice teacher discussed the incident of a learner who was from a different culture than the one she had grown up in. Although she was vexed by the incident, she understood later, based on our open discussion of the incident, that it was her duty to understand and guide such learners and to forge bonds with parents beyond cultural differences.

A sociocultural perspective on learning also guided my understanding that each novice teacher I interact with at my school is unique. In my view, a sociocultural perspective underpins every activity and interaction in a school environment. I shared this essential insight with the novice teachers as a group but also endeavoured to interact and understand them as individuals. The insights that I gained helped me to adapt my mentoring and managerial approach and enabled me to solve problems and confront challenges associated with culture, values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, and traditions in my school.

My learning confirmed the notion that all novice teachers require support and guidance from me as a mentor and deputy principal. However, I have to understand that the support and advice may vary from one novice teacher to another because they come from different social and home environments. For example, the sub-theme of being non-judgemental emerged. One novice teacher initially could not come to terms with the tardiness of a learner in her class who seemed to refuse to do his homework. She judged this boy very harshly until she learned that he was being abused at home by his stepfather. The novice teacher thus had to understand her learner's background to stop judging him and to start helping him.

### **10.7 My Learning of Mentoring Novice Teachers to ensure Learner Behaviour Support**

A vital lesson that I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support is to be fair. Testing myself against this finding, I confirmed that I had always been, and would always be, impartial in my judgement of the decisions that novice teachers made, and will make, to achieve and support positive learner behaviour in their classrooms. For example, the novice teachers agreed that they first had to gain knowledge of a learner's background before judging and addressing his or her unruly behaviour. As a mentor, I learned that I needed to do the same as fairness and a non-judgemental attitude at all times instil confidence in novice teachers.

In my view, being accommodative is also a key aspect that ensures positive learner behaviour and the support of novice teachers. In our discussions on strategies to support learner behaviour, I always allowed the novice teachers to voice their opinions and to make suggestions about the way forward regarding the improvement of learner behaviour. One proposal that I endorsed was that the novice teachers wanted to meet independently as well as with me.

I also learned to be considerate. For instance, I had to be considerate of the novice teachers' social backgrounds as the level of learner behaviour support is never the same from one (novice) teacher to another. I thus considered factors such as their environmental background, attitudes, habits, and cultural beliefs and practices. When the novice teachers adopted this approach, they also put themselves in the shoes of their learners and understood with more compassion the ordeals that their learners often faced. However, it may take some novice teachers a while to fathom learner misbehaviour.

## **10.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented an overview of findings pertaining to the two research questions of the research study: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support teachers in my school?* I presented themes of the data that had emerged and these themes elucidated the findings in more detail. I also used excerpts from different chapters to illustrate the points I raised about what the novice teachers and I had learned. These excerpts were supported by literature findings from various reputable scholars. I concluded Chapter Ten by a consolidation of my learning.

The main messages were drawn from three themes and the corresponding extracts presented in this chapter. One of the main messages is the importance of teacher collaborative learning as learning does not happen in isolation. Moreover, shared knowledge is key to teacher professional development. I benefited richly from the discussion sessions as these meetings enabled me to continuously reflect on how I managed and mentored these novice teachers in learner behaviour support, and how I would do so in the future. Another message is the call to foster healthy relationships between novice teachers and the parents of their learners. This could culminate in positive learner behaviour support in novice teachers' classrooms. The message is

also clear that support for novice teachers should be sustained and improved with time. It is also crucial that all the role-players in a school, particularly novice teachers and their mentor, should enrich and even modify school culture when required to ensure that it addresses and embraces cultural and racial diversity within the school community.

In the next chapter, Chapter Eleven, I conclude this thesis by consolidating all the chapters of this thesis and revisiting the key findings.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONSOLIDATING AND ENRICHING MY LEARNING THROUGH SELF-STUDY

#### 11.1 Introduction: Exploring my Professional Mentoring Endeavours

The focus of this self-study research project was on mentoring novice teachers, with particular focus on learner behaviour support in a primary school where I was a deputy principal. I hoped that my research would contribute positively to the mentoring phenomenon in schools for the effective and swift induction of novice teachers in general, but for learner behaviour support in particular. Through observations as well as intensive reading on the topic of mentoring, I became aware that mentoring could be a key contributor to improving the classroom management skills and strategies of novice teachers and that it might thus result in the improved academic achievement of all learners.

I anticipated that my research on the topic *Mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support in my school* would elicit positive results in as far as mentoring novice teachers, particularly in learner behaviour support in their classrooms, was concerned. My interest in pursuing this self-study research was stimulated by the level of learner disruptive behaviour I had noticed in novice teachers' classrooms during notional times. Moreover, novice teachers continually reported learners whose behaviour was unruly to me as a school manager.

At one point, the situation had become almost untenable, and I was deeply concerned that my school did not have a mentoring programme for newly appointed teachers, especially novices. As a school manager, I felt that it was a vital responsibility of the school management team to be proactive in guiding, supporting, and nurturing novice teachers in their endeavours to become competent teachers in the school. Watching them struggle and trying to cope using 'miss and hit' strategies had become an option I could no longer support. I also felt that the persistent unruly behaviour of learners in novice teachers' classrooms contributed little to learners' academic attainment. What was required was sound classroom management and wise disciplinary strategies by all novice teachers.

I had already read widely on the topic for my Master's qualification, and I therefore anticipated that this study would assist me in formulating scholarly endorsed guidelines for mentoring

novice teachers. I envisaged that mentoring based on such a sound foundation would culminate in the improvement of classroom management and, ultimately, acceptable learner behaviour.

In the previous chapter, I responded to the following themes that were formulated based on the data: (1) *Mentoring supports and accelerates teacher professional development*; (2) *Mentoring promotes collaborative parent participation*; and (3) *Mentoring encourages a conducive school culture*. I also drew on readings that were relevant to the three themes in response to the two research questions: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* Lastly, I consolidated Chapter Ten by providing an overview of the findings.

In this concluding chapter, I offer an overall review of the self-study thesis. This is followed by an explanation of how my study influenced me personally and professionally. Next, I consider my methodological learning, followed by my reflections on my conceptual and theoretical learning. I conclude by explaining what I plan to do differently in the future as a consequence of this study.

## **11.2 Review of the Thesis**

In Chapter One, I presented the focus of my study, which was on mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support in the primary school where I was a deputy principal. I also explained that the main purpose of this self-study was to reflect on and learn about mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support. Next, I offered a brief introduction to the self-study methodological approach that directed this study and I also elaborated on the background and history of education in South Africa. I then gave an account of the rationale for the research. I also listed the two questions that guided and gave impetus to this research project. I expanded on how these two research questions would aid me in understanding my earliest experiences of being supported and being frustrated by a lack of support as a novice teacher. I then elucidated what I had learned about mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support by engaging with them in in-depth discussions. Furthermore, I discussed a sociocultural theoretical perspective that I adopted to focus on learning that occurs through interactions in cultural and social surroundings. I explained that I had engaged in in-depth reading to clarify my

understanding of the key concepts of mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support. In conclusion, I presented a brief overview of this thesis.

In Chapter Two, I explained my self-study research process. I quoted various researchers to explain how I used a self-study methodological approach that was enriched by memory-work, arts-based work, and collaborative self-study methods. This was followed by a description of the setting of the study and I clarified that I was both the researcher and the main participant in the study. I also explained how novice teachers in my school would aid me in my response to the two research questions I posed. I then elaborated the critical role that my three critical friends (fellow PhD students) played in ensuring that my study was well structured and would have value. For instance, we shared of ideas and advice, engaged in discussions, and they assisting me in solving various problems as they arose.

I also gave details of the six main research practices that I used to generate data: (1) taking and reflecting on photographs; (2) social networking (using WhatsApp discussions and clarifications); (3) audio-recordings of discussions with the participants; 4) memory drawings; 5) a reflective journal; and (6) artefact retrieval. I also explained how I consolidated my learning through concept mapping. In conclusion, I reflected on some research challenges that I had encountered as well as the limitations of the study.

In Chapter Three, I commenced by addressing the first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* Chapters Three to Five are linked by my memories of being a novice teacher in the first school where I taught. To orientate the reader, I presented a brief description of the first school where I taught. I explained how photographs were used to rekindle memories of my first experiences as a class teacher and how they elucidated my insights about professional behaviour and dress. I presented and discussed the letters that I had written to my grandmother and my sister to thank them for the positive influences they had exerted on me in my initial years of teaching. I then used artefact drawings to illustrate what I had learned in these vulnerable years of teaching. To conclude, I described how I embraced the expertise of a seasoned teacher who had protected and supported, guided, and nurtured me in my early years in this profession.

I described my learning that was pivotal when I became a mentor and school manager. For instance, it was essential that I inculcated a culture of respect and trust between the novice

teachers and myself. It was also crucial that I, as a mentor, modelled the kind of ethical behaviour that the novice teachers could emulate. This could then aid them in managing their classrooms effectively and productively. I also learned that exhibiting empathy, love, compassion, care, and trust would constantly remind the novice teachers to embrace such traits themselves, just as I had yearned to do when I was a novice teacher. As an influential mentor and school manager, I realised that I should allow collaborative interactions between myself and the novice teachers. This helped us to engage in various professional issues other than unruly learner behaviour in their classrooms as well.

In Chapter Four I reflected on my teaching experiences using artefacts in response to question 1 of my research study: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* The artefacts illuminated *school community collaborative learning* as well as *shielding future leaders and guiding them towards the world of possibilities*. I engaged my learners effectively and *established close teacher-learner bonds and relationships*. I also explained how I became *a member of the school governing body* in my early years of teaching. Furthermore, I gave details of how I *developed confidence by organising and coordinating school activities*. Finally, I reflected on what I had learned.

My core learning as described in Chapter Four also responded to my first research question: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* By recalling my experiences and learning, I became a reflective mentor in my engagement with novice teachers. I learned to embrace and contextualise other people's opinions and I thus became a considerate mentor of novice teachers in my school.

In Chapter Five I recalled various memories of a lack of support in my early years as a novice teacher at the first school where I taught. I narrated an *unpleasant encounter with parents of a learner* in my classroom and I also described the impact of *the banning of corporal punishment and the effect it had regarding learner behaviour* in my school. I spelled out how *I did not get support from my colleagues as a sports convenor* and I gave details of *the embarrassment I endured at the hands of a circuit manager*. Furthermore, I clarified *the day I had to prove my worth in my school*. To conclude, I consolidated what I had learned about the importance of supporting novice teachers.

The discourse in Chapter Five also responded to research question 1: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* Central to my learning was the necessity to face any dilemmas head-on as a mentor. By rekindling my memories of incidences when I experienced a lack of support as a novice teacher, I learned that I am bound to make mistakes from time to time. However, I need to learn from these mistakes in order to become a better manager and mentor for the benefit of novice and all other teachers. Looking back, I realise that the challenges that I encountered as a novice teacher enabled me to persevere in almost intolerable situations.

In Chapter Six I started addressing question 2 of my research study: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* Chapters Six to Eight are linked as I continued to explore my interactions with the novice teacher participants in my school about learner behaviour support in their classrooms. I described how *I engaged with novice teacher participants for the first discussion meeting* when they wrote letters to express their feelings about me as their mentor. Next, we discussed *the behaviour of learners* and the participants articulated how they *experienced embarrassing moments in their classrooms*. I concluded the chapter by reflecting on the key issues that had emerged from these deliberations.

In Chapter Six, I responded to question two of my research: *What have learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in our school community?* By analysing the letters the novice teachers had written, I learned that I have to strengthen my working relations with novice teachers in my school. This could be achieved by constant and intense deliberations and shared knowledge. I also realised that ongoing engagements with novice teachers regarding classroom management matters could curb unwarranted learner behaviour. I learned that the more time I spent interacting with them on professional issues, the more knowledge I gained as far as mentoring and managing my school was concerned.

In Chapter Seven, I explained how I engaged the novice teacher participants in *discussion sessions on managing learner behaviour support in their classrooms*. Finally, I consolidated the findings that emerged from our discussions by reflecting on the outcomes of my mentoring of novice teachers in terms of classroom management, and learner behaviour support in particular. I responded to question 2: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for*

*learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* The multiple ideas that we shared in our discussions highlighted the gravity of cooperative learning for novice teachers. I noted that, by sharing their fears of and successes in classroom management, the novice teachers encouraged one another through provocative discourse to focus on innovative strategies to curb learner misbehaviour. The outcomes of these discussions reinforced my understanding that, as a mentor and school manager, it is my responsibility to create time for deliberations on classroom management with all novice teachers.

In Chapter Eight I discussed the outcomes of our deliberations based on the *photographs of areas where learner misbehaviour occurred in the school* that had been taken by the participants. Next, we deliberated on *misbehaviour patterns* by looking at photographs that reflected their experiences when they were learners themselves. We also had frank discussions about mapping the way forward for learner behaviour support. In conclusion, we shared *reflections on the sessions we had through drawings*.

Chapter Eight also responded to question 2 of my research: *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* It was vital for my personal growth to consistently reflect on our discussions. I believed that such reflections would be emulated by the respondents for improved learner behaviour and classroom management. I also learned that it was crucial that I displayed positive character traits, such as caring and compassion, towards the novice teachers. Encouraging the novice teachers to understand their learners' backgrounds and to treat them compassionately could improve learner behaviour in their classrooms. It also became apparent that I needed to open the door, and to keep it open, for collaborative dialogues to enhance my mentoring capabilities.

In Chapter Nine, I gave an account of my reflections on mentoring. I realised that I had placed myself on a significant learning curve that strengthened my capabilities as a seasoned teacher, a deputy principal, and a mentor. I explained what I had learned about the process of *mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my experience as a novice teacher and a mentor*. I also elucidated my learning of, among others, *teacher professional knowledge, mentoring encourages sharing, and mentoring facilitates learner-teacher relationships through sharing and the acquisition of professional knowledge*. To follow, I analysed the theme:

*mentoring encourages sharing and the acquisition of professional knowledge* by referring to various excerpts from previous chapters.

Next, I clarified two sub-themes: (a) *mentoring facilitates learner-teacher relationships through sharing and teachers' acquisition of professional knowledge*; and (b) *mentoring enhances support and guidance from veteran and mentor teachers through sharing and teachers' acquisition of professional knowledge* by referring to extracts from relevant earlier chapters. I concluded the chapter by highlighting *useful discoveries for engaging in this self-study research* as a mentor and a school manager. I also outlined the insight I had gained in relation to my research topic. In closing, I reflected on what I had learned about myself and my role as a deputy principal and mentor of novice teachers.

In Chapter Nine, I thus responded to both the research questions: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* Central to my learning as illuminated in Chapter Nine is that I as a mentor have the responsibility to constitute social coercion among novice teachers by inculcating positive school values in them. I also learned that I need to embrace the newly acquired knowledge that novice teachers bring to the school. I must embrace the responsibility to encourage a professional milieu that will inspire novice teachers, while they in turn should exude similar professional behaviours inside their classrooms as well as in the community.

In Chapter Ten, I described how I responded to the following three themes: (1) *Mentoring supports and accelerates teacher professional development*; (2) *Mentoring promotes collaborative parent participation*; and (3) *Mentoring encourages a conducive school culture*. My exploration of these themes shed light on my findings pertaining to the two research questions: (1) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support from my memories?* and (2) *What have I learned about mentoring novice teachers for learner behaviour support by engaging with novice teachers in my school?* I then recapped my overall learning as discussed in Chapter Ten.

The essence of my learning is that I cannot learn in isolation and that I thus need to encourage collaborative learning involving myself and teachers. I learned that sharing my knowledge with novice teachers and embracing theirs result in positive professional development outcomes. The

series of interactive discussions enabled me to reflect on my mentoring practices in terms of learner behaviour support. I also managed to encourage enhanced working relationships among the novice teachers and the parents of their learners. It was essential that the novice teachers and I considered the school culture for the enrichment of our understandings. We also needed to learn to embrace the array of cultural and racial diversity that existed in the school and to be tolerant of the opinions of others.

### **11.3 Personal-Professional Learning**

The purpose of my study was to explore how I could utilise my experiences as a veteran teacher and a deputy principal to aid novice teachers in managing and handling learner behaviour support in their classrooms. I had been perturbed by the persistent disruptive behaviour of learners in my school, particularly in novice teachers' classrooms. Therefore, I aimed to learn from and devote myself to assisting novice teachers and help them face the uncertainties and challenges they encountered about learner behaviour. The overarching aim of engaging in this research was to learn how to enhance the support, advice, and guidance I give to new teachers in order to help them manage learner behaviour in their classrooms.

#### **11.3.1 What I now know about my research topic that I did not know before**

I made several discoveries of vital points that I had not considered in depth before I embarked on the study. For instance, as a mentor and a school manager, I always need to ensure that there is trust among teachers, and especially between novices and myself. By trusting one another, we were able to have open discussions about issues that were of concern to all of us. I also realised that I am easy to talk to. Moreover, I should be approachable at all times because I work with vulnerable people whose voices are important and who need to be listened to.

I also know that, as a mentor, I should value diverse points of view. I now acknowledge that one needs to respect the views of others to be able to acquire new knowledge. By interacting with the novice teachers on an equal footing, I was given the opportunity to learn and discover some aspects of my mentoring and managerial qualities that I had never thought of before. For example, I now know that I am empathetic and compassionate, which are vital qualities that a mentor should possess.

By exploring this research topic, I gained enhanced knowledge and expertise to adequately support and also provide feedback to teachers. In my capacity as a school manager and mentor, I now realise that my support of novice teachers is necessary to boost their confidence. Mentoring these four novice teachers afforded me multiple opportunities to discuss various strategies with them so that they could better manage their classrooms.

I now know that I need to be humble and also appreciate other people's ideologies. Exploring this research topic taught me that I should be a lifelong learner. On this journey I learned that there is no prescribed recipe for being an effective mentor and school manager. However, if one is appreciative of others' efforts and acknowledges the small, positive things that teachers do, one gets the recognition of one's fellow teachers as well.

### **11.3.2 How this research changed my educational outlook**

Conducting this research made me realise that all senior teachers are mandated to play a mentoring role in the professional lives of novice teachers. I also believe that I should actively encourage novice teachers to contribute to the maintenance and development of the school culture. From my perspective, every school must have a mentor whose sole duty it is to nurture, support, and guide novice teachers.

I now also realise that it is crucial that schools develop a mentoring policy that will guide the assistance of novices and newly appointed teachers so that they will make a smooth transition to the new school and its community. Novice teachers could also play a role in contributing towards the formulation of such a policy. This could culminate in every teacher taking particular interest in and ownership of the mentoring process.

### **11.3.3 How this research project changed my own educational practices**

An important impact that this study has had on me personally is that I have been capacitated to offer enhanced professional and personal support to all teachers in my school. By professional support I mean that I take it upon myself to expose teachers to different educational activities that are conducted by various stakeholders. For instance, I organised sessions for teachers to deliberate on issues that affected them personally. I believe that these interactions and discussions created a warm and positive collegial climate in my school.

I also realise the importance of teacher collaborative learning. For instance, I resuscitated functional subject committees where teachers map out effective ways of dealing with subject content. I believe this helps novice teachers to quickly come to grips with subject content expectations.

As a school manager and mentor, I realise that we are bound to make mistakes, and it is often due to those mistakes that learning occurs. I am now very cautious not to mete out harsh treatment to novice teachers who make mistakes. I ensure that we first talk about the reasons for a mistake and then resolve it amicably. However, we should never repeat mistakes but learn from them. This research also inspired me to encourage all teachers in my school to further their studies by enrolling at tertiary institutions, as this will enhance their development and confidence.

#### **11.3.4 What I now know about myself and others that I did not know before**

One thing I know about myself as a mentor and deputy principal is that I am influential. I did not know that my mentoring could yield such positive results in as far as inspiring novice teachers was concerned. I now know that novice teachers look up to me as a mentor and school manager for direction. I also now know that I have the capacity to positively contribute to the lives of teachers in- and outside the school premises.

I now have the courage and confidence to conduct successful workshops for professional development in my school as well as for teachers of neighbouring schools. I did not know that I could stand in front of people and address them on pertinent educational and private issues with such zeal. I also did not know that my passion for teaching was this deep. I now know that being a teacher is not only confined to the classroom and subject content, but that there is more to education than being a subject teacher in a classroom. For example, I have to be a father to learners who do not have one, and be a friend, an adviser, a priest, a role model, and so much more to every member of the school community.

I also did not know that there were so many people who believed that I was capable of achieving more in life. I now believe in my capabilities because of the inspiration and motivation that I received from the people I came into contact with along the journey of searching for my true self. I now know that forging exhilarating relationships with people in educational spaces and

others has taken my self-esteem to the next level. I also know that the level of respect, trust and understanding that has always existed between myself and other teachers has been elevated due to this self-study project.

## **11.4 Methodological Learning**

I chose self-study methodology to enhance my learning in an educational context. By utilising self-study, I envisaged that I would improve my mentoring and leadership philosophy and practices for my personal professional development. Samaras and Freese (2006) note that self-study prepares a fertile ground for evaluating and developing one's insights about learning with information that is prompt and personal. Thus self-study methodology offered exciting opportunities for persistent reflection on the role I needed to play and the impact I should make to help novice teachers manage their classrooms in ways that would support their learners. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) point out that self-study inquiry permits educators to interrogate themselves and ask complicated questions to which there are no straightforward responses, only options. By engaging in this self-study research, I thus undeniably improved my practice as a school manager. For instance, I am influential in encouraging transformation in my school, particularly in as far as mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support are concerned.

### **11.4.1 The new insights I have gained about self-study methodology**

I needed to transform myself to be a better teacher, school manager, and mentor, hence I adopted self-study methodology. This project made me aware of the positive impact I have on people and my school as well as my capacity to inspire positive change in people in the entire school community. I improved both my demeanour and my learning as self-study provided a platform for reflection on my successes and flaws and it illuminated the manner in which I should approach my position as a mentor and manager.

Through self-study, I discovered that I could become an agent of change in my workplace. I am now aware that I should play a continued role in contributing to professional learning spaces by presenting my work in public spaces for scholarly and peer scrutiny. I am now aware that self-study methodology is a process that allows one to make new discoveries as one continues

to learn. By engaging in self-study, I also learned through my mistakes, and it is by acknowledging these mistakes that I can make meaning of my learning.

I am now aware that self-study enabled me to reflect on my mentoring and managerial practices and that reflection is a powerful tool that prevents the repetition of mistakes. Reflection also improved my mentoring and managerial outlook. Self-study is not only about myself as an individual, but it is also about sharing my learning with others to enhance theirs and to lift their self-esteem.

The self-study methodology also opened my mind for multiple teaching techniques that will enhance my teaching, mentoring, and managerial practices. Understanding and utilising this methodology will allow me to become increasingly innovative and inquisitive and to think beyond what the prescribed textbook has to offer.

#### **11.4.2 The impact of self-study on my personal and professional development**

Embarking on self-study research transformed my personal and professional character in a positive way. I acknowledge now that self-study is not for self-enrichment but for knowledge acquisition that is shared with others as well. Self-study enriched my confidence and gave me opportunities to facilitate and conduct educational workshops for the professional development of people in the teaching fraternity. My research experiences also opened opportunities to face my vulnerabilities and to take criticism from others. This built my character so that I am now able to withstand and face my flaws head-on.

I now understand my character and who I really am better than ever before. I now make sound decisions as a mentor and manager because I take other people's opinions seriously. Learning from others developed me as a person and a professional. I also know now that being involved in self-study is not a question of succeeding or failing, but it is all about learning. Therefore, self-study allowed me the space to accept my shortfalls and to rejoice in my strengths on my journey as a life-long learner.

### **11.5 My advice for other teachers/school leaders who are interested in self-study**

I advise my colleagues of all ages that, if they want to discover themselves and illuminate what makes them who they are and act the way they do, self-study is the methodology to choose. I advise them to use self-study methodology to discover the benefits of collaborative teaching and learning as self-study allows teachers and school leaders to share ideas, deliberate, discuss their struggles and joys, and to overcome their challenges together and become better professionals.

I also advise them to be prepared to present their research for public and peer scrutiny because that is when learning takes place. This methodology allows researchers to do introspection and to scrutinise their practice, behaviour and demeanour. I would also advise them that self-study allows you, as an individual, to conduct research on what is interesting or what is disconcerting in a field of study. Self-study methodology also guides teachers and school leaders to use diverse teaching methods to stimulate learners' interest in subject content that is delivered in the classroom as well as what exists beyond the textbook.

### **11.6 Conceptual and Theoretical Learning**

By reflecting on the key concepts that I explored in this study, I now understand that the value of underpinning this investigation with various theoretical perspectives helped me to elucidate these concepts in a way that contributed meaningfully to the study outcomes. Two key concepts were *mentoring novice teachers* and *learner behaviour support*. Sowell (2017) describes mentoring in the school context as a process that allows mentors to shape novice teachers into reflective professionals who constantly ponder and develop their practice. Moreover, Ennis et al. (2017) argue that positive behaviour support is a proactive and supportive course for encouraging all learners in a school to give only their best. I employed a sociocultural theoretical perspective which supported my deep understanding of the key concepts that I explored. Murphy and Ivinson (2018) argue that, through a sociocultural perspective, the researcher understands that learning transpires because of the relationship between an individual and his/her surroundings, where the term 'environment' includes both the physical environment and its past and societal surrounds, as well as inner features such as individuals'

viewpoints and awareness. In the same vein, Boreen (2009) advises that collegiality is a noteworthy attribute of school life just as it is in any society.

### **11.6.1 What I have learned about the relations between the key concepts and my theoretical perspective**

A sociocultural theoretical perspective was foundational in the study because it was the platform from which I embarked to understand the phenomenon of novice teachers and the manner in which they should function and be supported in a school. Through this lens, I had to acknowledge that the novice teachers in my school came from diverse backgrounds and that their perspectives of teaching and learners might have been entrenched in multiple cultural, racial, and philosophical realities. I thus learned to take particular interest in every novice teacher's social and cultural development to cultivate positive and professional teaching practices along with them. I also realised that most learning occurs when we interact with other people. Thus the multiple discussion sessions I had with the novice teachers opened spaces for learning. I acknowledge now that their and my learning was embedded in social experiences. I also now accept that my role as a mentor and a school manager is not only to convey knowledge, but to keep all teachers informed of the rules, beliefs, and culture of the school and to bolster their confidence through inspiration and appreciation. I gained new knowledge by inviting the novice teachers to share their beliefs and narratives of their experiences with me and to contribute to the development of revised school rules and the culture of the school as well.

As a mentor, I also learned that I should continually offer guidance, support, points of view, and advice to colleagues with limited experiences. I realise that, as a key source of support and guidance in the school, I should alleviate the fears and anxieties of novice teachers and bolster their self-confidence by assuring them of my trust. In this manner, I shall have a positive impact on their professional development.

I learned that teacher collaboration is vital in the mentoring process if one wishes to yield desired and positive outcomes. By sharing ideas and viewpoints, information is allowed to flow and expand and, through honest and frank discussions, novice teachers become equal partners of the mentor which adds value to the school community. I gained new knowledge in every interactive engagement that the novice teachers and I shared and I am now able to use mentoring as a site for the continuance of my own learning. I believe that the novice teachers' knowledge

and viewpoints were essential for developing new knowledge and that we all benefited richly by the experience.

I learned that the common culture that we established for the novice teachers' classrooms was likely spiral outwards and ultimately impact the entire school community. I now know that positive behaviour support is required by both learners and teachers to improve and encourage acceptable social behaviour and minimise unwarranted delinquency and misbehaviour. Positive behaviour support in every teacher's classroom is a cornerstone for learners' academic improvement and the promotion of a positive teacher-learner relationship.

I noted with dismay that the novice teachers in my school felt ineffective when they did not know how to deal with unruly learners in their classrooms. It is therefore my responsibility as a mentor and school manager to assist them by monitoring the level of learner behaviour in their classrooms. I now know that mutual respect between learners and teachers enhances both learning and professional teaching practices. I also learned that a teacher's positive attitude could have an astonishing impact on successful classroom management.

I learned that teachers should involve learners in the formulation of classroom rules and behavioural expectations. Establishing such guidelines makes learners feel more responsible and they are also more prepared to take ownership of their behaviour. Over and above that, teachers must at all times model positive behaviour if they want to restore a positive milieu in their classrooms. It is thus my responsibility to encourage the teachers in my school to always plan their classroom management strategies in the same way that they plan their lessons.

I now also know that it is vital that I insist that teachers involve parents in their children's education. The more visible the parents of a learner are at school, the more the learner will display acceptable behaviour towards others in the school.

### **11.6.2 What the key concepts and theoretical perspective taught me about myself and how to respond to the research questions**

Exploring the key concepts and the theoretical perspective helped me to learn more about myself in numerous ways. For instance, as a mentor and school manager I have the capacity to improve my practice by getting to know and understand the cultural background of each teacher

in my school. Also, by working together, the novice teachers and I were able to create a culture that could, ultimately, be embraced by every member of the school community. I learned of my responsibility for collaborative teaching and learning and to ensure that subject committee meetings are held to promote effective academic engagement by all learners in the school.

I also realise that I am in a position to encourage novice teachers to have a voice in mapping a way forward towards establishing themselves as worthy and valued educators in the school. I learned that my influence is pivotal in motivating teachers to ensure that their classrooms are free of disruptive learners. They should thus attend and arrange meetings, do lesson demonstrations, engage in dialogue, and plan together. I also learned to always leave the line of communication open so as to allow novice teachers to air their concerns without feeling intimidated. I need to empathise this as it will help them to share private matters with me if they need my support.

I also learned that I should always encourage both veteran and novice teachers to establish a work ethic that requires that they learn from one another. I now know that I am in a position to influence veteran teachers to become mentors of novice teachers. I believe that, should only a handful of senior teachers mentor novice teachers appropriately, teaching and learning outcomes will be enhanced enormously. I also learned that I have to model positive behaviour and a neat appearance by displaying a professional disposition at all times. I now know that I have to be the first one to come to school and I should always dress in a professional manner.

I am capable of influencing novice teachers so that they and their learners will establish rules that will promote a culture of positive learner behaviour. I learned that I can be a source of inspiration to novice teachers by modelling how to maintain acceptable learner behavioural patterns. I also realise that I am responsible for enabling novice teachers to get acquainted with their learners by inviting their parents to school to discuss issues pertaining to their children.

## **11.7 Implications of the Study**

I believe that this self-study research has contributed positively to my understanding of the topic: *Mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support in my school*. The self-study research guided me to understand that mentoring can only be successful in an environment

where a mentor displays adequate emotional and psychological support for novice teachers. As a primary source of support for the novice teachers, I needed to uncover who I was by exploring my strengths and shortcomings. I felt that the outcomes would contribute to this field of study because experience alone does not qualify one to be an effective mentor. In fact, one needs to embark on an ongoing discovery to be able to mentor others.

By working so closely together with the novice teachers, I was able to support them in developing a range of problem-solving approaches to deal with learner misbehaviour and classroom management. This self-study research was not only about myself as an individual, but it also provided the novice teachers with opportunities to share their successes and challenges with me so that they might garner insights about managing their classrooms with minimal or no disruptions at all. I believe that this understanding is important in our efforts to improve our educational endeavours. The major focus of the study was on the core business of education, which is teaching and learning, and to propel these processes without unwarranted interruptions in the classroom.

I also believe that this self-study research contributed to the development and growth of both the novice teachers and myself in different ways. For instance, these inexperienced teachers were enabled to formulate innovative methods to manage their classrooms effectively. Their lesson preparation became more thorough and included planning for learner behaviour. Our mentoring discussion meetings also contributed to my development as a mentor and school manager. For example, my influence on and belief in them motivated the novice teachers to such an extent that they soon shone as happy, dedicated, and enthusiastic educators in the school. It is an undeniable fact that teachers' growth and development are crucial requisites in the field of education.

### **11.7.1 New contributions**

A new contribution of this study is that a mentor and school manager has to work with teachers who come to school with different attitudes – thus mentoring is never smooth sailing. It is a process that requires mentors with big hearts who understand that teachers have personal issues that they bring to school. The literature does not cover or stipulate *what* measures a mentor must employ to guide novice teachers who display unbecoming attitudes towards others, their work and the school. In this context, my study proposes persistent collaborative dialogue that also recognises the voice of the novice teacher. Just telling novices what to do is counter-

productive; the mentor should demonstrate his or her own learning and flaws in the process of supporting inexperienced teachers.

What this study also contributes to new knowledge is that the mentoring process should not assume that ‘one size fits all’. Mentoring requires patience and compassion and one has to understand that novice teachers have different capabilities and personalities. These personality traits could either hinder or advance their efforts to acquaint themselves with the school culture.

I discovered that I cannot mentor the teachers in my school without support. The rest of the school management team, as well as veteran teachers, need to make certain that mentoring is embraced by all in the school community.

A new finding that has not been highlighted in the literature is that mentoring novice teachers bears fruit in as far as the smooth running of the school is concerned. For instance, after the conclusion of our discussions, I noticed a drop in learner misbehaviour cases reported to me as well as learner and teacher late coming and absenteeism. Instead, there was a marked increase in parents taking an active role in supporting school activities and teachers building strong relationships with the learners in their classrooms by engaging them in debates, role-play activities, drawing and artwork, public speaking, and more.

### **11.7.2 Proposals to be included in the School Development Plan**

One outcome that I shall unhesitatingly take on board is to invite veteran teachers to take part in the mentoring process of novice teachers. When this is operationalised, I am convinced that any school will develop into a force to be reckoned with. In my view, seasoned teachers should share their experiences with novice teachers while they, in turn, should also enhance their knowledge and skills by learning more about current teaching approaches from novice teachers. Moreover, novice teachers will then be exposed to effective classroom management approaches.

I shall also persuade the school management team and the entire teaching staff to invest in teacher professional development by upgrading their qualifications as soon as possible. In this process, teachers will engage in dialogues, discussions, and problem-solving sessions that will facilitate vibrant educational insights within the school. I shall also encourage a staff participatory model that should be adhered to at all times.

I shall also insist that the school endorses and arranges staff developmental workshops on pro-social behaviours. I believe that deliberating on issues that we are expected to be taught in our communities such as good manners, speaking politely, being considerate, and showing respect for others and their property should also be a deliberate focus of interactive educational sessions in schools. These programmes should augment the Life Skills curriculum and should extend beyond the classroom. If this is done, I believe that we shall experience harmony in the school as both teachers and learners will exhibit expected behaviour patterns as part of a positive school culture.

### **11.7.3 How these new insights might be useful for other teachers and school leaders**

These insights might be useful for other school leaders as they may adopt similar mentoring strategies for novice teachers in their schools. School leaders could also meet at cluster level to discuss ways of promoting mentoring. These cluster meetings could then be extended to district and ultimately to provincial level.

The insights could also encourage school leaders to motivate novice and senior teachers to collaboratively address classroom and misbehaviour management. In this way, schools could experience exponential growth and teachers will take a huge stride forward in becoming effective in their management of learners who persistently misbehave.

All school leaders should strive to achieve a common vision that could redirect our schools to desired levels of excellence. I believe that this excellence could be attained through determination, optimal teacher practices, a high quality of school management team support, and the understanding of and adherence to the school culture by all.

### **11.7.4 How these new insights may be useful to education researchers**

Future researchers in education may use these insights to facilitate the amendment of current ineffectual educational policies. Although an exploration of such policies was beyond the scope of this study, my observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that teachers are often frustrated by policies that were unilaterally devised without the inputs of classroom practitioners. I believe

that education researchers have an obligation to peruse other researchers' studies in order to perpetually renew and amend educational perspectives.

By subjecting my study – or excerpts of the study – for peer review in academic journals or at workshops and symposia, education researchers might be prompted to ask more questions for clarity or add interesting opinions that I might have omitted. This could persuade future researchers to deepen their investigations into issues that were raised by this study.

Moreover, teacher educators (i.e., lecturers at higher education institutions) may recognise the need to introduce mentoring as a subject or topic in the curriculum. This could prepare novice teachers for further support and guidance at schools and they may thus approach the right people and ask the right questions soon after starting their teaching careers.

#### **11.7.5 How my study will add to the knowledge base of self-study research**

Involving myself in self-study as a mentor and deputy principal enabled me to share my successes as well as my frustrations regarding the induction of novice teachers into a school. Whitehead et al. (2020) acknowledge that significant leaders influence transformation in knowledge structures by sharing their ideals and research findings based on self-study. They can also use a self-study approach to share their vulnerabilities and strengths and by observing and acknowledging teachers who share their beliefs (Whitehead et al., 2020). I hoped that, by sharing my knowledge with and about novice teachers, I would contribute to their professional development and stimulate them to harness positive and effective teaching practices that would curb learner misbehaviour in the classroom.

My self-study research knowledge could provide fertile ground for innovative classroom management practices that could enhance the skills of novice teachers and augment the insights of other researchers in the field. Whitehead et al. (2020) advocate that mentors should concentrate on techniques and formations that sustain the valuable preparation of teachers for our progressively developing schools. By engaging in educational conversations with novice teachers, I believe that I enhanced their desire to embark on self-study research themselves.

Kitchen (2020) argues that more needs to be done to promote self-study project engagement among school teachers. My study offers a unique and motivational example of a senior teacher's

endeavours in self-study research. This is a significant contribution to the knowledge of self-study research as it can fill potential researchers with ideas and aspirations to improve their own knowledge and enhance their skills. I can also use this self-study knowledge base to share my perspectives with and motivate other leaders to engage in self-study for their own new learning.

## **11.8 Moving Forward**

My plan is to remain active in research. I plan to convince my supervisor and critical friends to collaborate in my ongoing research because I feel there is a lot that I can still learn and also contribute as an education researcher. I am now very inquisitive to learn how best I can lead my school to encourage everyone to acquire adequate knowledge and enhance their self-concept.

In the future, I would like to explore the role I can play in cultivating teacher-learner engagement and optimum parent participation.

## **11.9 Conclusion**

The purpose of Chapter Eleven was to provide an overall review of what I had discovered through this self-study research.

I presented an overall review of the thesis by explaining what was covered in each of the chapters and describing the inter-connectedness of some chapters. Furthermore, I reminded the reader of my personal and professional motivation that prompted me to engage in this study. I reflected on and explained how this study affected me as the researcher. I also reflected on my chosen methodology and highlighted the new insights that I had gained about self-study, the difference that self-study had made to my personal and professional development, and the advice I would give to others in terms of self-study research.

I also reflected on the key concepts that I explored and the main theoretical perspective that assisted me in understanding these key concepts. Next, I discussed what this self-study research had contributed to my understanding of the topic and why it would be of vital importance to the field of education. To conclude, I revealed what I plan to do differently in the future as a result

of this study. I also explained that I would like to embark on more in-depth investigations in a similar field in the near future.

In this concluding chapter, I highlighted that mentoring could be a key factor in improving novice teachers' classroom management skills. This could be achieved by extending adequate support to them, creating trust, and eliciting respect and collegiality in the school community. I learned that valuing novice teachers' viewpoints could have a fundamental impact on how they conduct themselves in their classrooms and in the school context. Another core message that I stressed in this chapter is that mentors should take compassionate interest in every novice teacher's social and cultural development. By doing so, a mentor could aid novice teachers to nourish their ongoing learning and improve their professional teaching practice. As a principal source of support, I learned to be sympathetic about novice teachers' uncertainties and to try to understand the challenges they are confronted with in their professional and, when relevant, in their private lives.

To conclude, it is imperative to acknowledge that this self-study research project has established itself as the cornerstone of my learning and the catalyst that revealed my true identity.

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## APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL



6 February 2018

Mr Khulekani Luthuli 200276715  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Luthuli

**Protocol reference number: HSS/0054/018D**

**Project Title: Mentoring Novice teachers in Learner Behaviour Support: A Deputy Principal's self-study**

### **Full Approval – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received 23 January 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
**Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)**  
**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan  
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza  
cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

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**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

**Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building**

**Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000**

**Telephone: +27 (0) 31 280 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 280 4609 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohung@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohung@ukzn.ac.za)**

**Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)**



Former Campuses

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## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

### LETTER TO TEACHER PARTICIPANT

43 Archie Gwillam Crescent Hillary  
Durban

4094

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Khulekani Luthuli, am a PhD student at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. I am currently engaged in a research study on “mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support: a deputy principal’s self-study.” The research objectives are: 1. To learn about mentoring novice teachers and learner behaviour support from my memories 2. To learn about mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support teachers in our school community.

As part of my research I would like to involve you as my research participant. This could be a two session discussions and will take about 45 minutes to one hour to complete. The data generated from the discussions will not be used for any other purposes either than research purposes. May you kindly allow me to conduct my research using you as my participant?

I would like to give an undertaking that the name of the school and participants in the study will be kept anonymous. Moreover, the research will only be conducted after hours using one of the rooms in the school.

I can be contacted at: Email: [mshibek@gmail.com](mailto:mshibek@gmail.com); Tel: 031 309 7139

My supervisor is Prof Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is located in Education Studies on Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Email: [Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za); Tel: 031-260 3460

The contact person in the research office is: Mr Premlall Mohum- senior administrator office. Email: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za) ; tel-031-260 4557

I thank you in advance for your on-going support and co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

Khulekani Luthuli

**DECLARATION**

I .....  
(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project: *Mentoring novice teachers in learner behaviour support: A deputy principal's self-study*. I consent to my contributions being used in the thesis and other publications based on the thesis. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

- a) The use of my:
  - WhatsApp messages                      YES/NO
  - Drawings                                      YES/NO
  - Photographs                                YES/NO
- b) Audio recording of discussions      YES/NO

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT COVER PAGE

12/3/2020

Turnitin Originality Report



PhD thesis 3 December by Kulekani Luthuli  
From Chapter drafts (Phd)

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["International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Pr: Science and Business Media LLC, 2020](#)

### paper text:

CHAPTER ONE MENTORING ? A WAY TO GO 1.1 Introduction: Change Begins with I principal and seasoned teacher in a multicultural urban school that accommodates lear from diverse backgrounds. I started working

1 **as a professional teacher in a primary school**

in 1994. I was transferred to another primary school in 2003 where I was promoted to tl Department (HoD) in 2005. I filled this position until 2013, when I was again transferred am currently employed. I have been working with teachers from diverse racial and cultu since 2003. I observed the many challenges that novice teachers encounter with comp; understood their anguish when they battled to manage learner behaviour in their classr wondered whether their plight was related to a lack of mentorship

1 **in the school, the focus of this self-study project was on**

my own mentoring practice as a seasoned teacher and a deputy principal. I thus intens explored my endeavours to assist and guide novice teachers to manage learner behavi mentor novice teachers stemmed from my memories when I was a novice teacher mys

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