

**TEACHING ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION TO ISIZULU-SPEAKING
LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL: A SELF-STUDY**

BY

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

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This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval.



.....
DR KATHLEEN PITHOUSE-MORGAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my self-study was to improve my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners. I was concerned because learners in the secondary school where I teach were underperforming in English oral communication. Therefore, I decided to examine my personal history to explore how my experiences of learning oral communication might have influenced how I was teaching my learners. I also wanted to develop new teaching strategies to enhance learners' English oral communication. I employed dialogism as a theoretical lens to better understand the concept of oral communication. My qualitative self-study took place in the Grade 10 classroom where I was teaching. I was the main participant. 42 Grade 10 learners and five critical friends (fellow Master of Education students) were the other participants. I employed two self-study research methods to generate data. The personal history self-study method enabled me to explore how a better understanding of my past learning and teaching experiences could enhance my present and future teaching. In addition, I used the developmental portfolio self-study method to keep track of the effectiveness of the new teaching strategies that I experimented with. The data sources for this study included my reflective journal, photographs, audio-recordings of my teaching and learners' responses, lesson plans, learners' written work, marking rubrics and audio-recordings of my conversations with critical friends (my fellow students). Four themes emerged as key to the teaching of oral communication: (a) oral exchanges; (b) socio-cultural contexts; (c) emotions and relationships; and (d) multisensory learning processes. In exploring my personal history and current teaching practice, I realised that the spirit of Ubuntu (the idea that people are not just individuals but live and care for each other in a community) is embodied in these themes. My self-study research enabled me to re-examine my past and present personal and professional experiences. I found that the way I had learned English oral communication at school had impacted negatively on my own teaching. Additionally, I became mindful of how some of my teaching strategies were limiting my learners' progress. Through my study, I discovered some creative and participatory strategies to enhance the teaching of English oral communication.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
BEd (Tech)	Bachelor of Educational Technology
BPead	Bachelor of Pedagogics
CAI	Computer Aided Instruction
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
HoD	Head of Department
JC	Junior Certificate
LAC	Language Across the Curriculum
MEd	Master of Education
NGO	Non-government organization
QLP	Quality Learning Programme
Sached	South African Council of Education
SSA	Sub-Standard A
SSB	Sub-Standard B
STD	Secondary Teachers' Diploma
TDS	Teacher Development Studies

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

In this self-study dissertation, I scrutinise my teaching of English oral communication in a secondary school that abounds with IsiZulu-speaking learners. I investigate whether, after 27 years as a teacher, my learning and teaching experiences have a positive or negative impact when I endeavour to teach learners to communicate efficiently and effectively using oral English.

In this chapter, I introduce my study by elucidating its focus and purpose. I then describe the rationale for the research. Furthermore, I outline the key concept and theoretical lens as well as the research questions that underpin the study. Thereafter, I explain the research paradigm and introduce the methodological approach. I end the chapter by giving the conclusion and an overview of the dissertation. It is important to note that in place of a chapter on literature review, “references to other texts are integrated into the storyline of this...self-study research text” (Pithouse, 2007, p. 22).

Focus and Purpose of the Study

In this study, the focus is on my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school. The purpose is, firstly, to explore how the manner in which I learned IsiZulu and English oral communication might be enabling or constraining my own teaching and, secondly, to develop new teaching strategies to enhance learners’ English oral communication. Hence, in my research I look at my oral communication experiences as a learner at school and as a student at tertiary level. I remind myself how I learned to communicate in my home language of IsiZulu and also in English. I also explore how my family, teachers and lecturers taught me to communicate orally. From those experiences, I endeavour to remember the problems I encountered when I tried to express myself in English. I then draw from my personal history and relevant literature to develop strategies to enhance my teaching. I try out these strategies to see how effective they are in teaching learners to use

English to “communicate accurately and appropriately taking into account audience, purpose and context” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 9).

Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) assert that in a self-study, one studies one’s teaching so as to make it better. Likewise, Chiung-Ching and Yim-mei Chan (2009, p. 20) explain that in a self-study “teachers examine the self within their teaching environment and their practices in terms of roles, actions, and beliefs, in order to consider making changes for improvement.” Although the main purpose of the study is to enhance my own practice, “I am writing this [dissertation] for myself and for others with whom I share a commitment to educational practice, research, and scholarship” (Pithouse, 2007, p. 14).

Rationale for the Study

I am an English teacher and my home language is IsiZulu. My learning to speak English has its foundations in both rural and township schools. All my school teachers were black South Africans whose home language was IsiZulu. Since 1986, I have been teaching English language in secondary schools that are situated in IsiZulu-speaking communities. Hence, in my experience, the learners I teach generally do not have much opportunity or impetus to speak English outside of school. Currently, my colleagues and I are also IsiZulu-speakers in a school that uses English as the official language of learning and teaching.

I decided to undertake this study because I was aware of many problems when I taught English oral communication. Not all the learners I was teaching were using English to “participate orally in constructing knowledge, solving problems, and expressing emotions and opinions” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 12). Many learners would utter few words or remain quiet when urged to speak in English. Consequently, this led me to lack self-esteem as an English teacher. I was concerned about how I could encourage learners to engage in an English conversation and how I could teach learners to communicate effectively in English. In addition, I had observed that learners needed to improve their oral communication skills in order to compete for the limited job opportunities when they finished school (Young, 1986).

As part of my Master of Education (MEd) coursework, I undertook a small-scale study on the teaching of English oral communication. I interviewed one teacher who had been a Head of Department (HoD) of languages for 15 years. I hoped that because of positional standing and experience, she would have a variety of teaching strategies for teaching English oral communication. However, I found that she understood oral communication in terms of a prepared, formal speech rather than an interaction. I also realised that I had been working with the same misconception. Therefore, I resolved to conduct a self-study because I wanted to discover activities that could assist me in facilitating interactive oral communication in English amongst learners. I hoped to find out how I could develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to go beyond just equipping learners to deliver a prepared speech. My aspiration was to find ways to make English oral communication teaching and learning an integral part of “the transformative function of education with the aim of eliminating social inequality, poverty and ignorance and unemployment” (Nkomo, 1990, p. 304).

My interest was to develop strategies for teaching English oral communication to learners whose mother tongue is IsiZulu. I was unable to find literature and research that was directly related to teaching English oral communication to these learners. The research studies I found were concerned with teaching English as a second language more generally. They also concentrated on universal trends and issues. None of the material was specifically South African. Furthermore, “there [appeared] to be little research available that [provided] a more precise understanding of the methods and approaches of teaching oral communication...” (Rahman, 2010, p. 2). Thus, through this study, I intended to make a contribution by exploring a phenomenon that appeared to be under-researched: teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners.

Key Concept and Theoretical Lens

English oral communication is the core *concept* of my study. According to Rahman (2010), oral communication is a remarkable eloquent capacity through which people learn what to say, how to say it and when to say it. As I was teaching English to IsiZulu-speaking learners, I noticed that there was a problem in the use of English oral communication by learners. This

caused me to want to find out more about what this capacity entails. Rahman (2010, p. 2) states, “communication is a dynamic interactive process...not passive and does not just happen. Communication is an exchange of meaning and understanding.” Therefore, I wanted to research how this kind of exchange could be more effectively cultivated among learners.

The theoretical lens that I identified to assist me in better understanding the concept of English oral communication was *dialogism*. According to Mkhize (2004, p. 8), “Dialogism extends beyond interindividual processes to include how the person engages with her or his social and cultural world.” Mkhize (2004) explains that this notion of collaboration and co-operation displays itself in the African spirit of *Ubuntu* (the idea that people are not just individuals but live in a community where they share things and care for each other). Similarly, Waghid and Smeyers (2011) argue that in the spirit of *Ubuntu* each individual considers himself or herself part of a group and feels attached to others and vice versa. Thus, my intention was to develop teaching strategies that would enhance learners’ socialisation. I wanted to involve them in exploring English oral communication topics that would equip them with knowledge and capacity that would be beneficial both to themselves and their communities. I hoped that through the teaching of English oral communication, learners would not only relate to each other, but also the environment in which they live (Mkhize, 2004). As Rahman (2010) explains, learners will need useful communication skills in the world of work, in community meetings, as well as in their own lives.

Research Questions

The main question that underpins my self-study is: *How can I better understand and improve my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school?* From there, I constructed the following three sub-questions to direct my research.

Question 1: *What can I learn from my personal history about the teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?*

My thinking was that this question would enable me to review my learning and teaching experiences of (English) oral communication to better understand the bearing these experiences might have had on the manner in which I teach my learners. I hoped that the answers to this question would help me to overcome barriers to my teaching.

Question 2: *What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?*

I anticipated that the answer to this question would aid me in realising where I was lagging behind in terms of teaching strategies. Therefore, I would be more aware of how I could teach more effectively, particularly in relation to English oral communication.

Question 3: *How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?*

My intention in asking this question was to discover generative teaching methods. I wanted to find techniques that would improve the manner in which I was teaching my learners to communicate orally in English.

Research Paradigm

The study is qualitative because my intention was “to collect data that is *contextualized*. Such data take into account the kind of school and community in which the research takes place, the socioeconomic status of the community in which the school is located and the history of the community” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 69). My intention was to consider the impact of social contexts on my learning and teaching of English oral communication. Hence, I aimed to conduct my study with an awareness of the school and community contexts in which I have learned and taught English oral communication. Nieuwenhuis (2010b, p. 51) asserts that “qualitative research typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment (in situ) and focusing on their meanings and interpretations”. Therefore, the location of my study was my English classroom, in the secondary school in which I teach.

I situated the research in the interpretive paradigm as my own understanding of teaching English oral communication was at the centre of my self-study. My intention was thus to try to understand the meanings and experiences that I was bringing to my teaching of English oral communication (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b). The research was also located in the critical paradigm as I intended to look critically at my teaching of English oral communication to see how I could improve. As Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002) argue, I took a critical

standpoint as I aimed to change my teaching practice. Furthermore, I hoped that the findings of my study would help me to improve my teaching strategies, as well as my learners' and my school's approach to English oral communication (Mack, 2010).

Research Methodology

The methodological approach of the research is self-study. (I discuss my use of this methodology in detail in Chapter Two). According to Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 43), "in self-study, teachers critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse". Therefore, I chose self-study as I wanted to discover what needed to be changed in the manner in which I was teaching (Makhanya, 2010). Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004) argue that self-study researchers acknowledge that our lived experience as people impacts on us as teachers and, as result, on the learning of our students. I chose self-study because I expected that it could help me to draw on my past and present experiences to better understand and improve my teaching of English oral communication. Through this study, I aimed to determine my teaching weaknesses and strengths. I also hoped to develop teaching strategies that would help me to realise my true potential as a teacher. Samaras and Roberts (2011) affirm that in self-study teachers learn more about what is useful and not useful in their teaching. My thinking was that if I could combine the findings about my personal history and my current classroom experience, I could develop strategies that would enhance my teaching of English oral communication.

Conclusion and Overview of the Dissertation

In this chapter, Chapter One, I have given the focus, purpose and rationale for this self-study research. I explained that, because I wanted to improve my teaching of English oral communication, I intended to generate, analyse and interpret data about this phenomenon (Merriam, 1998) through exploring my personal history and my current teaching practice. Thereafter, I discussed the key concept and theoretical lens that underpin my study and the research questions that have guided my study. In addition, I indicated the research paradigm and briefly introduced my methodological approach.

In Chapter Two, I discuss my research process. I start by dealing with research context. Since this is a self-study, I clarify my role as the principal participant. I then discuss the learners and my critical friends that are also participants in the study. I go on to outline the data generation and interpretation processes. After that, I look at the limitations and challenges of the study. Finally, I review trustworthiness and ethical issues.

In Chapter Three, I describe how my learning to communicate orally originated. I point out that this started at home and then developed further at school, college, university and during my current teaching. In doing so, I look at people, circumstances and artefacts that have had an impact on my learning and teaching of the phenomenon in question.

In Chapter Four, I look at my personal history narrative and my current teaching practice with the intention of examining the quality of my teaching. I do that by revisiting four areas of focus that have influenced my learning and teaching of oral communication. I conclude the chapter by considering the implications of these themes for my teaching of English oral communication.

In the last chapter, Chapter Five, I offer a reflective review of my study, highlighting my responses to my key research questions. I summarise what I have learned about my past learning and current teaching of English oral communication. Finally, I look at how to take my self-study forward by giving guidelines that I think are appropriate for teaching English oral communication. I also offer ideas for further research that I would like to undertake in collaboration with other English teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROCEDURE OF MY SELF-STUDY RESEARCH

Introduction

My intention in undertaking this study was to enhance my teaching of English, more precisely oral communication. In the preceding chapter, I explained why this research is vital for me as an educator. In addition, I stipulated the questions to be answered in the research as well as the key concept and theoretical lens that underpin the study. I also highlighted the methodological approach and ended the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

In this chapter, Chapter Two, I discuss the research context and the participants. I then explain my data generation and interpretation processes. Furthermore, I discuss limitations and challenges of the study, trustworthiness, as well as ethical issues. In conclusion, I summarise the contents of the chapter and give a concise overview of Chapter Three.

Research Context

This study took place in the context of the township secondary school where I teach English as a First Additional Language to IsiZulu-speaking learners. The school has 20 classrooms and caters for learners from Grade 8 to 12. The total enrolment of the school is 659. Of these learners, school records show that 31% of families depend on the government social grants for their monetary needs. There is a Physical Science laboratory, as well as Consumer Studies and Media centres. However, these facilities are either inadequately resourced or vandalised. Moreover, the school is poorly resourced because one English textbook is shared by two learners at Grade 10 to 12 levels. There are 60 English textbooks that are shared by 142 Grade 8 and 123 Grade 9 learners. There are no electronic teaching aids such as CD players or computers.

I conducted my study as classroom-based research at the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (Grade 10 to 12). The focus of the study was at an entry level of the phase, Grade 10. The curriculum for Grade 10 comprises seven subjects, six of which are taught in English. The other subject is IsiZulu, which is the learners' home language and is taught in their language. The learners families' and the teachers' (myself included) home language is also IsiZulu. In the

Grade 10 class where I conducted the research, only four students out of a class of 42 possess an English dictionary. I positioned the research in my professional context as I aimed to develop my own teaching strategies. Thus, my self-study was about an examination of myself as a teacher, my teaching and learning in my classroom, as well as my personal and my professional development (Samaras, Hicks & Berger, 2004).

Participants in the Research

The participants in this study included me, as the principal participant, and 42 Grade 10 learners, 25 girls and 17 boys. The learners' ages ranged from 14 to 18, and all of them were pursuing English as a First Additional Language. They were a Physical Science class, which was deemed to be the 'bright' class. The other participants were my "critical friends" (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 43). These were my five fellow Master of Education students. They are all school teachers (females and males), teaching in a range of different types of schools and subjects. One of them is teaching English to isiZulu-speaking learners in Grade 6 and 7. All of them are South Africans. Two are Indian and one is white. Their home language is English. The other two are black and their home language is IsiZulu. All five are using self-study methodology in their research projects. I worked with them collaboratively during my study to gain various viewpoints (Samaras et al., 2004). For example, in my conversations with my critical friends, they suggested research/teaching activities such as role play and discussion emanating from excerpts cut from magazines or newspapers.

Data Generation Methods and Data Sources

LaBoskey (2004) asserts that using diverse research methods for self-study allows one to study oneself and one's personal experience from different angles. Thus, I used two data generation methods and a variety of data sources. First, I employed a *personal history self-study method* (see Chapter Three) to generate data for this study. Through this method, I revisited my own personal and professional progression (Samaras et al., 2004). I examined possible past influences on my current teaching strategies. The personal history self-study method allowed me to investigate my own lived experience, in order to better understand and change my teaching (Samaras, 2011). As Brandenburg (2008) contends that transformation cannot happen on its own, I wanted to improve my teaching methods for oral communication.

Therefore, I opted for the personal history self-study method as I wanted to know what personal experiences and knowledge of English oral communication I was carrying to my work and how they inspired my professional practice with learners (Kitchen, 2009).

As a key data source for my personal history self-study, I used a reflective journal, in which I recorded my memories of and reflections on my past experiences of learning and teaching oral communication. Journal writing has helped me improve my personal and professional learning because as I revisited my past oral communication learning and teaching experiences, I also recorded what I was observing in my current teaching (Mlambo, 2012). In addition, in retracing my personal history, I photographed, described and analysed artefacts that have influenced my learning to communicate orally. I took these photographs (see Chapter Three) because they allowed me to stand back and introspect (Mitchell, Weber, & Pithouse, 2009). In addition, I also found old school photographs in an album. These assisted me to conjure up my personal and professional memories (Mitchell, 2011). In looking at these old photographs, I reflected on where I had come from in terms of learning to communicate orally and to teach English oral communication.

The second self-study method I used was the *developmental portfolio self-study method* (Samaras, 2011) as I wanted to track my development in the teaching of oral communication. For this data generation method, I used a range of sources of data to provide information about my current teaching (see Chapter Four). These included lessons plans, audio-recordings of learners' oral responses, learners' written work and my marking rubrics. The other data source was my research journal in which I recorded my observations, innovations and critical friends' teaching suggestions. Thus, I used a portfolio to document my Grade 10 English oral communication teaching activities. Reviewing the teaching and learning activities and the marking rubrics assisted me in considering whether my teaching of oral communication was changing for the better. Monitoring the learners' work and progress in relation to my teaching was significant because self-study "does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Thus, in the portfolio I also included data sources such as learners' written essays, transcripts of audio-recordings of lessons and photographs of T-shirts learners had brought for a class activity. Furthermore, in

the portfolio I kept transcripts of my audio-recorded discussions with my critical friends. In my journal, I wrote down their suggestions such as topics, examples of class activities and teaching aids. Samaras (2011) advises that it is helpful to keep critical friends' feedback in a portfolio as this gives a researcher additional insights when revisiting and reflecting on the study.

In Table 2.1 I give a summary of my data generation methods and data sources:

Table 2.1: Data Generation Table

Research question	Methods of data generation	Rationale for this method	Participants	Sources of data	Types of data
Question 1 What can I learn from my personal history about the teaching of English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners? (Chapter Three)	Personal history self-study method	It would allow me to explore how my personal experience had influenced my learning and teaching of oral communication.	me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective Journal • Old photographs of myself and my primary school buildings • New photographs of artefacts 	Personal experiences of learning to communicate orally and learning to teach this aspect of English language.
Question 2 What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching English oral communication? (Chapter Four)	Developmental portfolio self-study method.	It would allow me to “store, catalogue and study [my] professional growth over a period of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • me • 42 Grade 10 learners • critical friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recordings of my teaching and the learners’ responses • Audio-recorded conversations with critical friends • Lesson plans 	Data identifying areas where I need to improve in my teaching strategies.

		time”(Samaras & Freese, as cited in Samaras, 2011,p. 3)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking rubrics • Reflective journal • Learners’ written work • Photographs of learners’ T-shirts 	
Question 3: How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners? (Chapter Four)	Developmental portfolio self-study method.	I would document and study my professional development (Samaras & Freese, as cited in Samaras, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • me • 42 Grade 10 learners • critical friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recordings of my teaching and the learners’ responses • Audio-recorded conversations with critical friends • Lesson plans • Marking rubrics • Reflective journal • Learners’ written work • Photographs of learners’ T-shirts 	Data that would facilitate my development of teaching methods that I could use to improve my teaching of English oral communication.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

My data analysis was inductive, which means that I did not develop categories to code my data in advance, but rather that patterns and issues emerged as I engaged with the data. (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a). I also worked with a group of “critical friends” (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 43) to “obtain alternative perspectives” when analysing my data. I shared my ideas about how I could draw on the data to answer my research questions and asked my critical friends for their feedback.

In Chapter Three, I provide analysis of artefacts that featured at the story-telling sessions at my home. An artefact is an object made or modified by people, which gives information about their socio-cultural understandings or behaviours (Prown, 1982). In teaching, artefacts can be items or objects used in lessons such as photographs or collage (Allender & Manke, 2004). In my study, I identified and analysed significant artefacts to find what I could learn from my personal history about the teaching of oral communication. For example, I used artefact analysis of a *mbawula* (a home-made heater). In Chapter Three, I highlight that sitting around the heater allowed the listeners to be closer to the story-teller. In remembering that experience during the research, I realised that the arrangement in which learners sit in rows in a classroom is not conducive for learning. Learners cannot interweave oral and visual tenets of oral communication because there is no proper eye contact and, as a result, learners are denied an opportunity of reading each other's facial expressions.

In the analysis of another artefact, *isithebe* (a wooden platter) in Chapter Three, I mention that the story narrator and listeners ate from the same platter simultaneously. I indicate that sharing food from the same platter symbolises the sharing of ideas. I explain how taking turns in picking groundnuts from the platter is like taking turns in talking to each other. I link this to the fact that, in my family's story sessions, listeners as well as the narrators did not remain passive. Questions and comments were exchanged. Listeners were given opportunities to predict what was going to take place in a story. Remembering the taking of turns by different people in picking from *isithebe* helped me to realise that indeed English oral communication is about two or more people talking to each other.

Following the artefact analysis that I present in Chapter Three, there are four themes that I developed to respond to the two research questions about my teaching of English oral communication. In Question Two, I sought to investigate my strengths and weaknesses, whilst in Question Three, I explored how I could develop new teaching strategies. It was the artefact analysis that brought about the following four themes in response to these two questions: *oral exchanges; emotions and relationships; socio-cultural contexts; and multisensory learning processes.*

As I explain in Chapter Three, my life history experiences indicated that in my family story-telling sessions, *socio-cultural contexts* were taken into considerations. Stories incorporated moral lessons with social norms and values. This was done to render stories educational even though they also served as pastimes. Furthermore, as I revisited my personal history, I observed the *multisensory* nature of story-telling that had a bearing on my current teaching practice. During my family's story-telling, the narrator imitated the gait and voices of story characters. Thus, I realised that this needs to be part of English oral communication so that learners' senses of sight and hearing are catered for. *Oral exchanges* were evident during story-telling when listeners were encouraged to ask questions or make suggestions about what was occurring in a story. Hence, I became aware that English oral communication lessons can be dialogic, particularly in group discussions and role plays. Lastly, the theme of *emotions and relationships* emerged because in my family's story-telling sessions we were asked questions such as how we felt when a predator assailed a prey. Consequently, in the English oral communication activities I designed for my self-study, I ensured that lessons had emotional and relational content (see Chapter Four).

Limitations and Challenges of the Study

This is a small-scale study that took place in a particular social and educational context. However, I hope that teachers and researchers in other contexts who are interested in English oral communication might find this study useful. I have tried to explain my study as clearly and simply as possible so that others will be able to use it in their own research and teaching.

The main challenge I encountered was the keeping of a reflective journal in which I wrote my feelings and thoughts about my self-study. I recorded ideas and challenges about my teaching on a daily basis, but the problem was that I did so in different exercise books. Initially, I sometimes forgot to write down dates and thus, could not follow the sequence of my work properly. However, I overcame this challenge by pre-writing dates on the blank exercise book's pages. Then, once an idea cropped up, I wrote it under a particular date. I kept the exercise book in a chest of drawers at home. Even if I thought of something while away from home, I wrote it on a scrap paper. On my arrival at home, I entered the material under a relevant date in my exercise book.

The other challenge is that I researched in my school, in a classroom where I teach English. Initially, I found difficulty in separating my research from my daily work. Later, I ensured that I attended to research records, including audio-recorded activities, of my study after school hours. During the school hours, I taught and recorded my class activities in a school file which I left at school. I realised that teachers doing self-study in their classrooms have to draw a line between their research project and their school work. Teaching as well as learning processes should be prioritised and must not be compromised in favour of the teacher's research.

Trustworthiness

In this study, I have established research trustworthiness by giving very clear and detailed explanations of what data sources I used and how I generated and analysed data (Feldman, 2003). Plausibility of the study has been strengthened by my taking into account the comments of my critical friends in the data interpretation and conclusions (Mlambo, 2012). Another important means that I have used to establish trustworthiness is through giving evidence in Chapter Four of how my educational understanding and practice has been improved by the study (Feldman, 2003). Moreover, I have used multiple methods to gain a variety of different perspectives on what I am studying (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

Ethical Issues

Before I embarked on the research, I sought permission from the relevant participants. I wrote them informed consent letters in English, detailing the nature and the purpose of the research (see Appendix A). I also explained to my learners what the research entailed. I explained to them that it was part of my study but its intention was to enhance my teaching and thus, their English oral communication. Next, I wrote to the parents of the learners, pointing out that the study was actually about my teaching. I stated that it was not compulsory for their children to participate in the research. I also met the parents and explained in IsiZulu to ensure that they understood what was involved. The parents acceded to their children's participation in the study by signing the informed consent letters. I also wrote letters to my critical friends asking for their collaboration. In addition, I requested permission from relevant authorities such as

the Department of Basic Education and the principal of the school where the research was conducted.

I ensured anonymity and confidentiality in relation to all the learners and critical friends involved in the research. I hid who the participants were and ensured that in representing the data no information could reveal their identities (Samaras, 2011). I used pseudonyms for all the participants and I have not used any information identifying the school where I conducted the research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the process of my self-study research. I started by giving the details of the research context. Then, I described the research participants. I followed this by writing about data generation and data sources, using a table for illustration. I have also clarified how I analysed and interpreted the data. In addition, I pointed out the limitations and challenges of my study and discussed trustworthiness and ethical issues. The self-study method has taught me that researching my teaching is not only about me. It is also about my learners, as well as my critical friends and other teachers. I have realised that what I have learned from studying my experience can be complemented by sharing my learning with other members of the teaching fraternity. Thus, in Chapter Five of this dissertation, I highlight future research that I would like to undertake with other English teachers.

In the succeeding chapter, Chapter Three, I revisit past and present educational experiences that have been the basis for my growth as a teacher of English oral communication in a secondary school. My intention is to better understand my development, personally and professionally.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW MY LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE ORALLY BEGAN

Introduction

I decided to engage in this self-study in order to better understand my practice as an English teacher. Through this research, I intended to improve my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school. In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I outlined my self-study research process. I elaborated on the research methodology, focusing in particular on data generation and interpretation.

In Chapter Three, I consider the following research question: *What can I learn from my personal history about the teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?* I begin my personal history narrative by relating how my family contributed to my early IsiZulu oral communication development. Thereafter, I outline how formal education contributed to my learning of English oral communication. I do that by considering roles played by my English teachers in primary schools and secondary schools. I also discuss what informal initiatives I undertook to learn ways of communicating orally. I then point out how lecturers at a teacher training college contributed to my learning to use spoken English. My early experiences of teaching English oral communication to learners in secondary schools are also discussed. Next, I take my reader along in my journey of postgraduate learning experiences, so as to indicate my quest for enhancement of my teaching of English oral communication. I conclude by identifying and analysing personal history artefacts (Samaras, 2011) that contributed to my learning of English oral communication. I consider what I might learn about teaching English oral communication from these artefacts.

My Personal History of Learning Oral Communication

Learning Oral Communication at Home: The Fire Place Circle

I was born and bred in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. My parents' two-roomed house was (and still is) in a township that was set aside for black South Africans during the apartheid era. As a young person, I had both an urban and a rural upbringing. I was raised in an extended family numbering 26, including my maternal grandmother, my paternal grandfather, mother,

father, uncles, aunts, as well as cousins (boys and girls). In the urban area, our family comprised 19 members, children and adults. I spent my weekdays with my five brothers and my parents in the urban area. Over the weekends, I went to sleep at my maternal grandmother's house, in another section of the same urban area, where she lived with my two uncles, three aunts and nine cousins. It was a four-roomed house, with two bedrooms, a dining-room and a kitchen. Two of my aunts slept in the main bedroom with my grandmother and two uncles slept in the other bedroom. The children slept on the floor, in the dining-room. The other aunt worked in a white suburb and slept there.

My main aim for those visits to my grandmother's house was to listen to her captivating fables and folktales. Every evening after supper, we gathered in the kitchen to cherish her stories. During the colder days, we sat around a home-made wood and coal heater, called a *mbawula*. (A *mbawula* is a makeshift heater, made out of a twenty litre paraffin container which is perforated on its sides). Before the telling of stories started, it was a daily routine for the adults to render evening prayers. This was done to thank God for guiding us through the day. It was also done to plead with the Almighty to safeguard us in our sleep. In addition, it was to solicit God's benediction of the story-telling sessions so that moral lessons could be conveyed to the listeners. An adult story-teller would plead with the Almighty to assist to bless the day's lesson. Thereafter, the children would take turns in reciting "The Lord's Prayer" or "The Lord is My Shepherd." The *isithebe* (a wooden platter dug out of a wattle tree trunk, with four legs and two handles), which was one of my great-grandmother's wedding presents, would be filled with either *amantongomane* (roasted groundnuts) or *izinkobe* (sweet corn kernels). All of those present would take turns in eating from the platter. Whilst we were eating, my relatives would take turns in relating stories of African warriors' bravery and of the intelligence of some wild animals. The ever cunning rabbit, the unforgettable elephant and the stupid pig kept one amazed. Below is a snippet of one of the stories I enjoyed very much:

The rabbit once fooled a lion by getting it stuck in a hole dug on the ground. It told the lion that there was honey in the hole. The rabbit said it would go first and lick the honey. Because of its tiny body, the rabbit emerged on the other side of the hole, dripping juicy honey on its whiskers. Then it was the lion's turn to relish the honey.

However, as a result of its huge body, the lion got stuck halfway through the hole. The head and the forelegs were inside the hole while the hind legs remained outside. Then the rabbit used a red hot iron to pierce the lion's buttocks. The lion roared loudly in pain but was unable to free itself. The rabbit left the lion stuck there.

From the above story, I learned that it is risky to accept other people's suggestions without examining them thoroughly. Sometimes, we children would be asked which characters we loved the most and the reasons for this. I can remember that we would favour the characters that did justice to others. Although the stories were narrated in IsiZulu, I now realise that part of my learning to communicate orally has its foundation in that era. I learned to listen to other people telling a story. As a story was being told, I would pay attention to the tone of the speaker's voice, as well as his or her facial expressions and gestures. Later in my life, I realised that those stories were used to teach us some social values and norms. For example, we were once told the story of how the guinea-pig (called *imbila*) ended-up with a vestigial tail. It is said that a group of animals went past this animal and told it that there was a gathering where all animals would be supplied with well-developed tails. The *imbila* decided to sleep and told other animals to get a tail for it. Through this story, we were taught that one has to stand up and do things on one's own instead of waiting for others to do things on one's behalf. Even today, when I teach English oral communication, I ensure that a moral lesson is infused.

Learning Oral Communication at School: The Birth of a Story-teller

My Primary School Education: The Dreaded Sharpener

In 1967, I started attending a junior primary school next to my home, which was situated in an urban area. The school was for black South African learners and black teachers taught us. In that school, I did Sub-Standard A to Standard 2 (Grades 1 to 4). In 1968, I repeated Sub-Standard A (also called 'first year'). I could not stand the lady teacher who either beat us with a stick or pinched us. We were punished for failing to reproduce what she would have told us a day before. One day, she told us to memorise the first two verses from an Afrikaans poem entitled "*Mankomezana, Die Waterman*" (Mankomezana, The Waterman). However, most of the learners, me included, could not recite the first line of the first stanza. The teacher

responded by giving each of us two stinging strokes with a cane. Consequently, I decided to play truant and went to sit at a local train station during school hours. When I failed the year, my father, who had left school in Sub-Standard B, beat me severely with a stick cut from a gum tree. He said he could not stand an uneducated child in his house. Later, I was to learn that his reason for leaving school in Grade 4 was that he could not tolerate being hit by a woman. My mother, who was a house wife, accompanied me to school daily for the whole of that repeated year.

In 1972, I started senior primary school, Standards 3 to 5 (Grades 5 to 7), in a rural area (see figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1. My rural senior primary school

My father's prime reason for this was to remove me from the ills of the township. He said he wanted me to learn how a proper African male should lead his life. I stayed with my paternal grandfather, two uncles, one aunt and three cousins. In the evenings, we would sit around a hearth and listen to folktales, family history and our relatives' heroic deeds, as well as those of our village neighbours. As the narration progressed, listeners were asked questions or to predict what was going to happen next. For example, a leopard would be chasing a group of buck and, as listeners, we would have to guess what would finally happen. We would predict that the leopard would triumph, only to learn that instead, the prey fought the predator and defeated it. The moral of the story was that good triumphs over evil. We also learned that unity is strength. Later in my life, I came to realise that this story-telling experience taught me that conversation is not only about listening. Therefore I can see that, English oral communication is a two way process, "with people sending and receiving messages to and from each other, in any interaction" (Deepa & Manisha, 2009, p. 34).

My family's oral conversations kindled in me the love for narrating stories. I was rated by both my class-teacher and classmates as the best story-teller at school. I would be surrounded by learners from different classes during break times. I told stories and answered questions about my tales. However, I often landed in trouble as my stories were told in IsiZulu. There was a school regulation that, as learners, we had to speak English among ourselves. There were prefects that ensured that learners' informal conversations were conducted in English. Sometimes we would improvise and speak jumbled English amongst ourselves as learners. When we got stuck, we resorted to gesticulation. Prefects, some of whom also experienced problems in spoken English, would report us to teachers. This resulted in corporal punishment, because only oral English was allowed. I think teachers felt that learners were disrespectful as they considered that not speaking English was a defiance of one of the school's regulations and therefore needed to be "closely controlled...through punishment" (Porteus, Vally & Ruth, 2001, p. 5).

In the classroom, my English teacher (Standard 3 to 5) meted out corporal punishment for any errors in spoken English. For this purpose, he kept a tiny bamboo cane called *umciji* (loosely translated – *the sharpener*). Thus, as a learner, one had to correct one's errors. However, how

that could be done was never explained. One had to keep on trying to express oneself correctly. The more mistakes we committed, the more punishment we received. Therefore, I ended up possessing an IsiZulu/English dictionary. As Makhanya explains, “I would first start thinking in my mother tongue and then translate the thoughts into English” (2010, p. 37). Thus, in order to say something in English, I would begin by constructing my sentences in IsiZulu. Then, in the dictionary, I would look for English meanings for IsiZulu words that I had used in my sentences.

The other teachers, for example, those teaching Social Studies, did not teach entirely in English. Looking back into my personal history, I can see that their code-switching, which is the alternate usage of two languages by the same speaker during the same discussion (Hoffman, 1991; Masango, 2004), caused an impediment in my acquisition of English. I now believe that this combination of spoken English and IsiZulu retarded my mastering of English oral communication because I had a flawed understanding of English grammar and vocabulary.

It is not surprising, therefore, that I did not develop a love of speaking English for academic purposes. However, I would listen and watch in awe when my teachers spoke English among themselves. I wished to know the language so that I would be clever like my teachers. I was amazed at how they had managed to learn such a strange language. I vowed that I would work very hard to learn English, particularly to speak it.

My Secondary School Education: The Making of an English Debater

In 1978, my paternal grandfather passed away and my uncles went to work in the cities. My aunt got married and went to stay in the Republic of Transkei (now part of the Eastern Cape). Therefore, I had to go back to stay with my parents in the urban area. At that time, I was doing Form 2 (now called Grade 9). I could not find a place in any school because it was August and the school year was already halfway through. Consequently, I had to repeat the grade in the following year.

When I started secondary school, I began to read IsiZulu novels privately. However, my love for reading English books was ignited when I did Form 3 (now called Grade 10). Some of the books I read were by writers from Africa, Europe, the Caribbean Islands and the Americas. I particularly loved *The Arrow of God* and *Petals of Blood* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *No Longer at Ease* and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe as well as Yulisa Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future*. I was also thrilled by E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*. I also read a number of Shakespeare's classics, but my favourite was *The Merchant of Venice*. In addition, I read *The Count of Monte Christo* by Alexandre Dumas and F.Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. But I had difficulty when re-telling these stories in English. Although I understood them, I struggled to learn how to relate the stories entirely in English rather than in a mixture of English and IsiZulu. I asked for assistance from my teachers, but received none. My teachers said I would learn by emulating how they spoke English. However, how I had to do that was not explained explicitly.

When I started Form 3 or JC (Junior Certificate), I also began to read English newspapers. JC was an entry level for higher education at that time. It could also be a school exit level for those who wanted to go and seek employment. My father wanted me to go to work as a clerk or as policeman for his employers. He was working as a storm water labourer for a local municipality. However, my wish was to continue with my education at university level. I had started to work on a temporary basis as a gardener for white families in the suburbs and I used my earnings to continue my education. What inspired me was what I read in newspapers and books. My employers would tell me to dispose of magazines, newspapers and comic prints that they no longer needed. I took them home and read in my spare time. Moreover, having to take instructions from my employers in English necessitated my learning to communicate orally. I became fascinated when the children of my employers spoke to me in English. Sometimes I understood what they said, and sometimes I did not. I begged them to teach me, but changing employers now and again hampered my progress.

Initially, I did not speak much English at school. Teachers generally chose rote learning as a method of teaching and, therefore, I reproduced what I could 'cram' when doing homework. I memorised my school work and reproduced it verbatim. My English teachers would give us

poems such as *Ozymandias* by PB Shelly and *The Solitary Reaper* by William Wordsworth to memorise. I was always praised for being good when I recited poems.

I became impressed by Form 4 and 5 (Grades 11 and 12) learners when they engaged in debates during Friday afternoons. Their eloquence in the English language inspired me to improve my speaking of the language. Although we were taught English, IsiZulu and Afrikaans languages, our debates were conducted in English. By the time I was doing Form 4, I was actively involved in the school's debating society. Our school principal recruited university graduates to teach us English. They assigned our debating society topics that were related to the prevailing South African political situation. It was after 16 June 1976. On that day, black students from Soweto (a conglomeration of townships near Johannesburg, in South Africa) rioted against the use of Afrikaans language as a medium of instruction. Consequently, throughout apartheid South Africa, black schools were teeming with demands for educational reforms. We would engage in debates or in symposia where we tackled social, economic and educational issues. For example, we looked at the roles of women and men in society. Therefore, we made our debating society "a source of collaborative construction of meaning" (Jita, 2004, p. 19). I used to quote Shakespeare when arguing for my points. For example, I remember when I summarised my argument during a debate on the armed struggle versus the use of education as a liberation weapon. The armed struggle entailed the use of guns and bombs to forcefully remove the white South African government which ruled oppressively. The topic was: "A pen is mighty than the sword." I quoted from Hamlet, but left it for the audience to deduce where I stood. I said it was for the individual "*to be or not to be*" educated.

I also became a volunteer in our school's scantily resourced library. Its size was equal to an ordinary classroom and it was situated at the far-end of a row of 10 classrooms. Unlike other races' school libraries, ours was filled with a row of benches and tables with no bookshelves. Books were lined against the wall on top of tables. Similarly, Mlambo (2012) recalls her school library as an improperly looked after facility, in which books were spread around on the floor. Furthermore, she points out that the library had no librarian to teach learners about its purpose or use. In my school "the facilities, like school buildings, classrooms, libraries and

laboratories [were] not of equal quality” (Christie, 1985, p. 11) with those of white schools. Such conditions did not auger well for a learner-centred education, in which a teacher supports and promotes learning whilst learners construct their own knowledge (Kunene, 2009). Because of insufficient reading materials, we had to listen to a teacher reading to us from his or her own book. Some white churches and book clubs donated books to our school. In addition, old books and newspapers were supplied by white schools if they no longer needed them. According to Pithouse (2005), this surplus was due to the educational privilege that was a significant feature of white schooling in South Africa during the apartheid era. Some of the books found their way into our library secretly because they were outlawed by the apartheid government. Amongst them were *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The History of the Russian Revolution* by Leon Trotsky, and Vladimir Lenin’s *Who are These Friends of the People, and how do they Fight Against the Social Democrats?* I remember reading books by South African authors such as Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Call Me a Woman* by Ellen Khuzwayo and Athol Fugard’s classical stage play, *The Island*, whose two protagonists are Robben Island political prisoners. Some banned books were written by African liberation struggle leaders and we quoted them in our debating sessions. Those were the books such as Steve Biko’s *I Write What I Like* and *Facing Mount Kenya* by Jomo Kenyatta.

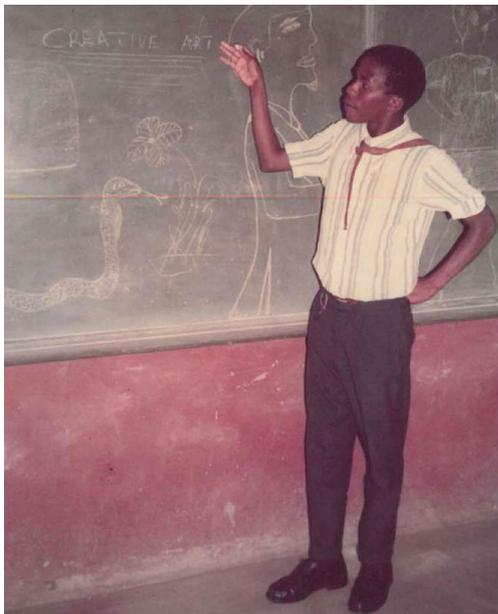
As learners, we took the initiative and formed study groups where we taught each other English. Although we tried to speak in English amongst ourselves, we also resorted to mixing IsiZulu and English. We read old and new newspapers such as *The Bantu World*, *Izwi* (The Voice), *The Daily Nation* and *Imvo Zabantsundu* (The Black People’s Opinions) and we discussed in IsiZulu what we had read.

Our English teachers encouraged us to share with our classmates what we had read from private readings. I now realise that the shortcoming of these presentations was that we did not engage in discussions. Each learner would stand in front of the class and tell what he or she had read. I think that this tendency impeded the development of my oral communication abilities because I could not assess if what I related in class was comprehended by other learners. A discussion would have afforded me the opportunity to correct my mistakes there

and then. As Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002) assert, people should be given opportunities to “learn from their actions and use this learning to plan further actions” (p. 182). Nonetheless, I consider the final years of my secondary schooling to be the era in which my learning of English oral communication was intensified. In 1981, I passed Form 5 (Grade 12) with exemption, obtaining the symbol D in English Orals. I intended to go to university for a degree in journalism. This was purely because I wanted to enhance my command of English. However, due to financial constraints, I had to look for a job. I worked at a curtain factory shop for four months, but I decided to quit as I felt the work was uninspiring.

Working as an ‘Unqualified Teacher’: My Teaching Journey Begins

For the rest of 1982 after I had left the curtain factory shop, I worked as an ‘unqualified teacher’ (see figure 3.2). Armed with only my Form 5 certificate, I taught English in a rural secondary school. Some of the learners were older than I was. Their parents worked in the cotton fields and wattle fields near the school. Learners hitch hiked lifts on the backs of the trucks and tractors that carried the labourers. In the afternoons, they had to wait for the workers to finish work at five o’clock so as to get a lift. The school day ended at three o’clock and learners would mill around with nothing to do. As a result, I decided to conduct afternoon classes for them to make use of this time.



Figure, 3.2. Thokozani, starting out as an ‘unqualified teacher’

Learners were amazed and amused when I spoke English to them. Therefore, whilst teaching, I had to re-explain my lessons in IsiZulu. When seeking for feedback in English, I found that the learners were unable to respond. But they were able to give answers in IsiZulu when given an opportunity to do so. This frustrated me because I did not have expertise to address these barriers. I decided to try to engage learners in dramatisation of English literature set works during the afternoon sessions. However, most of the learners simply memorised their lines and proved not to understand what their characters' speeches entailed. Sometimes they would resort to expressing themselves in a mixture of IsiZulu and English. They became more interested in acting than in learning to speak English. They suggested that we dramatise IsiZulu literature set works as they were more comfortable when they expressed themselves in isiZulu. That is why I decided to go to a teachers' college to acquire the relevant teaching skills, particularly for spoken English.

Teachers' Training College: The Communication Seed is Germinated

The following year, I enrolled at a teachers' training college where fees were affordable. I pursued a secondary teachers' diploma (STD) for three years, specialising in History and English. Except for Special Afrikaans, the lectures I attended were conducted in English. Of all the lecturers that taught me, only one was black. He taught music for an hour, once a week. The other lecturers were whites, either English or Afrikaans speakers.

I was fortunate to train at a college that was liberal and progressive. At school, particularly primary school, I had learned that teachers are the providers of knowledge. By contrast, at the teachers' college, I learned that learners had to find knowledge for themselves. I also learned that my role was to guide and facilitate the learning process. The college was against spoon-feeding of its students and therefore discouraged using of narrative and text book teaching methods. As students, we dubbed the college the 'mini university' as lecturers encouraged students to learn by seeking and making meanings for themselves (Doyle, 2011). The Teaching Science lecturers emphasised teaching methods that were learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. Hence, they promoted trial and error, discussion, as well as self-discovery methods for us as students. My favourite one was the discussion method because engaging

with other students enabled me to verify the knowledge I had obtained in my secondary school education.

I remember a discussion I once had with my fellow students. We noted that a paragraph has one central point, called a topic sentence. I explained that once a vegetable is added to a basketful of fruit, it is a mismatch. Using this analogy in my discussion with others aided me to understand that paragraph is a group of related sentences. Due to the discussion method, I improved “speaking, listening and critical thinking skills” (Doyle, 2011, p. 94). As I engaged in conversations with fellow students, I learned from them and vice versa. I better understood the essence of my fellow students’ and lecturers’ spoken English. I improved my listening skills and spoke to my lecturers entirely in English. Therefore, as Mlambo (2012) explains, I benefited from peer learning and teaching during my time at the college and consequently, my English oral communication prowess improved. Hence, through these peer discussions at the college, I learned that oral communication involves people talking to each other rather than just presenting a speech.

Furthermore, I joined the Drama and Debate Societies where the *lingua franca* was English. I remember being involved in performances in three stage plays that I wrote. *The Hostel Life* was about the inhumane living conditions in the South African migrant workers’ hostels. In this play, four males, irrespective of their ages, lived in a 12 square metre room and slept on concrete beds. I played a role of a cook for the other hostel dwellers because of unemployment. The other hostel inmates did not pay the cook money but offered him a sleeping place. He paid himself by buying cheap foodstuff and kept the rest of the money in his homemade piggy bank. With his savings he bought a second-hand taxi which he used to transport other hostel dwellers to and from work. Eventually, he owned a fleet of luxury buses. In *Our Side*, I highlighted the callous deeds that black people inflicted on their own folk. I was the main character and acted a part of an employer that exploited his workers. The employees worked long hours, with no breaks or lunch and earned meagre wages. The play also looked at sexual harassment in a work place by black bosses, and thus the title. Hence, the play looked at the black men’s exploitive side rather than that of white men. Subtly, the stage play exposed the indecent behaviour of male teachers, especially principals, towards

both female teachers and learners. This anti-social malady I had observed in my practice as an ‘unqualified’ teacher. My role in *Just Like That* was that of an uncle who dispossess his nephew of his inheritance. I acted as a man whose wealthy sister dies as result of an armed robbery in one of her boutiques. The brother claimed all his sister’s belongings, including businesses, because the sister was unmarried. He said that, according to African culture, his sister’s son belonged to him as well. Thus, the nephew lost what was due to him, just like that. I can now see how play-writing and performance can be used to show learners that oral communication is about exchanging of messages between two or more people. This is evident when the characters engage in dialogue and when audiences respond to a performance.

In addition, in the college I learned the effectiveness of using a variety of teaching aids in the learning of English oral communication. For the first time, I studied in an electrified educational institution. Because there was electricity, tape-recorders, radios, television sets and computers were used for oral lessons. Tape-recorders, radios and television sets assisted me to learn correct pronunciation of most English words. Computer-aided instruction helped me in improving my understanding of grammatical and lexical items of the language. I also vividly remember one lecturer who used to emphasise that “*A stick is not a teaching aid*”. When I was a learner, especially at primary school level, I understood corporal punishment as a necessary part of the teaching process. Looking back, I realise that this lecturer’s saying has teaching. In my understanding, corporal punishment is nothing else but “violence that hangs over the learning relationship and hinders all forms of exploration and even thinking” (Payet & Vije, 2008, p. 170). Therefore, I put emphasis on self-discipline. I tell a learner that it is more fulfilling to achieve something out of his or her own effort than to be forced to do it. Hence, when a disciplinary problem persists, I call a learner aside and talk to him or her.

Enter the ‘Qualified Teacher’: The Communication Problem Resurfaces

Upon qualification in 1986, I obtained a teaching post in a township secondary school. The school fell under Department of Education and Training, which controlled schools for blacks that were in the ‘white areas’ during apartheid South Africa. The ‘white areas’ were under the direct control of South Africa’s white government. In those urban areas black townships were under the rule of white municipalities. The school I worked in was in such an area and under

the control of a department of education manned predominantly by white educational officials. There were about 40 to 45 learners in each classroom that had one chalkboard, insufficient learners' desks (three learners per desk) and no teacher's table, chair or cupboard. It was an under-resourced school as its library had only a few old books (see figure 3.3). The school had no television sets, radios and computers. The laboratory had very limited equipment that was either used for Biology or Physical Science experiments. Most of the learners came from families that were either headed by single mothers or grandmothers. These families survived on the government social grants or as vendors of fruits and vegetables in stalls at local schools or clinics. The learners and my colleagues spoke IsiZulu as their home language.

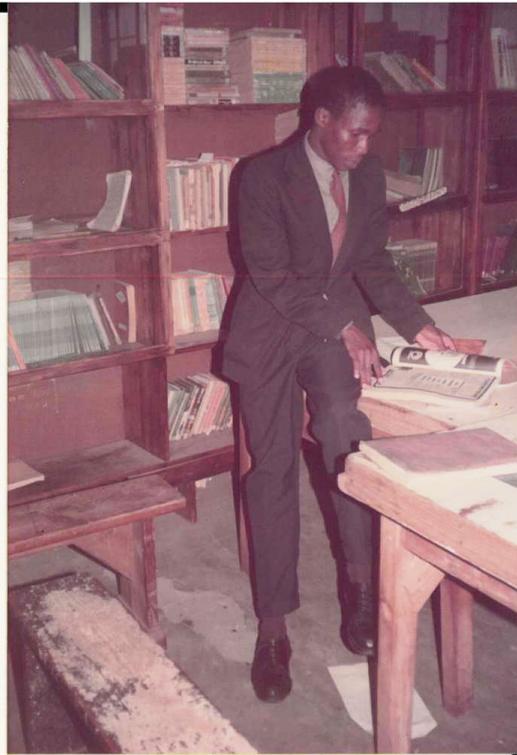


Figure 3.3. Thokozani as a qualified teacher trying to make use of limited library resources.

The problems I had noticed when I embarked on my teaching journey as an unqualified teacher still prevailed and thus I encountered difficulty in teaching English oral

communication. When I started teaching as a qualified teacher, I became confused because learners expected me to give answers to the questions I asked them. When I asked them to do oral presentations, they simply giggled and said nothing. I tried to encourage them to say something as that counted for their year mark. Some would try to say something, albeit inconsistent with their level of education. Others would say I had to score them zero as they were not able to speak English.

My experienced colleagues did not support me either. They were discouraging because they advised me to work towards finishing the syllabus rather than worrying about learners that were not willing to learn. They said that in the end, it would be up to me to account to the education inspector why I had not completed the syllabus. Despite my professional qualification status, the learners whom I taught did not show satisfactory progress. As a result, I became frustrated when teaching the afore-mentioned English language aspect. My frustration was exacerbated by a schools' inspector (black like me) who blatantly said I did not know English. My fault was the pronunciation of "though" like "thou". Although I felt humiliated by the inspector's unprofessional conduct, the comment did not demoralise me. Instead, it made me more determined to improve my English pronunciation. Therefore, I joined a non-government organisation (NGO) called South African Council of Education (Sached) Trust. The organisation assisted black South African teachers with strategies of teaching English as a second language. In addition, I sourced books where I read about various English teaching strategies. Thereby, I hoped to improve my English language proficiency and thus, that of my learners.

My Postgraduate Learning Experience: Searching for Generative Teaching Techniques

When I started as a qualified teacher, I was convinced that I had secured the post due to my prowess in the teaching of English (Reeves & Robinson, 2010). However, as I have explained, after teaching for two months, I found that my teaching was proving insufficient. The learners that I taught were not excelling in spoken English. When I asked them questions in English, they responded in IsiZulu.

I therefore decided to do a Bachelor of Pedagogics (B.Pead) degree on a part-time basis. However, I soon felt frustrated as the course proved redundant. It was a repetition of what I

had done at college. There were no new or innovative teaching strategies, especially for teaching oral communication. I then started to frequent libraries to look for various media to help me in enhancing my teaching of English listening and speaking. Despite these efforts, my teaching showed little improvement.

In the year 2000, a national non-government organisation (NGO) came up with a quality learning programme (QLP) for English teaching in my school's circuit. The idea was to ensure the teaching of English language across the curriculum. Hence, the programme was also called English LAC. Disappointingly, it did not meet my expectations because it was about written language rather than oral communication. However, I now realise that what was vital about it was that it put emphasis on teachers' and learners' collaborative as well as co-operative working. Later, I registered for an Advanced Certificate of Education (ACE) in language learning and teaching. Unfortunately, I did not get much satisfaction as this programme also emphasised reading and writing.

Therefore, I decided to do an honour's degree called a Bachelor of Educational Technology. I thought Computer Aided Instruction (CAI) would give me more options for teaching English oral communication. However, the research task assigned by lecturers was about HIV/AIDS instead of English oral communication. I worked with two other students whose research interests were different from mine. One was interested in Life Sciences, while the other one was interested in History research.

I then decided to pursue a Master of Education degree, specialising in Teacher Development Studies. During the first module of this course, I undertook a small-scale study of strategies for teaching English Oral communication. I interviewed one participant who has been teaching English to IsiZulu-speaking learners for more than 15 years. Moreover, she is a Head of Department (HOD) for languages in her school. I thought that because of her position she would be a highly qualified practitioner in language teaching, particularly teaching of spoken English. However, I found that this teacher understood oral communication only in terms of the formal presentation of prepared speeches. According to my understanding, speech presentation alone is not oral communication as the presenter speaks whilst other people

listen. There is no conversation that takes place, unless the speech is followed by discussion. In contrast, according to Rahman (2010, p. 3), “oral communication is the spoken interaction between two or more people”. My intention in doing the study was to learn teaching strategies that I could use to assist learners to interact with other people using spoken English. Unfortunately, in this, I was disappointed.

Nevertheless, while I have been working on my self-study research, my engagement in collaborative and cooperative learning with my fellow students as critical friends has assisted me in improving my teaching of English oral communication. Under the leadership of my supervisor, my fellow students and I “share our learning and help each other with ideas if necessary” (Mlambo, 2012, p. 44). Through participating in discussions with my critical friends (see Chapter Two) over the past year, I have learned about some innovative strategies for teaching oral communication. For example, my critical friends suggested using rap music where learners would discuss the message of a song they would have composed and performed in front of the class. They also suggested role play where learners would perform and thereafter discuss the rights or wrongs of the characters’ deeds.

Learning from my Personal History: Artefact Analysis

This section of the chapter presents my consideration of my experiences of learning and teaching of oral communication. I identify significant artefacts from my personal history in order to better understand my experiences and teaching practices. First, I offer an analysis of the two artefacts that featured when my family was engaged in story-telling sessions. Second, I discuss an artefact that dominated my learning experience at school. I consider what roles these three artefacts played in my learning to communicate orally. My main aim in this artefact analysis is to generate ideas to assist me in my search for the development of English oral communication teaching strategies.

My Family's Role in my Oral Communication: A Give and Take Process

My personal history reveals that, from the beginning to present, my family has had a vital impact on my learning of oral communication. Most of the time, adults told a story and children listened attentively. However, as children, we were also required to provide answers to questions. Sometimes, we were asked for our opinions about certain characters. These conversational elements seem to support suggestions that oral communication is about two or more people talking to each other (Rahman, 2010). Moreover, the narrator of the story would act out the character of the tale. Such active story-telling approaches “[provide] not only sound, but also visual input providing...more contextual clues” (Janda, 2010, p. 89).

Two artefacts formed an integral part of my family's evening story-telling sessions. It seemed one could not enjoy a story without either of them. Each of us, as children, had a duty to ascertain that they were available during story-telling. There was the *mbawula* (makeshift heater), filled with wood and lit to keep us warm (see figure 3.4). I remember its yellow embers and bluish flames. As a result, I am reminded of the stories of the cunning rabbit and unforgettable elephant. My memories of these two stories emphasise for me that in teaching oral communication I should combine speaking skills with moral lessons or life skills. The rabbit stories taught me that although one has to live a communal life, one has to be careful of people with destructive tendencies. On the other hand, through the stories of unforgettable elephant, I learned that one must be extra careful of what one says or does to other people. As the AmaZulu say, “*umenzi uyakhohlwa, umenziwa akakhohlwa*”. Loosely translated, this means that the one who inflicts pain forgets while the victim does not forget easily.

In addition, the *mbawula's* flickering flames symbolise the ever existing need for people's oral communication. When we sat around the heater, we were so close to each other and felt each other's breath. The spirit of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises that *I am because we are*, was cultivated. From the story-telling sessions, I learned that as a human being I cannot live in isolation from others (Mkhize, 2004). I have to respect fellow citizens' emotional, spiritual and social well-being. The above-mentioned artefact also reminds me that listening and speaking to each other helps people to communicate orally. In this way, they become actively involved in the exchange of information and ideas (Rahman, 2010). Through discussions, we

develop each other, assimilating what is correct for our livelihood and discarding what is detrimental. Thus, oral communication embodies the spirit of *Ubuntu* because “the person in African thought is never a finished product; he or she is perpetually in the making” (Mkhize, 2004, p. 25) by others and vice versa.



Figure 3.4. The home-made heater, the *mbawula*.

Linked to the *mbawula*, is my grandmother’s huge *isithebe* (a traditional wooden platter – see figure 3.5). Thinking about the *isithebe* fills me with nostalgia as it reminds me of the evenings I always cherished. I now realise that it symbolises the vital core of my research because the most important tenet of oral communication is the sharing of ideas. The *isithebe* also symbolises my family unit. Whilst listening to narrations of my grandmother’s fables, we took turns picking roasted corn or groundnuts from the platter. It is traditional for AmaZulu people to eat from one vessel, using bare hands. Thus, I understand that the story-telling

sessions were dialogic as they involved communicating with one's family within a cultural context (Mkhize, 2004).

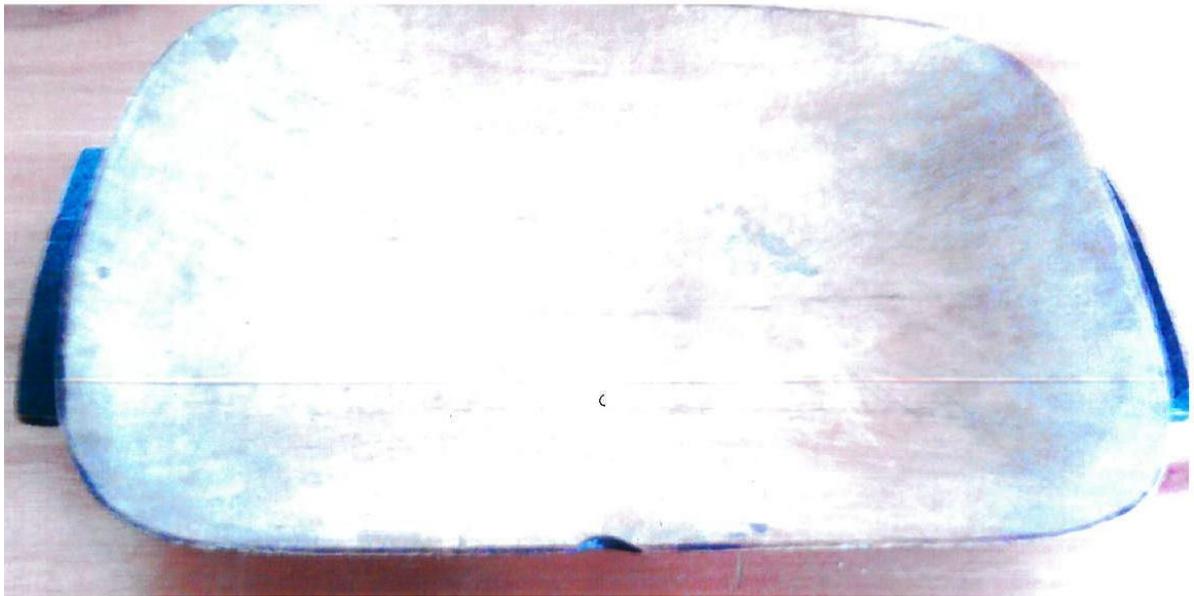


Figure 3.5. The family bond, *the isithebe*.

Other family members are involved in these artefact memories. When we have family gatherings, we still reminisce about these story-telling sessions. We discuss how we should allow our children to experience what we enjoyed. In my mind, this reinforces my desire to research more about strategies for teaching English oral communication. Then, I realise that my learning to communicate is based on interacting with others. My memories of sitting around a fire tell me that learners' sitting in rows is not good for an interactive discussion (Doyle, 2011). For me, dabbling from a communal platter also symbolises collaborative and co-operative learning. Thus, I hope to suggest to my colleagues to teach English oral communication across the curriculum by letting learners talk to each other. As I remember the excitement and the feelings of belonging I experienced during the story-telling sessions, I become aware that all types of learning, including the learning of English oral

communication, can be better achieved when we pay attention to how emotions and relationships can enhance learning (Burke, 2002; Storrs, 2012).

The Dreaded Teaching Aid: The Stinging Sharpener

Today, I realise that my senior primary school teacher's use of *umciji* (the bamboo stick – see figure 3.6) was counter-productive. Because I feared the teacher, I decided to memorise instead of striving to understand the lessons or the subject matter taught to us. My experience tells me that it is better to look for other modes of motivating learners than to use corporal punishment. When I think of my teachers that used corporal punishment, I feel resentment rather than gratitude towards them. When I look at my right hand, I feel aggrieved when I see one of my fingers that was deformed by a teacher's stick. Therefore, I have firsthand experience of what corporal punishment can do to a learner. In my experience, it breeds hatred rather than constructive learning. I know of school mates who decided to quit school as they could not stand being beaten by teachers. If it were not for my parents' insistence that I should go to school, I would have left school as early as Grade 1. However, most of my current colleagues believe in the use of the stick. They claim that they grew up being beaten both at home and at school and so it is cultural. However, from my reading I have become aware that corporal punishment is not actually a traditional black South African practice; instead, it was "brought by missionaries" (Morrell, 2001a, p. 154). Furthermore, I have found no evidence that corporal punishment enhances a teaching or a learning process, in particular that of oral communication.

Justifying corporal punishment, a colleague once said to me that a child has to be beaten to ensure that he or she is disciplined. Others concurred with him, saying in a chorus: "*Spare the rod and spoil the child.*" However, as a teacher, I prefer "consultative mechanisms of discipline" (Morrell, 2001b, p. 296). I have found that talking to learners in private about their learning problems brings about a good working rapport. Moreover, my personal history reveals that learners cannot freely engage in oral communication if corporal punishment is used. They fear to try to communicate because they think they may be punished when they make mistakes.



Figure 3.6. The frightening motivator, *umciji*.

Implications of my Personal History Narrative for Teaching and Learning Oral Communication

In writing this chapter, I have come to understand learning oral communication as a process where two or more people are talking to each other. I have realised that my family's story-telling sessions were *oral exchanges* (Deepa & Manisha, 2009; Rahman, 2010). For example, in my personal history narrative, I describe the dialogic nature of my family's stories where the listeners were given opportunities to air their views about characters.

The story-telling also highlights the significance of *emotions* and *relationships* (Burke, 2002), because listeners were afforded opportunities to state if they felt sympathetic or unsympathetic towards some characters' deeds. Therefore, in my teaching of English oral communication, I have decided to pay attention to emotions (Masinga, 2009). For example, I will encourage the learners to discuss with their audience how they feel about the content of their oral presentations. In addition, my family's routine of story-telling made me feel comfortable as the stories taught me that if I maintained healthy relations with others, I would

never be short of assistance. I learned that it is wrong to cause unhappiness to fellow human beings. I learned that I must always be aware of my immediate society's norm and values. However, I also realised that I must act according to my conscience. Consequently, in the case of disciplinary measures, I do not use corporal punishment with my learners. I talk to them individually if they fall foul of school rules. Thus, I have come to see that a teacher needs to create trust, comfort and clear expectations for learners. To achieve this, teaching English oral communication must be a familiar and unthreatening process where consistency is maintained.

Furthermore, during the story-telling sessions, listeners had to be attentive and take note of *socio-cultural* traits that were conveyed through the stories, such as sharing of ideas and aiding of the needy and sickly. As Mkhize (2004, p. 11) asserts, "culture: generally refers to knowledge that is passed on from one generation to another within a given society, through which people make sense of themselves and the world". As a result, I have realised that I should select English oral communication topics that take note of my context and that of learners (Masinga, 2009). When I let learners choose their own oral topics, I should guide them to choose topics that are relevant within their immediate environment and context. For example, they might talk about education and teenage matters such as substance abuse.

In retracing my personal history, I have realised that, as a teacher, I have avoided raising sensitive issues, such as sexuality. In my culture, adult males do not talk to children about sexual practices or sexuality. Traditionally, in IsiZulu culture, discussing sexuality with girls was the responsibility of the older girls, whilst boys discussed it among themselves. However, at school, I am responsible for teaching both boys and girls. Moreover, Masinga (2009) points out that sometimes traditional cultural practice become outdated. Therefore, I think it is a good idea for teachers (male or female) to use English oral communication lessons to guide boys as well as girls on sexuality issues. I see that it is an abdication of my duties to leave topics on sexuality solely to Life Orientation teachers, who in my school are females.

Additionally, my memories of the story-telling sessions show English oral communication as a *multisensory learning process* in which the tone of voice and non-oral interaction such as

gestures play a significant role (Doyle, 2011). For example, I remember how the smell and taste of roasted corn blended with the sight of the story-tellers' facial expressions. I have realised that learners need to be involved in hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting when they are learning to communicate orally. My personal history narrative also demonstrates how facial expressions and descriptive images, which are easily perceived by a brain, form an integral part of learning English oral communication (Zull, 2002).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have revisited my early learning and teaching experiences in order to better understand my practice as an English teacher. I have remembered how I learned English oral communication from my family members, teachers, my fellow learners and students as well as my lecturers. I have highlighted how the manner in which I learned, particularly at school level, shaped my early teaching experience. These reflections and recollections have helped me to learn that I can draw from my personal history in my search for teaching strategies that can improve my teaching of English oral communication. My intention is to draw on those experiences in developing new teaching strategies.

In Chapter Four, I build on what I have learned in Chapter Three to examine the strengths and weaknesses that have been prevalent in my teaching of English oral communication and to consider how I can enhance my teaching practice. Hence, in Chapter Four I address two of the three research questions that underpin my self-study. I look at Question Two: *What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?* I also address Question Three: *How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners?*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MERITS AND DEMERITS OF MY TEACHING: INNOVATIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES UNEARTHED

Introduction

I undertook this self-study to enhance my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners. In the preceding chapter, Chapter Three, I presented my personal history narrative through which I portrayed my learning of oral communication in IsiZulu (my home language) and in English. In addition, I looked at my experiences of teaching English oral communication as an unqualified and as a qualified teacher. I considered these learning and teaching experiences so as to understand the impact they might have had on the manner in which I had been teaching and what I could learn from them to enhance my future teaching.

In this chapter, Chapter Four, I attend to the second and third research questions of the study. The second research question is: *What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?* In my search for answers to this question, I draw from my personal history narrative (Chapter Three) and from my developmental teaching portfolio (Samaras, 2011). (I explain the methods of personal history self-study and developmental portfolio self-study in more detail in Chapter Two.) The portfolio included Grade 10 English lesson plans I designed for areas that I identified through writing my personal history narrative as those where I needed to improve my teaching of English oral communication. The portfolio also included my research journal, my marking rubrics, learners' written feedback, learners' creative essays, photographs of T-shirts learners brought for a class activity and audio recordings of English oral communication lessons.

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, four areas of focus that have influenced my learning and teaching of oral communication have emerged from my personal history narrative. These are: (a) *oral exchanges*; (b) *emotions and relationships* (c) *socio-cultural contexts*; and (d) *multisensory learning processes*. Therefore, in this chapter I consider the extent to which I have been paying attention to these four areas in my teaching. I also respond to my third research question: *How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication*

to isiZulu-speaking learners? To find answers to this question, I explore oral communication activities that focus on learners' oral exchanges, emotions and relationships, social-cultural contexts and multisensory learning processes.

Oral Exchanges: The Core of Oral Communication

When I scrutinise my personal history narrative, I realise that my style of teaching English oral communication has in many ways been “influenced by how I was taught and learnt from primary school level to tertiary level” (Makhanya, 2010, p. 35). Through recalling my personal history, I have become aware that, just as my own teachers taught me, I have been teaching learners to present speeches individually and that this has actually prevented them from engaging in oral communication in the form of a conversation. Even before I began my research, I had tried to facilitate group conversations, which I learned about at the teachers' training college and later at university. However, this did not work as I had anticipated. I found that, although involved in group work, learners spoke in turns as if they were presenting a formal speech. Furthermore, learners did not respond to what was said by their group members. They came with prepared speeches which they had memorised and they presented these without waiting for fellow group members' input. Hence, I have realised that English oral exchanges have not been prevalent among learners in my lessons. Thus, the theme of *oral exchanges* has come out from my personal history narrative as one of the most important tenets of oral communication that needs my attention. In the following sections, I discuss *learner input* and *teacher feedback* as two significant aspects of oral exchanges in relation to my teaching of English oral communication.

Learner Input: The Cornerstone of an Oral Communication Learning Process

From my personal history narrative, I have become aware that one of my former teachers' errors was their inability to afford me opportunities to engage in English oral exchanges with other learners so as to gauge if I was succeeding or not. I allude to this limitation in Chapter Three:

I now realise that the shortcoming of these presentations was that we did not engage in discussions. Each learner would stand in front of the class and tell what he or she had

read. I think this tendency impeded the development of my oral communication. A discussion would have afforded me the opportunity to correct my mistakes there and then. (p. 25)

Thus, I have become conscious that my teachers' *modus operandi* has had an influence on the manner in which I have been teaching. Over the years, my learners have just stood in front of the class and given a speech presentation and then sat down without any response from the audience. In addition, I have realised that the teaching strategies that I have been using to try to encourage learners to give input on each other's presentations have been inefficient. For example, I have told learners who formed the audience to make comments at the end of each presentation. I have suggested that they must pose questions to presenters. However, I have become conscious that due to lack of confidence and fear of committing errors, learners have not been giving input even when I told them to.

In my early teaching days as an 'unqualified' English teacher, I noticed that learners encountered difficulties when speaking English to each other or to me. This hindered my teaching because I could not find out where and why the learners were experiencing problems. In my personal history narrative, I make note of this handicap:

Whilst teaching, I had to re-explain my lessons in IsiZulu. When seeking for feedback in English, I found that the learners were unable to respond. But they were able to give answers in IsiZulu when given an opportunity to do so. (p. 27)

Thus, I observed that learners' inability and lack of confidence to speak English prevented them from giving me feedback which I could utilise to address their barriers. Moreover, I lacked teaching experience and had limited expertise in gathering learner input during my lessons. Therefore, as I explain in Chapter Three, I decided to pursue a diploma in teaching in order to develop strategies for teaching oral communication as well as facilitating learner feedback.

However, after having taught for 27 years, I realised that I still lacked productive teaching strategies to facilitate learner input. I embarked on my self-study research because of my concern that most learners could not give me satisfactory ideas or express their feelings about what made their learning successful (Rodgers, 2006). I was finding that, at the end of a lesson, they were generally unable to discuss the gist of an English oral discussion except to say the topic had been interesting.

Looking back at my personal history, I have realised that one of my weaknesses has been the use of code-switching in gathering learner feedback. In my personal history narrative, I consider the impact of my former teachers' use of code-switching on my learning:

The other teachers, for example, those teaching Social Studies, did not teach entirely in English. Looking back into my personal history, I can see that their code-switching, which is the alternate usage of two languages by the same speaker during the same discussion (Hoffman, 1991; Masango, 2004), caused an impediment in my acquisition of English. I now believe that this combination of spoken English and IsiZulu retarded my mastering of English oral communication because I had a flawed understanding of English grammar and vocabulary. (p. 22)

I am now aware that I have been quick to think that learners do not understand me when I speak in English. Therefore, I have tended to use both IsiZulu and English when teaching English oral communication. For example, I would say: "I want you to talk about 'a person *engingasoze ngamkhohlwa*'" (meaning 'A person I will never forget'). Or, I would ask them: "*Iya bhora yini le topic?*" which means, 'Is this topic boring?' In addition, sometimes, I would allow learners to conduct their group discussions in IsiZulu and English. However, when I urged learners to present oral tasks, I expected them to speak only in English. I have since realised that I have not employed generative teaching strategies that could enable learners to shift from the mother tongue reasoning to English. I am therefore concerned that the use of both IsiZulu and English simultaneously might have resulted in the learners not acquiring required skills and knowledge for English oral communication (Fleisch, 2008).

Over the years, I have attempted to incorporate some of the more interactive strategies that I learned at the teachers' training college, such as grouping learners to discuss some topics or engaging them in debates of current issues. However, I have now realised that even these interactive strategies were not appropriately designed to promote learner input. For example, after a group discussion a spokesperson would give a presentation on behalf of the other group members. No conversation would occur to assess if each learner had been actively involved in the activity they had been assigned. Moreover, I have recently tried to include learning experiences and teaching strategies I have discovered in my postgraduate studies. For example, my lecturers have engaged me in one-on-one conversations where I have been encouraged to give input on my progress as a student. However, when I have tried this with my students, their response has been that they can understand what I say to them in English but that it is difficult for them to respond in English.

Realising that these approaches were not yielding the results I expected in my teaching, I decided for this study to seek more actively for learners' input. To illustrate, in my research journal, I wrote:

I am going to ask learners to come up with suggestions as to how they would like to learn English oral communication. Perhaps, they are going to suggest techniques that can suit their learning styles and thus, their presentations. Therefore, that would give me opportunities to develop teaching strategies that would make them speak English correctly. (29 July, 2012)

I thought that the 42 Grade 10 learners' feedback on what and how they would like to be taught would provide me with data I required for developing the teaching strategies I needed. I hoped that this feedback would enable to assist learners to acquire English oral communication skills that were more suitable for their individual needs. Moreover, I realised that for my research to succeed I needed to collect input from learners and avoid being at the helm (Masinga, 2009). Thus, through my research, I hoped to "gather information about what students have learned and how they have learned it , including what helped their learning and what hindered it" (Rodgers, 2006, p. 219). I anticipated that this input would assist me to

equip learners for sharing meanings and comprehension, which is pivotal for communication (Rahman, 2010).

However, initially, the questions I asked orally produced no response. When I probed further, the learners said they could not answer orally and that they would prefer to write their responses down. Hence, I wrote the following questions on the chalkboard:

- What do you remember about your previous experiences of oral presentations?
- How do you like to present orals currently?
- Which topics would you like to talk about?
- What do you hope to achieve through an oral communication lesson?

All the learners responded similarly to the first question. They wrote that they dreaded the English oral presentations as they could be laughed at by other learners if they made mistakes. In what follows, I quote some of the learners' responses that are representative of what many of them wrote. I decided to quote the learners' responses unedited in order to show their attempts to communicate in written English. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity. Learners' fear of 'getting it wrong' is illustrated by the following written response:

Before I afraid to present orals because I had to stand infront of the people. What makes me fear is that all the people just pay attention to all what you are going say. Since I started presenting orals I used to panic and go nervous because I always crame what I am going to represent and therefore make mistakes. The hole class laughs at me. (Nomusa, 25 July, 2012).

Besides being frightened to make mistakes, it seemed that all learners would rather rely on what they had prepared instead of giving impromptu presentations. In response to question two, many learners wrote that they preferred to be given topics prior to oral presentation sessions. Below is an example of one such response:

I would like to learn my orals by firstly practice what I am going to say. before I stand in front of the class. I would like to be given an article that can be from a magazine or a newspaper that I would read in front of the class because if I will memorise it. I will not forget the words and not being shy and nervous to be talking in front of the class. (Thabiso, 25 July, 2012).

The learners' responses also indicate that they considered rote learning to be an effective way of learning English oral communication:

Before I start represent I listen the teacher to what he told me about the topic. I choose that he said he want to say. Now I start to confirm that is what he said talk all about not representing my wrong orals. (Bonga, 25 July, 2012).

Furthermore, I noticed that the learners understood an oral lesson primarily as a speech presentation rather than a oral exchange. For example, one of the learners wrote:

I used to prepare for orals the whole week in my room stand in front of mirror going over the speech I have written. my mom used check every word to make it right. When talking in class I took more time than allocated never looking up at my audience. I was afraid even to stand in front of the learners. (Khosi, 25 July, 2012).

My analysis of the learners' responses to the third question was that they opted for topics that are related to teenagers' matters. I looked for common or differing threads that emerged from learners' responses to the question. Learners mentioned solutions to the problems they identified in their responses. Learners suggested topics about things that they considered to be destructive but did not mention constructive ones. To me, the learners' topics were not about 'progress'. For example, most of the learners listed topics on teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, gangsters, and car hijacking.

In their responses to the fourth question, most of the learners stated that English oral communication lessons should equip them to be successful in life. To illustrate, I include the following excerpt:

There are many topics which I wish to talk about. The most important ones is to tell how important is school, what cause most people to suffer from poverty and how to be successful in life. These are the topics I wish to present-“how to choose a career”, “how money ruin peoples life” and “the person I admire” (Msizi, 25 July, 2012).

To me, this suggests that learners are aware that through oral communication people convey meaningful messages to each other (Rahman, 2010). By contrast, however, learners do not seek for each other’s views in English oral communication lessons. Contrary to engaging to conversations, they seem to think that orals are speeches that they have to present in order to be credited with marks.

Teacher Feedback: The Missing Connector

Examining my personal history, I have since realised why I have been teaching in particular ways (Allender & Allender, 2006). My primary school teachers did not give me adequate opportunities to engage in English exchanges with other learners. Nor did they give me feedback on my attempts to engage in English oral communication. I have done exactly what my teachers did, giving learners lists of oral topics to either present as impromptu or prepared speeches. Furthermore, I have become aware that I have not been in the habit of explaining clearly how learners should proceed in finishing the task at hand. In addition, I have noticed that in my lessons constructive feedback has been missing. I have not paid much attention to the power that feedback gives to learners so that they can improve their performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). I have not been telling learners how to enhance their English oral communication, although I have noticed that they commit errors. Through my reading, I have discovered that for learners to make progress, as a teacher I must guide them in their learning process. I have learned that I must offer learners strategies for correcting their own mistakes. Through my self-study, I have learned that “feedback becomes a reflective conversation when there is a back and forth between teacher and students” (Rodgers, 2006, p. 221).

The other failing that I have become conscious of is that I have been crediting learners with marks, but not telling them if they are making headway or not. For example, I have not been telling learners why the marks I have credited them with are categorised under “good”, “very good” or “excellent”. I have been giving them marks out of a total of 10 and recording them once a quarter. The oral feedback I have been giving them is that, if a learner obtains 50% and above, that is a sign of progress. My written feedback has appeared only in their quarterly reports card as part of English as a subject. My other failure has been keeping a rubric for marking orals to myself instead of making learners aware of what it entails. Due to time constraints and overcrowding, I have only been making learners aware of the rubric at the beginning of first term of each year. Moreover, I have become conscious that that while I would like to give learners effective feedback, I lack relevant strategies to do this.

Writing my personal history narrative has enabled me to see how, at school level, particularly primary school, my teachers neither asked for nor gave feedback to learners. However, I have now realised that it defeats the intention of education not to give learners feedback, because feedback “consists of information about progress, and how to proceed” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 89). In my early learning experiences, my teachers did not tell me if I was correct or incorrect in my English oral communication. Instead, my teachers told me to find correct answers on my own. This is evident in this extract from Chapter Three:

But I had a difficulty when re-telling these stories in English. Although I understood them, I struggled to learn how to relate these stories in English rather than in a mixture of English and IsiZulu. I asked for assistance from my teachers, but received none. My teachers said I would learn by emulating how they spoke English. However, how I had to do that was not explained explicitly. (p. 23)

My personal history narrative also reveals that when I was a novice teacher, I found problems when seeking for feedback about my lessons. I approached my experienced colleagues with the understanding that “a critical aspect of feedback is the information given to teachers about attainment of [teaching] goals related to the task or performance” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 88). I wanted my colleagues to assist me with suggestions as to how to give feedback to

learners about English oral communication. However, as illustrated below, my fellow teachers were not encouraging in their responses. They advised me to wait for the learners to tell me if they had problems. If learners did not tell me about their misunderstandings, I should not worry. It was even worse when a Department of Education official made an unconstructive comment instead of offering me developmental support. The following extract from Chapter Three bears testimony:

My experienced colleagues did not support me either. They were discouraging because they advised me to work towards finishing the syllabus rather than worrying about the learners who were not willing to learn. They said that in the end, it would be up to me to account to the education inspector why I had not completed the syllabus....My frustration was exacerbated by a schools' inspector (black like me) who blatantly said I did not know English. (p. 31)

Paying Attention to Emotions and Relationships

The emotional and relational aspects of the learning of English oral communication have emerged as another other significant theme from my personal history narrative. In Chapter Three I make mention of this theme:

The story-telling also highlights the significance of *emotions* and *relationships* (Burke, 2002), because listeners were afforded opportunities to state if they felt sympathetic or unsympathetic towards some characters' deeds. Therefore, in my teaching of English oral communication, I have decided to pay attention to emotions (Masinga, 2009). For example, I will encourage the learners to discuss with their audience how they feel about the content of their oral presentations. (pp. 38-39)

Furthermore, from oral communication tasks I have assigned to learners during this study, the theme of emotions and relationships has become even more evident. Therefore, in this section, I discuss *emotion as topic content* and in terms of *learner-learner relationships*.

Emotions as Topic Content

In my efforts to stimulate oral exchanges among learners for this study, I assigned oral communication topics that I anticipated would evoke emotions. The 42 learners were required to discuss these topics in small groups of six each. Learners frowned, grimaced and sighed when they discussed sensitive issues such as child abuse. Some learners expressed anger at those who laughed during the conversations that involved emotional topics like rape. For example, one group took unkindly to one of their members who laughed as they talked about a 16 year old boy who had raped an 84 year old grandmother. In another group, members became sympathetic towards one of their own when he told them about his father's car hijacking. Therefore, the oral communication lesson created an opportunity for learners to be emotionally involved in their learning process (Raht et al., 2009). During this group's discussion, I observed that learners became emotionally affected by hearing about their classmate's ordeal. Through that lesson, I found that emotional content in group work can assist learners in the acquisition of emotional qualities such as empathy that will help them to develop into "productive and effective members of the society" (Mlambo, 2012, p. 53). Furthermore, I think that, through these discussions, the learners learned that English oral communication can assist them to obtain general knowledge and to relate to other people.

To follow on from these group discussions, I involved learners in another project that had emotional content. It was also a group conversation that I hoped would involve "an understanding of the issues in connection with their own lives and situations" (Masinga, 2009, p. 244). Each group member brought a T-shirt with a slogan inscribed across the front or back. I asked the learners about the source of their T-shirts. Some explained that these were the T-shirts that they had received for free as part of social campaigns run by non-government organisations (NGOs) and South African government departments. Some learners brought T-shirts with pictures of soccer or film stars which had been bought from shops.

After learners' consultation among themselves, each group chose one T-shirt and discussed its inscription. Each group used a cellphone camera to photograph the selected T-shirt and discussed its slogan as well as its logo. Thereafter, they used a voice-recorder to record their conversation. As Moletsane and Lolwana (2012) highlight, emotional content such as incest,

sexual abuse, drug abuse, intoxication, HIV, and rape dominated the selected T-shirts. Hence, by using T-shirts as a prompt, the English oral communication lesson was able “to bring to the fore and to illuminate, if not settle, socio-political issues that are often hard to talk about” (Moletsane & Lolwana, 2012, p. 287). I observed that whilst learners engaged in a lively discussion of these social issues, they attempted as much as possible to speak in English. Some learners struggled to express themselves in the language, but were assisted by fellow group members. There was evidence of the notion of sharing ideas, which is part of the essence of “co-learning” (Brandenburg, 2008, p. 134). The learners suggested solutions and agreed that the issues emanating from their discussion were eyesores in our society. The T-shirts gave learners “a way of expressing the said and the unsaid, and [allowed] for multiple avenues of interpretation” (Butler-Kisber, 2008, p. 268). I have included photographic collages of a selection of the learners’ T-shirts, which show the range of emotionally charged issues that the T-shirts highlighted (see figure 4.1.a; figure 4.1.b; figure 4.1.c).



Figure.4.1.a. Evoking people’s feelings, an emotional T-shirt collage

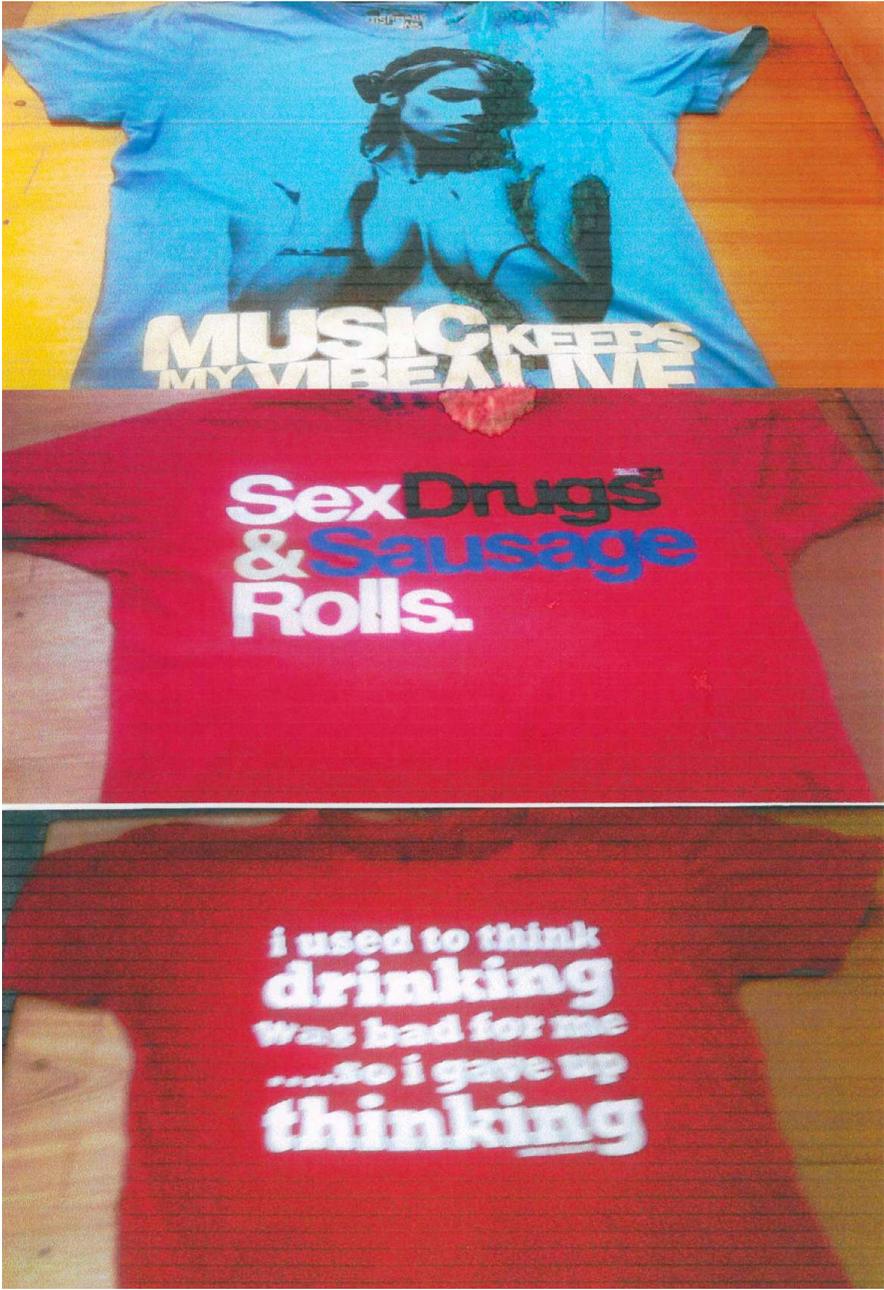


Figure 4.1.b. Evoking people's feelings, an emotional T-shirt collage



Figure 4.1.c. Evoking people's feelings, an emotional T-shirt collage

From my reading, I have also identified that emotional content in a lesson can bring about creative thinking (Raht et al., 2009). Therefore, during this study, I asked learners to write creative essays where they paid attention to their feelings. I gave them three topics to choose from, namely, “As I look at that photograph”, “A truly remarkable person” and “It is quiet now.” Thereafter, learners discussed their essays in groups of six each. Each learner took a turn to briefly tell his or her group what his or her essay was about. I told the learners to ask questions, comment on or discuss each others’ presentations. However, I now realise that a weakness of this activity was that I did not guide learners as to what type of questions they might ask. Nonetheless, in my analysis of their presentations and discussions, I identified emotional content. For example, below is a written response of one learner to the essay topic “It is quiet now”:

Life was so simply when she was still alive. Our mother could see through us if something was bothering us. She did everything in her power to make us feel better. My heart became broken when God took her away from us. There was no joy and happiness when my mother passed away. The house felt empty. Our father tried to fill the gap but his love was not like my mother’s. (Thandi, 07 September, 2012)

After Thandi had read her essay to the group members, the other learners responded. During the discussions, I decided not to get involved in the learners’ oral interaction. However, I observed that learners in Thandi’s group were talking in hushed voices. When I went closer, I noticed that three of the girls in the group were wiping tears from their eyes. To me, that suggested that the topic had aroused their emotions.

Another learner chose to write about a photograph of her father’s car in response to the topic, “As I look at that photograph”. She said it brought back mixed memories. Some of those memories were fond, but some were not amusing. When members of her group asked how that photo made her feel, she replied:

When I look at that photograph, I miss the people who are in it. I remember the happy times when my father took us to the beach every Christmas day. But I feel sad and feel

like crying because my father is no longer with us. He passed away in 2008. We were all left in shock because his death was caused by that car. Death is an ugly monster which took the most important people in one's life and leaves a person feeling lonely and sad. (Ayanda, 07 September, 2012)

Thus, the essay writing and discussion evoked the learner's emotions and those of her classmates. In fact, in all the groups, learners showed emotional attachment to the content of their discussions. As I walked around, I noticed that words showing emotions dominated. Those were words such as: "unhappy", "sad", "lonely", "loss" and "heart-broken".

Thus, I realised that oral communication activities for learners need "to be evocative...to call or draw forth emotion, meaning and understanding" (Raht et al., 2009, p. 231). As not all learners can best express their feelings in written English, emotions can sometimes be better catered for through oral communication. Oral communication can also allow for emotional interaction among learners.

Learner to Learner Relationships

I have realised that learners need to feel comfortable when they express themselves in English. From revisiting my own experiences as a learner, I am aware of the difficulty I encountered in my attempts to speak English. Sometimes I had to rely on my own judgment, uncertain whether I was correct or incorrect. I make mention of this impediment in Chapter Three of this self-study:

Thus, as a learner, one had to correct one's errors. However, how that could be done was never explained. One had to keep on trying to express oneself correctly. The more mistakes we committed, the more punishment we received. (pp. 21-22)

I have also observed that many learners in my classes are either frightened or uncertain of the reaction of their classmates when they engage in English oral communication. Thus, during my study, I have been striving to create an atmosphere of mutual trust in my classroom. I have

become aware that a learner has to feel that it is neither the teacher's nor the other learners' intention to ridicule him or her. To illustrate, in Chapter Three of this study, I explain that:

I have come to see that a teacher needs to create trust, comfort and clear expectations for learners. (p. 39)

Hence, as I teacher, I must cultivate the feeling of equality among learners. By equality I mean the feeling of inferiority or superiority complex in terms of academic achievements among learners should be discouraged by teachers. In the English oral communication lessons that I have designed as part of my study, I have found that learners' "mutual, active and creative engagement with a topic promotes discussion" (Raht et al., 2009, p. 220). I have noticed that peer teaching occurs and learners more freely open up to each other. Through peer teaching, learners become confident and improve their communication expertise (Mlambo, 2012). Even those who are usually reserved become more actively involved and listen attentively in a group discussion. Some learners have swapped their usual seating positions in the classroom and decided to sit with the members of their oral communication discussion groups. Others have gone as far as becoming personal friends. I have observed that some of the learners have formed study groups where they discuss subjects other than English. To me, this is evidence of learner to learner emotional relationships. I have seen how learner to learner relationships develop as the group members begin to express their feelings and to respond to each other, in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Socio-Cultural Contexts as Foreground of Oral Communication

Through this self-study, I have realised the importance of learners' immediate milieu in their learning to communicate orally. I found that in my teaching of the English language, I need to integrate "the idiosyncratic dynamics and influences of relationships at home, at school, in various community groups, and in faith-based organisations" (Burke, 2002, p. 110). Therefore, in accordance with Igbo and Yoruba (Nigerian) proverb; *it takes a whole village to raise a child*, in teaching English oral communication I assume the multiple roles of learners' parent, guardian and teacher (Burke, 2002). "The basic meaning [of the proverb] is that child upbringing is a communal effort" (Healey, 1998, p. 1). The study has enabled me to

acknowledge that learners learn better if teaching strategies “involve learners engaging with their surrounding environments and learning more about their friends, families and communities” (Raht et.al., p. 220).

When I was a learner at secondary school, I joined a debating society where my English oral communication was intensified. Through the debates, I started to learn about black South Africans’ struggle for political freedom. I also became aware of pressing social issues such as poverty and economic deprivation. This is affirmed by this extract from Chapter Three:

Our school principal recruited university graduates to teach us English. They assigned our debating society topics that were related to the prevailing South African political situation. It was after 16 June 1976. On that day, black students from Soweto (a conglomeration of townships near Johannesburg, in South Africa) rioted against the use of Afrikaans language as a medium of instruction. Consequently, throughout apartheid South Africa, black schools were teeming with demands for educational reforms. We would engage in debates or in symposia where we tackled social, economic and educational issues. (p. 24)

The coursework for my Master of Education (MEd) degree made me more aware about current educational issues such as facilitating learners’ integration of prior knowledge and newly acquired knowledge (Ball, 2009). I realised that I lacked teaching strategies and content related to socio-cultural contexts of learners. According to Trout (2010, p. 122), “listening to each other, asking each other questions, identifying what they [know] and [do] not know about a topic, and solving problems in groups” can enhance learners’ interaction with their socio-cultural contexts. Hence, with the assistance of my supervisor and critical friends, I have explored means of incorporating social-cultural teaching aspects in my teaching of English oral communication.

In writing my personal history, I was reminded of how drama can be used to raise social issues and stimulate oral communication. For example, in one of the stage-plays I wrote whilst at the teachers’ training college, I depicted the maltreatment of employees by

employers. I wanted the other student teachers to become more conscious of the socio-cultural contexts they were going to teach in. Indirectly, my intention was also to alert the prospective female teachers about the exploitative male principals they might encounter in their teaching journey. Moreover, I was warning the male teachers about unprofessional deeds towards school girls. The following extract from Chapter Three illustrates this:

In *Our Side*, I highlighted the callous deeds that black people inflicted on their own folk. I was the main character and acted a part of an employer that exploited his workers. The employees worked long hours, with no breaks or lunch and earned meagre wages. The play also looked at sexual harassment in a work place by black bosses, and thus the title. Hence, the play looked at the black men's exploitative side rather than that of white men. Subtly, the stage play exposed the indecent behaviour of male teachers, especially principals, towards both female teachers and learners. This anti-social malady I had observed in my practice as an 'unqualified' teacher. (p. 28)

I remember that, as the drama was performed, the audience shouted and rebuked the boss in English. The audience told the boss to desist from his abusive deeds. This was due to their sympathy towards the employee. What they saw the employer doing evoked feelings of hatred towards him. Therefore, "drama as process" (Francis, 2010, p. 61), where the actors and the audience interact, was taking place. It is common with the AmaZulu to sing along, clap hands and comment while others dance on stage. It is also done during *ukungcweka* (the game of stick fighting, where AmaZulu males engage in a mock fighting which is a form of entertainment). The audience shouts: "*Mshaye! Mshaye!*" This means "Hit him! Hit him!" On both occasions, the actors respond by saying they cannot be beaten by the opponent.

In this self-study, I included role play as a pedagogic strategy to experiment with the impact of including socio-cultural content in activities for teaching English oral communication. In order to encourage a learner-centred educational activity, I asked learners to dramatise socio-cultural events or issues of their own choice. One of the role plays they performed was about *umkhosi womhlanga* (the reed dance). This is a ceremony where Zulu girls undergo a virginity test. The learners also presented role plays on topics of *crime, intoxicating substance abuse*

and *single parenthood*. Such topics help learners to “[address] connections between what they are learning and their overall life experiences” (hooks, 1993, p. 19).

Then, in another lesson I put out flash cards, on which a variety of topics were written, upside down. The topics included “Euthanasia”, “Abortion”, “My Dream”, “The Indecent Stepfather” and “The Social Networks”. One member of a randomly selected group picked a topic for his or her group. After deliberating among themselves for five minutes, they dramatised the topic in front of the whole class for ten minutes. (Because of ethical reasons, I did not photograph learners performing their role plays). The other class members then asked questions for three minutes. I remembered that in the learners’ social contexts people usually gather to discuss issues that affect them as a community. Thus, I designed group work where each learner had a conversational input about the topics that had been dramatised. This reminded me of audience response and involvement in social issues during my family’s story-telling sessions, which were followed by educational discussions, as affirmed by this extract from Chapter Three:

Later in my life, I realised that those stories were used to teach us some social values and norms. For example, we were once told the story of how the guinea-pig (called *imbila*) ended-up with a vestigial tail. It is said that a group of animals went past this animal and told it that there was a gathering where all animals would be supplied with well-developed tails. The *imbila* decided to sleep and told other animals to get a tail for it. Through this story, we were taught that one has to stand up and do things on one’s own instead of waiting for others to do things on one’s behalf. Even today, when I teach English oral communication, I ensure that a moral lesson is infused. (p. 19)

Using role plays as a learning activity has taught me that, besides improving my teaching, interactive, creative group work can facilitate the addressing of social ills through English oral communication. I have discovered that such group work can enable learners to engage with socio-cultural issues that concern them and their communities (Raht et al., 2009). Moreover, using group work and drama has helped me to develop teaching strategies that can aid learners to understand South Africa’s diverse cultures. I have learned to teach learners who

are IsiZulu-speakers to communicate in another language (English) which “is the closest way humans [can use for] getting inside another person’s head” (Wynne, 2008, p. 210).

In my study, I have experimented with techniques of teaching learners oral communication so that they will connect to their “extended families and [see] themselves and all people as related” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 50). I have become aware of how learners can engage in discussion about constructive issues and can think more critically about destructive or anti-social tendencies in their own lives, as well as their surrounding contexts. I hope this will enhance learners’ socio-cultural interconnections with their environment and thus, help them to transform themselves and other citizens. Therefore, this self-study has transformed my personal and professional attitude and beliefs about how learners’ acquisition of English oral communication can be enhanced by interaction with socio-cultural patterns (Schulte, 2010).

Multisensory Learning Processes: The need for Multi-Faceted Oral Communication

Lessons

According to Doyle (2011), listening to music, seeing actual objects, drawing or being shown pictures, can stimulate multisensory learning and help learners understand what is being taught. Similarly, Zull (2002) points out that multisensory experience results in powerful learning. From my personal history narrative I have learned that, for multisensory learning to occur, all the five human being’s senses should be catered for. Through revisiting my experiences of story-telling, I realised that in an English oral communication lesson I should try to ensure that learners can see, hear, smell, taste and touch what they discuss:

Additionally, my memories of the story-telling sessions show oral communication as a *multisensory learning process* in which the tone of voice and non-oral interaction such as gestures play a significant role (Doyle, 2011). For example, I remember how the smell and taste of roasted corn blended with the sight of the story-tellers’ facial expressions. I have realised that learners need to be involved in hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting when they are learning to communicate orally. My personal history narrative also demonstrates how facial expressions and descriptive

images, which are easily perceived by a brain, form an integral part of learning oral communication (Zull, 2002). (Chapter Three, p. 40)

Furthermore, in my personal history narrative, I point out that at the teachers' training college, audio-visual teaching aids made learning of oral communication much easier. To illustrate:

Because there was electricity, tape-recorders, radios, television sets and computers were used for oral lessons. Tape-recorders, radios and television sets assisted me to learn correct pronunciation of most of the English words. (Chapter Three, p. 29)

I have become aware that these teaching aids helped me see, hear and listen to people speaking English. Therefore, they encouraged multisensory learning.

Hence, in an effort to stimulate multisensory learning, I asked learners to use their cellphones to take photos of T-shirts on which there were slogans (as explained earlier in this chapter). In groups of six, they discussed what was written on those T-shirts. Thus, learners saw and touched what they learned about as they passed the T-shirts around in the groups. The learners heard what others were saying and it was evident that they became emotional about the messages conveyed by writings on some of the T-shirts.

From my reading I have been conscious that multisensory learning is part of participatory pedagogic methods. According to Raht et al. (2009, p. 219), such participatory methods "are a way of turning classrooms into spaces where everyone has the opportunity to share with one another and all voices are listened to". This new awareness prompted me to design English oral communication lessons where learners took a more active role. One of my critical friends (see Chapter Two) suggested an idea of a role play to stimulate multisensory learning. As explained in the previous section, these role plays evoked audience response. I observed that some learners cringed, grimaced or sneered when groups acted about rape or incest scenes. Learners that often underperformed in English oral communication were able "to express issues that are hard to put in words" (Raht et al. 2009, p. 220) through their dramatic role plays. Similarly, Francis (2010) argues that when young people are using drama, they are

often able to communicate orally, and through their movements and expression, about issues they usually find difficult to discuss.

Implications for Teaching and Learning of English Oral Communication

My self-study has revealed that in planning my English oral communication lessons I should take account of the four themes that have emerged from my research. I have realised that cornerstone of English oral communication is oral exchanges. Hence, when planning lessons, teachers must ensure that learning activities will involve learners in interacting with each other. Moreover, teachers should give feedback to assist learners to improve their English oral communication responses. I have also become aware that English oral communication lessons should have emotional and relational content aimed at assisting learners to develop intrapersonal as well as interpersonal awareness. In addition, since learners do not exist in isolation from a broad community, their English oral communication learning activities should take cognisance of their milieus and their socio-cultural contexts. Finally, in order for learners to engage actively in English oral communication, teaching strategies should include multisensory learning processes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Chapter Four, I have explored the four themes that have emerged in this study about the teaching of English oral communication. I have identified strengths and weaknesses in my teaching strategies. Furthermore, I have described and evaluated teaching strategies that I developed through my reading and from the suggestions my critical friends put forward for me to enhance my teaching. In the following chapter, Chapter Five, I make a summary of my self-study research. I offer guidelines for improving the teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners and consider how I could build on my study through further collaborative research with other teachers of English.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: AFTER REFLECTION, WHERE TO?

Introduction

I decided to do self-study research to explore how I could improve my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school. I wanted to look at my past and current lived experiences and reflect on my own educational experiences in order to enhance my educational understanding and my English teaching strategies.

In this final chapter, Chapter Five, I review my self-study. I reflect on what I have learned and consider how my study has enabled me to answer my research questions. I also present guidelines for teaching English oral communication based on the study and point out future research that I would like to undertake in collaboration with other teachers of English oral communication.

A Review of the Study

In Chapter One, I explained that my study was focused on how to improve my teaching of English oral communication in my school. I described how my research had emanated from a small-scale study which I had undertaken as part of my Master of Education (MEd) coursework. In that previous study, I investigated another teacher's understanding and facilitation of oral communication learning. My findings were that my teacher participant understood English oral communication as a presentation of a speech. To me, that was a misconception of English oral communication, which I realised I had also been perpetuating in my teaching. Hence, I decided to explore how I could enhance my teaching of English oral communication. In Chapter One, I explained how the theoretical perspective of *dialogism* (Mkhize, 2004) helped me to better understand the key concept of my self-study, *English oral communication*. I discussed the relationship between dialogism and the African spirit of *Ubuntu* (Mkhize, 2004; Waghid & Smeyers, 2011). I elaborated on how I saw *Ubuntu* (the idea that people are not just individuals but live and care for each other in a community) as vital to the teaching and learning of English oral communication. In this chapter, I also outlined my main research question and three sub-questions: (1) “*What can I learn from my*

personal history about the teaching of English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners?” (2) “What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners?” (3) “How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking-learners? Furthermore, in Chapter One, I identified my research paradigm as both interpretive and critical and explained why I had chosen self-study as my methodological approach.

In Chapter Two, I dealt with the methodological approach of my self-study. I gave a detailed explanation of my self-study methods: personal history and developmental portfolio. I also listed data sources, for example my reflective journal and artefacts. In addition, I explained how I worked in collaboration with my critical friends (fellow students) during my study. I explained that my critical friends were of value in my research, as they assisted me in developing new strategies for teaching English oral communication. I also gave an in-depth description of how I analysed and interpreted data, using an inductive approach. At the end of the chapter I considered limitations, challenges of the study, as well as trustworthiness and ethical issues.

Looking back at Chapter Two, I can see how using self-study as a methodology has contributed to my research learning because I learned about the significance of collaboration and co-operation with other researchers. I also learned that research is a back and forth process. As a researcher, I need to rely on various data sources and keep verifying my data before the final analysis. There is no absolute end to a self-study research project. The more one seeks to investigate a particular aspect of one’s practice, the more questions emerge that can lead to further exploration. For example, in my study I examined my own teaching strategies. But as the research continued, I realised that there is need to investigate how teachers can collaborate in the teaching of English oral communication. I also learned that the self-study methodology is not only about the self of the researcher. It is about his or her practice as well as the context and other people that can help him or her to better understand the research phenomenon.

In Chapter Three, I addressed my first key research question: *What can I learn from my personal history about the teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?* When I reflected on how I learned to communicate orally, I found that both formal and informal education had formed an integral part of my English oral communication learning and teaching. I came to understand that English oral communication learning and teaching is an interactive process that spans home, school and community contexts. I identified and analysed three personal history artefacts that had contributed to my early learning of English oral communication. This artefact analysis assisted me in drawing from my past lived experiences to distinguish four themes that could guide me in developing strategies for English oral communication: *oral exchanges; emotions and relationships; socio-cultural contexts; and multisensory learning processes.*

In Chapter Four, I further explored these four vital themes which had emerged from my experiences of learning and teaching English oral communication. Through my study, I have learned that these themes can form a basis for any new teaching strategy that I will develop to enhance my teaching of English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners. In this chapter, I addressed two key research questions: *What are my strengths and weaknesses in teaching English oral communication to isiZulu-speaking learners?* and *How can I develop new strategies for teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners?* In responding to these research questions, I became aware that I should use teaching strategies that provide learners with opportunity to engage in English oral communication. In order for my lessons to be powerful and successful, the socio-cultural environments that surround the learners should be taken into account. I also found that for my English oral communication lessons to be more effective, I should plan lesson activities that take into consideration multisensory learning processes. Furthermore, my lessons should pay attention to emotional and relational content. Thus, collaborative learning strategies such as role plays and group work should be facilitated if teaching of English oral communication is to be generative.

In reflecting on Chapter Four, I have realised that learner-centred education (Kunene, 2009) is beneficial to both teachers and learners. I have found that I can learn from my learners and vice versa. For example, from the topics I assigned, learners aired their views on socio-

cultural aspects that some of the learners and even I did not fully understand. Learners also mentioned some English idiomatic expressions and gave meanings for them. Learners taught each other some English words.

I have also learned about participatory teaching and learning activities that seemed to be more than generative than non-participatory ones. For instance, role plays proved to be more effective in facilitating oral communication than formal speech presentation. During the role plays, learners corrected each other's' grammatical errors and suggested choice of words. They exchanged ideas and suggested solutions to some of the problems they discussed. Likewise, I noticed how invaluable peer teaching can be when learners assisted other learners who had difficulty in expressing themselves in English. Similarly, my critical friends were of great value in my research, as they suggested innovative English oral communication teaching strategies that I then used in my lessons.

Guidelines for Teaching English Oral Communication in the Spirit of *Ubuntu*

In Chapter One, I discussed *dialogism* as a theoretical perspective that helped me to better understand learning and teaching of English oral communication. When I proceeded with my self-study, I found that four themes, as explained above, complemented the theoretical lens I had identified for my study. Moreover, I discovered that the spirit of *Ubuntu* is embodied in these themes. Hence, in the following sections I discuss the incorporation of these themes into guidelines for teaching English oral communication, with the emphasis on the teaching and learning in the spirit of *Ubuntu*

Oral Exchanges

One of the significant discoveries of my self-study was that oral exchange between two or more people is vital to an oral communication process. This oral interchange must be among learners and with me as the facilitator of their learning. As a teacher I have to give feedback to learners about their progress. I found that in the development of teaching English oral communication strategies, interchange of spoken words among learners must be ensured. Learners should be given opportunities to experience that the essence of oral communication is the sharing of ideas and knowledge and that their existence and that of fellow citizens is

interwoven. Moreover, learners have to understand that their acquisition of knowledge is interdependent. Thus, the gist of this guideline is that, as a teacher, I should strive to be aware that oral communication should not be taught in isolation from the spirit of *Ubuntu*. Therefore, further research could explore the question: *“How can teachers facilitate oral exchanges in order to enhance teaching of English oral communication in the spirit of Ubuntu?”*

Emotions and Relationships

Through this study, I have come to understand that learning, generally, is improved when teaching takes into account the learners’ emotions and relationships to promote meaningful learning experiences. As teachers, we need to develop tactics and strategies that make schools emotionally safe and comfortable learning environments where learners can engage in self-discovery and develop empathy for others. Therefore, English oral communication lessons should be based on topics that evoke learners’ intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness. In my study, I have realised that learners come to school with prior knowledge and interests on which teachers have to build and, therefore, I suggest that learners should be encouraged to come up with topics that have emotional significance for them. However, it is important for teachers to ensure that care is taken when dealing with emotionally sensitive topics in the classroom. Hence, further research could explore the question: *“How can teachers incorporate emotions and relationships in English oral communication learning activities?”*

Socio-Cultural Contexts

Through my personal history self-study, I have realised that in teaching of oral communication, awareness of environments, in particular social and cultural contexts, is key. I found that learning is enhanced when learners are encouraged to communicate about things that are happening in their immediate environments. For example, in the vicinity of my school, teenage pregnancy and burglary are rife. Hence, to facilitate discussion I assigned topics that touched on these kinds of social challenges. Therefore, I recommend that oral communication lessons take note of social topics that are relevant and accessible to learners. The topics should enhance learners’ awareness of their interdependency with their socio-

cultural contexts. Thus, for further research this question could be explored: *“How can socio-cultural contexts be utilised to facilitate the teaching of English oral communication?”*

Multisensory Learning Processes

Through this research, I have become aware that not all learners understand what is taught to them in the same way. This has led me to observe that my lessons should cater for all human senses to make learning productive and enjoyable for all learners (Erickson, Brandes, Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, as a teacher, I should plan English oral communication lessons that will help to make every learner’s participation possible. Furthermore, I need to design learner support material or teaching aids that are inclusive. This means each learner must be afforded an opportunity to develop according to his or her own pace and capacity. I need to ensure that oral and non-oral communication strategies complement each other in oral communication lessons. Thus, another research question that could be explored is: *“How can teachers accommodate multisensory learning processes in the teaching of English oral communication?”*

Conclusion

My self-study research has allowed me to examine my past and present personal and professional experiences. I have found that the way I learned English oral communication at school impacted negatively on my own teaching. Additionally, I have become aware of instances where my teaching strategies have constrained my learners’ progress. I discovered some innovative teaching strategies through my own research as well as through my critical friends’ suggestions. Although the findings of this research have enhanced my understanding and practice as a teacher, I would like to undertake further study of the teaching of English oral communication in collaboration with other English teachers. I am of the opinion that working with other experienced teachers to research the teaching of English oral communication would help me to understand this phenomenon even better.

As I explained in Chapter one, through this study, I intended to make a contribution by exploring a phenomenon that appeared to be under-researched: teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners. In reflecting on my study, I think that it makes a

contribution in this area. For example, in this dissertation, I have demonstrated how, by delving into creative teaching methods, I have enhanced my teaching of English oral communication. I have shown how the use of participatory teaching strategies such as role plays and group discussions afforded learners opportunities to engage in English oral communication. Based on my study, I suggest that English teachers should pay attention to oral exchanges, emotions and relationships, socio-cultural contexts and multisensory learning processes when designing and facilitating English oral communication lessons.

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APPENDIX A

P.O. Box 43042

Inanda

4310

16 June 2012

Dear Critical friend

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM DISCUSSIONS OF CRITICAL FRIENDS' MEETINGS

Title of study: Teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school: A self-study.

The purpose of this study is to explore how I, as an English teacher, can better teach oral communication in a public secondary school. To achieve my purpose, I reflect on my educational life, using the method of personal history self-study. I aim to better understand and explain the English teacher I am today and how my past experiences have impacted on teaching and learning in my context. This will enable me to determine how I have engaged in teaching English oral communication. I also intend to better understand the different perspectives, interests and needs I bring to development of teaching initiatives in my school. In addition, I will investigate how I can use this deeper understanding of my lived experiences to improve my own practice.

In this study, I will use the following method to gather information: group discussions with critical friends. The critical friends' meetings will take place during our group MEd supervision meetings and will not require any additional time from you. I will take notes and audio-record the discussions. I hereby request permission from you to refer to our discussions in my study. I will only use this data if I receive written consent from you.

If I receive your consent, I will use the data in a way that respects your dignity and privacy. My notes on your inputs to the discussions will be securely stored and disposed of if no

longer required for research purposes. Your name or any information that might identify you or your school will not be used in any presentation or publication that might come out of the study.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution to research on the development of teaching strategies for English oral communication. I will also wish to state that you have no binding commitment to the study and may withdraw your consent at any time if you feel the need to. If you withdraw your consent, you will not be prejudiced in any way.

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

If you have any questions relating to the rights of the research participants, you can contact Ms Phume Ximba in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Office on 031-2603587.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Thokozani P. Ndaleni

(Contact No: 0825738246/0836858365)

APPENDIX B

P.O. Box 43042
Inanda
4310

18 June 2012

Dear Parent/Guardian

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM YOUR CHILD'S/WARD'S CONTRIBUTION IN ORAL COMMUNICATION LESSONS

Title of study: Teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners in a secondary school: A self-study.

The purpose of this study is to explore how I, as an English teacher, can better support teaching and learning of English oral communication to secondary school learners. My aim is the development of strategies for the teaching of oral communication in our particular school context.

In this study, data would be generated through daily activities which form part of the lessons that I use to teach English oral communication to learners. I will also use learners' oral interactions which will be audio-recorded. Therefore, I hereby request permission from you to refer to your child's/ward's contribution in the above-mentioned lessons. I will only use this data if I receive written consent from you.

If I receive your consent, I will use this data in a way that respects your child's/ward's dignity and privacy. My notes on and audio-recordings of his/her inputs to the lessons will be securely stored and disposed of if no longer required for research purposes. Your

child's/ward's name or any information that might identify him or her will not be used in any presentation or publication that might come out of the study.

There are no direct benefits to your child/ward from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution to research on teaching English oral communication to IsiZulu-speaking learners, generally, and particularly in our school. I also wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the study and may withdraw your consent at any time if you feel the need to. If you withdraw your consent, your child or ward will not be prejudiced in any way.

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

If you have any questions relating to the rights of research participants, you can contact Ms Phume Ximba in the University of KwaZulu- Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Office on 031-2603587.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

T.P. Ndaleni

(Contact No: 0825738246/0836858365)