CULTIVATING SURPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS: A

TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY

BY

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COLLAGE OF HUMANITIES

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DR KATHLEEN PITHOUSE-MORGAN

ACRONYMS

- BEd   Bachelor of Education
- MEd   Master of Education
- UKZN   University of KwaZulu-Natal
- ATM   Automated teller machine

ABSTRACT

My research focus was on supportive relationships between teachers and learners. I therefore, aimed to better understand and evaluate my relationships with my grade 1 learners and to improve my teaching practice by cultivating supportive relationships with them. Adopting a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning helped me to understand that learning is culturally and socially constructed, which means that it is important to pay attention to learners' social and cultural backgrounds and circumstances, so that I can draw on what they already know to stimulate their thinking and learning and to offer them appropriate support. The first question that guided my research was: *What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?* This question helped me to look back on my past relationships inside and outside of school; for instance, I looked at support that I received from parents, teachers and friends, and how this support managed to drive or motivate me to finish school. My second research question was: *How can I cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?* In responding to this question, I worked with my learners on various lessons whereby learners' classwork activities enabled me to interpret how they viewed teacher-learner relationships. I was the main participant in the study. I also worked with my 37 grade 1 learners and two of my former school friends. Throughout my self-study research process, I also worked closely with my two of my fellow Master's students. Data were generated using five research practices: a) artefact retrieval; b) reflective journal writing; c) drawing; d) collage; and e) audio recording of lessons and conversations. From my self-study research, I discovered that learners should be the center of learning and that it is vital that we teachers consider carefully any social-emotional factors that might inhibit teaching and learning. Thus, learners need to feel close to us teachers; this means they need to be sure that they can trust and rely on us to listen to them and take seriously their little needs. Hence, a key part of teacher self-development is to be able give yourself time to constantly learn about your learners' needs and concerns and to make changes in response to those needs and concerns that will improve teaching and learning.

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Introduction

In developing my research focus, I was asked by my research supervisor to create a haiku poem about my past school days. According to Samaras (2011), creating a haiku poem (which is poetic form of Japanese origin that has 17 syllables)can help a researcher to draw together her ideas in few words. Those few words in the poem can help the researcher to look for key words that would help her to find the main focus and aim of her study. The haiku poem that I developed (Figure 1.1) made me realise that I wanted to be a teacher who was different from many of my former teachers. I wanted to develop a positive, supportive manner towards my learners[1]. I wanted to walk closely with my learners, to understand them, and to be a good listener to their worries or anything that they felt they should share with me. As Wu, Hughes, and Kwok (2010) affirmed, learners who perceive their relationship with their teachers to be supportive tend to feel welcomed at school and try to work closely with their teacher to attain positive behaviour and academic performance. I also believed that knowing my learners' fears, concerns and joys would draw me close to my learners and this would help me to develop healthy, positive and supportive relationships with my learners.

Improving teaching
Different teacher
Not to alienate learners
Enhance my teaching

Figure 1.1. **Haiku poem**

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[1] In South Africa, "learners" is used to refer to children and adolescents in school, while "students" refers to those studying in higher education institutions.

In this chapter, I explain why I conducted my research and what I hoped to achieve. I look at the reasons why I thought the study would be important for me as a teacher. I also briefly describe my methodological approach. I list my research questions and indicate why I asked them and how I responded to them. The theoretical perspective and key concepts that are woven through the research are also discussed. In conclusion, I outline the structure of the dissertation.

Focus and purpose of study

The focus of the study presented in this dissertation was supportive teacher-learner relationships. In my study I aimed to find out how I could build supportive relationships with my grade 1 learners, which I anticipated could also have a positive impact in terms of their academic performance. I felt that in my past school days many teachers distanced themselves from learners' social-emotional wellbeing and as a result I felt that the only relationship many teachers had with learners was purely based on academic teaching and learning (as illustrated in Chapter Three of this dissertation). Hence, I believed that many of my classmates dropped out of school or repeated the same grade several times, not because they were empty minded, but because some of them lacked social-emotional support at school and they were not understood by their teachers. Thus, the school environment rejected them. Klem and Connell (2004) explained that "students with caring and supportive inter-personal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with school. These students also are more engaged academically" (p. 262). Consequently, in relation to my own teaching, I felt that maybe some of my learners might not have been doing well because they might have experienced a lack of support from me. I was concerned that that they might not feel comfortable with me as their teacher or that they might not feel safe in our school or classroom environment.

Therefore, I pursued this study with an aim of evaluating my teaching and improving in my profession. In the study, I wanted to find out how my grade 1 learners interpreted the relationships they had with me, in order for me to be able to improve on my teaching practice by cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships. Wu et al. (2010) emphasised that "children who perceive teachers as being as supportive and available may be more likely to approach teachers for learning assistance" (p. 539). Hence, I believed that cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships with my learners could enable them to feel free to

share their feelings and also trust me to give them support and guidance. I anticipated that this could contribute to a positive teaching and learning environment; also, in the longer term, as Banks et al. (2001) pointed out, schools that are characterised by warmth and social-emotional support can create significant changes in the lives of learners.

My study was self-study research. In this study, I did self-introspection whereby I studied myself as a grade 1 teacher with respect to how my learners viewed my relationships with them and what kind of relationships they would like to have with their teachers. I also took a retrospective look at my own experiences as a learner at school. My aim was to learn from this to be able to cultivate supportive relationships with my learners. My concern was raised by my own past school experiences and the challenging social circumstances of many learners in the primary school where I teach. I anticipated that supportive teacher-learner relationships could create a positive and welcoming environment which could form a strong foundation for supporting the learners' academic performance and their social-emotional growth.

Rationale

I am a foundation phase teacher (grade R-3).I have been teaching for 4 years. I am currently teaching grade 1 in a school that is located in a semi-urban area in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Most learners who attend the school come from the surrounding area and most of our learners come from a low socioeconomic background, where either one or both parents are unemployed. What is even worse is that some come from child-headed households as their parents have passed on or they work far from home and children are left to look after each other. Circumstances such as these can result in learners being faced with a range of social challenges. From my own past school experiences, I understand that social challenges such as poverty can give rise to poor academic performance. Additionally, Ward, Gould, Kelly, and Mauff (2015) also argued that the stress of social challenges that are endured by parents and families, such as poverty, can have a negative emotional and social impact on children. This means that these children need to be supported and teachers can play a significant role in ensuring that learners are emotionally and socially supported. When teachers distance themselves from learners' social-emotional lives they might not understand the problems learners are faced with and the learners might feel neglected and not loved.

I feel that it is important for teachers to try to engage with learners' social-emotional lives in order to know and understand learners' needs and be able to provide necessary support. The support teachers provide to learners can make them feel loved, secure and welcomed in the school environment. In my understanding, teachers should play a key role in cultivating a healthy, positive learning culture in their classrooms and even in school as a whole. Furthermore, as Hughes (2011) explained, "teachers who are adept at creating a positive social-emotional climate provide more responsive instruction and better-organized classrooms" (p. 2).

In my understanding, a warm and hospitable school environment can have a powerful influence on building enthusiasm for learning among learners by affecting how they feel; for instance, if they feel welcome, loved and understood they are more likely to be enthusiastic about learning. As Hughes(2011) emphasised, "children who experience social support from teachers will construct a positive sense of school membership and academic self-concept that will promote greater effort and persistence as well as commitment to school rules and norms" (p. 2). As a result, supportive teacher-learner relationships could enable or stimulate learners' learning capability and their participation in their school work and extra mural activities.

I undertook this study because I felt that teaching and learning might not be effective if there was a distant relationship between teacher and learner. Most of my learners carry various burdens or social problems and as a result the learners might not fully engage in class activities or might come to school with lack of interest in learning, which could result in learners not performing well academically. Thus, I felt that it was important for me as the teacher to cultivate supportive relationships with my learners in order to understand their individual needs. When the teacher does not have a supportive relationship with learners, she or he may not be able to approach or respond in a supportive manner to learners' problems as she does not understand the learners' social circumstances. Hughes (2011) highlighted that teachers need skills and abilities to foster a positive social and emotional learning environment. Similarly, Lindo et al. (2014) argued that teachers need to attain necessary capacities to raise their awareness of learners' needs, to cope with learners' behaviour problems and to be able to encourage learners' cooperation and to communicate effectively with learners. Likewise, Jairam (2009) explained that teachers should develop counsellors' skills and attitudes to develop supportive relationships with learners. In my view, it is

important that teachers gain these capacities to assist learners with social-emotional issues as it will help teachers to be more understanding and be able to offer necessary support.

Consequently, it is important that we teachers create a conducive environment to allow learners to engage freely in school activities. If learners fear being at school, they might withdraw themselves from any school activities that take place in school and not interact with other learners as they might feel uncomfortable or unwelcomed (Banks et al.,2001).Wu et al. (2010) also stated that "children's perceptions of their relationships with teachers as being close and supportive, irrespective of the congruence with others' perceptions of the relationships, may promote a sense of their belonging to school and their general perceived competence" (p. 359).Thus, I strongly believe that I as a teacher should cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships with my learners, in order to enable me to better understand learners' social-emotional needs and perspectives, to try to offer necessary help, and to promote a sense of belonging at school for all learners.

Methodological approach

The study was qualitative. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) asserted that a "qualitative study uses qualifying words and descriptions to record aspects of the world" (p. 37). This implies that a qualitative study looks deeply into people's perspectives about their social situations. A qualitative study also offers in depth information as it provides clear, descriptive data (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). Taking a qualitative approach enabled me to explore my own personal history and it also allowed me to further describe my relationships with my learners and to learn from my learners' perspectives. My study was located in an interpretive paradigm that aims to understand how people make sense of their own world. As Henning (2004) explained, an interpretive paradigm tries to present the reality of participants from their own viewpoints. Thus, as I worked with my grade 1 learners, I aimed to allow learners to present how they felt about the relationships I had with them in terms of whether these were supportive or unsupportive. I also wanted to know what kinds of relationships they would like to have with their teachers.

For this study, I chose a self–study research methodology. Self-study methodology allows teachers to study themselves in order to develop their teaching practice (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Pithouse, Mitchell and Weber (2009, p. 45) emphasised that teachers who choose to do

self-study are required to present evidence of how their thinking and practice have evolved. I anticipated that applying a self-study methodology in my research would allow me to study my personal history and my personal relationships with my learners with an aim of thinking deeply and improving my teaching practice. (I give a detailed account of my self-study research process in Chapter Two of this dissertation.)

I was the main participant in the study as I researched my personal history and my experience of my current teaching with the aim of improving my teaching practice. Since my study required me to explore how I could engender supportive relationships with my learners, I worked with my 37 grade 1 learners as I was their class teacher. Two of my former school friends with whom I still have contact were part of the study to prompt my memories of past supportive and unsupportive relationships. One was a friend from primary school and one was a friend from high school.

Research questions

Two questions guided my research:

Question One

What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?

I respond to this question in Chapter Three of this dissertation. This question helped me to look back on my past relationships inside and outside of school; for instance, I looked at support that I received from parents, teachers and friends, and how this support managed to drive or motivate me to finish school. Thus, responding to this question helped me to better understand why it is important that I should cultivate supportive relationships with learners, and how they and I might benefit from such supportive relationships. In answering this question, I used artefacts, drawings and discussions with my primary and high school friends to prompt relevant memories of supportive and unsupportive relationships we had with our teachers, classmates or other significant people.

Question Two

How can I cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?

I address this question in Chapter Four of this dissertation. I show how I learnt that young children need to be listened to, respected and loved. I explain how I figured out that I needed to improve in ways that would help me to become closer to my learners. In responding to this

question, I worked with my learners on various lessons whereby learners' class work activities enabled me to interpret how they viewed teacher-learner relationships. Audio recording was used to record learners' discussions and my teaching. I also used reflective journal writing to reflect on each of the lessons. Engaging the learners assisted me to understand how they viewed our relationships and how I could improve my relationships with them.

<div align="center">**Theoretical perspective and key concepts**</div>

A sociocultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning

In my understanding of a sociocultural theoretical perspective on learning, it draws attention to how young children start to be socialised early on according to certain of ways of living by their families. As John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) explained, learners gain knowledge through social interaction and they internalise that knowledge to use independently in similar situations. As a result, they internalise norms, beliefs and roles they are socialised into and therefore their thinking tends to be shaped by how they were raised or socialised. As Harro (2008) explained, our families or guardians teach us how we should behave or to think in a certain manner. Thus, young children tend to conform to parents' views and rules. For example, I was raised knowing and believing that as a child I should not look at an older person eye to eye when I was talking to her. As a child I knew that I should not answer back to an older person, even if she was wrong, and that I should always take the blame. Banks et al. (2001) highlighted that as teachers we should be aware of learners' cultural contexts and be able to apply and construct culturally appropriate activities to bridge the gap between what learners already know and what they are to be taught in school. As learners also internalise values and beliefs that they are taught at home, it is our duty as teachers to recognise and not suppress what learners already know.

Moreover, Harro (2008) argued that different institutions can reinforce what we learn at home. Once children start to attend institutions such as school or church they can practice more of what they have learnt at home. Meyiwa, Letsekha, and Wiebesiek (2013) brought forward that each society preserves its own cultural heritages and resources that are used daily; hence, schools should utilise culturally appropriate material to teach, as young children associate more easily and understand better if what they are taught is familiar to them. Banks at al. (2001) also maintained that teachers must be able to infuse culturally appropriate content

into learning activities to assist children in learning with understanding. However, in my view, we need to be aware that teachers also tend to practice what they learnt as they grew up and hence, they can reinforce societal norms and beliefs that might not always be in the best interests of cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships. Such norms and beliefs can reinforce that children should not talk back to older people or not talk with an adult about things that might be seen as disgraceful. Looking back at my childhood, I believe such traditional customs often made us learners feel scared and not comfortable to share with our teachers any problems we came across within or outside of school. I think such beliefs tended to create a distant relationship between learners and teachers, which resulted in some teachers not knowing and understanding each individual learner's needs in order to support her. Therefore, I believe it is important that teachers learn and understand how to listen to and communicate with children; I think that would help to create connection and understanding between teachers and learners.

In my study, I adopted a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning because I felt that taking this perspective would allow me to enhance my teaching practice as it encourages teachers to be alert to learners' sociocultural backgrounds (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Therefore, it encourages teachers to use various social and cultural resources to improve their teaching practices. As I am teaching young children, it is important that I use resources or materials that they are familiar with to enable them to understand better. Similarly, Meyiwa et al. (2013) agreed that using indigenous knowledge can promote learning and teaching since learners can relate more easily to what they are learning. Likewise, McMurtry (2015,) explained:

> teachers must carefully consider not only the content, but also students' previous education, language abilities, culture, personal interests, and bodily states (tired, hungry, alert, hostile, secure, etc.). Even then, students may interpret the same events very differently, depending on their previous education, and background. (p.1)

Correspondingly Banks et al. (2001) affirmed that "if teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning" (p. 197). Hence, it is important that as teachers we consider various social and cultural factors that may influence teaching and learning and teacher-learner relationships in our classrooms. For example, families, friends, traditions and peers may influence the learning of the children and their relationships. As John-Steiner and Mahn

(1996) explained, culture and family organisation play significant roles in the creation of knowledge and experiences. This means that children's thinking is influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds. To illustrate, Meyiwa et al. (2013) explained that working with Cofimvaba women in a rural area of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa helped educational researchers in sourcing indigenous knowledge to enrich the enacted school curriculum, as they identified context-appropriate activities and items that could be used to create learning resources for learners.

From a sociocultural perspective, I understand that learners learn more easily and better understand concepts through associating them with what they already know. For example, when a teacher is teaching mathematics in grade 1and she teaches about shapes, learners are likely to understand better if she uses examples of things that learners are familiar with. To illustrate, Meyiwa et al. (2013) explained how they used local items that learners were familiar with, such as a three legged pot, as indigenous material to enable learners to easily understand the number concept 3. The teacher teaching shapes might also use example of a ball or box to make an example of a square or circle. Thus, using culturally relevant material can assist learners to better understand and to become more interested to what they are taught and it also can encourage them to engage in the lesson. As learners become more interested in their learning, they might also work to achieve positive results.

According to Kelly (2006), sociocultural learning theories emphasise that teacher professional knowledge is constructed through sharing ideas. Kelly (2006) further stressed that "knowing-in-practice is a dynamic process resulting from the collaborative actions of teachers and students together in the context of their own work" (p. 510). This means that knowledge is built through engaging with others and hence we learn from each other. For instance, in my study, I worked with my grade 1 learners, as well as some former primary and high school friends. I anticipated that this would help me to learn from them about how they view supportive relationships. This gave me alternative perspectives on teacher-learner supportive relationships. As Kelly (2006) maintained, according to a sociocultural perspective, teacher learning is a constructive movement whereby teachers partner with learners, colleagues and look for ways that will improve their professionalism and to enable learners to engage in their classroom activities. Thus, working in collaboration can help to improve teaching, learning and teacher-learner relationships.

Teacher-learner relationships

This study focused on supportive teacher-learner relationships. A supportive teacher-learner relationship can create a positive environment for a learner, as it can make the learner feel a sense of belonging to the school (Wu et al., 2010). According to Lindo et al. (2014), "children are more likely to succeed in school when the teacher-child relationship is characterised by warmth, trust and low degrees of conflict" (p. 285). Additionally, as Blanco, Ray and Holliman (2012) explained, children tend to develop better academically in a classroom environment that is free from judgement and anxiety. Therefore, in reading this, I realised that it was important for me to develop positive and supportive relationships with my learners to build a positive teaching environment that could foster learner participation and engagement in learning activities.

Furthermore, Wu et al. (2010, p. 358) stressed that, "a positive relationship with one's teacher may be especially important to the school adjustment of students at higher risk for school failure due to family background variables". Many learners in my school come from family circumstances that are affected by different social problems, such as poverty; and some are raised by parents or other family members who are illiterate. Thus, these learners in particular need teachers' support to remain motivated in doing their best at school.

Jairam (2009) highlighted the importance of teachers developing counsellors' qualities that could enable them to offer support to learners. Some of these skills and attitudes that I thought I should adopt to offer helpful support to learners were respect, empathy, acceptance, listening and empathic responding (Jairam, 2009). I thought that applying a combination of these skills and attitudes in my teaching practice would allow me to know my learners better and to be able to offer the social and emotional support they need. I anticipated that this could enhance teaching and learning and that it could also motivate me as a teacher to become more involved in developing my teaching practice to become a supportive teacher.

Conversely, Hughes (2011) cautioned that learners "whose relationships with teachers are characterised by conflicts are more likely to be retained in grade, to experience peer rejection and to increase externalizing behaviour" (p. 1). Thus, learners who experience conflicts in their relationships with teachers may lack enthusiasm for doing their work at school or for participating in any school activity. Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, and Wehby (2009) also cautioned that "preschool students most often received teacher attention contingent upon

their aggressive and disruptive behaviours" (p.173). This indicates that for some young children, "attention from one's teacher is likely reinforcing or increasing inappropriate behaviour"(Partin et. al 2009, p. 173). This suggested to me that it was important that as a teacher I should try to create a favourable environment for young children and to find positive strategies to develop self-discipline among my learners. If the teacher pays attention only to negative behaviour and never shows appreciation for children' little efforts, they may not feel any need to work towards the teacher's satisfaction.

Teachers should be able to develop strategies that will enhance learners' positive behaviour. For instance, Partin etal. (2009) explained that the use of rewards and paying attention, not only to negative behaviour, but also to positive behaviour, can encourage learners' positive behaviour. I thought it was important for me also to apply some classroom management strategies that are highlighted by Partin et. al(2009), which could be appropriate for stimulating positive behaviour and promoting supportive relationships between teacher and learners. These include rewards for good performance or behaviour and working together with learners to make decisions about what happens in the classroom. I believed that learners would not easily forget decisions they had been involved in creating and they would also understand the meaning and the importance of keeping to such decisions. Similarly, Roache and Lewis (2011) explained that learners need to be clear about teachers' expectations and that teachers should apply an appropriate variety of rewards and sanctions that will promote learner self-discipline and encourage learning.

Teacher learning

In this study, I also focused on my own professional learning as a teacher in relation to supportive teacher-learner relationships. Kelly (2006, p. 507) explained that from a sociocultural perspective, "teacher learning involves teachers engaging in the process of knowing-in-practice so as to allow their full participation in classroom activity". This means that I should actively engage myself in enriching my knowledge and constantly strive to improve my teaching practice. Kelly (2006) added that teacher learning moves teachers from a marginal level to the level of expertise, as they continuously develop their knowledge and consequently improve their teaching skills. Likewise, Day and Gu (2007) maintained that "teachers' professional learning . . . will enrich teachers' knowledge base, improve their teaching practices" (p. 425). To improve my knowledge, it is important that I participate in a variety of educational practices such as developmental seminars and academic studies and

that I also do introspection. Day and Gu (2007) further stated that teacher professional learning and personal development helps teachers to "build character, maturity and other virtues in themselves and others, making their schools into moral communities" (p. 428). As a result, further learning should develop me as a teacher and transform my thinking and my practice. In addition, Easton (2008) further maintained that teachers need to engage themselves in learning in order to become knowledgeable and wise. Hence, I realised that teacher learning could help me to engage positively with my learners, and to develop strategies to enable my classroom to become a favourable environment for my learners. As Kelly (2006) maintained, expert teachers have a productive relationship with their knowledge as they are able to practice and extend their knowledge through their teaching.

Webster-Wright (2009) proposed that professional learning can facilitate professionals' thinking as it develops or shapes practice from a wide range of activities and it encourages professionals to interact with their colleagues to gain different perspectives and share their experiences. Thus, this can help professionals such as teachers to self-develop their teaching practice. Easton (2008) also asserted that "educators learn from one another, enriching their own professional lives and the culture of the school or district. They build a shared vision of a school or district, work on what matters, and help one another make changes" (p. 757).Hence, I realised that it was important for me also to work closely with fellow teachers to enrich my knowledge and teaching. As explained in Chapter Two, to enhance my self-study research, I worked closely with two other primary school teachers who were also Master's students conducting self-study research.

Conclusion and overview of the dissertation

I began this chapter by explaining how creating a haiku poem helped me to find the focus of my study. I further elaborated that the focus of my self-study research was on positive teacher-learner relationships, as I believed that supportive relationships could contribute to a positive, welcoming, and warm environment for teaching and learning. I also reflected on how my motivation for the study was driven by past unpleasant school experiences that I believe were linked to lack of support or understanding from some of our teachers. In addition, I presented my two research questions. I went on to explain my grasp of a sociocultural theoretical perspective and the two key concepts of teacher-learner relationships

and teacher learning. In subsequent chapters of this dissertation I continue to weave in my thinking and learning about these key concepts in relation to my study (Samaras, 2011).

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I offer an in depth look at how my self-study research process unfolded. I explain my choice of a self-study research methodology. I also describe the location of the study, as well as the research participants and my critical friends (my two fellow Masters' students). Moreover, I clarify how data were generated using diverse research practices. I then discuss meaning making, ethical issues and validity. I also explain how I addressed certain research challenges. To end, I offer my core learning about carrying out self-study research.

In Chapter Three, I respond to my first research question: "What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?" I narrate my personal history with respect to memories of supportive and unsupportive relationships from my early childhood, primary schooling and my high school years. To illustrate my personal history, I include images of artefacts and drawings. I further demonstrate how I represented my personal history narrative in collage form. I describe how presenting my two collages to my research supervisor and my critical friends for their input helped me to respond to my research question. I end with my key learning from recalling supportive and unsupportive relationships in my personal history.

In Chapter Four, I relate how I engaged my class of 37 grade 1 learners to assist me in responding to my second research question: "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?" I give details of how, for the purposes of my research, I planned, taught and studied three Life Skills lessons, two Mathematics lessons and four IsiZulu lessons with my grade 1 learners. In describing how these lessons took place, I present illustrations of learners' class work. I also present extracts from my reflective journal to reveal my thoughts and feelings and to show how my teacher learning progressed. I then show how I created a collage to bring together and make visible what I discovered through engaging the learners and how I heightened this learning through discussion with my research supervisor and critical friends. To conclude, I express my central learning from engaging my grade 1 learners.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter Five, I go back over my self-study dissertation. I give details of how my study has influenced me personally and professionally. I also consider my

methodological learning. Lastly, I illuminate what I plan to do in the future because of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I outlined the focus and purpose of my study on cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships with my grade 1 learners. I explained the rationale for my study as I described how I thought my learners and I as a teacher would benefit from the study. I further clarified my understanding of how supportive teacher-learner relationships can promote positive behaviour and academic performance (Hughes, 2012). I then discussed the research questions that have guided this self-study research. My theoretical perspective, key concepts and research approach were also explained.

In this chapter (Chapter Two) I explain the research methodology that I applied in my study. I go onto discuss the location of the study. A description of research participants and critical friends is also given. Furthermore, I explain how data were generated using different data research practices. I then discuss meaning making and ethical issues. I consider the validity of the study and, finally, research challenges are addressed.

Research methodology

In this study I chose to employ a self-study research methodology. Samaras and Freese (as cited in Evans,Kaʻōpua, & Freese,2015)explained that self-study research helps teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and to look for challenges, in order to make an effective change that will benefit their learning and the learning of learners. Similarly, Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) also brought forward that through "self-study research, professionals seek out innovative and responsive ways of seeing, doing, and becoming" (p. 1). Thus, in selecting a self-study methodology, I was aware that through self-study research I could critically examine my teaching practice with the help of my critical friends (my fellow Master's students) and my learners in order to develop new understandings of my teaching practice and of how I could change to become a better teacher. LaBoskey (2004) also agreed that self-study research focuses on how teachers understand their teaching practice as they aim to improve it. Consequently, I understood that self-study research was about teachers looking back and learning from studying their own teaching experiences to see where they need to improve.

Samaras (2011) highlighted that self-study research is purposely conducted with an aim of improving teaching and learning. Correspondingly, Pithouse, Mitchell, Weber (2009,) maintained that "self-study is improvement-aimed and it looks for, and requires evidence of, reframed thinking and transformed practice of the researcher" (p. 45). Russell (as cited in LaBoskey, 2004) furthered explained that self-study allows teachers to learn from their experiences and formulate new experiences for themselves and for learners. Hence, self-study methodology suited my research well as I aimed to learn about how I might improve on my teaching practice by cultivating supportive relationships with my learners to promote a welcoming and secure classroom environment.

I also anticipated that applying self-study methodology would enable me to critically examine my past experiences as a learner, by reviewing what my personal history revealed about supportive and unsupportive relationships. According to Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004), "personal history self-study entails the opportunity to disrobe, unveil, and engage in a soul-searching truth about the self while also engaging in critical conversations, and most importantly, continuing to discover the alternative viewpoints of others" (p. 910). Personal history self-study enabled me to reflect on my own learning experiences by interacting with my high school and primary school friends as they reminded me some of my past school learning experiences. I was able to reconsider how my past might have influenced my current teaching practice. Samaras (2011) advised that personal history self-study is "useful to examine who you are as a teacher, your teacher identity, the motivations behind your teacher goals, and the constraints and supports you have experienced in reaching those goals" (p.95). Thus, I anticipated that I would be able to engage with my past experiences regarding supportive and unsupportive relationships in terms of how these had influenced my teaching practice and to develop understanding of how I might improve my current and future teaching.

In addition, in my self-study research I applied arts-based self-study research practices, such as artefact retrieval, drawing, and collage; these visual arts-based practices helped me to make visible and reflect on my past experiences and my learning through the self-study research. Samaras (2011) maintained that using arts-based methods in a self-study allows the researcher to analyse and create meaning that might not have been easy to remember or to put in words; thus, it provokes self-reflection when aiming to improve one's teaching practice. Weber

(2014) further asserted that "arts-based approaches to research expand our knowledge base by including many of the neglected, but important ways in which we construct meaning through artistic forms of expression" (p. 10). By using arts-based research practices, I had an opportunity to gain more understanding about my past supportive and supportive relationships in my personal history. Furthermore, I also used visual arts-based practices, such as collages and drawings, to encourage my learners to express their thoughts and feelings.

Location of the study

I am a foundation phase teacher with 4 years of teaching experience. I am currently teaching grade 1 in a primary school. The school is situated in the outskirts of the town of Pinetown, and it falls under Pinetown district in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The learners who attend the school come from areas nearby to the school. The school's medium of instruction is IsiZulu, which is the home language of most learners and teachers. The learners and teachers are all African. The school is under resourced and the socio-economic background of the community around the school is poor, with most of the children who attend the school coming from impoverished family circumstances. Also, many of the learners come from families where either one or both parents have passed on (often due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic), or where children are left to look after each other as their parents work far from homes. Thus, many learners come from family structures with a lack of support and most families rely on government grants as a source of income. Many parents or guardians of learners who attend my school are illiterate. Most learners walk to school and they often come with empty stomachs. Fortunately, the school is supplied with breakfast as a donation from a mission organisation. The National School Nutrition Programme also funds the school with food parcels that are prepared and served during school break times. Thus, the children receive breakfast and lunch at school.

Research participants

I was the main participant in the study as I researched my personal history and my current teaching with the aim of improving my teaching practice. Since my study required me to learn about engendering supportive relationships with my learners, I worked with my 37 grade 1 learners. I am their class teacher. My class consists of 25 boys and 12 girls and their ages are between 6 and8 years old.

Two of my former school friends with whom I still have contact were also part of the study to prompt my memories of past supportive and unsupportive relationships. One was a friend from my former primary school days who went to the neighbouring school to mine. Her school was very much like my school in terms of resources and the school location. The second participant was a friend from my former high school. My primary school friend is female and she is 28 years old. She is a teacher by profession. She has 5 years' experience of teaching and she is teaching in a primary school. My high school friend is also female and she is 32 years old. She is in mechanical engineering and she has 8 years of professional experience.

Critical friends

Throughout my self-study research process, I worked closely with my two of my fellow Master's students. I met them when we were studying for a Bachelor of Education Honours degree; the three of us did the same specialisation. Teacher Development Studies was one of our elective modules and that is how we first met our Master's research supervisor, Dr Kathleen.

During our Master's studies my critical friends and I have worked together to help each other with our research and writing. Ntokozo, one of my critical friends, is female. She is in her mid-20s; she teaches in a multiracial primary school. The school is situated in Durban; she teaches grade 4 and she has 4 years of teaching experience. Khulekani, my other critical friend, is male; he is in his late 40s. He teaches in a multiracial primary school and the school is situated in centre of Durban. He has 22 years of teaching experience. Like me, both of my critical friends are African and speak isiZulu as their home language. All three of us chose a self-study research methodology for our Master's research.

Over the past 2 years we have had regular group meetings held every 2 weeks with our research supervisor and we have also met together often without our supervisor. When we met together we evaluated each other's work, in terms of sharing ideas and questioning each other's ideas, with the aim of improving our research (Samaras, 2011). Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) highlighted the importance of critical friends in building constructive self-study research. They pointed out the importance of valuing the opinion of others who share

the same interest in improving their professional practice. Working with my critical friends helped me to gain different understandings as they brought in their beliefs, thought and experiences; thus working with them helped me to reconsider some of my ideas and to restructure my ideas to improve my research (as shown in Chapter Three and Chapter Four).Correspondingly, Samaras (2011) maintained that "critical friends can prove useful in data collection and analysis as they provide alternative perspectives on interpretation to increase the validity of your research" (p. 179). This means that as critical friends we shared ideas and questioned each other's perspectives in order to make useful and thoughtful meaning of data. Additionally, some of the practical ways in which my critical friends helped me was that they gave me ideas on how I could introduce an IsiZulu lesson on children's rights in school. And when I had a problem because suitable magazines for my planned class collage making activity were limited, they suggested I could get some free pictures from the internet and compile them into a booklet for the learners to use.

Data generation

Table 2.1.

Data generation

Research Questions	Data generation activities	Data Sources
What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?	1. I wrote about my personal history of supportive and unsupportive relationships 2. I collected objects that triggered my memories of my personal history in relation to supportive and unsupportive relationships. 3. I created metaphor drawings and memory drawings to make visible my memories. 4. My former primary and high school friends and I discussed our primary and high school experiences.	1. Reflective journal entries 2. Artefacts, and my journal writing 3. Metaphor drawings and memory drawings 4. Audio recorded discussions and my journal writing.

How can I cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?	1. Learners were be asked to draw a picture of the teacher they would like to have	1. Learners' drawings
	2. Learners were asked to discuss their drawings. This discussion was audio recorded.	2. Audio recording of learners' discussion
	3. Learners were asked to work in groups of five and make a collage of children's rights and to present their collage	3. Learners' collage, audio recording of learners' presentation
	4. Learners used numbers on a scale of 1-9, to rate how their feelings about their class regarding me as their teacher or classmates. They were also asked to present their scores	4. Learners numbers rating score and audio recording of learners' presentation
	5. To reflect on my teachings, audio recorded three Life Skills, two Mathematics and four isiZulu lessons in my class	5. Audio recording of lessons, lesson plans, reflective journal entries

As shown in Table 3.1., in this self-study data were generated using five research practices, namely: a) artefact retrieval; b) reflective journal writing; c) drawing; d) collage; and e) audio recording of lessons and conversations with my former school friends. The five data generation practices that I applied in my study were used as a means of making visible and prompting reflection on my personal history and my current teaching. Artefact retrieval was used as a stimulus for remembering my personal history. I used reflective journal writing to reflect on my past and also to reflect on my teaching. Audio recording was used to record learners' discussions and my teaching, as well as to record conversations with my two schools friends.

Artefact retrieval

Real objects or artefacts can help one recall and understand events of the past (Brogden, 2008). Thus, one can engage with the past by collecting and reflecting on artefacts that have a personal or professional significance. Correspondingly, Allender and Manke (2004) brought forward that "artefacts come from our past and are found in file drawers and dusty boxes,

drawn on as we engage in analysis of our work" (p. 21). Thus, artefacts can bring the past to the surface and enable us to work on our past and be able to understand it, in order to change the present and future. However, as I searched for suitable artefacts I realised that artefact retrieval was not an easy thing to do. Although I may have had many objects that I regarded as artefacts, they did not all have powerful meanings with respect to my past supportive and unsupportive relationships. In the end, I used craftwork, a pencil, a stick and a textbook as artefacts (see Chapter Three). I used them because by looking at these objects I was taken back to my past primary school days. In looking back to my past school days, I was trying to find meaning in my experiences, in terms of how they had influenced my life and my teaching. I figured out that objects had their own way of taking me back to my past; they took the past to the present. These objects aroused mixed feelings about my past school days. These were feelings such as fear and pain, but I also recalled happy moments I had in school. Thus, working with these artefacts made me realise the importance of the emotional aspects of supportive teacher-learner relationships. Allender and Manke (2004, p. 20) asserted that "the variation among artefacts collected over the years evoked the ways [teachers] change and grow through their reflective practice". Therefore, using artefact retrieval as a data generation practice benefited my study. It enabled me to engage with my personal history and to be able to assess my current relationships with my learners in the light of the past. Thus, it helped me to be able to apply necessary development to improve my relationships with my grade 1 learners.

As shown in Chapter Three of this dissertation, artefact retrieval helped me realise why I strongly believe that supportive teacher-learner relationships are important in nurturing the education of learners. For instance, craftwork made me think of how it was difficult to look for used plastic bags and to collect grass to make craftwork, but because of support I had from my family and friends, craftwork was fun and I enjoyed it. A pencil was another artefact that brought back so many memories of my past primary school days. By looking at a pencil I was taken way back, thinking of how it was difficult to get a pencil, and of the problems we would encounter when we entered the classroom without it. Therefore, while the process of collecting artefacts was challenging as I had to think of artefacts that would make meaning and relate to my research, these artefacts were invaluable in bringing memories to life.

Reflective journal writing

Reflective journal writing was used to reflect on my personal history and on my teaching practice (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four). As Masinga (2012) highlighted, through journal writing she was able to discover herself as she reflected on the past through writing stories. Similarly, I was also able to reflect on past experiences and on my daily observations in class, my interactions with learners and planned activities, such as drawing and collage making, to assess what I was learning about my relationships with my learners and about cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships. Thus, journal writing helped me to come to a better understanding of my relationships with learners and it assisted me to develop my relationships with them.

When I started writing in my journal, especially about my observations and interactions with my learners, I felt that it was quite a difficult thing to do. After little conversations I had with my learners, I kept on asking myself whether the conversation was valuable or if it revealed anything about supportive or unsupportive relationships.

There was one particular time during my research process when I felt that the mood of classroom was determined by me as a teacher. I remember how I went out for few minutes and I left my learners with work to do, but when I came back half of the class was busy making noise and not doing my work. I was so angry that I made a few of my learners who were leading with playing in class instead of doing my work kneel down and write. I really felt that the classroom mood changed as the learners were all quiet. Even those who would normally come to me to tell me stories were silent. For instance, they did not come to tell me stories about food they like or what their mothers will buy them when they get paid. Through writing in my journal about that day I somehow realised that I, as a teacher, set the tone of my classroom. I became more aware that if I lay a foundation for positive and supportive relationships with my learners, there would be more effective and positive teacher-learner relationships, which could lead to a positive, happy and self-motivated class. In my journal, I reflected:

> *Sometimes, as teachers we think shouting and punishing our learners is the only way to discipline and to show our learners we are in control of the classroom and not to think about how learners feel about our disciplinary technique. After I ordered some of my learners to kneel down, my class turned quiet for whole day, I think they read my facial expression that I am so angry about the noise they were making while I was*

out. But thinking about it now makes me realise that I made them feel so powerless, I took away their own space, and possibly they lost their trust in me as their mother figure in school, someone who they can run too where never they feel lost, scared. So, I think I am the one who sets the tone of my classroom; if my learners are happy or uncomfortable I am responsible for their feelings towards the classroom.(Journal entry, 3 March 2016)

Drawing

Metaphor drawings and memory drawings

In retracing my personal history, I created drawings to help me remember and make visible my past experiences of supportive and unsupportive relationships (see Chapter Three). For example, I drew an umbrella as a metaphor drawing to symbolise the protection and support I felt when I was around my family. As Pithouse (2011) explained, metaphor drawing is a way to expose the meaning of a particular situation or experience. Therefore the drawing of the umbrella revealed how, in my childhood, I knew that people who surrounded me at home and in the community cared for and loved me; and that made me feel safe and protected around them. I also drew a memory drawing that showed a learner hiding under a school desk, which was one of the tricks of how to escape punishment in primary school. Pithouse (2011) maintained that drawing can make unclear memories vivid, with details of an event and emotions associated with the experience. Drawing helped me to remember in detail how some learners felt about punishment, emotional and physical. It allowed me to write an account of how punishment alienated many learners from teachers. It also helped me to find meanings or consequences of this particular situation. For instance, I remembered how most learners were scared to be called by a teacher, even if they knew they had done nothing wrong; from the drawing I saw how this was a result of pain and how punishment hurt us as learners emotionally and physically.

Learners' drawings

According to Literat (2013), "because of its playful nature and its lack of dependence on linguistic proficiency, [drawing as a] research method is especially suitable for work with children and youth across a variety of backgrounds and cultural contexts" (p. 85). As part of my research, my learners were given a task to draw a picture of a teacher or anybody else that they felt they would like to have as their grade 1 teacher; for example, this could be one of their relatives (see Chapter Four).They also had to explain their drawings by presenting them

to the whole class. The aim of this activity was to reveal characteristics that I needed to develop to be an effective and supportive teacher to them. Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith and Campbell (2011) maintained that "artistic images can help us access those elusive hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or ignored" (p. 19). I anticipated that the learners' drawings would give me more insight into what skills and attitudes I should work on to develop supportive relationships with them.

From my learners' drawings I learnt that young children have free spirits when it comes to drawing, as they were very happy and eager to do their drawings. I felt that their drawings were eloquent. Nothing was hidden. The drawings expressed what the children really felt without even telling me in words. It was important for me not to get learners to draw pictures of their ideal teacher, but rather to get at the meanings of their drawings, in order to be able to find my faults and learn to cultivate supportive relationships. Thus, I learnt that drawings could be read and interpreted and drawing even can be another useful strategy to enable young children to send messages, as I was able to read and interpret information from my learners' drawings that they did not mention in their presentations.

Collage

According to Butler-Kisber (2008), "collage is a process of cutting and sticking found images and image fragments from popular prints magazines onto cardstock" (p. 265). I asked my learners to work in groups of five to make a collage on children's rights at school and they were also asked to present their collage to the class (see Chapter Four). Learners were very pleased and excited to do this activity. Since they were bit chaotic when I asked all the groups to work on the same day doing cutting and pasting, I therefore decided to work with only two groups per day. Those groups that had not yet done their collage would remind me first thing in morning and they would continuously remind me not to forget to work with them. I think this activity enabled my learners to work well in groups, and it also revealed some of their abilities that I was not aware of. For example, I noticed that learners were able to communicate and share ideas as they discussed among themselves which pictures to use, what the pictures symbolised and how to arrange the pictures to make their collage representative. I was a bit surprised by how these young children worked so well together to achieve their goal.

This activity assisted me to see more about what I needed to further address in order to improve on supportive relationships with my learners. Butler-Kisber (2008) maintained that

collage offers "a way of expressing the said and unsaid, and allows for multiple avenues of interpretation and greater accessibility" (p. 268). Therefore, collage enabled me to read more into the learners' collages about what they thought of me or their feelings towards me. For instance, I looked to see if they felt I was part of their lives, as a loving, caring, respectful teacher, and if they could trust me.

Audio recording

I audio recorded: a) learners' discussions of their drawing and collage activities, b) lessons that I planned and taught as part of my self-study research c) my conversations with former school friends. The purpose of audio recording was to listen to and fully engage with what had happened during learners' discussions, conversations with my friends and my teaching. Recording helped me to listen again carefully as I might have missed some of the crucial things, such as tone of voices and emotions of my friends as they recalled their past experiences of supportive and unsupportive relationships (Masinga, 2012). Similarly, Masinga (2012) highlighted that listening to audio recordings helped her to learn that participants' voices changed as they spoke and she was able to listen carefully to what she might have missed, such as emotions involved when participants were explaining. Listening to recordings of my learners and my own teaching helped me to assess skills and attitudes that I need to improve on, such as respect, acceptance, listening and empathy, which I believe are crucial qualities that assist teachers to become supportive.

Having the audio recordings helped me to listen carefully and make more meaning of what was discussed during lessons or meeting with my friends. For example, when I listened to the recordings of my first and second Life Skills lessons, I felt that I did much more talking than my learners, as I felt I needed to explain more so that learners would not be off topic. After listening to the recording, I kept on telling myself that in my next lesson I must give learners more chances to explain. Thus, from listening to the audio recordings of my teaching I learnt about the importance of listening to my learners. I asked them to elaborate more on what they were saying and they were free to give more explanations. Subsequently, I felt that learners were happy to get a chance to speak about their feelings towards all my lessons, as I wanted to clearly understand what they were saying. To my surprise, even the shy or reserved learners were more willing to present their drawings and give numbers that demonstrated how they thought they were valued by learners and teachers. Thus, I would say that listening to the

audio recordings gave me a chance to learn and analyse, and make meaning of what learners were saying and of how learners might be feeling.

Making meaning

In my self-study I engaged inductively with information or data generated in response to each of my research questions to search for relations, patterns and meanings that would allow me to answer these questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). As Butler-Kisber (2008) explained, "collage can be used as a helpful way of conceptualizing a response to a research question (p. 270). To facilitate my meaning making for my first research question, I represented my personal history narrative in a form of two collages (see Chapter Three). I presented these collages to my research supervisor and my critical friends and gained feedback and alternative perspectives from them, which I audio recorded and transcribed (Samaras, 2011). Creating, presenting and discussing the collages helped me to consolidate and reflect on my learning from my personal history in order to respond to my first research question.

I also created a collage to show what I discovered through engaging my learners in my research (see Chapter Four). Creating this collage enabled me to demonstrate and communicate more than I could have said in words or in writing (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). I again presented my collage to my critical friends and my research supervisor and was able to extend my learning through discussing the collage with them (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Hence, collage also helped me to respond to my second research question.

Ethical issues

Parry and Mauthner (2004, p. 140) maintained that "identification or disclosure of a person or establishment violates the assurances of confidentiality given to providers of the information". Hence, the information I gathered during this research was kept as confidential as possible. The participants' real names and any identifiable information were not used in the dissertation. However, I did use the names of my research supervisor and two critical friends as this was mutually agreed upon to show their contributions to my research process.

Participants should have the right to take part and also the right to decline to take part in the study without any threat (Parry & Mauthner,2004). It was important that my participants took

an informed decision and therefore I explained that their participation was entirely voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the process any time without penalty. I also explained that at any time they could also choose not to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable. Samaras (2011) also maintained that it is a researcher's responsibility to inform the participants about what the research entails; for example, the researcher has to explain the research purpose and things that involve participant engagement, to allow participants to make an informed decision.

I also ensured that my participants received written consent letters that stipulated what their involvement in my study would entail. My high and primary school friends received clear explanations about the study and they signed letters of consent to agree to participate, and I also explained that they had a right to decline participation at anytime (see Appendix K).Morrow and Richard (1996) argued for the importance of reporting back the findings to the participants. I therefore arranged a further meeting with my former school friends to discuss my discoveries.

I sent home consent letters to request permission from parents or guardians for the learners to participate in the study (see Appendix J). All the parents or guardians consented. Child-friendly assent letters using visual images were also given to learners to request their permission to participate in the study (see Appendix L).I explained the study to the learners in the language that they understood (their home language of IsiZulu) and I asked their permission to participate. The activities done with the learners formed part of their classwork for Life Skills, Mathematics and IsiZulu. All learners were required to participate in the Life Skills, Mathematics and IsiZulu classwork activities whether or not they agreed to participate in the study. However, I explained that for the learners who did not give consent to participating in the study, their classwork would not be used as a source of data for the study. After our discussion, all of the learners were eager to participate in the research.

Morrow and Richard (1996) recommend that as researchers we should allow child participants to be part of data interpretation; hence it was important that I did not just collect the learners' classwork for my research purposes. So I allowed time for them to present their classwork to me, in order for me not to misinterpret it (see Chapter Four). I also had a class discussion with learners to discuss the discoveries of my research, using pictures which illustrated the benefits of supportive-teacher learner relationships.

Graham, Powell, and Taylor (2015) proposed that research studies that involve children should honour the dignity and wellbeing of every child. This implies that researchers should seek ways of ensuring that the children are respected and their human rights are not somehow violated. The research should also maximise the advantages or benefits to the children (Graham et al., 2015). For instance, in my study one of my main objectives was to cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships; in working with my learners I anticipated that any gaps identified in the research process which displayed unsupportive relationships between me and my learners would be bridged to ensure positive supportive teacher-learner relationships, thus benefitting my learners as well as me. Grahamet al.(2015) further advised that children must be protected from any emotional or social harm that might result from the research. In my case, as my research involved my grade 1 learners, I aimed at working towards learners feeling welcomed and comfortable, not during just during the research process, but also on a daily basis in the classroom and the school.

Validity

Feldman (2003) maintained that validity is important in self-study research because, as we engage ourselves in self-reflective processes, we may not be sure of the accuracy of what we are seeing. According to Feldman (2003), "to achieve validity we must provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we collect data" (p. 27). My dissertation has given details of how I generated data using five data generation practices namely: a) artefact retrieval; b) reflective journal writing; c) drawing; d) collage; and e) audio recording of discussions and lessons. The above research practices helped me to recall my personal history and also helped me to evaluate my relationships with my grade 1 learners. The use of multiple data generation strategies helped me to improve the validity of the study since each was adding another dimension. Similarly, Samaras (2011) affirmed that using different data sources validate or strengthen the trustworthiness of a self-study.

Moreover, Feldman (2003) advised that a clear presentation of evidence can help to convince readers of the study's validity. For example, I showed how, when working with learners in my class, one source of evidence was their drawings whereby they drew a teacher they would like to have (see Chapter Four). Such an activity helped me to assess my relationships with my learners and enabled me to find means to develop supportive relationships with them.

28

Feldman (2003) maintained that "self-study [should] result in a change in the researcher's way of being a teacher" (p. 28). Therefore, evidence of how I have changed by learning about my relationships with learners was required. This is shown in Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Research challenges

A potential challenge that I came across in my study was with learners' drawings. I was concerned that learners might try to impress me or they would be scared that I would penalise them. So it was important that I explained to learners that they would not be marked in terms how their drawing looked, but that my focus was on how they could explain their drawing in relation to the topic. I also tried to create an environment that freed learners' minds from being in the classroom; consequently the drawing activity was presented to them as a sort of amusement.

Another challenge was lack of availability of my former primary and high school friends. Initially, my high school friends kept on postponing our arranged meeting. I tried to make sure that my meetings with them were at a convenient time and a convenient place for each of them. This helped me to avoid delays in my research process.

Finding children's magazines for the collages was another challenge that I came across, since the adult magazines that I had easy access to, such as *Drum* and *You* magazines, seemed not to be child-friendly. In meetings with my supervisor I asked for help on I how could get magazines that would relate to learners. My supervisor was able to help me; she gave me some magazines. I also asked learners to bring old magazines that they liked. I also approached my sister who has a child enrolled in grade R to give me magazines that her child gets from school. And I download some free images from the internet. I was therefore able to make my lesson successful.

Journal writing also gave me bit of a problem as I was not sure what exactly to write, as I was trying to find something that was associated with my research topic. However, with the help of regular meetings together with my critical friends and supervisor we managed to share ideas on how and what we could include in our journal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained that applying a self-study research methodology enabled me to conduct self-introspection in terms of my teaching practice and my relationships with my learners, in order to improve on developing supportive relationships with my learners. I have given a detailed description of my research process and of how my research participants and critical friends contributed to me answering my research questions.

Employing a self-study methodology assisted me to learn more about my current teaching practice, especially with regard to the value and effects of supportive teacher-learner relationships. Doing self-study research helped me to understand the significance of allowing myself to step aside and reflect back on my past to learn more about who I am and who I would like to be as a teacher. I also learnt about the importance of interacting with others, such as critical friends, to share ideas and to accept criticism; this helps to enhance one's self-development in the teaching profession. It allowed me to understand that there is always room for improvement.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I respond to my first question: "What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?" In this chapter, I provide an account of and reflect on my personal history with respect to supportive and unsupportive relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: LEARNING FROM MY PERSONAL HISTORY TO IMPROVE ON MY TEACHING PRACTICE

Introduction

In myself-study research, I focused on supportive teacher-learner relationships. The purpose of my research was to study my past experiences and my current teaching practice in order to look for ways to improve my relationships with learners. As I explained in Chapter One, I think that it is important that as teachers we adopt some counsellors' skills and attitudes, for instance, listening skills, empathy and caring(Jairam,2009). These skills and attitudes could assist teachers in developing understanding of learners' problems or concerns; this might help learners to feel respected, loved and understood. I considered that such skills and attitudes could assist me in cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships, hence creating a positive and welcoming school environment. Lindo et al. (2014) affirmed that "in healthy teacher-child relationships, children are more likely to participate in effective learning, demonstrate adaptive social behaviour and perform academically" (p. 285). This means the teacher must foster positive relationships with learners, to develop a calm, warm and comfortable environment that can enhance teaching and learning.

In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I explained that I chose a self-study research approach methodology because it allows teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and to find new strategies to improve teaching and learning. I then gave an in depth description of my self-study research process.

In this chapter, Chapter Three, I respond to my first question:"What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?" Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004) maintained that personal history self-study is a process of learning about yourself, whereby for instance, a teacher reconstructs meaningful events in her life history to make sense of her professional learning with the aim of transforming and improving her teaching practice. As explained in Chapter Two, to answer this question I used two of my school friends as a source of information as I believed that having discussions with them could prompt memories of supportive and unsupportive relationships. I also reviewed artefacts as another way to dig down to my past supportive and unsupportive memories. Allender and Manke (2004) asserted that artefact retrieval can arouse memories and allow teachers to develop and improve through

reflective practice. Additionally, I did metaphor drawings and memory drawings to assist me to find and engage with my past experiences. As Pithouse, (2011) affirmed:

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

The use of drawings in my study helped me to bring past emotions to the present to enable me make sense of my past supportive and unsupportive relationships.

In this chapter, I have illustrated my personal history in terms of supportive and unsupportive relationships I experienced as I grew up. I begin my personal history narrative by discussing how I was brought up at home and also in my community. This is because I thought that learning begins at home and we are socialised according to societal norms and beliefs and it is where one as a child can get so much love and become attached and dependent on her family members. So, whatever a child experiences at school she or he might associate with what she has experienced at home or from her societal background. As John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) explained, "as individuals we belong to a society that we are born into" (p. 410).I further narrate my primary supportive and unsupportive experiences at primary school. Lastly, I recount my high school personal history regarding supportive and unsupportive experiences. I focus in more depth on my primary school years because these are most closely related to my current practice as a grade 1 teacher.

I further show how I represented my personal history narrative in a form of two collages that I created. I describe how I presented the collages to my research supervisor and my critical friends and gained feedback from them, which I audio recorded and transcribed. I demonstrate how making, presenting and discussing the collages helped me to consolidate and reflect on my learning from my personal history.

Education began at home
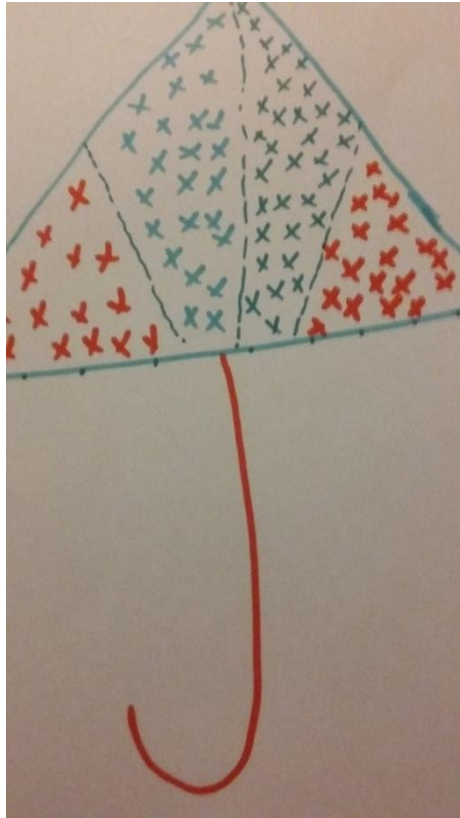
Figure 3.1. A metaphor drawing of an umbrella: I felt protected.

The metaphor drawing of an umbrella (Figure 3.1) represents the protection I felt when I was around my family. There were problems I experienced in school and outside of school, but with support from my family and friends I was able to manage to get through every challenge. I felt safe with my family around me, as they were a source of inspiration in my life.

Developing relationships with people around me started at home, where I was raised with lot of love and support. I grew up in a big family, living together with extended family members. As I had older sisters and brothers, I looked up to them to see how things were done. For example, from them I learnt to do home chores. We were all taught that older siblings should teach young ones about how things were done. Hence, at home, positive and supportive relationships were cultivated with working closely together in achieving one goal and sharing. To illustrate, I remember how, when I was between 6 and 7 years of age, I went with my sister, who is two years older than me, to collect wood to make fire. My mother told us to go together because on our own our little hands could not carry enough wood to make a fire to cook the food or boil water, but if we went together we would get enough wood. Thus, we experienced teamwork. We knew the job would not be accomplished without helping each

other. Thus, from an early age, I learnt the importance of respecting others and knowing that we need each other.

I also remember how, through storytelling, we learnt important social skills and what to expect in the outside world. Stories also taught us about listening and using our imagination. After we had had supper we would normally gather in my mother's room, and my mother or my elder sisters or brothers would tell us a story; or sometimes our father would tell us the history of our family. I remember that this was the most important time that we all valued in our family as we would all take out our blankets from our rooms and sit close to each other on a mat. Recalling the family story time has made me realise today that we were not only taught skills such as listening, but that it was also a way in which our parent and siblings were cultivating supportive relationships so that we felt part of the family.

I recall a particular story that I loved and which contributed to build my personality. It was a story of a beautiful flower that was planted by little girl who always nurtured the flower by watering it every day and taking out weeds to make the flower look beautiful and clean. The moral of this story was to make young children to learn to take care of themselves and everything they had as their own. From this story, I learnt the value of being responsible and always to care of myself and to value whatever I had. And so, I made sure I was always clean, my schoolbooks and my bags were tidy and neat. I even passed this story on to my learners to help them to learn to take care of themselves from early age, since many of them come from families where either one or both parents have passed on or where children are left to look after each other as their parents work far from homes.

Community support

"Your child is my child and my child is your child"; that is how I was brought up, as every adult person in the community was considered to be our parent. The child from your neighbourhood was like a sister or a brother. This encouraged community members to tolerate, respect and help each other. I remember that when we were young we would never do anything wrong in front of an elder, because she or he would beat or punish us. As a child you would not go back to your family and report that someone had beaten you because your mother or father would also give you punishment because they believed that any adult

community member was your second parent; she or he gave you the punishment you deserved.

This made us always conscious that we could not do wrong just because our parents were not present, since every elder was our parent. In this way we learnt to respect our elders and we also knew that we could rely on anyone for assistance in our community. For example, I remember when I was in the lower grades at school there was a meeting for parents; as learners we were supposed to come to school with our parents. If your parents were not present you were not allowed to enter school premises. Unfortunately, my parents could not come to the meeting and I was waiting outside school gate with other children feeling sorry for ourselves. Some other parents felt sorry for us and they took us to the meeting and pretended that we were somehow related to them. They did this out of goodness of their hearts to help us, not because they intended to commit fraud. I think they somehow thought that our parents were not present because of certain reasons and we were their children too. This made me believe that we were one family; we could cry to any one for help.
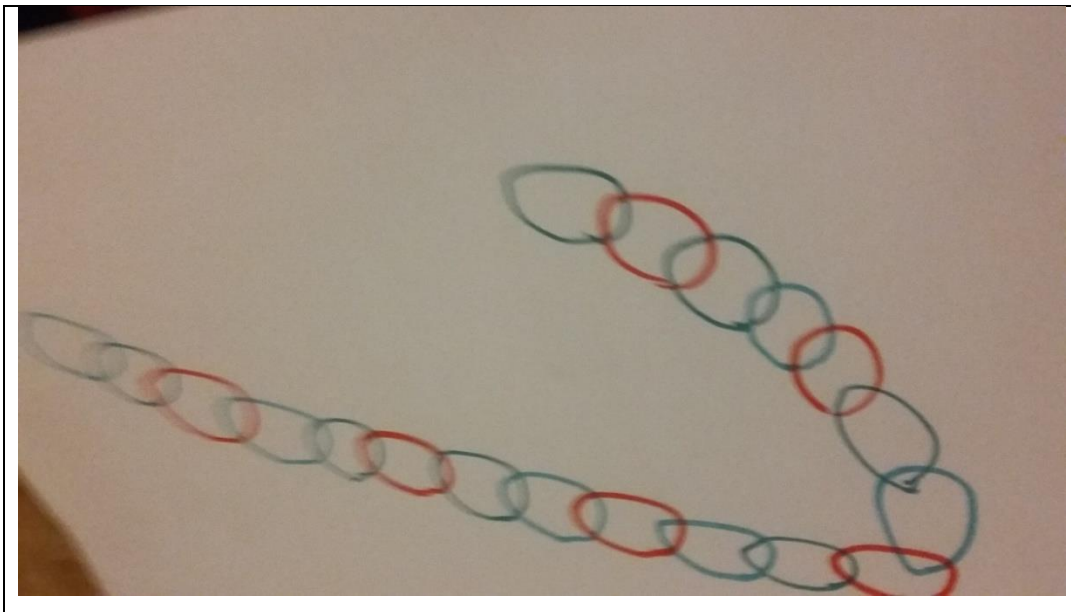
*Figure 3.2.*A metaphor drawing of a chain that symbolises unity.

The above metaphor drawing of a chain (Figure 3.2) represents the connection and unity we shared as community members. People were not rated according to their status. Everyone was given equal respect and love, and we were raised with the mentality that we were of one family. We helped each other and shared so many things with each other, such as ideas, clothes and food and this encouraged the spirit of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a Southern African term

that means humanity; it is an ethical philosophy that encourages us to be able to tolerate others' differences and to support and help each other as a community (Mkhize, 2004).

Social and cultural norms also played a vital role in building a spirit of affinity. We were taught from the early age that whenever there was a visitor, we would need to prepare food for the visitor or even a room to sleep in if she or he stayed until late. It was a norm that no one should pass by without getting anything to eat or drink. For example, there is a Zulu saying that instils this norm:"*Isisu somhambi singangenso yenyoni*"(translated as "A visitor's stomach is so small like a bird kidney"). This means that you cannot complain that you do not have enough food to give to your visitor because she will appreciate anything that you give her, no matter how small it is. In other words, this meant that your home was a home for everyone and the important value was that you should lend your hand to others who need help.

Consequently, we took such important values and beliefs to school. As children we were supporting, guiding and helping each other, not only academically, but also in with social and emotional issues. At school we mostly relied on each other; for instance, sharing food, school stationery, and uniforms. For example, I remember that my mother did not buy me a school uniform from grade 5 to grade 7; this was because my neighbour was in grade 7 when I was going to join grade 5 in the following year and I had to use her uniform and some of her text books. Thus, this made us understand that although our parents might not have had enough means to educate us, it was still important to them that we would finish school and hopefully become better people.

Since most of our parents were illiterate, they could not help us much with our school work. If you did not have an elder sister or brother in your family who could help you with your school work, you would approach anyone in your neighbourhood to help you. For example, some of my peers who were younger than me would come to me with their homework and ask for assistance. This resembled the culture of valuing school, unity and most of all the importance of supporting each other in order to become successful. This was not only supporting each other but also caring and understanding that one's success was success of the whole community. For instance, when you met an elder from your community she would ask who your parents were and what grade you were doing; she would give you words of encouragement to continue to study and become whatever she thought would suit you best. I

remember that when we were young and we saw an older person carrying so many bags, coming from the shops, we would help her and carry a few plastic bags. She would thank us and give us blessings and the blessings were mostly to wish us to finish school and become something important.

Today I could say that we were raised by community. There is a Zulu idiom which goes "*Indlela ibuzwa kwaba phambili*" (translated as "For one to know better; to do good in life and not repeat the same mistakes done by others you need to learn and look up to them for advice"). This idiom was normally said to make young people always careful not to repeat the mistakes that were made by others who were older than them. To think of it today, I can see how it was also used to make us grow with a positive mind-set, and to learn to emulate good things that were done by others. I remember how my mother used to encourage us to study hard so that we would do well in our studies and she would make examples of people in the community who were successful. She would illustrate for us how they had managed to achieve a good life. For example, I remember the story my mother used to tell when she wanted to encourage us to work hard to achieve our dreams. My mother would tell us the story of a boy who was raised by a granny, and his granny was not working*:*

> So, after the boy finished his matric [final year of school], he wanted to study further and become a teacher. But because his granny did not have enough money to educate him, he had to find himself work. The boy got a job in a shop, and whenever the boy did the stocktaking, he would talk to packets of sugar as if he was teaching them. The shop owner noticed what was done by the boy and he called him aside and asked him about his behaviour and the boy told the owner that his dream was to become a teacher and that is why he always talked to the sugar. The owner was touched and he could see the talent of the boy. Then the owner decided to go and visit a few nearby schools and ask school principals if they had available posts in their school. One school needed a Mathematics teacher. The boy was then called to teach in that school. With his dedication, his learners excelled in Maths and he also got sponsored to study further and he became a professional teacher.

This story always motivated me not to ever give up on my dreams. As I am a teacher now I always ask myself if I am like this boy who worked hard and dedicated himself to make sure that his learners achieved excellent marks. I also ask myself if I could lead by example so that my principal would notice, and even other teachers, that I am not only teaching but I that want

my learners to feel loved, precious and valued to an extent that they make school their second home.

My primary school supportive and unsupportive memories

I started school in 1991in a neighbourhood primary school. The school was located in a rural area. It was under resourced, and classes were overcrowded as each grade had only one classroom. Due to a shortage of school furniture some learners had to write with their books on their knees as there was not enough space for five or six learners to write on one desk or table. There were no sports that were formally taking place in school, since there was no sports gear and proper playgrounds to practice any sports. Learners who attended this school mainly came from poor family backgrounds, as most learners were struggling to pay school fees, to buy the full school uniform and to buy school stationery.

When I started primary school, like most children, I was excited to start school. My first years of schooling were bit difficult, since I had to start to adapt to a new environment, as I had to spend most of the day in school, meaning I had to see less of my parents and my family. The school environment was not similar to a home environment. Teachers were now parents, and I expected that they would be there to guide us, protect us, comfort us, and take care of us. I expected to receive the above mentioned attributes from my teachers in order to have comfortable relationships with my fellow schoolmates and teachers. However, not everything was according to how I supposed it would be. School felt cold, unwelcoming and not safe for me as a child. Looking back, I can see that this was a result of how most of our teachers treated us. During the conversation I had with my primary school friend, she reminded me of what we normally practiced as a belief to avoid being beaten by a teacher when we arrived late at school. She said:

> You remember when we were late at school we had to put a small stone in our mouth, so that we would not answer back our teachers when they questioned us, because arguing as we were trying to explain why we were late it angered them and they would beat us more.

I had never had an explanation for putting a small stone under the tongue until my friend explained to me that it was to silence ourselves.

At school everything was done according to our teachers' perspectives. For instance, my grade 1 teacher was the one who was most important to develop good relationships with us as first year learners in school, since we were not used to this new environment. However, as far as I can recall, my grade 1 teacher created fear in me of being in school or even being in a classroom environment. I had to get used to my teacher walking around the classroom carrying a stick, always ready to find learners' mistakes and punish them. We were not only punished by being beaten but also by being called names. For example, I still remember that the teacher always referred to those who were not performing well as "*amakhanda amakhulu angenalutho*" (translated as "empty big heads"). This made me realise that at school there was no room for mistakes or failing. As a result, I was even scared to try giving answers, or to do something like reading for the class, since I was scared that my teacher would find a mistake in what I was trying to do. Thus, I learnt from my first year of school that everything should be properly done or no mistake should be found in whatever you were doing. In my conversation with my school friend she reminded me of how learners used to dodge school. She recalled boys who used to stay under the mango trees and play there until school was finished and they would join us as we walked back home as if they were also coming from school. In our discussion it was clear that most learners were scared of going to school, because of teachers who ill-treated them.

Although we felt that school was bit cold and uncomfortable, we knew that the teachers were practicing societal norms of how they were taught to raise a child. For instance, I do not remember any parent coming to school to complain about teachers not treating learners well. Our parents had a strong beliefs that whatever teachers were doing at school was proper to educate and raise a child in a fitting manner. My friend recalled how she was unfairly beaten by a teacher because the teacher's book was missing and she thought it was taken by girls who were on duty to clean the class on the previous day. The teacher beat all the girls who were cleaning the classroom and my friend was left with marks of a stick on her legs and thighs. She felt that she could not show her parents the marks she had on her thighs and legs because they would also beat her more, as they would believe that she knew where was her teacher's book was. Her story made us recall that during our school days the teacher who was known as a teacher who did not tolerate children's misbehaviour was respected and loved by most parents as they believed that from such a teacher children would learn qualities that would prepare them to be good adults.

Despite the hardships we experienced, some teachers gave me motivation and willingness to come to school every day. For example, I remember Mrs Mpanza[2], a grade 2 teacher. She was a mother to every learner. We used to call her Mother Teresa. Every day she came to school with brown bread and she would give learners who had no lunch box one slice of buttered bread. Some learners with problems, such as losing a parent, being abused physically or emotionally by a parents or guardians, or being betrayed by their friends, would come to her for advice. Thus, teachers like her were nice to have as your class teacher, because they were always willing to listen, and would try by all means to understand your situation without criticising. Therefore, I think it is important that teachers cultivate supportive relationships with their learners, to make their learners feel easy and comfortable to explore or to be willing to try without been criticised.

Without a pencil there was no point to being in the classroom

Figure 3.3. **The pencil artefact: No school without a pencil.**

This photograph above (Figure 3.3) shows a pencil. I took this photograph because it reminded me of how the pencil was valued in my primary school; without a pencil there was no point to being in the classroom. Since the teacher demanded that her work should be done, it evoked the feeling of been scared to go to school if your pencil was missing. Although a pencil was not that expensive, most of us could not even afford to buy it and as a result we stole each other's pencils. Fear of losing our pencils also taught us to be responsible because

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[2] All names have been changed to pseudonyms.

we learnt to hang our pencils around our necks with rope to avoid losing them while we were playing.

The pencil served as the most important tool of my primary school years. We used to write with pencils from grade 1 to grade 3. All learners had to bring a pencil to class. Teachers would ask us why we came to school without pencils and they would punish those with no pencils. Hence, we became more careful, as we made it a point that we checked if we had pencils before we left for school.

I recall the fear of not having your pencil. I still remember how learners would cry if the teacher caught them not writing, as they were scared of punishment. I do not remember anyone trying to approach the teacher to explain that she had forgotten her pencil at home because everyone knew that the teacher would not be interested in your explanation for not having a pencil. The pencil artefact also reminds me of boys who would hide under desks or even in toilets not to be seen by teachers because they had forgotten their pencils. I now see that this fear that learners felt could mean they were not able to approach teachers about any worries they might have been experiencing.

I believe that as a teacher I should try to work closely with my learners. I should listen to their concerns and problems to create positive working relationships. If I think of the support I shared with my classmates and friends, I think I should also share such support with my grade 1 learners. For example, if one of my friends did not have a pencil we would lend her one pencil if one of us had two, or we would even share one pencil by breaking it in half so that we could share it. I could say that the support we gave to each other as friends made us willing to hold on and survive all the challenges we came across in school. Thus, I also want to cultivate healthy relationships with my grade 1 learners, to make them feel comfortable and welcome in school. I anticipate that such supportive relationships could encourage my learners to work hard to achieve good academic results.

Lovely colourful craftwork

*Figure 3.4.*A basket: The craftwork we used to make in primary school.

Figure 3.4 is a photograph that I took of a basket that I bought in a market place. It reminded me of how craftwork brought us together as learners as we would work together and also support each other. For instance, we would go together to collect grass and share plastic bags to make our mats or baskets. We enjoyed this a lot and would even compete with each other to make lovely colourful craftwork.

At my primary school, craftwork was done by girls from grade 4 and boys had to do gardening. I think all girls enjoyed the time for craftwork. This was an hour period where learners were allowed to go outside and cut the grass using sickles. Most of the time teachers were not following or supervising us as we went out to the field which was around the school premises. The teachers chose two or three learners who would make sure that everyone was doing exactly what we were asked to do and that we were not misbehaving.

I remember how I used to enjoy this time of school as teachers were not always after us. We really felt freedom and being outside of classroom made it even better, knowing there were no books and pencils in front of us. It was pleasant as we had a chance to help each other in both cutting grass and making craft. For example, if one of us did not have lovely colourful plastic bags to cut into strips, we would give them to her, so that she could also blend nice colours to make her woven doormat or basket look good and colourful. We were even competing with

each other for making the nicest craftwork such as a doormat or basket. All learners had enthusiasm and made an effort because we all wanted to make lovely craftwork. As a result, we even made it a point that we took our craftwork home to ask for assistance from our parents and siblings.

Looking back, I can now see how craftwork somehow boosted my self-esteem as it made me believe that I could achieve something on my own. It gave me freedom as I experienced no fear of being embarrassed or beaten. Craftwork also reminds me of support we learners gave each other, as we worked together and helped each other to achieve good results. I suppose this means that teachers should work together with learners, to support and always help them in their difficulties. The support I received from my family and friends enabled me to believe in myself and to work hard to achieve good results in my craftwork. Hence, if all teachers were to cultivate supportive relationships with the learners they might be able to learn to understand learners' problems and create a more positive school environment.

When I asked my primary school friend what she remembered about craftwork she also agreed that craftwork brought out the best in us. She said, "It was one thing that made us believe in ourselves; it allowed us to bring our own ideas, thoughts, and it made us human as it allowed us to be creative and it developed our thinking and rationality". In our conversation we even talked about how we shared ideas to make our craftwork look unique and attractive; our aim was not to get good marks only but mostly to impress our teachers. Hence, I think this shows that we never felt mistreated or hated, but instead we felt that whatever our teachers were doing was correct and proper and we believed in them, for guidance.

We would hide not to be seen by our teachers
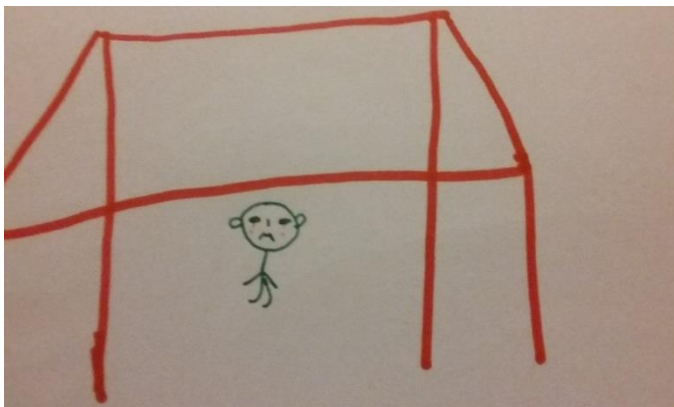
Figure 3.5. **A memory drawing of a learner hiding under the desk**

Figure 3.5 is a memory drawing that represents a learner hiding under a school desk, which was one of the tricks of how to escape punishment. Since we were overcrowded in our classrooms, each class had maybe 60 to 65 learners. Because the classrooms were tiny, it was easy to get under the desk to hide. The teacher would not see you, and no one would tell the teacher because everyone knew that it might be her or him doing the same trick some time. We did this not because of fun but because we were scared of the consequences of not having a pencil or some other wrongdoing. For me, it really shows that the teachers seemed to have had little understanding of us as learners and they probably had no idea about or ignored how we were hurt and the fear we had towards them.

I showed my friend this memory drawing to trigger her memory of what she remembered about hiding under the desk in school. With bit of anger and sadness in her facial expression, she whispered, "One thing that made me hide was not having full uniform". I remember how the principal would come in the morning to our classrooms to check if we all had school jerseys. If you were not wearing the correct jersey, the principal would take your jersey and keep it until end of the term, which meant that you would be cold at school. However, my friend and I agreed that it was probably not because our teachers were cruel, but rather because they wanted to maintain good standards and also to make learners and parents aware of the importance of the school uniform.

The stick was the enemy of every learner at school

*Figure 3.6.*The stick: Fear and it distanced most learners from teachers

The photograph above (Figure 3.6) represents the stick that would be used at school. I took this photograph of a stick because it evoked haunting memories of my primary school experiences. I think almost every teacher in our school carried a stick even if they were walking just around school corridors. When they had a class they would be carrying a stick and a book. I still remember the fear we used to have when we saw the teacher with the stick. Even if we were not doing anything wrong, we would still be scared because she might find fault in whatever we would be doing.

The stick was the enemy of every learner at school. Most teachers seemed to think it was the only solution to maintain discipline in school. I remember how in my grade 1 class on the first day of school we went to the assembly for Morning Prayer. The principal was leading the assembly. She was carrying the stick and some teachers who were standing behind learners were also carrying sticks. Therefore, I think they were passing a message to every new learner that they were going to use the stick to make sure that we learners obeyed their rules. I think most of the learners were scared of been beaten, because most learners tried their best not to upset teachers as they knew the consequences. As my primary school friend mentioned, "Although at home parents disciplined us by using a stick, but we never got used to it, and it

was going to be difficult for teachers to practice another strategy to discipline learners". Thus, I think that our teachers also knew that parents beat their children to discipline them and the teachers themselves were raised in that manner. So they held on to what they believed would work better to build children's futures.

To avoid been beaten I had to try by all means to love school and stay in the good books of all teachers. Doing my homework and performing well in my tests kept me safe from trouble. That was the remarkable thing; learners' performance decided if they were safe or not. Although, I can say that it made most learners feel uncomfortable. For instance, if you had forgotten or did not get a chance to do your homework, you would think of any possible excuse not to go to school that day, because of the fear of punishment. So, I think corporal punishment somehow made it difficult for most learners to develop supportive relationships with their teachers. For instance, I for one found that it was very difficult for me to approach a teacher with any problems that I encountered outside school, even if these problems affected my academic performance.

The *Mashihambisane* text book brings back so many memories with mixed feelings
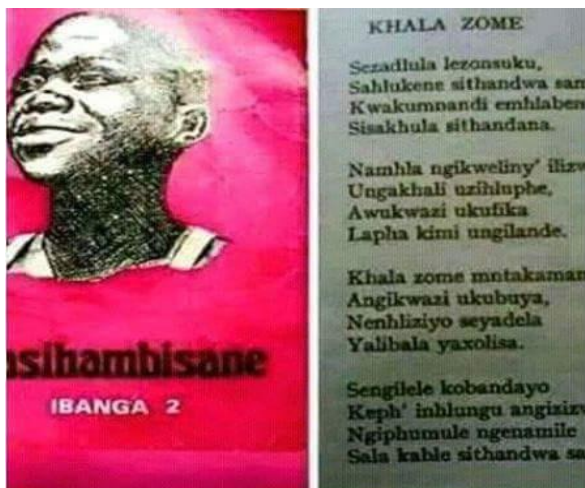
Figure 3.7.Masihambisane: **A textbook**

The photograph above (Figure 3.7) shows the textbook that was used for reading short stories and poems in isiZulu. Our teachers made it a point that each one of us in class must have this textbook. Thus, it reminds me of how it was difficult for us as learners not to have this book. Our teacher would chase us outside if we did not have it, and some of us would hide under desks not be seen by the teacher. Most teachers failed to listen to our explanations.

This textbook brings back so many memories with mixed feelings. As I was discussing it with my primary school friend, feelings such as sadness came up as we remembered getting three strokes of a pipe on the hand if we did not have the textbook. The hand would turn red and sometimes we would not be able to hold a pencil. There was also the feeling of amusement that was brought by the thought of how we used to dodge our teachers, and the feeling of angerwas brought by the thought of how our teachers failed to understand and empathise with us as most of them knew our family conditions.

One thing that I remember is the difficulties I experienced for not having this textbook in my grade 4 class as my parents could not afford to buy me one. Our teacher expected us to all have this textbook, since it was used for short story reading, comprehension and homework activities. Hence, it was very difficult for us to learn without this book. For example, if we had homework we had to go to neighbouring friend's to do our homework. In the classroom, as learners we knew that if it was time for an IsiZulu lesson trouble would begin because our teacher first would check who had the textbook. If you did not have it, you were either chased out of classroom or the teacher would make you kneel down on the floor until she had finished teaching. If it happened that day that she was in a good mood she would ask those who had books to share with those who had no books.

Although the punishment was probably meant to motivate our parents to buy us the textbooks, they did not seem to be aware of how it affected us. Because of fear, some learners would steal other learners' books and some skipped school until they dropped out of school. Without the support from my parents maybe I would have also dropped out of school, but my parents always encouraged us and made us understand that we needed to go to school to have a better future as it was the only thing that would help our family to get out of poverty.

I now realise how anxiety in school might have made learners feel isolated and unwelcome in a school environment. Most of our teachers failed to listen and understand learners' reasons for not having school books. Thus, as I want to improve on my teaching practice I feel it is important that I learn from my past school experiences. For instance, in looking back I feel that we were unfairly punished, as I believe punishment made most of us hate or fear school. It is therefore important that the way I discipline my grade 1 learners does not make them feel hated or uncomfortable, but rather help them to learn to be responsible for their behaviour.

That small dusty playground was somehow big enough for everyone to have fun

The school playground is one place which I still think about and laugh to myself, remembering fun moments I had with my friends and schoolmates in primary school. This was a common place for most learners to play, interact, eat their lunch, and help each other. My primary school did not have a big playground, but that small dusty ground was somehow big enough for everyone to have fun. I remember learners standing in groups sharing their lunch in the first few minutes of break time; somehow we managed to locate a few minutes for eating and the rest of the break time was for us to play.

I can see that the importance of the playground was not only to provide a space to for us eat and play, but it was also the place that gave us a chance to get know each other and to socialise with other as school mates; we would share painful and funny stories and even get help from others. I still remember that most of us did not have a mathematics instrument set and when we had mathematics period after break we would walk around in the school playground looking for someone who might lend us whatever we needed.

In that small playground different indigenous games were played in groups. My friend recalled that her best friend was a girl not from her class but that they had met during break time as they were playing *ushumpu, ushumpu*, which is an indigenous game that is usually played by girls. To play this game, the girls have to be divided in to two equal groups and it is played using a ball that is made of plastic bags.

The playground was also a place where one grieved alone if it happened that you had forgotten to write your homework; the teacher would sometimes chase you out of the classroom and most of us would go and hide behind the trees in the playground because if we were seen by other teacher or learners they would take us to the office of the school principal. Once you got to the office of the principal you would get a much worse punishment. To illustrate, I remember how, when I was in grade 5, we were given History home work; I did my homework but I forgot my exercise book at home. I was too scared to approach my teacher and tell him that I had forgotten my exercise book. Then when he was checking if everyone had done the homework, he found that I and other two learners did not have our exercise books in class. He chased us out of the classroom. I remember that this was a period immediately after break.So we had to go and hide behind the big tree that was towards the end of the playground for almost for 3 hours.

Recalling the playground has made me more aware of the need for us as teachers to be understanding towards learners' needs, such as playing. For instance, some schools do not offer sports or extra mural activities, as some teachers seem to believe that academics is the only thing that is important in school and thus, they fail to encourage learners to participate in sports or even to play during break times. From remembering my happy times on the playground, I believe that more play could enhance learning of young children.

Assembly time was valued by everyone at school

Assembly was the time where we all gathered for morning and afternoon prayer, for important announcements and other multipurpose functions. Assembly time was valued by everyone at school. I remember that we used to run if we heard the bell ringing when we were still a bit far from school. It was important for everyone to be in school at the time of an assembly. It brought us together and maintained the feeling of readiness for learning, unity, being part of the school family or community group. Teachers used to prepare motivational speeches, to guide and encourage learners to do well both in school academically and in their community.

The assembly area was also used for different types of functions such as entertainment and to show off learners' talents. For example, we had beauty contests and music concerts in the assembly area. This was one way in which the school tried to promote learners' talents. Talent shows helped learners to gain confidence and it also made learners feel belonging as learners worked together in groups to perform different activities such as Zulu traditional dance and music.

In my discussion with my school friend, she recalled how at the end of every term the names of learners who had performed well were announced in the assembly. This was done to motivate learners to work hard to achieve good results and to offer a good example to learners who were not doing well. As she shared her story, it triggered my memory as it reminded me of how our teachers used to inspire us and instil the importance of education in us. I remember that every Monday and Friday the school choir would lead with music and one learner from the class that was leading the assembly would read a Bible verse before praying. I also had a chance to read a Bible verse in grade 3.Although I was nervous, I wanted to read it well, and after I had read it my class teacher was very impressed. As a result I was

motivated. I began to believe in myself and that could do well even in my studies; it drove me to keep on trying and to do better academically, not only to please my teachers but also to make myself happy.

Thus, morals, values and skills were developed during assembly time to maintain good discipline such as punctuality and cooperation in school. Learners' participation in different activities during assembly helped learners to enjoy and to be acknowledged for their talents; that stimulated positive attitudes towards school as they found it more accommodating and welcoming.

My high school supportive and unsupportive memories

Supportive memories of my high school: I managed to make the school my home

I started high school in 1999. I went away to a girls' missionary boarding school. The school was well resourced as it was a semi-private school. It had enough facilities such as proper chalkboards, well maintained classrooms and sports equipment. There were also enough teachers. Learners who attended the school mostly came from middle class families, but the school also offered bursaries to learners coming from poor families. The school fees were expensive, but I got a bursary as my parents could not afford school fees.

When we came to school in our first year of high school it was important for us as learners to adapt to the school situation because our fellow school mates were to become our siblings, and boarding mistresses became our parents. Therefore, developing relationships with them was very important to me, in order not to feel far from home. Thus, I managed to make the school my home. This was easy because our teachers and boarding mistresses really tried to make us feel welcomed and loved. For example, if we were short of something, we would ask one of our teachers to buy us whatever we needed. Some teachers really tried to help us in whatever way they could. Even though not all our needs were met, our teachers and our boarding mistresses made it a point that our essential needs were met.

My high school friend talked about how her parents struggled to visit her because her home was far from the school. So, because her parents barely visited her at school, she relied on boarding mistresses for everything she needed in school. She also said that if her parents happened to visit they would give the boarding mistresses some cash to keep for her, in order

to help her if she run out of essential items. There was thus an element of trust, support and understanding between the school and our families.

High school was a second home for me and it was where I learnt to be independent. I had to do everything on my own. I learnt ways to survive without my family support. For instance, we were taught most of the home chores and we all had our duties that we were responsible for. I remember how in grade 9 my duty with another five girls was to clean dormitories. In the beginning, we felt that the duty was too much for us as learners because we had to clean dormitories in the morning and afternoon. However, as time went by, we enjoyed our duty and I think we even learnt to be responsible as we were no longer had to be reminded that it was time to clean. Moreover school chores helped us as learners develop close relationships with each other. I think it taught us to value, love and respect ourselves and each other and also to keep our place clean. As my friend pointed out, the duties were meant to groom us to become responsible young woman and to appreciate what we have and to value the importance of every job in how it makes a difference and contributes to making our county successful.

Although we were more than 1000 learners, we all knew each other regardless of which grade we were in. We all had a special relationship; we were like a big family. For example, in the dining hall where we had our meals for the day, tables were set to fit 10 learners per table. In each table there were two learners of each grade, hence, we had all five grades at a table. This made us to get to know and develop friendship relationships with other learners from other grades.

As learners, we supported each other and shared so many things together. For example, we built our small families; we had sort of a game where senior learners would choose one child from grade 8 or a new learner who was doing a lower grade than her to be her mother. So this ended up by each learner having a family in school, just as she would have a sister, aunts and granny. My high school friend also noted that celebrations of birthdays was one way of showing unity and love to each other as learners. She went on to say: "At home we never celebrated birthdays, because no one cared or valued the celebrations, but I learnt value of birthday celebration as it made us feel special and to be thankful to God for the gift of life". The spirit of unity was one way in which we built strong loving and supportive relationships.

Although we may have had our worries or problems, by being with loving and supportive people we managed to pull through and succeeded academically and socially.
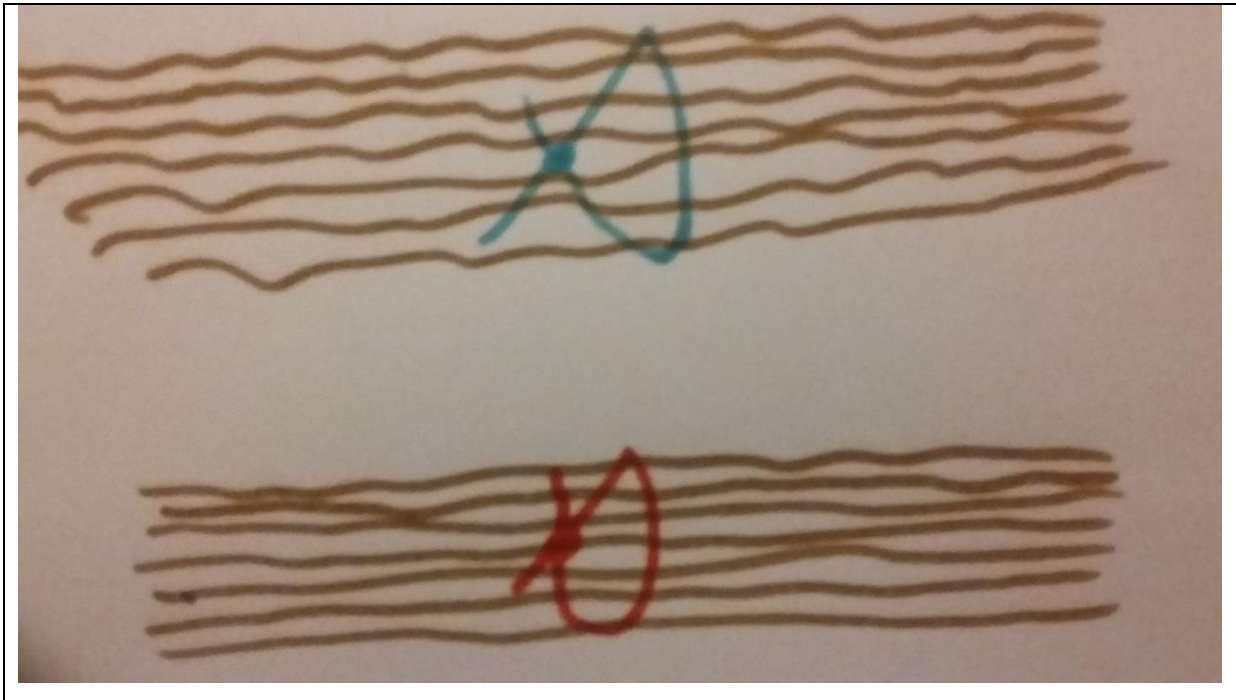
*Figure 3.8.***A metaphor drawing of wood tied together to symbolise togetherness**

Love and support made us pull out through every challenge we encountered in school. The above metaphor drawing (Figure 3.8) shows the pieces of wood tied together. This symbolises the unity we shared with each other as learners. Just as pieces of wood are collected from different trees and put together to make fire, although we came from different family backgrounds, we managed to all live together and work together to achieve our dreams and overcome many obstacles .

Unsupportive memories of my high school: As learners we did not much have of a choice
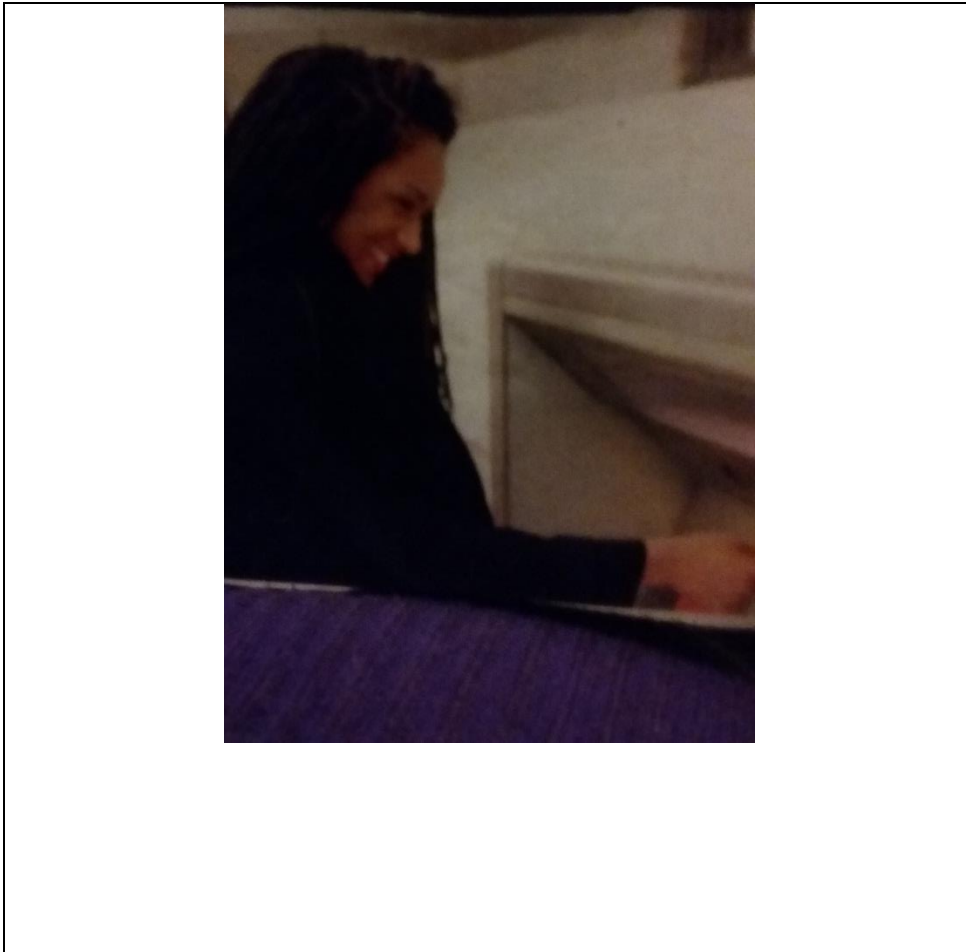
Figure 3.9. **A photograph of an automated teller machine (ATM)**

I used took the photograph of an ATM (Figure 3.9) as a metaphor for how we as learners were fed what to believe about what we were and what we could achieve. Teachers made us accept and we could not challenge or question their orders, as we were located by them to the academic streams which would determine our careers. Therefore, we had to learn to adjust and be prepared to accept that our teachers knew us better than anyone else regarding our capabilities. So, some of us were denied the chance of trying to do better than before.

In my discussion with my high school friend, we talked about the labelling of learners in school, which was practiced by many teachers. The grading system was used to categorise learners according to their academic performance. We felt that the system was unsupportive to learners. For example, I remember that our grade 8 teacher made us sit in three rows; each

row was classified by learners' academic performance. For instance, the first row next to the teacher's table was for learners whose academic performance was outstanding. The second row, which was in the centre, was for learners who were performing at the average level and the last row, furthest from teacher's table, was for learners who were not doing well academically. This classifying method might have suited teachers, but it somehow favoured some learners and distanced other learners from the teacher's attention. Thus, learners who were performing well were the teacher's favourites. They were the ones who she would ask to do things for her in the classroom, for example, sorting books, cleaning the teacher's table, or helping her with anything around the classroom. Therefore, most learners who were sitting in the last row could have felt neglected.

As a result, there was little progress in these learners' performance because the teacher paid little attention to them. Hence, it might have been that these learners did not feel loved enough. They might have felt uncomfortable and unwelcomed and consequently they might have put less effort into their schoolwork because they knew that the teacher cared less about them. The teacher might not have given them enough support, meaning that she might not have tried to use different techniques of teaching to help them and also not to isolate them.

But the grading system also might have been used by teachers to try to motivate learners to work hard. As my friend shared her experience of how the grading system affected her and how she managed to come out of the third row, she explained how she still remembers how painful it felt to know and have it known by your peers that you were not doing well. She said, "I worked hard to move from third row". Thus, grading worked to encourage some learners to work hard to achieve better academic results.

Furthermore, this was not only the case for my grade 8 experience as the grading system continued up to grade 10. This was a critical grade for all learners because grade10 was where we had to choose the academic stream for our future careers, whereby we had to choose between the Science stream and the General stream. For example, if you chose the Science stream you would have to take these subjects: Mathematics, Physical Science, and Geography. You were then more likely to enter into a more prestigious field, such as being a medical doctor or an engineer. For the General stream these were the subjects that you had to take: Geography, History and Business Economics. If you chose this stream you were more likely to end up in a field such as teaching or marketing.

Teachers in grade 10 were the ones who chose which stream we had to take; as learners we did not much have of a choice. Even if your dream was to become a medical doctor, the teacher's choice was final. My friend shared with a big smile how she lucky was to get into the Science class. She stated, "I worked hard after not doing well in grade 8 in the first and second terms. I pulled up my socks and worked hard from grade 8 to get into Science group as my dream was to be a pharmacist or engineer". The Science stream was regarded as a difficult stream and the General as an easy stream; therefore learners who were doing science were regarded as clever and hardworking. They were given special attention compared to the General stream, as it was regarded as easy. Learners who were in the General stream were regarded as not so clever but at the average level and so, little attention was paid to them.

Consequently, this made even the learners look down on each other. For example, as I was in a General class I remember that as learners we grouped each other according to our streams. Most of us dropped our friends if they were in another stream and we would try and make friends with those who were in the same stream as ours. I believe this was not fair to most of the learners, because it changed our mind set and made us believe that we were not equal, or not the same and one could not mingle with lower or top group.

Most of the teachers thought our General stream was not as important as the Science stream. Thus, it was very easy for any teacher to ask our class to do anything such as cleaning the hall if there would be any function in school. Looking back, I consider our teachers' action towards the General stream as not showing supportive relationships between teachers and learners. I believe that most learners from the General stream felt not good enough or not capable to do anything better and also not valued enough compared to the Science stream.

My collages

The collages presented below (Figures 3.10 and 3.11) offer a visual representation of my personal history narrative of what I experienced in primary and high school with respect to supportive and unsupportive relationships. Van Schalkwyk (2010) explained that collage scan help to tell stories about individuals, in terms of who they are and how they became to be who they are now. Because I understood that it might be possible that my current teaching practice is influenced by my past school experiences, the main aim in creating my collages was to

further develop my understanding of how and what I could learn from my personal history. I wanted to see what I could change or do differently to develop supportive relationships with my learners.

I presented my collages to my research supervisor and critical friends and we discussed my collages. My research supervisor (Dr Kathleen) and critical friends (Ntokozo and Khulekani) also gave their perspectives on the possible meanings of some pictures on the collages. My critical friends also mentioned what they had learnt in my collage presentation and how my presentation could relate to their studies. My presentation and our discussion were audio recorded so that I could listen and reflect on them.

My primary school experiences collage

Figure 3.10. **A collage representing my primary school experiences.**

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In my primary school collage (Figure 3.10), the picture with the girls baking the cake, and the picture of the grass both symbolise the craftwork that we did in primary school. The picture of grass represents the field near my primary school where we were given a chance to go and cut the grass to make our craftwork. These pictures signify artwork creativity and exploring of our gifts and talents. Almost all learners in our school enjoyed craftwork. We were given the time to show our talents and it made us feel good as we had to be creative and use our imaginations to make our craftwork attractive The grass picture respects the field as we had to go to the field to cut the grass to make our craftwork. In response to this, Ntokozo stated that craftwork seemed important as it reveals children's talents. She suggested that if teachers have free time it would be nice to give children time to work with their hands to reveal their gifts. Khulekani also added even though the children might not be good academically, teachers could try to develop and work with what talents children have or are good at.

The picture with girl crying shows how at school we had to deal with corporal punishment. This picture shows a child being unhappy, in pain and stressed. Our teachers did not seem to care how we felt as they would give us a hiding even if we were apologising. In most cases they did not seem to care that they were hurting us or feel sorry that we were crying and scared. Thus, we had to deal with the pain alone. Reflecting on this, Ntokozo suggested that she feels it is important that after teachers have disciplined children the teachers must continuously remind children what they are good at and encourage them to focus on what they do well, to keep them out of trouble.

The picture with a girl looking frustrated and stressed reminds me of how we used to be stressed and frustrated because we did not have textbooks, as our parent could not afford to buy us the textbooks that were needed in school. Especially in grade 3 and 4, most children would hide under the desks and some even skipped the classes because of fear of punishment.

The picture with a girl standing under the tree represents children who would prefer to play under the mango trees instead of going to school. Some learners skipped the class and played under the trees because parents did not have enough money to buy them stationery, textbooks or uniforms; so because they were scared of punishment they preferred not to go to school. The word "angry" denotes anger, feeling demotivated and not being happy in school.

The picture with adult and children as a group shows the support we got from our families and community. They helped us, especially with things that we needed. For example, we shared uniforms and textbooks with the children from our neighbourhood. Khulekani pointed out how community played an important role back in our school days, as the adults cared for all children in the community; they would intervene to help any child, sharing books and passing on uniforms to children from neighbourhood.

The cartoon picture with boys playing soccer shows the fun and joy we children shared with each other during break time. We all enjoyed break time as we had time to chat, play and get from friends what we might need for the next lesson. This picture displays fun and happiness, as most learners at our primary school enjoyed playing in the field or playground. The words "making friends" represent how we made friends, communicated and enjoyed each other's company as primary school children.

My high school experiences collage

Figure 3.11. **A collage representing my high school experiences.**

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In my high school collage (Figure 3.11), the picture showing a group of learners sitting together reminds me of how when I went to boarding school we relied on each other for help and support. This picture reminds me of how we as learners formed friendships and we became a little family and shared so many things to help each other survive boarding school life.

The picture with boy watering the plant, the word "care" and the image of the heart exemplify how our teachers and boarding mistress took care of us and loved us. They were the ones that were with us all the time and they tried their best to get us whatever we needed. The image of the heart also represents the love we shared as learners, nurturing, sharing and caring for each other as friends. Dr Kathleen proposed that the picture with a boy watering the plant represented a fitting metaphor for love and care, as she felt that children are like small plants that need to be nurtured to grow up healthy.

The boy studying represents how at school we were encouraged to study hard to get the best results. Sports were not encouraged as I do not remember our school competing with other schools. Sports were just for fun, but teachers were more concerned with us achieving good academic results. Likewise, the phrase "Ready for school" represents how at high school learning was made a priority. For example, before we started school each morning there was study period, to make us ready for school. We were given 15 minutes before school each day to just jot down what we need to do for the day and to check if we had everything in order.

The lady busy typing on a computer and the picture with a doctor show how teachers fed us information, expecting us to accept it without questioning them as they felt they were making the right choices for us. For instance, they chose the subjects for us that they thought would best suits us and prepare us for the right career. These pictures symbolise the power teachers had over us as learners; they gave orders that we had to follow, fed us information and made choices for us and they did not expect us to challenges their orders. From another perspective, the picture of a female doctor also illustrates success and good achievements; it reveals how our teachers believed we would achieve if we worked hard. The phrase "Make the right choice" signifies how our teachers believed that the decisions and choices they made for us were appropriate to lead us to a better future.

The image with books on the shelf and the picture of learners sitting at their desks reveal the type of high school I went to. The school was well resourced, the school facilities were well maintained and, unlike my primary school, we had enough textbooks. The picture of learners in classroom also shows that, unlike my primary school, my high school was well resourced. We were not squashed; each classroom had enough space for us. It also links to the picture that shows books. In my high school, we had a library and enough textbooks.

The picture of a cartoon figure cleaning shows how we were taught domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking, making beds and washing clothes. This taught us to be independent and responsible. Ntokozo pointed out that she found it interesting that in our high school we were taught to be responsible by learning how to cook and clean. This was different from her high school experiences.

Learning from my collages

Dr Kathleen asked if there was something I had discovered when I was creating my collages that I was not aware of before. My response was that I figured out that my primary school collage portrayed mainly negative memories. So, I felt like I needed to dig more and find more positive things, especially on my teachers' side. As I was busy doing my collage, I decided to call my primary school friend to help me to think of some things that we did or our teachers did for us that were good because I was sure that not everything was negative. My friend suggested assembly as one of the main things that our teachers used to motivate, guide us and give us encouragement us to do well in our studies. Assembly made us feel like one family. And so, I went back and added a section about assembly into my personal history narrative.

Dr Kathleen asked, "What can you learn from your collage that links to your research topic of supportive teacher-learner relationships?" I responded:

> I think it is important that my learners feel comfortable and welcomed in my classroom. Also it is important to groom them to be one small family like I had with my peers in my high school. We were like a family as we supported each other in everything, I believe that would help my learners to be able to help each other and share whatever they have among each other, such as sharing pencils, pens and crayons.

Dr Kathleen emphasised the value of grooming my learners to become family, as she stated that it could help them as they went on to the next grades as they would always care for and love each other. Ntokozo also added that she also had noticed that in her grade 4 class there are learners who have been together in one class from grade 1 and they have developed a strong bond and they care for each other.

Dr Kathleen questioned me about things shown in my collage that I would avoid or apply in my classroom. My answer was: "I would try by all means to avoid giving orders to my learners [as my high school teachers did]. I want my learners to voice out their opinions and allow them to make their choices."

I added:

> I would also like to avoid my primary school negative experiences. I do not want my learners to feel uncomfortable and to fear to be in school. I want them to be able to approach me for anything, especially when they have problems at home or school. As I recall, one learner happened to forget her exercise book at home one day and she did not come to me to report that she had left her book at home. Instead she used another book to write her work. This made me feel that some learners might be scared to approach me. So, I need to help learners to feel comfortable and welcomed in the classroom.

Ntokozo suggested that it is important that we also learn to control our emotions when we discipline learners, because once we ignore and fail to understand learners' explanations, they tend to distance themselves from us as teachers. Dr Kathleen also added that we teachers need to develop strategies that can help us avoid problems in classroom. For instance, for learners who have forgotten their books or pencils, we should have spare pencils or paper.

Learning from my critical friend's collage

Ntokozo had also created a collage to represent her personal history in relation to her self-study research topic of cultural inclusivity. When we were discussing Ntokozo's collage, Dr Kathleen asked me a question about what I could take or learn from her collage and apply to my own learning as a teacher. My response was that Ntokozo's colourful and vibrant collage inspired me to become an optimistic teacher. I explained that I thought that this was

important for me as it could help me to bring the best out of children and stimulate positive attitudes towards learning. I spoke about the importance of being a caring, supportive teacher, always and being willing and being there for my learners to listen to them and help them in their worries. I also explained how I believe positive teachers can stimulate positive learning environments for learners. Learners should feel loved, welcome and comfortable at school; school should become their home. Since many of the learners at my school come from family backgrounds where either one or both parents are absent, it is important that we as teachers become parents to learners, to make them feel loved, appreciated, to help them enjoy school. I also believe that many of my grade 1 learners feel confused, lost and fearful in school or in a classroom since it is a new environment for them. Thus, I can develop strategies such as creating class activities, especially on the first day at school, to ease learners' minds and to create a comfortable environment for learners to make them feel free, warm, safe and happy to be in school.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an account of my personal history with respect to supportive and unsupportive relationships. To elicit and illustrate my personal history, I used artefact retrieval and drawings to describe supportive and unsupportive memories from my early childhood, primary schooling and my high school years. As Brodgen asserted, "artefact retrieval is one way of uncovering the past in view of a reflective present and a hopeful future" (p. 857). This implies that artefact retrieval can enable the individual to make meaning of the past experiences to make changes to the present and future. Drawing is another useful method of getting at memories, which enables one to reveal her standpoint, through engaging with and expressing feelings and thoughts in a visual manner (Pithouse, 2011). Therefore, both artefact retrieval and drawings helped me to bring my past memories to life; these research practices enabled me to recall and reflect on the feelings, thoughts and emotions associated with those memories.

The collages I created assisted me to draw together my experiences and allowed me to reveal my feelings and thoughts towards my past supportive and unsupportive relationships. As stated by Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009), "words can lack the power to represent subtle variations of meaning, and translating feelings into images rather than words can be less threatening and help make an inner impression more visible and tangible" (p. 159).The

collage presentation helped me to share my past experiences with my critical friends and my supervisor; I also believe without me explaining much, my critical friends and my supervisor were able to interpret and make meaning of the images presented in the collage. Our discussion enabled me to see how I could learn from my past experiences in order to improve my current teaching practice. Evans, Kaʻōpua, and Freese (2015) agreed that with the help of critical friends we are able to share our research challenges, make continual progress in our research, and gain alternative perspectives in a supportive and intellectually safe space.

Learning from my past was not only associated with my past school experiences as my family and community were also part of my learning, and supportive relationships with them played a vital role in my development. Recalling these memories made me more aware of how young children start school having already gained important knowledge and relationships from their home and community environments (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As a teacher, I can build on what learners bring to school to enrich their thinking, learning and social-emotional growth. I figured out that children's learning in school can be motivated by positive support that they receive from home and community. Retracing and reflecting on my personal history also reminded me that learners often experience problems inside and outside of school and that they need support and empathy from teachers. Therefore, it is important that we teachers learn to develop our capacity for listening and empathising. This could help to cultivate supportive relationships between teacher and learners and create a more favourable environment for learning (Klem & Connell, 2004).

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I give a detailed account of the lessons that I conducted with my grade 1 as part of my self-study research. In Chapter Four, I respond to my second research question: "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?"

CHAPTER FOUR: CULTIVATING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS: ENGAGING LEARNERS

Introduction

The focus of my self-study research was on supportive teacher-learner relationships. I wanted to learn about how I might improve my practice as a grade 1 teacher in order to cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships. In the preceding chapter, Chapter Three, I addressed my first research question: **"What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?"** I narrated and reflected on my personal history with regard to supportive and unsupportive relationships. In retracing my personal history, I saw how young children can be nurtured by care and love that they receive from their homes and communities, from their peers and from their teachers. Reflecting on my personal history reminded me that learners often face difficulties inside and outside of school and that they need support from teachers who can listen and empathise. I also realised that young children need to be encouraged to express themselves, make choices and to be given time to play.

In this chapter, Chapter Four, I narrate how I engaged my class of 37 grade 1 learners to help me to respond to my second research question: "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?" For the purposes of my research, I planned and studied three Life Skills lessons, two Mathematics lessons and four IsiZulu lessons. This was to help me learn about cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships in the context of all three of the learning areas that I teach. All the lessons were conducted in my home language of isiZulu as it is the school medium of instruction, and the content of all lesson was in line with the prescribed national curriculum for grade 1 (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Audio recording was used to record learners' discussions and my teaching. I also used reflective journal writing to reflect on each of the lessons. In narrating how these lessons unfolded, I present illustrations of work that learners completed in class. I have also used extracts from my reflective journal to demonstrate my thoughts and feelings and to show how my learning developed. I have included some photographs that I took to show how the classwork took place; to ensure anonymity, I was careful not to show any faces in these photographs. For the purpose of confidentiality, learners' classwork has been presented

without their names and all names of learners have been changed when referring to specific learners. In some direct quotations from the learners I have quoted in IsiZulu and translated them into English as I felt they would lose their meaning and the tone of how they were said and understood by the speaker if they were only given in English.

To conclude this chapter, I demonstrate how I created a collage to show what I discovered through engaging the learners and how I enhanced this learning through conversation with my research supervisor and critical friends (my two fellow Master's students).

"My School": Life Skills lesson 1(14 March 2016)

At the start of this lesson, I was a bit nervous as it felt as if it was my first time teaching; because I was audio recording my lesson I felt as if there was someone watching me. But as I continued with my lesson I felt more relaxed. I started the lesson by introducing my research, although I had already previously explained it to the learners when I was asking for their permission to participate (as described in Chapter Two). I explained to my learners that I was doing my research whereby I was studying how I could create good relationships with them, so we could all feel comfortable and come to school happy with no fear, to be able to share good and bad life experiences and support each other. However, they all looked puzzled. To help them to understand, I asked them how they felt about coming to school and having not done their homework. Learners quickly raised their hands up. I got various responses. Most of them were responses that I expected such as: "Scared", "Quickly do it before school starts with the help of my friend", "Hope that you do not come to school or even hope that Mam you forget about the home work". I was able to probe from the answers that learners were giving me to get more explanation from them. This was a key for me to further explain that this fear might have been caused by the fact that there were various barriers that made us not understand each other. I explained that the study would help me and them to support each other and work together in order for all of us to feel welcome, warm and comfortable in our school, especially in our classroom. There was relief on their faces as they seemed to understand.

The learners seemed fascinated to participate in my study by doing the activities I would give them. They were curious to know more and find out how this lesson would be different as some asked, "Miss are we going to read or tell stories?" Or "You will read a story for us?"

But I asked them to wait until we started. Before starting the lesson I told them that if anyone felt that he or she no longer wanted to participate in the study they could feel free to come and tell me. I would then not use their classwork as part of my research. I also emphasised that learners could come to me privately if they were scared to speak in front of other learners.

The first lesson for my research was a Life Skills lesson and the topic was "My School". I introduced the lesson by asking learners about their first day at school. I think this was important for me to get to know how they had felt when they came to this new environment of school, and they had to see new faces in the classroom and for the first time they had to get used to new routines or rules. I also wanted to know how they felt about me as they had to consult me for every move they made. I thought some might have felt uneasy to come to me. The responses I got from my learners were more of what I expected. For instance, most of them mentioned that they were scared to be left with strangers; for example, Thubelihle stated, "*Mina ngakhala ngiqala ukuza esikoleni.*"(translation: "I cried on my first day of school") and when I asked why she cried, she said, "Because I did not know anybody in school". While Ndabenhle said "*Mina ngangijahileukubasesikoleniukuzengenzeabanganefuthingiqaleukufunda*", (translation: "I could not wait for school to start so I could make new friends, start writing and reading"). This activity gave me some insight into how learners felt about coming to school on the first day and I realised that in future it would be important for me to plan activities for the first day of school that would make learners feel at ease and help me to form supportive relationships with them.

Next, I read the learners a short story about Lerato's first day at school. I took this story from the big story book, which is a book that is part of the learner-teacher support material for the grade 1 class. The story was about a little girl who woke up in the morning delighted about starting school in grade 1. The little girl was in a rush to get to school. Sheeven left her mother behind as she jumped off from the taxi and hurried to school to find her class. She was happy to meet her teacher and she went to the playground to meet others and make friends with them. When it was time to go home Lerato could not wait to get home to tell her parents about her first day at school, the friends she had made, her teacher and the work they did in class. I chose this story because I wanted to know if the learners had the same feelings about being in school.

The learners' responses showed me that a favourable school environment plays an important role in making learners feel happy and willing to come to school, especially as young children become attached and dependent. Ncamisile said, "I was happy to come to school" and Xolani mentioned, "I was not happy because I did not know anybody." "I was happy because you were my sister's teacher when you were teaching grade 3" explained Phumeza. "Were you happy because I taught your sister Phumeza?" I asked. She replied, "Yes Miss, she brought me here in your classroom and told me that you will take care of me". I was a bit surprised to get such response as I had never thought that learners as young as grade 1 cared about how their affectionate and caring their teacher was. It made me realise the positive effect we can have on learners; for instance, a morning hug, and a goodbye hug can create warmth and love in classroom relationships.

I further asked the learners about the things they liked and did not like about school. Asking this question helped me to find out how learners experience their school environment and how they experience their relationship with me as their teacher, as well as their classmates or even schoolmates. Most learners said they liked the school because they get to play in school and they get food in school. Something that stood out for me was when Sibahle stated, "*ngiyakuthanda esikoleni ngoba ekhaya asihlali namuntu*" (translation: "I like the school because there is no one at home to look after us"). This made me realise that for some learners school is their second home, as they find love, nurturing and they are cared for. Thus, it is important that we make the school environment comfortable and welcoming for all learners.

Lastly, I asked the learners to colour a picture of a school. The aim of the activity was to see how the learners felt about being in school. The instruction I gave them was to nicely colour and decorate the picture to make their school look lovely if they loved their school. The response I got from this activity was that learners showed interest as most of them kept on asking if their school looked lovely or not; they asked whether the colours they were using were lovely or if they should use other colours to make it look nicer. As they began doing their activity they were coming to me with questions as everyone wanted to do the task well. For instance, if they did not have a certain colour, they would ask if they could borrow it from others. For example, Minenhle asked, "Miss, can I borrow blue crayon from Zipho?", and some came to show me how pretty their school looked.

Figure 4.1. **Learners colouring the school picture**

The above photograph (Figure 4.1) was taken by me in class when learners were busy colouring their school pictures. Most learners tried by all means to make their school pictures look attractive, as they were selective about the colours that they were using. They wanted to use bright colours.

Nevertheless, I noticed a few learners who were quiet. I had to attend to them and find out why they were quiet as I thought it could be because they were not happy at school. I wanted to find out what exactly they were not happy about. I then asked Dwala, "Why you are so quiet. Are you clear about what exactly you need to do?" "Yes Miss", he replied. I asked, "Okay, so why you are not showing interest in completing your task?" He explained, "Because Sipho is laughing at me; he says my school is not good as his". I probed further, "Do you think your school does not look nice?" "It is, Miss" Dwala said. "Then complete your task" I said. I thought it was normal for young children to tease each other, but I realised that it could be a problem if it makes other learners feel demotivated. I then had to explain to the learners not to laugh at or tease each other, as this would make others feel uncomfortable and not happy at school. In the end, not all learners completed the task. Those that did not complete were given time to finish it in the next lesson.

Journal entry (16 March 2016)

Two days later on, I listened to my first Life Skills lesson audio recording. I deeply thought about what Sibahle had said about coming to school because they have no one to look after them at home. It became clearer to me now why some learners come to school even if they are sick, or come to school even if they have been given letters to inform parents not bring them to school. This made me think of how the school is important to some learners. It is not only the source of academic learning, but it is a home too, a safe place, as parents feel at peace or comfortable knowing that their children are safe at school. So, if the learners ever feel rejected at school, they then would not have any place to be. I really felt that it is important for us teachers to create a conducive school environment and to develop supportive relationships with our learners.

"My School": Life Skills lesson 2 (15 March 2016)

The second Life Skills lesson continued from the previous lesson. First, we revised what we had done in the preceding lesson. When I asked learners what we had done in the previous Life Skills lesson, hands were raised up fast. The answers I got included, "We were doing school", "Colouring school", "Making our school look beautiful". Sinamile's response was what I wanted as it showed me that they had some understanding of the aim of the lesson, as she explained, "*Besifaka imibala kwisikole sethu, sibonisa ukuthi siyasithanda noma asisithandi*" (translation: "We were colouring school to show if we love or not love our school"). I then expanded from Sinamile's response, "Did we all colour the school beautifully?" The whole class shouted, "Yes Miss!" I responded, "If we loved it, we coloured it nice". They all shouted again, "Yes Miss!", "And if there is something we do not like about our school?" I asked, Mpume replied, "You colour your school not nicely". From this discussion, it was clear that they had understood their previous task activity and I could move on with my new lesson.
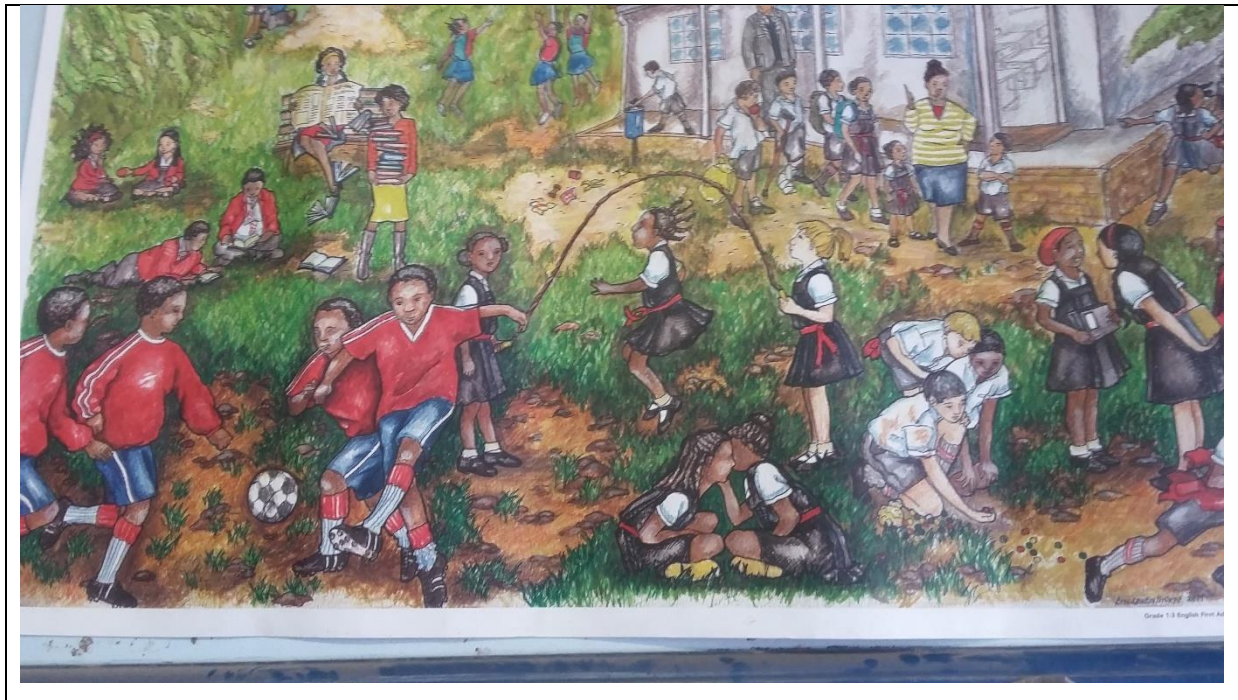
Figure 4.2. **School poster**

Figure 4.2 illustrates a School poster that I used in my lesson. This poster is a grade 1 poster which is part of teacher-learner support material provided by the Department of Basic Education to promote effective teaching and learning. This poster shows learners playing in the playground and some having their lunch. I wanted to draw my learners' attention to the teachers who are amongst learners in the playground and to some learners who are consulting a teacher.

I started the new lesson by pasting the poster on the chalk board. Learners had to relate what they saw on the poster with their school. I used this poster because it shows close relationships between teachers and learners and the learners all looked happy in their school. I wanted to find out how my learners experienced their school, in terms of their relationships with me as their teacher and if they are also happy in school. While learners were looking at the poster I heard, "Mmmmh", "Wow", "Skipping ropes" "Soccer ball", "Netball. The learners were whispering to each other about what they liked on the poster, and it showed me that they were impressed by what they were seeing on the poster. I asked them to look at the poster and tell me what they thought about the poster. Quickly they responded, "It is a school", "School playground", "Learners are playing", "And it is break time". I asked learners to raise their hands if they liked the school on the poster. All learners raised their hands up. I then pointed to a few learners to tell me why they liked the school.

Sandisiwe said, "I like that school, because it has a big play ground, and many games". I expected such responses from grade 1 learners and indeed many of their responses focused on playing games. I then shifted their focus, to be on the two teachers, one talking to two learners and other standing on the school veranda watching learners. I wanted to know their general views on teachers. For instance, I wanted to know if they feel safe around teachers or even if they like the presence of teachers. I also wanted to know what they thought about teachers when they come to school. I asked myself if they understood the presence of teachers besides teaching, such as helping them whenever they need help. I wanted to get an idea of how much the learners thought I am of help to them.

In referring to the poster, I asked them, "What are the teachers doing on the playground? Are they also playing?" Simphiwe's response was, "No Miss, they are not playing, but they are looking for naughty kids"; while Mpilo replied, "Yes Miss, teachers they are checking if all children are eating." I think Mpilo was referring to the fact that at our school there is a feeding scheme and teachers have to monitor to ensure that all learners get food, especially those who come to school without a packed lunch. I went on to ask, "Well, what you think of the learners talking to Miss?" Mpume's response was, "I think the other one looks angry and she is reporting to Miss that he had taken her sandwich". "What do others think?" I asked. I purposely pointed Sakhile, because I noticed that the learners who were doing the most talking were those who are normally active and participating in class. Hence, I decided also to point at those who were quiet, as I thought they were the ones who might experience fear or feel uncomfortable in the classroom. Sakhile responded, "I think the girl had been beaten up by the boy". "And the teacher"? I asked, "Teacher is trying to resolve the problem," Sakhile replied." And you Khanyinisani?"I asked. "I think they were fighting and the teacher was telling them not to fight" Khanyisani responded.

I further asked learners to tell what things they would like to copy from the school on the poster to have at their school. As I expected, they all raised their hands. Some were shouting, "Me Miss!", as they wanted me to at point them. Their responses focused more on the playground, as most of them shouted, "We want a big playground" "Swings", "skipping ropes" and "Netball". More boys wanted "soccer balls". "Is that all you want? What about teachers and the school?" I asked. They were silent for a minute and some looked at the poster more closely. A few learners raised their hands and Siphume whispered, "*Mina mem*

ungithanda lesisikole ngoba sincane" (translation: "I like that school because it is small"). I repeated his response as a question, "Do you like the small school?" Sazi replied, "Yes I think a small school is good because there are not many children in school".

This made me become conscious that some children in the foundation phase (grade R to 3) were not happy with having older children from the intermediate and senior phases in school. This might be caused by older children taking too much space from them in terms of playing in the playground, or maybe the older children bully them. It made me wonder about how young learners could be made to feel safe at school since our school enrolment is large and therefore, playgrounds are mostly occupied by older children. The foundation phase learners do not get to play enough of what they want, as they have to play in passage ways. I thought this might be something that I should raise with my colleagues, in order that we can share ideas about what could be done. For instance, we might have to have two playgrounds or playing field areas.

Journal entry (15 March 2016)

My aim for the lesson was for learners to focus on the presence of teachers in school; to see that teachers care, are always available wherever they need them even during break time; that they are there to help and to make sure they are protected. But learners only tended to focus on the playing field, which I think is normal for grade 1 learners. So, I think they made me alert and to recognise the importance of them having fun in school by playing, in order for them to love school.

"My School": Life Skills lesson 3 (18 March 2016)

I again began this lesson by revising what we had done in the previous lesson. The reason I began each lesson with revision was because I felt the lessons were all linking to each other. I pasted the school poster on the chalkboard and recapped our previous discussion on what learners would like to adopt from that school on the poster. This also helped me to review if I was still getting similar answers from learners. I found that most of the learners gave me similar responses to those I got from the previous lesson as most mentioned, "We would love to have same games like that school", and "Big playground". It became clear to me that learners would really love and enjoy school more if they had more opportunities to play games.

Since the learners were only responding to what I was asking them, I also gave them the opportunity to ask questions about anything regarding their school or me as their teacher. I gave them this opportunity as I felt they might not understand the essence of schooling, or why all schools are not the same, as they compared the one on the poster with their own school. It took time for them to come up with questions, but eventually a few learners came up with questions. One of the questions was, "Why Miss do we always write in school?" There was big amusement and they answered each other, and I added to the answers they gave. For instance, Sibahle mentioned, "We write so that we will pass and go to grade 2". And I emphasised, "Writing in school also helps us to develop our mind and skills to be able to read and become knowledgeable".

The lesson went on with me telling the learners a very short story about my favourite primary schoolteacher, who was teaching me in grade 6, when I was still in primary school. I told them how much I liked her because she had a nice car and one day when I was not feeling well at school, she took me to the hospital. I told them that from that day I loved that teacher. The aim of telling them about my favourite teacher was to give them an idea that the task that I was planning to give them would require them to tell me more about why they liked a certain person and wished that she or he could be their grade 1 teacher.

Therefore, the next step of the lesson was to ask learners to draw their favourite teacher or anyone that they thought they would love to teach them. As I was telling them what they would be doing in their task, I could see that they were happy as they were all smiling. It was clear to me that they really liked the task. I gave them the paper and crayons they would use to draw. Everyone began drawing as soon they received their drawing paper.

*Figure 4.3.***Learners' drawings of their favourite teacher**

The above pictures (Figure 4.3) show two examples of learners' drawings of their favourite teacher. The first teacher on the left is a male; some learners pointed out that they would love to be taught by male teachers, this could be because there are few male teachers in our primary school. The picture on the right is a woman with a small boy next the teacher. The teacher looks lovely as bright colours have been used with decorations of hearts and flowers on the dress. The learner drawn her teacher to show kindness and warmth; she looks like a lovely teacher who is approachable as he has drawn her with a smile and he also drawn a learner next to her. This might mean the learner who drew the picture wanted a teacher who would be always be there to support and help him whenever he need her.

As the learners were busy drawing they all wanted my suggestions on their drawings. Some were asking, "Does my drawing look nice?", "Can we also draw Sir?""(Sirrefers to the only male teacher in our school who is teaching grade 7). They all wanted their drawing to look attractive. Cebo came crying to me with his drawing as one learner was laughing at his drawing because he said he was drawing his grandmother. It was then that I decided intervene and tell the learners again that they could draw anyone as long they could explain to the class why they would love that person to teach them.

The lesson continued by me asking the learners to tell the class who they had drawn and why they would like to be taught by that person. All the learners showed interest in presenting their work. Even the quiet learners were also keen to present their drawings. I then decided to select learners according to their seating arrangements, starting with the first row until the last row. I noticed that in their drawings most learners drew their mothers, sisters, aunts or female teachers. The drawings showed mainly women, but there were also a few fathers and the male teacher in our school. I think this somehow revealed to me that learners are close to their mothers and they feel free and comfortable around women, as Sandisiwe said, "*Ngidwebe uMama ngoba uyangithanda ungenzela yonke into futhi yena akangithethisi*" (translation: "I drew my mother, I like her because she does everything for me I need and she never shouts at me"). Those few learners who had drawn male teachers might have done so because they do not live with their fathers and possibly miss the presence of a male figure in their lives. For example, Alondwe explained that he had drawn "Sir" because he is driving a nice car and he will be his father.

Journal entry(19 March 2016)

Well, this lesson went well. Learners were eager to participate and my shy learners were happy to present. In this lesson I think I managed to achieve my goal, as I was aiming to find out what kind of teacher grade 1 learners prefer. From their drawings I managed to read more than what they presented. Some had drawn pictures with hearts and to them a heart means love. So, I think they need to be loved in order for them to feel happy and easy around their teacher.

"Number Relationships": Mathematics lesson 1 (28 April 2016)

The lesson started by counting. Learners counted in 1s up to 50, 2s up to 30 and 5s up to 50. The learners enjoy morning counting as I have made it a norm in my class that after Morning Prayer we count together before they sit down. I normally notice that most of my learners now know the numbers by heart in terms of which number follows, and most of them can identify numbers. Thus, this Mathematics lesson focused on the meaning of numbers. I wanted my learners to understand and know that the numbers have different meanings depending on the situation. For instance, being number 1 could mean you are first or in top position, and 1 could also mean less or lower position. My lesson was based on place values. To achieve my

research purpose, I also aimed to find out how learners felt in terms of whether they feltloved, comfortable and warm or rejected, fearful, and shut out of the classroom.

The lesson progressed as I asked learners to explain the feeling of being loved or to love. There was giggling as they looked each other in surprise as if I had said something funny or insulting. First I wanted to check on how they understood the word "love". So, I drew five hearts, three hearts, and seven hearts and I asked them to count the number of hearts in each row. I further asked them, "If you were to be asked to pick hearts for someone who you loved or who takes care of you like your grandmother, grandfather, sister, mother, aunt or brother, which row would you pick hearts from?" All I heard was "Miss!", as I was still looking around for who to point to. Almost all hands I pointed to choose a row with seven hearts. When I asked them, "Why you are all choosing the row with seven hearts?" Thabiso whispered, "*Ngimthanda kayisikhombisa uMawami*" (translation "I love my mother seven times"), and Sandisiwe explained,"I choose seven hearts because I love my mother this much", as she demonstrated with her hands, opening them wide. I further asked them why they were not choosing rows with five or three hearts. Sakhile responded,"*Ngoba u 3 no 5 unolavi abancane"* (translation: "Because 3 and 5 has less love", with love referring to hearts. Musa said, "3 with love means you have less love". Expanded from Musa's answer I asked, "So, does this mean 7 is bigger than 3 and 5?" The whole class was shouting "Yes Miss!" "Are you sure Dwala?" I asked. He replied,"*Uma unezinto eziyisikhombisa unezinto eziningi"*, (translation, "If you have seven things you've got so many things"). Dwala was comparing 7, 5 and 3, as he meant7 is the biggest compared to other two numbers.

I developed my lesson to look at place value, as I wanted them to understand that numbers differ in terms of value. For example, numbers get bigger as you count on. I then asked the learners to use counters. Counters could be tin tips, matchsticks, marbles or drawn pictures, to help learners in counting. I picked a few learners to stand in a line, and they had to take a number of counters depending on which number they were in the line. For example, the first learner had to take one counter, the second took two, the third took three, until the last person in the line. Learners then had to tell who got more counters. I further asked them why the last learner had more counters. They were a bit quiet at first, but I could see that they were thinking deeply and trying to find answers. Simphiwe slowly raised his hand. He sounded unsure as he said,"*Ingobammmm*[hesitating] *nombolo 1 iwonaomncanekunabanye"*

(translation: "I think number 1 is the smallest number than all the numbers".) "Yes," I replied and the I asked, "You, Lusanda, what do you think?" "I think number 20 is big than the other numbers," she answered.

I further explained that numbers get bigger as we count on. I made a few practical sums to assess if learners had an understanding of place value. For example, using counters they had to solve practical sums. An example of a sum I asked was, "If Lebo had five oranges and Thapelo had nine oranges, how many oranges Lebo would need to get more to have equal oranges with Thapelo?" Learners were excited and eager to count and solve sums, as they quickly raised their hands after they had finished counting.

Lastly, I gave my learners a writing activity whereby they filled in the missing numbers in order. Feedback from this activity was a success as most learners correctly filled in the missing numbers.
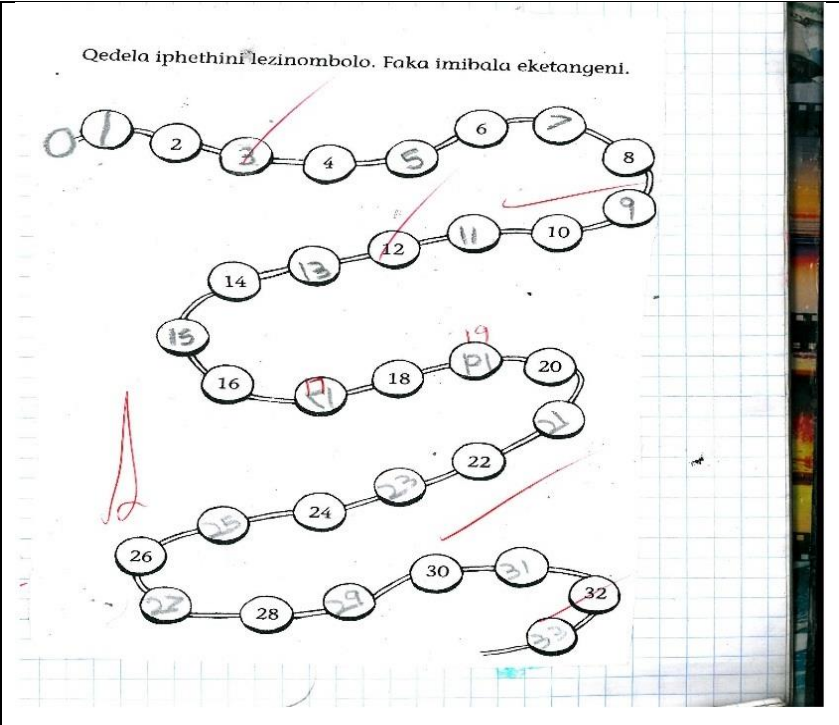
Figure 4.4. **An example of the missing numbers activity**

Figure 4.4. displays an example of the activity that learners completed in class. This activity was to assess if learners could write numbers in a numerical order. I needed to get an idea if the learners understood the value of numbers, for example the number concept of knowing

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which number is after, before and between. Beginning with this activity was to lay a foundation to ensure learners understood number figures.

Journal entry (28 April 2016)

Though this lesson did not have much of what I could use for my research, the aim of this lesson was to make a foundation for my following lessons on my research. This lesson was to make learners understand the value of numbers and what I meant about love; I think I managed to achieve that goal as most learners showed good understanding of number values and concepts. So, in the following lesson I plan to find more of what learners think of our classroom relationships using a number scale to describe their relationships.

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"Number Relationships": Mathematics lesson 2 (29 April 2016)

</div>

I started the lesson by asking learners to recite a poem called *"Amabhanisi ayishumi"*. The rhyme goes: *Amahbanisi ayishumi ahlezi etafuleni anoshukela ngaphezulu, kwafika uncende wathatha elilodwa washiya ayishiyagalolunye* translation:"ten buns with sugaron top, are on top of the table, the bird comes and take one bun and nine buns remain"). The learners recite the poem until no bun is left. As they recite the poem they also act it out as 10 learners act as buns and one learner as a bird.

Learners were then asked to count together. I guided them as they were counting. We counted in 2s and 10s up to 50. I then grouped the learners into three groups. Two groups consisted of 12 learners and one group had 13 learners. They counted in groups as they took turns. It was easy for me to identify learners who were still struggling with counting, and different methods of counting enabled them to get more practice as we counted using a number chart and counters.

I further moved on with my lesson. I told them a few story sums that they needed to solve using counters or mental counting. As I told them the story sums I could see that they were carefully listening as they were all quiet and looking at me. Even the learners who are normally disruptive in the classroom were listening carefully. One of the story sums was about two boys, Khule and Sikhona:

> Khule had 11sweets and Sikhona had some sweets; because Sikhona had less sweets
> than Khule, Khule gave Sikhona two sweets. They were now had equal number of

sweets as they both had nine sweets. How many sweets did Sikhona have before Khule gave him two sweets?

The purpose of story sums was to assess if learners had an understanding of number concept and place value. The learners enjoyed solving story sums. Most of them were no longer using counters to count. They all wanted to quickly give responses before others did.

Following the positive response I got from oral story sums that I did with my learners, I gave the man activity to rate their relationships with their class mates and me as their teacher. They had to present to the whole class their rating score to explain what their score meant about the relationships they have in the classroom. They had to rate their classroom relationships on a scale from 0 to 9. To ensure that they understood the number concept of a rating scale, I asked them using a number line I drew on the chalk board to explain how to define big and small numbers, and the number that comes before and after on the number line. Hence, they were doing their activity with an understanding of the meaning of number operations and concept. For example, Sakhi explained, "1 and 2 have less counters. Thus, less counters could mean not being happy in the classroom and numbers with more counters could mean you are happy in the classroom".

Learners were excited about this activity. Although I did not instruct them to colour the counters of the number symbol they wrote, I found almost the whole class colouring their counters to make their activity look nice. They were also very concerned about how to do their work properly as most of them they were asking me which number to write. For instance, Dwala asked, "Would 7 or 8 would better describe being happy in class?" It was important for me to insist to learners that they should choose a number to describe best how they felt in class. I kept referring to what Sakhi had explained about 1 and 2 having less counters meaning you are not happy, while more counters means you are happier.

After the learners had finished their writing activity I asked them to present their work. I could see that they were keen to present. They all wanted to go first and present. However, together we agreed that it would be better if they presented in their seating arrangement in rows. In their presentation what caught my attention was learners who had written small numbers as I felt that I needed to hear their worries and try to figure out how I could resolve those issues to maintain their happiness in the classroom. For example, Xolani wrote number 3, and he told us in his presentation that he was not happy in classroom because he does not

have friends in class, and that they always steal his pencils and glue and crayons. Thabiso also mentioned, "I wrote number 4 because Anathi is always teasing me and I do not like it and you Miss, you never asked me to make copies for you in the classroom". I was a bit shocked about what Thabiso had said about me not sending him to make copies for me in the office. I guess I was shocked because all the other learners were avoiding talking about me in their presentation, especially about things they did not like about me, and I was quite amazed by Thabiso's presentation. It made me question why I choose certain learners for certain tasks. I realised that it was obvious to learners that normally I ask particular learners to do certain things for me because they quickly complete their work.
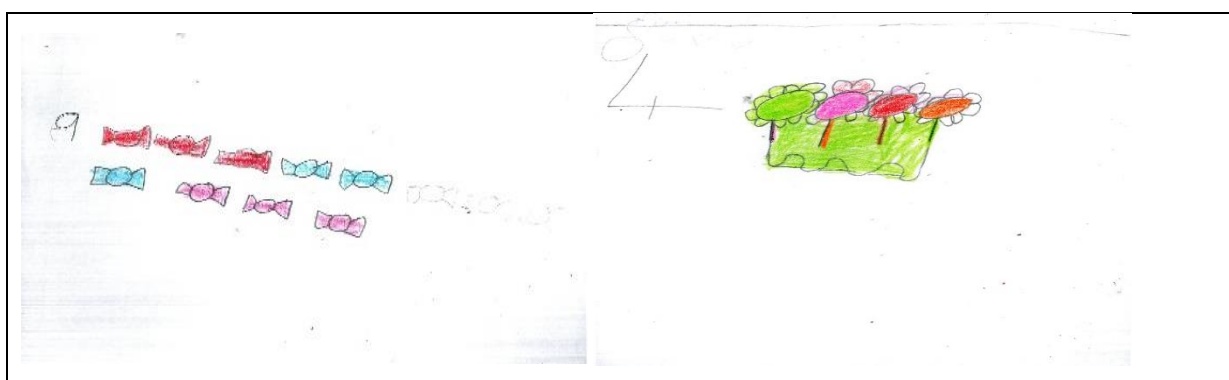
Figure 4.5. **Numbers that best describe learners' feelings and relationships in the classroom**

Figure 4.5illustrates two examples of the activity that learners were doing in class, as they were asked to write suitable a number from scale of 0 to 9 that would best describe their relationships with their peers and me as their teacher. Although both picture were coloured beautifully, the picture on the left has a big number, which revealed that the learner was happy in class, while the other picture has a small number, which showed that the learner was not happy in class. Through their presentations, I learnt what could possibly make learners happy or not happy in class.

Journal entry (29 April 2016)

I was quite happy with this activity, as I felt that learners were really open about how they feel in the classroom, such as things they like and do not like. It also pleased me that learners felt they could trust me, to open up about their worries in school. To me it meant that they had faith that the situation would be better after they had told me how they felt in classroom. I

thought to myself that caring, being friendly to one another and helping one another is what I have to emphasise to my learners, to make sure that all learners feel loved and safe in class. Most of all ,I figured out that it was important for me make sure that no learner would feel less important, as Thabiso had mentioned in his presentation that I am selective regarding to who I send to the office.

"Learners' Rights at School":IsiZulu Lesson 1(30 May 2016)

I began my Isizulu lesson with the learners' favourite poem. They normally recite it whenever I ask for them to sing a song or to recite a poem. I requested them to stand up to recite this poem. I made them stand up because I wanted them to feel relaxed and to make meaning of the poem they were rhyming as they acting out the words of the poem. The poem goes:

> *Thina sizinkanyezi*
>
> *Siqhakazile*
>
> *Umhlaba wonke uyasithanda*
>
> *Sinamaphupho ngekusasa lethu*
>
> *Awusibheke sibahle*
>
> *Mina kusasa ngizoba uNesi, uDokotela, uThisha, iPhoyisa*
>
> *Thina sizinkanyezi eziqhakazile*
>
> Translation:
>
> We are stars
>
> We are shining
>
> The whole world loves us
>
> We have dreams about our future
>
> Look at us we are beautiful
>
> Tomorrow I'll be a Nurse, Doctor, Teacher, and Police
>
> We are stars and we are shining

I asked the learners to recite this poem because I wanted them to review the meaning of the poem and what it said to them. I also wanted to know if they felt the love and being the shining stars as I related shining to a child feeling important both in school and at home or in the community; shining could also mean doing well academically and to be a helpful child both at school and home. I questioned them, "What does the poem say to you, about who you are?" There was a silent moment after I posed that question, and so I made an example of

myself. I explained how at their age I always felt special and I had so many dreams about what I wanted to be when I was grown up. Thereafter, I saw some hands going up and most of their responses were in line with what I wanted to hear. For example, Thubelihle whispered, *"Ithi sibahle futhi thina sizoba odokotela"* (translation:We are beautiful and we will be doctors)."I think it tells us that we are good, beautiful, and we will find ourselves good jobs" Ngcebo said."What you want to be after you finish studying?" I asked. They all raised their hands, "Miss!", as they were all shouting, "Miss!"," I want to be a teacher", "Soldier", "To have many taxis" and "To be a Nurse". And Palesa said, "My mom wants me to work in television". Learners' responses showed that they understood the poem. Thus, the essence of the poem was to make learners aware that they are loved and special; they need to set goals and always to dream big to have a better future.

I further told the class a story about children's rights. The story was about Khwezi, a little girl. Khwezi was bathed by her grandmother. When she went to school, her grandmother would always tell Khwezi how beautiful she looked, who named her and why she needed to take care of herself. Khwezi's grandmother would alert Khwezi before she went to school about wolves she would meet who would destroy her and make her feel less important. Grandmother would tell Khwezi the rights she had as the child as she believed that would encourage Khwezi to be a little good girl and feel special and not to be let down by anyone. Khwezi's grandmother named a few rights, such as the right of having a name and surname, be called with her name, to be loved, to go to school, to have food, to say "no", to play games and to be taken care of. Khwezi enjoyed listening to grandma and she would ask her questions if there was something she did not understand.

After I had finished telling the story, learners answered a few questions, such as which right they thought was most important from those that were named by Khwezi's grandmother. Learners were very fascinated and very eager to participate as they were all trying to give answers. I was very pleased with the responses I got from learners as I asked them what Kwezi's grandmother meant, when she said Khwezi had the right "to say no". I posed that question to learners to get a feeling of what they thought in regard to themselves. Responses I got from learners included, *"Kumele unqabe uma ungafuni, ungayenzi into ungathandi"*, (translation: You can refuse to do something if you do not want to). I asked, "If you do not want to come to school you can refuse?" Sanele shouted, "No! Miss but you can refuse if you not feeling well", and Siphamandla added, "Everyoneis supposed to go to school unless

you are sick". I think we had a very interesting debate and learners showed interest in the discussion as I asked them to add some rights they felt were not mentioned in the story. The rights they added included:

Right to have a home

Right to live

Right to have clothes

Right to be safe and protected

Journal entry (30 May 2016)

I think starting my lesson with a poem made learners feel at ease as we also discussed the poem, and they were open to talk of what they thought. The poem discussion made it easy for learners to quickly grasp Khwezi's story. The mood of the lesson was relaxed which made the lesson very interesting as learners' participation was good. This made me realise how much learners enjoy listening to stories and sharing their own stories. I think they also enjoyed the lesson as some were still wanted to further discuss as I was concluding the lesson.

"Learners' Rights at School": IsiZulu lesson 2 (31 May 2016)

I started the lesson by pasting a few pictures that were in the form of a collage (Figure 4.6.) on children's rights on the chalkboard.
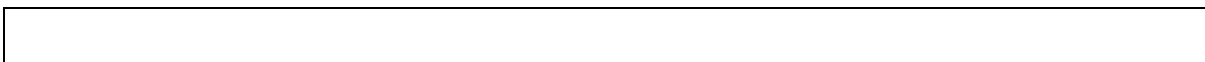
Figure 4.6. **A Collage of pictures of children's rights**

I pasted these pictures on the chalkboard to prompt learners' thinking about how they could relate them to their rights both in school and in the community. These pictures reveal happiness of children, love and being loved, being supported by adults, and they also highlight the importance of education for children.

I asked learners to tell me what they thought of the pictures they saw on the board. Their responses were right to the point. The answers I got from learners included, "The girl is happy", "Children are going to school", "Granny is telling a story to the kids", "And the boy is in the classroom". The learners were telling me exactly what they saw in the pictures I had pasted. I wanted them to get an understanding by seeing pictures of what we had discussed in the previous lesson about children's rights. I further asked them what they thought of the pictures, relating them to the rights they had mentioned in the previous lesson. They were able to associate the pictures with their rights. For instance, Sakhile said, "*Ngicabanga ukuthi isithombesengane eseklasini sisho ukuthi abantwana banelungelo lokufunda"*, (translation: "I think the picture with the child in the classroom means that children have a right to go to school"). While Thubelihle, referring to the same picture, said, "This picture means learners have the right to learn". Sibongile replied, "The second picture on the corner means learner have the right to have mothers" and Sazi added, "Also to have grandmothers". The learners

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were involved in the lesson as they were able to relate these pictures with our previous lesson discussion.

I moved on with the lesson to revise what we had learnt in the previous lesson about Kwezi's story. This was to add on to the children's rights that were shown in the pictures I had pasted on the board. I wrote the rights that learners were mentioning on the chalkboard. Writing them down was to make learners read them out loud, in order that they would not forget them. My learners were very active, as most of them wanted to talk; even if what they were saying what had already been said they would rephrase it. For example, Xolile, my quiet learner, said, "The children have the right to laugh and play". She said this even though that point had been already been made that the children have the right to be happy. This showed that learners were really willing to participate as they all wanted to say something.

After our discussion, I explained the collage activity that learners needed to do. I told them that they needed to make a chart with pictures of their rights that we had discussed in class. I asked them to ask to look for old magazines at home and bring them to the following lesson, in order to look for pictures together in the classroom. I divided the learners into groups of six and one groups had seven members. The strategy I used to divide learners was to make them count from the first learner to the sixth learner as they named themselves in numbers from 1up to 6, and start over again, all 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5sand 6swere grouped together. This was to avoid learners making choices of who they wanted to be with in their groups, as this would have resulted in some learners being isolated as some do not have friends in the classroom.

Journal entry (3 June 2016)

The lesson was quite interesting. Learners showed enthusiasm in coming up with their ideas of pictures I brought in class in relation to their rights. I think this was because the lesson was more about them, so they felt more connected and part of the lesson. I sensed that learners did not feel that I am teaching but they thought I am having conversation with them, as they were so excited and very opened about the discussion. After this lesson I think I really felt that the learners had an understanding of what their rights means as they could relate them to the pictures I brought in class.

"Learners' Rights at School": IsiZulu lesson 3 (3 June 2016)

The lesson started with an icebreaker. I asked each learner to work with the person sitting next to him or her. Learners had to select one learner among the three of them at their desk. That learner who they had chosen would have his or her eyes closed and would have to point one question (see Table 4.1). Then one of the two whose eyes were not closed would answer the question. I created the questions for the icebreaker as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1.

Icebreaker questions

- What is your favourite food?
- Who is your role model?
- What is your favourite television programme?
- Who is the person you become angry if the day ends without seeing that someone?
- What is your favourite pet?

Learners were thrilled about this icebreaker. They all wanted to be the ones who would be chosen to have their eyes closed and choose the question for a group. So, I had to intervene and think of a strategy that learners could use to randomly select one learner. I decided it would be better if I squashed a piece of paper to make it a ball. Then I threw it on top on the desk and the one who managed to catch the ball was the one who would have his or her eyes closed and choose the question with his or her eyes closed. I had to read out each question that the learners had chosen. I also asked learners to read after me and to elaborate on the question to make sure they were clear about what it meant.

Learners enjoyed this activity; but there were some questions they did not want to answer or found hard to answer and they would be furious if their peer had chosen that question. For example, the questions they were happy to answer were about their favourite food, their favourite television programme, the person they would become angry if the day ended without seeing that person. But they were not happy to answer questions about their role models and their pets. I was not sure why they became angry if they had to answer those two questions, but I guess the role model question required them to think more deeply compared to the other questions and it could also be possible that most of my learners do not have pets.

The aim of this icebreaker activity was to make learners feel calm, and to instil the spirit of teamwork. I also anticipated it would make them feel the joy of being different from others, but still be able to tolerate others. For instance, the choices they made in answering the questions were not the same. I wanted them to understand that there is no shame in being different from someone else, but that they should learn to tolerate each other and love each other. This activity was to prepare them for the actual class activity where they would be required to work in groups to make collages together.

I went on with my lesson to recap on what we had done in the previous lesson. I started by reading the children's rights that they had mentioned in the previous lesson. I then asked them to read the children's rights after me. As we were reading, I also asked them to elaborate on each of the rights by giving examples. This was just to remind them of what each one meant and to make them aware that each of the rights should have meaning for them and they should be able to explain their collage on children's rights.

I further moved on with my IsiZulu lesson as I asked the learners to sit in their groups. I then instructed the learners that I would work with two groups per day to avoid chaos in our classroom and so that each group would get enough time to work on their collage. As soon as I had finished giving them the instruction, they all looked disappointed. I questioned them, "Are you happy with me working with two groups per day?" Sandisiwe quickly raised her hand, "*Abanye bazoyenza nini Miss ikholaji yabo?*" (translation: "When Miss are the other groups going to make their collages?)". I noticed other learners also nodding their heads with some whispering as they were all agreeing with Sandisiwe's question. My response was, "I will work with two groups in every IsiZulu lesson until the groups are all done with their collages". I saw some relief and satisfaction on their faces as they were happy that they would also get a chance to work on their collages. I handed some magazines to the groups that I would work with on that day and I also asked them to take out their magazines as some of them had brought magazines as requested.

I think working with two groups per day worked fine for me as it allowed me to manage the learners as they were working in their groups and to be able to intervene whenever it was needed. For example, I could ensure that quiet and shy learners were not overpowered by active learners so that they also could share their input in the making of their collage. It also

enabled me to get into each group and hear their ideas and I could see they were all participating as they were sharing ideas on which pictures to use and how to paste their pictures in an orderly manner to make their collages look wonderful. Although the learners were all active in their groups, some were more dominant as they were trying to make their collage more meaningful. For example, as they were working I could hear them telling each other: "Mmmh, not this one", "Cut this picture", "Let me paste this picture here"; Some were shouting, "Not there!", "Paste it there; it would look nicer". Most of the time they were consulting me, asking if the pictures they had chosen were appropriate or not, or if their collage looked beautiful.

There was a lot of interaction among the learners. I think they developed good teamwork, and they all had enthusiasm for making their collages perfect. However, I had to constantly keep on reminding them that the pictures they chose should be meaningful to the collage they were making. I was repetitively asking them about this as they were working. For example, I had to continuously ask, "What children's right does this picture symbolise?" This was to make them more careful and not to forget the purpose of the collage. It took three lessons for all groups to complete making their collages, from 3 June to 7 June 2016. As I alternated groups of learners, I had to prepare IsiZulu classwork activities to occupy the other learners who were not busy making their collages.
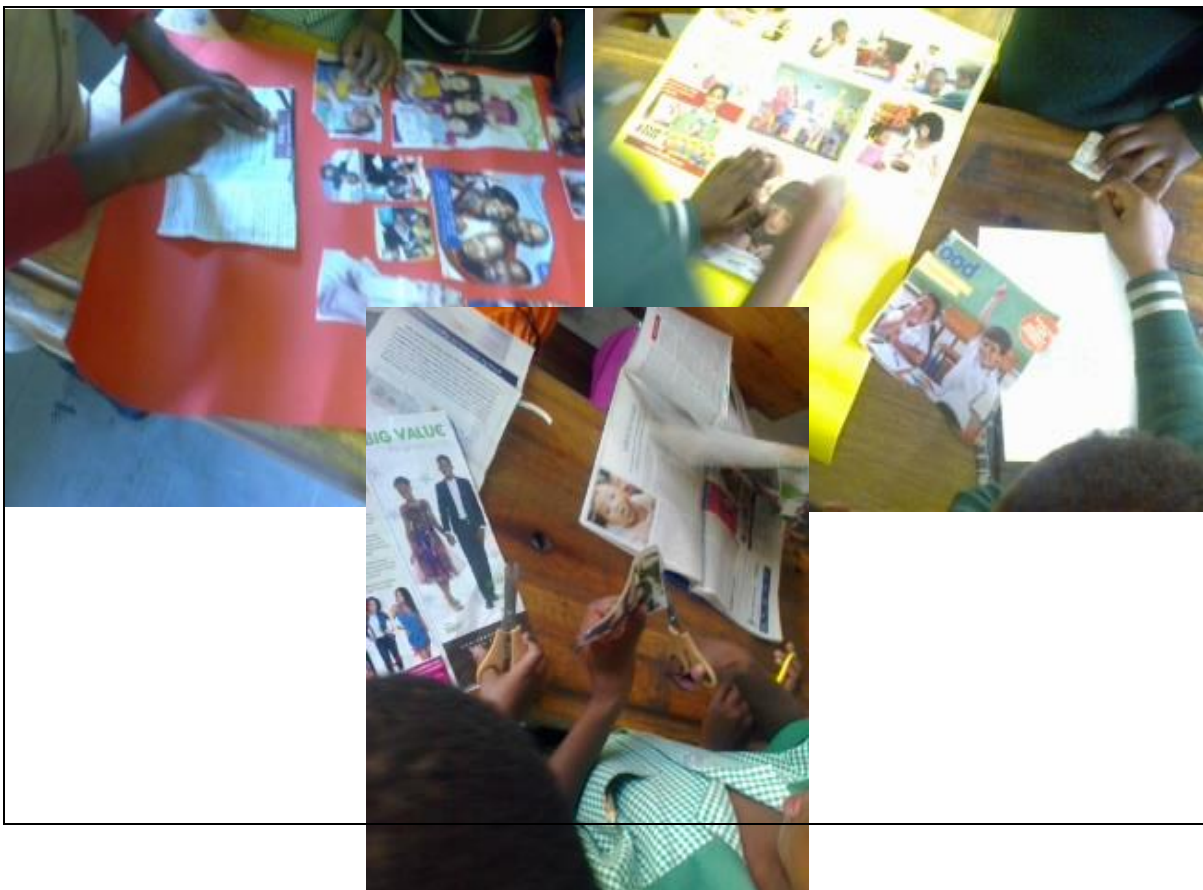
*Figure 4.7.*Learners making collages

The above photographs(Figure 4.7) portray learners working on their collages as a group and sharing ideas to complete their collages. Learners had to look for pictures from magazines that would best describe their rights.

Journal reflection (4 June 2016)

All three isiZulu lessons went well. I felt like all the learners were part of the lessons. Even the learners who were not very active in class discussions were involved and willing to make their input in the collage making. As I noticed that as they were busy with their collages they were arguing about which picture was suitable. Almost all groups tended to choose similar pictures ,such as pictures of children with adults, children eating, playing in school. This revealed to me that more learners felt that they must have parents or adults taking care of them, to have fun in school and also a right to education. As a result, this implies that most learners showed some understanding of their rights, for both school and in their community.

"Learners' Rights at School": IsiZulu lesson 4 (8 -9 June 2016)

This lesson was intended for learners to present their collages. I began my lesson by asking learners if they had anything to add on their collage and their feelings about working on the collage making. Most learners' responses were that they thought their collages looked good, and they would love to make another collage. I then thanked my learners for their dedication and the effort they had put into their work.

I then requested learners to sit in their collage making groups. I handed back their collages, and they were so pleased to see them and they were peeping at each other's collages, comparing them. I asked learners in their groups to choose two learners who would do the collage presentation. I thought they would dodge making the presentation because of fear as adults often do, but to my surprise they were eager to make their presentations. If the two learners who were chosen to present were failing to explain what right the picture represented, others in their group would quickly raise their hands to help the presenters. I designed two questions that learners needed to answer when doing their presentations. The two questions I designed were:

      1. What right does the picture symbolise regarding children's rights?

2. Do you think this right is being fulfilled?

I used these two questions to try to guide my learners to not end up telling us unnecessary things. However, to start with, most of the presenters were only answering the first question. Therefore, I kept on reminding them to answer both questions. I thought these questions would also help me to respond to my second research question, as learners would also tell me how their right is fulfilled or not fulfilled in class. For instance, I noticed that most groups had a picture of children in school either eating, or in classroom doing their school work, and in their presentation they well explained those pictures well. As one group explained,"*Ingane esikoleni zinelungelo lokukhuluma, ziphiwe ukudla*" (translation: "Children in school have the right to talk and to get food").I thought having them explain how their right was fulfilled in school would help me to evaluate myself and find means to fix the gaps where I feel there is a need for me to work out an amendment to achieve supportive relationships.

Figure 4.8. **Examples of learners' completed collage on children's rights**

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The above images (Figure4.8) display examples of completed collages done by learners in groups. The common thing that stood out in all collages was that they all had pictures of: learners wearing school uniforms or in school; children playing and having fun; children together with adults who could be their parents; and children eating or preparing food. Thus all of these pictures had significance for children's rights as learners felt that their happiness could be fulfilled if their collages were made realistic. From the above collages some of the pictures that learners included taught me and gave me different perspectives on how learners felt school should be to them. For instance, I noticed: a picture with a girl wearing a school blazer and pants; a picture with a girl wearing a graduation gown; and a picture with a teacher helping a learner. These pictures highlighted the importance of learners feeling free in school, participating or engaging in school projects, and allowing them to speak. It also showed me that as teachers we should be close to them, listening to their concerns and helping them in their needs. I saw that success is what they were aiming for.

I felt that learners were able to explain to the extent that they were able to associate pictures on the collages to what they saw in their social life. For instance, Dwala in his presentation even referred the picture of a child with adult man and woman to a child having the right to have a mother and father even if she does not have parents. He explained, "*Kumele ingane ihlale nogogo nomkhulu*" (translation: "If the both parents have passed on, the child must stay with grandmother and grandfather"). Thando added, "Miss, the child can also stay with his aunts or sisters like me". "Miss!" she explained further, "I stay with my aunt and my big brother and my uncle visit us regularly". This revealed to me that learners had understanding of their rights and how they could be fulfilled. Another example was when Thabiso highlighted in his presentation about the picture he had on his collage of children in school. He said, "Children have the right to talk in class". I asked him, "Is that right fulfilled here in our classroom?" He just looked down. I guess he was scared or uncomfortable to answer that question and Senamile responded, "Yes Miss, but sometime we are scared to talk to you, for example, if we had forgotten our homework book". As the learners were laughing about Senamile's statement, some were pointing at Zipho, who had forgotten her homework book at home on the previous day. Zipho did not inform me that she had left her book at home, but instead she used her notebook to write on. Senamile's response made me realise that I needed to do self-introspection about why some learners would fear to approach me with their problems. Hence, I had to explain to the learners that I would love it if they would come to

discuss with me every little problem they had, in order to make our class comfortable and free of fear.

Journal entry (11 June 2016)

Learners were enthusiastic to deliver their presentations. Though I could make more sense and meaning from their collage without them explaining much, their presentations were original in terms of that they presented what they had on their collage, and they did not try to interpret or make different meaning from what they had on their collage. Therefore, it made me believe and feel the sincerity of their longing and the need for fulfilling every right they mentioned. Learners' collages and presentations were for me to learn from them what they thought their rights at school and in their social life were, and to be able to find possible ways to fulfil learners needs. For instance, it was obvious that in their collages they had children in school playing, having fun and children in school either talking or writing and having meals. This requires me to do self-introspection to find out if I do allow learners to have their say or express opinions in classroom because I thought the pictures with learners talking in class were not only about learners answering teachers' questions but also allowing them to make decisions as this could make them feel happy and feel part of the class. This could cultivate teacher-learner relationships.

Extra class activity (September 2016)

This extra activity was not something that I had initially planned to do and it was not part of any formal assessment task. After having reflected on the other lessons I had taught as part of my research, I thought this would be helpful activity to do with my learners. As I normally prepare extra work for learners who complete their work quickly, I arranged this colouring activity as part of extra work to be done by learners after they had finished their classwork. To prepare the activity I made a worksheet with pictures of different things, places and people that would be found in a school.

I grouped those learners who had completed their work first. I explained to them that in this activity they would only be required to colour pictures that represented things they liked or places in school where they felt comfortable to be or people they felt safe or protected to be with. I asked them not to colour pictures that made them feel uncomfortable. For example, if they felt scared or uncomfortable to be in the toilets or scared of me as their teacher or of their

principal they would not colour those pictures. I did not want the learners to feel apprehensive that they would be marked down for colouring or not colouring particular pictures. Hence, I gave my learners leeway to choose colours and to colour any picture. I also aimed to avoid learners wanting to impress me as I would not get a true reflection of their feelings towards school.

Learners showed enthusiasm in doing their activity and in giving explanations as to why they had coloured or not coloured certain pictures. As I was marking their activity I asked them questions related to pictures they had coloured and not coloured. This was to help me to get to know reasons for what made them feel uncomfortable as they did not colour certain pictures. I noticed that most of them did not colour classroom chores such as sweeping classrooms; they also did not colour playing in the playground and the principal's office. In our little discussion I managed to get at the reasons why they feared or not like being involved in doing some activities and why they were scared of principal. For example, Mpume said, "Naughty kids are sent to principal's office to get punishment" and Simphiwe stated that he did not like cleaning the classrooms after school because his friends leave him behind. Xolani reported that his mother did not like him to clean at school because he came home dirty.

This activity made me realise that there were many factors that contribute towards effective learning in school. For instance, learning cannot be effective if learners resent some school activities or fear some parts of school. Fear could also inhibit communication between learners and teachers, which might lead to lack of the support that learner needs from their teachers. Fear could also hold them back from performing at their best level. On the other hand, I saw that the feelings of happiness and freedom could promotepositive learning.

***Figure 4.9.*Examples of learners' completed colouring activity.**

The above examples of the completed colouring task (Figure 4.9) reveal the feelings of learners in terms of how they feel towards: classroom chores; places in school, such as toilets and the principal's office; me as their teacher; and working or playing with others. In looking at the above pictures I could see that both learners were scared of the toilets, and one learner was scared of the principal's office and did not like cleaning the classroom. The other learner did not like playing with others on the playground.

Journal entry (7 September 2016)

I figured out that issues such as fear might have a negative impact on children's school attendance as it may lead them not to come to school. Simphiwe and Xolani's response reminded me of one learner who I taught in grade 3. She used to fake sickness when it was her group's turn to clean the classroom. It is important that these issues are addressed in school as some learners could drop school because there are things they do not like or fear in school. I felt that learners were honest when they were doing this activity, as they did not look for my approval. They were happy with what they had done; it was clear to me that they were satisfied with their work.

My collage representation of what I have learnt from my learners

I created a collage as a way to show and reflect on what I had discovered through engaging my learners. From my research, I learnt more about who my learners are, what their expectations are, and what would make them feel happy and comfortable. Creating a collage enabled me to show and express more than I could have said in words or in writing. Van Schalkwyk (2010) explained that collage making is one way to provide are presentation of what "we think and say . . . and do below the level of awareness" (p. 676). This this means that a collage can represent thoughts, feeling and emotions that we might not have said in words. In looking at the pictures used in a collage, we can "[bring] to light or [disclose], especially by a process of questioning, rich and vivid stories of" lived experiences (Van Schalkwyk, 2010, p. 677).

My collage (Figure 4.10) shows what I have learnt and discovered from my learners. The image of the child looking at a microscope shows me how learners have passion and enthusiasm for learning; they always want to learn but we as teachers sometimes limit learners by thinking that they are not capable. Learners usually try to do their best with every activity. For example, I remember when I gave them the activity on colouring pictures of things, people and places at school I believe they did their best and they were happy that I was not fussy about anything and not also trying to point out mistakes they make. I accepted what I got from them as I was ticking and putting stars and that motivated other learners to complete the task.

Figure 4.10. **My collage: "What I have learnt from my learners".**

I included a picture of flowers to show how learners always want to please, to be always look good and appreciated by teachers. This connects to the word "creative" in the collage and the picture of someone drawing. I learnt that learners like to take "pride" in whatever they are doing and they feel disappointed if they are not recognised for their efforts.

Learners also want to be treated as individuals and not just to be grouped with others. Being understood is also very important to them as I can see when I at look the picture where the child talks to someone whom I think is his father; the child is talking and the father is listening. This shows that children like to be listened to and to be understood, whatever message they are trying convey. But many times, we as teachers fail to listen to learners, and I believe that learners share information with adults because they think it is important to them. For instance, in most of my research activities, I allowed my learners to speak and present. I think they all enjoyed getting a chance to talk or to express their thoughts and feelings about issues we were discussing, especially because the issues we were discussing concerned them. This connects to the word "intelligence". Learners are intelligent and we should not undermine their reasoning capabilities.

"Let's all respect each other". I put those words in the collage because that in most of the group activities my learners worked on they were willing to work together as a group and to share ideas to accomplish the given task successfully. This is also shown by the images of children working together. I learnt that learners can be like a small family when they love and support each other. This is symbolised by the image of a family.

In the picture with mother and a child, the mother is giving the child a flower, and this picture demonstrates that learners want to receive love from adults. This relates to the word "love" in the collage. We teachers always expect to receive love from our learners, but I have figured out that it is important that we also show love to our learners regardless of their academic performance.

There are pictures showing learners looking happy. I think they can become unhappy when they are ill-treated by peers and teachers at school. This connects with the word "emotional". I

remember when they had to mention children's rights and as we were discussing the right of a child to have parents, one learner explained that she does not have a mother but she lives with her granny and more learners expressed that they also live with grandparents or aunties and uncles. This made more aware of how they need emotional support from the adults in their lives.

My collage presentation discussion

I presented my collage to my critical friends (Ntokozo and Khulekani) and my research supervisor (Dr Kathleen). Dr Kathleen asked my peers if they had something to add to my collage presentation. Ntokozo replied, "I like the part that children are always happy." She explained further that learners love to laugh and share jokes but we as teachers limit their happiness; for example, we keep on reminding them of classroom rules not to make noise. Therefore we expect learners to read our mood every minute. Ntokozo emphasised this point as she added that as teachers expect learners to adapt to our moods. For instance, we want learners to be happy when we are happy.

Khulekani suggested that as teachers we should be careful as learners might want to please us as teachers because they have expectations that they might gain more favours than the other learners. Therefore, he argued that it is important that we teachers make learners know that they are all special and they are all loved.

Dr Kathleen proposed that the use of flowers in my collage symbolised love and also that children are like flowers; they are beautiful and also delicate and thus, they are easily damaged; they need to be looked after and we can then get great pleasure and joy from them. She suggested that flowers being placed in the centre of the collage resembled a metaphor that we teachers need to centre our teaching on the learners. Form this, I realised that learners are flowers as they are beautiful gifts that we are grooming; we sometimes tend to forget that because of frustrations and being exhausted as our work is demanding.

Dr Kathleen asked me about the most important learning from my collage. I responded:

> I think I have learnt that children like to be treated as individuals, to be noted and recognised for every good try, but we teachers tend to group them. Learners always want to feel important. Learners want to be loved; it is important that we show love them. I have also learnt that they are intelligent and they are good judges of characters;

they can see that if a teacher is supportive or has a negative attitude towards them. We must also not limit learners, it is important that we let them have a voice in our classroom.

Ntokozo also added that learners really like to be treated as individuals as she pointed out that in most cases when you as a teacher give a compliment to one learner, others also expect you to compliment them as well, to recognise their skills or talents. Dr Kathleen also shared a story about when she was still teaching learners in school. She said that she wrote letters to all learners telling them what she thought they were like and what they were good at. Because it was the end of the year she wrote the letters with her address and she felt that learners really appreciated receiving letters as some even replied to the letters. Thus, she was also emphasising the point that learners like to be treated as individuals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I responded to my second research question, "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships?" I described how I involved all my grade 1 learners in my research so that I could learn from them about their understandings of supportive teacher-learner relationships and their needs with respect to building a conducive learning environment. I also showed how I created a collage to make visible my learning and how I enriched my learning in discussion with my critical friends and research supervisor.

I have learnt a lot from different activities that I did in class with my grade 1 learners; I believe for me it was a self-development in relation to the aim of my study, which was to learn about cultivating supportive relationships with my learners. The lessons I conducted with my learners helped me to learn and gain more understanding of who my learners are and what their needs and expectations from me are. For instance, the Life Skills lessons were aimed at finding out how learners felt about school as a whole and the drawing each one did of the teacher that she or he thought would be the best teacher to teach her or him grade 1 helped me to get to know what learners want from me as their teacher. I think it also helped me to become closer to my learners. The Mathematics lessons were about learning about learners' attitude and feelings towards each other and me as their class teacher. These lessons were to assist me to do self-introspection on how I could improve towards being a supportive teacher. Lastly, in the IsiZulu lessons I aimed to improve learner relationships as they had to

work together on collage making. I also wanted to find more on how I could make learners feel happy and welcome in school, especially in my class. I strongly believe that knowing more about my learners' expectations and needs can eliminate fear from learners, as sometimes you may find that in a class half of the class fears to approach the teacher with anything that concerns their problems and thus that inhibits healthy teaching and learning.

With these few lessons and class activities I learnt that learners, especially grade 1 learners as they are still young, are like little plants that need to be nurtured, be loved and cared for. They are so dependent and attached to adults and they trust them for their safety, protection; they constantly need adult approval.Roorda, Koomen, Spilt and Oort (2011) emphasised that supportive teachers can serve help learners to feel secure, which enables children to explore the school environment and become engaged in learning activities. Trust is important, as young children want someone who will be close to them so that they can speak openly about anything that concerns their lives. As a result, it is important for them that they can trust me as their teacher, and that I can be always available for them to listen attentively to their concerns and worries and be able to support them. In that way they are likely to feel loved, happy and welcome in school.

I also believe that to cultivate supportive relationships between a teacher and learners, the teacher needs to allow learners to feel part of school by allowing and giving them chance to voice their opinions and sometimes to make decisions as appropriate. As Klem and Connell (2004) explained, "students also need to feel they can make important decisions for themselves, and the work they are assigned has relevance to their present or future lives" (p. 262). I have become more aware that young children are able to make decisions and express views and that we should not undercut their capabilities. Learners also need to be given time and space to work and play together. I anticipate that this would make learners feel like they are a small family as this would strengthen love and care among each other. Additionally, I have learnt that learners like to be treated as individuals and to be recognised for their uniqueness and their efforts.

In Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, I offer a review of my dissertation. I reflect on what I learnt from my self-study research. Lastly, I consider what I will do differently as a consequence of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTING ON MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

Introduction

My research focus was on supportive relationships between teachers and learners. I anticipated that supportive relationships could create a comfortable, warm, and welcoming environment for learners and also might enhance academic performance of learners. The focus of my study was influenced by my past school experiences; in looking back at these experiences, I felt that many teachers were distant from learners, in the sense that they did not seem to take into account social and emotional issues that affected learning. This distance also meant that it was not easy for us learners to approach these teachers about any problems we had. In my understanding, supportive teacher-learner relationships could develop through teachers trying to reach out to children's needs by listening to them and encouraging them to express themselves. I anticipated that this could help learners to feel understood, loved, and welcome at school. I therefore, aimed to better understand and evaluate my relationships with my grade 1 learners and to improve my teaching practice by cultivating supportive relationships with my learners.

In the previous chapter, Chapter Four, I responded to my second research question: "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner relationships? "In responding to this question, I learnt that it is important that as a teacher I get closer to learners by listening, understanding, empathising and providing social-emotional support.

In this concluding chapter, Chapter Five, I review my dissertation by briefly explaining what was covered in the previous chapters. I reflect on what I have learnt from the study. Lastly, I explain what I would like to do in future as a consequence of my self-study research.

Review of the dissertation

In Chapter One, I started off by clarifying how composing a haiku poem helped me to discover the focus of my study, which was on positive teacher-learner relationships. I also revealed how my enthusiasm for the study was driven by recalling some of my own disagreeable school experiences in which my fellow learners and I experience a lack of positive support from some of our teachers. Furthermore, I listed and explained my two research questions. I continued to explicate my interpretation of a sociocultural theoretical perspective and the two key concepts of teacher-learner relationships and teacher learning that informed my study.

In Chapter Two, I offered a comprehensive account of my self-study research process. I gave reasons for my choice of a self-study research methodology. I further described the location of the study, as well as the research participants and my critical friends (my two fellow Masters' students). Additionally, I gave details of how data were generated using varied research practices. I further consider meaning making, ethical issues and validity. I then explain how I addressed certain research challenges. To close, I offered my main learning about doing self-study research, which was that doing self-study research helped me to understand that, as a teacher, I need to keep learning in collaboration with colleagues and my learners.

In Chapter Three, I addressed my first research question: "What can I learn from my personal history about supportive relationships?" I related my personal history concerning memories of supportive and unsupportive relationships from my early childhood, my primary schooling and my high school years. To illuminate my personal history, I incorporated visual images of artefacts and drawings. I also revealed how I represented my personal history narrative through the medium of collage. I depicted how sharing my two collages with my research supervisor and my critical friends helped me to conceptualise my response to my research question. I ended with my core learning from remembering supportive and unsupportive relationships in my personal history, which was that it is vital for me as a teacher to develop my capacity for listening to and empathising with my learners in the interests of cultivating supportive relationships and creating a more conducive and warm environment for learning.

In Chapter Four, I communicated how I engaged my class of 37 grade 1 learners to help me in answering my second research question: "How I can cultivate supportive teacher-learner

relationships?" I disclosed how, for the purposes of my research, I prepared, taught and studied Life Skills lessons, Mathematics lessons and IsiZulu lessons with my grade 1 learners. I presented illustrations of learners' classwork and extracts from my reflective journal to disclose my thoughts and feelings and to show how my teacher learning progressed. I then revealed how I composed a collage to consolidate and make evident what I discovered through engaging the learners and how I intensified this learning through discussion with my research supervisor and critical friends. Lastly, I expressed my central learning from engaging my grade 1 learners. I explained how I had learnt that young children need to be given time and space to make decisions, to express their views and to work and play together. Another important learning was that young children long to be recognised for their distinctiveness and their efforts.

Personal-professional learning

In doing my research I made discoveries about my learners, about myself and about teaching and learning. Adopting a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning helped me to understand that learning is culturally and socially constructed, which means that it is important to pay attention to learners' social and cultural backgrounds and circumstances, so that I can draw on what they already know to stimulate their thinking and learning and to offer them appropriate support (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; McMurtry, 2015). It also allowed me to extend my learning and learn more about how learners' sociocultural backgrounds and the relationships that they have formed with their families and communities can impact on how teachers and learners form their relationships (Harro, 2000).

I realised that learners often have problems and that they depend on adults for solutions and support. Thus, it made me more conscious that listening and empathising are important capacities that I need to improve on in order to provide necessary support to my learners that would make them feel loved, special and welcome (Jairam, 2009; Lindo et al., 2014). I also discovered that encouraging learners to voice out their opinions on certain things, for example on the design of learning activities or compiling of classroom rules, can make learners feel proud, give them confidence and, most of all, make them feel part of the class and comfortable in their classroom and school (Banks et al., 2001; Roache & Lewis, 2011).

My self-study research has made me become conscious of the importance of treating learners as individuals, meaning that as a teacher I should know and recognise each and every learner in my class; for instance their talents, skills or anything that they are good at. It is also helpful to know of specific social-emotional issues learners are experiencing (Jairam, 2009). It is vital as well to reward or appreciate learners so that they know that you as a teacher recognise their talents and their good deeds (Roache & Lewis, 2011). That makes them feel proud and motivated to always try to do better.

Conducting this research has had some positive outcomes for my learners, as I have noticed that a few of my shy and reserved learners are now more willing to participate in class discussions. I have also noticed that some learners feel freer to come to me and share their worries, especially regarding problems they encounter outside school. For example, recently one of my learners came to me and told me that her mother had lost her job a few months back and now she was coming to school sometimes without having had breakfast. She then asked me to add her name to the group of learners who receive breakfast at school. This made me realise that my research taught me how to reach out to my learners as they now seem to feel it is easier to approach me with any kind of problem.

My research has enabled me as a teacher to be self-developed, motivated, innovative, and optimistic toward teaching and learning (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). I have learnt the importance of using different teaching strategies; for example, using ice breakers when introducing a lesson helps children to feel calm and creates a comfortable environment for learning. Reading about the concept of teacher learning (Easton, 2008; Kelly, 2006) helped me to understand that as teachers we should involve ourselves in developmental workshops and form collaborative teachers groups to exchange ideas and help each other to enhance our professional teaching. In addition, taking a sociocultural perspective on the study made me realise the importance of building collaborative teamwork in schools. It is vital that as teachers we work as a team for the best interests of learners, to share ideas and help each other if we experience challenges (Easton, 2008). I have learned that teacher learning and supportive teacher-learner relationships are interrelated concepts; one cannot cultivate teacher-learner relationships without engaging oneself in a reflective learning process of improving one's teaching (Newberry, 2013). Therefore, cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationships requires a teacher learning process of professional self-development.

Methodological learning

My study was informed by teachers' self-study methodology (Samaras, 2011). Self-study methodology requires the researcher to learn about her teaching practice with the aim of changing and improving it. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras(2015) highlighted the importance of critical friends in building a constructive self-study. Hence, self-study research methodology values the opinions of others who share similar interests in order to enrich your professional learning. In my study I worked with my two critical friends who were invaluable as they helped to me gain new perspectives on my teaching practice and my research. Since sometimes it was hard for us to see our own mistakes, working together helped us to share ideas and critique each other's work in an encouraging way.

I applied several research practices that helped me to generate data to respond to my research questions. I learnt that artistic activities such as drawings and collages are useful ways to learn about and reveal "hard to put in words" feelings and thoughts (Weber, 2014). Visual images can help to explain further how one feels.

Reflective journal writing helped me to reflect and to learn about my learners and my teaching practice (Masinga, 2012). For instance, reflecting after each lesson helped me to breakdown the lesson and look for meaningful learning about my learners'needs, such as things that would make them feel happy, loved and comfortable, and also any social-emotional issues. I believe that regular reflective journal writing enabled me to learn to improve my teaching practice. However, I did find it hard at the beginning because I felt I was not sure of which information was worthy to be considered as part of my research. It was also quite difficult to dig deep and reveal my past experiences in my journal writing; at times I felt they would bring shame and not make sense for someone else.

Audio-recording was also helpful. I discovered that audio recording can help the researcher to listen carefully to every detail of what that was said during research discussions or presentations. This listening can enable the researcher to fully engage and think deeply about what was said and also about the emotions revealed (Masinga, 2012).

There area few things that I wish I had known before I started my research, such as the importance of being organised. As Samaras (2011) advised, to embark on self-study research needs careful planning, time management, filing and keeping records of every little detail. I also wish I knew that self-study research needs a researcher to be always alert, and keep on reading more and more.

For someone who also wishes to do self-study research, I would advise her to be critical, meaning that you should always try question everything about your teaching practice. It is also important to allow others and yourself to criticise your teaching practice and to understand that there is always room for development. Thus, allowing criticism enables you to change and improve on your teaching practice.

Moving forward

In future, I would like to do further research on this topic of supportive teacher-learner by involving my fellow teachers in a collective inquiry. I believe that collective research would enable me to involve more teachers to discuss and share ideas on helping each other. I anticipate that it would empower us and allow more teachers to have the opportunity to discover the significance of nurturing positive relationships between themselves and learners. It could also have a great impact on many learners.

Conclusion

From my self-study research, I have discovered that learners should be the centre of learning and that it is vital that we teachers consider carefully any social-emotional factors that might inhibit teaching and learning. It might be difficult for a teacher to understand those factors if she is distant from learners. Thus, learners need to feel close to us teachers; this means they need to be sure that they can trust and rely on us to listen to them and take seriously their little needs. Hence, a key part of teacher self-development is to be able give yourself time to constantly learn about your learners' needs and concerns and to make changes in response to those needs and concerns that will improve teaching and learning.

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Appendix A

<u>Discussion Topics for discussion with two former school friends</u>

1. Explain your primary or high school experience with respect to relationships with your teachers?

2. How would you describe supportive and unsupportive teacher-learner relationships?

3. How would you describe your relationship with your best teacher?

4. What motivated you to keep on going to school?

5. What demotivated you at school?

6. How would you describe your relationship with your worst teacher?

7. What kind of teacher would you have liked to have had? Why?

Appendix B

Discussion Topics for learners to discuss their drawings

1. What do you like about your teacher?

2. What is it that she does better than any other teacher?

Discussion Topics for learners to discuss their collage activity

1. Tell us what is in your collage

2. Tell us why you decided to choose those pictures

Appendix C

Life Skills lesson plan: one

Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: My school
Time: 45 minutes- day 1
Life Skills CAPS Document outcomes:
- Name of school, teacher, principal
- Rules and routines at school

Objectives: 1. To identify things learners like and do not like about school
      2. To assess my relationships with my grade 1 learners

Resources: A4 colour charts, colour pens, pencils, rubbers, charts, chalk board and life skills text books

INTRODUCTION
Teacher will read a story about Thuli's first day at school. Teacher will ask learners few questions on the story and their first day at school, for instance, how they felt on their first day at school.

DEVELOPMENT

Whole class discussion
Teacher will ask learners to talk about the things they like and do not like at school, and what they would like their school to be like.

Class activity
Learners will be asked by teacher to colour the school and write the name of the learner they are sitting next to

Reflection_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix D

Life Skills lesson plan: Two

Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: My school
Time: 45 minutes- day 2
Life Skills CAPS Document outcomes:
- Name of school, teacher, principal
- Rules and routines at school

Objectives: 1. To identify things learners like and do not like about school
      2. To assess my relationships with my grade 1 learners

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Resources: A4 colour charts, colour pens, pencils, rubbers, charts, chalk board and life skills text books

INTRODUCTION
Teacher together with learners will discuss the previous lesson, what learners find interesting in their activity or if they enjoyed their activity.

DEVELOPMENT
Teacher will paste a school poster; learners will tell what they see on the poster and explain what they see in the poster. Referring from the poster teacher will ask learners to explain how learners find school, for example boring, or ask if they are enjoying being at school. The teacher will ask learners what they would like to implement in the school that is in school poster and why.

Class activity
Learners will be given an individual task to draw a picture of a teacher they would like to have.

Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix E

Life Skills lesson plan: Three

Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: My school
Time: 45 minutes- day 3
Life Skills CAPS Document outcomes:
- Name of school, teacher, principal
- Rules and routines at school

Objectives: 1. To identify things learners like and do not like about school
           2. To assess my relationships with my grade 1 learners
Resources: A4 colour charts, colour pens, pencils, rubbers, charts, chalk board and life skills text books
INTRODUCTION: Teacher will paste a school poster to remind learners of a previous lesson, together they will recap what they had discussed about the poster

DEVELOPMENT
Teacher explanation
Teacher will explain to learners why school is important, why it is important that they come to school every school day and also why they are supposed to do their school work.
Teacher will instil the importance of school, and teacher will ask learners to give five things they like and do not like about school

Class activity
Learners will be asked to present and explain their drawing of a teacher that they would like to have as their teacher.

Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix F

Zulu lesson plan: One
Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: School
Time: 45 minutes Day 1

Zulu Jikaimfundo outcomes:
- Where to find different places in the school -include toilet, office, play areas
- Classroom routines and rules
- How I get to school

Objectives: 1. To enable learners to understand why school should be a safe and protective place
      for them as learners
        2. To assess learner's feeling towards schooling

Resources: colour pens, pencils, rubbers, charts, magazines, chalk board and life skills text books
INTRODUCTION
Teacher will ask learners to sing a song on future stars "thinasizinkanyezi". Teacher will then ask learners about the meaning of a song; teacher will also guide learners on their responses.

DEVELOPMENT
Whole class discussion
Teacher will ask learners to talk about the things that should be implemented in school to make them feel safe and protected
Activity
Learners will be asked by teacher to work in groups of five to make a collage on things they like at school

Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix G

Zulu lesson plan: Two
Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: My school
Time: 60 minutes Day 2

Zulu Jikaimfundo Document outcomes:
- Where to find different places in the school -include toilet, office, play areas
- Classroom routines and rules
- How I get to school

Objectives: 1. To enable learners to understand why school should be a safe and protective placefor them as learners
2. To assess learners feeling towards schooling

Resources: colour pens, pencils, rubbers, charts, magazines, chalk board and life skills text books
INTRODUCTION
Teacher will tell a story about the rights of a child at school. Teacher will ask learners if they feel that they are enjoying any rights mentioned in the story and the children's right they would like to add in the story.
Teacher and learners
Teacher together with learners will talk about their school expectations, for instance, things learners or teacher expect from school and how those things should be catered for. Teacher will write on the board learners' suggestion and her suggestions and they will all together discuss how these suggestions could be made possible to take place in classroom.
Conclusion
Learners will revise the rights they learnt about in the story. Teacher will instil the importance of the possibility of learners and her expectations to take place in their classroom.
Activity
Teacher will ask learners to present their collages
Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____
Appendix H
Mathematics lesson plan: 1
Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: Number relationships
Time: 60 minutes Day 2
Mathematics JikaImfundo Document outcomes:
- Learners be able to count from one to fifty
- Learners to understand number relationship, place value, compare, and order numbers
- Learners be able to recognize numbers from one to twenty

Objectives: 1. To enable learners to understand the number place value and how numbers are related to each other

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2.To assess learners relationship with other learners and teachers
3.To assess learners on how they think they are valued by peers and teachers

Resources: Colour pens, pencils, rubbers, counters, magazines, chalk board, number chart and Mathematics text books
INTRODUCTION
Learners together with a teacher they will count in ones from 0 to 35, in twos from 2 to 50.
Teacher and learners
Teacher will explain to learners the place value of numbers from 0 up to 20, for example 2 come before 3 and 7 is after 6. Leaners will use their counters to compare the value of numbers so that they can see and understand which number has more value than the other for example,13 has less counters than 15.
Conclusion
Teacher will writes the numbers up to ten on the board and leave some other numbers out and she will pick few learners to fill the missing numbers on the board
Activity
Teacher will ask learners to choose number from one to ten that they think will explain how they think they are valued by teachers and peers.

Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____
Appendix I
Mathematics lesson plan: 2
Grade: 1
Theme: Environment
Topic: Number relationships
Time: 60 minutes Day 2

Mathematics Jikaimfundo document outcomes:
- Learners be able to count from one to fifty
- Learners to understand number relationship, place value, compare, and order numbers
- Learners be able to recognize numbers from one to twenty

Objectives:1. To enable learners to understand the place value of numbers and how numbers are related to each other
2.To assess learners relationship with other learners and teachers
        3.To assess learners on how they think they are valued by peers and teachers

Resources: Colour pens, pencils, rubbers, counters, magazines, chalk board, number chart and Mathematics text books
INTRODUCTION
Learners together with a teacher they will count in ones from 0 to 35, in fives and tens up to 50.
Teacher and learners
Teacher will ask learners to solve few practical or oral sums, for example questions teacher would ask maybe if Olwethu was number 9 which number will be before and after Olwethu? Learner will show the numbers they have chosen and they will shortly explain what that

specifically number mean to them in relation to their relationship with his or her peers and teachers.

Conclusion

Teacher together with learners will sing a song on numbers 123 pick up the stick

Reflection:_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix J

Informed consent letter for learners' parents/ guardians

250380 Mangangeni

Mariannhill

Dylom Road

3624

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Nontuthuko Queeneth Phewa. I am currently studying for a Master's in Education at University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. I am conducting a research on cultivating supportive teacher-learner relationship with my grade 1 learners. The research objectives of my study are to learn from my personal history about supportive relationships and to cultivate supportive relationships with my grade 1 learners.

To collect information for my research study, I would like to work with my grade 1learners. I have selected my learners because the study requires me to explore strategies that I could use to cultivate supportive relationships with my grade 1 learners. To gather data I will use the following data collection methods which will include grade 1 learners in providing contribution to my study.

Hello grade 1, I am doing a research on how I can cultivate supportive teacher learner relationship with you grade 1 and I want you to be part of my study

In my study I want you to draw a picture of a teacher you would like have as your grade 1 teacher and I would like you to present to us your drawing like


why you think the teacher you have drawn would be your best teacher. I will also want you to work in groups to make a collage where you will cut and

paste pictures from magazines or newspapers of things you like about school and I will also ask you to present your collage. I will audio record both drawing

and collage presentation, I will also audio record my five teaching lesson with you.
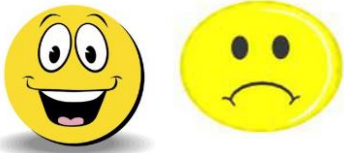
Are you happy or unhappy to be part of my study?

Data generation activities are:

<u>Drawing</u>

I will ask learners to draw a picture of the teacher they would like to have

<u>Collage</u>

I will ask learners to cut and paste pictures of the things they like in school

<u>Audio recording</u>

I will record learners as they participate in their drawing activity and as they will be discussing what they have drawn and their collage.

I will audio record my three life skills and two isiZulu lessons on the topic of "my school"and two Mathematics lessons on number relations with the grade 1learners.

<u>Please note that:</u>

- Learners' identity will be protected as their names will not be revealed in the study.
- Any information they have given will not be used against them, and data collected will be used for research purposes only.
- Participation is voluntary; learners have a choice to participate or to withdraw from participating in the research. They will not be pernalised for not participating. Although all learners are expected to participate in class activities, the class work of those who do not give consent will not be used as a source of data.
- Learners' involvement is purely for academic purposes only, there is no financial benefit.
- Research findings will be discussed with learners using drawn pictures, which will briefly explain the benefits of supportive teacher-learner relationships.

I can be contacted at:nontuthu123@gmail.com or 071 030 7451

My supervisor is Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is located in Education Studies on Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Email: Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za; Tel: 031-260 3460

The contact person in the research office is: Mr PremlallMohum- senior administrator office. Email :mohunp@ukzn.ac.za ; tel-031-260 4557

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours faithfully

Miss Phewa Q.N

DECLARATION

I ………………………………………………………………… (Full names of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to my child or ward participating in the research project: *Cultivating supportive teacher learner relationships with grade one learners.*

I understand that I am free to withdraw my child/ward from the project at any time, should I wish to do so.

I hereby provide consent to:

Use of my child /ward's drawing and collage

      YES/NO

Audio-recording of my child /ward's discussions on a drawing and collage activity

      YES/NO

Audio-recording of my child's contributions to three Life Skills, Two Mathematics and two isiZulu lesson

        YES/NO

Signature of parent/ guardian……………………………

Appendix J

Incwadiyokucelaimvumeukubaumntwanaabeingxenyeyalolucwaningo

250380 Mangangeni

Mariannhill

Dylom Road

3624

Mzali/ umbhekeleliwomntwana

Igama lami nginguNontuthuko Queeneth Phewa. Ngingumfundi waseNyunivesithi yakwaZulu Natali kwikundla yaseEdgewood eSouth Africa ngenza iMasters yezemfundo. Ngenzaucwaniningomaqondananokwakhaubudlelwaneobuphakathibukathishanezinganezesik ole.

Ucwaningoengilwenzayolumayelananokufundangomlandowamingisakhula,

kanyenokubhekaindlelaengingayisebenzisaukwakhaubudlelwanephakathikwaminabantwanae ngibafundisayo.

Ukuqoqa ulwazi engiludingayo ukwenza uncwaningo, ngizosebenzisa lamathuluzi alandelayo:

Ukudweba/Drawing

Abafundi ngizobacela ukuba badwebe isithombe sathisha abamthandayo.

Kholaji/ Collage

Abafundingizobacelabenzeikholajilaphobezonamathiselaizithmbezezintoabazithandayoesikol enisabo.

Ukubaqopha

Abafundingizobaqophabechazangabakudwebile,nabakwenzilekwikholajiyabo. Ngizophindangiziqophekanyenaboabafundingibafundisakumalesiniayisikhombisakwisifundos amaKhonoEmpilo, Izibalo Kanye nesiZulu.

Nakhuokubalulekileokumeleukwazi:

- Ngiyaqinekisangithiamagamaabafundiazogcinwaeyimfihlokululoluncwaningo.

- Imininingwaneyomntwanaizogcinwaiminyakaemihlanuendaweniephephile, beseiyashabalaliswa.
- Kuyilungelolakhomzaliukubaumntwanawakhoahlanganyelanomaangahlanganyelikulolucwaningo.
- Ukusebenzisanaukuqoqaulwazikululoncwaningoangekelukwakheleinzuzo, lumayelananokuthuthukisaulwazi.
- Imiphumelayalolucwaningoizoxwanabafundingokusebenzisaizithombeezidwentshiweukutshengisaubuhlenokubalulekakobudlelwaneobuhleobuphakathikwathishanomntwana.

Ngiyatholakala: kwi-emeyili ethi-nontuthu123@gmail.com noma kumakhal'ekhukhwini-0710307451

Umphathiwami u Dkt Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan otholakalaesikhungwenisezemfundoephakemei-UnivesithiyaKwaZulu-Natali, enkundleniyase-Edgewood. i-imeyiliyakhe ithi-Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za noma 031-260 3460

Umphathiwase-ofisilocwaningoumnumzanePremlallMohunutholakalakwiimeyili ethi-mohunp@ukzn.ac.za nomaenambeniyocingo ethi-031-260 4557

Ngiyabongaukuthiuzibandakanyekululoncwaningo

Yiminaozithobayo
Miss Phewa Q.N

Amazwiafungelwe

Mina ……………………………………………………………………………

(amagamaapheleleomzalinomaumbhekiwomntwana)

ngiyavumafuthingiyaqondangakhokonkeokushicilelwekulomqulukanyenezinhlelozocwaningo

,

ngiyanikelaukubaumntwanwamiazibandakanyekulolucwaningokanyenokulethaizethulozakhe

ocwaningweniolumayelananesihlokoesithi: ukwakha ubudlelwane phakathi kuka thisha

nomfundi.

Ngiyaqondaukuthingivumelekileukuhoxisaumntwanawamikulolucwaningonomaininiumangifi

sa.

Ngiyavuma:

Ukuba kusetshenziswa imidwebo kanye nekholaji yomntwana wami   YEBO/CHA

Ukubaumntwanawamiaqoshwelaphoechazangomsebenziwakheawudwebilekanyenangekholaji

yakheayenzile   YEBO/CHA

UkubaumntwanawamiangaqoshalaphoefakaimibonoyakhekumalesiniamathathuAmakhonoEm

pilo, ambili eZibalo Kanye namabili esiZulu

                                                         YEBO/CHA

Ukusayina komzali noma umbheki womntwana

…………………………………………..

USUKU…………………………………………………………..

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Appendix K

Informed consent letter for former school friends

<div align="right">
250380 Dylom Road
Mangangeni
3624
</div>

3 August 2015

My name is Nontuthuko Phewa and I am currently studying towards a master's degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the requirements of the degree, I am required to complete a research project. The research objectives of my study are to learn from my personal history about supportive relationships and to cultivate supportive relationships with my grade 1 learners. To collect information for my research study, I would like to work with two of my former school friends, one from primary school and the other from high school. Since my study requires me to learn from my personal history about supportive teacher learner relationships, therefore, friends will be able to prompt some memories of past school supportive and unsupportive experiences. During discussions sessions I will take down notes and use an audio recorder to record our discussions.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be asked to share your own perspective on supportive and unsupportive school experiences

- You will be asked to share your own experiences of primary or high school

- The discussion will take approximately two hours

Risks of Participation in the study

There are no known physical, economic, social or psychological risks associated with participation in the discussion.

Benefits of Participation in the study

There are no guaranteed benefits for you; however you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own involvement in providing information required by this study.

Confidentiality

The information gathered from this will be kept as confidential as possible. The participants' real name or any identifiable information will not be used in the reports and all files, but information will be used for academic research reports.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the process any time. At any time you may choose not to answer any questions, if you feel uncomfortable.

Consent

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or you may withdraw your participation at any point without penalty.

My supervisor is Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is located in Education Studies on Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Email: 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 ; tel-031-260 4557

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours faithful

Miss Phewa Q.N

DECLARATION

I ……………………………………………………………………. (Full names of participant)

Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of research project, and I consent to participating in the research project: *Cultivating supportive teacher learner relationships with grade one learners.*

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I wish to do so.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my discussion on my school experience. YES/NO

Signature of participant……………………………