

EXPLORING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN A GRADE 4 CLASSROOM: A TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY

Ntokozo Sibusisiwe Mkhize

Student Number: 213569420

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

School of Education: College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa

January 2020

Supervisor: Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

DECLARATION

I, Ntokozo Sibusisiwe Mkhize declare that

(i) The research reported in this dissertation/ thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

(ii) This dissertation/ thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii) This dissertation/ thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.


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

a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;

b) where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.

(v) Where I have reproduced a publication of which I am author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.

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

Signed:  _____

Ntokozo Sibusisiwe Mkhize

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

Signed:  _____

Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

ABSTRACT

I am a teacher at a primary school in South Africa. This thesis presents a self-study project exploring social and emotional learning in my personal history and my Grade 4 classroom. I wanted to discover ways of improving my teaching practice to create a secure, compassionate, and loving learning environment. The first research question I asked was, *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* This inspired me to revisit my childhood and adolescent experiences and reflect on learning engendered by my parents, teachers, friends, and other people. I evoked memories using personal history research strategies such as artefact retrieval, photographs, and narrative writing. In addressing my second question, *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*, I offered a detailed portrayal of interactions during lessons in various subjects. I documented the lessons in my teaching developmental portfolio, which included journal entries and learners' written and drawing activities. The classes were audio-recorded and photographed. As I engaged in this self-study project, I explored teacher learning and social and emotional learning from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective, emphasising the importance of working together in educational settings to make sense of collective and individual experiences. I was fortunate to work with three critical friends who helped me uncover different ways of making sense of my research and enhancing my teaching. The thesis presents seven themes that elucidate my understanding of social and emotional learning and implications thereof for teaching: 1. Social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness; 2. Social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging; 3. Social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments; and 4. Social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships. 5. Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach; 6. Social and emotional learning is a source for emotional healing; and 7. Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice. My study demonstrates how school children's voices should be positioned at the forefront in teachers' self-study research in ways that respect children's dignity and perspectives and acknowledge them as key contributors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Almighty God for allowing me to be a tool and a source for change in education. I know my strength and power comes from You who possesses all-surpassing power and wisdom.

- ✚ My supervisor, Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, thank you for all your insightful thoughts, support and encouraging words.

- ✚ To my mother, for always believing in me and reminding me that I am capable of achieving anything in the world. Your love has been my strength and light.

- ✚ To my late father, you have given me some the most treasurable moments that radiated positivity and pure joy. I have carried you in my heart and always strive to leave footprints that reflect your undying love for me. Thank you for colouring my childhood.

- ✚ To my brothers for always taking the time to drive up and down with me. I hope that one day you will fulfill your own dreams.

- ✚ My husband, thank you for always being patient with me, you have been my life line and my source of resilience and courage. Your abundant love and compassion has been my light.

- ✚ My family, thank you for contributing and giving me plenty to write about through our rewarding and defeating life experiences.

- ✚ My critical friends for your time, your dedication and constant engagement and your constructive feedback. You made this journey a fruitful one.

- ✚ To my friends, thank you for understanding and unwavering support.

- ✚ I would also like to express my earnest gratitude to Linda Coertze for working diligently and professionally on editing my thesis. May God Almighty richly bless you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	Page
CHAPTER ONE: HEARTFELT REFLECTIONS	
1.1 Introduction	1-4
1.2 Focus and purpose of the study	4-7
1.3 Background Information	7-8
1.4 Rationale	8-14
1.5 Research questions	14-15
1.6 Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning	15
1.6.1 A safe and secure learning environment	15-16
1.6.2 Social and emotional awareness	16-17
1.6.3 Social and emotional learning is therapeutic	17-18
1.6.4 Offering and receiving hope	18-19
1.6.5 Navigating relationships in a positive manner	19-20
1.7 Teacher Learning	20
1.7.1 Accommodating differences	20-21
1.7.2 Working collaboratively to build relationships	21
1.8 A socio-cultural theoretical perspective	22-23
1.8.1 Embracing personal experiences	22-23
1.8.2 Nurturing social development	23
1.8.3 Cultivating relationships and learning	24-26
1.8.4 Making sense of life by engaging with the world around us	26
8.5 Drawing on life's everyday encounters	27-28
1.9 Methodological Approach	28-30
1.10 Overview of the Thesis	30-32
1.11 Conclusion	32-33

Content	Page
CHAPTER TWO: “UNPACKING OUR INTUITIVE VOICES”	
2.1 Introduction	34
2.2 Research Methodology	34
2.2.1 The qualitative research approach	34-35
2.2.2 Adopting an interpretive paradigm	35-36
2.2.3 The key characteristics of self-study methodology	36
2.2.3.1 Questioning my teaching practice	36-37
2.2.3.2 My journey of professional learning	37-38
2.2.3.3 Transforming teaching through our narratives	38-39
2.2.3.4 Finding and developing new perspectives	39-41
2.3 The Research Setting	41-42
2.4 Research Participants	42-43
2.5 Critical Friends	43-45
2.6 Self-Study Methods	45-46
2.6.1 Creating collages	46
2.6.1.1 The collages I created	46-47
2.6.1.2 Collage transcript	47
2.6.1.3 What did I learn from collage making?	48
2.6.2 Journal writing	48
2.6.2.1 Journal writing	48
2.6.2.2 Recording my memories in a journal	49
2.6.2.3 Journal writing about my teaching	49
2.6.2.4 My learners’ journal writing	50-51
2.6.3 Poetry writing	51
2.6.3.1 My poetry writing	51-52
2.6.3.2 My learners’ poetry writing	52-53
2.6.4 Photographs	54
2.6.4.1 Retrieving old photographs	54
2.6.4.2 Taking new photographs	55-56
2.6.5 Audio recordings of lessons	56
2.7 Making Meaning: Data Analysis and Interpretation	56

2.7.1 Critical friends	56
2.7.2 Inductive analysis	57
2.8 Ethical Considerations	58-59
2.8.1 Gatekeepers' permission	59
2.8.2 Privacy and anonymity	59
2.8.3 Letters of consent	59-60
2.8.4 Children's voices in research	60-61
2.9 Validity of the Study	62
2.10 Research Challenges and Limitations	63-64
2.11 Conclusion	64
CHAPTER THREE: NOSTALGIC FEELINGS	
3.1 Introduction	65-66
3.2 Personal History Self-Study Research Strategies	66-67
3.3 My Personal History and Social and Emotional Learning	67
3.3.1 Self-love	67-70
3.3.2 My hiding place	70-73
3.3.3 Comfort	73-75
3.3.4 Beyond the graveyard	75-79
3.3.5 My homeland	79-81
3.3.6 Mrs Murethi	81
3.3.6.1 A positive approach to learning	82
3.3.6.2 A letter to my teacher	83-84
3.3.7 The media Centre	84-87
3.3.8 Understanding our emotions	87-90
3.4 Discussion: A future perspective on my learning	90
3.4.1 A holistic approach to learning	90-91
3.4.2 Spiritual awareness	91-92
3.4.3 The naked truth	92-93
3.5 What I Learnt about and Applied to Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom	93
3.5.1 Embracing positivity	93-94
3.5.2 Creating a safety net	94-96

3.5.3 Social and emotional learning starts with me	96-97
3.5.4 Social justice and emotions	97-98
3.6 Conclusion	99
CHAPTER FOUR: RELIVING MY CHILHOOD AND ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES	
4.1 Introduction	100-101
4.2 Personal history self-study research strategies	101-103
4.3 My Personal History Related to Social and Emotional Learning	104
4.3.1 The darkest day of my life - 10 June 2001	104-106
4.3.2 Social justice meets emotions	106-111
4.3.3 A New beginning	111-114
4.3.4 Gone but not forgotten	114-117
4.3.5 Unarmed womanhood	117-119
4.3.6 Reliving my childhood	119-121
4.3.7 Orientation week in my first year at 'varsity	121-122
4.3.8 Glorious raindrops	123-124
4.4 Reframing Teaching and Learning	124-128
4.5 Conclusion	128-129
CHAPTER FIVE: UNPACKING EMOTIONS AND DAILY ENCOUNTERS	
5.1 Introduction	130-131
5.2 Unpacking English Lessons	131-132
5.2.1 Lesson 1: English Reading Comprehension	132
5.2.1.1 Pre-Reading Activity	132-136
5.2.1.2 Reading activity 2	136-140
5.2.1.3 My reflections	140
5.2.2 Lesson 2: English Reading Comprehension	141
5.2.2.1 Pre-reading activity	141-142
5.2.2.2 Reading Activity	143-145
5.2.2.3 My reflections	145-146
5.3 Unpacking a Geography Lesson	146
5.3.1 Lesson 3: Social Science	146
5.3.1.1 Pre-reading activity	146-152
5.3.1.2 Visual and reading activities	152-156
5.3.1.3 My reflections	156-158

5.3.1.4 Time heals: San’s Story	158
5.4 My learning	158-159
5.4.1 Living in harmony with nature brings new perspectives	159-160
5.4.2 Positive learning experiences through adversity	160
5.4.3 Looking in the mirror	161-162
5.4.4 Reflections on achieving social and emotional learning	162
5.5 Conclusion	162-163
CHAPTER SIX: ECHOING AND SHARING SINCERE LEARNING EXPEREINCES	
6.1 Introduction	164-165
6.2 Unpacking History and English Lessons	165
6.2.1 Lesson 4: Leaders in history (28 May 2018)	165
6.2.1.1 Pre-reading activity	165-167
6.2.1.2 Visual and reading activities	167-168
6.2.1.3 Individual activities	169
6.2.1.4 My reflections	169-170
6.2.2 Lesson 5: My Emotions (29 May 2018)	170
6.2.2.1 Watching a video about courage	170-172
6.2.2.2 Paragraph writing	172-173
6.2.2.3 My Reflections	174
6.2.3 Lesson 6: Nelson Mandela Day (18 July 2018)	174
6.2.3.1 Starting a new term	174-175
6.2.3.2 The “Long walk to freedom”	175-180
6.2.3.3 My reflections	180-181
6.2.4 Lesson 7: All about bullying (1 August 2018)	181
6.2.4.1 Athletics day	181-182
6.2.4.2 Bullying rearing its ugly head	182-190
6.2.4.3 Some reflective thoughts	190-191
6.2.4.4 Reflections	191-192
6.3 My Learning	192
6.3.1 Leaders need to build learning communities	192-193
6.3.2 Emotions are signals	193-194
6.3.3 Kindness matters	194

6.3.4 Positive self-talk	194-195
6.3.5 Emotions under the lens	195-
6.4 Conclusion	195-196
CHAPTER SEVEN: ENLIGHTENING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP AND EMOTIONS	
7.1 Introduction	197
7.2 Unpacking Social and Emotional Learning through English Lessons	198
7.2.1 Lesson 8: A new pet for Mary-Ann (17 July 2018)	198
7.2.1.1 Pre-reading activity	198-200
7.2.1.2 Reading activity	200-201
7.2.1.3 Post-reading activities: discussion and writing	201-202
7.2.1.4 My reflections	203
7.2.2 Lesson 9: Unpacking a Natural Science 1 lesson (12 September 2018)	203-204
7.2.2.1 Pre-listening activity	204-205
7.2.2.2 Listening to music stirs the senses	205-208
7.2.2.3 Music is a remedy for pain and adversity	208-210
7.2.2.4 My reflections	211
7.2.3 Lesson 10: Fun with Poetry (27 September 2018)	212
7.2.3.1 After recess...	212
7.2.3.2 Poetry reading activities	212-217
7.2.3.3 My reflections	218
7.3 My learning	218
7.3.1 Building a community on social justice	218-219
7.3.2 Life is art and we make it colourful	219-220
7.3.3 Redefining teaching and learning	220-221
7.3.4 Reinventing myself and my learners	221-223
7.4 Conclusion	223
CHAPTER EIGHT : SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: A GATEWAY TO NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS	
8.1 Introduction	224-225
8.2 My Social and Emotional Learning Collage	225-226

¹ Although the study of music may be deemed part of Social Science as music is a cultural expression, the actual lesson focused on sound frequencies that is a topic in Natural Science.

8.3 Themes	227
8.3.1 Theme 1: Social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness	227-231
8.3.2 Theme 2: Social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging	232-238
8.3.3 Theme 3: Social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments	239-247
8.3.4 Theme 4: Social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships	247-255
8.4. My Learning	255-258
8.5 Conclusion	258
CHAPTER NINE: AWAKENING HEARTS AND SOULS	
9.1 Introduction	259
9.2 Thematic Analysis	260
9.2.1 Theme 5: Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach to life	260-268
9.2.2 Theme 6: Social and emotional learning is a source of emotional healing	268-277
9.2.3 Theme 7: Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice	277-284
9.3 My Learning	284-287
9.4 Conclusion	287-288
CHAPTER TEN: INHALE AND EXHALE	
10.1 Introduction	289-290
10.2 A Review of the Thesis	290-303
10.3 Personal-Professional Learning	304
10.3.1 A mindful journey	304
10.3.2 Embracing diversity	304-305
10.3.3 A source of light	305-307
10.4 New Discoveries	307-308
10.5 Methodological Learning	308
10.5.1 Creating a collage	308-309
10.5.2 Meaningful conversations	310-311
10.5.3 Past experiences as the cradle of learning	312-313
10.6 Looking in the Mirror	313-316
10.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Learning	316
10.7.1 Social and emotional learning	316-317

10.7.2 Teacher learning	317-318
10.7.3 A socio-cultural perspective	318-319
10.8 Implications of this Study	319-322
10.9 Moving Forward	322-324
10.10 Reimagining my Classroom through Self-Study	324-325
10.11 Conclusion	325-327
REFERENCES	328-340
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Approval	341
Appendix B: Example of Informed Consent Letter	342-344
Appendix C: TurnItIn Report Cover Page	345

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE	Page
Figure 1.1: Lantern poem that reflects my research focus	3
CHAPTER TWO	
Figure 2.1: WhatsApp messages of concern and encouragement	45
Figure 2.2: Examples of my learners' journal entries	50
CHAPTER THREE	
Figure 3.1 Music healed me	69
Figure 3.2: The wardrobe – my place of safety and security	70
Figure 3.3: My blanket of comfort	73
Figure 3.4: My father's blazer	78
Figure 3.5: My grandfather's garden and my sanctuary	79
Figure 3.6: My diligence badge	82
Figure 3.7: An influential teacher	86
Figure 3.8: Memorable moments with my father	96
CHAPTER FOUR	
Figure 4.1: Looking through his lenses	105
Figure 4.2: Memory drawing: A warm place called home	108
Figure 4.3: Every picture tells a story	114
Figure 4.4: My journal	116
Figure 4.5: "Unarmed Womanhood"	119
CHAPTER FIVE	
Figure 5.1: Graceful Nature	136
Figure 5.2: Reading passage: "The People Who Hugged Trees"	138
Figure 5.3: "What was Lulu like?"	144
Figure 5.4: A bright and inviting corner in my classroom	147
Figure 5.5: My learners' understanding of a learning community	148
Figure 5.6 A-D: "A flag of me" - Activity completed by the learners	149-151
Figure 5.7: "Thabo's story"	154
Figure 5.8: "Thandi's Story"	155

CHAPTER SIX	
Figure 6.1: Reflections of a true character	166
Figure 6.2: Activity based on “Long Walk to Freedom”	177
Figure 6.3: All about bullying	186
Figure 6.4: “Stop Bullying!”: Exercises of positive self-talk	190
CHAPTER SEVEN	
Figure 7.1: Indigenous musical instruments	205
Figure 7.2: Musical instruments	209
Figure 7.3: Seeing life through poetry	217
CHAPTER EIGHT	
Figure 8.1: “Make your soul smile”	225
Figure 8.2: Key collage caption: “Make your soul smile”	226
Figure 8.3: “Home”	232
Figure 8.4: Positive self-talk posters	237
Figure 8.5: “Outdoor enthusiast”	239
Figure 8.6: Safe spaces	242
Figure 8.7: “Get cracking”	246
Figure 8.8: Family and social interaction	247
Figure 8.9: Cultivating social and emotional relationships	258
CHAPTER NINE	
Figure 9.1: “Sharing stories”	260
Figure 9.2: “Fighters”	264
Figure 9.3: Emotions and Poetry	267
Figure 9.4: The ability to listen...	268
Figure 9.5: “Mizz President”: A symbol of social justice	278
Figure 9.6: “Beauty”	283
CHAPTER TEN	
Figure 10.1 “Who’d have thought?”	309
Figure 10.2: “The inside story”	310
Figure 10.3: “Tabloids and criticism”	310
Figure 10.4: “Bravery and courage”	311

Figure 10.5: “Re-assess and revisit”	311
Figure 10.6: “A heartening discovery”	312
Figure 10.7: “The inner child”	312
Figure 10.8: “Sewing requires working delicately”	313
Figure 10.9: “Reflecting on my learning”	313
Figure 10.10: “Uncomfortable questions elicited enlightening answers”	314
Figure 10.11: “Honesty”	315
Figure 10.12: “Our flaws”	315
Figure 10.13: “My classroom”	324

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER TWO	
Table 2.1: Summary of the data generation processes to address the research questions	46

CHAPTER ONE

HEARTFELT REFLECTIONS

1.1 Introduction

When I conceptualised this study, I was a Grade 4 teacher at a primary school in an urban area in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. According to Goleman (1996), reflecting on our personal history can teach us to show compassion and to empathise with others. I aimed to explore social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom because I became aware that our emotions influence how we react and respond to certain social situations. In my Master's dissertation (Mkhize, 2016), I recalled some challenges that I had encountered in my childhood that had hindered my learning and the way I had interacted with the world around me. I realised that, in primary school, the curriculum that I had been exposed to had not offered opportunities for me to explore my emotional and social well-being and this often made my learning experiences very unpleasant. In fact, my reflections on my childhood experiences motivated me to undertake this doctoral research as I wanted to discover and embrace new ways of improving my teaching practice to create a secure, compassionate, and loving learning environment for my learners. I wanted them to work collaboratively and to gain a positive perspective on life. In my view, learners need to soldier confidently through their daily disputes and face life's challenges head-on. I hoped that, by exploring the intricacies of social and emotional learning, I would be provided with a platform from which I could freshly launch effective teaching and learning in my classroom.

John Gray (in Blake, Bird & Gerlach, 2007, p. 122) said, "When we heal the pain of others as we give compassion, our inner pain has a chance to come up and sometimes automatically be released."

When I read this quote, I understood that healing someone by being compassionate, understanding, and sympathetic would engender my own healing. I wanted to put this notion into practice in my classroom. I was inspired to create opportunities for sharing thoughts, feelings, and ideas and to participate collaboratively with my learners in my teaching space. Swartz (2017) explains that social and emotional learning entails having sound relationships and improving abilities and skills. This includes having the ability to be a good listener, to

collaborate with others, and to conquer negative social pressure. Panayiotou et al. (2019) recognise that learning is a social route and that schools are social places. I was thus encouraged by the thought that it is at school where we should learn to empathise with others, to listen with understanding, and to be sensitive to the feelings of others. This understanding enthused me to enhance my own emotional competency, and I understood that it would involve listening with empathy, appreciating others' views, and facing reality regardless of the circumstances.

For effective learning, it is imperative that learners are aware of their feelings, that they reflect on their feelings, that they discover what prompts certain feelings and responses, and that they understand that they should learn to consider others' feelings. Cornwell and Bundy (2009) acknowledge that feelings can be multifaceted as they do not engage only one emotion. As a teacher, I needed to acknowledge and accept that all emotions are meaningful and need to be managed aptly. Of course, I understood that I was not only dealing with emotions, but I also needed to take cognisance of how I interacted with people. I needed to be able to see and understand social prompts, consider others' feelings, read emotional signs correctly, and learn from my emotional and physical experiences.

I needed to be attentive to the emotional – or hidden – curriculum. I thus had to encourage discussions on diverse feelings and emotional responses. I wanted to learn more about how my learners and I could express our feelings in words, attain a positive self-image, and adapt to regulating our emotions. According to Cornwell and Bundy (2009), the emotional curriculum's key objectives are to develop emotional vocabulary and to allow learners to recognise and understand their own emotions and others' feelings and respond to them in an appropriate manner through self-control. The latter authors also highlight the importance of developing the social skills that are needed to build relationships and preserve shared friendships and relationships. Swartz (2017) maintains that social awareness involves understanding social customs and behaviour and being able to understand the diverse views of and sympathise with others. I wanted my learners to become socially aware by sharing their opinions and emotions, building positive relationships, and acquiring an optimistic approach towards learning and their daily challenges.

I chose to use creative poetry writing to evoke my childhood memories and to share my lived experiences of teaching. I imagined that this would allow me to relate to different contexts and to express myself freely. I particularly enjoyed writing lantern poems. Pithouse-Morgan, Deer-Standup and Ndaleni (2019) argue that lantern poems can be read vertically and horizontally and that this poetic style creates numerous opportunities for story work and conversations. Moreover, it addresses diverse and related human memories and understandings in multiplicative ways that can open up new corridors across backgrounds. They also state that, by using this poetic style, ‘mosaic pieces’ come together that are reminiscent of learning resources. It is through these resources that teacher-researchers and others “...can engage with personal insights and culturally imbued ways of knowing and being” (p. 171). I looked forward to sharing my personal visions as a learning resource and to participate in evocative poetry writing.

While developing my research proposal, I expressed my understanding of the topic I had selected in a lantern poem. A lantern poem is a descriptive poetic format derived from the Japanese culture. It has five lines shaped like a Japanese lantern with a syllabic pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 1. Writing lantern poetry enabled me to express my understanding of the research topic as it immersed me in ideas such as socialising, emotional engagement, embracing diversity, and encouraging my learners to be positive by respecting, and recognising others’ emotions.

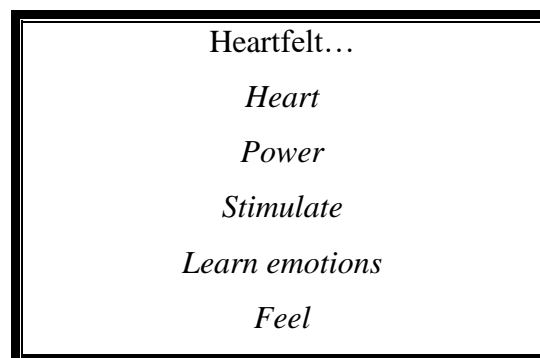


Figure 1.1: Lantern poem that reflects my research focus

In this chapter I shall further discuss the focus and the purpose of my research. I then go on to explain the background of the study. The rationale for the study is presented, followed by the research questions that were the driving force of my research. I also explain key concepts and the theoretical perspective that directed my research. A brief explanation of the self-study

research methodological approach that I followed is also presented in this chapter. To conclude, I give an overview of the chapters of this dissertation.

1.2 Focus of the Study

In my view, it is intriguing to identify and acknowledge the emotions we experience and to discover how they play a fundamental role in portraying and saying what words cannot express. As Goleman points out (1996), an insight of human nature that neglects the power of emotions is despondently short-sighted. The purpose and the strength of our emotions as we go about our daily routines, and how we respond to the disputes we encounter, influence our lives and determine the manner in which we interact with people. Emotions can also prompt us to make impulsive decisions and can illuminate our true feelings, desires, fears, and encourage us to reach our full potential. Corcoran et al. (2018) caution that some learners may come from communities where a lack of social and emotional competencies causes them to become less involved in school activities. This comment, among others, made me understand that being aware of our emotions requires an optimistic mind-set and self-discipline. As teachers, we need to model social and emotional intelligence in our classrooms and we need to comprehend that we are surrounded by emotional beings.

I wanted to examine social and emotional learning to explore deeper emotions that would cultivate a strong culture of learning in my classroom. I also wanted to discover new and creative ways of teaching and learning that would introduce an adventurous atmosphere in the learning environment. Cohen (1999, p. 4) advocates that, the more we as educators and school specialists "...are attuned to students' developmental changes, the more empathic and supportive we can be". Correspondingly, Corcoran et al. (2018) highlight that teachers, administrators, and parents should implement social, emotional, and academic learning. In my view, social and emotional learning is the foundation and the heart of teaching and learning and of maintaining healthy relationships with ourselves and our learners. Moreover, social and emotional learning opens possibilities for new and exhilarating experiences that are motivated by an open mind and an open heart.

The purpose of my research was to explore social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom. I aimed to explore how I could encourage my learners to have an optimistic

approach towards learning and life, to be aware of their emotions, and to be interactive socially. I wanted my classroom atmosphere to mirror positive feelings and ideas and my learners to embrace values that stimulated their learning. It was my desire that my learners would learn to be emotionally mature and to exert confidence when faced with new challenges. I hoped that they would be able to relate to others by being compassionate, kind, and respectful.

I needed to acknowledge and be conscious of the many contextual factors that would influence teacher-learner relationships throughout the year. I was inspired by Newberry (2013, p. 16) who believes that teachers "...must be given opportunities to reflect so that the decisions [they make] that lead to relationships are based on accurate information rather than quick impressions". It is a fundamental requirement that we tap into our learners' social and emotional needs and that we are attentive and empathetic at all times. I understood that my mind-set and relationships with my learners would be forged by my learners' personalities, their need for relationships, and the quality of the emotional energy they would require. I took heart from Panayiotou et al. (2019) who enlighten that emotional knowledge may nurture effective learning collaborations in the classroom that will ultimately result in learners' successful academic achievements. I had to be conscious of all these factors when I planned to flourish in my endeavours to explore social and emotional learning. I wanted to be responsive to my learners' social and emotional challenges regardless of their academic abilities or character traits.

I envisaged that, by exploring social and emotional learning, I would be better able to interact with others. I wanted to learn how to understand young people – how to interpret their behaviour and emotions and how to effectively communicate with them. According to Goleman (1999), emotional intelligence aids healthy social relationships and guides us to be sensitive to others' feelings, to celebrate their successes, and to congratulate others without feeling jealous of their achievements. Boler (1999) argues that emotions spring from cultural histories where they have been disciplined, suppressed, or ignored in educational contexts. Additionally, Taylor et al. (2019) state that emotions in schools and classrooms, whether negative or positive, may be stimulated by interactions with students, fellow teachers, parents, and administrators. These arguments encouraged me to acknowledge that various emotions, and the reasons for these expressions, would be a creative channel through which my

understanding of my learners and my exploration of social justice in education could be enhanced.

I longed to make learning democratic and I needed to celebrate the differences and commonalities among the learners and between them and myself. Boler (1999, p. 2) states: “Emotions are inseparable from actions and relations, from lived experience...”, while Swartz (2017) argues that social and emotional learning promotes responsible decision making that allows us to make fruitful decisions about our behaviour based on social norms and ethical standards. Such arguments encouraged me, as a teacher, to value personal experiences, embrace diversity, and understand emotion as a form of learning and transforming injustices such as gender-based discrimination. I wanted my learners to express their feelings, to be able to resolve problems without conflict, and to respect others’ feelings. I also wanted to address social injustice in an ethical and humane manner.

I was aware that children adopt behaviours from adults, their communities, and their learning environment. It was therefore essential that I should model positive behaviours that would strengthen my learners’ ability to engage in positive emotional and social learning. McIntosh and Style (1999) clarify that teaching is about power, social relations, and emotions in school. I also agree with Coetzee and Jansen (2007, p. 31), who maintain that, “to a large extent, the personal values of the teacher influence how he or she treats and interacts with learners.” Furthermore, Taylor, Newberry and Clark (2020) argue that our learners’ behaviours are driven by beliefs and feelings, and they highlight that understanding learners’ behaviours helps us to be sensitive and to respond appropriately to their needs. I thus understood that I needed to teach in a manner that encouraged courtesy and respect and that endorsed dignity and empathy. I also needed to understand what motivated my learners’ behaviours and emotions.

The prescribed national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) takes a holistic approach to the child’s development throughout childhood. It mandates teachers to prepare their learners to seek and acquire knowledge, skills, and values that can assist them to fully achieve their physical, intellectual, personal, emotional, and social potential. This prescribed curriculum thus promotes social and emotional learning. In keeping with the curriculum policy, I understood that I needed to be

conscious of my learners' self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and how they interacted with the world around them. The prescribed curriculum states that teachers should allow learners to share their experiences, explore, and express themselves through music and the arts. Likewise, Weare (2004) insists that we can investigate and support children's emotional reactions through pictures and other visual depictions such as dance, drama, and movement. I was optimistic that these types of activities would allow me to explore social and emotional learning in my classroom.

1.3 Background Information

My research site was an urban primary school in Kwazulu-Natal. This school was exposed to the teaching and learning policies of the apartheid era and experienced transformation to a democratic dispensation. At the time of the study, the school had a large staff of more than 70 teachers, teacher assistants, and support staff. The school had a rich diversity of staff members and learners in terms of culture, religion, race, and language. There was also a dedicated special needs classroom.

When I commenced the field work of the study at the school, it had enrolled more than 1 350 learners from different cultural backgrounds, religious groups, and races. However, the majority of the children derived from Black African households whereas a few learners came from neighbouring African countries as their parents had immigrated to South Africa. A feeding scheme that was sponsored by a Muslim organisation provided food to needy children. Most of the parents were educated and had an average monthly income. This means that that they were not rich, but were able to afford most basic necessities. The school adhered to a policy of inclusive education and was recognised and awarded as one of the most inclusive schools in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2013.

I took into account that my learners came from different backgrounds and that they would adhere to different belief systems derived from their parents and home environments. I was sensitive to the fact that some might know how to express themselves freely and identify with others, while some would be shy and aloof. In this context, I had to acknowledge that we were all emotional beings who experienced feelings such as joy, sadness, and fear. I accepted that

some learners tended to be shy and embarrassed when they had to share information about their social backgrounds and that many might lack emotional security. I craved to construct a culture that would echo positivity in a classroom where social and emotional learning would occur to instil the values of compassion, love, and tolerance in my learners. I knew that my learners' different personalities would require different approaches to guide their choices, and that these choices would have consequences for the rest of their lives.

The school had a social worker who supported the learners and helped them cope with overwhelming feelings. In my view, the social worker supported the social and emotional well-being of our learners. She made referrals if the learners needed psychological help or a medical doctor. The social worker also strengthened the social and emotional development of the learners by engaging with teachers, parents, and learners. This collaboration encouraged all to work as a community and filled gaps that occurred when teachers inadvertently overlooked a child's needs or took their well-being for granted.

1.4 Rationale

To explore social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 classroom, I needed to become familiar with the social backgrounds of my learners and make an effort to understand how their backgrounds influenced their attitudes, values, and the way they learnt and interacted with the world around them.¹ Meyer et al. (2019) indicate that social and emotional learning supports learners to successfully employ the awareness, outlooks, and abilities that are required to recognise and handle their emotions. They also need to be able to show compassion for others, develop and maintain constructive relationships, and make sensible choices. I thus needed to find out who my learners were, what triggered their thoughts, and motivated and what captivated their attention. My earlier experiences of teaching and prior studies inspired me to probe deeply but sensitively into my learners' lives to discover how social and emotional learning played a pivotal role in allowing them to reach their full potential. To strengthen my understanding of my learners' experiences, I first had to dig deeply into my

¹ Although I was conscious of this diversity in my classroom, I could not allow gender, social, cultural, religious, or racial issues to impact teaching and learning as these are delicate issues that were beyond the focus of the study. The data were thus never applied or evaluated comparatively in terms of the distinctions referred to above. I never evaluated the data obtained from my learners in any discriminatory manner regardless of their diversity. I thus rigorously adhered to human rights and democratic principles in executing this study.

own experiences of learning to discover what had motivated and triggered my interests, and why.

I recalled my experiences and noted discoveries that I had recorded in my previous work (Mkhize, 2016). The latter study investigated cultural inclusivity in a Grade 4 classroom and focused on children's culture. To understand children's culture, I perused Mitchell and Reid-Walsh's (2002) work that describes the particular character of childhood as an event, the rebuilding of children as social actors, and the subsequent view of children as the new subjects rather than the objects of research. I discerned that children are specialists in their field and have a culture that is noticeable within their circle. This culture exists inside and outside the classroom and manifests for example in the way they approach certain views, the things that fascinate them, the dilemmas they encounter, and how they respond to any adversity. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) argue that children embrace knowledge about their culture that is influenced by other children. They discover good features of their anticipated audience and are fuelled by enthusiasm and obsession to connect with their interests such as books, toys, and television shows. To enhance my earlier learning, I was now eager to tap into the social and emotional well-being and learning of my learners.

I was eager to instil a sense of self-worth in my learners by allowing them to share their views and concerns. Blake, Bird and Gerlach (2007) outline that exploring learners' attitudes and values allows us to support their development. Our understanding also opens the door for their personal and social well-being as they acquire motivation, autonomy, knowledge, and skills. Social and emotional learning and development help to build peer relationships. Blake, Bird and Gerlach (2007) underline that the development of personal and social skills enables emotional growth and maturity when children interact with people around them. In my view, this is closely linked to identifying others' feelings and inner thoughts as well as relating to others' personal experiences.

By exploring social and emotional learning, we also seek to know ourselves better. Powell and Kusama-Powell (2010) state that self-knowledge and social awareness play a pivotal role in social and emotional learning and allow us to search for self-development and to be aware of our own and others' feelings. Furthermore, we accumulate a vocabulary for our emotions to describe how we feel and we understand our strengths and weaknesses. This also aids

social interaction because we become socially aware of what people around us are experiencing and what their daily challenges are. Taylor et al. (2020) state that recognising deeper issues is essential in shaping our interactions with learners. I thus realised that it is through social interaction that learners learn to empathise and to sympathise as they learn to put themselves in someone else's shoes. They can experience a particular emotion without dismissing or suppressing it and they will understand what someone else is going through.

We do not learn alone and therefore, as teachers, we have to have a positive relationship with our learners. I was motivated by Blake, Bird, and Gerlach's (2007, p. 123) advice that emotional development "...is an on-going process influenced by the quality of the earliest relationship with primary carers, which continues through the early years into puberty, adolescence, and adulthood". I therefore wanted to be open-minded about all my learners, whether they were performing well academically or not. I also wanted to have a good relationship with those who challenged my patience in the classroom. I yearned to sustain positive thinking, creativity, and to understand how social and emotional learning aids learning.

I anticipated that my learners and I would need to be aware of our emotional journey of learning and allow it to be as organic and authentic as possible. Powell and Kusama-Powell (2010) highlight that "...becoming aware of one's own emotional life in the classroom is not necessarily a naturally occurring phenomenon" (p. 21). As teachers we need to know ourselves, which means we need to recall our personal memories and relive those experiences. Moreover, knowing our learning styles provides a skylight to understanding the different learning styles of others. Powell and Kusama-Powell (2010) also assert that teachers' perceptions of their childhood establish the way they interact with learners, which is a notion that is closely related to emotional self-awareness.

I knew that this study would allow me to search deeper into what we feel and how we experience these feelings. It would also address the question why we feel a certain way. Goleman (1996, p. 47) defines self-awareness as "...being aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood". Likewise, Swartz (2017, p. 521) explains self-awareness as "...the ability to detect one's own emotions and values and [to] understand how they control conduct". I understood that we should always try to share and explore our feelings rather than

dismiss them or disregard them. For example, I anticipated that when I was dealing with a child who was going through an emotional moment, I should try to picture myself and reflect on those days when I was a learner and was frustrated with a teacher, or when I had a frustrating morning. For instance, instead of merely scolding a child for coming late, I should strive to uncover the reason for this tardiness.

When conceptualising this study, I viewed self-awareness as a vital element in our development as social and emotional learners. I understood that this trait allows us to identify our shortcomings and enjoy our moments of success and victory. Goleman (1996) stresses the point that self-awareness is a dominant consequence of strong positive emotions. I therefore accepted that a strong sense of self would lead to a successful life. Being aware of one's past experiences, adversities and accomplishments, and the accompanying emotions attached to those experiences, breeds more emotions that support our know-how. We can strengthen our character, our thoughts, and solve internal problems because we are conscious of our past.

I believed that teachers need to value personal experience and emotions as a tool for learning and transforming injustice. Boler (1999) informs us that women are excluded from certain spheres simply because they are perceived as being emotional and irrational. Furthermore, Boler (1999) stresses that point that the exclusion of women depends the affective sphere and the fact that traditional hierarchies are maintained by ensuring that no one upsets the patriarchal social order. I thus took cognisance of this point and realised that I needed to consider the importance of the emotions of both boys and girls in their learning. I was aware that, as a teacher, I would be compelled to promote social justice as I had stumbled on the fact that we often treated boys and girls differently because of our social and emotional learning. For example, we accept it when a girl cries but deem a boy who cries a 'sissy'. I thus knew that I needed to enhance equality when I disciplined or comforted my learners. I undoubtedly needed to look at the way children projected or expressed themselves before I acted or made snap decisions.

I realised that emotional awareness would guide me in managing my emotions and practising resilience, not just in my teaching and learning environment but also in my daily life. Weare (2004) affirms that schools that practise emotional learning are inclined to have an optimistic approach to teaching. Furthermore, Weare (2004) asserts that our emotions "...are then an

indicator of how we can best assess what is happening to us, and we mistrust them [our emotions] at our peril” (2004, p. 31). Expressing our emotions therefore not only indicates how we feel, but it also facilitates the social construction of our lives and our learning. In the course of practising social and emotional learning, we are preparing ourselves to thrive in our personal, educational, and professional lives. I looked forward to reaping these benefits as I understood that being able to label my emotions and to identify others’ emotions would direct my life and my learners’ lives towards greater emotional maturity.

As a teacher, I wanted to acquire an optimistic mind-set so that I could positively influence my learners. According to Goleman (1996, p. 55), emotions “...that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react, even though we have no idea that they are at work”. I had to model positive behaviour and values in my classroom such as respect, love, and compassion. I had to acquire self-ownership, be confident in what I did, and form relationships that aided teaching and learning and that would allow us to work collaboratively and to share ideas.

The social and emotional climate in the classroom exerts a noteworthy influence on our learners’ attitudes and willingness to learn (Coetzee & Jansen, 2007). These authors argue that learners “...need to feel safe and secure [which] is a basic human psychological need” (p. 31). In my view, learners feel a sense of belonging in an emotionally welcoming classroom. Here they feel accepted for who they are and their self-esteem is enhanced because their social-emotional needs are fulfilled through psychological security, unconditional regard, and acceptance. They feel a sense of belonging, exude purposeful behaviour, and experience a sense of personal competence. I understood that learners who were free from feeling anxiety and who would be comfortable and protected would be more willing to take on new challenges confidently and would be better able to focus on the task at hand.

I felt that it was my responsibility to help my learners to build positive relationships and to form a common sense of belonging. Cefai (2008) also reinforces the idea of a warm, welcoming classroom. He describes the ideal classroom as a home that encourages caring and [that connects] teachers and learners. I wanted my learners to feel secure, valued, and trusted. As a teacher I needed to take on the dual responsibility of an effective and nurturing educator

who supported learners' learning and academic success, while also seeking to address their socio-affective needs.

I saw collaboration in a classroom as an opportunity to allow learners to build trust and promote open conversations. Cefia (2008) reveals that, in collaborative classrooms, learners construct learning experiences together. I hoped to introduce this practice in my teaching. I believed that my learners would not only learn individually, but that they would also learn from one another. Cefia (2008) asserts that working in small groups and pairs encourages recognition and celebration of others' efforts and achievements. I wanted to promote the culture of collaborative learning in cultivating social and emotional learning.

At the outset, I perceived all emotions and life experiences as valuable and I thus needed to be attentive and sensitive to the needs of my learners. Coetzee and Jansen (2007) argue that emotions should be understood and accepted in a socially responsible way. I thus desired to look deep into the emotional world of my learners and conceive all emotions as significant and valuable. Suppressing or dismissing certain emotions does not support teaching and learning as this makes us think that we live in a fantasy world where everything is perfect.

I realised that my learners would face emotional and social challenges on a daily basis. They would also be able to negotiate relationships despite or because of these challenges and come to an awareness of their emotional capacity. Coetzee and Jansen (2007) urge that teachers should be cognisant of the fact that unsettled and aggrieved learners' emotions disturb their relationships with others. I thus believed that it would be my responsibility to help my learners heal emotional wounds that could impede their social and emotional development. Taylor et al. (2020) explain that all teachers should be able to genuinely address the feelings of learners and creatively deal with emotional incidents. I thus needed to be present in my learners' experiences to gain a deeper insight and understanding of their worlds. I wanted my learners to feel courageous and resilient.

However, I also understood that the challenges we face as teachers evoke disabling feelings. For instance, we may feel discouraged from time to time. Taylor et al. (2020) address the patterns of negative emotional episodes in the classroom and argue that teachers should change from emotional expressions (for instance outbursts of anger and dissatisfaction) to

truly feeling compassion and effectively countering negative emotional episodes. I anticipated that exploring social and emotional learning would assist me to uncover better ways of dealing with emotions and help me in the daily struggles I encountered in my classroom. I needed to acknowledge that my learners would experience a range of emotions that might range from joy to both dread and fear. I needed to allow my learners and myself to experience all these feelings and to understand why we felt that way. I knew that I needed to avoid disregarding or subduing my learners' feelings and my own emotions, and I comprehended that I would be learning alongside my learners.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?*

I respond to this question in Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this dissertation. Seeking answers to this question compelled me to revisit my past experiences and to reflect on my learning that was engendered by my parents, teachers, friends, and other people who supported or abandoned me socially and emotionally. I placed particular importance on my childhood years because I felt that these would be most relevant to my experiences as a Grade 4 teacher. I was able to search deep and to be aware of my life experiences. In answering this question, I was also encouraged by my learning experiences in social and educational environments. I needed to travel beyond the sphere of academic learning and explore my encounters that fostered the values that I hold so dearly today. In this process, I was able to celebrate an inclusive model of learning that underscores creativity and affirms that all learning should be an optimistic and life-changing experience.

Also, by using a variety of personal history research strategies, I evoked memories of social and emotional learning that occurred throughout my primary and high school years, and also my transition to higher education. I employed research strategies such as artefact retrieval, photographs, and narrative writing. Using these research strategies facilitated recollections of my past learning and experiences as a learner and student. Journal entries were also used to reflect on my memories and illuminated my social and emotional learning as I wrote about and reflected on my past experiences using prompts such as: (a) How can I describe my social

and emotional learning experiences? (b) How did I feel about my teachers' approach to social and emotional learning? (c) Did I like what and how I was required to learn?

2. *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*

I respond to this question in Chapter Five, Chapter Six, and Chapter Seven of this thesis. By addressing this question, I was able to see social and emotional learning as an anchorage for exploring my learners' journeys of learning. I ignited an optimistic approach, encouraged an eager attitude, and nurtured social relationships amongst my learners. I also encouraged positive daily experiences for my learners by means of classroom activities related to social and emotional learning. We used writing, listening to music, and telling and enacting their favourite stories. I was also able to share my emotions and vulnerable moments with my learners. I learned to speak emotively in recognition of the fact that my learners and I were emotional beings. I also discussed how social and emotional learning would help cultivate sound learning strategies.

To answer this question, I wrote in my teaching developmental portfolio and in my daily journal, reflected on my lessons, evaluated my learners' written and drawing activities, and evaluated my and learners' verbal responses. I recorded my observations and reflections related to my lessons on social and emotional learning in the journal. My learners and I discussed the importance of respecting the differences among us, our different emotional experiences, and the importance of identifying feelings and social skills. I audio-recorded my lessons and the classroom discussions.

1.6 Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning

1.6.1 A safe and secure learning environment

I desired to create a safe and secure learning environment for my learners and engage them in emotional learning. I also strove to address and explore the emotional curriculum as I anticipated that such an investigation would give birth to emotional maturity and balance. Taylor and Larson (1999) voice the point that constructing a safe and nurturing atmosphere encourages children to want to come to school. In addition, Corcoran (2018) explains that

children's feelings at school are linked to their learning and academic accomplishments. I learned that social and emotional learning encourages teachers to provide instructional activities that cultivate learners' capabilities to help understand and manage their emotions. I realised that learners could also be encouraged to understand and identify their own emotions, abilities, and needs. It was inspiring to learn that social and emotional learning could motivate learners to reach their full potential and to achieve intelligence that is related to respecting others' perspectives and feelings as well as managing their emotions.

I assumed that, by locking into learners' emotions, I would be able to expose them to problem-solving strategies, stress management, conflict resolution, and negotiating skills. Rimm-Kaufman and Merritt (2019) argue that learners acquire relationship skills and social awareness by listening emotively and collaborating courteously, even when they have views that differ from those of others. By exploring social and emotional learning, I also wanted to help my learners break barriers such as frustration, a low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Embracing the notion of cooperative learning motivated me to hope, as learning means building trusting relationships, developing communication skills, and acquiring critical thinking and classroom discussion skills.

1.6.2 Social and emotional awareness

In my view, not acknowledging children's thoughts and feelings can negatively affect the way we convey teaching and how learning is received. Cohen and Marans (1999, p. 116) state the following: "An overlapping and equally critical dimension of life is how children feel about themselves and others, their conscious and unrecognised narratives or images of self and others." Thus if children's experiences, memories, feelings, sensations, expectations, and wishes are unrecognised, it will influence their enthusiasm and competence to learn. It was astonishing to learn that we are persuaded to act in a certain manner by feelings and thoughts that we are not fully aware of at a given moment (Cohen & Marans, 1999).

I wanted to be able to tap into my learners' minds and understand what they experienced and how they dealt with or responded to emotional episodes. Cohen and Marans (1999) argue that a socially and emotionally informed perspective regarding teaching and learning involves an appreciation of how past conscious and unconscious experiences paint and craft current

experiences and future developmental challenges. I understood that learning is not a solo journey but that we learn from one another inside and outside the classroom. Correspondingly, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) state that learners learn collaboratively with their peers and their teachers. Consequently, schools have an imperative task to cultivate social and emotional development. Furthermore, social and emotional programs are integrated with routine educational practices that target social and emotional competences, thoughtful teacher-learner relationships, and cooperative learning. I wanted to create a safe and secure learning environment that would reinforce positive behaviour.

I was cognisant of the fact that social and emotional learning supports learners' social and emotional well-being in a safe and compassionate learning environment. It is in such an environment that learners engage with peers' and family members' ideas, improve their classroom behaviour, and build a positive community of learning. It is in this context that social and emotional learning programs impact the emotions we internalise, determine how we perceive ourselves and the world around us and who we are, facilitate relationship with others, and shape our social behaviours.

1.6.3 Social and emotional learning is therapeutic

Another key aspect to addressing social and emotional learning is bereavement. Lytje (2018) observes that the loss of a parent during childhood is one of the most disturbing incidents a child can encounter. Furthermore Taylor et al. (2020) state acknowledging of, and responsiveness to, the deeper issues is more imperative than the apparent emotions conveyed. I became conscious that I needed to identify children in my classroom who had encountered loss and I also needed to determine what influence this had on the child's social and emotional learning. The literature reveals that bereaved learners are at risk of depression, often underachieve at school, and often feel isolated from their peers. Some are also subjected to bullying because they are in a vulnerable state. The studies that I perused provided interesting information about children's bereavement, but I found it problematic that children's voices were often not reflected. This might be because such children are traumatised and thus not suitable subjects for research. However, I hoped that I would be able to listen to my learners' concerns and determine what troubled them emotionally.

I wanted my classroom to be a place of healing and freedom where I would be sensitive to my learners' grief and loss. In terms of an ideal grief response, Lytje (2018) emphasises that the key elements are understanding the significance of the loss, respecting the learner, and sincerity. I wanted to adopt this approach by establishing rules and a structure for dealing with a bereaved child in the time immediately following the loss of a loved one to help the child feel cared for and comfortable in my classroom.

I therefore realised that I needed to identify measures to handle bereavement in the aftermath of a parent's death. I also knew that I should see each loss as an individual experience and deal with the situation sensitively. I felt that it would be imperative to allow my learners to be able to express their emotions in the classroom. Corcoran (2018) states that children's emotions are linked to their learning and academic achievement. Similarly, Jones and Kahn (2017) highlight that handling one's emotions is essential to resolving conflicts, and recognising emotions is crucial for being able to work with them constructively. I anticipated that a sensitive approach would allow me to explore social and emotional learning and unearth deeper insights and an array of emotions in teaching and learning through social interactions. I also understood that social and emotional learning is valuable to academic achievement.

1.6.4 Offering and receiving hope

In my exploration of social and emotional learning, I anticipated that it would be vital for my learners to discover their voices. Listening to their voices would allow my learners and me to find connections and create unity in the classroom. If this relationship was forged, it would contribute to equality and inclusivity. Cook-Sather (2018) states that, in cultivating gratitude and understanding through harmonious relations and the creation of a sense of belonging we all yearn for, we can create an inclusive culture in classrooms. Likewise, Northwest (2017) states that nurturing a sense of belonging is imperative for a successful learning environment. It knew it would be my responsibility to create a space that would instil inclusivity and affirm the diversity of learners' experiences and identities.

I therefore needed to remain hopeful, exhibit patience, and learn to be sensible and warm. I had to assist my learners to learn from a variety of resources and work to become conscious of their goals and gifts. This notion is supported by Bullough (1996), who affirms that teachers need to be reinvigorated to do what they consider paramount if learners are to harness their strengths. However, the main substances of teaching and learning, namely hope and happiness, are seldom the topic of dialogue among educators and seldom feature in the work of those who seek to influence education (Bullough, 1996). Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2020) argue that deeper problems are often more important than the exterior emotions children express. I thus treasured the understanding that engendering hope and happiness in my teaching would motivate both teachers and learners in my sphere of influence. As an instrument of survival, hope keeps a door open for optimistic possibilities. When we are faced with an adverse situation, we look for reasons to keep going and we hold onto hope and look outside ourselves at others when we seek help and support. I felt that the learners in my classroom would be content if we approached life with hope and with an optimistic frame of mind.

1.6.5 Navigating relationships in a positive manner

I wanted to engage in social and emotional learning to positively navigate relationships among and with my learners and to encourage perseverance in the face of difficulty. Jones and Kahn (2017) stress that social and emotional development occurs when learners have the skills and aptitude to manage their emotions. I realised that schools exert extensive power in terms of social, emotional, and academic growth. Therefore, the learning environment is a crucial setting for purposefully and carefully building and nurturing social, emotional, and academic skills. This is an important place where learning can be facilitated through collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation, empathy, and respect.

I imagined that my learners would be willing to participate in classroom activities and to engage in learning if I set the example of what collaborative learning entails. Jones and Kahn (2017) posit that learners with robust social and emotional competences are also more likely to instigate and sustain encouraging relationships with people around them. They blossom in classrooms with warmth and where positive teacher-student relationships stimulate deeper

learning. I wanted my learners to feel comfortable with me and their classmates and to be eager to engage with thought-provoking material and challenging learning activities.

I accepted that it would be my duty as a teacher to foster a culture of a classroom community by engaging my learners in positive learning. Wiest-Stevenson and Lee (2016) argue that the classroom should be a place where learners feel related to one another and the teacher. I envisaged instilling social and emotional learning in my classroom and I thus needed to provide a safe, secure environment where we would support one another. I wanted my learners to know that they could always seek help from me as their teacher and from their peers.

1.7 Teacher Learning

1.7.1 Accommodating differences

My research aimed at enhancing my learning as a teacher. Kelly (2006) elucidates that teacher learning is visibly dispersed across teachers, learners, and resources that aid teaching. Such resources are, for example, abstract objects, models, theories, and physical pieces like books and computers. In my research I chose a variety of resources and aids to enhance my teaching and the way my learners learned. I anticipated that this would also encourage classroom participation and guide my learners to express themselves emotionally and build healthy relationships. I needed to respond to my learners' needs and this involved developing myself through learning with my learners. I wanted to build a supportive classroom, be empathetic, and encourage communal trust and a classroom community that allowed positivity to blossom.

I wanted to explore different learning styles that would accommodate my learners' needs and competencies. According to Weare (2004), professional learning is on-going and needs feedback and reflection on what is being learned or assessed. He also mentions that some teachers learn far too little even when they are capable or gifted. Similarly, Easton (2008) states that "professional learning requires a new action plan for systems that are engaged in improving so that all children can learn" (p. 756). I anticipated that I would need to become

knowledgeable in my field and acquire wisdom. I needed to become a learner to be a self-developing teacher.

I wanted to explore my learners' emotional challenges and understand their daily experiences. Kelly (2006) advises that reflecting on lesson plans and how lessons unfold is critical to teacher learning. I realised that I needed to reflect on my teaching methods and the manner in which I presented my lessons. I anticipated that reflecting on my teaching would allow me to respond constructively to my learners' social and emotional difficulties and challenges. I also needed to seek assistance from my colleagues and courageously address the challenges I encountered.

1.7.2 Working collaboratively to build relationships

According to my understanding, teacher learning involves working collaboratively, sharing ideas, and using a variety of teaching methods. Also, teacher learning requires full participation and interaction in the classroom (Kelly, 2006). Kelly (2006) further argues that teacher learning engages learning through experience and practice to permit teachers' full involvement in classroom activities. I aimed to encourage interaction and participation in my classroom to allow my learners to share their opinions and experiences so that I could learn from them about social and emotional learning.

By focusing on social and emotional learning, I aimed to encourage my learners to embrace and celebrate diversity, equality, and respect for differences. According to Kelly (2006), teacher learning occurs when they progress towards expertise. Therefore, by adopting a self-study methodological approach, I wanted to be able to explore my learning and teaching which I believed would allow me to grow from a novice to an expert teacher. Jurasite-Harbison and Rex (2010) underline the point that teacher learning also involves drawing knowledge from one's own personal and professional experiences and then translating this knowledge into teaching. For this reason, I decided to utilise my personal experiences in my engagement with social and emotional learning. I predicted that this would have a positive impact on my knowledge as a professional and my relationship with my learners. It would also allow me to mature as a teacher and to work closely with my learners to understand their beliefs, values, and cultural influences (Gerhard & Mayer-Smith, 2008).

1.8 A Socio-cultural Theoretical Perspective

1.8.1 Embracing personal experiences

I adopted a socio-cultural theoretical perspective in my study. Kelly (2006) clarifies that, according to a socio-cultural perspective of learning, learners bring conceptual resources to the classroom based on or adapted from their cultural backgrounds and their beliefs before learning or attending school. Furthermore, Luthuli, Phewa and Pithouse-Morgan (2020) explain that taking a socio-cultural approach in working collaboratively with people from different backgrounds could nurture beneficial exchanges in terms of personal understandings and social and cultural relations. Kelly (2006) states that learning can be enhanced when resources are provided in the classroom that take into account and build on learners' conceptual resources. I thus resolved to use a variety of teaching resources to integrate social and emotional learning. For example, I focused on used indigenous musical instruments in my teaching (Chapter Seven). This was an interesting topic that my learners related to and enjoyed. Introducing indigenous resources into a learning environment can help to link classroom concepts to learners' daily encounters outside the classroom, which makes learning more interesting for them (Nkopodi & Mosimege, 2009).

Learning at school requires a classroom community where individuals learn from and share insights with one another. According to Gerhard and Mayer Smith (2008, p. 5), socio-cultural theories of learning "...are based on the assumption that learning is not an individual activity but rather a social phenomenon". This presupposes a relationship that engenders learning through interaction and collaboration. This notion encouraged me to devise collaborative tasks and to allow my learners to share ideas, experiences, and to collaborate in their daily activities. According to McMurtry (2015, p. 1), "most human cognitive skills originate in social interactions, practices, and tools". When I read this statement I realised that learning occurs through social interaction and when learners communicate with their parents, family members, fellow learners, and friends.

I hoped that my learners and I would be able to embrace such relationships and activate them in the classroom. John-Steiner and Mann (1996) also agree that learning takes place through social interaction and that we learn by interacting with our social environment. I thus realised

that my learners would learn best by participating in classroom discussions, interacting with their peers on the playground, and communicating with people around them.

1.8.2 Nurturing social development

I understood that, as a classroom teacher, I would play a fundamental role in nurturing social development. Northfield and Sherman (2004) explain that creating opportunities for interacting with peers is pivotal in acquiring social aptitudes. A primary foundation of social knowledge in children of all ages is their relations with other children. I understood that my learners might experience some dilemmas as they would constantly try to find themselves and preserve their identities, even if it meant getting negative attention rather than no attention at all. Classroom teachers thus need to create an environment that nurtures sociability in the classroom community.

Clearly, schools need to engender a sense of belonging within the school and smaller classroom communities by balancing children's need for individual identity and autonomy with sound social relationships in which others' needs are also considered. "Teachers can influence peer relationships by establishing values, standards, and norms in a caring classroom that is supportive of strong nurturing relationships" (Northfield & Sherman, 2004, p. 294). I wanted my learners to understand that they were worthy of love and care. These values need to be carefully negotiated in collaboration with other teachers and classmates. Our actions, how we perceive ourselves, and how we treat others stem from the values and central beliefs we grow as we mature in our relationships with others.

People learn through their lived experiences (Pithouse-Morgan, Deer-Standup and Ndaleni, (2019). To understand this process, I engaged with socio-cultural theory. Samaras and Freese (2006, p. 50) argue that socio-cultural theory is constructed on the belief that humans are profoundly influenced by their social and historical backgrounds that facilitate their experiences. In my view, socio-cultural theory encourages learning communities where all role-players work together, and it was this kind of culture that I wanted to instil in my classroom.

1.8.3 Cultivating relationships and learning

Being aware of our surroundings is essential for learning and also builds character through social experiences. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) elucidate that, within a socio-cultural perspective, thinking occurs when the individual is in a relationship with a social setting which entails historical and social surroundings as well as internal characteristics such as an individual's philosophies and knowledge. When I perused the value of a socio-cultural perspective, I understood the importance of working hand in hand with my colleagues to establish healthy relationships and to gain knowledge from my learning environment and social setting.

I was mindful of participation as an instrument that cultivates learning experiences and allows everyone to have a voice in the classroom. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) state that socio-cultural studies of learning and teaching have illuminated how knowledge is extended through participation in a range of communities which affords learners diverse opportunities for learning. I wanted to encourage participation in my classroom to assist in resolving the conflicts among the countless social standards my learners encountered in their communities and homes. I understood that social standards and beliefs often clash in communities and homes and that family and friendship groups might often influence learners negatively.

It was vital for me to be mindful of my learners' diverse experiences and backgrounds and I knew that I needed to explore and respond to their social and emotional needs. Kortjass (2019) supports this notion as she interacted with pre-service teachers through energetic and collaborative participation that involved, amongst others, the use of cultural artefacts. Teachers thus need to be attentive to the diverse cultural customs that might exist among their learners to enhance their understanding. I thus planned to use artefacts to illuminate my childhood experiences and to strengthen my learning. I understood that my own childhood background, encounters, and social and cultural experiences would play a significant role in my exploration of social and emotional learning among my learners.

It was my duty to embrace diversity and to have an open environment that would accommodate my learners' differences. Kortjass (2019) proposes that socio-cultural theory also suggests that teachers should embrace differences and use strategies that cater for those

differences. I chose to apply a socio-cultural perspective and focus on the understanding that my learners brought to the classroom based on their daily lives. I was encouraged to be mindful of social and psychological resources that different cultures and upbringings bring to the classroom.

I anticipated that a socio-cultural theoretical perspective would elucidate how my learners and I saw one another as human beings that shared values such as respect, love, and compassion. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of considering diversity through the lens of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective as this encourages us to better understand our learners and to apply teaching strategies that will make learning stimulating. Moreover, Dhula-Moruri et al. (2017) argue that, in the South African context, a socio-cultural perspective illuminates the principles of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is an ethical philosophy expressed as “umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu”, which means that a person is a person through other people. This ethical philosophy reminds us to work collaboratively and it encourages us to learn from one another. I was thus reminded to learn by interacting with different people and by engaging in different conversations.

It was imperative that my learners should know who they were and to understand their roles within their classroom and social settings. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) define a socio-cultural perspective as “...a theory that promotes social interaction [as] evolving developments play a pivotal part in learning and the transformation of identity or finding our sense of belonging” (p.5). Understanding a socio-cultural perspective encouraged me to become conscious that learning and teaching occur in a collaborative manner. I had to engage in intercessions that extended participation for my learners by creating a healthy space for learning. I had to instil a sense of belonging in my learners to develop their social identities and I had to embrace the knowledge that my learners brought into the learning environment. I thus formulated a social and emotional curriculum from the perspective of my learners.

I comprehended that a crucial key to social and communicative activity would require the creation of a classroom community that would interact with the world around it. Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner (2006) describe a socio-cultural perspective as a theory that stresses social interaction. Moreover, they argue that it explains ‘learning languages’ as a form of learning that is dominant in the cultural artefacts that humans own and create to mediate their

relationship with the world and with themselves. I wanted my classroom to be a powerhouse that would allow my learners to express themselves and where they could communicate about their shared and lived experiences.

1.8.4 Making sense of life by engaging with the world around us

I perceived that learning collaboratively in an inclusive learning community would aid fruitful learning. Holding the same notion, Engelbrecht and Swanepoel (2013) state that knowledge is shared socially in different social backgrounds at different times. I understood that, as human beings, we actively make sense of life through engaging with the world around us – i.e, we build social relationships and connect to our social, cultural, and historical contexts. I wanted my learners to draw knowledge from all these aspects as underlined by a socio-cultural perspective. I realised that it would be important for me to see my learners as individuals and to also view my classroom as a learning community.

Hausfather (1996, p. 4) states: “People come to social interactions with different perspectives, different interpretations, [and] different understandings of a concept or task”. The social environment of formal education thus conveys a clear message regarding what is imperative and appropriate in teaching and learning. I therefore hoped that, by exploring social and emotional learning, I would help my learners and myself to develop and to take on active roles in sharing our understandings and experiences.

I was eager to build healthy relationships that would inspire my learners to do better and to work collaboratively. I wanted them to freely share their ideas, thoughts, and emotions. According to Northfield and Sherman (2004, p. 295), the opportunity to interact with peers “...is critical with regards to developing social competencies”. I wanted my learners to interact with their peers because it would be critical for their social development. I also accepted that communication would be vital for their intellectual development and that dialogue would support this growth. These discussions would enlighten their democratic rights, give them a voice in society, and enable them to negotiate a status quo that would recognise their equality.

1.8.5 Drawing on life's everyday encounters

Looking back on my own childhood, I recalled the kind of relationships I had formed, my early school experiences, the various people I had encountered, and their different personalities and social backgrounds. Hausfather (1996, p. 1) elucidates that school is "...primarily a social environment; a culture where people interact with each other [sic] and various cultural materials". Some of my most profound experiences occurred in schools. I can honestly say that school was a social context where I acquired social skills, built friendships, and was exposed to diverse races, religions, and cultural backgrounds. Schools are sites where learners explore various socio-cultural perspectives beyond their academic education. In my view, adopting a socio-cultural perspective prepared me to create an educational atmosphere that nurtured the cognitive, emotive, and social development of my learners.

By understanding and embracing Vygotsky's (1978) philosophy of learning, I understood that learners had to experience zones of proximal development as they grew in knowledge and skills. This could only occur if they worked cooperatively in groups where they would engage in dialogue and analyse their own experiences regarding social and emotional learning. For this reason, I decided to encourage my learners to work collaboratively and I endeavoured to encourage learning through sharing ideas that were linked to their daily experiences. This process helped me to integrate social and emotional development as my learners engaged in learning (Gerhard & Mayer-Smith, 2008). Hausfather (1996) stresses that teachers need to provide opportunities where learners can learn from and within social circumstances. I therefore created opportunities where constructive conflicts and challenges encouraged my learners to become active participants who collaboratively shaped their understanding of social and emotional learning.

In my exploration of social and emotional learning, I was conscious that my learners needed to express themselves from the context of their cultures while they collaboratively built and shared knowledge. To be able to do this, they needed to draw on everyday encounters and their prior knowledge of cultural practices and the daily challenges they encountered. Hill and Wood (2019) propose that children's interests and prior knowledge can lighten learning development through freely-chosen play. I thus built my own learning on the understanding

that children learn from one another's experiences and by interacting with the world around them.

1.9 Methodological Approach

I employed a self-study research methodology. Pithouse, Mitchell, and Weber (2009) state that self-study methodology is frequently used by teacher educators and teachers who are studying their practice. In this process they are assisted by colleagues and/or students or learners. By employing the self-study methodological approach I envisaged that I would be allowed to reflect on and improve my teaching approaches and methods. I also envisaged that this methodology would facilitate my exploration of social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 classroom. Furthermore, according to Pithouse, Mitchell, and Masinga (2009, p. 240), self-study is "...a way for teachers, teacher educators, and other practitioners to study ourselves in action within our professional contexts". As the classroom was my primary professional context, I thus aimed to learn about the importance of social and emotional learning in this environment by better understanding the roles of social interaction and emotion in the development of learners.

Adopting this methodology motivated me to question my own educational and learning experiences as a child and as a teacher. LaBoskey (2004, p. 829) argues that "...the challenge for teacher educators is ... to provide ways for students to articulate and interrogate their personal histories and resultant understandings". I needed to encourage my learners to establish common goals and to interact by means of, among others, classroom discussions. Hausfather (1996) posits that cooperative devotion and shared problem-solving activities are necessary to facilitate cognitive, social, and emotional interchange. This means that learning in the zone of proximal development does not only encompass the internalisation of external lessons, but involves adopting features of shared activities where learners are interpersonally engaged.

LaBoskey (2004) describes self-study research as a reflective practice that promotes life-long learning and teacher development. I thus had to question myself to determine if I was applying social and emotional teaching strategies in my lessons. I understood that, as a teacher, I needed to revisit and analyse my teaching practices and that I should strive to grow

and better myself in my chosen field. All teachers need to answer to the call to facilitate learning – and this can only occur if we create a culture of learning and induce a positive atmosphere in our classrooms by reflecting on our practices. We should move away from ignorance and complacency and acknowledge that the essence of self-study research is that the knowledge engendered by teaching is eternal.

To adequately address the requirements of self-study research, I utilised multiple data generation tools, including: journal writing, artefact retrieval, photographs, and audio recordings of my lessons. My purpose was to unearth everything I could about social and emotional learning, and I thus needed to explore my own practices and my learner participants' experiences. I thus commenced by exploring my own childhood and adolescent memories and experiences that underscored and enriched my findings regarding social and emotional learning that had been elicited by the literature review. I then applied my knowledge and experiences to the classroom, where I endeavoured to offer my learners opportunities to express their emotions relating to social and emotional learning. In this process, I applied the different self-study methods referred to above. Together, these processes aptly addressed the research questions of this study.

Self-study research allows teachers to re-evaluate their teaching and the way they address/ed certain issues. Chiu-Ching and Chan (2009, p. 20) affirm that "...it is through inquiry that teachers examine self within the teaching environment and their practices in terms of roles, actions, and beliefs, to consider making changes for improvement". By questioning my teaching practice and reflecting on my past experiences regarding social and emotional learning, I anticipated that I would be able to make changes that would improve my teaching and the way my learners learnt. Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) agree that sharpening our approaches in self-study research can construct our work and simplify questions that arise for new readers within this research field. Furthermore, self-study can add to our understanding of teaching and teacher education. I hoped that doing self-study research would add value to my teaching and offer valuable insights to others.

I anticipated that, by drawing on my daily teaching practices and my learners' experiences, I would be able to identify my shortcomings and address the gaps in my teaching. Reflecting on my teaching could have a positive impact on my professional development and my

relationship with my learners. Kelly (2006, p. 515) mentions that “teachers with a high degree of commitment and motivation and who gain much satisfaction from their work, or in socio-cultural terms, are those who identify most closely with the communities in which they act, [and] are most effective in influencing their students’ attainments and attitudes”. Through self-study research, I aimed to be able to work closely with my learners and be more effective in influencing their social and emotional learning positively. I give a more detailed account of my research methodology and processes in Chapter Two.

1.10 Overview of the Thesis

In **Chapter One**, I elaborate on the focus and the purpose of the research study. I discuss the background of and the rationale for the study and present the research questions that gave impetus to the investigative processes. I also discuss the key concepts and theoretical perspective that served as a compass for my research. A short explanation of the purpose and methodology of the self-study approach is also presented in this chapter. It should be noted that the thesis does not have a separate literature review chapter. Instead, throughout the thesis I support, contextualise, and extend my discussions with citations from relevant literature. This is in keeping with the personal narrative style of the thesis (Nash, 2019).

In **Chapter Two**, I give an in-depth account of the self-study research processes that I employed. I discuss my choice of research methodology, the location of the study, the research participants, as well as the significance of working collaboratively with my three critical friends who were also Ph.D. students. Furthermore, I explain my self-study methods and data sources and how I made meaning by addressing the research questions. I proceed by deliberating on the validity and ethical issues that I adhered to, describe the research challenges that I encountered, and explain how I dealt with those challenges. To conclude, I discuss my fundamental learning about conducting self-study research.

Chapter Three is the first chapter that addresses research question 1: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* I approach this investigation by concisely reviewing the research strategies that I followed. I thus recall and critically evaluate my childhood memories and I recount stories and descriptions of experiences of social and

emotional learning that my memory evoked. I place specific prominence on my childhood years because I felt that these would be most closely connected with my experiences as a Grade 4 teacher.

In **Chapter Four**, I continue to address research question 1: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* In this chapter, I briefly explain the research approaches that illuminated my childhood and adolescent memories. To follow, I recount stories and representations of the childhood and adolescent experiences that I contemplated. I again focus more specifically on my childhood years because these were closely related to my practices as a Grade 4 teacher.

In **Chapter Five**, I give a comprehensive account of and reflect on my lessons about social and emotional learning. In this chapter, I begin to respond to research question 2: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*

In Chapter Five I also relate how I became more aware of my learners' relationships and emotions. To further address research question 2, I utilised my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, my learners' written and drawing activities, as well as oral presentations. To enrich my research, I planned and studied lessons during which my learners engaged in various activities. I also harnessed elements of English, Natural Science, Social Science, and Life Skills in the lessons in which I addressed elements of concern regarding social and emotional learning. I offer a comprehensive account of and reflect on the lessons that I planned and taught for the purposes of this self-study research. I describe and illustrate everyday teaching and learning experiences involving my 40 Grade 4 learners. I conclude by underlining my vital learning in response to research question 2.

In **Chapter Six**, I offer a broad explanation of how and why my lessons and own learning resonated with social and emotional learning. I continue to address research question 2: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* I again utilise my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, my learners' written and drawing activities, as well as oral presentations.

In **Chapter Seven**, I continue to critically reflect on my lessons and what I learnt concerning social and emotional learning in relation to research question 2: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* I again refer to my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal, my learners' written and drawing activities, and oral presentations.

In **Chapter Eight**, I discuss how and what I learned by means of this self-study research. I present developing themes that reveal my understanding of social and emotional learning. These themes are reflected in a collage presentation that I also describe. I identified these themes by numbering the pictures in the collage and categorising them according to these numbers. These themes address both research questions about exploring social and emotional learning in my classroom and reflect my learning based on my memories.

In **Chapter Nine**, I continue the discourse on how and what I learned through this self-study research. I again refer to and extend the themes that resonated with my understanding of social and emotional learning. These themes are illustrated by a social and emotional learning collage presentation. I also discuss my encounters related to exploring and applying social and emotional learning and the new insights I gained pertaining to the aim of the study. Referring to my findings, I endorse that value of embracing a socio-cultural theoretical perspective on learning as this helped me to understand and discuss these themes in great depth.

In **Chapter Ten**, which is the closing chapter of this dissertation, I revisit the main findings that were illuminated as a result of this self-study investigation. I reflect on how this study influenced me personally and professionally and I also deliberate on my methodological learning. Finally, I shed light on what I aim to do in the future as a consequence of this study.

1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the background of the study and explained what had encouraged me to conduct this research. This was followed by the rationale and the research questions that were the heart of my research. I also explained the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that channelled my research. A brief description of the self-study approach was also provided.

This chapter served as an overall introduction to the self-study research that I conducted to explore social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 classroom. I commenced the discourse by discussing the background to the study and explaining what had encouraged me to conduct this research. This was followed by the rationale and the research questions that were at the heart of my research. I also explained the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that channelled my investigation. A brief description of the self-study research approach was also provided. To conclude this chapter, a brief overview of each of the ten chapters of this dissertation was provided.

CHAPTER TWO

UNPACKING OUR INTUITIVE VOICES

2.1 Introduction

I decided to entitle Chapter Two *Unpacking our intuitive voices* as I felt that my learners and I needed to search for profound ways of understanding our experiences of social and emotional learning. I needed to use creative methods to evoke my memories and explore my learners' experiences, and for this reason I had to utilise sound research methodologies to address the research aim and questions.

In this chapter, I therefore discuss the research methodologies that I employed, describe the location of the study, identify the research participants, and reflect on the significance of my critical friends who assisted me along this journey in various ways. Samaras and Roberts (2011) argue that self-study needs to be sensitive and cooperative and that learning, thinking, and knowing develop through cooperation and response from others. In such a research approach, critical friends in particular offer support and encouragement and provide truthful and fruitful feedback. I also present the data generation processes that I employed using a table and I explain how I interpreted the data. I also discuss the manner in which I adhered to ethical requirements, how the trustworthiness of the study was attained, and I explain how I tackled the various challenges that I encountered.

2.2 Research Methodology

2.2.1 The qualitative research approach

I employed a qualitative research approach as I aimed to explore my own as well as my young participants' (Grade 4 learners') experiences related to social and emotional learning. According to Denscombe (2010), qualitative researchers aim to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations that inform a particular research topic. It allows the researcher to gain fresh insights into the issue being explored and produces ideas that

enlighten the research problem. Furthermore, Denscombe (2010) stresses that the qualitative researcher describes and explains relationships, individual experiences, and group norms.

First I needed to explore my own emotions before I looked at my youthful (Grade 4) participants' feelings and experiences. Collins and Cooper (2014) explain that, in qualitative research, emotional intelligence reinforces the researcher's ability to relate with participants and allows him or her to competently listen to and understand the lived worlds of the participants. By following this advice, I hoped to understand my own and my participants' feelings and learning by stepping into their life experiences. Furthermore, Collins and Cooper (2014) highlight that qualitative research is inimitable because it requires both emotional development and strong interactive skills to collect data by listening to the stories of others and using their words to define phenomena. Even though they were young, I wanted to better understand my participants' perspectives and explore how they related to their social and emotional learning. I anticipated that a qualitative research approach would allow me to gain emotional and social maturity myself and that this would enable me to better understand the social interactions I explored.

I understood that undertaking this qualitative research would not be a seamless task. In fact, I knew that I would make mistakes and needed to give myself time to learn and take cautious decisions. Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2019) posit that qualitative research becomes effective through practice, which means making decisions and mistakes and having the endurance to wait for enlightenment and insight with time and patience.

2.2.2 Adopting an interpretive paradigm

My study was informed by an interpretive paradigm. This means that I sought to understand different lived experiences from participants with different social backgrounds and values and I needed to explore how these influenced social and emotional learning. Denscombe (2002) states that an interpretive paradigm helps the researcher to focus on the way people make sense of their world, and my aim was to explore and understand my own as well as my Grade 4 learners' engagements that resulted in social and emotional learning.

Taylor and Medina (2013) state that an interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to understand the life-world experiences of teachers and learners as well as the classroom culture and learning community that are embedded in the study site. Furthermore, Taylor (2014) explains that interpretive researchers do not merely observe classroom life, but argues that they are profoundly involved in interventions that are aimed to make a difference. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm allows teachers to be reflective and thus gain an enriched understanding of the life-worlds of their learners through continuous enquiry (Taylor, 2014). To commence the study, I first interrogated the influence my past and present had on the way I delivered teaching and engaged with my learners. I hoped that this would assist me to better interact with my learners and that my enhanced understanding of my own experiences would enable me to reflect on and understand my knowledge of social and emotional learning at a much deeper level than before.

Moreover, the interpretive paradigm assisted me in understanding that, as my learners and I lived our lives through our individual and common experiences, we were constructing narratives and gaining valuable insights that could inform and enlighten those around us. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2013) argue that interpretive researchers focus on understanding the research environment rather than on predicting outcomes. I thus had to unpack my own as well as my learners' social and emotional learning encounters and understand our divergent social perspectives. In short, instead of predicting and changing my learners' perspectives, I needed to understand their life worlds.

2.2.3 The key characteristics of self-study methodology

2.2.3.1 Questioning my teaching practice

I questioned my own teaching practice by unpacking my personal history and professional experiences. According to Galman (2009), self-study research encourages teachers to be reflective beings who look back at their personal history, childhood memories, and who have enquiring minds. I thus needed to critically reflect on my teaching practice and make sense of my own learning before I could grow in my teaching. I uncovered personal and professional experiences that made me feel vulnerable, sincere, and open-minded and it was from this platform that I was able to explore social and emotional learning in depth. Galman (2009)

highlights the importance of reframing and reconceptualising the role of the teacher, arguing that the teacher researcher should work constructively by employing critical self-examination and strong personal references. The ability to do so is a critical characteristic of self-study research. Additionally, Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1237) explain that self-study “...is based on asking questions – questions asked by myself, by students, by parents, and by colleagues”. I thus initiated conversations, asked questions within my learning environment, explored my own learning experiences, and thought critically about social and emotional learning.

I needed to have meaningful conversations and ask constructive questions whose answers would induce positive change. Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1237) state: “It is through this open dialogue that I gain new insights and that others see new ways in which to view their practice”. The self-study approach thus required that I engaged in and reflected on open dialogues about the topic under investigation, which in turn enriched my understanding and improved my practice. I looked forward to finding my voice and I eventually drew strength and learned from my personal experiences and those of my learners.

It was an enlightening experience to reach a level of self-awareness that enriched my teaching. Samaras (2011) underlines the point that self-study compels the teacher to question him-/herself. I had to ask myself challenging questions to which there were no easy answers. Samaras and Freese (2006) also state that self-study as a situated inquiry, which means that I had to initiate the inquiry and ask questions whose answers would be located in my own learning environment. I realised at the outset that I had to be motivated to ask the right question based on my personal classroom setting. It was from this platform that I wanted to reflect on my learning, respond to challenges, uncover different beliefs and practices, and share my dilemmas with my colleagues and learners as well as with my critical friends.

2.2.3.2 My journey of professional learning

I realised that, if I did not reflect on my professional experiences and the influence they had on me as a teacher, my professional learning would not be effective. Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1244) clarify this point as follows: “Every person’s life is a journey that includes a professional life”. It was therefore critical that I experienced a feeling of personal

accomplishment, as only then could I explore different ways of teaching and learning and broaden my thinking. Forgasz and Clemans (2014) argue that self-study manifests in our personal growth as we embrace emotion along this journey. Furthermore, they assert that ways of knowing and using feelings is an approach that helps learners to find their way into academic knowledge, but they insist that this journey is experienced in different ways. In my yearning to teach well, I wanted to improve my teaching practice and teach in a meaningful way. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) argue that self-study allows the professional character and knowledge of the researcher to evolve through the narratives and explorations of those significant others involved in the inquiry. I hoped that, by engaging in self-study research, I would be able to infuse my teaching with practices that have intrinsic value.

2.2.3.3 Transforming teaching through our narratives

I was eager to find new experiences that would help me develop professionally and facilitate better teaching practices. Self-study methodology is an influential tool that transforms teaching as, according to Austin and Senese (2004), this research approach inspires teachers to articulate, observe, and re-define the essential values that guide teaching. I anticipated that the self-study processes would assist me in creating an optimistic atmosphere in my classroom and in building a healthy relationship with my learners and colleagues.

I was pleased that I would acquire knowledge from my self-study research and I anticipated that it would provide me with the tools to nurture my learners emotionally and socially. Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1247) emphasise the interactive nature of this research approach as follows: “When teachers acquire a deeper understanding of how and why teaching and learning occur because their research informs them, they should act on that knowledge”. Furthermore, Austin and Senese (2004) state that a vital component of self-study is the awareness of the fundamental values in which personal teaching practices should be embedded. I saw this as a challenge that would be imperative for the depth of my research. I understood that I needed to be vulnerable and open about my values and my personal history to learn more about myself and my personally in order to enhance my teaching practice.

LaBoskey (2004) emphasises that equity and social justice are core values that are associated with self-study. As a teacher, this meant that I needed to accept and recognize differences in

lived experiences introduced by my learners. I needed to acknowledge my learners' diverse needs, accommodate them and respond to them. I anticipated that, by embracing all the required self-study characteristics, I would be able to recognise my learners' marginalised voices. I looked forward to answering crucial questions and delving into memories that would help me become a better teacher. It was imperative for me to explore social and emotional learning through my personal history and relationships, to understand different social settings, and to unearth how these moulded me to become a seasoned teacher. Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004) emphasise that one of the most fundamental motives that drive teachers and researchers to undertake personal history self-study is the acquisition of self-knowledge and the expansion of their professional identity. Furthermore, LaBoskey (2004) elucidates that self-study is about learning from experience that is entrenched in our personal history and memories. Therefore, I revisited my memories to adhere to a profound self-study requirement.

I wanted to step into my personal history and engage with it as an important foundation of lifelong learning. Moreover, I wanted to deepen this learning through collaboration with significant others. Samaras et al. (2004, p. 933) voice this process as follows: "Personal history self-study can be used to transform our relationships to [sic] ourselves, our students, and the curriculum". I anticipated that a personal history exploration would enable me to see myself as a learning individual who would not only produce but also share knowledge. After walking through my personal history, I looked forward to working collaboratively with my colleagues and critical friends in the knowledge that they would offer encouragement, support, and honest feedback. I imagined that, by evaluating my personal history, I would be capacitated to understand and respect others' viewpoints even if they were different from my own.

2.2.3.4 Finding and developing new perspectives

As a teacher, I needed to be aware of my own as well as my learners' perspectives so that I could better support their learning and social and emotional needs. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2011, p. 18) state: "Examining one's perspectives as a teacher educator is vital in clarifying and developing understandings that frame practice, and creating opportunities for personal

professional growth”. I wanted to travel a path towards self-awareness and encourage myself to reflect on patterns of behaviour and emotions as they unravelled in my classroom. I anticipated that self-study research would allow me to explore the notion that I could learn from my learners. Moreover, I needed to learn by asking myself questions regarding the way I delivered teaching and how it was received by my learners. For instance, I needed to ask: *What patterns of behaviour have I encountered concerning social and emotional learning?* and *How did I communicate and express my emotions and social relationships of myself in trying to rectify an uncomfortable or inappropriate approach?*

Self-study requires commitment to outside interpretations and a willingness to review the borders one may have unwittingly crossed. Also, Samaras and Freese (2006) express that self-study teachers expose their research to others for constructive criticism as they share a commitment to better understand their practice. I committed to sharing my findings and making my self-study research known inside and outside my learning environment. Through self-study, teachers acknowledge that they are willing to explore their actions and think about the effects of their behaviour on learners. It thus entrenches jeopardy but also a challenge and the commitment by teachers to transform. I looked forward to grow in my teaching profession and to bring positive change to my classroom. Also, by sharing my research findings and insights on relevant platforms, I hoped to bring change to the classrooms of other teachers.

By adopting a self-study research approach, I wanted that my intuitive voice to resonate with those of others – yet I also wanted to become autonomous in my field. It was thus imperative for me to reflect on my teaching philosophy and to seek alternative methods that would make teaching evocative and allow me to engage in insightful relationships and conversations with my learners. Samaras and Freese (2006, p. 42) highlight the point that self-study research “...is a process that gives you permission to change your teaching philosophy without incurring guilt over past practices and beliefs”. As a teacher who had a profound interest in self-study and social and emotional learning, it was crucial for me to be aware of my learners’ feelings of anxiety, discomfort, joy, and enthusiasm, and to develop new perspectives and understandings that would support their learning. I looked forward to changing my learning culture and to reframe my teaching and my learners’ learning.

I wanted to improve and grow professionally. I realised that it would be essential for me to do introspection about my teaching and my classroom practices. It was critical that I adopted interactive teaching methodologies and that I engaged in collaborative interactions with critical friends to ultimately improve my practice. Austin and Senese (2004, p. 1236) illuminate that teachers should "...no longer [be] content to work in isolation". I thus needed to collaborate and forge friendships in my profession. I knew that working with critical friends would help us to identify our shortcomings and acknowledge the gaps in our studies. I also anticipated that my critical friends would assist me in validating my research and gaining new perspectives and understandings as I revisiting my initial insights. I hoped that, by including my learners' and critical friends' views in my evaluation of social and emotional learning; I would broaden my viewpoints and improve my practice. To do this, I needed to listen to my intuitive voice and acknowledge those of others on my journey of self-discovery and understanding social and emotional learning.

I needed to reflect on my classroom practices and encourage my learners to be reflective as well. This would help them to understand their metacognition and to tap into deeper social relationships and their emotions. Austin and Senese (2004) argue that the classroom is a door that has to be opened or removed. This means that the classroom also exists beyond the four walls that hold the students and teacher. I was excited to learn that, by its nature, self-study values learners' contributions to the learning process and uplifts them. Learning would thus not be confined to a textbook, the prescribed curriculum, or a calendar, but it would have limitless boundaries. The self-study approach would thus address my need for fruitful, encouraging feedback from my learners, particularly in the context of social and emotional learning.

2.3 The Research Setting

My research site was a primary school in the Umlazi district in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The school was situated in an urban area and learners and teachers had access to numerous resources such as whiteboards, laptops, computers, and I-pads. This school already existed in the apartheid era and experienced the time when the country peacefully transformed to democracy after a time of political, social and economic upheaval and strife. At the time of the study, the school had over 70 teachers and teacher assistants. It

was rich in diversity not only among staff members, but also among the learners. Diversity existed in terms of cultures, religions, and languages. The school's medium of instruction was English. Most learners' home language was IsiZulu, but the majority of the teaching staff spoke English at home. There was also a dedicated special needs classroom. The teacher to learner ratio was 1:41.

The school was categorised by the Department of Basic Education as a quintile 5 school as it had a sound infrastructure, was well resourced, and parents paid a compulsory school fee that was determined by the School Governing Body on an annual basis. Schools that are categorised as quintile 5 are given minimal financial support by the government. The quintile according to which a school is categorised is based on rates of income, unemployment, and literacy levels within the school's area, whether it is situated in an urban or rural context.

Most learners hailed from residential areas or townships near Durban and many relied on transport provided by their parents. An aftercare system had been established to ensure that learners whose parents could not pick them up directly after school were well taken care of. Some learners made use of public transport or used the 'Malume' (an IsiZulu word meaning uncle) system. This private transport system used buses or smaller minibus vehicles to transport learners from the same neighbourhood to their school and back. Parents paid a certain amount per month for 'Malume' transport, which was quite popular and safe.

The school had the services of a full-time social worker who provided social and emotional support to learners in need. Such counselling is, in my view, essential at a school as trained people can identify learners' social and emotional learning needs and then support them. The social worker also collaborated with teachers and this system meant that the learners were supported holistically. This support helped them to develop their self-esteem, courage, and hope and facilitated their social and emotional well-being.

2.4 Research Participants

I am a woman and was 30 years old when I commenced this study. I can speak, read and write IsiZulu and English proficiently. When I commenced this study, I had been a teacher for 7 years and was a Grade 4 teacher. I had, and will always have, a keen interest in teacher

development and social and emotional learning. Because I was conducting self-study research, I was the primary research participant in this study. I taught all subjects to my class, which meant that I spent most of the school day in one class. In the year when I conducted this research I had 15 girls and 26 boys in my classroom of ages ranging from 9 to 11 years. Most of my learners lived with both their parents while others were raised by single parents (generally women) or by their grandparents. Knowing something about the domestic background of my learners played a crucial role in my ability to identify social issues that hampered learning and to determine how the absence of a parent or parents impacted their emotions and academic achievements.

Working with these 41 Grade 4 learners as my research participants was convenient as I was able to reflect on my teaching approaches and methods by working with my whole class and looking at my lesson plans and their classwork. However, for ethical reasons which I shall discuss later in this chapter, I only used data from the classroom activities/work of learners whose parents/guardians had given their consent for them to participate in my study.

I expected that I would be able to teach and learn from my learners. I wanted to learn so I could appreciate their interests and what they desired in their learning environment. Through involving my learners, I aimed to acknowledge that my learners were dynamic resources that also played a crucial role in my learning. Furthermore, I hoped to discover different perspectives, understandings and interpretations by engaging with them, with particular reference to their social and emotional learning. I wanted to be able to reach into my learners' hearts and minds and to get to know myself better through their eyes.

2.5 Critical Friends

I was fortunate to work with three critical friends who were also primary school teachers who were doing their Doctoral studies. We all specialised in teacher development under the same supervisor. My critical friends were two males and one female. One male teacher was a head of department (HoD) and the other was a school principal. The female was a Grade 1 teacher. My three critical friends and I came from different backgrounds but shared similar challenges regarding teaching. We were all IsiZulu speaking Africans, but the age gap was large among us.

My critical friends' contributions assisted me to uncover different ways of making sense of my research and they helped me to enhance my teaching practice. According to Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 43), critical friends "...encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to obtain alternative perspectives, and they work to help validate the quality and legitimacy of each other's claims". My critical friends were able to identify some errors I had made such as being biased or forgetting that I was the primary participant in my research. They encouraged me on my journey to find new ways of planning and managing classroom activities, advised me on ways to allow my learners to express their voices and thoughts, and directed me to use diverse approaches to produce data and to converse with my learners.

My critical friends offered their insights unstintingly and stimulated me to record my work, to be more reminiscent, and to give lucid examples and details related to my study. I was also inspired by Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 43), who emphasise that self-study "...is personal and interpersonal with learning, thinking, and knowing to arise through collaboration and feedback from others". I was pleased to know that I had critical friends to support me, to give feedback, and to allow me to learn through self-study. My critical friends and I met at least three times a month for three years. We read one another's work, assisted one another in amending some flawed work, and recommended potential readings. We continuously used WhatsApp to share ideas and meet deadlines. WhatsApp is an application that allows the user to communicate with others by sending videos, images, text messages, and voice notes. We also kept one another motivated by seeking help and being positive about our self-study research. According to Samaras (2011), working with critical friends "...validates that your thinking about your research has extended beyond yourself" (p. 176). Having critical friends helped me to envision my work and to discern shortcomings that I had overlooked. They also helped me to identify relationships that emerged from my study and to face the hurdles that threatened to trip me. In brief, I was not just a single student trying to make sense of a mass of data, but a worthy, emotional researcher who belonged to a learning community.

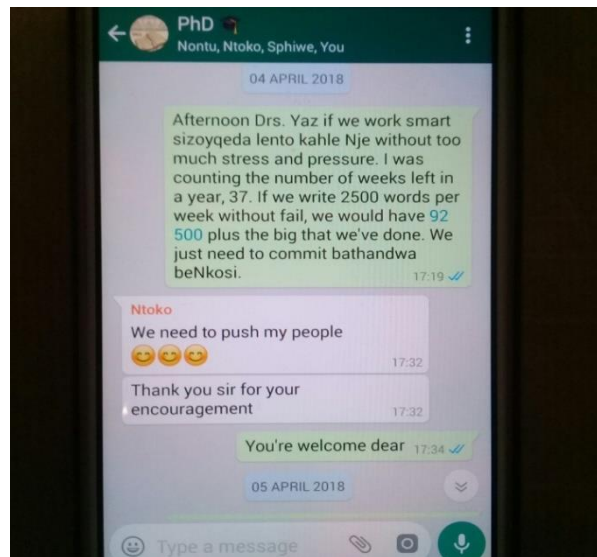


Figure 2.1: WhatsApp messages of concern and encouragement

Note: The code switching between English and IsiZulu was typical of our dialogues as we strove to find the best expressions to support one another.

As critical friends we shared our insights and tried to identify the gaps in our work. This improved the trustworthiness of this study as I was supported to identify issues or shortcomings that might have blinded me and impacted my work negatively. The flaws in my research were pointed out and this helped me to reflect on, go back, and improve my work. My critical friends thus supported me in my professional learning and development and helped me to engage in reflective learning. I followed a process of introspection and dialogue and thus learnt from my mistakes. I was also able to support this community of critical friends by offering constructive critiques and comments on their work. My critical friends in turn helped me to find methods to identify emotionally needy learners and to amend parts of my study that needed clarity. They also encouraged me to document my lessons and to reflect on my classroom practices.

2.6 Self-Study Methods

I utilised a variety of self-study methods to explore social and emotional learning as this was required by the nature of the study. LaBoskey (2004) encourages self-study researchers to use multiple methods and to employ multiple representations of experiences, knowledge,

background, and emotions to enhance the validity of the self-study project. I wanted first of all to explore the influences of my past on my understanding of social and emotional learning and then to explore learners' experiences and understanding of the same topic. The sources I used included a reflective journal, learners' exercise books, learners' written work, and audio recordings of my lessons (Table 2.1). The use of a variety of methods and data sources enabled me to narrate and then evaluate my own professional and personal growth, to document my emotions, to explore my social and emotional experiences, and to unpack my insights regarding social and emotional learning as my study unfolded. I also wanted to be able to identify my personal shortcomings as well as my triumphs in order to learn from these experiences.

Table 2.1: Summary of the data generation processes to address the research questions.

Research Questions	Data Generation Processes	Data Sources
1. <i>What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I reflected on my memories regarding social and emotional learning. I wrote my memories down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal entries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I used my journal writing to compose poems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poetry
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I retrieved old photographs to prompt my memories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photographs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative writing 	
2. <i>What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My learner participants kept a journal in which they recorded their experiences related to our lessons on social and emotional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' Journal entries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I took photographs of my learners and their classroom activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audio recordings and photographs of lessons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We explored social and emotional learning in English, Mathematics, Life Skills, and Social and Natural Science lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher's journal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I kept a journal to reflect on lessons that addressed social and emotional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' poetry
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I encouraged my learners to write poems to express themselves in words and images related to social and emotional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' work

2.6.1 Creating collages

2.6.1.1 The collages I created

Creating collages involves pasting materials such as leaves, buttons, words, and/or photographs onto a sheet of paper. Creating collages allowed me to portray and communicate

my emotions and understanding. To do this, I selected pictures and texts that reflected my insights regarding the topic under investigation and I cut these out and pasted them on a large poster board to express and explore my memories of social and emotional learning. The two collages that I made are presented in Chapter Eight and Chapter Ten respectively.

Creating my collages entailed pasting multiple visual images and texts that I had found in magazines and newspapers onto an A3 chart. Butler-Kisber (2008) explains that, in qualitative inquiry, "...a collage can mediate understanding in new and interesting ways for both the creator and the viewer because of its partial, embodied, multifocal, and nonlinear representational potential" (p. 265). Furthermore, the latter author expounds that a collage echoes our perspective of the world as objects are given meaning not because of something within them, but because of our view about what they depict meaningfully in relationship to one another. The activities of selecting, cutting, and sticking, and the eagerness to experiment, can result in a creative and innovative collages that result from our creativity and that can cultivate deep levels of understanding (Butler-Kisber, 2008). For instance, I created a collage that illustrated my definition and understanding of social and emotional learning (Chapter Eight). By selecting and using the pictures and texts that I did, I explored my experiences of social and emotional learning as a child and as a teacher. Creating this collage undoubtedly stimulated my creativity and thinking. The collage helped me to revisit and reflect upon my learning experiences, research accomplishments, and the challenges that I had encountered in the self-study research process.

2.6.1.2 Collage transcript

I was guided by Van Schalkwyk (2010) to write a collage transcript (see Chapter Eight) that catalogues the key ideas, thoughts, and feelings that were evoked by my collage making. I chose collage making because I wanted to share my lived experiences, personal history, teaching experiences, and professional insights related to social and emotional learning in a visual manner. The collage transcription involved giving explanations for choosing each image and presenting and recording my accompanying thoughts, feelings, and insights.

2.6.1.3 What did I learn from collage making?

I became aware of various emotions and experiences that I had overlooked or suppressed in the past. McKay (2019) argues that using a collage supports reflection and helps the researcher to reconnoitre past and present life experiences to see how they unite with contextual influences and uncover or form identities. Additionally, McKay (2019) highlights that collage making helps unformed and fragmented thoughts to come to consciousness and develop a logical form. I was eager to tap into my personal history and my current teaching experiences through collage making. This eagerness was not wasted as it taught me to reflect on and deeply engage with aspects of social and emotional learning.

I took pleasure in sharing my emotions and life experiences through the collages I created. Van Schalkwyk (2010, p. 678) states that a collage “...is a poster or visual representation in which participants make use of photos and pictures”. I wanted to find my personal and social voice and to recollect thoughts and memories related to social and emotional learning. I also used collage making to reflect on my research study (see Chapter Eight and Chapter Ten).

2.6.2 Journal writing

2.6.2.1 Journal writing

Journal writing entails writing one’s thoughts and personal insights down in a special book that is kept for that purpose alone. It can also be used to reflect on daily experiences and for recording questions on professional topics. Masinga (2012) describes how, through using journal writing, we can discover that the journey of reflecting on our work and experiences is a tricky one because it requires us to expose our deepest thoughts and even vulnerabilities for all to see. Furthermore, Masinga (2012, p. 35) explains that the aim of journal writing is “...for us to learn from experience, [as] keeping a journal assists us in making the session more educative”. I believe that journal writing is a learning journey as it allows us to record our most sincere feelings, show our vulnerabilities, and share our deepest feelings without holding back.

2.6.2.2 Recording my memories in a journal

I used a journal to record my memories concerning social and emotional learning (Chapter Three and Chapter Four). Upon reflection, I realised that journal writing about my memories allowed me to transform my negative memories into positive thoughts and insights. I resolved to maintain an affirmative and positive mind-set as I gave a general description of my childhood and adolescent memories. I tried to think of vivid details that enriched my childhood and I thus share some significant memories with the reader that were elicited from times of triumph and conquest.

By recording my memories in a journal and reflecting on them, I enlightened my understandings of my childhood and adolescent experiences and generated new thoughts about my learning. I could see myself as a child and a learner and used this opportunity to reflect deeply about new discoveries, revisit my personal history, and explore social and emotional learning. I needed to acquire knowledge authentically by identifying my emotions.

2.6.2.3 Journal writing about my teaching

I also used my journal to record my daily experiences and lessons. This allowed me to reflect on my teaching approaches and methods and using a journal for this purpose allowed me to grow professionally and personally. Meyer and Willis (2019) describe how engaging in reflective journaling can aid understanding of unanticipated research encounters and how it can develop an awareness of researcher location to illuminate a more comprehensive appreciation of the collected data. Through journal writing, I gained respect for my diverse emotions and the social backgrounds of myself and others. I explored the differences among my participants and critical friends and affirmed myself to the point where I could express my appreciation of as well as my concerns related to social and emotional learning (see Chapter Six and Chapter Seven).

Journal writing encouraged me to search for deeper meanings and to explore different ways to question and adopt social and emotional learning. Meyer and Willis (2019) state that reflective activities unveil the ways a researcher shapes how data were created and findings

reached. I was enthusiastic to delve into my teaching and learning while interacting meaningfully with my learners' environment and backgrounds to build healthy relationships.

2.6.2.4 My learners' journal writing

My learners were given the opportunity to keep a journal in which they recorded their daily experiences and to reflect on what they had learned about social and emotional learning. My learners wrote in these journals for two to three weeks. For practical purposes, they recorded these reflections in their English exercise books. I encouraged my learners to write every morning or at the end of the day. I also informed them that they could take their journals home if they felt that they had more to write. I was not stringent when it came to their writing, as I aimed to allow them to unpack their emotions and declutter their brains. I also encouraged them to use colour and decorate and put stickers on their journals and at certain entries. They were also allowed to illustrate their thoughts or daily encounters in simple drawings. As the days went by, I noticed that journal writing was a popular activity and that the learners recorded their insights, emotions, and daily experiences with enthusiasm (see Figure 2.2).

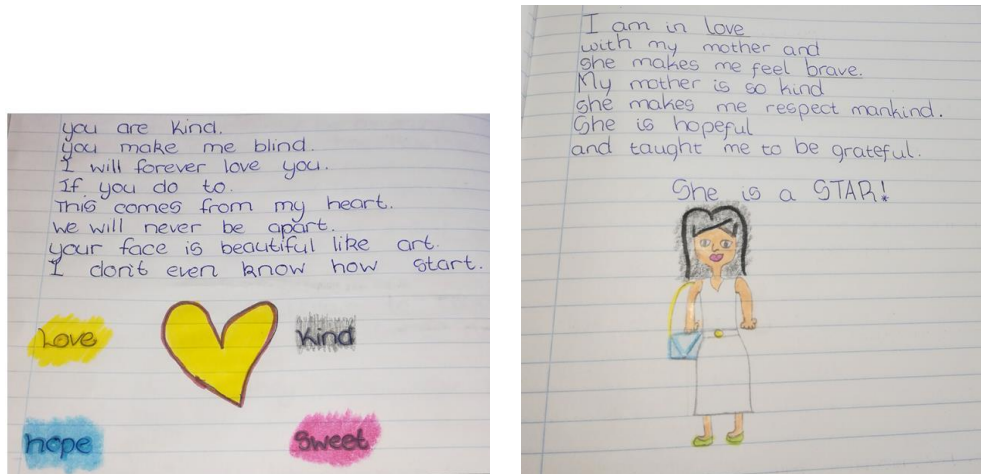


Figure 2.2: Examples of my learners' journal entries

I chose to keep a reflective journal and encouraged my learners to do the same. Because this was a free-writing activity that would not be marked, I felt that this would allow them to communicate in an honest and sincere manner. Masinga (2009) states that she involved her learners in journal writing because she comprehended that self-study research by teachers was constantly steered by the contributions of others, whether directly or indirectly. I understood

that writing in a journal would offer moments of reflection and clarify experiences encountered during and outside of lessons.

The learners' journal entries allowed me to witness their emotional challenges such as how they dealt with grief and loss as well as their everyday conflicts. I watched them work more freely by drawing and expressing their deepest emotions and how they approached the world in ground-breaking ways. At first, I was concerned that my learners constricted their feelings into what they felt was a safe response that would carry my approval and please me as the adult in the classroom. Gradually, however, recording their authentic social and emotional expressions liberated them and they started to reveal their true feelings. I explained that the journal was a safe place where honest dialogues and expressions were celebrated and welcomed. They attached their names willingly to their diary and I reminded them continuously that our classroom was a safe space and that they could withdraw from participating when they felt uncomfortable.

2.6.3 Poetry writing

2.6.3.1 My poetry writing

I was able to express my feelings and reflect on my experiences concerning social and emotional learning in the 'found poetry' that I wrote. According to Butler-Kisber (2005), 'found poetry' is a method that travels from undeviating thinking that is apparent in transcripts to a more embodied form of text that represents feelings and heartfelt expressions in poetic form. Moreover, it is an approach that instils words from transcripts and transforms them into poetic form to evoke different kinds of feelings. By writing in this poetic style, I allowed myself to express my feelings and thoughts related to social and emotional learning in a constructive yet creative manner. I wrote a poem inspired by my journal writing. I created images of my research journey and reflected therapeutically on my personal memories. This poem (*All this will be a distant memory*) describes the cycle of life and learning and is an encouragement to hold onto hope. I was also able to embrace my identity and to be sincere about my experiences. The themes that I addressed in this poetry related to my memories, my experiences of social and emotional learning, and how I could integrate social and emotional

learning in my Grade 4 classroom. I used words from my journal writing to create this ‘found poem’:

*All this will be a distant memory
A learning journey worth reliving
A surge of complete serenity and freedom
All my imperfections make me unique
I am emptying myself from everything that steals my joy
I am reliving my past to heal
I choose to be sincere and unapologetic about my truth
I choose to forgive myself*

-Ntokozo Mkhize-

2.6.3.2 My learners’ poetry writing

I also encouraged my learners to explore what they learnt socially and emotionally by writing poetry (see Chapter Seven). Below is an example of one such poem:

*In love...
Hello, Thabo is my name, I have not told anyone, but I am in love.
She is bright like a holy dove
Soon, I will have time
In the future, she will be mine
When I am in my 20s in spring
I will give her an engagement ring
I have not told you but she is kind
Now you see that I am love blind”*

-Thabo Langa-²

Wiseman (2010) explains that poetry is a means of conveying and expressing emotions and it was therefore essential that I encouraged my learners to relate to their own lived experiences and emotions in their poetry. These authentic and honest expressions were an opportunity that

² Pseudonym (all the learners are referred to by pseudonyms in this thesis)

they enthusiastically used to express their feelings and to reflect on their lives. It was not easy at first. Some gazed wretchedly into empty space, cautiously moving away from my direction as they were daunted by the challenge. I comforted them, explaining that I was there to help. We first worked in groups and progressively moved towards individual poetry writing. We explored rhyme, alliteration, metaphors, similes, and personification. We chose simple topics such as their feelings, friends, family, or their daily experiences. Soon, most became enthused and asked for help while others were still nervous. I prompted my learners to reflect on their lives, to think about their feelings and special people in their lives, and to remind themselves of the challenges they had to face. I also encouraged them to focus on a single memory such as a colour, a taste, and even music to evoke their emotions.

Soon my learners could express themselves freely and share their experiences through poetry writing. They worked jointly and individually, identified similar experiences, and embraced diverse encounters and perspectives. Wiseman (2010) argues that poetry is a form of social cooperation and that the social nature of poetry writing echoes essential features of human development. This was true for my learners as they were allowed opportunities to discuss their insights and learn together. I was pleased, as they found that they could often relate to their classmates' experiences.

Furman et al. (2008) argue that writing poetry is a valuable process for self-discovery and self-reflection, that it opens new perspectives on the world, and encourages us to reflect on emotions and feelings that have previously been unexplored. My learners thus had opportunities to reflect on their unexplored emotions and to be true and honest about their feelings and life experiences.

In exploring poetry writing with my learners, we had to work collaboratively to develop their writing while honouring inclusivity by listening to and respecting different experiences and ideas. Coles (2017) states that writing poetry was developed to encourage inclusive education which enables everyone to participate fully in workshop activities. Moreover, every child is capable of responding imaginatively to incentives, to build ideas, and to create a poem. I was pleased to witness the high level of my learners' creativity and commended the manner in which they expressed their thoughts and emotions on paper. I found that poetry writing was a

useful remedy for their hidden emotions of hurt, pain, and uncertainty and that it brought a sense of emotional healing.

2.6.4 Photographs

2.6.4.1 Retrieving old photographs

I found that retrieving old photographs allowed me to relive my childhood as they evoked emotions that I had cherished but also concealed for years. Looking at old photographs allowed me to confront my feelings of loss and pain and addressed my desire to go into a realm that I had suppressed for years. I wanted to see myself as a child again by resurrecting memories and feelings that had been buried for years. I looked forward to using old photographs (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four) to revisit my past and to unearth what I had learned about social and emotional learning. I found the exploration of photographs a powerful prompt to evoke memories of my lived experiences, knowing that these memories would be meaningful and allow me to rediscover myself. Mitchell et al. (2009, p. 119) explain that “...using images connects us to the self, yet distances us from ourselves”. Using the images, I was reminded of childhood experiences and I shared these with my critical friends and learners. Thus memory recall exercises helped me to develop professionally and to tackle a variety of social issues.

Using photographs allowed me to revisit the past and to relook and reframe my identity. Notshulwana and de Lange (2019) explain that photographs can help us to critically reflect on our knowledge and share our experiences. They evoke memories of past influences, enhance our perspectives of our current experiences, and help us to reconsider and contemplate the way forward. I thus reflected analytically on my knowledge and experiences, explored my earliest influences and current experiences, and reconsidered and contemplated ways forward. Using photographs allowed me to re-enter the past and, more particularly, to reframe the concept of gender identity (see Chapter Four: Social Justice Meets Emotions and Unarmed Womanhood).

I have always utilised photographs as a tool that allowed me to relive my childhood and reflect on and express my emotions. Campbell and Mhlongo (2019) state that using

photographs as memory recall objects helps us to scrutinise our literacy experiences, recall memories of our childhood, and enlighten the pivotal role that our parents and reading played in our lives. Using photographs also evoked my personal memories and led to journal writing and the poem which influenced my teaching and learning concerning social and emotional learning.

I was intrigued by the possibility that photographs would evoke self-recognition and hoped that the photographs that I selected would allow me to write emotively and to openly share my childhood experiences and memories. Mitchell et al. (2019, p. 51) advise that photographs “...can be very powerful tools for evoking the past and yet also for being future-orientated”. I became aware that my perusal of photographs prompted reflections on emotions that were either overtly or covertly depicted in the photographs. Mitchell et al. (2019) emphasise that photographs support transparency and elicit a sense of ownership of the past and future.

2.6.4.2 Taking new photographs

I took photographs of my learners’ classwork activities. Mitchell et al. (2009) argue that the challenge in working with photographs is to identify relationships and to be insightful and thoughtful. Taking photographs of my learners and their work, with the approval of their parents, assisted me to discover links that were related to social and emotional learning. For ethical reasons I only took pictures of their hands and their classwork and not of their faces (see Chapter Five, Chapter Six, and Chapter Seven).

Taking photographs facilitated my observations of my learners’ interactions as I could capture distinctive and meaningful moments. Moskal (2017) explains that visual research allows children to be active in the research process and reverses the typical role of having research done *about* them and not *with* them. For example, I took photos of my learners hugging trees and writing how they felt (see Chapter Five). In this activity, they were allowed the opportunity to be active participants in research. I would like to think that this enhanced social justice as children are often silenced and marginalised in society and in research (see Chapter Five).

I perused many photographs to see what they revealed about the subjects' underlying emotions and the kind of social relationships we built and nurtured in the classroom. Oslund and Crespo (2014) state that looking at and conversing about classroom photographs and other professional resources can help teachers engage more deeply with conversations related to pedagogical ideas entrenched in these visual aids. Furthermore, they point out that different perspectives embolden teachers to consider the experiences of different classroom members as either insiders or outsiders of a lesson, and to find remedies that will involve all.

2.6.5 Audio recordings of lessons

I audio recorded my lessons that dealt with themes related to social and emotional learning. These recordings helped me to learn about social and emotional learning associated with my present experiences and they also assisted me in integrating social and emotional learning with the curriculum in my Grade 4 classroom.

Audio recording my lessons supported my narrative writings about these lessons. Masinga (2012) states that audio recordings can play a fundamental role in discussions and clarifications of what participants said or intended to say. Moreover, the audio recordings were invaluable in unpacking the data and in my reflections on the findings. These recordings helped me to become aware of my learners' emotions and voices. I was able to replay and listen to critical points and analyse my learners' responses, and I was able to detect the emotion behind these responses. However, there were constant announcements and interruptions in my classroom that often made audio recording difficult and I experienced challenges such as inconsistent sound levels and background noises as my learners chattered or other learners abruptly entered my classroom.

2.7 Making Meaning: Data Analysis and Interpretation

2.7.1 Critical friends

I needed different perspectives on my study that would help me identify any shortcomings I might have overlooked. I therefore had to work closely with my critical friends who offered various constructive perspectives on my work. According to Samaras and Roberts (2011, p.

43), "...critical friends encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to [elicit] alternative perspectives, and they work to help validate the quality and legitimacy of one another's claims". Therefore, I worked closely with my three critical friends who were also doing their Ph.D. studies specialising in teacher development. Their inputs helped me to find alternative ways of making sense of my research as they enthusiastically offered ideas and critiques that improved my work.

2.7.2 Inductive analysis

The data analysis process that I employed was inductive as I looked for patterns and codes in the data (Nieuwehuis, 2010). The inductive analysis method helps the researcher to reflect and focus on what is taking place in the world. The researcher thus thinks "...in increasingly more abstract ways of moving towards [the] theoretical concept" (Neuman, 2006, p. 60). This was an effective way of analysing my data as I was looking at my own as well as my learners' lived experiences while reflecting on my teaching practice.

I used a variety of ways to generate data such as audio recordings, transcripts, journal writing, and photographs, and I applied thematic analysis to answer my research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is a technique for recognising, analysing, and reporting themes that are identified in data. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this process helps the researcher to arrange and explain a data set in detail. I thus identified themes that explained my understanding of social and emotional learning. During the research process, I noticed significant happenings and ideas by reflecting on my lessons through journal writing and discussions with my critical friends and supervisor. I was able to observe how social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness and fosters a sense of belonging. I felt liberated and encouraged to tap into my learners' daily challenges. Being in search of who I am and the kind of teacher I aspired to be, social and emotional learning allowed me to find myself and be conscious of my life experiences and my learners' emotional vocabulary. I illustrated these themes in a collage that is presented in this thesis to depict my social and emotional learning. I also present a narrative transcription and explanation of the collage (see Chapter Eight).

Braun and Clarke (2006) endorse the use of visuals in self-study by emphasising that they are supportive of the process of data analysis. I thus used visual representations to sort out the different codes that I then merged into themes. I applied Van Schalkwyk's (2010) guidelines by creating a collage transcript to catalogue key ideas, thoughts, and the feelings evoked by the collage of my personal history. I presented the collage of my self-study (Chapter Ten) and a collage of social and emotional learning (Chapter Eight) to my critical friends and my research supervisor. The discussions that followed were audio recorded and transcribed.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that inductive analysis as thematic analysis is data-driven. I was thus free to alter the direction of the study after the research process had begun. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83) stress that an inductive approach means that "...the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves". Inductive reasoning is, in my view, based on learning from experience as patterns, similarities, and consistencies in experiences are used to reach conclusions. I thus generated meanings from the data set to identify patterns and relationships on which my conclusions were based.

I had to search for similar patterns and identify relationships amongst the rich body of data I had collected. Braun and Clarke (2018) advise that it is important to review data and to identify where elements collate and how they are relevant to the topic of a study. Additionally, Scharp and Sanders (2019) explain that we need to familiarise ourselves with the data through reading and re-reading transcriptions and notes to produce themes. The researcher thus needs to compare initial codes and gather all similar data to construct them into possible themes. I therefore generated codes and identified themes related to social and emotional learning.

In analysing the data, I had to revisit all the collected data and familiarise myself with what transpired. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that, by immersing oneself into the data, it is important to reach a point where one is familiar with the depth and the breadth of the content. In this process, one examines related coded extracts and defines and names themes. I thus had to thoroughly peruse the massive body of data by reading the data set repeatedly, listening to audio recordings, and reviewing my lesson recordings and journal writings to search for meanings and patterns. The themes were identified by exploring the patterns that emerged as I

read through the work. I discussed them with and presented the identified themes to my critical friends and supervisor on a regular basis (see Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine.)

2.8 Ethical Considerations

I wanted to ensure that all the participants felt comfortable and protected during this research study. Babbie (2011) states that conducting research should never harm people in any way, whether emotionally, physically, or psychologically. According to Murchison (2010), the ethical considerations that a researcher needs to take into account are the following: (a) Informed consent. This means that my participants had to be given a clear explanation of what the research study would entail and what possible risks they could be exposed to. This allowed them to make an informed choice and to participate voluntarily in the study or not. As my learner participants were very young, their parents/guardians were informed in writing and their permission was sought. Only the work and contributions of the learners whose parents had given permission were used in the data set. (b) Confidentiality. The participants remain anonymous and pseudonyms are used in this study report. Feedback and honesty also played a major role in adhering to the ethical requirements of research.

2.8.1 Gatekeepers' permission

Permission was sought from the UKZN Research Ethical Committee, upon learning of the ethical approval of all the gatekeepers, also approved the research proposal in writing and granted permission for this study to proceed.

2.8.2 Privacy and anonymity

The privacy of all the participants remained a paramount consideration at all times. I thus needed to ensure that my learners who shared confidential information would not be identified or victimised. I had to limit conveying detailed, accurate accounts of their social settings and protect the school and the individuals who participated in the research. The study data and findings are thus addressed sensitively. I refrained from forcing my learners to participate in or discuss traumatic topics. My classroom was maintained as a private environment where I ensured that my learners felt comfortable. I used storytelling and shared my own sensitive

stories to encourage my learners to express themselves freely, but no learner was coerced to participate or share any personal experiences or insights.

2.8.3 Letters of consent

I sent letters to the parents/guardians of my learners to obtain their consent for these young people's participation in a research study of this nature. They were given clear explanations about the aims of the study and were assured that their children would not be compelled to participate in the study. I clarified that neither participation nor non-participation would affect the learners' academic results or my attitude towards them. They could withdraw from the study at any time. Also, they were assured that their diverse beliefs and value systems would be respected and treated ethically. I informed the parents that this study was aimed at having a positive impact on my own teaching and learning as I would embrace what I learnt from their children to improve my teaching practice for the benefit of my learners. Each letter of consent included my full names and those of the learner involved.

According to Graham and Powell (1996, p. 335), "children involved [in research] are entitled to justice" and I thus resolved that my learners would benefit from my study. Obtaining their and their parents' consent was necessary and played a vital part in creating harmonious relationships. I carefully and clearly explained what I meant by social and emotional learning and this aided in managing the daily challenges that occurred, adopting an optimistic mind-set, and establishing healthy relationships. Most learners seemed intrigued but some seemed doubtful initially. I stressed that they were not forced to participate in the research and even that those who agreed could withdraw at any time. Of the 41 learners in my class, 40 agreed to participate with the permission of their parents, and 5 withdrew during the course of the research activities.

2.8.4 Children's voices in research

It was important that I as the researcher reflected on my research and involved my learners by discussing possible issues that might arise. I realised that it was important for me to work collaboratively with my learners and to identify them as carriers of knowledge and valuable

thoughts. I wanted to hear my learners' intuitive voices and understand their perspectives by exploring their writing and the photographs I took of their activities. Yoon and Templeton (2019) enlighten the point that children are pleading to be heard through their writing, photography, and drawings instead of through adults' preferred forms of communication. I acknowledged that my learners' forms of communication would be imaginative and impactful, that their voices would be numerous and rooted in the social relationships they had with their peers and families, and that their actions would be pointers to the knowledge they had of their own social and cultural positions.

Children are social beings who have unique yearnings, purposes, and understandings, and critically examining these desires would transform my understandings of their identities and cultures. Yoon and Templeton (2019) argue that children have the power to influence their socio-cultural settings and to form meanings that lead to the creation of new cultures. By exploring their conversations, gestures, and behaviours, I aimed to construct their interpretations of childhood. I would like to believe that children's experiences are constantly restored through space and time, in their societies, and through interacting with the world around them. For instance, children in a classroom work together in play, when they share ideas, and when they negotiate meaning through conversations and social interactions.

I was cognisant that the learners would need to be aware of their surroundings and the potential relationships that would be revealed during the research. Lane, Blank and Jones (2019) argue that we understand the values children uphold by exploring their play experiences and witnessing how they established relationships in social contexts. Furthermore, I envisioned exploring the learners' experiences and gaining a deep understanding of the social and cultural issues that emerged as they steered their playground collaborations. I hoped that the results of my investigation would be beneficial to them and that they would be able to embrace the art of learning through what I would apply in my classroom based on my research.

I anticipated that research *with* children rather than *about* children would be insightful and that the results would emancipate and empower them. I did not want my learners to feel silenced or disempowered. Lane et al. (2019) explain that listening to children's voices is a way of identifying their viewpoints. At the outset, most of my learners were excited about

and willing to participate in the study. They exuded enthusiasm and were quite intrigued by the prospect of sharing their social and emotional experiences. However, some found the idea quite daunting, especially the more reserved learners. I reminded them that our classroom was a safe and secure place and that we were all here to learn from one another as there would be no wrong or right answers.

2.9 Validity of the Study

Ensuring the validity of my study was essential, especially as I employed a self-study approach that is described as “a novel way of addressing the ethical issues of voice and power by turning a study inward and making the researcher and participant the same” (Dencombe, 2002, p. 100). On the same page, this author also states:

“Validity concerns the accuracy of the questions asked, the data collected, and the explanations offered. Generally, it relates to the data and the analysis used in the research. It is an important reflective component in any study for examining researcher assumptions.”

Therefore, by using multiple data sources for my self-study such as learners’ classwork, journal writing, and audio recordings of my lessons to explore social and emotional learning in my classroom, my study’s validity was strengthened.

I needed to be clear and transparent about the processes and methods I employed to conduct the research. According to Feldman (2003, p. 27), in self-study research it is important to give “...a clear and detailed description of how we collect our data and make clear what counts as data in our work. That is, either within the text itself or as an appendix [we should] provide the details of the research methods used”. I thus provide clear details in the self-study methods section of how I generated the data using a variety of modes. Additionally, I present my extracts from teaching lessons and extracts from the audio recordings and journal writing in Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

Moreover, my study was strengthened by constant reflections and interactions, which I have alluded to in the discourse up to this point. It was important that I engaged with critical friends as Samaras and Freese (2006) advise, because, when we do not do this, our vision is too narrow. Moreover, the collaborations that I engaged in supported the validity of the findings because the study ranged beyond my personal views. Moreover, I needed to address

my impending prejudices. In my experience, I found that collaboration encouraged reflection outside the self. I needed to engage in collaborative thinking that illuminated different perspectives as I searched for more questions and opportunities for clarification. I was thus able to obtain new insights and create more questions that prompted alternative perceptions and resulted in further questions.

2.10 Research Challenges and Limitations

A problem I encountered was that some of my learners' parents were hesitant to allow their children to participate in the study as they did not understand the importance of this investigation. I encouraged the parents and guardians to consider giving consent by stating the importance of social and emotional learning and arguing that my study aimed to teach my learners to respect, value, and build healthy relationships that would prepare the learners to function effectively in society. However, a few parents still did not give their consent. Nevertheless, I treated all my learners with the same respect and ensured that in my thesis I only included data of the research activities of those learners whose parents had given their consent.

Another challenge that I faced was to ensure that my study was aligned with the theoretical perspective that I employed. It was initially a challenge to triangulate the literature, the theoretical perspective and the data, but as I grew in experience this process was mastered. I constantly revisited the research questions and collated different perspectives and resources which was a process that enhanced the validity of the study.

The weather was not very friendly in Durban, as we experienced floods which meant that our learners were frequently absent from school and this often slowed down the teaching and learning processes. There were also several public holidays that added to this problem. The school calendar also prevented me from working towards agreed deadlines. Lessons often had to be extended to the next day, and this required a lot of careful planning as I had to cover the curriculum for assessments.

There were also xenophobic attacks in the area where the school was located. This caused a lot of fear and disintegrated learning, but I used these events to explore the true meaning of

humanity and embrace diversity and tolerance. Teachers' absenteeism also meant that I had to stand in for some and I thus lost lesson time. Teaching and learning opportunities about social and emotional learning therefore had to be concentrated to a larger extent than I had anticipated.

In terms of the limitations of the study, I acknowledge that the execution of my lessons in only one class and school limited the scope of the study. However, the concentrated nature of my engagements with my learners and the personal attention I was able to give them during these focused lessons were invaluable in obtaining rich and saturated data. The fact that some learners' data could not be used did not, in my view, limit the findings in any way.

At first I was aware that the key concepts that would be explored – namely social and emotional learning – would be conceptually difficult for the learners in Grade 4 to grasp and that this would limit the findings to some extent. However, I explained these concepts in simple and accessible language and offered numerous examples of what they were required to do, and this negated this possible limitation to a large extent.

2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave a detailed explanation of the map that I followed to execute this self-study research. I offered reasons for doing self-study as a research approach, discussed the interpretive paradigm, and explained why it was related to this self-study research. In addition, I discussed the research setting and explained why I chose Grade 4 participants. This was followed by a detailed explanation of the data generation strategies and data sources and I discussed my approach to data analysis and interpretation. I also provided details of how I handled issues of ethical requirements and validity. Finally, I discussed the practical challenges that I encountered and referred to what I regard as limitations to the study and how they were addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

NOSTALGIC FEELINGS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter Two) I gave an account of the process or ‘map’ of my self-study research. I discussed my research methodology, the location of the study, the research participants as well as the impact of having critical friends, and how they helped me. I gave a clear explanation of each research practice that I used to generate data and explained how I used collage-making as a creative analytic practice. To conclude, I discussed how I addressed ethical issues and trustworthiness, as well as the challenges that affected my study.

I chose to title Chapter Three *Nostalgic Feelings* as a fitting title because in this chapter I recall my early and primary school childhood experiences. These memories evoked sentimental feelings and I experienced moments of deep nostalgia. Feeling nostalgic built my self-esteem, enhanced my understanding of life, and calmed my fears about the past and present. I engaged in this study to explore social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 classroom and it was therefore vital that I revisited memories of my own childhood experiences so that I could position myself in my exploration of social and emotional learning among my young learners. Moletsane (2011, p. 204) explains that revisiting our past “...can be destructive when our memories of our experiences prevent or limit progressive social change, especially with regard to gender equality and social justice for women and girls”. Instead, she advocates a “productive nostalgia that allows us to ask difficult questions about the past in order to reimagine the future” (p. 206). I thus found it fruitful to revisit my childhood experiences as I was able to identify my emotional struggles and joys and reimagine how I could cultivate social and emotional learning in my classroom. This journey allowed me to imagine redefining relationships and to respond to my learners’ needs in a holistic manner.

Chapter Three attends to my first research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004) elucidate that when teachers engage in personal history self-study, they gain self-knowing and develop their professional learning. I thus begin by recapping the research strategies that allowed me to

stimulate and retrace my memories of my childhood and adolescent years. To follow, I reminisce on stories of my childhood. I focus in some detail on my childhood years because my experiences in this phase of my life would be closely related to my practices as a Grade 4 teacher. I share my personal history through self-study using some strategies that I to evoke my memories such as photographs of artefacts and I narrate my personal history in relation to social and emotional learning. I provide a title for each of my personal stories that express its significance concerning my past and upbringing. Each narrative is complemented by a photograph of an artefact. A letter that I wrote to my Grade 7 teacher, which paints a picture of my personal history in relation to social and emotional learning, is also presented.

I begin by looking at the theme of *Self-love*. I acknowledge that self-love built my self-esteem and allowed me to find my emotional language and compass. Subsequently, I look at *My hiding place*. I explain how a wardrobe was a place of emotional safety and security. I then narrate how and where I found *Comfort* using my blanket as an artefact. I share my feelings regarding loss and death in my narrative titled *Beyond the graveyard*. I also reminisce on my father's personality and character by sharing my memories of his vintage *Blazer*. I describe how visiting *Homelands*, the place that was my home, impacted my spiritual and cultural growth. I had an influential teacher, *Mrs Murethi*, and I reveal how she made me feel accepted and acknowledged. Furthermore, I write about *A positive learning approach* which is illustrated by a letter to my favourite teacher. I then share my memories of visiting the *Media Centre* and how my experiences in this space ignited hope. It was the place where I became aware of social issues and social relationships. Afterwards, I discuss the theme of *Building emotions* by expressing myself freely and explaining what I had learnt about emotional vocabulary.

3.2 Personal History Self-Study Research Strategies

By using a variety of personal history research strategies, I evoked memories of social and emotional learning in my primary school years. As explained in Chapter Two, these research strategies were artefact retrieval, letter writing, photographs, and narrative writing. Cole (2011) enlightens that memory plays an inescapable purpose in any study that needs participants' reflection on the past. Using these research strategies helped me to reminiscence on my past experiences as a child and a learner in primary school.

Mitchell and Weber (1999) explain that artefacts are objects with a personal meaning that can be used to recall childhood memories. Artefacts can induce positive thoughts and feelings and lessen feelings of anxiety during the process of remembering (Evans, Ka`opua & Freese, 2015). Using artefacts served as a way of sharing my personal history and redefining my memories. When I looked at the artefacts I had selected, my thoughts were drawn to past emotions. I became conscious of the fears and challenges that I experienced as a young girl. This allowed me to reminisce and to reconcile with hurtful feelings.

I found that photographs were a powerful link to my past and that they evoked significant memories. Using these photographs thus connected me with my past. I was reminded of people, places, feelings, and stories. According to Mitchell, Weber, and Pithouse (2009), photographs "...act as powerful memory prompts" (p. 127). They explain that choosing which photographs to use "can [spark] ideas and [lead] to insight into what images might be the most valuable for [a] self-study" (Mitchell et al., 2009, p. 127). I also took photographs of noteworthy artefacts to help incite ideas, thoughts, and feelings about my past experiences. I also took photographs and used old photographs of places and spaces that allowed me to put my past experiences into perspective. According to Mitchell and Weber (1999), "recounting memories in a social context may contribute to constructing these memories in a particular way" (p. 12). I was enthused by this statement and tried to see how I could use photographs to prompt memories of my own lived experiences in socio-cultural contexts.

3.3 My Personal History and Social and Emotional Learning

Instead of placing these thematic titles in inverted commas, I write them in a different font to imitate handwriting to render each title more personal.

3.3.1 *Self-love*

The radio was one of my father's favourite objects in the house and I think, for him, it was a channel towards joyful moments, celebrations, and a breakthrough towards a happy and informed life. It also took him down memory lane as he shared stories about his childhood and how he dated my mother. The radio was black and had a knob to turn the volume up or down. It was fitted with giant speakers and had a fast forward and rewind button. We could play CDs and cassettes on the radio. My father's mom always described it as a vintage radio.

I always thought of it as ancient because it was old and represented my father's staunch personality, his character, his culture, and the historical events that he loved to celebrate at traditional gatherings and rituals. The radio also served a clock and shared a lot of stories that were related to current issues and day-to-day challenges. The radio also exposed us to social skills as we used it to entertain our family members and close friends. This radio had a lot of sentimental value and was deeply linked to my father's presence. He would listen to jazz and took pleasure in music by Siphso Gumede, Hugh Masikela, Jabu Khanyile, Barry White, and Luther Vandross. This music was infused with culture, tradition, and romance. Looking back, I realise that it was through this music that I was able to learn emotive language and identify as well as express my own emotions.

I remember that there were days when I felt as if I was grieving my own imminent death as thoughts of death and sorrow were always in my head. This was probably because I felt very lonely after my father had been diagnosed with renal failure. I was numb physically and emotionally and I was empty spiritually. It was a muted feeling that I struggle to describe, but I was existing and not living. These feelings persisted when I started my schooling in a new school. I was enrolled at this new school in 2000 when I was 10 years old and in Grade 5. My problem was a lack of self-identity and I felt lonely and lost. The school was much bigger than my previous school and also embraced diversity in terms of culture, race and religion. It was also situated close to the city. For some odd reason, I felt different from my peers as they all seemed familiar with the school's culture, traditions and history. I guess that being surrounded by learners of such diverse religions and races was overwhelming at first.

I was concerned about the prospect of social interaction with others as affiliations with different social cultures and identities scared me. I struggled to identify myself, my personality, my attributes, and my physique. I was constantly searching for my identity in others and I made a conscious decision to withdraw emotionally. I remember the days when I felt lost and struggled to understand the world around me. I wanted to be invisible because I feared what others thought of me and how they would respond to who I was. I can now see that my 'self' was absent – I was silent and had a low self-esteem that was the product of self-doubt and fear.



Figure 3.1: Music healed me

Looking at the photograph of the radio (Figure 3.1) reminded me of how music brought healing, joy, and pure contentment when I was still a child. Now, as an adult, I comprehend that when I grew up I did not understand my place in the world or identify my feelings. I was almost disoriented and oblivious of myself as a worthy person. I would often sit back and observe instead of experience and participate actively in the world around me. I lived in a shell most of my primary school years and did not have the emotional vocabulary to express my feelings. In fact, using our voices was taboo, as we never questioned an adult. We simply obeyed and digested everything we were told. I suppose this is the reason I struggled to identify my own emotions and those of others and I rather suppressed or dismissed my feelings. It did not matter because no one was going to listen anyway. I did not know whether I was feeling sorrow, disappointment, joy, or sadness. I was suffering from emotional deprivation yet was emotionally hungry.

I was self-conscious, lacked confidence, and I always compared myself negatively to my peers and my siblings. I was not happy with the way I looked – I felt I was too short and dark in complexion, that I had a big forehead, and too narrow a nose. However, I learned slowly as I matured to listen to my intuitive voice that was somehow consoling and healing me. Of course, I realised that I could not isolate my emotions from my circumstances, but I needed to feel and grow and identify others' emotions and emotional experiences. I remember that I once scribbled on a piece of paper that I felt emancipated and this action was the beginning of

consciously sharing my thoughts, feelings, and challenges. This first scribbling exercise gave birth to positive self-talk and to look at my life's lessons, struggles, and triumphs as learning experiences from which I could draw inner strength.

3.3.2 *My hiding place*

It was a striking, sunny day. The sky was clear and painted the horizon blue. If my memory serves me right, I was eight years old. Summer days were always days of exploration and adventure regardless of the heat. The sun was out to play and we expected to be sun-kissed and to indulge in ice lollies or ice cream. Unfortunately, we could never venture on any mission or plan without informing our parents as they held our world in their hands. There were rules and laws we had to abide by and their authority was unquestioned.

These were days to cool off, and what better way to cool off than to have an ice lolly? We were young and carefree – little things mattered and significant things made little or no sense. The heat provoked us to push our boundaries.

Looking at the picture of this wardrobe (Figure 3.2) allowed me to reminisce and to relive my childhood days. I remember the lingering scent of my mother's clothes that hung in it. I recall seeing my mom in her beautiful form-fitting dresses, her beaded blouses, and high-waisted skirts that I always longed to try on.



Figure 3.2: The wardrobe – my place of safety and security

I remember my little fragile body, my dry knees and elbows, and my piercing voice that, when used optimally, made everything come to a halt. I recall the coat hangers and the glass drawers that always left me with bruises and cuts. I also recall the gold-coloured door handles. They looked majestic. The wardrobe was of a heavy dark brown colour and was quite ornamental. It was crafted in hardwood and had a peeling vinyl lining. I also remember the colour that coordinated with the mutely neutral, nude and bright colours that my mother wore. Her clothes were always neatly ironed and stacked. This wardrobe constantly allowed my mind to escape into a place that echoed royalty and fairy-tale experiences and it easily allowed me to get lost in my imagination.

When I look at the picture of this wardrobe a host of childhood memories bubble to the fore. I do not have only one vivid picture in my mind but I recall a host of scenarios that are constantly playing in my head. I am reminded of our four-room house that was situated in Umlazi Township. A township in South Africa is a residential suburb for predominantly black people. These areas developed and were officially designated for black occupation by apartheid legislation. I recall dusty routes to the tuck-shop, walking among informal dwellings and abandoned shacks, and neglected dogs and cats. I have a picture in my mind of informal settlements that encircled our home, and avocado and peach trees. We would play detective and watch people who tried to steal fruit from our trees. It was quite fascinating and entertaining and we would sing "*Aphela amape*" (a song in IsiZulu that means the peaches are getting finished). I also recall seeing malnourished children and children walking around with ragged and worn-out clothes who had very little. However, most of them seemed cheerful and content.

Yes, the photograph of the wardrobe evokes many memories. I remember homes that had no electricity but that used only candlelight and the tranquil and soothing voices of church members who sang harmoniously whenever there was a death or sick person in the community. This is where I learned to sympathise with other people and to feel compassion and humility.

One of my most profound memories that this picture evokes is my fretful search for money in my mother's purse. When she had left her purse carelessly on the kitchen counter, this signalled a perfect opportunity to snaffle some money for an ice lolly. My friends were

outside enjoying their ice lollies, and I recall looking at one of them and me desperately wanting one too. My friends refused to share theirs with me and I knew if I asked my mom she would say no, especially as I had heard my parents discussing their finances and wondering how they could make ends meet. Of course, this did not mean much to me as I was too young to comprehend the gravity of the situation. I just wanted an ice lolly.

The pleasure of sin was knocking on my mind's door and I knew I had to open the door to this opportunity. I had to make a choice: surrender to my greed and be socially in line and relate to my friends, or listen to the voice of discipline that said it would be wrong to take the money. So I fed my gluttony and decided to steal from my mother's purse. I bought a raspberry flavoured ice lolly. It was juicy and succulent with a sweet delicate flavour and a pleasant aroma. When I realised that it had melted and dripped on my lemon-coloured t-shirt, the earth resounded with thunder because I would have a lot of explaining to do when I got home. How did I manage to stain my top? Where did I buy/get the ice lolly? And who gave me the money? I knew I had put myself in deep trouble. I entered the house nervously and walked down the passage and straight to my room.

When I entered the house my mother gave me an unfathomable look, but I knew she was disappointed and broken-hearted. In a matter of seconds, my world came crashing down, and I was defeated by my selfish action. My mother was fuming and I knew I had to confess as my crimson mouth and dirty t-shirt told the story. My parents used this opportunity to impress upon me that I was the eldest and should set a good example for my younger siblings. But worst of all, they expressed their disappointment in me. I was ordered to fetch a belt from the wardrobe. I knew I had to face the consequences of my actions.

On that day the wardrobe was not only my magical space but it also became my hiding place – a place of safety and security. I would hide in the wardrobe when I was overwhelmed by my emotions and when I felt defeated by issues I could not control. This was where I talked to myself and where my sense of freedom surged. I learned several values that day: to be patient, to practise self-control, to control my desires, to know my boundaries, and to respect the feelings and emotions of others. Today I know that these are powerful values that I would like to instil in the learners in my classroom.

I realise that a hiding place is a place of emotional safety and security. I thus imagine that my learners will also like to be in a space where they feel emotionally safe and secure. I think writing about this journey of self-discovery provided me an opportunity to heal and to understand my own emotions. I realise that, when we speak of our life experiences, we explore our weaknesses and find our inner strength. We also remind ourselves of our power and this gives birth to new perspectives. My hiding place allowed me to live in an imaginary world, to think freely, to be emancipated from my emotional struggles, and to explore different spaces. It was a safe place that I treasured as my sanctuary.

3.3.3 *Comfort*

Looking at the photograph of the blanket (Figure 3.3) evokes pleasant childhood memories. I see the brown colour, smell its mustiness, and recall cold winter days. I am reminded that this blanket is as old as I am. My mother bought me this blanket when I was a baby. It is of an unruffled brown and dark tan colour with an imprinted flower. It feels soft and fluffy and very warm. I have always wrapped it around me and snuggled into its folds. I took it with me wherever I went.



Figure 3.3: My blanket of comfort

I remember one day when there was a looming dark cloud on the horizon. This meant only one thing: cold. It was in the evening in the middle of winter and the weather was frosty. I probably made many mistakes as a child because I was a curious soul. I questioned everything and opened every single door to adventurous opportunities. I was usually up to mischief and I

enjoyed being around people that were older than I was, as I knew they always had tales to tell.

I recall my parents' room. My mother adored the smell of lavender so she always used lavender body lotion. I found its scent serene and soothing as it filled the room with peaceful wisdom. It also revitalised me emotionally and spiritually. When I visited their room I felt a harmonious song in my heart – no wonder I loved their room more than mine. It was healing in more ways than I could imagine.

I recall the way my father danced and laughed. This memory reminds me of the fields of eZingloweni near my homestead in Kwa-Zulu Natal. We always took pleasure in looking at the hills and watching my cousins herd sheep and cows. I recall watching and listening to the cows chewing the cud. I remember the long drives home during my father's last days on earth. I remember seeing the fields of sugarcane, driving past Murchison hospital, and being reminded that I was born there. I was a winter baby and that perhaps explains my obsession with my brown blanket.

Wrapping this blanket around me always signalled life and filled me with hope as I associated my birth with a new beginning and a chance to restore and redeem broken relationships in my family. My parents told me that my name, Ntokozo, means 'joy', and that my second name, Sibusisiwe, means 'we are blessed'. These names were given to me to dispel the negativity of some of my family members who were always embroiled in a feud. I believed that I would live up to my name and bring positive change to my family.

This blanket was with me in times of happiness and tragedy. It heard my giggles, my silent cries, and felt my tears. It also knew what feelings I preferred to keep to myself. In a strange way it was always my sanctuary.

A fire stove in our kitchen brought warmth and closeness to us as a family. It was in the kitchen where we shared our daily experiences and listened to the stories our parents and grandparents shared with us. I remember the smell of charcoal, the awareness of the outside toilet that we called a 'long-drop', the long walks to the community tap, the wet grass under my feet, and the sweet sounds of animals near the homestead.

One particular story that I enjoyed listening to was the story of my late great grandfather. He was an orphan and was born in Botswana. To find work he came to South Africa and later migrated to the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal. During this journey, he walked down the deepest valleys and scaled highest mountains. It was slippery and very rocky routes and one day he encountered a foaming waterfall. He ended up in bushes on what appeared to be a sugarcane farm. Suddenly he heard gunshots. This frightened him and he was trembling. His heart was pounding loudly and his hair stood on end. Fortunately, he managed to hide in a cave. He spent the whole night there but in the morning he realised that something was wrong. He had been woken up by the birds who caused a commotion. The birds were fretting, flipping, flapping, and shedding their feathers. This alerted my great grandfather. Then he noticed a long, scaly, three meter long undulating snake with enormous eyes. It was rearing its head as it slithered out of the cave, hissed, and looked deadly. He said a silent prayer and held his breath as the snake coiled and recoiled and, slithering, swiftly disappeared into the bushes. This is a story of survival.

I remember walking on muddy ground and struggling to find my balance. I probably fell a million times but this did not stop me from exploring or chasing my younger siblings. This is when I learned to be resilient and to endure the brutally cold mornings of winter and the simmering heat of summer that always seemed to invite insects that caused skin irritations. There was so much to discover and my escapades built my character and prepared me to work in harmony with my family. I learned to value relationships.

3.3.4 Beyond the graveyard

The skies were haunting and bleak with not a single bird in the air, yet it smelt untainted and fresh. This was in the deep hours of the night, just after midnight. I was eleven years old. The squealing wind sneaked into the house occasionally and it was like living in a nightmare. I had had a strange, unsettling feeling for week. It was a very odd feeling that I could not quite explain. I tried to understand why I felt this way but it was too intricate so I decided to ignore it. I tried to mask these feelings from my family simply because I did not want them to question me. I listened to my brothers eagerly anticipating my father's homecoming from the hospital. I had to hang his clothes out to dry that morning. Most of them would not fit him anymore as he had shrivelled away. My hero was fading away and I could not do anything to

save him or to make him better. I could tell that he was emotional as he appeared to have little hope of healing. His eyes were still piercing but filled with sadness. He would force a smile once in a while. Soon his eyes stared lethargically as he was fading and absent.

My father had lost a lot of weight. He was frail and seemed to have lost all hope of surviving this time. This bothered me. I recall hearing him pleading with God, crying that he could no longer bear the pain. He was surrendering, giving in to Death. I was hoping that this was just a figment of my imagination or his and that he would soon heal. The one person whom I identified with so closely was giving up on life and wanted to leave me. What was going to happen to my family? I began to replay memories of happiness before sickness reigned in our lives – before my father struggled to walk. I was imprisoned by fear.

The day of my father's death was inevitable. It was on the 10th of June that we received the news that my father was no longer with us. It was at 01:00 am. I heard my mother's loud cry from the dining room. I was terrified, thinking that a burglar had entered the house, not knowing that my father had reunited with his ancestors and was with God. He had passed away. It was as if a cascade of cold water had been poured over my head. I could not breathe. I tried anxiously to hold back my tears as I desperately wanted to comfort my mother. I knew I had to be emotionally strong and unwavering for my family. Emptiness surged into my being; it was an emptiness that would never be filled by anyone or anything. I was shattered and emotionally wrecked. The hollow, agonising feeling was ice cold and unbearable. The aura of death enveloped us but we needed to remain fortified spiritually and fight against negativity. I did not want to remain calm, practise self-discipline or regulate my feelings. I wanted to scream and rage against this loss. I was confused and lost and felt my life unravels as I gave in to my emotions. And so I wallowed in grief. My heart and spirit were heavy and worn out. I did not know whom to call and where to find a cure.

The month of June always brings flashbacks of his death. I recall feeling extremely cold. I was shivering and my skin had goose bumps as if a cold breeze whistled in my ears, causing unbearable discomfort. My skin prickled and throbbed due to the viciously cold weather. My nose, fingers, and toes were without sensation. I snuggled into my red jacket, pulled my socks up, and wrapped my blanket around me, but nothing seemed to help. My body was stiff, my joints groaned like old hinges. I then heard voices outside talking about my late father.

They were making arrangements for his funeral. It was as if a dark cloud had settled over me. The urge to cry out was all consuming. I wanted to question God and was angry and furious. I could not understand why he was no longer with us. Perhaps I was not cold physically but I was emotionally flustered and numb. This was my father's final whistle. He was gone and would never come back. I was never going to hear his voice or touch him again and all I was left with were memories.

I realise now that death has no age and the emotions that erupt at the loss of a loved one do not discriminate either, whether you are a child or an adult. We lose our faith and question God. We go through affliction and acrimony and are easily provoked. When mourning the death of our loved ones, we lose ourselves and all that we believe is true and real. Our spirits are downcast, tired and weary. It is difficult to rejoice again and to regain our faith, especially when people around us try to comfort us with messages of hope. However, through this time of hardship my spirit summoned me to persevere and to pour out my love. I needed to redirect my thoughts in hope and build my character.

We all experience loss and go through hard times. I realise now that death is real, and that it even touches the young learners in my classroom. As a teacher and someone who has experienced loss, I understand now that we sometimes have to walk into a daunting space that is delicate and fragile. When we lose a loved one, returning to what was 'normal' is almost impossible. Feelings of anger, hatred, and resentment well up and threaten to choke us. It is a daily challenge to face this emotional wound that is almost terminal. But the moment we learn to cherish and treasure our memories, we invite healing. I want my learners to know that death is part of our journey. It happens and we need to face it to strengthen and rebuild our lives. At the time, I was not fortunate enough to have a teacher who comforted me. I had no one to share my grief with. I had to walk this lonely path and find my own healing.



Figure 3.4: My father's blazer

The photograph of the blazer (Figure 3.4) reminds me of my father's cologne, his footsteps, and his knock on the door. It evokes an image of his masculine presence that shaped my life in a positive way. I now comprehend the importance of his presence as a father and a significant parental advisor. I imagine that, had he lived longer, he would have played a notable role in my upbringing. This thought somehow manages to fill the empty void that he left with comforting energy and gives me the spiritual confidence that he is still around and watching over us. The vintage quality of this blazer brings memories of love, joy, and togetherness. I can now only experience the memory of his love and, through subconscious visitations, I remember his humble and friendly presence.

I am often reminded of his humble spirit and his generous personality as he engaged with people from diverse backgrounds. I also recall all the special occasions that he attended as an honoured guest. He knew how to entertain people with narratives of his childhood adventures and troubles. It was also inspiring to see him in front of a crowd and sharing the vulnerable side of his life. The blazer is like a trail of my father's life as it commemorates his gentleness and his love for culture, celebrations, fashion, and social events. He was a fine gentleman.

I can picture my father wearing this blazer and I relive many precious childhood moments. It is a vintage blazer that was fashionable in the 1950s. It is of a classical design with solid,

loosely sewn on buttons. It is made of heavy woollen checked material. Looking at it evokes a feeling of joy as it represents my father's fine taste in clothes. I was told by that he wore this blazer during *umembeso*, which is a tradition that involves exchanging gifts between the groom's and the bride's families. My mother told me that this was a profound moment in their lives as it symbolised a new beginning of love and building a relationship between two families.

3.3.5 My homeland



Figure 3.5: My grandfather's garden and my sanctuary

In my grandfather's garden, which was his sanctuary and also became mine (Figure 3.5), he grew a variety of vegetables. Being in the garden filled me with delight which is a memory that I still cherish. I loved the fact that the garden gave back far more than we put in, and it also symbolises nature and being nurtured. I also found this garden a space for reflection where I felt safe.

I searched long and hard for a source of strength that would restore and renew me emotionally and spiritually. I longed for solace for a long time until I realised that I was responsible for my own healing. I had to find the inner strength to move on. This journey guided me to find my true self. It meant questioning my roots and background and taking pleasure in nature as a source of power, peace, and solitude. I found this in my homeland that is situated in eZinglweni on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. I was told that this is where my 'belly

button fell' – that is, where I was born and raised as a toddler. I have such a strong sense of belonging when I am surrounded by the hills and drink in the cold winter mornings and evenings of my homeland. This place is also famous for fruit such as bananas and avocados and for exporting marble, sugar cane and lime. I think I was 23 years old when I started reflecting on my memories and values that are strongly rooted in this majestic place. I refer to it as majestic because this is where my forefathers found their home and multiplied. This is also where I found words of wisdom, courage, and strength.

As I think back to the hills that remind me of my childhood, I see the young men herding the cattle and imagine their social lives. Here they learnt how to manage time, explore, and learn how to survive in secluded places. I was told that they learnt the skill of stick fighting and to be tolerant, respectful, and self-disciplined. I remember their sombre suits, the songs they sang, the way they shared their daily stories with us, and how they cherished their herds of cattle. It was in these hills that they learnt to hunt and gather wild roots. They also explored nature, swam, and played games in the river while they carefully watched the cattle herds feeding contentedly. This was a good place to gain a sense of selfhood and independence and to build character. I remember hearing their whistling, the cattle lowing, and pigs snorting and grunting. This was a completely different world compared to the city and it was here that I always reconnected with myself and my family and embraced my roots. Even today, going back always makes me feel close to my forefathers and our rich culture and history. Returning to my homeland always inspires me to reinvent myself and to be completely serene. Here I find parts of me that have been hidden and I unearth emotions that have been suppressed and forgotten. As a child, I took pleasure in listening to the villagers' stories. I was forced to face my deepest desires and fears and to treasure timeless moments with my family and close friends. I acknowledge today that this was necessary for my emotional growth and a serene and contented spirit.

But my roots also want me to stand up and face the firing line. I want to stand up for women. I particularly want to dispute what is perceived as socially acceptable when women are marginalised, and to rescue those who resist expressing their true feelings. I want above all to represent and empower women who are afraid to question or disobey their husbands when they demand subjection. I realise that life calls us to redirect our position and humanity continuously. I learnt to embrace gratitude, to reflect, to be empowered, and to feed my spirit

through prayer and thanksgiving. I now want young women like me to be part of a legion of female warriors who know that our emotions and spiritual strength can be forged into a powerful weapon that will help us stand up against unfairness.

3.3.6 Mrs Murethi

In 2003 I was fortunate to be placed in Mrs Murethi's classroom. It was one of my most memorable years. I had had to face failing dismally the previous year and had to contend with the loss of my father and a mother who was wrecked emotionally. I was 13 years old and in Grade 7. I had feared entering this grade, simply because it would be my last year in primary school. If that was not daunting enough, my hips were getting wider and my breasts were protruding. I felt so uncomfortable.

Mrs Murethi was my register class teacher. She was phenomenal and always addressed us with respect and dignity. She embraced diversity and helped us to explore and the respect cultural and religious differences. I remember that she believed in me and acknowledged my opinion in the classroom. I felt encouraged and became a determined and diligent learner. She was not only interested in my academic life, but was also interested in my well-being. I remember her approach to teaching about puberty and how she used her own learning experiences as examples. She certainly made my last year in primary school memorable and treasurable. When I received a diligence badge, I felt as if I was at last doing something right. It was a symbol of my ability to persevere, that I was consistently behaving well, and that I had been doing my best academically. It ignited hope in me and gave me the opportunity to dream of soaring academically and forging positive social relationships. I treasure this badge to this day.

3.3.6.1 A positive approach to learning

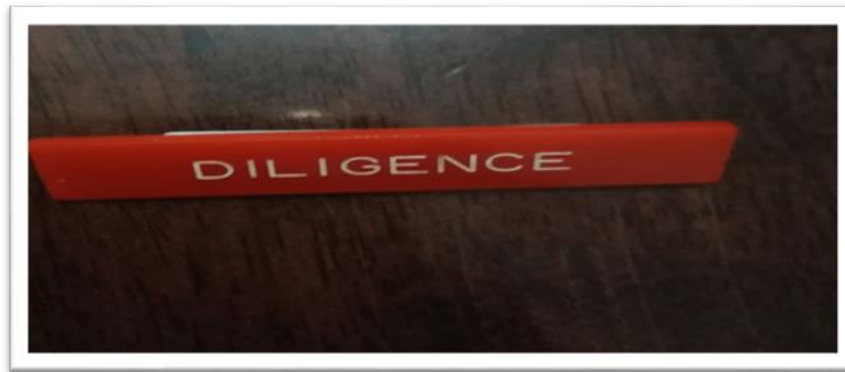


Figure 3.6: My diligence badge

This diligence badge (Figure 3.6) is what we received in primary school after acquiring three ticks in a row. You would stand up for diligence for two weeks during assembly and, on the third occasion, you would receive a tick. We were always encouraged that anyone could get a diligence tick because it ‘was all in the mind’. We were motivated to always do the right thing, to complete our work and homework, and to wear our full school uniform with pride. A diligence badge also meant that the person displayed self-discipline, respected nature, and honoured the school's rules and ethos. This person was also always willing to produce consistently good work. Receiving this badge encouraged me to have an optimistic mind-set towards my learning and I was pleased when Mrs Murethi commended my conscientious attitude towards learning in the classroom. I felt inspired to do better. I was also very proud to be one of her diligent learners.

I felt pleased and motivated when I produce consistently good work and adopted a positive attitude towards my learning. I was proud of myself and looked forward to learning and building meaningful relationships with my peers and my teachers. I anticipated being more engaged in classroom discussions and to question topics that were dear to my heart. Looking back, I realise that I grew mentally and emotionally in her classroom. Therefore, by engaging in this study, I hoped to inspire my learners in the same manner by allowing them to explore social and emotional learning and to be affirmative, disciplined, and free to be themselves. I decided to write a letter to Mrs Murethi to thank her for contributing so profoundly to my social and emotional learning.

3.3.6.2 A letter to my teacher

Dear Mrs Murethi

I have been drawn to reading more about Kenya – in fact, I am intrigued by Kenya and even contemplate learning Swahili. Whenever I come across a book or magazine that describes the beauty of your country, I am inspired. Kenya is a stunning country with exquisite beaches and a large number of wildlife parks and reserves. I remember how you shared your experiences and culture with us. You displayed so much passion and enthusiasm. I must say I experienced the unique cultures of Kenya’s people through you. You had a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

I remember your calming and comforting presence and your heart-warming smile. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for introducing me to an optimistic approach to learning and for your inspiration to adopting a positive attitude towards learning. Thank you for always having an inviting spirit and bringing hope and the world into our classroom.

Growing up there were times when I struggled to identify and believe in myself. But when I met you, I began to realise my abilities and to find my sense of belonging. I realised then that I was capable of achieving anything and everything. Your undying love and dedication towards teaching were astonishing. Your kind and encouraging words always brought hope to me. I felt inspired by some of the messages that you shared and portrayed. What I loved the most about being in your class, was the feeling of complete liberation and acceptance. I could easily transform my space into a fairy tale or galaxy because you stimulated our imaginations. You intrigued our thoughts and evoked emotions that echoed humanity, love, compassion and pure joy.

You taught us to embrace diversity in religion, culture, and race. Your lessons were always so compelling because of your personality that was characterised by politeness and gracious good manners. I also experienced your exuberant side; I would like to think that this also enthused me to be a better person and a teacher one day. You displayed enthusiasm and a desire to share this with us. You encouraged learning for understanding and you were

concerned with how we felt and where we came from.

I took pleasure in learning through my own reading, doing dictionary skills, and our daily experiences. You always exposed us to different learning strategies and considered our thoughts and feelings. Our lessons were also engaging. We participated in a variety of activities, we expressed our emotions, and shared our stories with the class. Thank you for always listening to us. Your lessons motivated us to reflect and to explore teaching and learning dynamically and reflectively and it allowed us to grow emotionally and socially. We became active citizens since we began to look at social issues and how they influenced our daily lives. Thank you for allowing us to be critical thinkers and to fall in love with who we truly are.

Love

Ntokozo

3.3.7 The media centre

Throughout my years of study I have collected many historical records and documents that enriched my academic learning. One of the most profound experiences that will always inspire me to be a better teacher was media lessons with Mrs Mardon. I had the pleasure of being in Mrs Mardon's presence in my primary school years from Grade 5 to Grade 7 (2000-2003). She was an eloquent teacher and allowed us to engage in classroom discussions. She allowed us to unravel our emotions and to explore current affairs. We would interact on an intellectual, social, and emotional level. I remember how we learnt the values of respect and diversity and of being in touch with social media as well as current affairs. We also yearned for a reason to have hope. We were encouraged to read newspaper articles to help expand our creative writing and language skills and our vocabulary. We were exposed to the world's challenges and victorious encounters.

In the media centre she displayed a timeline with a record of events that occurred over time in particular years. We were allowed to share information about historical events and were

exposed to our school's history. We learnt how our school had transformed over the years from being reserved for white children to becoming a mixed-race school and embracing democracy. The media centre was a space that instilled a spirit of unity and learning that taught us how to relate to our diverse school community. This school still has an impeccable reputation built on a rich history.

I found the media centre learning experiences quite intriguing and fascinating. We were also allowed to socialise, to allow others to share their experiences with us, and to express how we felt about social issues. I remember listening to inspirational articles and stories. In particular, I recall watching a movie titled *Pay it forward*. This American drama directed by Mimi Leder was released in 2000. The movie is lightly based on the novel of the same title by Catherine Ryan Hyde. I learned several things from our media sessions which were also profoundly impacted by this film. I learned to be resilient, empowering, and to be courageous. The film emphasises the importance of helping people and making a world a better place through random acts of kindness. It also highlights the importance of being a member of a compassionate and helpful community. The main character in this story is resilient, courageous, and heroic. He fought against bullying and the victimisation of other learners and tragically lost his life while fighting a bully. The film also shows how people face adversity and emotional trauma and is a comment on the scars that influence the way people view and approach life. Although tragic, this is a story of humanity and pure kindness that uplifted my spirit.

Another incident that occurred in 2001 that is still very vivid in my mind is the 9/11 tragedy that left the world aggrieved and traumatised. I recall how we sympathised with families and friends that had lost loved ones in this heart-rending episode. We also felt very helpless. This was when I realised that enmity, conflict, and war erupted if people were intolerant of others' religions. I learned that we are not born with hatred and that loathing and violence are lethal diseases. We were confronted with words such as 'terrorism' and 'sacrifice'. I began to wonder, "*What is regarded as godly and what is wicked?*" As a school, we prayed and had a silent moment for the United States of America. Our hearts were perforated and we did not feel secure for some time. This was a time when we were drawn to reading newspaper articles and listening to the news. We began to understand loss and death and felt empathy and sympathy for all those who had lost loved ones. It was a life-changing time and we engaged in

philosophical arguments about life and death. These discussions helped me to embrace an optimistic approach towards life and not to take anything for granted. I yearned a life that would be filled with hope and great possibilities.

I always looked forward to visiting the media centre, to learn more about different people and places, to find out how they lived, and to understand their beliefs and challenges and how these influenced their perspectives and experiences. What I discovered in this space was astonishing and informative. I began to be cautious of others' struggles and challenges. I felt motivated to perform random acts of kindness and to cultivate heroic movements.

The other films that were watched also instilled positivity and an understanding of how we should approach life. I realised that their themes were rooted in building an optimistic approach and mind-set. I wanted to make a difference, uncover sincere emotions, and celebrate moments of pure sentimentality as this exposes out vulnerabilities that make us human. The lessons we had and the films we watched also allowed me the freedom to think and share my emotions liberally. Here I learnt to share my narratives and to rewrite my own history. I also learnt to initiate and negotiate ideas and to hone my listening skills and find emotional balance. The media lessons somehow made me socially alert and concerned about understanding and identifying issues that affect us daily and influence our learning.



Figure 3.7: An influential teacher

Note: Mrs Mardon is seated in the first row on the far right. The photograph is deliberately blurred as the learners could not be traced for their permission to print the photographs in this thesis.

The photograph above (Figure 3.7) was taken in 2002 when I was in Grade 6. The photograph depicts the typical atmosphere of discipline and courtesy that prevailed in the school. When I look at it, I have a clear memory of how honoured I felt when I was selected by Mrs Mardon to be a Media Centre Monitor. I was delighted that I had finally found my own space and I enjoyed my duties as a monitor, such as cleaning books and encyclopaedias that had collected dust. I recall that I was captivated and content with myself and my fellow monitors. I felt stimulated to read and to collect magazines and books on a daily basis. I also treasured reading about our school's past and I admired old portraits, photographs, posters, trophies, and school magazines. I felt appreciated as my thoughts, feelings, and knowledge were valued and considered important. Being around such an optimistic teacher taught me to invest in and empower myself. Therefore, when we engaged in memory work as a facet of this study, I wanted to encourage my learners to be alive to social issues and current affairs and to discover how these impacted their learning. I wanted my learners to initiate positive relationships.

3.3.8 understanding our emotions

At times we are haunted or crippled by our own choices. We walk in shame and feel unworthy simply because we fail to understand that life is not a walk in the park. We encounter challenges but we also experience joyful moments if we allow ourselves to do so. We cannot escape reality or isolate ourselves from the world but have to soldier on. We have to stop being hard on ourselves and understand that we have to forgive ourselves and allow healing, restoration, and redemption to put us back on track.

I have learnt to draw from my inner strength as this gives birth to inner peace. It comes with self-acceptance and when I control my own emotions. When I grew up I always felt the need to hold back my feelings and tears as I felt that revealing my true feelings would render me fragile and unacceptable. These were invisible rules and laws that I imbibed due to my social and cultural settings. I was never encouraged to talk about my feelings and thoughts and lived in the knowledge that adults knew everything and were always correct. I was always expected

to regulate and to suppress my emotions. For instance, I recall many days when my mornings were an absolute catastrophe – my homework was incomplete and I could not find my school uniform. This feeling of not being in control affected the way I learnt, socialised, and interacted with my teachers and peers. This frustrated me and I felt secluded and invisible.

Unfortunately, in 2000 I did not have a teacher who was attentive and could identify my suffering. Looking back, I do not recall any activities in the classroom that were aimed at ensuring our emotional well-being. I had to learn to be resilient and to heal my emotional wounds myself. My teacher this year appeared to be absent-minded and paid no attention to the social and emotional well-being of his learners. I recall looking at the very beautiful school garden and the impressive buildings when I arrived at my new school in 2000. I could see that this school had a powerful history and was aware that it had transformed from the apartheid period to democracy. I must confess that the school's buildings were quite daunting and that being immersed in a multiracial school with learners of diverse races and religious beliefs was intimidating. I found myself continually questioning my identity.

Any classroom should be defined by the teacher's warm and caring personality and character. Sadly, in my Grade 5 year, this was not the case. The classroom might have been warm, but I never felt any warmth from Mr B. He hardly smiled at or laughed with us and did not display a sense of humour. All we had to do was echo and replicate everything he taught us. We did not partake in classroom discussions or share our feelings and ideas. He seemed to anticipate that we should all learn in the same way. To a certain point, I felt as if his emotionless expectations impaired my ability and desire to work and do my best. I often felt muddled as he was not cognisant of our emotions or helped us understand new concepts and ideas. He never helped us to relate our learning to our daily experiences and our contexts. In fact, we were detached emotionally and socially from our learning. I recall having 'mini heart attacks' before Mathematics lessons as I was not very good in this subject – especially problem solving and geometry. I cringed and felt very nervous during Maths lessons. I was ignorant about my needs and emotions then, but I understand now that I longed for a teacher who would fervently teach us by recognising our social and cultural backgrounds and understanding and harnessing our emotions in the teaching and learning process.

When other learners were entrusted with leadership roles, I did not feel acknowledged. Perhaps I had confined myself by believing that I was not adequate. At one time, I knew that no one would resuscitate my self-assurance unless I did it myself. This understanding was revealed as I reflected on my academic progress. I had lovely handwriting but my work was judged as below average and lacking consistency. This threatened my chances of being recognised as a '*Star learner*'.

I recall the smell of crayons, pencils on the floor, papers, erasers, and glue. I also remember seeing the dusky blue paint on the wall, the desks that had graffiti when you opened them, and a room full of unfamiliar faces. I was always frightened to close the windows as they seemed so far-flung because I was short. I always felt like I would fall. I also remember the rigorous sound of writing on the chalkboard and Mr B's piercing voice, his red and teary eyes, and that I felt so far away from him. He was easily angered and agitated and was moody as his emotions changed like the weather. We always treaded cautiously when we had to approach him. I remember the resounding sound of children walking and running down the corridor and his voice angrily extorting discipline.

And how could I overlook the news corner? There were visual displays of our social framework and current affairs. Well, at that tender age I could barely keep up. There was also a wall on which 'good work' was displayed. However, half the time I was in my own world and had little concern for my school work. Although the classroom was warm and looked appealing and the learning resources and environment cultivated learning, somehow I felt that our teacher had little passion and seemed preoccupied and unfulfilled, particularly when we misbehaved.

Looking back, I realise that there were too many activities and school traditions that had to be upheld that disrupted our learning. Our Grade 5 teacher encourage us to attend school events such as celebrating our school's birthday. This compelled us to reflect on past challenges, shortcomings, and achievements. Our school also hosted an annual reading and quiz evening. During this activity we interacted with our peers and our parents and teachers socialised, which undoubtedly aided social and emotional learning. This event stimulated reading, the acquisition of general knowledge, and embracing a culture of learning by enhancing our listening skills, providing emotional support, and enriching or general knowledge through

reading. We also held talent shows, performed plays, and had raffles and cake sales. Even though these activities had a positive effect on our school's financial situation and encouraged learning to a certain degree, unfortunately they demanded a lot of time and organisation. In my opinion, teaching and learning time was robbed as too much emphasis was placed on fundraising. I felt that these events prevented me from getting to know my teacher better and from establishing a sound relationship with him this year. It felt as if my teacher's mind-set was divorced from teaching as he failed to give us his undivided attention. The aim to promote teaching and learning was not valued or given enough time to blossom. I do not recall establishing any form of relationship with this particular teacher and feel that my social and emotional learning was not accommodated or acknowledged.

3.4 Discussion: A future perspective on my learning

Chapter Three responded to the first research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* I outlined the research strategies that I used to recall memories of my childhood years in primary school and to reflect on what I learnt about social and emotional learning through these experiences. I recounted stories and presented images that evoked relevant memories of both emotional upheaval and contentment during my early schooling years. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my narratives. This reflection highlights what I learned from my personal history and elucidates the insights that I gained.

3.4.1 A holistic approach to learning

When I grew up I loved to visit my grandfathers' garden and reflect on my daily experiences. I admired the flowers, trees, lush crops, and chirping birds. Collins and Cooper (2014) state that emotional awareness is the recognition of emotions and their influence and that this recognition encourages self-confidence, which reflects a resilient sense of self-worth and competence. Through my reflections, I was able to identify my emotions and thus build my self-awareness by connecting with my childhood memories. I now understand that, as a teacher, I need to search deeper into my learners' psyche and be cognisant of their life experiences. This is a vital approach that I missed in my Grade 5 year as my teacher seemed aloof and uninvolved in his learners' emotional well-being. I thus want to travel beyond the textbook by nurturing positive values and embracing an all-inclusive model of teaching and

learning that promotes creativity and reasserts an optimistic outlook on life. It is moving and enthralling to know that school can be a place where we learn and that it is also a space where we find our inner strength. The memories of my early years of schooling encouraged me to adopt a holistic approach to learning and a growing understanding that this would play a pivotal role in the social and emotional well-being of my young learners. These memories also encouraged me to look forward to being instrumental in the unfolding of my learners' emotional awareness and the forging of positive relationships. Life is full of challenges and inner gratitude for life's driven purpose should be encouraged to ripen personal strength and obtain the emotional resources to manage adversities.

3.4.2 Spiritual awareness

I recalled how, as a child, the reality and ensuing atmosphere of death encased us. The need to remain heartened spiritually and to fight against negativity was almost tangible. I found strength and hope through prayer and worship when I was faced with adversity. Being a spiritual person, I am intrigued by the fact that the essence of spirituality links to the topic of religion but that it actually also infuses our everyday actions and experiences. I thus enhanced my reflections on my experiences through prayer and worship and by reading the Bible. I would like to think that my spirituality is a reflection of my experiences and insights from which I draw the strength and power that support my emotional well-being. I would therefore like my classroom to be a place of refuge, peace, and a space where spirituality reigns.

When in my classroom, I need to explore my learners' emotions and be mindful of their life experiences. My reflections encouraged me to focus on my learners' well-being by ensuring that they take time to breathe and reflect on their day-to-day experiences. I also embrace the importance of growing spiritually and being spiritually alive through meditation, prayer, and breathing exercises. Long (2008, p. 185) explains that any narrative of a teacher's experiences "...reflects aspects of the writer's spiritual growth and highlights the need among teachers to explore their spiritual well-being as much as the spiritual well-being of their pupils". I thus engaged in a spiritual journey to explore social and emotional learning, and will continue to do so after this study. In this process, I should also be aware of my learners' spiritual background, their childhood experiences, and their pursuit of hope and faith. It is fascinating to know that we often go on an individual spiritual journey that allows us to connect with

ourselves and find both clearer perspectives and a spiritual awareness that are related to social and emotional learning. I anticipate that introducing a spiritual dimension into the teaching and learning in my classroom will create fertile soil for acknowledging our emotional experiences. This will emancipate my learners and guide them to embrace autonomy in their work, emotional fulfilment, and meaningful engagements and relationships.

3.4.3 The naked truth

I have a vivid memory of summer days that invited exploration and adventure. The sun was out to play and we were sun-kissed and treated ourselves with ice lollies or ice cream when we could afford it. Collins and Cooper (2014) state that communication that embraces open listening and that builds bonds and relationships prevails in happy and contented households and communities. I was easily influenced by my peers and obviously wanted their approval, but I did not want this to be apparent to my parents so I decided to take things into my own hands. My siblings and I regretted the fact that we could never go on any mission or plan anything without notifying our parents. I broke this bond when I stole money from my mom's purse because I felt left out and I wanted to enjoy an ice lolly. I did this awful thing simply because it was crucial for me to maintain my relationship with my friends and I was afraid to ask for money from my parents. The consequences caused justifiable punishment and retribution and taught me much about honesty and honour.

I explored my childhood memories and experiences and identified the learnings that I would like to adopt or change. I realised that, at times, I should share unpleasant emotional challenges with my learners. I was aware that it might be challenging to be vulnerable and to reveal the naked truth, but it was important as unpleasant memories also reveal useful life stories and lessons. For instance, when I grew up I took pleasure in adventures. These were essential experiences as they built my character and enhanced my imagination. Opportunities to interact with my peers were critical as these experiences developed our social competencies. It is therefore vital that my learners are interactive in classroom discussions and are enabled to initiate constructive conversations. Northfield and Sherman (2004, p. 294) state: "A primary source of social knowledge in children of all ages is their direct interaction with other children". Throughout my childhood, I had to be resilient and work collaboratively

with my peers. When I engaged in this study, I thus hoped that my learners would adopt interactive methods of learning enthusiastically as it would aid their social and emotional learning.

3.5 What I Learnt about and Applied to Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom

3.5.1 Embracing positivity

When I grew up I thrived on being in positive environments powered by my interest in playing, learning, and building relationships. I again recall Mrs Murethi's influence as she was enthusiastic about teaching. She had a positive mind-set and always addressed us with respect and acknowledged our dignity even when we were children. I felt encouraged and was determined to be a diligent learner. She was not only interested in my academic life but was also interested in my emotional well-being. I remember her approach to teaching us about puberty and how she provided examples of her own learning experiences.

I understand that enthusiasm and positivity are vital in the classroom. Durlak et al. (2011) convey that social and emotional learning yields positive effects on directed social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. These competencies also boost learners' behavioural regulation and their ability to cope with problems and improve their academic performance. Mrs Murethi was the epitome of social and emotional learning as she encouraged me to have an optimistic mind-set. Her influence motivated me to build healthy relationships and to dedicate myself to my academic work.

When we learn, making mistakes is part of the process. When I conducted the study in the classroom, I applauded my learners' efforts and gave constructive feedback (see Chapter Five and Chapter Six). It was insightful to know that their learning would require my compassion and empathy. I thus needed to treat my learners with respect and dignity. I needed to teach them about their rights as well as their responsibilities. I maintained an open-door policy that allowed my learners to feel safe and secure in a space where they were listened to and cared

for. This exploration of social and emotional learning motivated my learners to show respect, embrace integrity, and to be motivated and transparent.

During the classroom phase of this study, I adopted a positive approach to learning and building relationships through encouragement. This ensured my learners' well-being and contentment and encouraged their self-confidence and gratitude. It was crucial that I adopted the position of a multi-layered teacher so that I could respond appropriately to the diverse needs of my learners. Jones and Kahn (2017, p. 4) state that social and emotional development "...are multifaceted and integral to academics—to how school happens and to how learning takes place". I believed that social and emotional learning would give my learners wings to soar academically and in their social relationships. I endeavoured to create a sense of unity in my classroom but I also cultivated independent work. This, I believed, would allowed my learners to be responsive to life's challenges and to develop the courage to explore their world.

I endeavoured to infuse a spirit of positivity in the teaching and learning processes that I used in the classroom to explore social and emotional learning. Through the processes of planning and execution, I was encouraged to grow as a teacher and I became more adept at my work. I wanted to create a reflective classroom community and a safe space that would welcome sensitive topics and their accompanying emotions. I tried to be open to diverse viewpoints and allowed my learners to do the same, and encouraged active teaching and learning opportunities.

3.5.2 Creating a safety net

As a child I longed to be in a classroom that thrived on safety and security. Engelbrecht and Swanepoel (2013) argue that a safe learning environment promotes learning and allows learners to explore and take risks. I wanted to be honest and transparent about my social background and my personal interests. In this endeavour my recollections of the wardrobe that had been my magical space, a hiding place, and a place of safety and security were motivational. I would hide in the wardrobe when I was overwhelmed by my own emotions, my surroundings, and when I was embarrassed by my thoughtless, childish actions. My self-study research was encouraged by my strong desire to have a classroom that would echo

social and emotional safety and security. I have always described and understood a classroom as a place that is a safe space and where the teacher and learners become a learning and reflective community. I anticipated that my learning space, whether inside or outside the classroom, would engage my learners to think critically, express themselves socially and emotionally, and help them to build and maintain positive relationships. I wanted my learners to exchange ideas without being fearful or feeling intimidated and hoped that, through classroom discussions related to exploring social and emotional learning, my learners would gain insight and embrace the values of optimism, critical thinking, and attentive listening, and where they would obtain meaningful perspectives on diverse views.

Some of my learners had experienced loss and many felt confused and heartbroken. I was aware that they would have questions when they had lost someone they held dear, just like I had when my father passed on. My childhood memories thus encouraged me to treat them with empathy and sympathy and I allowed them to share treasured memories. My learning taught me that showing empathy involves negotiation to identify the emotional needs of others and to respond fittingly and find harmony through sharing such experiences.

I hoped that having an emotionally safe classroom would cultivate a sense of safety and security and allow my learners to engage in classroom discussions openly and to build healthy relationships. I also hoped that they would embrace the values of belonging, accountability, courage, sympathy, and empathy. It is these values that enable us to safely engage in social relationships, to work cooperatively, to explore creativity, and to listen with understanding. These were lessons that I learnt early in Mrs Murethi's and Mrs Mardon's invaluable presence.

I recalled my father's radio and the empowering impact that music had on me in my childhood. It was often through music that I was infused with hope, comfort, healing, and contentment. I recalled the times that I was enthused by the music that I shared with my late father as we listened to recordings on the radio. This was one of my father's favourite possessions. Music in my childhood epitomised joyful moments and celebrations and breakthroughs for my family and me. It also took my father down memory lane as he shared many stories about his childhood and how he dated and married my mother.

Figure 3.8 is an image of a golden tie pin which has a lot of sentimental value. I recall seeing it every day clipped to my father's tie. It reminds me of his spicy cologne and long, warm hugs. It also symbolises resilience, determination, and love. I guess he loved it and that is why he wore it all the time. It never lost its shine or its golden colour.



Figure 3.8: Memorable moments with my father

3.5.3 Social and emotional learning starts with me

Enrolling in a new school was difficult for me, and I struggled to be honest about who I was and where I came from. I always searched for myself in others and wanted to please the crowd. I sacrificed my individuality to gain new friends or to fit in socially. I remember the coal stove in my grandparents' home. It warmed in the kitchen and also brought everyone together. I suppose I hoped that my new school would offer a similar environment where I could work closely with people around me. School was where we shared our daily experiences and listened to the stories our parents and grandparents had shared with us. I remember the smell of charcoal, my awareness of the 'long drop' toilet outside, the long walks to the community tap, the wet grass under my feet, and the comforting sounds of domestic animals outside.

Mohoney (2018) posits that social and emotional learning requires the application of knowledge, a positive attitude, and the ability to manage emotions, display empathy for others, forge and preserve positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. In the ensuing study, as in the future, I wanted my learners to fall in love with who they truly were. They should build healthy relationships to believe in themselves. To do so they would need an optimistic mind-set and be aware of their own emotions, whether positive or negative. I wanted my class to be united but I also wanted my learners to embrace their individuality. I hoped that exploring social and emotional learning with my learners would promote self-love, self-awareness, and the ability to express themselves freely. They thus needed to identify their emotions, what emotional triggers affected them, and how they responded to certain situations.

My childhood reflections taught me that learning spaces should acknowledge learners' emotions and encourage active social relationships. I embraced the memories of my positive relations with two teachers in primary school and cautioned myself by remembering that aloofness by a teacher in the classroom is destructive and counter-productive. I thus wanted the learning community that I created in my classroom to be supportive and to accept diverse values. I realised that I also had to share my own emotions as my learners learnt about emotional experiences, just like my favourite teacher had done. I had to acknowledge my learners' feelings, empathise with them, and validate their emotions and their thoughts by praising and recognising their interests and triumphs. I also needed to show my own vulnerability and be sincere and honest. I hoped that this would create a safe learning environment as we learnt about emotional and social learning.

3.5.4 Social justice and emotions

I was told countless times by other women, usually elders of the family, to behave, or adopt society's high standards, to talk less, and to limit my questions. This occurred mostly when we gathered for traditional ceremonies or when we visited eZingloweni, our home village. I accepted these admonishments in light of the traditional tenet that 'children should be seen and not heard'. My voice, as so many voices of children who grew up before and in my time, was thus effectively silenced by a traditional value system that deemed children unworthy of comment or opinion. Fortunately such values are progressively changing, as Hill et al. (2018)

acknowledge that social justice draws on humanistic dialogues and that social justice requires the acceptance of diversity and difference and is built on an understanding of equality. I thus needed to ensure that my learners' questions and perspectives were never suppressed or limited simply because of what society perceived as socially acceptable. I wanted them to freely express themselves and to know that differences are colourful and make relationships meaningful.

When I grew up, I was told what was expected of me as a woman and how important it would be to respect and to submit to men. However, as an independent woman who is mindful of the Constitution of this country, I would like to teach my learners the values of social justice, which means that no woman should submit to or dwell under the supremacy of a patriarchal culture. I wanted all my learners, regardless of their gender, to be in touch with their emotions and to have a voice. I wanted my male learners to disregard the myth that tears are toxic to their masculinity and thus instil social security in my classroom through the unbridled expression of real emotion. Northfield and Sherman (2004, p. 294) explain that, as we mature, "...our behavioural constructs are determined by our values". I wanted my learners to gain valuable lessons and to adopt behaviours that would cultivate harmonious relationships, such as showing compassion, kindness, and respect for different values and beliefs.

My learners had to develop a larger vision of our society and understand that we are all equal and can accomplish anything. The concept of social justice captivated my thoughts and was a driver of my efforts to achieve what I imagined was fair for my learners and our society. In teaching and practising social and emotional learning, I tried to build my learners' self-esteem and emotional vocabulary and to give them the freedom to narrate and share their experiences.

My learners needed to realise that the classroom was a learning community and that they should all embrace diversity, respect one another's differences, and be united. I hoped that, by exploring social and emotional learning, we would all be empowered to form positive relationships and to identify and respect one another's emotions.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I shared my personal childhood history and memories of social and emotional learning. I presented memory stories that illustrated my experiences of social and emotional learning as a child and a prospective teacher. By narrating my lived experiences, I gained valuable insights and could identify the values I longed to employ and instil in my classroom. Moletsane (2011) expresses that productive nostalgia allows us to be reflective when we revisit our memories and that this enables us to ask critical questions that introduce new and fruitful narratives. I retraced my memories in a productive manner so that I could explore social and emotional learning in the classroom.

I demonstrated how I perceived my past experiences as I interacted with diverse people in different environments. I reflected on how my past played a fundamental role in how I constructed, and will continue to construct, my emotions and social relationships. The chapter divulges how, by means of images of artefacts, I was able to reflect on my childhood experiences and draw lessons and inspiration from them. I also referred to letter writing that expressed my understandings and new insights about how my lived experiences shaped my thinking and redefined my approach to teaching and learning. Molestane (2011) states that using our past as a resource for teaching and learning through recollecting pleasant and unpleasant memories can transform our learning experiences.

This chapter underlined the prominence of revisiting our childhood experiences and narrating these memories in an honest manner. Revisiting these memories was part of my engagement with my personal history and my exploration of social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 classroom. This process of self-study opened the door to personal and professional development as it allowed me to appreciate and reconsider how my social and cultural experiences influenced the way I taught and allowed my learners to learn. In Chapter Four, I shall expand on my later childhood and adolescent experiences. I shall also refer to more artefacts that elicited memories that were linked to social and emotional learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIVING MY CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES

4.1 Introduction

I decided to title this chapter *My childhood and adolescent experiences* as the narratives are a continuation of my reflections on my personal history and what I learnt about social and emotional learning. I again narrate personal events that unfolded during my childhood and also recall some adolescent experiences. This was done in the hope that this journey would deepen my understanding of social and emotional learning and that it would thus improve my teaching. I wanted to become a mature teacher who would be mindful of her learners' life experiences and daily challenges. Moletsane (2011, p. 204) states that "productive nostalgia" allows us "to ask difficult questions about the past in order to reimagine the future". I realised that asking critical and uncomfortable questions would allow me to reimagine the way I would teach and learn in the future.

In the previous chapter, I commenced my response to the first research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* I recapped the research strategies that permitted me to motivate and review my childhood memories. To follow, I recounted stories of my early childhood and primary school experiences using photographs of artefacts and journal writing. Narrating my personal memories brought healing, and I was able to reconstruct my learning and draw inner strength and faith from it. It was indeed a therapeutic writing journey.

Similar to Chapter Three, in Chapter Four I shall narrate how I was able to identify my shortcomings by exploring my memories of childhood and adolescent experiences that either supported or were not favourable to social and emotional learning. Each of my personal stories has a title that articulates its impact on me. Each narrative is also augmented by photographs of artefacts that illustrate my memory of social and emotional learning. I also present a letter that I wrote to my late father posthumously.

I begin by discussing the letter I wrote to my late father, titled *The darkest day of my life*. In this letter I express my emotions and thoughts that still visit me daily. To follow, I look at how *Social justice and emotions* are related and the kind of feelings that transpire when we experience subordination and discrimination. I also discuss *A new beginning*, which occurred when I was introduced to diverse languages that allowed me to be multilingual and mindful and respectful of different cultures. Subsequently, I also share my experience of loss and grief in *Gone but not forgotten*. I acknowledge grief as a challenge and express that we treasure the love, values, and memories of those who have left the earth. I also discuss my vulnerability under the title *Unarmed womanhood*, narrate my memories, and reflect on how I responded to my body's changes and how I felt about growing up to being a woman. Additionally, I share *Reliving my childhood* and how I saw myself in one of my fragile learners who had also experienced sorrow and loss. I then deliberate on how *Orientation week in my first year* taught me to work collaboratively and to engage in emotive as well as thought provoking conversations. Finally, I reflect on *Glorious raindrops*, a title that is a metaphor for my learning of healthy relationships, my enhanced social abilities, and my skills in identifying and managing my emotions. I conclude this chapter under the heading *Reframing learning and teaching*, which is a section in which I reflect on my learning and insights as revealed in Chapter Four.

4.2 Personal history self-study research strategies

My self-study research was stimulated by my comprehension that teachers encounter and experience countless challenges and opportunities regarding learners' social and emotional challenges and needs. Hamilton and Worthington (2008, p. 19) explain narrative as "a method [that] gives researchers an opportunity to study and share their experiences". This methodology usually encourages teachers and teacher educators to share and learn from one another through exchanging knowledge, skills, practices, and evolving understandings.

In my self-study research, I aimed to explore what I could learn about social and emotional learning, and I predominantly focused on learners' learning culture and social relationships. I was encouraged to revisit my childhood experiences of adversities and triumphs. By engaging in memory work and narrating my childhood experiences, I hoped to better understand the relationship between learning and teaching and what would ensure my learners' social and

emotional well-being. Using photographs of artefacts aided me in sharing my personal history and identifying positive and negative childhood memories. When I reflected on these artefacts, my thoughts were drawn to emotions and memories that had shaped my past and would determine my future. I became cognisant of my past fears and the challenges I had faced. This allowed me to reflect on and reconcile with my hurtful feelings.

Pithouse-Morgan, Makhanya, Downing and Phewa (2019, p. 59) define memory drawing as “...a way that allows teacher-researchers to learn from their own and other teachers’ early memories of learning”. They also convey the point that memory work can aid the researcher to look back into the past and allow him/her to deal with the future. Furthermore, memory work can bring back the past and release elapsed memories. They also state that memory drawing serves “...as a resource and a collective for professional learning” as it “brings back vivid memories that are associated with emotions” (p. 71). As I was mindful of my past and wanted to recall emotions that were related to social and emotional learning, I looked forward to directing my learning by initiating interactions and dialogues. I wanted to recollect and reflect on my lived experiences and hoped that memory work would serve as an emotional trigger to evoke personal memories from which I could learn more about social and emotional learning. I thus anticipated retracing my steps and reflecting on my personal history through memory drawing and seeing myself again as a child. I needed to be expressive and conscious about my feelings and experiences and, through memory drawing, I was able to ignite memories and explore my imagination (Figure 4.2).

I longed to communicate and express my feelings and letter writing seemed to be one of the most sincere ways in which I could express my emotions. Flemming (2020, p. 2) states that letter writing as a reflective practice is “...an attractive and intertwined method of discovery”. Letter writing locates ideas within a detailed time frame, expresses our vulnerabilities, and exposes our strengths. Thus in Chapter Three I included a letter that I wrote to one of my influential teachers who moulded my educational experiences. I sent the letter by means of Facebook Messenger but unfortunately did not receive a response. I also felt compelled to write a letter to my late father who was the foundation for my emotions related to my lived experiences. I believe writing these letters offered me the opportunity to again be conscious of my suppressed feelings, to face my childhood challenges, and to engage in insightful as well as reflective conversations with myself.

Just like letter writing, journal writing introduced me to reflective writing practice and became a method of recording my daily encounters and emotional responses. Journal writing helped me to question my teaching practice and to record what I had learned. Meyer and Willis (2019) argue that journal entries unfold unanticipated, painful, or noteworthy field encounters – frequently through posing numerous burning questions – before the writer reflectively explores possible answers to these questions. Furthermore, they explicate that reflective journaling “...can provide direction in dealing with challenging circumstances” (p. 583). I anticipated that my journal writing would allow me to engage critically in social and emotional learning and to make ethical decisions. I decided to keep a reflective journal to delve deep into my life stories and to unearth the tragedies and joys that I had learnt from. I thought that this would assist me to gain a deep understanding of how my life’s journey shaped my personal and professional identity. I thus reflected on some dilemmas and discoveries I had experienced by frankly exploring my past and the emotions that had shaped me.

I used photographs to revisit my school years as an entry point to excavating my understanding of my professional identity. Mitchell, MacEntee and Allison (2019) explain that visual images, together with written narratives, elicit deep understanding of memories related to learning, struggles, and accomplishments. Using photographs thus prompted my memories and guided my learning in part. The photographs that I used (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.5) allowed me to recount my memories and the processes that shaped me as a person, a woman, and a teachers. Mitchell et al. (2019) state that photographs are potent tools for conjuring the past and yet also for being future-oriented. The use of photographs also allowed me to explore social and emotional learning in my classroom and to build healthy relationships with my learners. I was able to capture familiar experiences and meaningful moments that forged my professional identity and supported my learning. I was also astonished by the element of surprise that encouraged me to constantly revisit and retrace my personal memories.

4.3 My Personal History Related to Social and Emotional Learning

4.3.1 *The darkest day of my life - 10 June 2001*

My dad's passing on 10 June 2001 profoundly influenced my thoughts and daily routine when I was in Grade 6. I began to withdraw from extra-mural activities as I had to take responsibility for my younger siblings. I helped them with their homework and to understand certain concepts. I obviously took on the role of an authoritative figure and being the most knowledgeable sibling in the family. It was almost like playing school. I felt compelled to abandon my childhood and help my mom where I could. My academic development was deteriorating and my phobia of Mathematics and Afrikaans heightened. Recalling the passing of my father makes me realise just how much I wished he was still around to experience life with me and to witness my adversities and accomplishments. I am constantly reminded of his undying love for his family and the positive energy he fuelled in our home. I am reminded of all his consoling and comforting words in my darkest days. I am also reminded of his strength on days I felt weak and unloved.

Somehow writing a letter to my father was a form of healing and a reminder that he was present and breathing. I feel I could be honest about my feelings and that, in some inexplicable way, he would read it and respond. Writing this letter allowed me to feel closer to him and to find closure as it was a healing, comforting, and therapeutic process.

Dear Dad

At my tender age when you left me, I was encouraged and comforted by being told that you would be watching over me. I would often look up just to connect with you spiritually and I would often seek to find a place of refuge, a place that breathed life.

I desperately longed to see your face and hear your voice.

I often wonder what life would be like if you were still alive. Would I make different decisions and live a different life? I question myself and wonder if you would have been proud of me. What would your advice and words of wisdom have been? I wonder who will walk me down the aisle.

Will you be pleased with my husband and am I everything you imagined I would be?

Your face and my memories of you revisit me daily. I miss your gentle smile and your boisterous laugh. I miss running to you every time I am in trouble. I miss your soothing and reassuring voice. I adopted a positive attitude by learning from you, and you taught me to conquer my fears, to acknowledge my forefathers, and to revere my Creator. You taught me to laugh on bright and dark days, to find strength in my most daring moments, and to speak and express myself freely. I am able to defend myself and to protect myself from the world because of you.

I am pleased to also say you taught me to love myself, to respect our culture and traditions, to embrace diversity and the beauty of being multilingual, of dancing and of being open-minded, and to practise democratic thinking. You taught me to love and to be loved. You breathed utter kindness and portrayed the value of possessing a gentle soul – yet you were a warrior in so many ways. Your love for people and your family was phenomenal. I miss telling you about my day and your random calls from the office. I miss digging into your pockets and finding sweets. I miss your hugs and kisses on my forehead. I miss dancing and laughing with you, and cheering for your revered soccer team, Pirates. I miss the conversations that we shared on our way to town or our homestead. I miss listening to the radio with you and frantically moving from Metro FM to Ukhozi FM and watching you listening to the news attentively. I wish you were here even if it was just for a day. I miss being in your presence.

Love

Ntokozo

When I look at the photograph of his glasses (Figure 4.1), I am powerfully reminded of the presence of my late father because they belonged to him. He could read and see clearly through the lenses of these glasses. Of course, I would also try them on, and I noticed that they magnified words and objects. They had a vintage and timeless look and went well with every outfit he wore. They had a gold frame and the lenses were slightly tinted. I always thought they represent impeccable wisdom and knowledge. I looked forward to learning astute words from my father. The photograph of these glasses reminds me of times I shared with my father when he read the newspaper every evening and Sunday morning. I enjoyed learning new words and about current issues that influenced and affected my social

consciousness such as theft, hijacking, and human trafficking. I am reminded of his love for reading and sharing what he had read and learnt from numerous newspaper articles. He inspired me to document life events and to investigate current affairs which I now do through social media.



Figure 4.1: Looking through his lenses

4.3.2 Social justice meets emotions

Our socialisation is initiated even before we are born. This depends on where and in which society we are born and is infused by our culture, customs, and religion. Whatever beliefs and attitudes we imbibe play a fundamental part in the classroom. In my childhood home, I was never really exposed to gender challenges or discrimination – girls and boys were treated similarly in my household. My father was not really into the whole male-controlled theory of raising children or structuring relationships. My parents made joint decisions on finances, academics, and social interactions. I can honestly say the first time I realised that there was a contrast between girls and boys was during cultural and traditional ceremonies and rituals. My parents treated my siblings and me equally and we were encouraged to pursue all our aspirations. No decisions and disciplinary actions were gender-based. I am the only girl in the family and I have two brothers. We shared all household chores and outdoor activities.

However, instances of gender discrimination occurred in my childhood when I felt shut out and completely out of place. These episodes occurred during the school holidays at my grandparents' homestead and I became aware of them when I was 10 years old in 2000. Unknowingly, I was part of a patriarchal society in which men were considered more significant and treasured than women. I had begun to observe that I resembled the shape of women and that I shared unquestioned virtues with them. I was told to follow the example of other girls when I carried out certain household duties such cooking, washing, cleaning, doing beadwork, wearing dresses, plaiting my hair every Sunday, wearing nail polish, piercing my ears, and doing a number of other things that were related to being a girl. I recall that our parents used verbal and physical aggression when disciplining us and reminding us that we were children, but there seemed no difference between the treatment of me as a girl and my brothers when we were raised. However, this perception changed as I grew up. I began to notice that women endured being treated like children in the way we were addressed by men, although this did not happen in my home. It seemed that women were considered primary caregivers and I gradually understood that this attitude confirmed our subjugation and our low position in the social hierarchy. Outside my home, I never had a chance to live in a space that was conducive to social justice and equal social and emotional learning.

Figure 4.2 is a memory drawing that reminds me of the fresh air, the wet grass, the barns, the dazzling landscape, the sugarcane fields we drove past, and the ladies who stood on the side of the road selling avocados, bananas, and mangoes. I also recall seeing the emerald hills, the highlight of the scenery, and the regal mountains. The homesteads possessed a rustic look. There was always a variety of animals around the homesteads, from the smallest chickens to the brawniest bulls. I would watch chickens pecking for food all day, cows sprawling on the grass, and goats playfully ramming their heads. My granddad had a vegetable garden in which he planted spinach, carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages, and beetroot. We also enjoyed eating guava during summer and chasing my grandma's chickens. I remember that the boys were always around the kraal feeding the calves and injecting ill cows or cattle that had sustained an injury.



Figure 4.2: Memory drawing: A warm place called home

I could plainly see the difference when most men were more educated than women. They were also seen as the heads of their households, responsible for their families' finances, and for disciplining their children. In my experience, most children feared their fathers as they could rarely approach or share their views or emotions with them. Evidently, men played the masterful role – one that could not be questioned or interrogated. They were the agents and women were the targets who had to be controlled as individuals who were empty vessels. Information was just transferred to women and not shared. We made no contribution other than domestic slogging and we had to accept that things were done in a certain way and that we had to be obedient. Women were their own victims because they chose to be submissive and the hostages of their husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers. They accepted oppression and being the brunt of men's discipline because they never questioned males' authority. Women were constantly reminded of their low place in society, their nurturing role, and their domestic duties.

For instance, when I was growing up, and even today, my elders would press upon me to be more domesticated and not devote too much time to my education because that could be intimidating for a man who would like to marry me. In other words, I was – and often still am – encouraged to be defenceless and deprived. In contrast, a male should always be in control and be masterful socially, academically, and financially.

In my view, manhood then and now has its rewards and shortcomings. When I grew up, being a male was allied with supremacy, fierceness, and often with condoned violent behaviour.

This resulted in the subordination of women who accepted male domination philosophically. Women learnt intuitively to respect men and they knew what to do and what not to do, what to say and what not to say, and how and when to respond. Men in turn embraced this culture of male domination as a societal and cultural norm and part of the tradition 'to be man enough'. I remember when I was 10 years old my mom revealed that she could not go to my grandparents' house wearing slacks (female trousers) because it would be regarded as a sign of insolence. The community would think she thought herself superior to men because she was educated. She had a harrowing altercation with her father when she revealed her financial status to him by stating that she supported her family financially as she has said, "*I feed my family*". My grandfather was insulted and erupted in rage and antagonism. Through this and other similar experiences I perceived that violence was frequently used to control women who deemed themselves socially powerful and financially independent to remind them of their place in society.

There is an unwritten and unspoken law in my culture that women and men are not equal. When men are disloyal and unfaithful their actions are condoned and accepted by society, but when a woman does something like this she is condemned, criticised, and categorised as a slut or prostitute. Virginity should be uncontaminated and should be preserved by women for the men who choose them, but in the case of men it is a different matter. In my view, a woman's virginity is also symbolic of her gender subordination and the persistent power of men over women to lead and control them in- and outside the bedroom. According to our unwritten law, a woman's crucial roles are to sate her husband's sexually, to cook for him, and to bear his children. This means that a woman is generally viewed as an asset or an object. Conversely, men maintain their dignity and image by doing as they please and women have to support their every desire. I was taught about the significance of remaining a virgin which I now understand is a belief that is embedded in my traditional framework. My grandmother would always say in IsiZulu: "*Impilo yentombazane ifana neyeqanda,*" meaning I should always look after myself and preserve my virginity.

I understand now that the human spirit can triumph over many challenges and calls us to remain positive. However, as a child I learnt to surrender with a heavy heart and I mastered the art of passivity and female fragility according to the tenets of my society. For many this might have been pleasing, but I came to perceive this subjugation as a flaw of womanhood

and self-identity. I have observed women collecting unbearable wounds and compressing themselves to fit into smaller spaces that elevate the value of men. However, I now believe that women should fully engage in positive change in their communities and break the barriers that have imprisoned them for far too long.

As young girls, we were raised to acknowledge the man as the head of the household, as the main source of income, and as the ‘owner’ of his wife and children. Fathers assumed the position of social and domestic supremacy. As females we were socialised to accept male domination and control and be faithful, loving, and submissive. We never questioned a man’s authority. These beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions influenced the nature of the relationships between women and men and impacted succeeding generations. When I questioned this order, I was put down by deleterious remarks and looks even from other young women or was called to order by the elders. I encountered oppression and tyranny as people endorsed what I termed a warped socialisation process. I was constantly reminded that men knew and understood better and their every behaviour was revered by female adoration.

I began to realise that my girlhood – and womanhood – was based on what society believed was right or wrong for women to believe and uphold. Today I look at women and realise that we inherited and adopted what we were told and taught by our forefathers regarding the grooming of children. Moreover, the patriarchal structures in the Black culture infuse the consciousness of the vast majority of men who believe it is right and justified to discriminate against women in a society based on cultural beliefs that consider women as subordinate to men. I understand now that women are misguided by outdated socialisation customs and conceptions of gender roles and equality in society. These insights and my undaunted spirit have motivated me to fall in love with myself. I thus fearlessly urge women to fall in love with their identities, abilities, and talents. Women need to seize power and seek self-love. We also need to understand that violence does not bring any harmony to our communities and does not elicit positive change. However, even though I rebel strongly against society's perceptions that have been cultivated by the traditional supremacy of men, I realise that I cannot fight for equality by celebrating rage and meeting violence with violence. At the same time, I understand that abiding by these oppressive societal norms would mean that I abandon my ‘self’ and surrender my being, values, and beliefs to societal norms that are abhorrent and unacceptable.

It is undeniable that cultural norms shape men's perceptions and position them as the leaders of our society where they fulfil public roles with authority, while women are expected to be content with the supporting roles of wives and mothers. This belief benefits men, who are frequently imbued with prominence at the expense of their wives and daughters. For example, 'lobola' negotiations is an African practice that involves payment, either in cash or heads of cattle, from the potential groom's family to the parents of the prospective bride as an important part of customary marriage. Lobola is not determined by any fixed amount, but the price for a bride is determined by the bride's family after intense negotiations. If the bride is no longer a virgin or even has children, the lobola is usually reduced. Thus preserving one's virginity escalates the marketing value of a young woman who has to sacrifice her sexuality for the enrichment of her parents, as none of the lobola price ever reaches her purse. She thus makes sacrifices involving her own body for her husband's and father's benefit and adheres to child bearing and child nurturing rituals to please them. The custom of lobola is a tradition that has been practised for years, but in many instances it has compelled a couple to live together without the benefit of marriage as the lobola price is often simply so high that the prospective groom takes years to pay it off. It is also well known that lobola has impoverished the married couples due to the high price set on the bride.

4.3.3 A New beginning

I remember the aroma of exotic plants and the fragrant smells of water lily extract, jasmine, and rose. The scents were calming and relaxing and allowed my mind to drift away to a sacred and peaceful place. I also recall being in a space that released positive energy. I saw bright colours and ducks on a pond that reflected the glorious sunlight. This garden (Figure 4.2) symbolised a new beginning in a fertile land where good seasons meant that we would reap whatever we sowed. This garden was real and was situated at the Groenkloof Campus of the University of Pretoria. I was 19 years old when I enrolled at this university in 2009. I recall seeing the faultlessly manicured garden containing bright flowers such as lilies and roses. This garden was the reason that I anticipated only good things. It was a place festooned with colour, not only of glorious nature but also of a rainbow of strange faces and unknown voices.

I felt a surge of joy that was hard to contain. My soul and spirit rejoiced, leaped, and danced. However, I was also visited by fear because I was about to embark on an unfamiliar path that was exhilarating and daunting at the same time. I looked forward to the challenge of learning and of creating new narratives of my life. I wanted to introduce a new me, be kinder to myself, heal, and forgive myself. I found tranquillity in this space. My soul was content as I walked into the unknown. I allowed myself to engage in introspection and I found a glorious victory within me. I was delighted by the freedom of knowing that life was full of hope and that my Creator was in control.

I also anticipated love but feared hostility and rejection. I wondered if I would be accepted for who I truly was. My heart was pounding. What were the social rituals and how was I going to interact with all these new and diverse people? At first, I adopted a defensive attitude as I was afraid to let anyone in. I had chosen the University of Pretoria in the Jakaranda city in the Gauteng Province as my tertiary institution of choice. Pretoria is well known for profound historical events and the majestic Union Buildings, which is the country's main seat of governance. I wanted to explore South Africa and I needed to grow mentally and spiritually. Moving from Durban to Pretoria was a leap of faith as this beautiful city would be a completely new learning environment and my home for the next four years. I had packed all my belongings and looked forward to a new beginning – a daring personal journey that would take me on unknown paths. The University of Pretoria was fondly known as 'TUKS'. Pretoria was quite dry in summer and cold in winter compared to my familiar humid Durban. I missed walking on the beach and being around people who spoke IsiZulu fluently. IsiZulu is one of South Africa's nine official languages. However, I appreciated being around people who spoke different languages as this would encourage my own multi-linguism. I would be exposed to diverse cultures, languages, and racial groups. I enrolled to study Geography as a main subject in my education curriculum. I wanted to become a teacher and was open to building healthy relationships and express myself freely.

I fell in love with teaching at this institution, particularly as my Geography lecturers influenced my development. One lecturer, Dr Baker, had a vibrant personality and he engaged us in classroom discussions. He was also passionate and deeply concerned about the planet. He used different methods such as video shows and outdoor lessons and he encouraged

critical thinking. He always urged us to do our best and inspired us to help the world become an environmentally friendly place. His students were encouraged to do presentations and share their concerns regarding Earth and the endangered species on it. Through his teachings, I became aware of the enormity of nature and its role in the lives of humans. My passion now is to preserve nature and conserve Earth. I recall looking at pictures of endangered species and understanding how we as humans contribute to the deterioration of our planet. Every year Mother Nature struggles with the loss of a variety of indigenous species. We were made aware of an expanding gap in the ecosystem and the dangers posed by environmental imbalances. A large number of animals and plants are at risk of becoming extinct and are now endangered species. Fortunately, zoos and botanical gardens do enormous work to preserve these species and to save them for the generation to come. When animals and plants become extinct, biodiversity is lost. This can also occur in a place where one plant or animal still exists but no longer procreates. Man's impact on nature is the major cause of the loss of biodiversity and I was enthused to appreciate and respect nature.

Mr Zulu also inspired me to be a better teacher and to further my studies. He was always intrigued by my lessons when he assessed me during my teaching practicals. He identified my strengths and areas that needed improvement. He built my confidence and gifted me with the seed of hope and the expectation of success. This motivated me to be an inspirational teacher and I resolved to identify different learning needs and employ various teaching methods in my classroom. I was able to identify my shortcomings and reflect on my teaching and learning experiences. I learnt to socialise and to engage in fruitful learning. I was also taught to be aware of social issues through my favourite subject, Geography, and to investigate issues by means of newspaper articles on aspects of Geography as a science. I took note of changing global issues and the role of ethnicity on a national scale. The photograph of the campus below (Figure 4.3) is a favourite that I entitled *Every picture tells a story*.



Figure 4.3: Every picture tells a story

This photograph depicts the lush gardens on the campus where I found new energy and the inspiration to pursue my studies.

4.3.4 Gone but not forgotten

“When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.”

-The Holy Bible, Psalm 73:21-23-

I was sitting in a dark room, my spirit low. I wanted to be in the most uncomfortable space because my emotions were shattered. I was questioning the will of God and did not know what lesson he wanted to teach me through this adversity and agony. I was deeply troubled and my thoughts dwelled on darkness. I was flooded by my tears and a deafening voice that brought no comfort but was a constant reminder of what Death had stolen from me. I was searching for refuge and strength. I tried bravely to ignore my destructive emotions but they held me hostage and there was no ransom to regain my presence.

August is a month that will always remind me of my loving aunt who passed. She was the life of our festivities and celebrations at home. She was always humble, resilient, and devoted to her family and friends. She breathed peace and had a welcoming heart. I do not think anyone of us ever planned to lose someone and thus no one was prepared for her death. She was a hero, a confidante, a mother, a sister, and a wife. She was a dynamic woman in so many

ways. I longed for God to restore her after the car accident that left her paralysed, but this did not happen.

Her death drained me emotionally and spiritually and my family was deeply bereaved. Her passing left a void that I have not filled to this day. She was unruffled under adversity, had a determined spirit, and was unwaveringly optimistic. It was devastating to see her lying on the hospital bed, paralysed, and struggling to breathe on her own. All these machines and the tubes feeding her body were emotionally wrecking. I longed for her to heal and for God to come and take away her pain. I asked why God was acrimonious and antagonistic. I watched everyone cry and saw unfathomable and palpable grief in their eyes. We were all so vulnerable but no one could help us.

My aunt's paralysis became critical and she could no longer breathe on her own. We had a family meeting six weeks after this tragic incident. Our biggest fear was about to become reality, as we had to make the decision to remove her from life support. We had said all our prayers and waited on the doctor's orders. We had no choice but to follow God's will. She soon departed and was enfolded by the angels. A part of me knew that she was in a peaceful place and doing more important and greater work than I could ever imagine.

I remember her resilience and her ability to touch people's lives positively. Her helping hand was always there to help those in need. She carried herself gracefully and with courage and faith. I remember her beautiful and sincere smile that would light up the room. She had strength in times that were fuelled by adversity and resentment. Her personality and presence were enough to bring peace, unity, and reconciliation.



Figure 4.4: My journal

The journal that is depicted in Figure 4.4 is pastel pink and grey with white flowers that represent blossoming and growing. This journal was filled with entries, dates, and emotions during the year of her death. I wrote in this journal for two years, from 2012 to 2013. I recorded my aspirations, the adversities that I had to face, my prayer requests, the promises that were fulfilled by God, and the disappointments I had to endure. Journal writing allowed me to narrate my thoughts and emotions, to document my daily experiences, and to express myself freely. The following are excerpts from my journal entries:

16 August 2012

Dear God

Silent cries and prayers matter too. When will you take away this agony? I feel so far away from you. I deeply mourn your absence and I long for your delicacy, your spiritual presence, and comfort. I am beginning to lose hope. Where are you?

15 August 2012

It is the third week. She is deteriorating and she is surrounded by and breathing through all these machines. We cannot even recognise her. Her purpose and submission to a purpose-filled life made her so graceful and we cannot imagine life without her. She carried herself with such courage even in her weakest moments. She remained hopeful and unperturbed. I recall pleading to God to spare her life but she was in a critical condition. I did not want to

entertain the thought that only death could heal or set her free from her pain. Our hearts remain shattered and our spirits are broken. We have nowhere to run to.

25 August 2012

The last trumpet is slowly sneaking in. Discomfort and a disheartening emotion erupt every time we meet in the hospital and when we have to pray. I hear silent prayers that are desperate for your presence...voices that long to embrace and see you in their arms again. And maybe there is some resentment towards God; a million questions that cannot be answered. I cannot stop thinking about your gentle touch, your quiet footsteps, your warm voice. Everyone's emotions are wrecked. I have dedicated weeks of prayer and fasting and pleading. I have surrendered all that I am and believe to have. I am praying for your spirit and body to find a resting place. I am certain we will always celebrate you: your laughter and your noble pearls of wisdom.

3 September 2012

She is gone. Closer to God now and fulfilling a greater purpose. My spirit is compelled to proclaim freedom, and for emotions to be released so I can have the strength to comfort all those I grieve and mourn with. I want to get rid of the feeling of despair and desolation, and I want to celebrate her life and honour her.

4.3.5 Unarmed womanhood

“Women will only be truly sexually liberated when we arrive at a place where we can see ourselves as having sexual value and agency, irrespective of whether or not we are the objects of male desire.”

-bell hooks-

I remember gushing sweat, the fragile fabric of my hair, my furrowed forehead when someone uttered something that did not quite resonate with my spirit, and my forced smile to mask the scars of being told that I was not good enough. My birthmark is a testimony to my existence and my bloodline. I searched deeply for moments that would give birth to self-confidence and positivity. I was 13 years old when I became aware of my changing body – my school uniform was getting smaller, tighter, and shorter. I noticed that my armpits also

had an odour. I became aware of my features, the meaning of true beauty, and what was considered unattractive. I listened to the stories of older women who had experienced heartache and tremendous pain because their bodies had been shamed. Dimpled thighs, contour lines and stretch marks, acne, protruding breasts, and expanding hips. Some of these attracted the enemy: boys and even older men would whistle and even grab you forcefully to gain your attention. If you did not give in, you were insulted about how ugly and unattractive you looked. They would also throw sexual comments at you that left you feeling uncomfortable and degraded. I hated walking into puberty as it made me a victim of society. Even older women had something to say about the shape or the size of my behind, my breasts, my thighs, and my hips. Aggressive period pains were a testimony that womanhood had arrived.

I had often wondered when I would transform from being a young girl to being a woman. I felt trapped in my own body. Even though I had small breasts I often wore big clothes to hide my body. I longed to find the wisdom that would release my strangling thoughts and I longed to be armed against the imprisoning changes that were taking place in my body. I was already strong-willed and became defensive and abrasive. The demeaning sexual comments that were flung at me at taxi ranks, the bus stop, and around the neighbourhood came back to visit me when I was feeling down. I suppose they were teaching me to love myself less. I wallowed in self-pity and self-loathing and I did not allow myself any mercy. I felt lost and betrayed by my own body and suffered undeserved moments of guilt because it was changing. I hated these changes because they advertised my growing womanhood and drew unnecessary attention. I felt unarmed and unable to face the onslaughts that accompanied my growing physical maturity. I am thankful that my mother was there to talk me through all these changes. She told me that my body fat would increase, that my breasts would begin to enlarge, that my pubic hair would grow, my hips would widen, that my skin and hair would become oilier and that I was most likely to develop acne. Unfortunately, I still struggle with acne even at this mature age. However, I remember that walking into puberty alerted me to the world around me. I became more aware of my surroundings and the kind of experiences women have to endure. I also became conscious of what is acceptable or not in society. I capitulated by seeking my identity in others and revering what the media portrayed as the perfect body shape and size.

Below is a picture of my mom and my aunt (Figure 4.5). They had a close relationship and always entertained us with their childhood memories. They encouraged us to be the best we could be. For me this picture reflects their internal power and resilience. On this day I listened attentively to my mom and her sister as they shared some of their challenges and triumphs. It was moving as they both shared what it was like growing up without having parental support and having to take responsibility for their younger siblings and household needs. They sacrificed a lot to raise us and to build their homes. These women are, in my view, the epitome of the strength and resilience that women need to arm themselves and that I shall always strive to attain.



Figure 4.5: “Unarmed Womanhood”

4.3.6 Reliving my childhood

He could hardly walk up straight and he was always anxious to tell me about his weekend, that morning, or what had happened the night before. San was spontaneous and had an alluring voice. He was sentimental and quite diplomatic. His dishevelled hair told a story that caught my attention. Although he walked with a limp, he always had a cheerful smile on his face and a book in his hands. He was so eager to share his current book and the story of his weekend with me which I found quite heart-warming. I looked at his fragile hands, long dirty nails, dry elbows and knees, his runny nose, red and teary eyes, and oily hair. San was a 9-

year-old boy in my classroom. I enjoyed teaching him as he reminded me a lot about myself. I reminded myself how vulnerable I was at the age of 10. I wished I had a teacher who would listen to my concerns and my thoughts, especially when I experienced challenges at home. He reminded me of the hardships I had faced as a child and the kind of emotions I had encountered when I wished my teachers knew about my struggles.

I wish my teachers knew and understood that the saying ‘looks can be deceiving’ is quite accurate. I cried silently. I wanted to be loved, to be listened to, and for someone to remind me that they cared for and would support me. My facial expressions did not always tell the real story. I looked like every other child, but inside I was fighting a battle that was sometimes too much to bear. I concealed feelings of fretfulness, anxiety, and a bleeding heart. I feared the fact that my mother had to face widowhood in her prime but it was also depressing to imagine her in someone else's arms and not in my father's. I longed for the day that I would find pleasure in life and that I would be healed and experience untainted happiness and freedom. I wanted to be released from the affliction of overthinking and the terror of facing another day. I understood that my father's resting place would be his grave and that he would soon abandon me for his last bed.

My thoughts were often demoralising and I had little hope and faith during my father's last days. I listened to my mom as she sang the gospel song in IsiZulu: “*UJesu usemnyango wezulu selizokhala icilongo simhlangabeze*”, meaning ‘Jesus is at the gate of heaven and soon there will be a song and we will soon meet him’. I am not too sure if this brought any comfort or escalated my fear. I recall walking sluggishly down the stairs. I had had a chaotic morning that day – I had forgotten my lunch because I had woken up late for school. My parents had been inattentive and bewildered. They did not pay any attention to my homework or the newsletter I had brought home. My dad's recovery was the core concern.

My dad spent most of his days in a hospital bed on dialysis. This left him incredibly exhausted at times. I longed for my dad's presence in my life, our long conversations, and occasional movie sessions. He was with me physically but not emotionally. His sickness had taken its toll on him and the family. I used to pray he would come back home alive when he had been admitted to the hospital. There were times I would go to his room to check if he was still breathing. I would be relieved just to feel the slight movement of his pulse. When I

looked at San, I was reminded of my own childhood experiences and what I had had to endure and how I had learnt to seek God as the source of my strength and my life and a power that was higher than me.

4.3.7 Orientation week in my first year at 'varsity...

This was a year to remember. It was filled with tears, laughter, and diversity. I recall encountering people of many different languages, cultures, and races. I had never been in a learning space that was predominantly Afrikaans. I was eager to learn all the languages I was exposed to as students from across the country enrolled at this tertiary institution. I remember walking into the empty hostel without a single sound or another person in sight. I had to wait for the housekeeper to hand me my keys. I was told that I was placed on floor 2 room 212. Orientation week is a period before the start of an academic year at a university when first-year students are inducted into the university. Various programmes are offered to orientate and welcome new students during this week. This is also an opportunity to socialise and meet new people who study in different fields.

I took the lift and met a couple of seniors who had already arrived and were doing their teaching practicals. I was told all first years were already participating in the orientation week. I was soon involved and in this week I learnt about true sisterhood, forging strong relationships, and embracing a positive attitude. I learnt to be resilient as the seniors inducted us in a culture that would preserve our hostel's traditions. This became our home as we embraced the rich values and ethos that had sustained this residence for decades. We learnt to respect our seniors and to honour history. In the hostel known as 'Zinnia' we were considered fairies and were allowed to mingle and communicate with people who introduced us to all the facilities available to us at the university. 'Zinnia' was going to be my home for the next four years and I had to prepare myself for new experiences and adventures, as well as challenges.

I remember late-night study sessions that were often interrupted by heart-warming conversations. I recall seeing strange faces in the cafeteria queue in the dining hall. Living with so many other girls I was never lonely. We conversed freely and shared our stories and backgrounds. I gained strength by interacting with strangers at first, but we soon became friends who shared similar values and experiences. We participated in outreach programs to

help disadvantaged communities and we taught these people the value of preserving and conserving water. We also forged learning communities involving learners with learning difficulties and challenges. They could learn by applying a variety of learning resources and techniques. These experiences had a positive influence on the kind of teacher I became and it aided my social and emotional learning. This part of my growth encompassed a new narrative of my life as I was exposed to new experiences. We wore vibrant orange t-shirts with a beautiful picture of fairies that resided in a garden.

I participated in the Serenade, or *Ienkmelodienk*, abbreviated as ‘Ienk’ (and pronounced ien-me-lo-dienk from the Afrikaans language). This was a first-year concert in which all first-years had to take part and is still a favourite custom to this day. ‘Ienk’ took place at the end of orientation week for the new first years. It comprised a choreographed musical celebration of rhythmical movements and song in which all the residences competed against one another. It was highly entertaining and set the tone for the rest of the year. The residence that was placed in the top three was generally highly regarded among the student community for the rest of the year, and this was always a great honour. Practice time was limited, and therefore it was imperative to make use of the restricted practice hours prudently. The music was played by a band of first years and it was quite testing to synchronise the choreography with the band. However, enthusiasm was all it took to produce and perform an awesome ‘Ienk’. The performances took place over one day at the amphitheatre on the Hatfield campus. In my first year the organisers in charge of our hostel’s ‘Ienk’ had selected a haunting melody to which the ‘fairies’ surrendered enthusiastically and delivered a star performance.

My first year as a resident at ‘TUKS’ prepared me to be independent and to respect the history, traditions, and ethos of the institution. I also managed to open myself and socialise with different people. I acknowledge that my university experiences were fundamental in preparing me to become a teacher as I learnt to build healthy and meaningful relationships. When I conceptualised this study, I knew that I wanted my learners to be transparent about their emotions and to engage in heartfelt conversations. I was eager to work with a class that would be enthused by love, freedom, and peace.

4.3.8 *Glorious raindrops*

Rainy days in the village where I grew up in my homeland were often murky and mysterious. I remember how we braved the rain as we walked in the wet fields to our neighbours' homes. My siblings, cousins and I splashed through water puddles and ran away from big-eyed frogs. We often sang in contentment as we walked through the muddy fields. I would often stop and strain my senses to identify the sounds coming from the puddles and from among the tall trees. I remember the sweet fragrance of different weeds, trees, leaves, and the wet soil that slowly faded with the first trace of sunlight on the grass. These moments, when the sun filtered brightly among the trees, were rich and fulfilling. I remember listening to the chirping birds that were completely oblivious to our presence.

We were often sent to knock on our neighbours' doors to borrow three-legged pots. In my culture, huge, heavy three-legged cast-iron pots are used to cook for a large number of people on an open fire. Slow-cooking beef or goat's meat in these pots resulted in tender, succulent dishes. The ingredients were layered and seasoned with spices and herbs. Such communal cooking events brought the villagers together for a divine and hearty meal. These pots were used when we hosted rituals or traditional celebrations. An example of one of these ceremonies is *umembeso*, which is part of the lobola negotiations when the groom gives gifts to the bride's parents and her family before the wedding. These gifts are blankets, clothes, and food parcels such as a bag of potatoes, butternuts, and rice. Lobola is symbolic of uniting two families, introducing the ancestors, and showing respect to the bride's family. Lobola is the practice from the groom of offering cows or a comparable sum of money to his bride's family.

Another example of a traditional celebration is *umemulo*, which is a traditional Zulu coming-of-age ceremony for women. The rituals include slaughtering a cow and *ukusina*, which is a Zulu dance. *Umemulo* indicates that the young lady is now ready for marriage.

I remember how we used to cover ourselves with newspapers and plastic bags to protect ourselves from the glorious rain. I remember the unpleasant smell of the soggy paper as the heavy rain battered on our heads, the trees, and the soil. Knocking on the doors, we would be reminded of the elders' warning: "Do not forget your manners!" We were expected to behave appropriately when talking to or approaching an adult. There was always a dreadful pause as

we tried to figure out who would carry the pot. There would be the rattling sounds of cutlery and we would laugh and muffle our voices. The laughter was infectious and made us look radiant. After careful thought, each got a turn to carry the heavy three-legged pot. Our hands would be painful and numb when we arrived home. Looking back, I realise how these rituals and traditional ceremonies allowed us to live abundantly and experience emotions of compassion and pure kindness. We learnt to encourage and motivate one another and we learnt about accountability and responsibility. We also built nurturing communities that forged warm and valuable friendships.

Sitting around a fire was part of growing up and brings back sentimental memories. Looking back, I can see how this allowed us to build positive relationships, work together, and share old tales and childhood memories. One particular tale I remember is the story of a giant named Khekhe who was feared in the village. It was believed that he would steal children and eat them. He was always thirsty for fresh blood. He was lonely and bitter, and whoever confronted him would face his wrath. I also remember the spicy aroma of delicious and hearty food. I remember how the fire kept me warm on winter days and nights. I learnt to have positive interactions with others, improve my social competence, and identify and manage my emotions. I was encouraged to nourish healthy relationships, to celebrate my culture, to pray for peace, and to develop a sound mind and grateful spirit.

Reflecting on these fond memories inspired me to engage in social and emotional learning. I was eager to teach my learners to share their lived experiences, to work together, and to respect nature. I particularly wanted my learners to flourish as they engaged in positive learning experiences.

4.4 Reframing Teaching and Learning

As I grew out of childhood and into womanhood, I found healing in writing and reading. I also appreciated finding learning spaces that brought harmony and hope such as my grandfather's garden. I was encouraged to adopt an optimistic attitude towards learning by being motivated emotionally and spiritually by my teachers and my lecturers at university. Taking note of Goleman's (1996) advice, I wanted to explore nature, rediscover myself, and

feed my curiosity. As I grew older, I took pleasure in the freedom of expression and I always looked forward to new beginnings. Laughter became a remedy.

I have many vivid personal memories that are deeply embedded in my heart. One particular memory is how I struggled to find my self-confidence when I reached puberty. I was 13 years old when I became conscious of my changing body. I became a woman but was imprisoned by cultural beliefs that denigrated me to a position of subordination. Lorber (2000, p. 204) states that, "...through the practice of sexism, women remain subordinate and men remain dominant", and so I now position myself as a champion for women's social recognition and equality in a country whose Constitution embraces democracy.

I am now conscious that masculinity allows boys and men to behave in an unregulated way and that girls and women are denied a fair chance. I also contemplate that it is imperative to find justice in social and emotional learning to help minimise social issues such as bullying, gender bias, and insecurities. Based on this study, I now know that I do not want my learners to be prisoners of their own emotions and to question their place and worth concerning their gender. I do not want them to be buried in self-doubt and I want to empower the boys and girls in my class equally.

I became conscious during the study of the importance of nurturing relationships and awakening the hero within me. I had to learn to accept that scars are beautiful and are part of the lessons life teaches us. When I looked back at my personal tragedies such as my father's illness and death, I recalled some of the words he had shared during his last days when his body was so frail. He was spiritually and physically fragile and even though I was only 11 years old, I felt the need to be strong for him and the rest of my family. This memory stayed with me and strengthened my resolve to understand and know my learners. Lytie (2018, p. 260) states that learners' "...willingness to open up and seek support from teachers [seems] to come down to trust and [the] history between the two parties", and I can honestly say that it was during this time of my life that I longed for a teacher who would understand and sympathise with me. I was transported into the adult world through my grief and had no one to confide in. I always saw my dad as my hero and it was a difficult journey to come to terms with his death. Holland (2008, p. 412) asserts that one 'certainty' of childhood is "...that your parents will always be there and available", and it was thus hard to face life without my dad. I

had a lot of questions, felt resentment and bitterness, and was shattered. What was going to happen to my family? I replayed memories of happy times before his sickness and struggled to move on after his passing.

However, reflecting on my childhood experiences also made me realise that adventure exhilarates us and awakens emotions that might have held us back if we had buried them too deep. Remembering my childhood adversities made me realise that we should not go through grief alone but that we should always seek support from and interact with people who have also experienced loss. Lane, Rowland and Beinart (2014) argue that people deal with their emotions by reflecting on their professional roles, embracing emotional distance, and seeking support from colleagues as well as outside the working environment. If I had been mature enough to do this, it might have made my healing easier and I might have felt accepted. I remember the days when I was haunted and imprisoned by my toxic thoughts and when I cried for salvation. I felt isolated and alone. Heath and Cole (2012) argue that when grief-stricken children witness teachers' and their peers' emotional expressions, they learn to express and cope with their own grief. By being allowed to express deep emotions in a classroom setting is thus more liberating than when this happens in isolation. I now understand that when our emotions are expressed outside the public eye and when they are shielded and secluded, there is little space for healing and comfort. Therefore, privatising grief often leads to further loneliness. I thus realise that, now and in the future, I have to support my learners on any such path of sorrow and loss.

Ultimately, I learnt that I could explore social and emotional learning through friendships and by sharing life's challenges and triumphs with those closest to me, including my learners. I learnt to engage in social interactions, to participate in multifaceted and cooperative play, to share and embrace different perspectives, and to cultivate fruitful ways of resolving conflict. I discovered that the roles played by my friends and family in my life were invaluable and that having healthy relationships with them built my self-esteem. Therefore, when I forced myself to be deliberately absent thinking that I would feel secure and safe from the rest of the world, I retarded the process of healing. I now realise that I had to learn to be resilient and have faith. I needed to feed my faith by being hopeful, communicating my thoughts, engaging in journal writing, and listening to music. This journey also involved consistent prayer, fellowship,

praise and worship, and finding self-acceptance. I had to applaud myself and forgive myself by finding my inner voice and emancipating myself.

When I re-read and reflected on what I had recorded in the sections under '*Reliving my childhood experiences*', I realised that I was still unlearning the parts of myself that were heart-breaking and undesirable. I am now grateful for the spiritual and emotional guidance that my faith brought me and for finding graceful moments that enhanced my inner strength.

What I learnt from my personal history was to become more conscious of accommodating emotions and recognising the individuality of each learner in my class. I thus engaged in classroom activities that would help me identify their strengths rather than expose their flaws (see Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven). With reference to my learning based on my personal history, I also wanted to bring more colour to their learning and infuse them with positive thinking inside and outside the classroom. Remembering my homestead and the celebrations we had had reminded me of the value of nature. Coetzee and Jansen (2007) argue that learners become fully integrated and functioning members of society when they engage in social and emotional learning. I anticipated that, by engaging in and exploring social and emotional learning in my classroom, I would enhance learner interaction and creativity. My experiences of the peace and serenity of nature also enthused me to explore social and emotional learning in my classroom. I wanted to share my love of nature, express my emotions, and enjoy reading with my learners. Also, I became more sentient of the importance of being aware of what is happening in learners' lives inside and outside the school and I wanted to provide them with a supportive space where they could share their opinions and feelings and felt at home.

A vivid memory that always allows my spirit and emotions to soar is the picture my mind of the hills of my homeland on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal. I often escaped to these hills in sheer bliss. Rainy days were a delight when we went on long, adventurous walks. The ground was wet and slippery at times and we took pleasure in the smells of nature. Social interactions and celebrations also allowed me to learn more about my culture and to celebrate healthy relationships that united families. I recall visits to my grandpa's vegetable garden, which encouraged me to be enthusiastic and to respect nature. I learnt gradually as I matured to support my intuitive voice that was somehow soothing and therapeutic through

optimistically channelling my thoughts. My grandfather's garden was my sanctuary at times when I felt overwhelmed and anxious. I took pleasure in admiring the variety of vegetables that grew there and being in the garden brought the feeling of abundant happiness as I witnessed its willingness to give, to grow, to feed, and to nourish. The garden also represented nature and being nurtured. It was there that I could organise my thoughts as I was in a safe space. In the same way, I wanted my learners to experience freedom and contentment. I wanted to fill them with positivity while I developed as a teacher at the same time. I wanted to create a philosophical classroom community and a safe learning environment. Reading novels as a learner emancipated me and made me feel more creative, free-spirited, confident, and happy, and I wanted my learners to embrace the joy of reading as well.

Exploring social and emotional learning cultivated my personal growth and allowed me to embrace being an individual. Being a spiritual person, I am intrigued that the essence of spirituality links to the topic of religion. I reflect through prayer, praise and worship, and reading the Bible. I would like to think that spirituality is the strength and power that lead to our emotional well-being. I would thus like my classroom to be a place of refuge and peace and a space where spirituality reigns. I learnt that my classroom needs to support my learners' spiritual growth and should be the foundation of their hope and faith.

4.5 Conclusion

Continuing to share my personal history about social and emotional learning in this chapter, I presented memory stories that revealed my experiences of social and emotional learning as a child and a prospective teacher. By recounting my lived experiences, I succeeded in identifying revelations of aspects I wished to explore with Grade 4 learners in the classroom. I grew emotionally and intellectually as I interacted with different people from different backgrounds. I now understand how my past played a major part in how I constructed social relationships and experienced my emotions. The discourse disclosed how my reflections were elicited by photographs of artefacts, letter writing, and journal writing. I explained how my lived experiences shaped my thinking and enhanced my understanding of teaching and learning. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the eminence of re-entering our personal memories and narrating these reflections in a truthful manner. By engaging in personal history self-study, I refined my personal and professional development as it was impacted by

my social and cultural experiences. My reflections on my childhood experiences revealed that, at times, I built barriers to protect myself from the rest of the world. I acknowledged that I had often suppressed my emotions and struggled to express myself in meaningful words and that I had allowed negative emotions to overwhelm me. I had to learn to be kind to myself and to be patient and celebrate my flaws as well as my growth. It was a daily process to choose to be kind and gracious to myself. Each day I learnt to build my self-confidence and to be resilient when I faced adversity.

In Chapter Five, I shall narrate my learners' experiences of exploring social and emotional learning. I shall describe how they learnt to express themselves freely by means of journal writing and interactive classroom and outdoor activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNPACKING EMOTIONS AND DAILY LEARNING ENCOUNTERS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four I recounted my personal history with specific reference to my social and emotional learning during my childhood and adolescence. The process of retracing my personal history exposed various areas that would help me to recognise the individuality of each learner in my class. I wanted to concentrate on their strengths rather than their flaws and give recognition to their voices, thoughts, and emotions. My memories of the outdoors and the impact of nature on my mood allowed me to feel more creative as a researcher and teacher. They filled me with a sense of belonging and hope. I thus wanted to share my love of nature and my optimism with my learners through meaningful conversations and classroom interactions. Furthermore, I had become mindful of the importance of my learners' backgrounds and individuality and wanted to infuse my classroom with compassion. I knew it had to be a safe space where they would be able to share their opinions and feelings openly and frankly.

In Chapter Five I offer a detailed explanation of the classroom interactions my learners and I engaged in. I reflect on Lesson 1 to Lesson 3 that I had taught for the specific purpose of enhancing my understanding of emotional and social learning in this self-study project. I planned and executed lessons English and Social Science (Geography) lessons focused on social and emotional learning. I describe my daily teaching strategies and the learning experiences of my 41 Grade 4 learners. Only the data of the learners whose parents had given permission were used in my reflections. I respond to the second research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?* I also utilised my reflections in my teacher's developmental portfolio and my daily journal and evaluate my learners' written and drawing activities as their well as their oral responses.

The lessons were conducted in English as it was the medium of instruction at the study site. The contents of all the lessons were aligned with the prescribed National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for Grade 4 (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). Audio recordings were made of the learners' responses and my teaching. In

my narrations of how these lessons developed, I offer examples of the learners' class work and activities. I also present excerpts from my daily and reflective journals to illustrate my interpretations and state of mind and to express how my learning developed. To ensure confidentiality, the learners' class work is presented without their names and pseudonyms are used when referring to particular learners. No faces are shown in the photographs.

I also engaged in retrospective journal writing. Through this self-reflective process, I was able to adopt and sustain a positive mind-set. I reflected on how I felt about certain circumstances and how I reacted. This process helped to make me a better teacher and a resource to my learners for their learning. To render this process valid and authentic, I posed thought-provoking questions to myself and, by frankly addressing them, I was able to develop a deep level of understanding of my own as well as my learners' experiences.

This chapter is titled *Unpacking emotions and daily learning encounters* as it offers my insights into the meaningful experiences that my learners and I shared. I describe how we celebrated our differences and I unpack some emotive conversations that exposed our vulnerabilities and strengths. In essence, I discuss how social and emotional learning facilitated and cultivated learning.

5.2 Unpacking English Lessons

5.2.1 Lesson 1: English Reading Comprehension

Before I presented this lesson I had had countless experiences that had enlightened me to consider people's feelings and their social backgrounds. I therefore looked forward to encountering glorious aspects of my learners by reading a thought-provoking text and insightfully identifying the emotions that unfolded during the activity. I hoped that the lesson would allow us to attain understanding of a range of emotions and to identify emotional patterns such as sympathy, love, and respect. I also hoped to create a safe and nurturing learning space. I understood that my learners might be afraid of being invisible and I thus anticipated that, through social and emotional learning, I would be able to build positive relationships that would enhance their emotional strength and allow them to be assertive.

I chose an English reading comprehension text that I believed would allow my learners to explore social and emotional learning. I wanted to tap into their emotions, see what they valued most in their lives, and how they dealt with their daily challenges. I hoped that reading *The people who hugged trees* would allow them to be in touch with nature and their emotions and that they would search for deeper meaning in their own daily encounters. I envisaged that social interaction, growing unity, and assertive expressions would grow from this lesson and endorse any positive values my learners believed in. The reading text and the comprehension activity were taken from the Platinum English Home Language Grade 4 learners' textbook (Heese, et al., 2012) which is on the DBE's list of prescribed textbooks.

The text is about warmth and friendship in a community that saves trees. Their only intention is to protect the trees and not to cause any commotion or conflict in the village. The villagers sacrifice their own safety as they put their bodies between the falling axes and the trees to stop a Maharajah from felling the trees. The text also symbolises the safety and security that trees offer human settlements. A lesson to be learnt from this text is that schools can open opportunities for learners to be open minded and to work collaboratively to accomplish set goals.

5.2.1.1 Pre-Reading Activity

Theme: Preserving Nature

Prior to the reading activity, I decided to have an outside lesson as I was optimistic that being outside would allow my learners to think cautiously, to be sensitive, and to learn and play freely. I thought this would be an adventurous and fun-filled way of learning and exploring social and emotional learning. I aimed to let my learners' creative energy surge and for us to interact socially. Having a lesson outside proved to be an enchanting idea as the learners were enthused when I mentioned it to them while we were in class.

I admired the landscape, the old and youthful trees, their trunks and strong branches, the steady roots, and the tall trees that sent their branches high into the sky and commanded us to look up and admire the glorious canopy they created. The school's playground was covered with a variety of trees – some fragile, some strong and curved, others bare or leafy, and many twisted and gnarled. I felt that this space was perfect for educational and social experiences.

However, the weather proved to be challenging as it was fairly cold and there was a strong wind. There were also a couple of other classes outside on the playground. Before I started the lesson, I was concerned that my learners would be more intrigued by a group of learners who were dancing and doing role play for creative arts than by my lesson. I noticed that my learners could relate to these learners and also wanted to join in. I began to feel a little apprehensive.

Fortunately, I managed to draw my learners' attention by asking them to clap their hands in time with the music being played for the other class. This made them feel part of the fun and the group that was practising their dance moves. My learners became engaged in that lesson as they enthusiastically kept the beat while clapping their hands and tapping their feet. As the other class moved back and forth, they swung as the beat picked up pace. Even though this was not part of my initial plan, this served as an ice breaker that liberated my learners and they participated more freely in my lesson. I observed how they connected with the world around them as they were able to communicate their emotions without really saying much. Their movements and facial expressions said it all.

I wanted my learners to build healthy relationships that would inspire them to do better and to work in a collaborative manner. I wanted them to share their ideas, thoughts and emotions liberally. It was crucial for my learners to interact with their peers, as this is vital with respect to developing social experiences. I saw it as my duty to introduce positive values that would nurture peer relationships such as being compassionate, encouraging, sensitive to differences, and being sympathetic. Northfield and Sherman (2004, p. 294) suggest that teachers "...can influence peer relationships by establishing values, standards and norms in a caring classroom that is supportive of strong nurturing relationships". Engaging in group or class discussions is also imperative for intellectual growth, but the need for dialogue goes beyond this skill as it is also about democracy, having voice in society, and being able to question the status quo. I hoped that this lesson would open such conversations.

Soon I asked the question, "*What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you see a tree?*" I wanted to evoke my learners' thoughts and feelings and to find out what they associated trees with. For me a tree is a place of refuge, safety and security. It is also a gift of nature that breeds life and instils harmony.

Awande whispered to a fellow learner while the rest of the class laughed and giggled. Then one of my learners interjected, *“Berries! I want to climb it!”* Mellissa whispered, *“Ummm...Ma’am, apples, mangoes or berries. I love fruits.”* I asked if she thought of picking fruit when she saw a tree. Thabo raised his hand, desperately trying to catch my attention. *“Ma’am, when I see a tree I just wonder how long it’s been around.”* Tristen expressed a passion and love for nature, saying, *“Trees are part of nature and they give us oxygen and that is why we need them.”* *“Oh yes, I love trees too!”* Awande exclaimed. *“We can play hide and seek.”* Ayden said, *“Trees also help us to see the view, like to see different buildings, to see our neighbourhood.”* Overall, this proved to be an engaging activity that got my learners thinking.

Next, I encouraged them to go and hug the trees (see Figure 5.1: Graceful Nature) and to come back and share with us what emotions they experienced when they embraced trees. While we were working outside, I also asked my learners to write down their feelings on a piece of paper. I was quite amazed by their responses. The class seemed excited and thrilled and responded in animated voices. I had to ask them to be composed and then I watched them as they sprinted to hug the trees. When I explained to them that they could hug any tree, they were disbelieving. No teacher had ever done that! It appeared that they could not believe that they were doing something new – some activity that did not involve writing at all and in which they had the freedom to do as they pleased. This seemed to be exhilarating as they delightedly revealed their thoughts and feelings. For instance, Awande shouted excitedly as she ran to hug a tree, *“Ma’am said we can hug any tree!”* *“Really?”* shouted Kristelle, sounding a bit astonished and requiring my reassurance. *“Ma’am, can we even hug this tree?”* I nodded to reassure her.

After they had each hugged a tree, I received a range of responses. San raised his hand and said, *“I felt happy and excited.”* I asked, *“But why did you feel happy and excited?”* He answered, *“Because, Ma’am, it felt good and calm. I like hugging trees. It makes me respect nature.”* *“Is there anyone else who would like to share their feelings with us?”* I asked the class. Tristen quickly raised his hand and said, *“I also care about trees. It felt good hugging a tree and I don’t think people should cut them down.”* I responded, *“Oh, what makes you say that?”* Tristen replied, *“Ma’am, trees do not harm anyone. So why destroy something that is*

harmless? They give us oxygen and help us to live.” Linda interrupted, “I felt like I was hugging a person. I like hugging people.” Ayden also shared a feeling which I found quite enthralling. He said, “Ma’am, I felt like I was rich and like I was not even in Durban.” We all laughed and I asked him why he felt that way. He responded by saying, “Because when I was hugging the tree the leaves were falling on me and I felt like it was money.” Eyes shining, Ayabonga said, “I felt like I was hugging my mom because I love my mom.” Jaden sputtered, “Ummm....Ma’am, I felt proud...wonderful...and...like I was part of the tree.” Melissa declared, “I felt very thrilled and I did not feel sad. It was so nice. I could not believe that I was at school...I thought that I was at home.”

According to Cornwell and Bundy (2009), the key objectives of the emotional curriculum are to develop emotional vocabulary, to allow learners to recognise and understand their own emotions and others’ feelings in an appropriate manner, and to exercise self-control. They also highlight the importance of developing social skills that are needed to build relationships and preserve friendships. I wanted my learners to build positive relationships and to adopt an optimistic approach towards learning and their daily challenges. I was thus intrigued when I observed that they could freely express their feelings through storytelling and in relation to their everyday lives. I would like to think this allowed them to locate their moral compass. I had hoped to prompt emotional responses that would allow my learners to talk about their emotions, and hugging trees was a wonderful cue. I also learned that these children were able to process and analyse their emotions and relate them to situations and relationships outside the school.



Figure 5.1: Graceful Nature

My learners hugged the trees enthusiastically and expressed their feelings and thoughts creatively and imaginatively. I was pleased to see their cheerful facial expressions and to listen to their concerns regarding preserving and sustaining nature. Moreover, the act of hugging evoked affectionate feelings that they could relate to people and they understood and verbalised the importance of embracing and appreciating how much love and care for others meant. Their responses also showed how a hug can reinforce a relationship. I realised that this activity allowed my learners to expand their imaginations and to appreciate their loved ones and those that they held dear to their hearts. I was quite emotional at the end of the lesson as I felt that I had exposed them to experiencing powerful and lasting emotions and that hugging these trees enhanced their social consciousness.

5.2.1.2 Reading activity 2

Title: “The people who hugged the trees” (3 May 2018)

Theme: Social awareness and nature conservation

Taylor and Larson (1999, p. 334) argue that moral dilemmas “...are innately intriguing, focus on issues vital to democratic living, and relate to concerns specific to students’ everyday lives”. The comprehension text that my learners read introduced a clash of values that resulted

in conflict and acrimony. In our lives, there may also be conflict such as between sustaining certain human livelihoods and preserving nature. My learners had to question such conflicts and decide how they would address it. This required ethical perspectives that could only have been imbibed from the ethics of their environmental and community contexts.

Reading and discussing the text encouraged learners to work cooperatively and to achieve a common goal. It allowed them to be socially aware and to consider real-life issues. Zins et al. (2007, p. 191) highlight the point that schools “...are social places and learning is a social process”. Social and emotional learning thus allows learners to explore who they are through their self-awareness. They need to learn to be socially mindful, to make conscious decisions, and to be competent in managing their lives and building relationships to help promote their academic success.

Below is the text we read as a class and that inspired the way we viewed and understood nature and our relationships. We learnt to respect our community and nature, to express our emotions without fear, and to value and build relationships in the face of adversity and conflict.

The People Who Hugged Trees

One morning, Amrita spotted a group of men with heavy axes. They were headed toward the forest. The Maharajah, a powerful prince, wanted the wood to build a fortress. Amrita ran to the forest. “Please, leave my tree,” Amrita begged. “Chop me instead!” The axe man shoved her away and swung his blade. Again and again the axe man chopped until Amrita’s tree crashed to the ground. Amrita knelt down and wept. Her arms tenderly grasped the tree’s dying branches.

Villagers jumped in front of the trees, preventing the axe man from cutting them down. This angered the Maharajah. “Cut the trees down!” he shouted. Just then a violent sand storm broke out in the desert. Sand piled up high around the village. Amrita saw that the trees stopped the desert from destroying the well and the village. The Maharajah stood and stared at the forest. He too observed this fact.

“You have shown great courage and wisdom to protect your trees. Your trees will not be cut,” the Maharajah declared. “Your forest will always remain a green place in the desert.” The people rejoiced when they heard these words. They sang and danced long into the night.

Activity

- a) Hug a tree, and write down three emotions that erupted when you hugged the tree.
- b) Discuss the following questions:
 - 1. Who are the good characters in the story?
 - 2. Who are the bad characters in the story?
 - 3. Who was the Maharajah?
 - 4. Why were the trees being chopped down?
- c) Amrita felt strongly about her special tree. Is there anything in your life that you feel strongly about?
- d) Write down words in the text that show how Amrita felt about the trees.
- e) How do you feel about what the Maharajah and the axe men did?

Figure 5.2: Reading passage: “The People Who Hugged Trees”

The reading comprehension activity required my learners to express what they felt strongly about, and I found that most of the answers were captivating. This activity elicited an abundance of emotions that were forged in sincerity and honesty. This revealed that we are all emotional beings. I was able to identify concurring feelings and multifaceted emotions and hoped that my learners would also be enthused to adopt such positivity. Cornwell and Bundy (2009, p. 12) state that the ability to recognise similar feelings “...involves appreciating that feelings can be complex and cannot always be described as comprising one emotion”. It was intriguing that the emotional curriculum that encourages the development of the child emotionally and socially came to life during this lesson as the learners’ stories and emotions unfolded in my classroom. The classroom became a learning space where we shared emotions and ideas and listened respectfully to others’ thoughts. I cherished the constructive and heartfelt responses my learners offered. They wrote about their feelings and, in the middle of the lesson, I asked those who were comfortable to share their feelings with us to raise their hands and tell us what they had written down.

Jessica stated, “*I feel strongly about my family because they mean everything to me and I love them with all my heart. I will never be the same without them. They make me happy.*” Tristen conveyed that he also felt strongly about certain things when he asserted, “*I feel very strongly about myself, God and my family. The reason is because God made me who I am and my family supports me. That is why I feel strongly about God and my family*”. I asked Tristen to

explain why he felt so strongly about himself. He was a bit puzzled and reluctant at first but then said, “*Umm...I feel strongly about myself ...ummm...to be honest, I don't know why I feel strongly about myself.*” His hesitation depicted that he was able to revisit his feelings. Themba said, “*I feel strongly about animals.*” No to be outdone, Thabo said, “*I feel strongly about the galaxy, because without the galaxy there would be no solar systems or any kind of planet.*” Zandile shared the same sentiments as Tristen when she mentioned that she felt strongly about her life because it was precious to her. I acknowledged this and found her comment quite insightful. What I found fascinating about these exchanges is how one relatively mundane emotion and insight quickly stimulated ever-expanding thoughts that embraced not only family and nature, but the universe. This became a metaphor for how learning occurs: we learn by moving from the mundane and the known to the unfamiliar, imaginative, and the unknown.

Various answers also emanated from the other reading comprehension questions. For instance, Awande discussed how angry and sad she had felt when the Maharajah wanted to chop down the trees. She sympathised with Amrita and wished she could help her. Wendy also expressed empathy for Amrita as she said that she had felt heartbroken. According to Cohen and Marans (1999, p. 116): “An overlapping and equally critical dimension of life is how children feel about themselves and others – their conscious and unrecognised narratives or images of self and others [will depict this]”. I realised that our unrecognised experiences and the memories, feelings, sensations, expectations, and wishes that they elicit influence our motivation and capacity to learn.

It was amazing to witness how these learners were persuaded to adopt new positions through the exploration of their feelings and thoughts that they had not even been fully aware of at the time we started the lesson. Cohen and Marans (1999) state that a psychoanalytic informed perspective regarding development involves an appreciation of how past conscious and unconscious experiences paint and craft current experiences and future developmental challenges. As I had wanted to expose my learners to a new learning environment and experience and to understand and become conscious of their surroundings, it was eye-opening to learn how their past experiences shaped their present. I hoped that this would bring positive change and impact their future learning.

The text and the shared reflections on it elevated the learners' thoughts and emotions to the extent that they agreed that the villagers valued and appreciated their trees – and that all people should do so. They also understood the value of the impact of nature on us at a deeper level as they commented on Amrita's courage and wisdom in saving the trees. It was evident that this discussion evoked their respect and love for nature. At the end of the lesson, they completed the questions and I was able to reflect on my learners' approach to learning and mine to teaching. I used journal writing to reflect on and direct my future lessons.

5.2.1.3 My reflections

Journal Entry

4 May 2018

I realised that having an outdoor lesson stimulated my learners' emotions and the way they interacted with one another. This was a space that opened opportunities for learning and that allowed my learners to explore their imaginations. They could learn and grow. My learners also negotiated relationships, conversations, thoughts, ideas, and expressed their emotions. They learned to work collaboratively with others. They were able to take on new challenges with an optimistic mind-set and with courage. I also learned that trees not only sustain life but that they also elicit emotions that are positive, such as feeling safe and secure, finding inner peace, and feeling respect for nature.

Retrospective Journal Entry

22 May 2018

I am beginning to realise that, when children stop going outside into the natural world to play, it can stanch their development as individuals and that of society as a whole. I recall seeing my learners' creativity and imagination explode. This unstructured way of teaching and learning allowed my learners to interact meaningfully with their surroundings and to build healthy relationships. I was pleased to witness them thinking and working more freely, drawing and expressing their own emotions, and approaching the world in innovative ways.

I wanted my learners to learn how to take care of nature. I had always been told that, if I took care of Mother Nature, she would take care of me. I realised that living things die if abused or not taken care of properly. I believe that entrusting a child to take care of the living parts of their environment means they will learn what happens when they forget to water a plant, or when they unthinkingly pull a flower out by its roots.

5.2.2 Lesson 2: English Reading Comprehension

Title: “What was Lulu like?” (30 March 2018)

Theme: Learn to be unselfish

In the previous lesson, I wanted my learners to feel gratitude and explore pure kindness. I had experienced that they were inclined to present negative emotions such as hurt, sorrow, worry, embarrassment, fear, and anger more readily than compassion and forgiveness, and was therefore encouraged to explore their experiences of positive emotions in more depth.

I first needed to identify areas that threatened their learning and development. Cohen and Marans (1999, p. 116) state that “...understanding the nature of the child’s problems helps us empathize and genuinely appreciate that the child is doing the best he or she can do”. I thus wanted to elicit healthy relationships among my learners and guide them to be aware of the challenges and difficulties that could block their learning journey. I anticipated that reading a story that my children could easily relate to in terms of social skills and emotions would help to underscore what I was trying to cultivate through my focus on social and emotional learning. I knew that these children would love being outdoors just as I had felt more emancipated, relaxed, and open-minded in my grandfather’s garden. The school playground was a social setting where my learners spent their mornings before school started as well as their break times. I thus anticipated that being outdoors for lessons would help them find a sense of belonging, reduce their anxiety, and keep them energised.

5.2.2.1 Pre-reading activity

My intention with the next ‘outdoor classroom’ was to establish an optimistic atmosphere that would allow my learners to be in an engaging and inspiring space that would nurture their creativity and imaginations. The sun beat down warmly from the sky and it was a perfect summer’s day. Relaxing on the garden bench, I appreciated the commotion caused by pigeons that were frantically fighting over bread crumbs. The blue sky was vivid against the green of the trees. The garden breathed tranquillity which was of course disturbed when my learners walked onto the playground.

This lesson occurred towards the end of the day. I seated the learners in a spot where we overlooked the crisp blue swimming pool. I hoped that my learners would get a chance to cool off in it at the end of the day but, unfortunately, the timetable was not in our favour. I started the lesson by asking my learners to rate their day from 1-10 and to explain why. This was an ice breaker that my research supervisor had told me about. It allowed us to exchange ideas and to share the emotions that we had encountered earlier that day. They were also able to identify similar experiences and feelings and talk about how they had tackled their challenges and which emotions had welled up in them as they responded to the situations they had faced. I also shared my experiences and emotions. San stated, *“I rate my day 3 out of 10. I was ill-mannered and mischievous in the hall this morning.”* I asked, *“Oh, so what happened?”* San replied, *“Mr S took away my first break. I felt bad and embarrassed.”* *“So how can we make it better?”* I asked San. *“I need to change my behaviour and listen when we are in the hall,”* he answered.

Surprisingly, most of my learners were moderately happy with their day and some mentioned that it was much better because they were outside now. It had been a long and busy day and I had not expected them to be elated. They displayed enthusiasm and exhilaration and were ready to learn. I hoped that the activity (reading the text “What was Lulu like?”) would allow my learners to better understand emotions and that it would expand their emotional vocabulary.

Listening to my learners’ enthused responses I realised that, when we become aware of our feelings and when we allow ourselves to talk about them, it deepens the intensity with which we are able to relate to and interact with one another. Coetzee and Jansen (2007, p. 67) suggest that emotions “...should be observed, acknowledged, reported and dealt with in a socially responsible manner”. People need to recognise their emotions as important and valuable, because suppressing and dismissing certain emotions are acts that do not support teaching and learning. Moreover, being outside the classroom opened the door to verbal expressions of emotions and to value the relationship that was forged between teacher and class.

5.2.2.2 Reading Activity

Title: “What Lulu was like?”

Theme: Kindness and Compassion

I decided that my learners would read a story from the English activity book and to align the themes that emerged with the experiences they encountered daily. This activity book is on the DBE’s prescribed list and the lessons in it are aligned to CAPS. It has weekly activities and exercises and serve as a guideline of what should be taught and assessed. It is thus a handy resource that ensures that teachers cover the curriculum, particularly in English and Mathematics. These workbooks were developed by the DBE under the auspices of the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga. They are referred to as the Rainbow books as they are published by Rainbow, are suitable for Grade 4-6 learners, and are available in all eleven of the South African official languages. They are available at no cost. The reading text has a number of questions that require ascertaining words children can use to express their feelings and reactions to events that took place. It also allowed them to put themselves in Lulu’s shoes and to relate these events to their own friendships and relationships.

What Lulu was Like?

Lulu was a very selfish ten-year-old. She lived in a big house in a beautiful neighbourhood. As an only child she was spoilt. She always had nice things to eat, which she munched in front of her friends without sharing them. She never shared her toys either.

One sunny afternoon, Adam, Muzi and Kate went to play with Lulu. They decided to teach her a good lesson. Muzi took his new skateboard with him. The children took turns skating up and down the long driveway to Lulu's house on Muzi's skateboard. Lulu had begged her parents for a skateboard at Christmas but they had refused to get her one. She became angry and sulky when her friends wouldn't let her have a turn. "You get your own skateboard, Lulu!" called Adam. "Then join in the fun!" Lulu felt very downhearted and disappointed. She had expected to enjoy the afternoon, but now she felt bored and sad. She realised how unkind she had been towards her friends and how sad they must have felt.

Suddenly she had an idea. "Why don't you all come inside and have some juice and chocolate cake?" she said to them. "And afterwards we can play on my computer." Lulu's friends were surprised at her sudden change of attitude. They were happy that Lulu was no longer thinking only of herself. They thought that she would start sharing her toys and sweets more often.

Writing Activities

1. Describe how Lulu's friends felt about her selfish behaviour.
2. Circle adjectives that describe Lulu.

Figure 5.3: "What was Lulu like?"

Amanda looked at the picture of the girl and stated, "*The girl looks upset.*" Sihle agreed, "*Yes, she looks like she is crying.*" "*That is true*", I responded and then asked, "*Can we guess why she is crying?*" Sim suggested, "*It is possible that she feels left out.*" I was surprised and pleased by my learners' ability to identify emotions and how readily they conjectured about the sequence of events and the emotional pattern of the story.

While we were reading I asked my learners, "*What good lesson was Lulu going to be taught by her friends?*" Jaden responded, "*Ma'am, to share.*" Tristen said, "*They will not give her a*

turn...” Mellissa interrupted Tristen, saying. “*They want her to feel left out and to know what it feels like when she refuses to share her toys with them.*” San said, “*They will teach her to be kind to others.*” I asked my learners, “*What are Lulu’s friends teaching her?*” Awande exclaimed, “*To share and to be kind and to respect other people!*” Amahle stated, “*To value friendship.*” Mandla said, “*She has to stop being selfish and jealous.*” Then Ayden stated, “*To start being caring.*”

We discussed the kind of person that Lulu was at the beginning of the story. We learned that she was selfish and unkind and we agreed that she was unpleasant. We talked about how her friends taught her to be kind by making her feel left out. We realised that Lulu then began to adopt a more positive attitude towards her friends and people around her. The lesson was stimulated by shared reading, as I had read the first half of the story and randomly chose children to read the rest of it. In the middle of the lesson, we were interrupted by mischievous monkeys, the same as those that habitually roam wild in the city of Durban, and so we decided to move and finish our lesson in the classroom.

The class circled these words in their English book: *selfish, silly, unkind* and *spoiled*. We all agreed that, at the beginning, Lulu had displayed a cynical attitude but later adopted a different attitude that displayed kindness, compassion, and friendliness. We then discussed the values of friendship such as showing random acts of kindness, respecting one another, and being compassionate. At the end of the lesson the learners completed an exercise that helped them to identify different emotions and actions that prevented them from working collaboratively. They also looked at and interpreted the illustrations as a visual reading skill that expanded their understanding of feelings and their vocabulary base.

5.2.2.3 My reflections

Journal Entry

30 March 2018

I understand that social and emotional learning is about allowing ourselves to gain a sense of self. We then begin to understand ourselves better and discover parts of who we are that we never knew existed. In this lesson, I was able to unfold patterns of relationships that existed among my learners and myself. I realised that we should not invade others’ thoughts and emotions but that we have to allow relationships to develop naturally. I hoped that this

awareness would allow my learners to feel comfortable and liberated. I thus wanted them to express themselves freely and openly. They shared their feelings regarding the text and the illustrations and understood that adopting a positive mind-set in the forging of friendships is important.

Retrospective Journal Entry

16 April 2018

Looking back, I understand that children need to be given the opportunity to engage in different real-life experiences. I think this will allow them to understand different relationships. I realise that social and emotional learning is important for discovering a sense of self and when learners begin to uncover and explore their identities. My learners should thus develop holistically by taking responsibility for their surroundings, relationships, and emotions. I also acknowledge that childhood experiences are not acquired in isolation as they are entrenched in our everyday activities and encounters. I look forward to creating heart-warming experiences for my learners that will warm their hearts and enrich their minds.

5.3 Unpacking a Geography Lesson

5.3.1 Lesson 3: Social Science

Title: “People and Places” (24 March 2018)

Theme: Diversity in living spaces

5.3.1.1 Pre-reading activity

When I entered my classroom in preparation for my Geography lesson on “People and Places”, I saw that it looked energising and colourful and I anticipated an interactive and learner-centred lesson (see Figure 5.4). I looked at the bright grammar and language posters, the art work depicting my learners’ hands that symbolise reaching for hope and keeping a positive mind-set, and the boxes of stationery that were stacked neatly next to the candy jar that never seemed to be full.



Figure 5.4: A bright and inviting corner in my classroom

My classroom reflected the splendour of nature's colours and I anticipated a lesson that would be interesting, interactive, and informative, but also one that would enhance a sense of caring and sensitivity for others' emotions. I hoped my learners would interact freely, have open minds, and would become aware of the emotional footprints that each interaction leaves. I also saw a welcoming classroom that exuded a positive atmosphere. I had tried to create a learning environment that would be sensitive to my learners' social and emotional needs and hoped that it would be a place of nurturing that would allow my learners to have an optimistic mind-set, a positive sense of self, competence, and immeasurable joy in their learning experiences.

I had looked for words that might encourage my learners to remain hopeful and optimistic. I had an emotional vocabulary board in my classroom (Figure 5.5) on which I displayed words such as 'courageous', 'love', 'compassion', 'kindness', and 'help'. These words had been discussed at the beginning of the year to maintain our classroom as a healthy learning space. These words were intended to keep my learners strong-minded and sanguine and to encourage them to take on new challenges with a stout heart.



Figure 5.5: My learners' understanding of a learning community

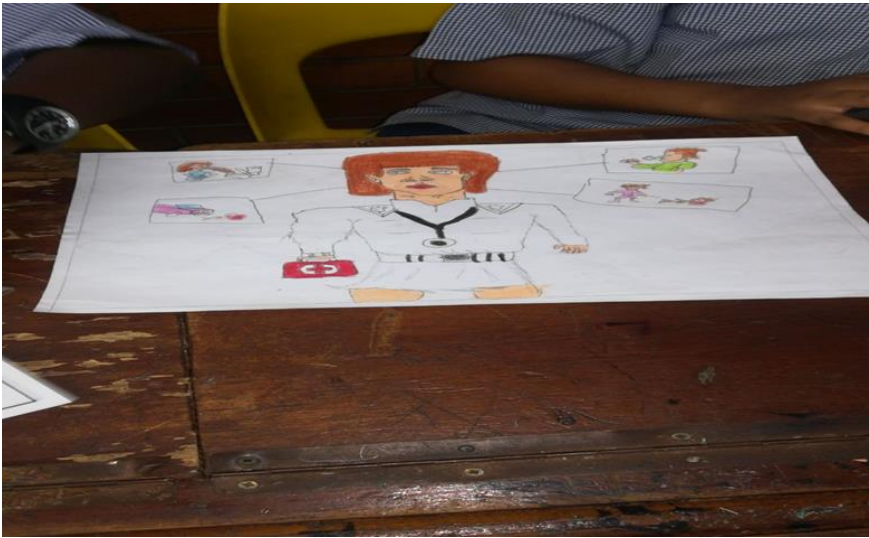
The mood in the classroom was influenced by a music lesson that was in progress in the classroom below mine. My learners sang along and were listening so attentively that you could swear they were also present in the school hall! They seemed to love the sounds and rhythm of Afro-pop music. The familiar music also allowed me to relive my childhood and I began to reimagine myself sitting in the school hall as a little girl. I was also reminded of the kind of dance moves my friends and I had enjoyed as children. When I planned the lesson, I decided to introduce it with a thought-provoking ice breaker that focused on social and emotional learning (retrieved from: <http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/flag-of-me>).

I looked forward to facilitating an activity that would permit my learners to respond naturally and to speak from their hearts. I was intrigued by this activity and felt that it would assist us to explore social and emotional learning. Coetzee and Jansen (2007, p. 32) emphasise the following: “Psychological safety means behaving consistently so that learners can accurately anticipate and predict what to expect”. I understood that I needed to be consistent in exploring emotions and in addressing social relationships and I acknowledged that such an approach would ensure a safe learning space for my learners.

The ice breaker is called “A flag of me.” To start, each of my learners received a blank A4 sheet of paper. I encouraged them to use coloured pencils and to be creative. Each had to design a flag that would tell something about themselves. I motivated them by highlighting

that this could be inspired by their favourite colour, sport, or cartoon. They could also include their family, where they came from, places they would like to visit, and what they believed in. I explained that, soon after they had finished, they would have to present their flags to the class.

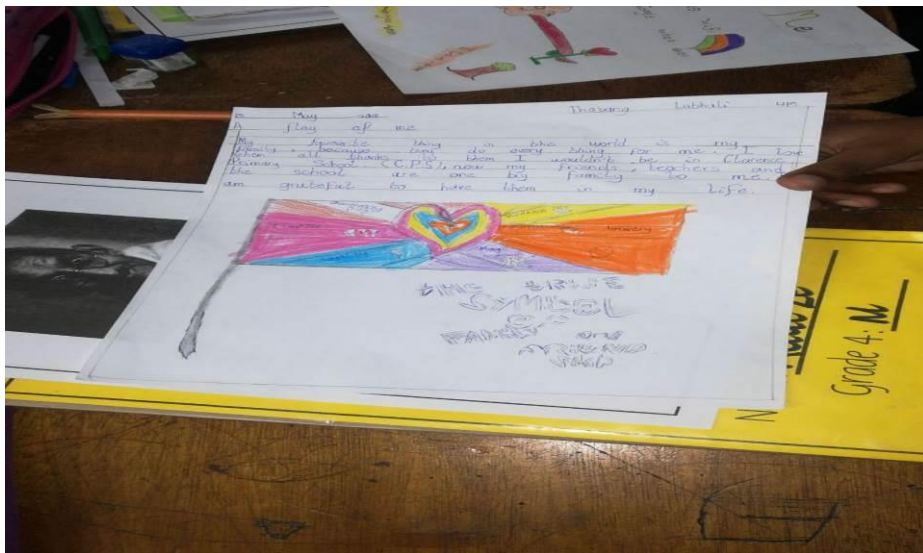
At first my learners seemed perplexed, but they were soon taken by the idea and asked me if they could write a few sentences and draw pictures to illustrate their flag. I made it clear that they had the liberty to go as far as they desired. I anticipated that doing this ice breaker would allow me to gain insight into my learners' personal spaces and I allowed them to spontaneously share who they were. I also thought that drawing and writing would be a fun and child-friendly way for them to express themselves and to communicate their social backgrounds. In addition, I hoped that this flag activity would help them convey their personalities and social perspectives (see Figure 5.6 A-D: "A flag of me").



A



B



C



D

Figure 5.6 A-D: “A flag of me” - Activity completed by the learners

Most of my learners exhibited an eagerness to participate and share who they were with the class. Some were reserved and did not feel comfortable to participate verbally. I took the liberty to walk around while they were busy. I noticed that one was drawing a South African flag and one asked me if she could draw any flag. Soon the class was filled with pure joy and the learners looked forward to sharing “a flag of me.” To begin, Melissa described her flag as follows: *“My name is Mellissa and my surname is Ndlovu. The reason I drew this flag is because it allowed me to use my imagination.”* Sihle interrupted, *“Ma’am, San wants to tell us about his flag.”* San said, *“My name is San. I have my father’s name and my mother’s name, and my favourite colour and my house is painted in blue. I’ve always liked this colour from the age of 6 years old. My favourite place to go to is the harbour and I enjoy a boat cruise. My favourite teacher is Miss Mkhize because you teach us everything and to do the right thing. My birthday is on 20 December, and I was born in 2008.”*

Linda stated, *“I live in Mgababa and I want to be a teacher when I grow up because I love teaching. My favourite sports are basketball and swimming. My mom’s name is Hle. She is kind and my granny’s name is Akhona and I love her. I love my family.”* Cebolihle raised his hand ecstatically, saying: *“Ma’am, I am ready to tell you about my flag...my flag is about the*

things I like and places I love to go to. I visit Bridge City in KwaMashu and Cape Town. I have two dogs and three puppies. I am very caring, loving, sweet and funny. When I grow up I want to be a doctor so I can help people and heal the sick.” Then Amanda simply stood up. She was one of the more introverted learners in the class. She was quite meek and hardly spoke unless she was spoken to. She said, *“The reason I designed this flag is because of my life and future. My favourite hobby is swimming. I want to be a doctor so I can help patients.”* It was interesting to know that my learners were concerned about ill people and wished to heal them.

When Olerato stood up, she was interrupted by Andile who exclaimed, *“I am after Amanda. I said I was next!”* Andile simply continued, *“I would like to talk about my dog. I like my dog because she is special to me. She is about to have four puppies. She is also very smart and good. I will never lose her and her puppies. I will always look after her and her puppies.”* Olerato seemed anxious, but she always lacked confidence and constantly sought reassurance. This time she spoke with confidence: *“My name is Olerato and my surname is Makhaye. The reason why I made this flag is because I love it and it makes me happy and it shows my favourite colour and my life. When I grow up I want to be a lawyer and fight for my people.”* Nandi voiced out, *“I like Wi-Fi because I get to Google songs and search for recipes. And Ma’am, I like making pancakes. I also love cooking.”* Amahle, who was listening attentively, soon smiled and raised her hand while trying to cover her face. She stated, *“I come from South Africa in KwaZulu-Natal. I live with my parents and my three brothers. I love to have fun with my family. I only have brothers and no sisters. I like going out with my family to Wimpy or Spur and Sun Coast to play games.”* Thabo revealed the following, *“My flag is about friendship! I want to be generous, honest, and kind.”*

5.3.1.2 Visual and reading activities

Based on the learners’ expressions of their prior knowledge of where people live and thrive, the lesson continued as we discussed human settlements. We looked at different pictures in our Viva Social Science Grade 4 textbook and focused on different settlements such as urban homes that have electricity, sanitation, and running water, and rural homes that use fire to cook, have pit latrines, and are far from shops and hospitals. I had decided to present this lesson to assist me to get a better understanding of my learners’ experiences and perspectives

and how they related to different people who lived in dissimilar places. I asked my learners what they could learn from the pictures. Most raised their hands eagerly, but some seemed a bit nervous and introverted. Satish was quite eager to participate in the classroom discussions as he exclaimed, *“Ma’am, I see some animals and homes that look like huts.”* Tristen gave an extensive explanation, and then he confidently explained, *“This is where different people live.”*

The lesson advanced to naming the places we could see. I asked, *“Well, can we please name these places?”* *“There is a farm,”* Wendy mumbled. She was followed by Andile who shouted, *“Cities and towns!”* I explained that these places are divided into urban and rural settlements. They seemed a bit puzzled and so I asked, *“Do you know what a settlement is?”* Most exclaimed *“No!”* while the rest looked blank. I referred to Tristen’s previous answer and elaborated: *“Earlier Tristen told us that these are places where people live, so that is what a settlement is. These places have different things offer. For example, rural settlements are farms and villages and urban settlements are cities and towns.”*

Looking at the different pictures I asked my learners to spot the differences. *“I see sheep and cows in the village,”* murmured Jaden. Sihle raised his hand and said, *“I see hills and mountains and homes that are far apart.”* I probed, *“Where?”* Biting his nails and looking a little uncertain, he said, *“In the village.”* *“Look at the differences between the roads and buildings,”* I hinted. I moved on by emboldening my learners to think of where they lived and to figure out if they lived in an urban or rural settlement. I asked them to support their statements.

But before we moved on I asked Linda to read the passage. She seemed delighted and asked, *“Must I start? Ummm... [clearing her throat]”*. I nodded. She read, *“In South Africa, people live together on farms and villages.”* I interrupted, *“Now these are referred to as rural settlements.”* She continued as the class listened attentively. *“People also live in cities and towns and these are called urban settlements. In rural settlements houses are far apart. In urban settlements houses are built very closely together.”*

We then read Thabo’s story in the textbook and my learners were distraught by this case study. The narrative described Thabo as a young boy who seemed like an adult because he

assumed so much responsibility, such as fetching water from the river, doing homework by candlelight, and using fire to cook. This was very different from my learners' everyday experiences because they lived in urban settlements and Thabo lived in a rural settlement. This was an eye-opening activity for them.

Thabo's Story

Thabo is 10 years old and lives in a village in Mpumalanga. He lives with his Gogo (grandmother) and his two young sisters. Thabo's mother and father work in Gauteng and only see Thabo and his sisters over Easter and Christmas. Gogo's house is very small and has no water. Thabo walks over 200 metres a day to the community tap to get water for his Gogo to clean, cook, and wash. Sometimes they get sick from the water because it is not clean. Gogo's house does not have a flush toilet. If they need to use a toilet they have to use a 'drop toilet' that is situated at the back of the house.

Once a month, Thabo goes to town to buy groceries with his Gogo. They have to get up very early in the morning and catch a taxi to town. The taxi fare is very expensive. When they get back, she has to cook supper for Thabo and his sisters. Thabo makes a fire outside so Gogo can cook their favourite meal. Thabo and his sisters have to wake up very early in the morning to get to school. They have to walk very carefully, especially after rain. The roads are often muddy and the river may be too dangerous to cross. Thabo and his sisters can't wait for the bridge to be built. Gogo has no electricity, so Thabo and his sisters have to do their homework by candlelight.

Activity

1. List the resources available in Thabo's home
2. What do you think are some of the advantages of living in a city or a town?
3. Where do you prefer to live? Please explain your answer.
4. Have you experienced any challenges in a city/town or a village/farm? Please share these challenges with us.
5. Did you learn anything new? If 'Yes', tell us what you learnt.

Figure 5.7: "Thabo's story"

As they listened to Linda reading Thabo’s story, the learners’ facial expressions displayed concern, sympathy, and disbelief that some people do not live with their parents. They also expressed their emotions during our classroom discussion. For instance, I asked, *“How did you feel when we read about Thabo?”* Ayaphila babbled, *“I feel like we need to be more grateful and to appreciate what we have.”* Sim explained, *“It reminded me of my grandmother’s house in Stanger. She also does not have electricity or running water.”* Thabo said, *“I feel heartbroken that they have to fetch water from the river because the community tap is not reliable. They might get sick and die from drinking polluted water.”* Nandi stated, *“When I visit the Eastern Cape, there is no bathroom; we use the bucket to bath. It is so uncomfortable.”* Tristen sounded disheartened and alarmed when he said, *“Ma’am, it is sad that they only see their family during Easter and Christmas holidays.”* The lesson was then reinforced by reading Thandi’s story which was about a girl who lived in an urban settlement.

I wanted to my learners to be able to identify feelings and manage social relationships. As Coetzee and Jansen (2007, p. 67) assert: “Emotions should be observed, acknowledged, reported and dealt with in a socially responsible manner”. When I looked at my learners, I became conscious that when we become aware of our feelings, we allow ourselves to feel them and to deepen the intensity with which we are able to relate to and interact with one another.

Thandi’s Story

Thandi lives in a house with both her parents. Their house is located in a suburb of Cape Town. Thandi’s house has two bathrooms, three bedrooms, and a big garden. A garbage truck removes their garbage twice a week. Their street is well lit and is always clean. If the lights get broken, they get fixed by the City Council.

Thandi is taken to school every morning by her mother. When Thandi gets home from school, she washes up while her mom prepares a meal for her. Soon after, Thandi’s mom takes her to the local library to do some research for her school projects. When they are done, they go to the local shop to buy a few groceries before returning home.

Thandi’s mother gets ready to prepare supper in their big kitchen while Thandi takes a bath.

Figure 5.8: “Thandi’s Story”

My learners felt that Thandi was advantaged compared to Thabo because she was exposed to a variety of resources and services such as electricity, running water, sanitation, and a local library. My learners could also relate to Thandi's story. I questioned them by asking, "*What can we identify or find in Thandi's story?*" Olerato explained, "*Thandi is rich. She has everything she needs.*" "Okay," I replied, and asked "*why do you say so?*" Emihle supported Olerato's statement by saying, "*She has electricity and running water.*" San raised his hand and said enthusiastically, "*And she does not have to walk to school or fetch water from the river.*" However, Jaden looked a bit perturbed. I enquired, "*Jaden, what are your thoughts or feelings about Thandi's story?*" He hesitated but managed to stutter, "*Ummm...Ma'am... Ma'am, she can visit the local library and does not have to do her homework by candlelight.*"

I was also intrigued to know if my learners – or some of them – had been exposed to both these living conditions, and so I motivated them to share their experiences with the class. I explained that they could share their joys and adventures and tell us about the activities that they had been exposed to that had allowed them to build healthy relationships and assume responsibilities. I also wanted to learn how these places made them feel and how they responded to possible adversities or 'lived in the moment'. In this activity, we ticked boxes and categories of different lifestyle experiences by the learners in our country.

5.3.1.3 My reflections

Journal Entry

17 March 2019

I understand that social and emotional learning is about allowing ourselves to go through life experiences and to explore different places that we may be unsure about or that intrigue us. I realise that this can also afford us the opportunity to engage in introspection and to get to know people and places that are around us. In this way we learn about what these different settlements have to offer. This was an exhilarating and eye-opening lesson. There is power and an unbelievable energy when you look beyond the factual lesson content and take an emotional stance to learn and interact with the learners. I am sure this had a positive influence on them as well.

Retrospective Journal Entry**24 March 2019**

Reading the text of lesson 3 (Social Science Geography: People and Places) I was able to identify the need to nurture and encourage my learners to adopt an optimistic approach towards learning. I focused on enhancing my learners' understanding of different backgrounds and life experiences. It was thus important that I focused on a nurturing family environment where dignity and a positive attitude are instilled. I did not only desire to focus on my learners' individual growth, but I wanted them to acquire knowledge and embrace attitudes and values that would prepare them for life in society. This aspect of my self-study research thus allowed me to grow as a teacher as it introduced a fresh start for me. I am now ready to face my challenges with a positive mind-set and to bring out the best in each learner. It was important that I addressed these topics in such a manner that my learners gained self-awareness, self-discipline, motivation, tenacity, resilience, and character.

Journal Entry**14 May 2019**

Awande was very upset this morning. She could hardly speak when I questioned her. She later opened up and told me that during the weekend she had attended her cousin's funeral and had only been told of his passing on the morning of his burial. She was heartbroken. I realised that we all have to face adversities and challenges. As long as we still have a beating heart, there is no way around it. I sympathised with her and observed that my learners also empathised and comforted her by telling her that she was going to be fine. It was heart-warming to realise that, as young as they were, they understood that this too would pass. I know that we need to feel empathy and have the courage to share our feelings. Persistent trials and tribulations draw us nearer to courage and open us to strong emotional responses that ultimately define who we truly are. Gaining selfhood is when we discover our strengths and it makes us soar like eagles.

Journal Entry**15 May 2018**

There was a gentle breeze that rustled the leaves. My learners were all fully engaged in their activity. I decided to walk around the classroom to see who was struggling and did not understand the work. I sensed a deep vulnerability in one of my learners. She was sobbing uncontrollably but she could not express herself. I told her to go and drink some water and wash her face. There were times that I did not have all the answers and did not know how to

respond to a learner's grief. I constantly had to revisit my emotions to find the right response to empathise with them. I think of San and how he reflected who I was as a child.

5.3.1.4 Time heals: San's Story

San's Story

San radiated a vibrant spirit. He was alive and alert to everything that happened in the classroom. He was the first one to tell me if something was missing or broken. I was amazed by his attention to detail. He was also very concerned about everyone's well-being and spoke up on behalf of the introverts. I loved his energy and his mindful nature and his positive approach to every day. I noticed that even though he was one of my outspoken learners, he was also very needy emotionally. Even though he hardly completed his work or handed in his assignments or projects on time, he took pride in engaging in classroom discussions, oral presentations, and helping those who struggled to grasp new learning concepts. He was a perfect mess. I saw many similarities between San and myself, especially as I was about the same age as he when I experienced the loss of my father. I saw his anguish, the way he was constantly sharing short-lived memories of his late mom, how he always had an object or an artefact that reminded him of her. I remember the gentle yet pained smile he had every time he mentioned her name. The only difference between him and me was his courage. Unlike me, he could express himself freely and enthusiastically and engage in classroom discussions. I was determined to be his pillar of strength and refuge inside and outside the classroom whenever he needed me. I had a desire to explore social and emotional learning with all my learners, but San's emotional world was so close to mine that I had a very special place for him in my heart.

5.4 My learning

I am pleased that I was able to engage in reflections after these lessons and that I was able to revisit at my teaching methodologies and the way I had delivered the lessons. In essence, I was able to explore social and emotional learning by creating responsive and interactive learning activities. After thinking about these learning events and the emotions that had unfolded, I again read through my lesson planning and looked back at that had been achieved.

In this section I share my thoughts and feelings and uncover what I learnt as I reflected on these lessons and my overall teaching experiences.

5.4.1 Living in harmony with nature brings new perspectives

We read a text titled “*The People who hugged trees.*” This story explored the values of trust and companionship in a community that worked together to save the trees that gave them life and protection. The villagers kept saying that their only intention was to protect the trees and not to cause any conflict. The act of sacrifice, which was to throw their own bodies in the path of the swinging axes to save the trees, was selfless and devotional and inspired my learners to respect nature and to acknowledge that we have a relationship with our natural surroundings. We were also able to acknowledge that, when we take care of nature, it also takes care of us.

When my learners hugged the trees, unexpected feelings and thoughts about trees were elicited. I was delighted to see their joyful faces and listen to their concerns regarding the preservation of nature for future generations. This outdoor classroom was a safe place where their emotions were valued and acknowledged, and I wanted the indoor classroom to be a similar space where open and emotive conversations would be valued. Taylor and Larson (1999, p. 331) state that, by creating safe and nurturing environments, “...teachers encourage children to want to come to school”. Teachers are thus responsible for nurturing and creating safe spaces that encourage learning.

I realised that my learners’ need for empathy would elicit feelings that would be similar to those of others and that they would thus experience themselves as worthy of love and respect. In our exploration of social and emotional learning, my learners and I interacted and shared conversations that really influenced and guided the way we built relationships and revealed our emotions. Northfield and Sherman (2004, p. 295) state: “Not only do interactive conversations build up confidence and communication skills, but the actual talking through of ideas will also develop the critical thinking ability we purport to value”. As we grow, our behaviour determines our values that tend to be carefully negotiated in collaboration within others’ significant social perspectives. Hugging trees instilled the value of respect and the desire to live harmoniously in my learners. The text revealed how working collaboratively

could assist us in conquering our daily battles and complete our tasks. I was sure that my learners had learnt something about respecting different perceptions and to think about how they would treat others in the future.

5.4.2 Positive learning experiences through adversity

Exploring social and emotional learning was an exciting journey – however, at times we encountered dilemmas which forced us to express ourselves cautiously. We read the story of Lulu who struggled to share her toys or play with other children. My learners were critical of her but had to engage in self-reflection and determine if they shared any traits with Lulu. This activity taught me the value of ongoing communication and positive relationships with my learners and colleagues. I also discovered that a positive learning experience is essential for building my learners' characters and that creativity and emotive conversations are ways that encourage exceptional thinking and revelations about oneself.

As I wanted both myself and my learners to gain more knowledge and insight regarding social and emotional learning, I selected texts that were infused with emotions that we encountered on a daily basis. As a pre-reading activity, I encouraged visual literacy and the ability to extrapolate and predict information by asking the learners to look at the pictures that illustrated the text. They had to identify emotional patterns and predict events by speculating what the story was about. The learners used their own books and could thus look at different pictures to identify emotions and determine themes and the moral of the story. This was a creative way to recognise and relate emotive texts to our own emotions. It also expanded their emotional compass and vocabulary and they were introduced to sincerity and passion in learning. Coetzee and Jansen (2007, p. 71) state: “Our emotions are the foundation for creativity, passion, optimism, drive and transformation”, and I wanted my lessons to be reflective, to be instrumental in building a learning community in my classroom, to create a sense of openness and trust, and to encourage my learners to speak and listen attentively. I wanted my learners to experience optimism and to find non-adversarial ways of resolving issues and struggles. Moreover, my learning was enhanced by observing the manner in which these young learners achieved this goal.

5.4.3 Looking in the mirror

My experiences had taught me that it is traumatic for a child to lose a parent. Lytie (2018) articulates that learners who experience loss want to be listened to and that their feelings and needs should be acknowledged. Lytie (2018) also argues that working collaboratively does not only mean working together, but that it also means respecting the choices and sentiments of those who grieve. San often came to me to share how critically ill his mother was. She was pregnant and then a sudden heart-attack took her life. He mentioned that the baby had been born prematurely and had to be kept in an incubator. He would force a smile when sharing this information with me but I could tell that he was emotionally devastated. It was always heart-wrenching to listen to San, and I wanted to embrace him and hug him to show how much I cared and that I knew how he felt. I listened to his stories with an open mind and heart as it was like looking into a mirror and reliving my own hurt and agony when my father passed away. The difference was that I had suffered alone, but I could now nurture and encourage him to express himself and find his road to healing in the company of someone who cared and understood.

My empathy for San made me realise that I should use my teaching and classroom as a source of inspiration that would bring happiness and hope and that I should bring light to my learners who experienced darkness and despair. I therefore wanted to urge each of my learners to engage in the noble quest for healing through sharing their hidden emotions.

It was enlightening and joyous when my learners finally began to see our classroom as a safe space where healthy relationships were cultivated and diversity was embraced. It was like looking into a mirror and again experiencing the positive impact some teachers had on me. I therefore had to remain responsive to my learners' social and emotional needs as my attitude gave them the opportunity to build healthy relationships and relate to the world around them. It was important to give them words of affirmation – just as I had received so long ago as a Media Centre Monitor – and to always give them positive feedback. I had to be conscious of the fact that each learner would show love and would love differently, but I had to focus on the positive impact of love regardless of how it was expressed. I had to take the time to get to know my learners individually as I realised that each was remarkable and unique. I realised that I had to listen attentively and with understanding to build strong relationships. At the end

of our encounters to explore emotional and social learning, I could confidently say that my learners had been enlightened and that they thrived on thoughtfulness, love, and compassion.

5.4.4 Reflections on achieving social and emotional learning

Before engaging in this self-study research I determined my teaching parameters in order to focus on what I needed to cover within the prescribed curriculum. Sadly, I realised that I had neglected my learners' social and emotional learning. At the conclusion of the study, however, I realised that I had been able to allow them to find themselves. They had been encouraged to discover their self-identity in a secure and safe space. It was a captivating experience that bred a sense of belonging in a supportive community. It also built independent individuals who emerged triumphantly from the safety of shared experiences.

Learning about social and emotional issues through this self-study research was like going on a journey to reach a harbour of safety and contentment. Along this journey learning opportunities were explored that gave my learners the opportunity to embark on their own voyages of social and emotional discoveries that allowed them to express themselves freely. I shall of course continue on this road to ignite positive mind-sets and encouraging enthusiastic attitudes and relationships among the learners I shall teach in the future. I want my learners to have intrinsic motivation and become young people who are resilient and responsive to social issues that threaten learning.

The new insights that I gained through the pre-reading and reading activities that my class and I had engaged in are that: reading cultivates social and emotional learning; that reading teaches life lessons such as dealing with loss, depression and disability; and that reading builds friendships. I also appreciate the fact that reading stimulates learners' interests and enhances fluency of expression, gives life to the imagination, enhances creativity, and ensures vocabulary acquisition.

5.5 Conclusion

In Chapter Five I offered a comprehensive explanation of and reflected on my lessons regarding social and emotional learning. I responded to the research question: *What can I*

learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom? I answered this fundamental question by drawing on my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, my learners' written and drawing activities, and their verbal responses and oral presentations. I learnt that the interactive manner in which I presented and delivered my lessons strengthened and encouraged my learners' learning and supported the way in which they would manage their emotions in the future. I was personally enlightened and learnt to redefine and reframe rejection and loss. These are only some of the multitude of meaningful ways in which social and emotional learning supports human development.

In Chapter Six, I shall give describe more of my lessons concerning social and emotional learning. I again address the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* In response to this question, I again refer to my teaching developmental portfolio, my musings in my daily journal, and my learners' written and drawing activities as well as their verbal responses and oral presentations.

CHAPTER SIX

ECHOING AND SHARING SINCERE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five I recounted some lessons that had I presented with the purpose of cultivating social and emotional learning. By narrating my approach to and purpose for these lessons, I became aware of the eminence of accommodating the diversity of the learners in my classroom. I learned that having a positive learning experience and a supportive classroom atmosphere would be crucial in shaping my learners' characters. I endeavoured to utilise innovative ways of stimulating unique thinking and to encourage creativity and emotive conversations.

Chapter Six also responds to the second research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?* To answer it, I utilised my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities and oral presentations. The chapter is titled *Sharing and echoing learning* because I narrate and reflect on my experiences of social and emotional learning. I believe that this chapter will echo the hope that I felt as my learners engaged in sincere conversations. I wanted to work consciously and collaboratively with my learners and I thus had to be honest with myself and with them. Where the previous chapter focused on the outdoor classroom, this chapter focuses on my indoor classroom lessons and I explain how and what I learnt about social and emotional learning by focusing on celebrating our historical leaders and engaging in conversations about the emotionally challenging issue of bullying. I also deliberate on how social and emotional learning aids and nurtures all learning.

I offer a detailed explanation of and reflect on the lessons that I had planned to drive my personal learning and that I delivered to my Grade 4 learners. I focused on themes in English and History that dealt with social and emotional learning. The lessons were presented in English and the contents of all the lessons were aligned with the prescribed CAPS documents for Grade 4 (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Audio recordings were made of the learners' discussions and my teaching. In my narrations of how these lessons developed, I

offer examples of my learners' class work and activities. I also employ excerpts from my reflective journal to show my interpretations and state of mind and to illustrate how my learning developed. To ensure confidentiality, the learners' class work is presented anonymously and pseudonyms are used to refer to individual learners. None of the learners' faces are visible in the photographs.

6.2 Unpacking History and English Lessons

6.2.1 Lesson 4: Leaders in history (28 May 2018)

6.2.1.1 Pre-reading activity

I reflected on the best possible ways for my learners to recognise their leadership potential, acquaint themselves with who they were, and gain social confidence. This topic is specified in the History curriculum in CAPS Grade 4 (2011). I felt that a history lesson to explore social and emotional learning would engage my learners as sources of untold narratives of their own histories as well. I anticipated that this would enable my learners to become a part of that story and to make empathetic connections. This lesson began with an alphabet game that I had found on the internet (retrieved from: <http://www.leadershipgeek.com/leadership-icebreakers-alphabetic-introductions>).

My learners were each asked to choose one letter of the alphabet although duplication was allowed. I gave them five minutes to think of as many words as possible to describe themselves as a leader (see Figure 6.1 "Reflections of me"). For example, a person who chose E could use words such as 'ecstatic', 'enigmatic', and 'extraordinary'. At the end of the five minutes, each learner had to share their words to describe themselves as leaders. The player with the most words was the winner. I decided to group my learners and divided them into four groups. I told them that they could design a border on the A4 sheet. They had to write their words down and share them with the classroom.

Before they shared their words, I shared my letter with them which was the letter D. I said, "*I am a good leader because I am devoted, diligent, and dynamic.*" They were motivated

knowing that I also participated in the activity and were zealous to share their letters and words with the class.

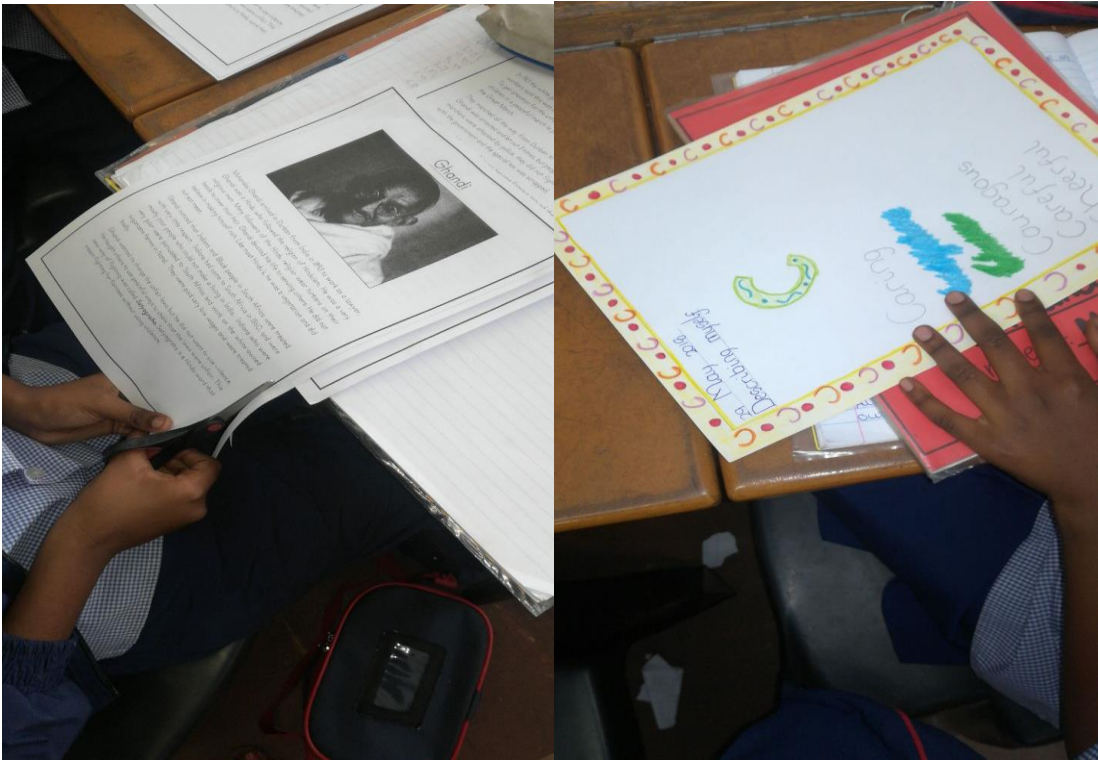


Figure 6.1: Reflections of a true character

Jessica chose the letter C, stating that she was “*compassionate, considerate, and concerned about others*”, while Kristelle chose the letter G and elaborated, “*I am gracious, gentle, and a good listener.*” Andy Z highlighted that he was “*a soldier, shiny, and soulful*”. I was impressed with Thabiso’s response as he said, “*I am a superhero, strong, and a shield.*” Awande also shared the letter C and stated, “*I am clever, cheerful, confident, and courageous.*” Thabo conveyed, “*I am trustworthy, tough, and thoughtful,*” while Jaden stated, “*I am helpful, honest, and hopeful.*” I was also thrilled with Mpume’s description of himself as he chose the letter R and wrote, “*I am respectful, reliable, and responsible.*” Sim chose the letter F and stated, “*I am friendly, faithful, and forgiving.*” Hearing these words, I became conscious of the learners’ ideas of a noble leader and realised that they could identify and understand what a virtuous leader was before we had even looked at our history textbook which was the Viva Social Science Grade 4 Learner book. They had identified imperative values and characteristics to enhance our exploration of social and emotional learning. We also brainstormed a few more words that we felt defined an admirable leader.

6.2.1.2 Visual and reading activities

We then moved on to look at a picture of Nelson Mandela on the worksheet. I asked my learners what they knew about him and the kind of life lessons they thought they could adopt from him. I was quite taken by their responses and their rich knowledge. I realised that some of the history of our country was deeply embedded in their hearts and was also helping them shape their characters and the way they viewed democracy, freedom, and equality. I can honestly say my learners appreciated recalling historical events that were stimulated by their knowledge of the country’s most famous leader and others. We explored the need to have courage, to be bold, and to endure. There was a pattern of believing in ourselves. My learners showed compassion and were thrilled to learn more about our country’s history.

We then moved on to read about and discuss the valuable leadership lessons we could learn from the life of Mahatma Ghandi. I asked my learners, “*What can we learn about leadership skills when we read about his history?*” I mentioned that Mahatma Gandhi did not believe in making himself rich. I asked, “*What does this tell us about him?*” Jaden exclaimed, “*He was a humble person!*” Cebolihle eagerly raised his hand and his eyes were wide open. He said,

“He believed in treating people fairly and fighting for human rights.” San could not compose himself as he stood up from his chair and jumped and up and down to catch my attention, saying, *“He was a determined leader!”* Tristen said, *“He was a peaceful leader because he fought for peace.”* I reiterated, *“So if you are a leader you must be a peaceful person.”* My learners were amazed to learn that the Great March of 1913 was also led by children. This surprised them and made them realise they were capable of great leadership. The Great March was to gain Indians’ rights in South Africa against unfair laws such as paying tax that was imposed on indentured labourers. The subsequent law is known as the India Relief Bill. This march was led by women, men, and children.

We then reflected on what we had learnt so far. I asked my learners what the name Mahatma Gandhi meant. *“It means great soul!”* a number of them shouted at the top their voices as they were distracted by the intercom. *“Can we look at Nelson Mandela before we move on to our activity?”* I asked. *“Why is he considered the greatest leader of all time?”* Most of my learners raised their hands abruptly. I pointed at Ayden who seemed eager to answer. *“Yes, Ayden?”* He explained, *“He fought for our freedom and rights.”* Awande interjected, *“Yes Ma’am, he did not agree with the apartheid laws.”* I enlightened them by stating, *“He believed in democracy, which means he was against unfair laws and he wanted equality for everyone.”* Ayden added to this statement while shaking his head in disbelief, *“He was in prison for 27 years.”*

The lesson started as an oral discussion and I then moved on to task them with a written activity in their history exercise books. Nandi wrote, *“I think he loved caring. He was a hard worker and he was a positive person.”* Thabo wrote in his history exercise book, *“Nelson Mandela wanted to make the laws fair for black and white people.”* Sethu shared the same emotion regarding Nelson Mandela’s leadership by stating, *“He was a brave man and respectful because he fought for what he believed was right for South Africa.”* Kristelle wrote, *“He cared for others first and did not become selfish.”* I went on to enlighten my learners about the importance of cherishing one another’s differences and having the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Towards the end of the lesson they also did an activity in which they had to describe a good leader.

6.2.1.3 Individual activities

With this activity I wanted to determine if my learners understood the meaning of being a noble leader and if they could identify the characteristics that define nobility.

1. Explain what a good leader is.
2. Fill in the characteristics of a good leader using the diagram.

A diagram can be defined as a flow chart. You can simply communicate it to other people and show your ideas. You can also use it to define and analyse a process and build a step-by-step picture of it.

Examples of their responses:

“A good leader is someone who is a good example.” (Thabo Langa)

“A good leader is diligent.” (Kristelle Smith)

“A good leader is positive and always willing to help.” (San Moodley)

“A good leader is compassionate.” (Wendy Ntuli)

6.2.1.4 My reflections

Journal Entry

23 May 2018

I treasured my learners’ experiences and how they could connect their emotions to historical events and incidents that shaped our country. This lesson allowed me to emphasise democracy and showing respect for differences. I am pleased that I was able to embrace these differences and to evoke positive thoughts. I understood that my learners had also shared some historical stories with their parents and grandparents. My classroom was filled with passionate dialogues that echoed our country’s past. I wanted my learners to be their own leaders and to be the authors of their own present.

Retrospective Journal Entry

25 May 2018

Reading my description of this lesson made me realise just how connected we were as a classroom community. It evoked lively expressions of emotion from my learners as they listened attentively and emotively. There were a few moments when I quietly wiped away a

few tears as I read and reflected on their writing. I would like to think that my and my learners' hearts were equally touched by Nelson Mandela's journey and the life that he had lived. There were also some graceful moments in which my learners wrote about performing random acts of kindness. He experienced a threatening life but went through the same emotions all humans endured in his lifetime. It was heart-warming and quite humbling. I was encouraged to have an optimistic mind-set and to adopt leadership skills that teach us to have humanity, kindness, and to fight for what we believe in.

6.2.2 Lesson 5: My Emotions (29 May 2018)

6.2.2.1 Watching a video about courage

The weather had not been sociable lately as the days had been unnaturally cold and blustery. I figured that having a lesson in the classroom would be more comfortable than outside. I had been brainstorming a few ways of infusing my lessons with social and emotional learning as I wanted my lessons to be thought provoking and to evoke emotions that would relate to the learners' social backgrounds. I had been contemplating this particular lesson for some time and believed that watching a video on courage would speak to my learners' hearts. I assumed that watching a video would be a great introduction to the lesson as it would enthuse my learners and engage them in social and emotional learning.

An assembly is when the school gathers in the hall to share a message that is inspirational and motivating. At my school, each class takes part in this activity and is required to host an assembly two or three times a year. It takes almost a week to prepare and learners are expected to lead the assembly. They usually give an oral presentation of their message and read a Bible verse and say a prayer at the end. We are also allowed to use videos or music to convey the message. I chose 'courage' as the theme for the assembly as part of social and emotional learning and development. I decided to show a video of children who approached each day with a courageous heart. The video I showed is titled *Amazing courageous kids*. It was released on 17 December 2012. It emphasises courage as a critical foundation of character by presenting real children who accomplished astounding outcomes for themselves and their communities. The message is that courage is fundamental to growth and

development. When they have courage, young people are better able to stand up to undesirable peer pressure, to defeat the anxiety of failure, to reach out for their dreams, and to express themselves and affirm their beliefs, even if others disagree.

The video shows a young boy who saved his dad from drowning. It also shows learners who had the courage to stand up against bullying and animal cruelty and it motivates learners to face their fears with courage. It also shows how children adopted acts of pure heroism and emphasises that having courage is not determined by our height, weight, or our social background. It is built by trying and trying until we get it right. When I watched the video, I appreciated learning how to dare to do things that seemed to be beyond my reach or strength and, even as an adult, I was motivated to be courageous. I realised that courage is not the absence of anxiety or fear, but that we need to follow our passion and to truly love who we are and the people around us.

Based on the video we had watched, the lesson spiralled to a discussion of our emotions and thoughts. My learners expressed intuitive feelings and were all quite moved by acts of kindness and the courage to try something different, innovative, and new. Kristelle offered the following insight, *“Ma’am, I learned that we never need to be afraid to try.”* Thabo explained, *“Ma’am...umm...I learned that your courage can save someone else.”* Ayden shouted, *“Having courage means you have power!”* Tristen voiced the following, *“It is to be brave.”* Amanda, who seemed a bit shy, confessed, *“Sometimes I feel embarrassed when I have to try something new.”* Mellissa was a somewhat inhibited and so, disturbed by her blank face and her eyes that seemed be staring at the ceiling, I posed a question directly to her, *“Mellissa, what are your thoughts on the video?”* All she uttered was, *“Eish!”* She appeared to feel a little side-tracked and self-conscious and vigorously scratched her head to hide her discomfort. The rest of the class gazed at her and waited patiently for her answer. She then stated, *“To try something new.”* I noticed that some of my learners found it difficult to identify and relate to acts of courage as they did not participate in the discussion. They seemed puzzled and lost. I understood that social and emotional learning is a journey and needs to be approached delicately and patiently.

I explained to my class that nobody needs to be big and strong to do something astounding or out of the ordinary. I emphasised that having courage has no age or perimeters. San said,

“Ma’am, we need to believe in ourselves, and can I please say my assembly part?” San loved participating in classroom discussions and receiving attention. He was one of my learners who seemed quite needy emotionally. I decided to satisfy his urge to share his speech with the class. He spoke assertively and with such pride that we applauded and congratulated him as he smiled jauntily and put his head on the table while playing with his fragile hands. I observed that he was always so pleased with himself when he was given a chance to participate in classroom discussions or to express himself. But he seemed withdrawn and disinterested when he was not given attention. At times I feared that the special attention I gave him because of his emotional needs might have dented my relationship with my reserved learners and those that were not always willing to express themselves freely. I noticed that I was constantly concerned about San compared to my other learners. I feared this because I wanted to build a relationship with all my learners and understand everyone’s emotions.

6.2.2.2 Paragraph writing

Soon the lesson progressed to us reflecting on our own most courageous moments and how we tackled our daily challenges. The next activity was a creative writing piece. I instructed my learners to look at their spelling list which comprised words that had to do with emotions such as ‘excited’, ‘joyful’, ‘embarrassment’, ‘anxious’, ‘hope’, and ‘courage’. I told them they could use any words from their spelling list to express how they approached life with courage or to describe when they encountered circumstances that demanded courage. They wrote these paragraphs in their English exercise books.

I envisioned that their paragraphs would be titillating and I looked forward to reading every single piece and understanding their perspectives. Before my learners shared their writing, I took the time to share my thoughts on courage. I explained that having courage does not mean you have to be big or strong, but it means being brave enough to show an act of kindness, believing in the impossible, and acknowledging that you are capable of doing whatever your heart desires. I mentioned that courage allows us to find inner strength, self-confidence, and the willingness to face daily challenges with a positive mind-set. They listened attentively as I read my piece of writing aloud. We discussed the art of accomplishing a mission or facing our fears by trying to reap the benefits of courage.

Thabo wrote the following: *“The people in the video taught me not to be scared but courageous, to try something new, save a life, or have a voice to show that you believe in yourself. I was afraid of playing soccer as I did not have the courage. I was anxious and afraid that I would injure myself, but I finally found the strength to do it.”* Linda also expressed that she had gained some valuable insights related to courage from the video: *“Last week it was our assembly when I watched the two videos. I need to be brave and fearless to try new things. Courage is when you feel brave. I need to try to be brave every day and help people that need me. I said to myself I will be brave.”* Amahle shared similar thoughts, stating, *“Having courage to try. I used to be afraid and nervous to swim. I was embarrassed and ashamed. I tried and tried until I could swim. Have the courage to try.”* Sethu wrote, *“When we had an assembly, we watched two videos on courage. They helped me to follow my passion and not to be anxious but to be joyful and excited. I want to have courage to be brave, trustworthy, and to be honest with my family.”* Nandi explained, *“I don’t always have the strength to do something new. I can’t wait to do something new but I always get nervous and then I complain too much.”* Mpume also emphasised the importance of having courage: *“I want to have the courage to help other people and to try to achieve what I want.”*

Kristelle stated: *“Having the strength to try something new with other people is sometimes good. The word courage does not mean you have to be anxious all the time, it means you have the ability to control your fear when something dangerous or difficult happens. Being nervous is fine but you still face your fear no matter what goes on. Some courageous people are honest and trustworthy.”* I then asked Kristelle to read this aloud to the class, as I felt enthused and heartened that she had understood and defined courage so aptly. Most of the learners were listening attentively. Eshle shouted, *“Resilience!”* This was one of the words I had taught them when we had discussed the importance of courage. I asked the class to remind us of these words and they yelled, *“Endurance, bravery, humble, determination, and being fearless!”*

6.2.2.3 My Reflections

Journal Entry

28 May 2018

My learners' paragraphs reminded me to draw courage from my inner strength. They were passionate about having a positive impact on society and taught me that our power lies in believing in ourselves and having the courage to try something new even if it is daunting. We embarked on an emotional journey and fed our emotions with optimistic thoughts. I wanted to be eager to find new meaningful ways that convey teaching and learning through social and emotional learning. I am thankful I got the opportunity to undertake this self-study, otherwise I would have been blind to my learners' needs and thoughts. In the midst of life and its turmoil, I am thankful that I stumbled through every fearful moment with courage until I found my inner strength. At times I questioned if they were sharing their honest feelings or if they only wanted to please me. I now understand the importance of investing more time in searching for concealed feelings.

Retrospective Journal Entry

30 May 2018

Reading my story of this lesson made me realised that, at times, we are stuck on being worried about things that haven't actually taken place. We empty our happiness before we even experience it. We drown in self-pity and wallow in fear. I can honestly say the most priceless moments take place when we feel incredibly uncomfortable. Such moments are impelled by our discomposure. We need to explore who we are and search for deeper meanings that allow us to blossom and to be the best that we can be.

6.2.3 Lesson 6: Nelson Mandela Day (18 July 2018)

6.2.3.1 Starting a new term

It was the first day of a new term. The school corridors were chaotic and rowdy. I had not come to school the day before to set up my classroom and my tables and I was wondering where to start. Fortunately, I managed to get my learners into gear and to help me arrange the classroom. I was surprised to learn that they still recalled how the desks and my table had been arranged. The girls quickly cleared up my table and my baskets for my worksheets. They stacked the papers neatly and asked me what I was keeping or throwing away. I was amazed

by their sense of responsibility and collaboration. My boys were more interested in carrying desks and chairs and opening the windows.

I am always a bit apprehensive on the first day of the school term. I always find myself furiously trying to reconnect with my learners and getting them back into the school routine. This term in particular was the most nerve wrecking as I had opted to be a house master. This meant that I would be in charge of athletics. I imagined that this step would take me further on my journey of becoming a more experienced teacher as teaching skills are not only developed in a classroom. I did not think I would ever reach my potential if I did not search for deeper meanings and insightful encounters in my teaching and my learners' experiences. Trying new things can be daunting and quite challenging at times. The thought of being involved in athletics or anything that had to do with sports had always been scary for me because I was not really familiar with the technicalities and the rules of sport. However, I was willing to learn and I also understood that I would need to work cooperatively with my team and my learners. Even though I was apprehensive, I was very excited and looked forward to seeing it unfold and to learn new things.

The world is full of people who need a ray of hope and healing from past wounds. I would like to think that learning about historic figures and honouring our heroes would allow my learners to discover and search for heroic ways to help the people around them. I wanted my learners to understand that they were capable of changing people's lives in a positive way. I imagined that revisiting Nelson Mandela's life history would resurrect emotions and recall acts that would teach us about reconciliation, to be free spirited, and to help the world. I anticipated that this would facilitate social and emotional learning and that it would assist my learners to feel and show empathy and to establish healthy and positive relationships. I wanted my learners to realise that they had the power to change lives and empower other people.

6.2.3.2 The "Long walk to freedom"

Mandela Day (18 July) not only celebrates Nelson Mandela's life and legacy, but it is also a worldwide invitation to all people to identify their gifts and to have an optimistic influence on others around them. The day is intended to enthuse people to embrace the values that Mandela exuded. These values include democracy, freedom, equality, diversity, reconciliation, and

respect. A number of people and organisations around the world participate in activities that endorse Nelson Mandela Day. These activities include volunteering to participate in sport, art, education, music, and cultural celebrations. These events are held on or around 18 July each year to respect and honour Nelson Mandela's values, political struggle, and to sponsor the different developments that were inspired by Mandela's accomplishments to fight against the apartheid regime and bring equality for all.

Mandela Day also includes a campaign known as '46664', which was Nelson Mandela's Robben Island prison number. Initially the crusade known as '46664' was launched to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. Over time, its emphasis stretched to wider humanitarian work. I felt that highlighting this day would also encourage my learners to be kind and know the importance of helping others, educating ourselves about social challenges, and learning how we can make a difference.

When the book *Long walk to freedom*, by our former president, Nelson Mandela, affectionately known as Madiba, first came out, it was over 600 pages long and not really appropriate for children to read. Because Madiba was so fond of children and wanted them to share his love of reading, it was shortened and published as a children's book as well. The book tells the story of Madiba's life from the time he was an infant until he became the president of our country. It tells us how Mandela and his associates opposed apartheid and made it possible for South Africa to become a democratic state.

Mandela was arrested for helping to fight the apartheid regime by means of a revolution. During the trial, Mandela told the court the ANC had been a nonviolent organisation. He told the court: "I have cherished the idea of a democracy in which all persons live together in harmony. It is an idea for which I am prepared to die." Mandela and his comrades were sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison and were sent to Robben Island. But, as we all know, they did not spend the rest of their lives in jail.

Because Madiba wanted all children to be able to read it, the book has been translated into the eleven South African official languages. The activity that we did was derived from the Platinum Grade 4 English textbook (p. 47). My learners had to complete this activity:

1. Copy and complete the following sentences:
 - a) The newspaper article is about _____
 - b) A children's version of *Long Walk to Freedom* was published because _____
 - c) I would like/not like to read *Long Walk to Freedom* because _____
2. Why do you think the book is called *Long Walk to Freedom*?
3. Write the definition of each word below. Use a dictionary to help you:

(a) released	(d) apartheid	(g) translated
(b) democracy	(e) harmony	(h) banned (c) cherished (f) colleagues

Figure 6.2: Activity based on “Long Walk to Freedom”

I discussed the kind of values Nelson Mandela instilled and modelled in South Africa. My learners and I were able to identify his love for children and humankind and his respect for good citizenship and random acts of kindness. I was motivated to express my thoughts and portray humanity and to make such realities a lifetime experience. My learners contributed to my learning journey by providing insightful conversations and insights. I was able to embrace their mis/interpretations of phrasing, their ability to negotiate rewards, their dynamic learning, and their understanding for the need to reconcile differences.

I took pleasure in reading an excerpt from an article on *Long Walk to Freedom* to the learners. Before I started, I reminded them of what our principal had mentioned during assembly that morning regarding Mandela Day. I was pleased to see that they had listened attentively and were aware of Mandela Day that year as he would have been 100 years old. I asked, “*What can you tell me about Nelson Mandela?*” This was a rhetorical question, but I still asked just to get a response from them. They raised their hands and made a lot of noise by blurting out different answers. Kristelle’s was the first hand I noticed, simply because she stood up swiftly and jumped to grab my attention. She shouted, “*Umm...he fought for freedom!*” I wanted to get more insights from them. Nandi stated, “*Ma’am, he believed in equality.*” Olerato affirmed this view by stating, “*Mandela was a good leader.*” “*True, but what can we learn from him?*” I asked as I continued to probe for more insightful answers. I could clearly see that my learners were reminded of their history when we focused on discussing honourable

leaders. San, who was always willing to participate in classroom discussions, clicked his fingertips to grab my attention. He yelled, “*He was a respectful man!*” Sihle reminded us of history when he said, “*Mandela fought against apartheid.*”

The school principal had stated that we needed to practise random acts of kindness on a daily basis. I moved on to posing more questions to my class, such as: “*How can we make sure that we practise kindness every day?*” They seemed a bit disconnected and were not interested in answering the question. I asked, “*Anyone? Can someone please try? Who would like to try?*” One of my learners was busy fidgeting and searching for something in her desk. I called her to attention, “*Linda, you are not paying attention!*” Self-conscious and startled, she cleared her desk and dropped her head on her arms. After much probing, someone finally tried to answer the question. Ayden whispered, “*We can share.*” To illustrate the many acts that involve being kind, I repeated a story that had been shared by Mrs B, our school principal. This was a story about a friend who had lent another friend some money. When the friend returned the money, she told her to give it to people who needed it. She had stated that it was an example of an act of random kindness as the giver helped people without expecting anything in return. This was a perfect example of offering help to those who are in need. She had encouraged our learners to be kind and to be helpful throughout their lives without expecting any reward or gifts. I did not ask my learners any further questions.

Then Esihle explained, “*Ma’am, by being forgiving.*” Jaden raised his hand swiftly and he could hardly contain himself, “*Ma’am, by showing that you care! Showing respect!*” Kristelle, who seemed cheerful, stated, “*We can be graceful.*” Nathi was a bit reluctant to answer but managed to utter a sentence after raising her hand half-heartedly, “*Through listening to each other.*” Jessica seemed quite eager to give an answer. She shouted and waited patiently for my reassurance, “*Miss Mkhize, by appreciating what we have.*” I explained that what they had stated were some of the qualities and values that Nelson Mandela had shared with us. He had the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness and was loving and caring. I said that he had wanted everyone to be treated equally and for us to embrace diversity and not judge one another by the colour of our skin. I was reminded that he had also taught us not to dwell in the past but to live together in peace.

I then read the text in the textbook and shared some questions and answers with my learners. We moved on to learning new words through dictionary skills such as ‘harmony’, ‘democracy’, ‘adversity’, ‘struggle’, and ‘equality’. I decided to ask my learners to write their thoughts on the celebration of ‘67 Minutes’ and to reflect of how they planned to exercise a lifetime of positive change in people’s lives, starting at home. I thought that this exercise would give me an idea of their understanding and would also allow them to think with their hearts. I explained to my learners how the ‘67 Minutes’ campaign came about. I had been told by a colleague that each minute is dedicated to every year that Nelson Mandela dedicated to the struggle for human rights since 1942. In this time he fought poverty, promoted living in harmony, and urged reconciliation. I expanded that one minute was given for every year of Mandela’s public service and that his footsteps were imprinted on this world for 67 years.

In 1942, Mandela started a campaign for the recognition of the human rights of every South African. Sikhakhane (2018, p. 9) underlines that the concept of Ubuntu means respect for one’s fellow human beings, a sense of community, and compassion. “To humiliate, insult, and diminish others’ self-esteem is not Ubuntu”, he states. The ‘67 Minutes’ campaign is thus intended to teach us humanity and respect as it encourages people to offer simple gestures of kindness and embrace humanity and solidarity. His life was an inspiration and his spirit continues to live as we celebrate his impact on our world. The ‘67 Minutes’ campaign has become a global movement.

These are the written responses that I received from some of my learners:

67 Minutes – Acts of kindness

“I think that ‘67 Minutes’ is celebrated because Tata Madiba was a legend. He fought for freedom and loved us all. Mandela donated money to help the homeless and he was fond of children. I am going to ask my principal for our school to donate money so we can have a soup kitchen in a children’s home. I will help people for the rest of my life! I love people.” (Awande Mngadi)

67 Minutes – Acts of kindness

“I think ‘67 Minutes’ made people live Mandela’s legacy. The ‘67 Minutes’ campaign helped a lot of people through donations and it made people more kind hearted. I am

going to help homeless people and show kindness, share and respect all people.”
(Wendy Ntuli)

67 Minutes – Acts of kindness

‘67 Minutes’ is about making a change in someone’s life and believing that everyone can make a change. For example, I want to help the poor and give hope to those families. I can donate old clothes, food parcels, or toys. And when I grow up, I want to end starvation in this world and make sure no one goes to bed on an empty stomach. I think this does not only start with me, but it starts with all of us.”

(Tristen Chetty)

67 Minutes – Acts of kindness

“I can’t wait for my ‘67 Minutes’ to begin because I want to practise random acts of kindness, show respect, and make people feel comfortable. For my ‘67 Minutes’ I would like to help people around me since I can’t afford anything. For example clean a house, organise a beach clean with children, and teach children about the environment. I am not expecting anything in return, in return I want to see a smile on people’s faces.” (Thabo Langa)

6.2.3.3 My reflections

Journal Entry: Mandela Day

18 July 2018

I realise that celebrating this day is an important journey for all of us. It is an emotional journey that calls us to act in kindness and with compassion and to acknowledge that we are all worth receiving and giving good. It is a call that reminds us that we need to practise humanity and respect differences. When we express ourselves, we heal invisible scars and wounds. We remind ourselves of our inner strength, our purpose, and our ability to think with our hearts. Acts of random kindness, love, and compassion bring new perspectives to our lives. I am inspired to search deeper for meaningful experiences that aid and combat social issues that are having a negative influence on my teaching and my ability to nurture my learners. I realise that my learners are capable of bringing healing to this world by expressing themselves and sharing their perspectives.”

Retrospective journal entry

18 February 2019

It was important that I infused my learners with hope and to encourage them to interact with the world around them as well as to offer a helping hand and apply random acts of kindness. I could tell that my learners yearned to help the world around them. I wanted them to develop skills to create safe and secure relationships. I also felt the need to be emotionally attuned to my learners. I wanted us to build resilience in ourselves. I also wanted my learners to communicate effectively and interact with others in an emotionally appropriate manner. I felt that this lesson compelled us to have the ability to sympathise and empathise with others.

6.2.4 Lesson 7: All about bullying (1 August 2018)

6.2.4.1 Athletics day

It was a chaotic morning. There were parents and learners parading in colourful garb, birds gossiping and giggling, and cats wandering around. The corridors were congested and there was the odour of stale urine curling from the visitors' toilet and change rooms. This smell was depressingly mixed with that of perfume or cologne. There were also multiple conversations taking place and a stampede towards the lining up section. Children were running across the field shouting, "*On your marks, get set, go!*"

This lively spirit was fuelled by athletics day that was held in the third term. Athletics day stimulated the learners' spirits and made them eager to come back to school after the holidays. Every single seat was occupied as the spectators devoured their lunch. We had had athletics trials for different houses during that week. Each house, namely Impala, Eland and Kudu, was a team with a winning spirit. Teamwork and the encouragement of positive behaviour were paramount values. Learners at my school were allocated a house when they enrolled and siblings were usually paced in the same house. Older learners (a boy and a girl) were selected as House Captains and each house also had Vice Captains. The houses competed in a swimming gala and on athletics day. Each team would also accumulate points based on the team spirit, learners' behaviour, and an optimistic attitude, and these points were also used to determine the victorious team for that year.

It was pleasing to see so many prospective parents also arriving at the school, eager for their children's pursuit of learning. The foyer at the front office was packed with prospective parents asking for directions and rushing to the reception area. It was the 1st of August, the month for applications and registration for prospective learners.

However, it was not pleasant to witness learners pushing and shoving towards the tuck-shop area as they unwound and filled up their growling stomachs. Their loud voices subsided as I gave them an unpleasant stare that communicated how disappointing and unruly they were. We were finally saved by the bell and peace reigned again.

6.2.4.2 Bullying rearing its ugly head

Sometimes we feel as if the world is a battlefield. We are constantly called to rise above our fears, to face our enemies, and to transform our mind-set in a positive way. Storrs (2011, p. 11) argues that, "by explicitly attending to emotions, teachers are afforded opportunities to learn about and to respond to underlying conflicts and can enhance student learning through dialogue and curriculum adjustments".

I had noticed that some of my learners easily felt excluded and emotionally bullied because of their physical appearance. I knew I had to attend to this phenomenon and to find out how my learners were influenced by this scourge and how they dealt with being bullied. Some had also experienced name calling and threats and intimidation that made them fearful and afraid to come to school.

I thought that positive self-talk would help my learners to explore social and emotional learning. The concept of positive self-talk is to be conscious of the negative words we constantly feed ourselves and to replace these words with positive declarations of our identity and our physical appearance. The idea was triggered by Mr Nduli, our school social worker, who had done this exercise with a group of Grade 6 and Grade 7 learners. Before the lesson, Mr Nduli and I had had an intriguing conversation regarding bullying and the impact it had on our learners' self-esteem. We had also shared some thoughts on acts of hate speech. The social worker had advised me to do an exercise that would elicit positive self-talk.

I appreciated the importance of being aware of my learners' feelings as well as my own, and I comprehended that I needed to reflect on my own feelings. I had to determine what triggered certain feelings and actions on a regular basis and how to consider others' feelings. Cornwell and Bundy (2009, p. 63) state: "Positive self-talk involves the children using an internal monologue, developed by themselves, to overcome negative emotions controlling their behaviour". I realised that I also needed to acknowledge that all emotions are significant and need to be managed in an appropriate manner. Of course we do not only deal with emotions, but we also need to look at how we interact with people around us. I was intrigued and I wanted to explore my learners' emotions and relationships. The idea was to use positive self-talk, to be kind to yourself, to forgive yourself, and to embrace being yourself without talking down about who you are. Self-talk helps us to choose to have an optimistic voice that lifts our spirit.

At this point my class seemed a little confused as they kept writing about how they felt and why. I asked some of my learners to share their work for some clarity and I then realised that I needed to revisit this exercise as the information was not vibrant and intuitive. In my view, my learners were not used to sharing anything that was negative or positive about themselves as, in a way, it threatened their self-awareness and caused a barrier to social and emotional learning.

I explained to my learners that they had to write about things that people had said to them that negatively affected their self-esteem and the way they interacted with the world around them. They also had to reflect on words that had made them feel insecure. I could sense that this was clearly a sensitive topic and I hoped that I would be able to tap into my learners' social and emotional battles and bring healing by encouraging them to express themselves and to identify all the positive gifts they held. As a stimulus for this activity, I also gave my learners an opportunity to read through the pamphlet on bullying that was in their English textbook. The challenge was that I did not always know if my learners' relationships or emotional scars had healed or not and therefore I had to treat each old and new emotional trauma and adversity in a delicate manner. I had to engage in social and emotional learning on a daily basis.

I thought that planning a lesson about stopping bullying would allow me to tap into my learners' perspectives. Sikhakhane (2018 p. 7) advises that the danger of bullying is that it can become "...normalised behaviour for some learners in the schooling context". I was pleased to learn that the article also found that the children gave an insight into the kinds of bullying they experienced and how they constructed 'bullying' as a phenomenon. The stories were of eight learners who had experienced a range of bullying incidences that were typical of the experiences of learners in countless environments internationally.

In my own experience, bullying manifested inside and outside the classroom. Sikhakhane (2018) highlights that bullying occurs through verbal insults, name calling, spreading rumours, and physical hostility such as hitting and beatings for quite illogical reasons. But in spite of the uncertainty of acts of bullying, the effects thereof have wide-ranging consequences emotionally and physically for many children.

After reading the pamphlet, I received a number of responses from my children. Some facial expressions displayed hurt and embarrassment. Ayden, who was usually very outgoing and loud, raised his hand and shyly said, "*Ma'am, most children call me fat and always tease me about my leg and that hurts my feelings, because I had an operation because I was born bow-legged.*" While he was talking, several voices shouted that he himself also teased other children. "*Shhh! Clap once, twice, and let's all give each other a chance to express ourselves,*" I spoke sternly and tried to regain some sort of order. Bonga said, "*I have been told that I have a big head.*" There was a dreadful pause. I was reminded of how I had learnt to love myself, my most undesirable features, and to forgive myself. I became conscious that my negative self-image had been fuelled by social interactions. I was deeply touched when I learnt how many of my learners had been victims of negative comments. I continued to encourage them to share their emotional experiences related to bullying.

**All about bullying
and
Putting an end to bullying**

Many school children are bullied. Bullying is a problem that we need to stop in our schools. You need to be on the lookout for bullying behaviour.

What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behaviour among school children. Often the behaviour is repeated. Bullying includes threatening, teasing, name calling, hurting someone, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Where does bullying happen?

Bullying happens anywhere:

- at school
- on school outings
- in the toilets
- on the playground
- on the way to school
- on the phone or the internet

How does it feel to be bullied?

Bullying is hurtful and children who are bullied feel unhappy, frightened, and lonely. The bullying will not stop unless you tell someone about it. If you are being bullied, you need to tell a teacher or another adult who will listen to you and who will help you.

If you can't get help, call Child-Line on this toll free number: 08000 55 555.

What can you do if you are being bullied?

Tell someone. Tell your teacher or your mother or father or someone in your family. Ask them to help you work out what to do. If you are being bullied on the phone or the internet, keep messages to show them to an adult.

Stay positive. Try to think about positive things such as what you enjoy doing at school or

what you are good at. Always remember that there are people who like you and who care about you.

Try some things yourself. Tell the person who is bullying you that you don't like it. Say: "I don't like that". Say it with confidence. If you feel that it is safe, you can ask the bully what the problem is and whether you will be able to sort it out together. Never speak to the bully when you are on your own. Ask a friend to come with you.

Have you been called a bully?

It does not feel good to be called a bully. Sometimes you don't know you are called a bully but sometimes you know why. If you are called a bully, you need to think about what you are doing and how you can change your behaviour. You can ask for help to change your behaviour. Talk to your parents or teachers and ask for help.

What should you do if you are a bully?

- Admit that you are a bully and start to change your behaviour.
- Think about what made you behave this way.
- Apologise to the person you have bullied. Saying sorry is the first step to making things better.
- Write the person you bullied a letter or send an email or an SMS if he or she does not want to talk to you.
- Tell your teacher that you have been unkind and that you need help to change your behaviour.

What should you do if you know someone who is being bullied?

If someone you know is being bullied, he or she needs your help. You may not know how to stop the bullying yourself, but you can help. Talk to your teachers about the bullying. Help the person who is being bullied to get away and go somewhere safe. Ask him or her to join your group or game.

Figure 6.3: All about bullying

Tristen stated, "*I always have a hard time because people always tease me about my teeth and I can only get braces when I am 13 years old.*" Thabo raised his hand and explained,

“Sometimes children call you stupid or ugly and that makes you feel bad.” Ayden stated, *“If you do not give them something nice like chocolate or chips they stop being your friend and leave you alone.”* *“Oh, so they exclude you?”* I responded. Wendy added, *“Ma’am, some children call me ‘fatty boom-boom’!”*

We then read the pamphlet in the book about bullying and noted how we could stop bullying (Figure 6.3) (Department of Basic Education, 2018, pp. 24-25). My learners displayed a range of positive thinking after we had engaged in positive self-talk. I was hopeful that this would allow them to gain confidence and teach them how to approach bullying and toxic comments as well as ensure that they would not be victims or victimise people by being bullies. I read the title of the pamphlet, and, before we continued, I questioned my learners: *“So, what is bullying?”* Kristelle, who was always willing to participate in classroom discussions, said, *“Being aggressive.”* Thabo elucidated, *“Being physical.”* He seemed anxious, and so I probed deeper, *“Being physical like how?”* Thabo enlightened us, *“Like punching and kicking people.”* San muttered, *“Being unkind.”* Themba uttered, *“Being negative.”* *“Being mean,”* Jaden stated, *“and threatening people.”* Thando unexpectedly raised his hand, looking quite baffled. He hardly participated in classroom discussions. He was struggling academically and was new in the school. He faltered, *“Ma’am, fighting with other children.”* Cebolihle said, *“Doing things that affect someone.”* *“Affect someone how?”* I delved. *“Like saying nasty things and then someone will feel bad about themselves,”* Cebolihle explained.

There was sudden chaos in the class as sounds of pencils, pens, and crayons being tossed and someone constantly opening and closing a desk were disruptive. I was not surprised to see that Ayden was responsible for this noise. He always seemed preoccupied when a lesson as lengthy, especially if someone else was talking. I felt that he needed to adopt self-discipline and learn how to be patient. I also took this as an indication that we had spent too much time on these responses. Annoyed, I gave Ayden a stern look to indicate that I was not pleased with his behaviour. He looked at me and continued to fidget with his stationery. I commented, *“Your book is not even on your desk and you are being disruptive. I am not happy with you right now.”* He looked at me in desolation and slowly searched through his desk for his book.

Jessica, who was already standing up to get my attention, exclaimed, *“Ma’am, calling people names.”* Sihle said, *“Being jealous.”* I was amazed that my learners had been exposed to so

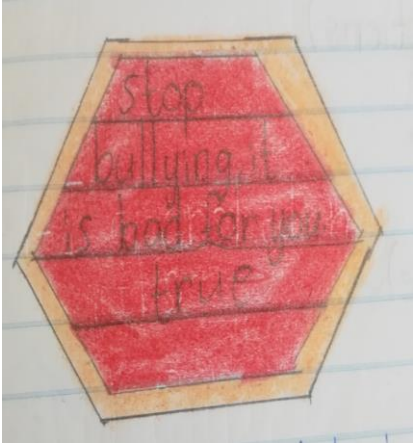
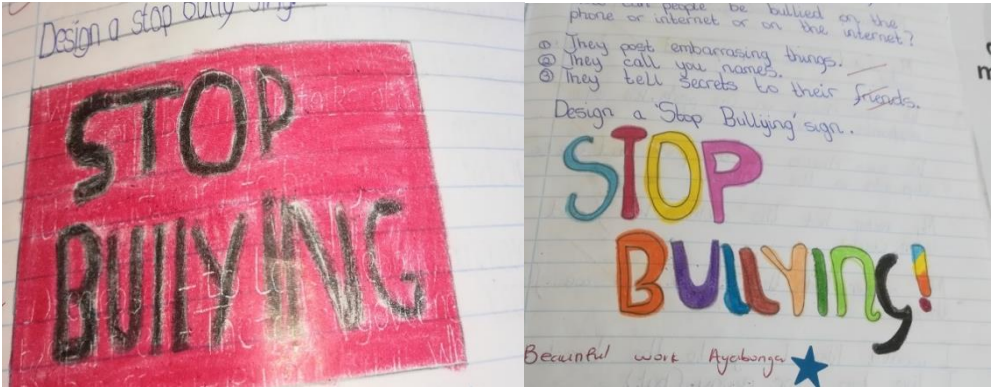
many different emotions and did not know how to react to her response. Nandi stated, *“Excluding someone from your group.”* I explained what the word ‘exclude’ meant: *“So excluding people means keeping someone out, denying them being part of your circle of friends or maybe during group work.”* Thabo raised his hand swiftly. He seemed distraught and murmured, *“They also force us to give them our things and threaten us if we don’t, especially in the boys’ toilet.”* I was concerned and decided to ask more questions.

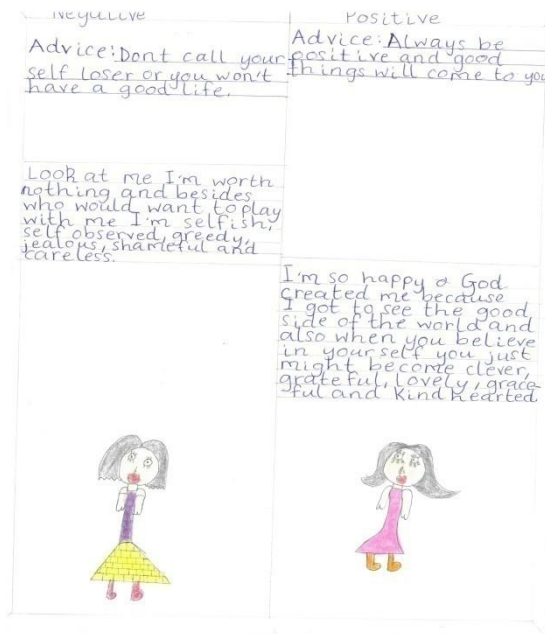
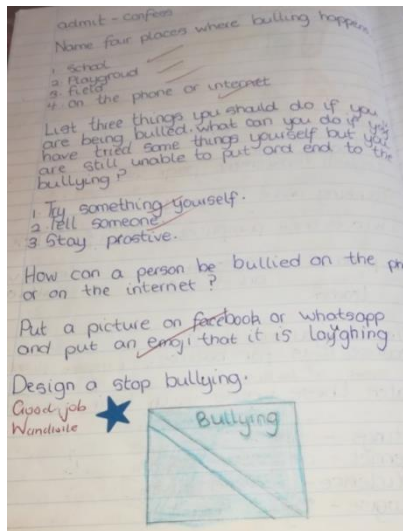
My next question was, *“How does it feel to be bullied?”* My learners all answered at once, *“It feels sad.”* Wendy stated, *“It is hurtful.”* Awande articulated, *“Embarrassing.”* Mellissa said, *“Downhearted.”* *“I like that word, Mellissa,”* I responded. Angel whispered, *“Lonely.”* I requested the class to tell us when and how it got to a point where one felt lonely. Zandile clarified, *“When people choose to ignore you or don’t respond to your questions.”* Mandla said, *“When your friends don’t help you.”* Sihle uttered, *“When you don’t have a friend to talk to.”* Tristen stated, *“When they used to be your friends and then they start leaving you.”* Jessica offered the following insight, *“When friends gossip about you.”*

I explained to my class that sometimes, when people are a group of friends, they influence one another negatively and decide to do hurtful things such as excluding others and not wanting to share their toys or have a conversation or even play with them. *“Yahhh...!”* There was the echoing sound of voices and their facial expressions indicated that many of my learners had stumbled upon such acts before.

To conclude the lesson, we read the pamphlet and completed a written activity. I was pleased with my learners’ sincere responses and the way they had displayed their emotions. I think that this was an important activity to learn about and explore the dynamics of social and emotional learning. I gained insightful knowledge and learned that learners are constantly undergoing social and emotional wars that need to be resolved and taken care of. Such wars are not only fought on the playground, but are active and dominant even in the classroom. I realised that my learners teased or abused one another as a defensive tool to counter how they were treated. I realised that it would be important to teach them moral standards, to practise positive self-talk, to build healthy relationships, and to address cases of bullying. The lesson was concluded with an activity that was related to bullying in which the learners were asked to design a poster against bullying.

Below are some of the posters that were designed by my learners. I chose these posters because I felt that they displayed saying NO to bullying and were educational as they reflected verbal, social, physical, and cyber bullying. They also encouraged an environment of safety, kindness, and respect in a classroom and school.





Positive

- loving
- faithful
- generous
- Pretty
- Caring
- helpful
- Friendly
- Kind
- beautiful
- Clever



Negative

- Selfish
- rude
- Cruel
- mean
- nasty
- greedy
- Sulky
- unkind



Figure 6.4: "Stop Bullying!": Exercises of positive self-talk

6.2.4.3 Some reflective thoughts

While we were learning about bullying, I anticipated that a culture of learning and teaching would be forged through effective collaborative learning. Teaching plays a chief part in upholding discipline and, as teachers, we need to focus on a culture of positive behaviour. Makoelle (2014, p. 133) reveals that collaboration has been confirmed as "...crucial in

changing how teachers view their practice”. I needed to play an active role in constructing a strong approach to discipline, working collaboratively, and interdependently exploring issues and problems concerning my learners.

I had been challenged as a young girl as there was no one to support me emotionally when I went through dark days, and I felt that I had to keep an optimistic mind-set. I sensed that some of my learners wanted to please me and were not sincere in the feelings they expressed. Some were reticent and very cautious in offering any responses. However, most were alert and generally attentive as they vied for my approval and affirmation. I felt that I had to admit my mistakes and show them that I was also human and honest.

At times I felt that the more dominant characters and personalities threatened social and emotional learning. These learners exhibited an authoritative role in the classroom by constantly participating and asking questions. Even though this brought warmth and cultivated communication, it provided little structure for other learners to participate. I had to teach them to work together, to consider others, and to practise self-discipline without making them feel insecure because they did not know the limits. Life stories were shared differently and some were restricted due to holding back and safeguarding their emotions. Some of my learners were not comfortable with the idea of sharing painful stories while others were quiet and reserved. I had to prompt them for answers or share some of my own experiences.

6.2.4.4 Reflections

Journal Entry

3 August 2018

By reading and transcribing the data from this lesson I am now conscious that my learners need nurturing, learning communities, and positive relationships. I also acknowledge that bullying is a repetitive act of emotional, social, and physical abuse which brings unbearable pain and resentment. These negative feelings influence the way my learners view themselves and the world around them. I understand that I need to take note of what my learners express to identify the bullies and those that are their victims. I also need to learn that even those who are bullies suffer from lack of confidence and need to be healed emotionally. I also question my ability to teach my learners to respect each other and to show empathy and compassion. I realise that I need to be observant of actions that seem aggressive and be in control to curb

negative patterns. My learners need to be aware of their rights and their responsibilities to help them to live in harmony and to be democratic. I need to form a safe learning environment that will allow my learners to express themselves openly and build their self-esteem. I would like to think that this will aid exploring social and emotional learning and allow my learners to engage in fruitful and healthy relationships.

Retrospective journal entry

14 August 2018

I realised that social and emotional learning could be a remedy for bullying or even ending bullying. Listening to my learners' experiences related to bullying made me aware that there was a lack of emotional understanding and that they were struggling to self-regulate prevailing emotions. It was clear that my learners, who did not know what to do with emotions like frustration, fear, or isolation, might turn to bullying for emotional relief. It was thus important that I focused on social and emotional learning so that I could help my learners to be emotionally mature. I wanted them to learn how to recognise these emotions and transform them into something more positive.

6.3 My Learning

I am delighted that I was able to engage in reflective learning throughout these lessons. For example, I was able to revisit my teaching and the way I presented my lessons. I was also able to reconnoitre social and emotional learning. After carefully thinking about the trials and the emotions that unknotted, I read through the transcripts of my lessons again and revisited the way I had controlled teaching and learning and how my learners had responded. In this section I share my thoughts and feelings about these lessons and describe what I gained from these experiences. I also reflect on my overall teaching experience.

6.3.1 Leaders need to build learning communities

My teaching served to expand my experiences as a leader as I had to balance my own and my learners' daily lives, the curriculum, teaching content, and social relationships. Taylor and Larson (1999) argue that social and emotional learning enables learners to engage in problem solving, develop stress management competences, share responsibilities, and practise conflict solving and mediation tactics. I hoped that I would prepare these learners adequately for the

roles they would have to play in society one day. I was conscious throughout this project that social and emotional learning would influence these young minds in a positive manner and that they needed it to become responsible citizens.

I took cognisance of the fact that my learners would be tomorrow's leaders. Therefore, while leadership might have come naturally for some, all of them had to learn lessons that would significantly impacted them later in life. The right words at the right time can make all the difference. My learners and I were able to identify important and influential leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Ghandi. We learned to handle failure as gracefully as they had handled success and we admired Madiba's perseverance during the struggle for a democratic country. It was important to expose my learners to disappointment rather than to protect them from it all the time. It was a necessary lesson that they had to learn to be able to deal with defeat and move forward.

By exploring Mandela's life, my learners realised that being a leader also means being one with the people. By reading about Mahatma Ghandi, we valued being a cradle of hope and strength for people around us and not to dwell on materialistic things. We were encouraged to be humble while standing in truth and victory. We also realised that we did not have to be violent and rowdy to get our message across.

6.3.2 Emotions are signals

Tapping into the mysterious unknown was a powerful learning experience. We had to be socially and emotionally alert in order to embrace diversity and to heal broken relationships. According to Bullough (2011), hope can be defined as not only remaining optimistic, but also being keenly involved in life. It was heartening to know that we could share our vulnerability and sincerity and be open to others' thoughts and ideas. I became conscious how important it was to adhere to ethical considerations and to conduct this research in a sensitive manner.

I also discovered the prominence of applying social and emotional learning to myself in order to support and validate my research study. This process exposed my relationships with my learners from whom I was able to learn valuable lessons. My learning in turn allowed them to express themselves freely and to protest against or dispute certain topics. It was a liberating

experience to let my learners drive parts of my research study with their own experiences. I learned that children are powerful in research and that their voices need to be considered and recognised in society.

6.3.3 Kindness matters

I recall my lesson on bullying and exploring the impact it had on my learners' growth and emotions. They all confessed to having been victims of bullying and that they had also used bullying as a defence mechanism. Taylor and Larson (1999) elucidate that, by joining in discussions, learners can cultivate respect for different viewpoints, exercise approaches for appreciating differences, and learn to cope with robust feelings. I thus had to develop sensitive ways of expression when addressing topics my learners could disagree with. It was important that I encouraged positive self-talk, insist on peaceful conflict resolution, and find ways of dealing with bullying. I appreciated learning about my learners' daily struggles, their fears, and what they did not like about themselves. I watched in awe as powerful emotions erupted in my classroom. It became a powerhouse that encouraged positive thinking and created a healthy learning environment.

I realise now that bullying occurs in complicated spaces that are fraught with power struggles that are, in most part, indiscernible to school management teams and teachers at a school. By revisiting my lesson on bullying, I became conscious of the feelings of defencelessness, powerlessness, and vulnerability that were evident in the storylines of my learners.

6.3.4 Positive self-talk

My learners and I engaged in positive self-talk after establishing that this would be an internal dialogue. Taylor and Larson (1999) argue that, by participating in democratic processes, students grow a sense of personal and shared responsibility and develop a gratitude for involvement in democratic structures and engagements. It was vital for my learners to embrace their individuality and to be content with who they were. I also encouraged democratic thinking in the classroom. I was able to identify intuitive thoughts that revealed beliefs, questions, and ideas. Furthermore, Burke (2002) highlights that social and emotional learning allows us to be self-aware and to respect ourselves and others. We thus had to

channel self-talk from the negative to the positive. It was heartening to participate in positive thinking and optimism and to manage our stress levels. I learned, as I hope my learners did, to believe in myself, to emphasise positive self-talk, and to encourage positive dialogue in the innermost recesses of my mind.

6.3.5 Emotions under the lens

All people are emotional beings that are capable of addressing and applying critical thinking. Educators in particular need to respect their learners' abilities. Corcoran (2018) states that children's emotions in school are related to their backgrounds, their learning, and their academic achievements. Moreover, the development of perceptions such as emotional intelligence explains why we have the ability to recognise, use, express, and manage our emotions to transform adversity and to triumph later in life.

We should not assume that young learners think alike or belong to a harmonious group. I know this because I needed to identify their individual needs and quirks and I was accountable for the emancipation of my learners and for protecting them against any physical and emotional harm. All people are different and therefore learn differently and react differently to emotional prompts. I had to step into my learners' minds and discover how they interpreted the world around them and what they found enthralling and important in their daily lives. It was imperative to engage in a variety of activities to understand their perspectives and emotional language. For example, the tools I used included oral presentations, writing, and drawing which all illuminated these children's culture.

6.4 Conclusion

In Chapter Six I continued to discuss my lessons related to social and emotional learning in depth. I answered the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?* I found the answers by perusing my reflections in the teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities, as well as in their oral presentations.

According to my understanding, the influence of family relationships on a young learner is part of growing up. Moreover, starting school and beginning to relate to the broader community and the neighbourhood expand a child's sphere of imperative relationships. Cohen and Marans (1999, p. 114) advocate that "we need others to survive". In other words, we cannot live or succeed alone. I appreciated that my learners became aware of who they were and that most found their identity and became aware of their competencies at an age-appropriate level in their Grade 4 year. I was pleased to bring social and emotional learning into the classroom and that this equipped my learners with social skills, the ability to face some of life's challenges, and that it allowed them to reach an appropriate level of emotional maturity.

As a teacher, I realised that the more we are willing to bond with our learners, the more efficient learning and teaching become. Taylor et al. (2020) point out that detecting the deep concern that we have for our learners' development is critical in our interactions with them. Cohen and Marans (1999) caution that numerous children in our classrooms are in jeopardy of becoming 'stuck' academically, socially, and/or emotionally. I was thus mindful that it would be important to know their capacity before I could be effective as a teacher. Various educational specialists have argued that it is vital to understand who our learners are developmentally, academically, psychologically, and socially (Cohen & Marans 1999). The social and emotional development of many learners unfortunately occurs in environments that cannot provide the central sense of security that is so vital, and it is therefore the teacher's responsibility to fill this space.

In Chapter Seven I shall continue to address the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* I shall offer more comprehensive descriptions of and reflect on my lessons linked to social and emotional learning. I shall again draw on my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities as well as their oral responses and presentations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENLIGHTENING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six I presented a comprehensive explanation of and reflected on English and History lessons that I had included in this self-study research. I described and elucidated daily teaching and learning experiences involving my Grade 4 learners. I responded to my second research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?* by drawing data from my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal and retrospective journal entries in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities and oral responses. The focus of my exploration of these indoor classroom activities was social and emotional learning through the media of English and Social Science.

In Chapter Seven, I shall continue to describe and reflect on lessons related to social and emotional learning. I again respond to the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* To answer this fundamental question, I drew on my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities as their well as oral responses. I titled this chapter *Enlightening social relationships and emotions* as it reflects the main theme of my learning about social and emotional learning as described in this chapter. I describe my learners' and my own journey by referring to the classroom activities that we engaged in and I illuminate what I learned about social and emotional learning using writing, listening to music, and reading stories. I also deliberate on how social and emotional learning enables and nurtures learning.

7.2 Unpacking Social and Emotional Learning through English Lessons

7.2.1 Lesson 8: *A new pet for Mary-Ann* (17 July 2018)

Theme: Companionship and Harmony

When I planned this lesson, I looked forward to stimulating social and emotional learning by introducing the theme of ‘companionship and harmony’. I wanted my learners to be cognisant of their own daily experiences, to explore their relationships, and to understand how they engaged with the world around them. I assumed that most might have pets at home or that they had at least been in contact with people who had pets. I wanted to know how they felt about animals and to understand their role in social and emotional learning.

7.2.1.1 *Pre-reading activity*

It was a very busy morning but I knew I had to exude enthusiasm for the lesson that I had planned. My intention was to extend my exploration of social and emotional learning by exploring my learners’ relationships with and emotions regarding pets.

I began the lesson by explaining what the reading comprehension text would be about in the hope of grabbing learners’ attention. I was tired as so many demands had been made on my time already and I realised that my journey towards understanding social and emotional learning had become taxing, but I took heart in the knowledge that my endeavours would be rewarding and uplifting. However, despite my positive self-talk, today was a challenge as I felt as if I was observing my class through a haze. I felt hesitant and could not see clearly. But I pulled myself together by reminding myself of my purpose and that it was time to interrogate the importance of choosing a pet as a topic that would support social and emotional learning. I asked myself, “*How will my lesson cultivate and explore social and emotional learning?*”

I instructed my learners to open their English textbook to the story titled *A new pet for Mary-Ann* and to read the title. They all read aloud: “*A new pet for Mary-Ann*”. Their facial expressions revealed that this title stimulated interest and that they were thrilled. However, it

was also a double-edged sword, as I was mindful that some of them might lack understanding of choosing or having a pet and the kind of companionship that is associated with having a pet. Nevertheless, their eyes sparkled, many smiled, and some fidgeted excitedly. I looked forward to the exploration that was imminent. I said, “*Look at the picture and discuss with your friend or partner what you think the story will be about.*”

My learner’s liveliness tended to escalate each time they had to speculate what a story was about. They started chattering and their faces revealed pleasure, but most looked entertained and confused at the same time. My mind questioned the essence of exploring social and emotional learning and I knew that my learners were yearning, as always, for a lesson that would be heartfelt and motivational. I wondered if I would be able to meet their expectations on this demanding day.

I commenced the lesson by focusing on visual literacy and asked, “*When you look at the picture, what you think the story is about?*” There was dead silence for a few seconds. Finally, Cebolihle raised his hand and stated confidently, “*It is about choosing a pet!*” Soon the class gained confidence. San also raised his hand and exclaimed, “*Having a new pet!*” However, Linda had a completely different idea as she thought deeply and then said, “*I think...Mary-Ann lost her pet.*” Amanda also came up with a different view, “*They are moving into a new house.*” I tried to indicate that some of their answers were not correct. I shook my head and turned my thumb downwards. However, I smiled in order to encourage them to keep trying.

Mpume stated, “*She is very happy to have a new pet.*” I smiled and looked at my learners and said, “*Right, let’s find out what it is about!*” But I first wanted them to dig deeper and I used the pre-reading activity questions in the textbook: “*Who do you think are the main characters in the story? I know we do not know yet, but we will find out.*” After some moments I asked, “*How old do you think they are?*” The class chorused, “*They are 10 years old!*” I agreed and said, “*So they are the same age as most of you in the classroom!*” This was important as the learners could relate well to characters of the same age.

I felt I was lumbering with the details and questions as some learners looked puzzled. I was afraid that trying to engage my learners in the topic of choosing a pet would be a stumbling

block as the pace of the lesson was slow and it took time to reach momentum. It seemed that most of them were clueless about pets and what kind of relationships and feelings they might experience when having a pet. I realised that my quest for a flawless lesson might have been thwarted, but I comforted myself that it was my duty to explore social and emotional learning and, even if not everybody had prior knowledge of the topic, they would still be able to participate in emotional conversations.

7.2.1.2 Reading activity

The lesson progressed as I finally read the story to my learners. The story revealed that Mary-Ann diligently saved to buy a new puppy by doing chores around the house. I felt that this example would teach my learners about the importance of managing money and being responsible. In the story, there were different puppies that were identified by looking at their collars. There was something special about the puppy with the purple collar. It had been born with damaged hips which made it difficult to run and play. The manager of the animal shelter discouraged Mary-Ann from buying this puppy, stating that she should ignore it. I explained this to my learners. They seemed troubled emotionally and showed great compassion and sympathy for the puppy.

The lesson finally took a turn when I introduced the theme of embracing differences. I asked, *“Which pet would you choose?”* They raised their hands and anxiously waited for me to point at one. *“Me! Me! Me Ma’am!”* San shouted to draw my attention. Tristen decided to answer the question without raising his hand, *“I would take the dog with the purple collar!”* I wanted a more descriptive answer and asked, *“Why, Tristen?”* He calmly stated, *“Ma’am, we should not judge people just because they are different from us. You can still play with him even though he was born with damaged hips.”* Nathi added, *“He will not run around and break anything so I would choose him so I will not be in trouble with my mom.”* I found this quite amusing as Nathi was concerned about the dog’s behaviour and how it would impact her relationship with her mom. *“Who else feels like Tristen?”* I asked. San still persisted and raised his hand again, and so I gave him a chance, *“Yes, San?”* He uttered a long sigh and said, *“Ma’am, it is because you can take care of it and maybe it will get better.”*

I continued reading the story. We read how, when Mary-Ann bent down to pick up the dog with the purple collar, she stroked him gently and cuddled him. She said, *“I’ll take this one. I was also born with a disabled leg and wear an orthopaedic brace, so it doesn’t matter if he cannot run. But I have my friends and family who love me and that means so much.”*

7.2.1.3 Post-reading activities: discussion and writing

The lesson was concluded when I tasked the learners to think about the story by referring to the questions in the activity section after the text. They had to respond orally by sharing their thoughts and feelings. There were illustrations of the puppies with different coloured collars in a table. To unearth more information about social and emotional learning, I tasked my learners to write a paragraph on how they thought the story would end and how they would feel if they were Mary-Ann. I was hoping that my learners would be compassionate, value relationships, and embrace diversity.

I was alerted to a range of emotions that emerged during the lesson, particularly when my learners had to write about owning a pet. I noticed that most were imagining building a relationship with a pet even though some of them had never had a pet before. Some seemed fairly reluctant to tackle the task of writing a paragraph and this made me cognisant of their life experiences. Essentially, trying to use pets as a topic taught me that I should not overlook the reality that certain things that we might take for granted are not present in my learners’ lives. However, I noticed that they were developing positive feelings about pets which contributed to their self-esteem and self-confidence. I wanted to encourage positive relationships with pets to help them develop trusting relationships with others. I hoped that learning about pets would also build non-verbal communication skills, compassion, and empathy. I had longed to have a pet as a child and I empathised with those learners who obviously felt this gap in their lives as well. Reading their paragraphs, I was touched by the warm emotions they displayed regarding different animals that have different abilities. I also searched for responses that reflected the learners’ readiness for the responsibilities that come with having a pet.

I then tasked my learners to write a diary entry in which they imagined themselves as Mary-Ann. I thought a diary/journal entry would allow them to express themselves freely and to share their feelings regarding animals. Below are some of the responses I received from them:

Dear Diary

17 July 2018

I don't know which puppy I should buy. I think I should take the one with the purple collar. It is so adorable and I don't really care if it has damaged hips. I like it the way it is and I will take care of it. (Awande Mngadi)

Dear Diary

17 July 2018

I haven't slept because I am so excited; I am getting a pet tomorrow. I started wondering about which dog I would choose between the pit-bull, bovver or a K-9. It will all depend on the one I love. I cannot wait to feed and to play with my dog. (Thabo Langa)

Dear Diary

17 July 2018

Today I had to go and choose a pet to buy. I freshened up and dressed up quietly and rushed. My friend Nomsa was coming over to visit me. She was also very excited, so we walked down the road happily. We finally reached the animal shelter. I wondered which pet/puppy I would choose. (Ayanda Ndlovu)

I realised that I needed to encourage my learners to express themselves openly without fear of criticism or admonishment. I had to be cognisant of their diverse backgrounds and culture, but an activity like the one about pets made it difficult as owning a pet was not part of the lives of quite a few of the learners. As soon as I started the lesson, I was challenged to search deeper and more passionately. I felt as if my learners' sincere feelings were imprisoned and that what they could share was not real as their responses were heavily influenced by what was in the reading passage. I also comprehended that children are constantly trying to please adults and pursue their support. But I acknowledged that social and emotional inputs could aid learning and teaching and, most importantly, could liberate my learners to disclose their true feelings.

7.2.1.4 My reflections

Journal Entry

27 August 2018

It was a muddled morning bursting with endless deadlines, IQMS (the Integrated Quality Management System that aims to enhance and monitor teaching performance), Mathematics moderation, and working tirelessly to prepare for Sports Day. I had delayed teaching my learners about pets as I had pictured that it would cause chaos in my classroom and be time consuming. I wanted to resurrect my own emotions of desiring a pet and relive this experience through my learners. Most of my lessons were like nothing I had planned or pictured as I constantly had to search deeper. I felt the need to redeem myself in order to find meaning in my exploration of social and emotional learning.

Retrospective Journal Entry

4 February 2019

Reading my description of this lesson made me realise that animals are affected by our emotions and the circumstances in which the people who wish to build a relationship with them live. Pets build a strong emotional relationship with the people they depend on for food, shelter, safety, and affection. That's why they so readily tune in to our emotional needs.

7.2.2 Lesson 9: Unpacking a Natural Science³ lesson (12 September 2018)

Topic: Indigenous African Musical Instruments

Theme: Music stirs the emotions

When preparing for this lesson, I imagined that engaging in a music lesson would allow my learners to get in touch with their emotions. By reflecting on my own memory work (Chapter Three Figure 3.1 “Music healed me”), I realised that music had abled me to learn emotive language and to identify as well as express my own emotions. Music allows us to undertake an emotional journey that is also heavily influenced by our childhood memories and daily encounters. It also allows us to tap into our inner thoughts and voices and to face our tragedies. I acknowledge that there is a spiritual relationship that takes place each time I listen

³ Although the study of music may be deemed part of Social Science as music is a cultural expression, the actual lesson focused on sound frequencies that is a topic in Natural Science.

to music, and I thus define music as an instrument that intrigues my emotions. I have experienced music as a tool that is evocative and that overwhelms the senses. It is a phenomenon that is difficult to describe as it means so many things for different people. When I planned this lesson, I could recall the number of times I had been captivated by music that had powerful and moving messages and inspirational lyrics such as the animated music that I listened to during a workout session and the sombre music that allowed me to contemplate and coordinate my thoughts. I also recalled that music had been present in my own life during many trials and triumphs. I thus hoped to stimulate my learners' thoughts and emotions by exploring social and emotional learning through music. Figure 7.1 is the passage that I used to introduce the lesson.

7.2.2.1 Pre-listening activity

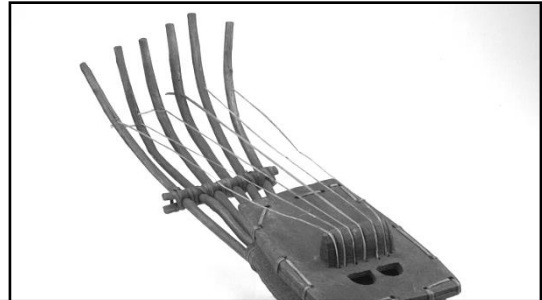
This was a Natural Science lesson that was based on using musical instruments. We explored the origin of various indigenous instruments, wave frequencies, and the energy in music. I engaged my learners in a reading activity and they also had to complete a worksheet that had been designed by one of my Grade 4 colleagues.

Use your dictionary to look up the word 'indigenous'

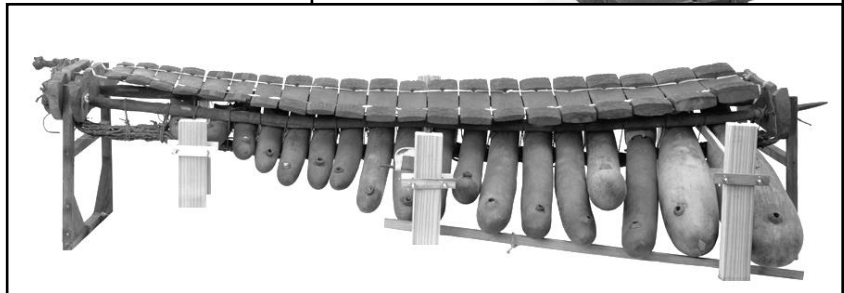
Music, song and dance are important to all people in Africa. Indigenous African musical instruments were first designed, made and used in Africa. Many of these are still used by African communities and some are now used in other places around the world as well.

Each of these instruments produces its own unique sound. Sound is the main output of energy of all musical instruments. Some instruments, like drums, are found all over the world, but in each place the design and materials are different.

The ***gwashi*** is a stringed instrument played by the Kung San. The player plucks the strings with his fingers and sings.



The ***mbila mutondo*** of the Venda people is the only traditional marimba in South Africa. A marimba has wooden bars of different lengths. Each bar produces a different note when you hit it.



The ***mbira*** is a small wooden instrument with metal keys. The keys are plucked with the thumbs. It comes from Zimbabwe but is also used by the Venda, Tsonga, and Pedi people of South Africa.



Figure 7.1: Indigenous musical instruments

7.2.2.2 Listening to music stirs the senses

I wanted to celebrate a music festival in my classroom to explore the influence of music on my learners' daily experiences and emotions. I listed the kinds of emotions that music might evoke such as sadness, nostalgic memories of the past, and pure joy. I thought of positive

emotions that would allow my learners to be optimistic and delighted and I hoped that our classroom would be a place of refuge and safety where they would share their heartfelt emotions.

I also anticipated awakening parts of me that I had hardly ever disclosed. I thought of the parts of my life that I had preferred to keep hidden, such as the long healing process after years of heartache and regret. I recalled my childhood experiences of heart-breaking moments, loss, and when I was not kind to myself. I had struggled to share my weakest traits with my learners and I hoped that learning about social and emotional healing would expose my vulnerability so that my learners would experience me as human and real.

By introducing the theme of emotions in my classroom, I was able to transform into a delicate dimension of self. My own emotions are easily channelled by the sounds and the beat of music while haunting lyrics tend to fill me with faith and courage. When I listen to music, self-demeaning beliefs disappear and a new promising and creative mind-set emerges. It was music that I turned to for comfort in my dark days and it is music that today elevates my spirit as I praise and worship my Creator. So, when I planned this lesson, I was conscious that music would possibly be the perfect escape for my learners.

When I introduced the topic, the classroom was vibrant with exhilaration. We could hear music playing downstairs in the hall where the Grade 3s were busy practising and preparing for Grandparents' Day. My learners took pleasure in listening to the cultural, gospel, and pop music wafting from below. I noticed how each song changed the way they interacted or participated. Music began to pulse against the walls, and whatever music was playing became an anthem as my learners sang along with conviction:

*“It’s been a long time without you my friend
and I will tell you all about it
when I see you again.”*

I had been planning to play this song for my learners and then it was played coincidentally in the hall.

There was an interlude when the music for the Grade 3s moved on to the next piece and this obviously disturbed our listening pattern. We listened with joy and adored the sound of the

music when the song was repeated. I felt that it called on us to be emotional heroes and to treasure friendships and relationships. Fortunately, I had the song on my phone. It was written by Wiz Khalifa and sung by Charlie Puth. The song is titled *See you again*. In an impulsive moment, I took the liberty to play the song. My learners' facial expressions portrayed that they were quite enchanted and they listened emotively. I then asked my learners to think about the song and to write their thoughts and feelings on a piece of paper. When they had finished, I asked those who felt comfortable to do so to share their thoughts and emotions with us.

There was ear-splitting silence in the classroom. As I wrote on the chalkboard the squeaking sound of chalk on the board enhanced the mood. Some of my learners looked through the window and watched the branches of the trees waving their arms in the wind. I wrote the date and heading. Phiwe stood up dauntlessly and stated, *“Ma’am, I would like to share my thoughts. This song reminds of my friend who died at a very young age. I remember how we used to play and visit each other, how we shared toys and games. He was one of my closest friends. I think of him every day. I hope to meet him in heaven one day.”* Linda sat silently in the front of the classroom. We had often witnessed her emotional outbreaks when she shared the love she had for her late mother. Linda delivered a testimony, *“I miss talking to my mom. I miss hugging her and this song makes me feel like I will see her one day.”* I was heartbroken. I felt helpless and I desperately wanted to heal her emotionally and spiritually and to take away her pain.

San, who was always willing to participate in classroom discussions, also decided to express his emotions. He stood up and looked vulnerable while he maintained eye contact with me and gently brushed tears from his face. He said, *“I was so sad when I had to leave my old primary school. I was leaving a good friend of mine and I was worried if I would be able to make friends or if I would be happy in my new school. This song is about friendship, sharing memories and showing that you are a good friend.”* Kristelle also shared her emotions, *“I think this song is about a long lost friend. It makes me feel gloomy but at the same time hopeful. It also reminds me of the movie ‘Fast and Furious.’ I really enjoyed watching it.”* Ayanda, who was usually timid in class, raised his hand slowly. He said, *“The song reminds me of all the precious times I shared with my grandfather. He was a kind man. I really miss*

him.” I listened emotively to my learners but did not to respond verbally so as not to spoil the mood.

7.2.2.3 Music is a remedy for pain and adversity

Most of my learners listened courteously and were willing to share their thoughts. But we soon had to read the textbook notes. Thabo volunteered to read first. He stuttered through the first few lines, but continued more confidently. He read aloud, “*Umm...mm... music, song and dance are important to all people in Africa. Indigenous African musical instruments were first designed, made and used in Africa. Many of these are still used by African communities and some are now used in other places around the world as well.*” Then Bonga offered to read next: “*Each of these instruments produces its own unique sound. Sound is the main output of energy of all musical instruments. Some instruments, like drums, are found all over the world, but in each place the design and materials are different.*”

The text moved on to allow the reader to think more deeply about music. I asked, “*What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say music?*” There were different responses such as, “*harmony*”, “*tempo*”, “*beat*”, “*rhythm*”, “*notes*”, and “*lyrics*.” We had never used musical instruments in the class before, but we had played music occasionally in the classroom on a CD player and the laptop. When I planned the lesson, I decided that it would be a good idea if my learners could see and use some musical instruments such as the tambourine, a triangle with two beaters, bells on a handle, and a wooden rattle. I wanted my learners to play these instruments rather than imagine using them and to explore their musical creativity. I thus borrowed various musical instruments from our Reception (Grade R) teacher.⁴

The sight of these instruments caused a lot of delight in the classroom and my learners could not wait to get their hands on these instruments. They were particularly enthused by the 13 note ‘glockenspiel’ that had vibrant colours and delivered bright and lively tones. I gave them a chance to play the instruments and we listened to the music as it unfolded. I asked them

⁴ The Reception class, referred to as Grade R, is the year of schooling before learners in South Africa start formal schooling in Grade 1. It lays the foundation for learning and schooling life. Learners are generally enrolled in this grade at age 5.

what sounds they could hear. I received a number of different answers such as: “a jingle”; “I can hear bells”; “a vibration”; “a deep sound”; and “a melody”.



Figure 7.2: Musical instruments

In the photos we can see a tambourine, a triangle with two beaters, bells on a handle, and a wooden rattle. Playing these musical instruments allowed the learners to burst with excitement. Their eyes were alight and their laughter and giggles filled the classroom with a splendid, resounding noise. I was pleased to see my learners smiling from ear to ear.

When they were done and order had been restored, I asked, “*What kind of music do you enjoy listening to?*” Esihle babbled, “*I enjoy listening to fast music.*” I searched for clarity, “*Okay, what kind of music is fast music?*” Jaden voiced, “*Hip Hop!*” Sphosethu raised his hand enthusiastically and so I gave him a chance. He screamed, “*Gqom!*” My learners seemed to share a similar sentiment and started cheering. “*Yes! Gqom is really good.*” Gqom is the famous South African buzzing sound that is usually enjoyed by the youth. It is described as a fusion of sounds originating from the Zulu townships in KwaZulu-Natal and dominating the neighbourhoods of Durban. Big names in the Gqom sphere are Babes Wodumo, Distraction Boys, DJ Maphorisa, and many more.

Tristen shared his taste in music, “*Ma’am, I like soft rock.*” There were many voices raised at once as my learners talked amongst themselves. I quickly reminded them to settle down. “*No one is talking, boys and girls...*” Emihle, who always had a striking smile and a radiant glow

on her face, stated, “*Jazz!*” There were reverberations of laughter in the background. My learners were quite noisy during this period and I let them be as they were enjoying the lesson. Olerato, who seemed to be listening attentively, mentioned, “*Ma’am, I enjoy listening to gospel.*” I was surprised that she chose gospel. She was really into dancing and entertaining the class with her dance moves and so I imagined that she would have enjoyed listening to Gqom or Kwaito music. Kwaito music is iconic in South Africa’s music culture as it is the kind of music that most Black South Africans of my age grew up listening to. It emerged in the 1990s in Johannesburg, South Africa. It is similar to Hip Hop but there is a distinctive way in which the lyrics are sung or rapped. The class was also stunned at Olerato’s response. Themba interrupted, “*Ma’am, rock and roll,*” and Linda stated, “*I like house music.*”

I realised that the music lesson was quite poignant and impassioned. We explored social and emotional learning and were able to reminisce on precious moments we had shared with our loved ones listening to music. This was a fundamental part of social and emotional learning. The values we shared based on this lesson were to listen attentively, to be conscious of others’ emotions and to respect their taste in music, not to suppress my own feelings, and to appreciate healthy relationships. I learned that music can be nurturing and my learners also learnt to maintain control even in times of great excitement. By responding to the value of music in our lives, my learners and I were able to revisit our emotional experiences and participate in meaningful conversations, determine moral values, endeavour to find ourselves, identify our identities, forge social relationships, and underline defining moments in our lives. I became conscious that music revealed some concealed emotions, particularly ones concerning questioning God, anger, deep hurt, rage, grief, and longing for a late relative or friend. Music allowed my learners to relate to one another – even if they disagreed – and to build positive relationships. By talking about their adversities and musical interests, they were also able to expand their imaginations, reflect on their learning, and identify personal traits. I realised during that lesson that music was a remedy as it reduced feelings of anxiety, fear, and helplessness and gave birth to hope.

7.2.2.4 My reflections

Journal Entry

12 September 2018

I was astounded by this lesson as it took a path I had not visualised. It was a bit daunting because I did not know what to look for from the beginning to the end. It was so impulsive and intensely emotive. This lesson revealed a dominant component of social and emotional learning, which is that emotions are often unexpected and surprising. It was thought-provoking to know that my learners listened to or were aware of some mature music as they gave different examples of genres such as gospel, jazz, and classical music. I comprehended that this was probably influenced by their parents or older siblings.

I observed my learners' facial expressions and the way they negotiated relationships as they shared their love of music. I was pleased to see them empathetic, expressive, and captivated by the lesson. It was almost like watching flowers blossoming in spring. I looked forward to reading more about their thoughts and feelings related to music. It was a thrilling lesson from beginning to end.

Retrospective Journal Entry

15 February 2019

I engaged in deeper introspection after reading my account of this lesson. I sensed immense power in music. I have always found my strength in praise and worship and particularly in listening to gospel music. Music has always allowed me to breathe and has emancipated me from my emotions and the negative thoughts that tended to imprison me. I was encouraged to listen to my learners' emotional and social outpourings and needs. One aspect that stood out was that we need to build and mend broken relationships. I felt a deep gratitude as my learners understood, perhaps unconsciously, the need for reconciliation and peace. I had thus achieved a harmonious relationship with my learning community as well as with myself. One of my biggest prayers has always been the gift of tranquillity as I cannot chase or travel to happiness – finding happiness is a spiritual journey that we undertake each day. Looking at the way my learners interacted during this lesson made me realise that sound relationships matter as they influence us positively and prepare us for the experiences we encounter every day. I believe that, through this lesson on music, my learners were encouraged to nurture and foster healthy relationships.

7.2.3 Lesson 10: Fun with Poetry (27 September 2018)

7.2.3.1 After recess...

The weather was humid and I urged my learners to settle down as they were entering after break. We were surrounded by sounds such as the snapping of lunch boxes, scuffling shoes on the floor, hinges slightly creaking, and the shrill voices of my learners who had still not quietened down. Of course there were stories of events that had taken place during break. “*Ma’am, Mpumelelo was playing soccer on the field!*” Jessica eagerly shared. “*Oh, okay, I shall talk to him,*” I responded to satisfy her.

I announced that we would be focusing on poetry for our English lesson. Wiseman (2010, p. 31) stresses that poetry “...has the potential to change and extend students’ learning in many ways, both inside and outside the classroom”. In my view, there are a number of values and lessons that one can learn from exploring poetry. I understand that poetry writing guides us to convey our thoughts, ideas, and emotions concisely but also imaginatively. It also give us the opportunity to explore our own experiences. Poetry can be inspiring as it expands our imagination. Therefore, I hoped that learning about and writing poetry would allow us to explore social and emotional learning. We started working on writing poetry at the end of our lesson.

7.2.3.2 Poetry reading activities

I wanted to encourage my learners to search deeper for rich emotional kingdoms that lived inside them by expressing themselves through poetry writing. I explained that creating a piece of writing such as a poem would allow us to evoke memories and emotions and to emancipate ourselves from emotional oppression such as stress and depression. I explained how I could find love, pleasure, fulfilment, and security by reading and writing poetry. I told my learners that I was also able to explore and expand my imagination and that poetry provided answers when I felt overwhelmed and uncertain.

We read a couple of poems together such as *Eleteleohony* written by Laura Richards and *Myself and the elf* written by Helen Moor. We then recited and memorised the poems. I

instructed my learners to identify and look for art in poetry. We discussed sound and rhythm and I also told them that poetry often has a story to tell and should be meaningful.

Instead of the deadly silence that I had assumed would follow, the learners erupted in sounds of joy and excitement. Songs and laughter filled the classroom. My learners were taking pleasure in writing poetry. Even those who were usually like statues came alive. There was an overflowing sense of passion and an eagerness to learn. I wanted to encourage my learners to express themselves through poetry, to spiral out of their boxes, and to reach for emotional liberty.

The atmosphere was almost electric as we brainstormed ideas and browsed the internet for rhyming words. I ensured that poetry would make sense for my learners by identifying simple and age appropriate poems. The mood of positivity was almost tangible and quite valuable. My learners were learning in a meaningful and exciting way. I scrutinised their faces and saw how excited they were to be engaged in learning communities as they assisted one another in writing evocative poetry and giving birth to new ideas. I selflessly endured not being involved while I took time to reflect on my own experiences when I had been enslaved by dark emotions. Amongst all this excitement, a few of my learners were miserably staring into space, cautiously looking away from my direction and avoiding catching my eyes. I suspected they were intimidated by the task and felt challenged to write a poem.

I visited the groups and gradually moved on to assist my learners individually. I assured them that poems have characteristics such as rhyme, alliteration, metaphors, similes, and personification. I encouraged them to write a poem that would reflect their true feelings. They could write about their friends or family or their daily experiences. Soon, the shy ones ventured nearer for assistance. Some were nobly forging ahead with fierce eyes while others trembled.

Every part of me wanted to explore my learners' social and emotional learning through poetry as it is an admirable approach to redeem and forgive ourselves. I saw some wonderful pearls of wisdom unfolding while my learners wrote their own poems. After a while I instructed my learners to clap their hands to grab their attention. "*All eyes and ears on me and arms folded,*" I emphasised. Remarkably, they were relatively acquiescent. I then extended the lesson by

requesting them to take out their textbooks and to open them. I mentioned that we would be doing more poetry. San interjected before I could finish my sentence, "*Oh, wow! Fun with Poetry, pages 36-37!*" He had a radiant glow and smiled from ear to ear. I could tell he couldn't wait for the lesson to take charge as usual. Ayden, who was also quite an extrovert shouted, "*Oh, yes! I finished my homework early yesterday so I already did it.*" He seemed pleased with himself but I was not. I gave him a look and half a smile, "*Well, it looks like you will have to do it again because I did not ask you to do it,*" I responded.

There were raised voices as my learners were talking amongst themselves for a couple of seconds. "*Sshhh! Can we pay attention, please?*" I said as I attempted to regain my authority in the classroom. "*Have you ever been tongue tied?*" I asked. "*Anyone? Who has been tongue tied before?*" My learners understood that being tongue tied related to struggling to express themselves or being too nervous to utter a single word. "*Have you ever tried to say or read a sentence that has words that have similar sounds and letters and then you end up twisting your tongue?*" As I was not getting any answers, I enlightened them, "*For example, try saying 'red lorry yellow lorry!'*" My learners enjoyed this exercise and soon there was the reverberation of "*red lorry, yellow lorry*" as they all attempted to say it as fast as they could. "*Thank you,*" I said. Unfortunately, I could still hear someone's voice repeating, "*red lorry yellow...*" I finally found the voice. I reminded Sphosethu to stop, "*Sphosethu, I said thank you, please stop.*" He was embarrassed. "*We are waiting for you. Now stop it,*" I urged. He looked up nervously and sat up straight. The rest of his group also whirled and sat up. I paused for a second. Someone burped loudly. Ayden grimly announced, "*Keep quiet!*" Ayanda also muttered in the background, "*Ma'am is waiting.*" There was the sporadic sound of laughter in the background. I was almost defeated and felt like the lesson needed more structure.

I tasked them to read two additional poems from our textbooks and I again let them write their own poems. This was accompanied by another activity. After reading a poem, I asked, "*Who tried to use the telephone? The writer used a few strange words; find those words that rhyme with those words.*" Their eyes widened and gleamed. I asked, "*Which word rhymes with elephant?*" Thabo raised his hand gently and stated, "*Telephant.*" I applauded him, "*Good, Thabo. Which word rhymes with elephone?*" I asked. The whole class yelled, "*Telephone!*"

“*With telephunk?*” I asked. Although she was a bit nervous and reluctant, Emihle whispered with a smile on her face, “*Ma’am, it is trunk.*” “*Yes, well done,*” I assured her. As I read aloud “*Telefree?*” the whole class chorused, “*Free!*” I continued, “*Telephong?*” and they bawled, “*Song!*” “*Well done. You guys are doing very well,*” I celebrated my learners.

After this exercise I posed more questions about the poem. For instance, “*What was she trying to do?*” Awande raised her hand joyfully and explained, “*She was trying to use the telephone.*” Kristelle stuttered, “*Bu...bu...but Ma’am, her trunk got tangled.*” In a squeaky voice Satish emphasised, “*The more she tried reading the more she got tongue tied.*” Tristen spoke expressively, “*She is trying to find out who used the telephone.*” I explained, “*When we work with poems, we find what is called personification and alliteration. Does anyone know what those are?*” They seemed bewildered as confusion clouded their faces. But most of them had a poker face and looked away. I suppose they didn't want me to single them out. I elaborated, “*Personification is when we give something that is not human, a human characteristic. For example, when we say ‘walls have ears’ or ‘the trees waved’.*” Cebolihle gave a long sigh, “*Aaaahhh.....such a long word,*” he murmured. I explained that personifications can be used to describe animals. “*Ma’am, we give them human characteristics like saying they talk,*” stated Tristen. I went on, “*In the poem the writer used personification. Copy a sentence that supports this statement. Alliteration usually has...?*” “*Oh, like tongue twisters!*” San completed my sentence.

I asked one of my learners to read an example of alliteration from the book. Kristelle read aloud, “*Fresh fried fish...*” I explained, “*This is an example of alliteration.*” I alerted Zandile who seemed preoccupied with her crayons. “*Zandile, please read the second one for us.*” She curved her mouth into a smile, desperately trying to camouflage her lack of concentration and paged anxiously through her book. Andile put his hand up cheerfully, “*Can I please read?*” He yelled. “*Yes, you may,*” I replied. He read confidently with a beaming facial expression, “*If two witches were watching two watches, which witch would watch which watch?*”

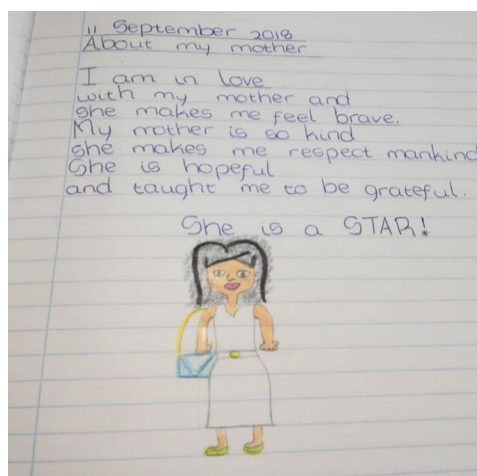
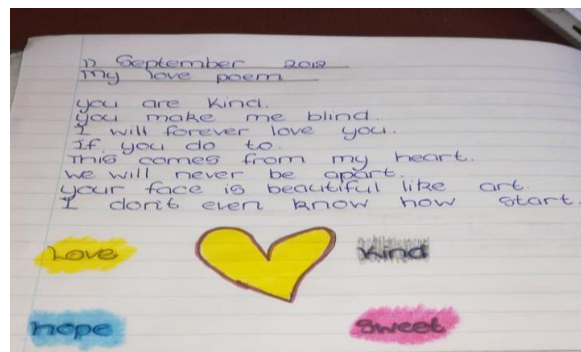
After a few more poetry activities I encouraged my learners to write their own poems. I prompted them to reflect on their lives’ journey, to think about their feelings, special people in their lives, and hardships they had had to face. I also encouraged them to focus on a single memory to evoke their emotions, or a colour, a taste, and even the impact of music on them. I

asked the confident learners to share their poetry and also pointed out whose poems I found enchanting. I also asked a few to read their poems aloud so that the others could identify rhyming words such as “heart - apart”, “blind - kind”. Jessica half-heartedly stood up with her eyebrows raised and a crinkled nose. She read nervously, “One morning it was spring, I was sleeping and my alarm rang”. I warned the class before Thabo read his poem not to make any “Ooh ahhh...!” sounds but to listen attentively. He had written quite an emotive and romantic poem. I was astonished and delighted that he had written such a mature poem. But Sethu was being disruptive again. “Sethu, please pay attention before you sit on the floor!” Thabo then read his poem fluently and emotively:

*“Hello Thabo is my name, I have not told anyone, but I am in love.
 She is bright like a holy dove
 Soon, I will have time
 In the future she will be mine
 When I am in my 20s in spring
 I will give her an engagement ring
 I have not told you but she is kind
 Now you see that I am love blind”*

-Thabo Langa-

Below are more examples of the poems my learners wrote:



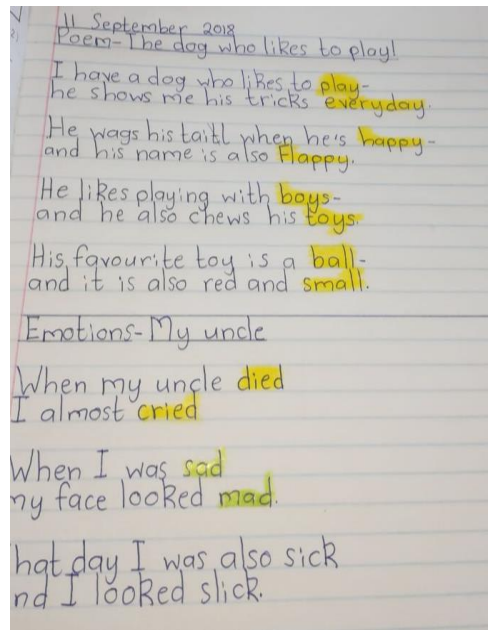


Figure 7.3: Seeing life through poetry

I felt that reading and writing poetry gave my learners an opportunity to express themselves artistically, socially, and creatively. Wiseman (2010) highlights that focusing on emotional and social aspects of children's lives is significant in terms of their own urgencies and values. I hoped my learners would be able to use language to express themselves and that it would empower them when they were faced with criticism. Working with poetry also extended literary learning and my learners were also able to share some important values. Achieving these goals were imperative in my approach to social and emotional learning and in the development of my learners.

I was pleasantly surprised that my learners were able to go beyond the normal parameters and that they explored poetry so whole heartedly. I would like to think that poetry writing allowed them to express their emotions and to forge stronger social relationships. They were able to open themselves to a new form of expression and creativity explored their previously unspoken pain, desires, and joy. I realised that poetry was like storytelling as it allowed my learners to reflect on and appreciate life's precious moments. This process is important for social and emotional learning. I was reminded of my own childhood and how writing and poetry had allowed me to fall in love with a better version of myself. I was often bruised and battered but always searched for happiness and healing in my writing.

7.2.3.3 My reflections

Journal Entry

28 September 2018

I was pleased to experience the fresh and positive energy in my classroom. I realised that my learners were freely sharing love, their life experiences, and their emotions through poetry writing. They were carefree and light-hearted and I was pleased that they were able to embrace writing consciously and that they were truthful and honest with themselves. I felt that this poetry lesson was a beautiful exposition of life and provided treasured moments.

Retrospective Journal Entry

10 October 2018

Looking back at my poetry session with my learners, I now realise that I was able to surrender to the moment and I acknowledge that I was astounded. While working with these learners, I was able to awaken a power and light within me that I thought had been doused. As a child, I found healing and strength in reading and writing. I remember that I fell in love with myself again and with my teaching which helped me to dig deep into my emotional and social experiences. Poetry has always comforted and counselled me during my most dreadful and painful experiences. I am delighted that my learners displayed such courage and that they achieved victory.

7.3 My learning

7.3.1 Building a community on social justice

I discovered the value of mutual respect and sound relationships. I also became conscious of the significance of creating a sense of community and belonging in my classroom. It was vital that I did not dismiss my learners' emotions or personal issues as I wanted them to feel valuable and acknowledged. I learned that I had to provide support and encourage a collaborative learning environment. I also learned to value diverse perspectives and social backgrounds. It was challenging to engage my learners in dialogues when they felt uncomfortable and insecure and battled to express their thoughts and emotions. I overcame this challenge by learning to respect my learners and to listen to them with sympathy and empathy. Allison and Ramirez (2020) communicate the point that teachers must be familiar with the life experiences of their students in order to engage them in learning contexts that do

not require them to conceal or mute their experiences or feelings. It is only in such contexts that learners will ultimately become aware of their worth. I realised that it was essential for me to create a welcoming atmosphere and a conducive learning environment in which I could explore social and emotional learning. I wanted my learners to be open and honest about their feelings and I also wanted them to know that their presence, voices, and thoughts were valid.

By choosing the lessons I did, I wanted my learners' imaginative energy to flow and for us to interact socially through sharing ideas, our emotions, and our life experiences. I anticipated that I would encounter wonderful fragments of my learners' lives through the texts I shared with them and this was indeed the case as various emotions and diverse life experiences unfolded during our lessons. I wanted to accommodate diversity in my teaching and learning. Hannon (2020) argues that a conscious focus on social justice can aid teachers in constructing responsive and supportive environments for their learners that highlight their understanding and support their physical, social, emotional, and academic requirements. I believe that this goal was achieved in my lessons and for the vast majority of the 41 learners in my classroom.

When I read the text *A new pet for Mary-Ann* to my learners, I was deeply optimistic. I treasured the themes in this text and believed they would encourage acts of kindness and humanity within and outside my classroom. I watched how the lesson developed and how it elicited a positive atmosphere in. I realised that being optimistic means to keeping one's head pointed towards the light and to embrace hope and faith. There were many dusky moments in my own life when my faith in humanity was profoundly questioned, but my quest to explore and encourage social and emotional learning kept me motivated.

7.3.2 Life is art and we make it colourful

During my poetry lesson, I learnt that expressing ourselves through poetry writing can bring healing, help us focus on inner strength and self-reliance, and channel our anger or sadness into positive self-talk. Wiseman (2010) advises that it is imperative to give learners opportunities to express their feelings while they learn about and write poetry. Such activities can also uncover shared life experiences that may result in social collaboration through writing about social events and experiences. I wanted my learners to embrace hope and faith

through poetry and music. Moreover, I wanted them to focus on positive emotions such as feeling safe and secure, finding inner peace, and respecting nature and its creatures.

The lessons that I presented helped me to identify my learners' emotions and to view the manner in which they interacted socially and individually in the classroom environment. Jones and Kahn (2017) indicate that the complexity of learning is heightened when learners have opportunities to cooperate and make personally relevant connections to subject material. I structured my teaching based on my quest to build opportunities for relationships and interactions. During these lessons, my learners also negotiated relationships, engaged in conversations, expressed their thoughts and ideas, and came to terms with their emotions. By working collaboratively with others, they were able to take on new challenges with courage and an optimistic mind-set. My learners negotiated relationships, opened dialogues, explored their experiences and desires, and shared their emotions. They were able to take on new challenges such as writing creatively with enthusiasm and bravery.

7.3.3 Redefining teaching and learning

The poetry and music lessons in particular taught me that learners are walking resources and should never be underestimated. Their knowledge of and insight in music was astounding and this underscored the educational reality of the value of prior learning as a foundation for new knowledge. My learners taught me to value nurturing positive relationships and experiences, to be optimistic, to build relationships, and to value honesty and trust. Allison and Ramirez (2020) state that if we hope to impart learning that empowers children, teachers must be compassionate and emotionally alert. What I had learnt encouraged me to reflect on my own learning and life experiences. I recall how I had to learn from my own triumphs and failures and come to terms with my flaws. In the same way, it was enthralling to notice how many shy learners unfolded their wings and spread them to fly, while the more verbal and outgoing ones learnt to accept constructive criticism and allow others to shine. I found inspiration and felt encouraged by exploring dynamic and creative learning opportunities such as poetry writing, drawing, paragraph writing, and listening to music.

I was able to discover a number of patterns that emerged during our lessons by allowing myself to relax control and the learners' energy to filter through and drive our lessons. Jones

and Kahn (2017) underline the point that recognising and working with one's emotions for self and social development. I became aware of my own emotional shortcomings. I realised how, before this study, I had often been impatient and overly strict and had not searched deep enough for insightful answers relating to social and emotional learning. However, the lessons that I presented in this and the previous chapters taught me that social and emotional learning occurred consistently through reflection, dialogue, and discussions in the classroom. A consistently silent classroom is therefore not a positive learning space. I thus encouraged collaborative reflection and pursued diverse perspectives through poetry writing, creative writing, music, and drawing.

For me personally these lessons were a steep learning curve that allowed me to enter new professional spaces. For instance, addressing research question 2 was strongly supported by my learner participants who also became 'critical friends' as, through their voices, I was able to identify aspects of my teaching that needed positive change. Together we explored who we were as individuals and we facilitated social and emotional learning for one another. I believe strongly that this process occurred for my learners at an age appropriate level, and that the foundation I established would be a sound springboard for their future development towards maturity.

7.3.4 Reinventing myself and my learners

This self-study research enabled me to reimagine possibilities for myself and my learners, and to engage in meaningful conversations that added meaning and value to our classroom experiences. My learners became a point of reference for positive social interactions and relationships. I was pleased to see that my learners embodied a wealth of potential for emotional maturity. Mahoney, Durlak and Weissberg (2018) state that social and emotional learning encourages positive social behaviours, forges healthy relationships and concern for others, stimulates empathy and prosocial problem solving, supports peace building, and ensures cooperation. I was delighted with my learners' growth and optimistic attitude towards learning. It was also important that I engaged in positive self-talk, shared appropriate life experiences in the classroom, and expressed myself sincerely.

I learned that teaching does not only occur in the school environment but that it is broader than formal schooling as the families and communities of learners are powerful drivers of their world view when they enter the classroom. I thus recognised and respected the fact that learning also transpired in the homes and in the communities of my learners through both formal and informal modes and constitutions. The Department of Education (2006, p. 12.) highlights the following point: “[there is a] need for changes to be made to the provision of education and training so that it is responsive and sensitive to the diverse range of learning needs”. The purpose of inclusive education is thus to change attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, and curricula. The learning environment needs to meet the needs of all learners regardless of their social backgrounds or settings and schools and teachers should maximise the participation of all learners so that they will embrace a culture of learning.

The reading studies that I selected were endorsed by the English and Social Science curricula, and these texts in turn minimised barriers to learning as they addressed strong educational values such as diversity and respect for nature and life. I appreciated finding these texts and the characters in them as they related to the curriculum and meaningful learning experiences.

Wiseman (2010, p. 30) states that students’ involvement with poetry leads to actions that affect their lives in various ways outside the classroom and that connect their learning across their own life contexts. I was pleased to see my learners share their emotions and lived experiences through poetry writing. I realised that the classroom was influenced by our daily life experiences and this was powerfully reflected in the themes of the poems the learners wrote, such as falling in love, love for a parent, love for a dog, and friendship.

Our society is often weighed down by traumatic life experiences such as domestic violence, the death of a parent or loved one, poverty, and social rejection and bias. Crosby, Howell and Thomas (2018) state that teachers have to be aware of both privilege and disempowerment that unfairly exist in our society. Furthermore, these authors argue that teachers must recognise the power that is prevalent in dominant groups and acknowledge its pervasive impact on all systems within society. It is thus imperative to commit to lifelong reflection on the ways in which we perpetuate oppression and how we should actively work against it. Teachers, myself included, should thus recognise the possible emotional roots of behavioural problems and unfair treatment that hamper learning and result in disciplinary problems. I

therefore wanted my learners to share their lived experiences and to express their emotions freely without holding back. I wanted to create a safe and secure learning environment where feelings were shared effortlessly and fearlessly. I must admit, however, that in a class of 41 learners this was a hard task and that some very shy and aloof ones may still have ‘slipped through the cracks’ during the relatively short duration of this project. However, I am conscious of their plight and will endeavour, by all possible means, to address their needs, as well as those of my future shy learners, on an equal basis at all times.

7.4 Conclusion

In Chapter Seven I offered a detailed explanation of and reflected on my lessons concerning an exploration of social and emotional learning. I answered the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* To address this fundamental question, I utilised data from my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners’ written and drawing activities, as well as their oral responses.

By means of my explorations of social and emotional learning as discussed in this chapter, I acquired insights about forging relationships and building strong foundations in teaching. I am now even more passionate about being an advocate for social change and social justice in my learning community than I was as a young student and teacher. The power of diversity has taught me to acknowledge different human experiences and perspectives.

In Chapter Eight I shall discuss how and what I have learned through my self-study research. The discourse is presented under developing themes and I explain my understanding of social and emotional learning. These themes are introduced by a collage that visualises social and emotional learning, and a transcription to explain the meanings that I elicited from these visuals.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: A GATEWAY TO NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

8.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to learn more about myself and my teaching practice by exploring social and emotional learning. I chiefly focus on the ways I encouraged my learners to give an account of their social and emotional needs and experiences, but I augment these findings with memories of my learning as a child and a young student. As an aspiring social and emotional learning practitioner, I wanted to learn from my personal history as well as my learners' and my own classroom experiences.

In Chapter Seven, I offered a descriptive account of and reflected on some lessons related to social and emotional learning. I responded to my second research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 Classroom?* To respond to this fundamental question, I drew on my reflective journal, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities as well as their oral responses.

In Chapter Eight, I shall reflect on how and what I learnt through my self-study research. I present this learning under themes to explain my understanding of social and emotional learning as discussed in Chapter Three to Chapter Seven. These themes are illustrated in a social and emotional learning collage which I also transcribed in narrative format. I created a collage because it aided me in identifying the themes from my explorations of social and emotional learning. By means of this collage I was able to apply visual thinking and extend my understandings of the self-study data. In essence, I wanted to bring my thoughts together in visual elements to explore their harmonies. Butler-Kisber (2018) explains that collage making has an evocative power that profoundly contributes to qualitative research. I concur, as by means of this method I was able to express what had been said and unsaid using pictures and word phrases. The collage that I created visualised my thoughts, feelings and emotions and was also a power channel for expressing my thoughts in words. It was exciting to share my lived experiences with my colleagues by means of this collage as it illuminates some of

The collage illustrates what I learnt through my exploration of social and emotional learning based on my memories and my interactions with Grade 4 learners. The self-study methods taught me where I was in my teaching and learning, what I needed to be aware and cautious of, and what could make learning meaningful. Van Schalkwyk (2010) argues that collage making is one way of providing “...a representation of what we think and say and do below the level of awareness” (p. 676). A collage can thus illuminate our thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are difficult to express verbally. The pictures in a collage also reveal authentic and sincere stories. This collage underscores what was revealed to me by self-inquiry, exploration, and narratives of my shared and lived experiences.

When I presented this collage to my critical friends and supervisor, I explained my choice of the caption *Make your soul smile* (Figure 8.2). I said, “*I felt that it was important for me and my learners to have a positive mind-set and this is underlined in social and emotional learning. They need to be confident about who they are and not be afraid to say what they are uncomfortable with such as A, B, or C and, at the same time, they should not dismiss their feelings but manage their emotions in an ‘age appropriate’ manner. My learners should also be able to identify different emotions and be understanding of and empathetic with one another.*”



Figure 8.2: Key collage caption: “*Make your soul smile*”

Looking at this visual text brought an inner glow as I was able to *find myself* and become *aware of who I was*. The visual text also allowed me to record my learning that was infused with excitement and optimism. I was eventually able to adopt an optimistic attitude towards learning by being motivated emotionally and spiritually by my teachers and my learning spaces as a child and a student.

8.3 Themes

In the processes of obtaining, analysing, and presenting my data, I was guided by two research questions, namely: “*What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?*” and “*What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*” Based on my exploration of these questions I identified seven key themes, namely:

1. Social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness.
2. Social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging.
3. Social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments.
4. Social and emotional learning cultivates positive social and emotional relationships.
5. Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic attitude.
6. Social and emotional learning is a source of emotional healing
7. Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice.

I was able to recognise these themes by numbering the pictures in the collage and aligning them to similar notions and ideas (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). These themes respond to and mirror both research questions with respect to reconnoitring social and emotional learning in my classroom and from my memories. I shall address the first four themes in this chapter and hope that the insights I share will enable further conversations in the educational sphere.

8.3.1 Theme 1: Social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness

Having self-awareness means to be conscious of who you are and being able to acknowledge your strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, inspirations, and feelings. According to Goleman (1996), self-awareness is the ability to recognise and understand personal moods, emotions and drives and what their effects are on others. Self-awareness also includes self-confidence and truthful self-assessment. I thus understand that self-awareness is contingent on one’s ability to screen one's emotional state and identify and name one’s emotions. I would like to think that having self-awareness allows me to understand other people and how they perceive me. It is also about my approach and responses to others at particular moments in time.

Below is an extract from my personal history narrative (Chapter Four: Reliving my childhood and adolescent experiences) in which I narrate how I reacted to my changing body and that I felt like a stranger in my own body. I was going into adolescence and was probably 13 years old when I realised that society sexualised the female body. The comments I endured on my way to and from school and in my community made me feel violated. This narrative reflects my lack of self-awareness:

I had often wondered when I would transform from being a young girl to being a woman. [When it started to happen] I felt trapped in my own body. Even though I had small breasts I often wore big clothes to hide my body. I longed to find the wisdom that would release my strangling thoughts and I longed to be armed against the imprisoning changes that were taking place in my body. I was already strong-willed and became defensive and abrasive. The demeaning sexual comments that were flung at me at taxi ranks, the bus stop, and around the neighbourhood came back to visit me when I was feeling down. I suppose they were teaching me to love myself less. I wallowed in self-pity and self-loathing and I did not allow myself any mercy. I felt lost and betrayed by my own body and suffered undeserved moments of guilt because it was changing. I hated these changes because they advertised my growing womanhood and drew unnecessary attention. I felt unarmed and unable to face the onslaughts that accompanied my growing physical maturity.

Looking back at this time in my life, I can see now that I had to fall in love with myself and to gain a positive image of my body. Jones and Kahn (2017) argue that social and emotional learning stimulates one's sense of self and promotes attitudes that facilitate learning and growth. I finally outgrew comparing myself to other women and feeling the need to hide when I walked past a group of men. By reflecting on this memory, I was encouraged to teach my learners to treasure their bodies and to be content with the changes that occurred naturally. I encouraged them to be confident and to be 'comfortable in their own skins'.

The following extract from my reflective journal demonstrates how my self-study research allowed me to grow in self-awareness and the ability to identify and respect others' feelings. This was an essential learning point about social and emotional learning. This extract was taken from Chapter Five: Unpacking emotions and lived experiences:

Retrospective Journal Entry

16 April 2018

Looking back, I understand that children need to be given the opportunity to engage in different real-life experiences. I think this will allow them to understand different relationships. I realise that social and emotional learning is important for discovering a sense of self and when learners begin to uncover and explore their identities. My learners should thus develop holistically by taking responsibility for their surroundings, relationships, and emotions. I also acknowledge that childhood experiences are not acquired in isolation as they are entrenched in our everyday activities and encounters. I look forward to creating heart-warming experiences for my learners that will warm their hearts and enrich their minds.

I appreciate that social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness and freedom. During my exploration of social and emotional learning, I was able to identify and understand different emotions and both pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Swartz (2017) outlines that self-awareness is the ability to detect one's feelings and values and to understand how they influence behaviour. I learnt to regulate my feelings and behaviours and not to suppress my emotions either inside or outside the classroom. This understanding now gives me the power to empathise with others, the willingness to understand different emotions, and the open-mindedness to respect different backgrounds and life experiences.

The following extract from Chapter Five illustrates how social and emotional learning promoted my learners' self-awareness. After reading the text titled *The people who hugged the trees*, my learners had to express what they felt strongly about, and many responses were enchanting as they were infused with emotion and honesty.

Jessica said, *"I feel strongly about my family because they mean everything to me and I love them with all my heart. I will never be the same without them. They make me happy."* Tristen conveyed that he also felt strongly about certain things when he asserted, *"I feel very strongly about myself, God and my family. The reason is that God made me who I am and my family supports me. That is why I feel strongly about God and my family."* I asked Tristen to explain why he felt strongly about himself. He was

a bit puzzled and reluctant at first but then responded, *“Umm...I feel strongly about myself...ummm...to be honest, I don't know why I feel strongly about myself.”*

My learners showed awareness of their feelings when they expressed who they felt strongly about and why. This was a vital indication of self-awareness as being self-aware also means being able to identify how other people see you.

I was particularly moved by Tristen's response because he showed a strong understanding of his relationship with his family and God, but he was still very young and needed to complete his journey of self-understanding and self-discovery.

The following extract from my personal history narrative (Chapter Three, Nostalgic Feelings) demonstrates what I learnt about myself as a young adolescent through my expressive writing, and how this enhanced my self-awareness:

I was self-conscious, lacked confidence, and I always compared myself negatively to my peers and my siblings. I was not happy with the way I looked – I felt I was too short and dark in complexion, that I had a big forehead, and that my nose was too narrow. However, I learned slowly as I matured to listen to my intuitive voice that was somehow consoling and healing me. Of course, I realised that I could not isolate my emotions from my circumstances, but I needed to feel and grow and identify others' emotions and emotional experiences. I remember that I once scribbled on a piece of paper that I felt emancipated and this action was the beginning of consciously sharing my thoughts, feelings, and challenges. This first scribbling exercise gave birth to positive self-talk and to look at my life's lessons, struggles, and triumphs as learning experiences from which I could draw inner strength.

Exploring social and emotional learning through reflecting and writing about my emotions and challenges allowed me to explore the impact of nature on me, to rediscover myself, and to feed my curiosity. As I dug deeper, I found freedom of expression. I always looked forward to new beginnings and laughter became a remedy. I came to realise that self-awareness is the ability to be attuned to our feelings, thoughts, and actions. When I recalled this truth as a teacher, I realised that it was important for me to encourage my learners to talk about their

feelings, to assist them to expand their emotional vocabulary, and to actively label their feelings. I also urged them to listen to one another's needs and concerns with an empathetic and compassionate heart.

Looking back, I recall how I often crawled back into my old self when I was faced with a challenge. This sapped my confidence and I reverted to dismissing or simply ignoring my emotions. However, I became cognisant that being self-aware is a journey and that it requires daily attention. I thus constantly need to revisit my emotions and address them cautiously but courageously.

When we learn to accept ourselves as we are, we feed the fountain of self-love, self-awareness, and healthy relationships. Of course, finding and accepting self-love is a constant journey and a work in progress. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) underline the competencies that support social and emotional learning, namely "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (p. 406). Along my journey of finding self-awareness I learnt to fall in love with myself, to constantly renew my spirit, and to embrace self-confidence.

Looking back, I realise that self-awareness is a powerful building block for social and emotional learning. I also realise that finding it is a journey because, as we improve our self-awareness, we also experience life. It is therefore imperative to be aware of our emotions, the challenges life throws at us, our shortcomings, and to improve our ability to respond to change and acknowledge different perspectives. I therefore wanted my young learners to obtain self-awareness at an early age as this would give them the ability to understand their emotions and what triggered their emotional responses. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) elucidate that a socio-cultural perspective in a South African context is mirrored by the spirit of Ubuntu, which means humanity. It is an African ethical philosophy that is expressed as "*Umuntu ungununtu ngabantu*" in IsiZulu, meaning a person is a person because of other people. Teachers do not live and work on an island, and thus I want my learners to analyse their emotions and understand how and why they distress or inspire others. They should also learn at an early age to understand the connection between their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours.

8.3.2 Theme 2: Social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging



Figure 8.3: “Home”

The above image from my collage highlights the importance of belonging and the fact that we strongly relate to others. Relationships are established at home where they should be nurtured and treasured. During the study project, I yearned for my learners to feel at home and accepted in my classroom where I endeavoured to accommodate their individual emotional needs. I understood that they had diverse needs as, for example, some enjoyed indulging in reading, some loved learning indoors, and some thrived in the ‘outdoor classroom’. I hoped that experiencing a sense of belonging in all these spaces would make them feel safe and secure.

In exploring social and emotional learning I was able to attain a sense of belonging and being comfortable in my skin. I also understood my learners’ diverse identities and respected their characteristics. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) highlight that a sense of belonging is important for different social identities to emerge. A vital step is to legitimise the knowledge that learners bring to the classroom and to create a social and emotional curriculum from the perspectives of the learners. I realised that this also meant being aware of my own emotions and the kind of relationship I had with myself. Therefore, by knowing myself, I was aware that my emotions, thoughts, and mind-set would help me build positive relationships with my learners. Social and emotional learning thus allowed me to find a sense of belonging and to convey this to my learners.

When I traced my personal history, I realised that not feeling a sense of belonging at school impacted me negatively. I was enrolled in new school at the age of 10. This school was completely different from my previous school as my new school was diverse in terms of cultures, religions, and races. I felt out of place because I struggled to relate to the school's traditions and learning culture. My peers had already adapted to the school and I needed to make new friends, build relationships, and find empathy and acceptance. I longed to be understood, I needed approval, and I yearned to be included. My reflections (Chapter Three, Nostalgic Feelings) illustrate how lost I felt:

I remember that there were days when I felt as if I was grieving my own imminent death as thoughts of death and sorrow were always in my head. This was probably because I felt very lonely after my father had been diagnosed with renal failure. I was numb physically and emotionally and I was empty spiritually. It was a muted feeling that I struggle to describe, but I was existing and not living. These feelings persisted when I started my schooling in a new school. I was enrolled at this new school in 2000 when I was 10 years old and in Grade 5. My problem was a lack of self-identity and I felt lonely and lost. The school was much bigger than my previous school and also embraced diversity in terms of culture, race, and religion. It was also situated close to the city. For some odd reason, I felt different from my peers as they all seemed familiar with the school's culture, traditions, and history. I guess that being surrounded by learners of such diverse religions and races was overwhelming at first.

The extract reveals that I, as every 'lost' child does, needed teachers who would encourage me to explore my new environment and make peace with myself. It also reflects how I restricted my experiences but acknowledged those of other learners, probably as I was in search of recognition. It was insightful to learn that a school's culture and environment can create an atmosphere in which we build relationships, find our identities, and share our life experiences. I thus understood that my learners might also experience the same predicaments because, as humans, we are constantly trying to discover ourselves, to grow, and to preserve our identity. These lessons inspired me to want my learners to face their hardships, to reject unresponsive relationships, and to move on after adversity. They needed to be embraced by a classroom community that nurtured sociability and acknowledged individuality.

As part of my self-study research, my learners and I completed an activity called *A flag of me* (see Chapter Five). I asked them to use coloured pencils, to be imaginative, and to create colourful images. They each had to design a flag that would tell us something about themselves. As they could include references to their families, where they came from, places they would like to visit, and what they believed in, this activity connected with their hearts and emotions.

Moreover, this activity allowed me to step into my learners' worlds as their flags revealed so much of themselves. I know this also encouraged a sense of belonging in my classroom and as a learning community because they could be honest without fear of criticism or ridicule. They belonged although they had different life experiences, needs, and backgrounds.

When I grew up, I longed to be acknowledged and to feel accepted for who I was. I now understand that social and emotional learning encourages and supports a sense of belonging within a classroom community. It enables learners to balance their needs and yearnings for individual identity and sovereignty. The following extracts from Chapter Five reflect how I tapped into my learners' daily lives and endeavoured to learn about their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences to foster a sense of belonging:

Soon the class seemed to be filled with pure joy as we looked forward to sharing “a flag of me.” To begin, Melissa described her flag, “*My name is Melissa and my surname is Ndlovu. The reason I drew this flag is that it allows me to use my imagination.*” Sihle interrupted, “*Ma’am, San wants to tell us about his flag.*” San articulated, “*My name is San. I have my father’s name and my mother’s name. My favourite colour is blue and my house is painted blue. I’ve always liked this colour from the age of 6 years old. My favourite activity is to go to the harbour. I enjoy a boat cruise. My favourite teacher is Miss Mkhize because you teach us everything and to do the right thing. My birthday is on the 20th of December. I was born in 2008.*”

The above extract demonstrates how I managed to encourage social participation in my classroom to help resolve the inner battles that my learners might have encountered in their young lives. Taylor and Larson (1999) state that, by creating safe and nurturing classrooms, teachers inspire learners to want to come to school. I wanted my learners to feel welcome and

cherished. I understood that emotional battles would have impacted their world view and their view of the people around them, and that this view would have influenced their ability to cooperate and function in the classroom. However, by connecting them to self-awareness through this activity, I hoped that it might be insightful and therapeutic for my learners. I was consistently heedful of my learners' diverse backgrounds and that some may have encountered traumatic experiences, but I wanted them to respond to their social and emotional needs, which they did, as the drawings of their flags were highly insightful.

My personal history narrative (Chapter Three: Nostalgic Feelings) reveals how I started being aware of my emotions and how I found a sense of belonging and being aware of myself in my learning environment. I was 10 years old when I was able to identify and name my emotions. When I started in a new school in the year 2000, self-identity was a problem. I felt isolated and misplaced. For some strange reason, I felt different from my peers – they all seemed familiar with the school's learning culture and history. I guess being surrounded by people of various religious groups and races was overwhelming. The emotional journey of constantly looking for myself and my identity provoked the feeling that I did not fit in and was out of place (Chapter Three: Nostalgic Feelings):

I was concerned about my social interaction with others and my ability to affiliate with groups of different social cultures and identities. I struggled to describe myself, my personality, attributes, and my physique. I was constantly searching for my identity in others. I made a conscious decision to withdraw my thoughts and suppress my emotions. I wanted to be invisible because I feared what others might think of me and how they would respond to who I was. I can now see that self was absent. I was silent – I had low self-esteem resulting in self-doubt and fear.

By recalling my childhood experiences, I understood that my classroom needed to be emotionally welcoming and supportive. I wanted my learners to feel a sense of belonging and know that they were accepted for who they were. The extract above illustrates how my self-esteem was absent because I did not identify my social and emotional needs. In fact, I “*felt invisible*”. I thus wanted to help my learners attain psychological security by giving them unconditional care and acceptance, strengthening their feeling of belonging, moderating their behaviour, and enhancing their sense of personal competence.

Payton et al. (2008, p.4) define self-awareness as “...accurately evaluating one’s feelings, securities, principles, and strengths [as] they are sustaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence”. For example, I comprehended that, as a teacher, I needed to search deeper and be mindful of my learners’ life experiences. This would enhance their sense of belonging in the learning community in the classroom, which is an approach that is encouraged by a socio-cultural perspective.

The extract above reveals how significant it was that I was able to emancipate my emotions and consciously share my thoughts, feelings, and learning experiences. My own social and emotional learning thus strengthened and promoted my self-awareness and fostered a sense of belonging that allowed me to express myself freely. This implies that I am now aware of my own emotions, emotional triggers, and how and why I respond to certain circumstances the way I do.

Looking back, it was only during puberty that I was alerted to the reality of my emotional self. I became conscious and cautious of my environment and the kind of experiences women have. At the time, I understood women’s role as ‘suffering in silence’. I realised that I yielded to the temptation to pursue my identity in others and to seek what the media defined as the ‘perfect’ body shape or size. Over the years, I became conscious that I was inhibiting my feelings and resisting true expressions of myself – verbally or otherwise. I endorsed adverse philosophies that overwhelmed me. I had to learn to be generous to myself, to endure, and to rejoice in my flaws as well as my achievements. Selfhood is a journey and for me it is still a daily process as I choose to be kind and gracious to myself every day.

Evolving developments play a pivotal part in learning and the transformation of identity or finding our sense of belonging. I became conscious of learning and teaching in a collaborative manner. I had to engage in mediations that stretched participation for my learners by creating a healthy space for learning. I needed to provide a sense of belonging, allow social identities to develop, and recognise the knowledge that my learners brought into our learning environment. In essence, I had to take cognisance of the social and emotional curriculum from the perspective of my learners.

During my self-study research, my learners and I participated in positive self-talk and referred to this as our ‘inner dialogue’. By engaging in positive self-talk, my learners developed a sense of individuality and group responsibility. They showed gratitude for their involvement in interactive activities and developed an optimistic mind-set. It was crucial for my learners to embrace their individual personalities and to be comfortable with who they were. I also fortified democratic thinking in the classroom.

The positive self-talk posters the learners designed (examples in Figure 8.4) reflected their sense of belonging and demonstrated how they viewed themselves. They also presented open-ended, thought-provoking, and imperative questions about how we treat other people and use hurtful words. This simple activity allowed us to explore social and emotional learning – and the consequences when it is absent – in some depth.

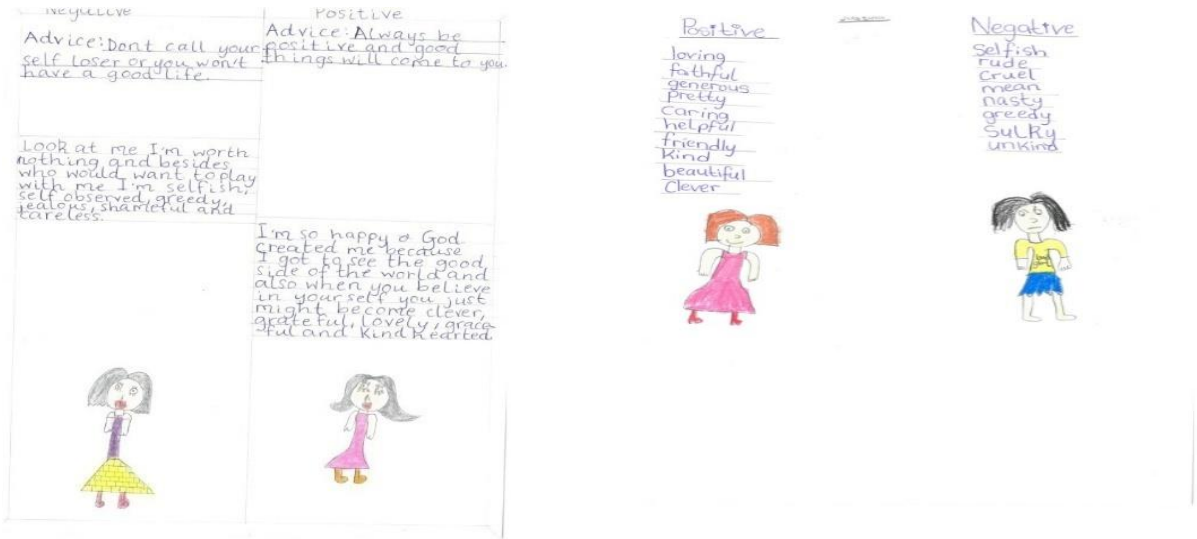


Figure 8.4: Positive self-talk posters

The poster making activity was discussed in Chapter Six. In this activity I needed to create a sense of belonging in my classroom and wanted my learners to feel comfortable and to share their victories and their struggles. Taylor and Larson (1999) elucidate that learners who are invigorated to attend schools that foster social and emotional learning and where they can grow healthy relationships are well able to solve intrapersonal problems and negotiate differences. In fact, they soon develop social and emotional intelligence. I anticipated that our journey to explore social and emotional learning would make them feel secure and that they

would be able to forge healthy relationships. I had to be open-minded and not resist change. I acknowledged that many of my learners had problems at home, but I wanted them to be safe in my care, embrace diversity, and expand their emotional vocabulary. To be able to do so was a journey of self-discovery in which my memories allowed me to reconstruct and reinvent my teaching through asking thought-provoking questions such as: *How can I improve my teaching skills?* and *How can I use my memories to deliver teaching in a positive manner?*

As a researcher, I needed to transform my mind-set and take on the roles of both teacher and learner. I had to be cognisant of the zone of proximal development which is “the distance between the developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving” (Hausfather, 1996). Learning is guided by an experienced individual who supports an inexperienced learner, and Murphy and Iverson (2003) explain that socio-cultural interaction plays a constitutive part in learning and the transformation of identity, arguing that it cannot be concentrated on generalised structures. Likewise, Hausfather (1996) elucidates that the classroom is complicated and therefore, by reconnoitring social and emotional learning, I had to transform and learn to be compassionate to myself and my learners and to be forgiving. I had to use kinder words in dialogues with myself and search for new and unique ways that would support feeling accepted in relationships.

Social and emotional learning encouraged me to constantly revisit my thoughts and to find time to meditate. To do this I used music, art, gardening, and reading. I had to break down and digest emotions, have a clear mind-set that evoked and engaged my learners’ positive emotions, and offer emotional support. I also had to respect different emotions and views. I had to discover who I was as a teacher, face my fears, find my inner strength, interact appropriately with the learners, and be emotionally aware.

8.3.3 Theme 3: Social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments



Figure 8.5: “Outdoor enthusiast”

Being an outdoor enthusiast (see Figure 8.5) allowed me to pursue growth and help others to grow. There never was – and never will be – an end to the journey of finding myself and reinventing teaching and learning. I felt that working in the ‘outdoor classroom’ with my learners negotiated relationships and dialogues (Chapter Five). Their experiences of working outdoors offered them a place to hide, a shelter, a safeguard against making errors, and a channel through which they could express their emotions. They were able to take on new challenges with an enthusiastic mind-set and show bravery. Working outdoors harvested life and positive emotions of feeling safe and secure and elicited inner peace. Moreover, working outdoors made my learners value nature more intensely.

Figure 8.5 (*Outdoor enthusiast*) for me means that, by exploring social and emotional learning not only indoors but also outdoors, I was better able to link emotions, needs, and apprehensions in a mature manner. Horner, Wallace, and Bundick (2015) assert that there are many unresolved questions concerning the consequences of a host of different emotions in schools. Emotions can be considered not only in terms of divergent personal experiences, but also in terms of experiences that are professed to be positive versus negative. In this regard, I saw the need for creating safe learning spaces, nurturing healthy relationships that would build supportive relationships, and the promotion of positive thinking. I felt that it was my duty to resolve my learners’ unexplored and unanswered questions.

I learnt that social and emotional learning can support and nurture learning environments. I discovered that my learners, even though very young, were able to manage their behaviour, to interact with one another, and to resolve conflict at an age-appropriate level. These all helped to decrease acts of bullying and promoted a more positive classroom climate that was

conducive for learning. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) assert that the social norms and values of communities, friends and families that are adopted by learners influence the manner in which they negotiate and manage their social participation and their learning environment. We live in spaces that constantly challenge us emotionally and mentally and many end up living in toxic relationships where personal growth is stagnant. My personal history posed examples of this theme. For example, as a mischievous 7-year-old child I hid in the wardrobe every time I was in trouble or when I was playing hide and seek with my siblings. I also remember stealing from my mom. The wardrobe was my place of safety and security. It allowed me to live in an imaginary world, to think freely, to be emancipated from my emotional struggles, and to explore a different mental space. The following extract from my personal history narrative (Chapter Three: Nostalgic Feelings) illustrates this:

On that day the wardrobe was not only my magical space but it also became my hiding place – a place of safety and security. I would hide in the wardrobe when I was overwhelmed by my emotions and when I felt defeated by issues I could not control. This was where I talked to myself and where my sense of freedom surged. I learned several values that day: to be patient, to practise self-control, to control my desires, to know my boundaries, and to respect the feelings and emotions of others. Today I know that these are powerful values that I would like to instil in the learners in my classroom.

I realise that a hiding place is a place of emotional safety and security. I thus imagine that my learners will also like to be in a space where they feel emotionally safe and secure. I think writing about this journey of self-discovery provided me an opportunity to heal and to understand my own emotions. I realise that, when we speak of our life experiences, we explore our weaknesses and find our inner strength. We also remind ourselves of our power and this gives birth to new perspectives. My hiding place allowed me to live in an imaginary world, to think freely, to be emancipated from my emotional struggles, and to explore different spaces. It was a safe place that I treasured as my sanctuary.

It is vital that we are aware of our safe spaces, particularly in the educational context. Taylor and Newberry (2018) explain that social and emotional learning is supported by safe and

nurturing environments that help us come to terms with our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and life experiences. When we are socially and emotionally aware, we are able to shape our thoughts and adopt an optimistic approach towards learning. It was thus vital that I created a learning environment that fostered positive relationships, exuded kindness, was consistent, and encouraged honest communication. I wanted my learners to feel safe and confident and not to be exposed to discrimination, condemnation, pestering, or any other emotional or physical harm. I understood that a safe learning space would shape and support the developmental paradigms that would frame their future decisions and behaviours.

In my mind, I accepted the responsibility to create a learning environment that nurtured relationships and supported safe spaces. Ungar, Connelly, Liebenberg, and Theron (2017) state that schools deliver educational opportunities and are a source of support for learners' resilience. Schools should thus be effective in encouraging learner engagement, their academic achievement, and their well-being across the many different spheres of their lives. I envisioned all these attributes in my classroom through accommodating my learners' emotional needs. I wanted my learners to feel safe and secure and to grow emotionally.

Vygotsky's (1978) predominant perception was that most human cognitive skills originate in social interactions, practices, and tools. For instance, children learn language by participating in signs and sounds with their parents and others, and it is these signs and sounds that give structure to their thinking. I understand that we build on existing knowledge and are also able to formulate our thoughts by participating in social interactions and adhering to cultural beliefs. I thus have to consider nurturing social interactions and participating in safe spaces that build me and my learners.

During the study I realised that it would be vital to create an emotionally safe classroom that would nurture safety and security and allow my learners to openly engage in classroom discussions. According to Cornwell and Bundy (2009), children who can read body language and facial expressions can recognise emotions. It was important for my learners to be able to read emotions by referring to body language as this would nurture healthy relationships, help my learners find a sense of belonging, encourage accountability and courage, and instil sympathy and empathy. Exploring social and emotional learning enabled both my learners

and myself to engage safely in social relationships, to work cooperatively, to explore creativity, and to listen with understanding in order for them to perform well academically.



Figure 8.6: Safe spaces

The image in Figure 8.6 (*Safe spaces*) pictures a mother carrying a baby. This image symbolises the importance of ensuring children’s safety by creating a nurturing environment for them. I felt that it was imperative for me to form a relationship with my learners and nurture our relationship. I had to make my learners feel safe and secure in their learning space and cater to their individual emotional needs. Below is an extract from a dialogue transcription that I discussed with my critical friends and supervisor.

Ntokozo: “...a picture with a heart, a mom holding her baby in a heart shape. I felt that it was important for me to establish a relationship with my learners and nurture those relationships – make my learners feel safe and secure in their learning space and cater to their individual emotional needs. Ummm...understanding that they have diverse needs. Some enjoy indulging in reading and some of them love learning indoors.”

Prof. Kathleen: “Yes! And that picture of the mother’s arm encircling the baby is very powerful and it also gives a sense of containment about emotions which can be painful and scary sometimes. But we want to share those emotions in a safe and contained way. You want to teach the learners how they can safely explore emotions. And I think that part of your research was looking at that.”

This conversation with my supervisor emphasised how important it would be to create a safe learning space that would nurture healthy relationships and in which I could embrace my learners’ individuality and diversity.

I was also able to identify examples of social and emotional learning that promoted and fostered a sense of belonging and self-awareness in my classroom. Panayiotou, Humphrey, and Wigglesworth (2019) declare that social and emotional learning skills allow children to embrace positive relationships and to recuperate in the face of catastrophe. They stress that a child needs to learn how to control emotions and anxiety and pursue educational opportunities. Therefore, it was important for my learners to control their emotions and to pursue healthy relationships. I thus looked at how my learners' emotions unfolded and what they expressed regarding safe learning and nurturing environments. I was pleased to see that they were able to express their emotions sincerely even though most had certainly felt victim to bullying, whether it was physically or emotionally. I deliberately incorporated a lesson on bullying as part of this project and this facilitated an opportunity for them to share their emotions and experiences related to bullying. The following is an extract from Chapter Five (Enlightening social relationships and emotions) to illustrate their emotive responses to bullying:

My next question was, "*How does it feel to be bullied?*" My learners all answered at once, "*It feels sad.*" Wendy stated, "*It is hurtful.*" Awande articulated, "*Embarrassing.*" Melissa said, "*Downhearted*" "*I like that word, Melissa,*" I responded. Amanda whispered, "*Lonely.*" I requested the class to tell us when and how it got to a point where one felt lonely. Zandile clarified, "*When people choose to ignore you or refuse to respond to your questions.*" Mandla said, "*When your friends don't help you.*" Sihle uttered, "*When you don't have a friend to talk to.*" Tristen stated: "*When they used to be your friends and then they start leaving you.*" Jessica enlightened us, "*When friends gossip about you.*"

As I felt that bullying threatened safe and nurturing environments, I needed to counteract that by establishing an 'emotionally secure' classroom environment. I realised that bullying was not a new phenomenon in my school and that children who are bullied feel abandoned and, in the worst case scenario, devastated. I thus introduced social and emotional learning as I hoped that it would eradicate the issue of bullying – or at least curb it. I wanted my learners to know they were supported and protected.

I discovered that social and emotional learning would teach us to live in harmony and to respect diversity. Sikhakhane et al. (2018) explain that the establishment of a human rights culture in schools ensures the safety and the well-being of all learners. I thus envisioned that learning about bullying, as the curriculum also requires, would cultivate a culture of respect. Collaborative learning was part of instilling discipline and safeguarding the emotional well-being of my learners. In this process, I needed to play an active role in constructing a resilient and disciplined approach and I encouraged both collaborative and independent work to explore issues and problems concerning my learners' daily experiences.

The following extract from my journal (Chapter Six: All about bullying) illustrates that I sometimes felt as if the world was a battlefield. I felt that we were constantly defeated but had to rise up to be better. I also felt that social and emotional learning would encourage us to adopt an optimistic approach towards learning:

Journal entry

3 August 2018

By reading and transcribing the data from this lesson I am now conscious that my learners need nurturing, learning communities, and positive relationships. I also acknowledge that bullying is a repetitive act of emotional, social, and physical abuse which brings unbearable pain and resentment. These negative feelings influence the way my learners view themselves and the world around them. I understand that I need to take note of what my learners express, and to identify the bullies and those that are their victims. I also need to learn that even those who are bullies suffer from a lack of confidence and need to be healed emotionally. I also question my ability to teach my learners to respect each other and to show empathy and compassion. I realise that I need to be observant of actions that seem aggressive and be in control to curb negative patterns. My learners need to be aware of their rights and their responsibilities to help them to live in harmony and to be democratic. I need to form a safe learning environment that will allow my learners to express themselves openly and build their self-esteem. I would like to think that this will aid exploring social and emotional learning and allow my learners to engage in fruitful and healthy relationships.

Social and emotional learning can be therapeutic and curb or even eradicate bullying. When I revisited my lesson on my learners' experiences regarding bullying, I was able to discern that a lack of emotional understanding and their struggles to self-regulate their emotions caused my learners to become victims of bullying. Therefore, it was vital for me to instil social and emotional learning in a safe and nurturing environment. It was only in such an environment that my learners would learn to identify these emotions and adopt an optimistic approach towards dealing with disputes.

I am aware that the conventional mode of teaching emphasises logical and rational cognitive functioning while viewing emotions as supplementary or even disruptive. However, Horner, Wallace, and Bundick (2015) argue that, in a learning environment, children are exposed to different experiences and also undergo several conflicting emotions such as boredom, elation, anger, frustration, satisfaction, pride, and shame. I thus needed to accommodate these divergent emotions and personalities. Of course I realised that emotions are part of stepping into emotional maturity and finding ourselves through our ability to resist temptations and to be resilient. In this context, Gerhard and Mayer-Smith (2008) indicate that a socio-cultural perspective encourages community building and working collaboratively. Furthermore, a socio-cultural perspective allows us to look at what circumstances compel our learners to change. With this perspective as my foundation, I was able to identify relevant experiences related to social and emotional learning. Most importantly, I understood that learning was not an individual activity but that it occurred best through interactions and collaboration.

The following extract from the transcription of my collage discussion relates to the previous example because it allowed me to tap into my learners' emotions and authentic encounters. I used ice breakers effectively as they allowed my learners to feel connected to their learning content as well as to their peers. I would like to think that this cultivated social and emotional learning and created a safe and nurturing environment for learning. Ice breakers made my teaching more engaging and revealed much about my learners' personalities and social backgrounds. I was pleased to participate in an interactive classroom that thrived on evocative conversations, which is a point that is encouraged in social and emotional learning.



Figure 8.7: “Get cracking”

Ntokozo: *So, Figure 8.7. You were asking me what I would say about ‘Get cracking’. It concerns using ice breakers which allowed my learners to feel secure and comfortable and to be more engaged in learning before we engaged in actual lessons or activities. I would like to think that it also allowed them to show who they were, reveal their personalities, and just to be free with their identities and not to hold back thinking that they might give correct or incorrect answers. This means that they [ice breakers] cultivated interaction in the classroom and [my learners’] engagement in meaningful conversations, which are important in social and emotional learning.*

Using ice breakers allowed my learners to engage in classroom discussions and to express themselves freely. They were also having fun and were able to identify social cues. I hoped that they would be able to navigate through social circumstances, resolve interpersonal conflicts, cooperate with others, work as a team, and exhibit compassion and empathy towards others. Jones and Kahn (2017) affirm that social and emotional learning manages emotions and facilitates an understanding of others’ emotions and perspectives. I thus needed to create a safe space for learning that would allow my learners to express themselves openly and build healthy relationships.

In my view, the influence of relationships is part of growing up. The school, the family, and the broader community are influential in expanding a child’s living sphere and imperative relationships. Cohen and Marans (1999, p. 114) state: “We need others to survive”. In other words, we cannot live or succeed on our own and we need to feel accepted and recognised. I appreciate the fact that it is fundamental for children to be aware of who they are, where they come from, and to find their identity and their emotional competence. I yearned to bring social and emotional learning into the classroom and to equip my learners with social skills by challenging them and allowing them to reach emotional maturity. This theme underlines the importance of emotionally safe learning environments that can be achieved by making social

and emotional learning an essential part of learning. I hoped that my learners would acknowledge and manage their emotions, share their feelings freely, show empathy for others, establish nurturing relationships, and make responsible decisions.

8.3.4 Theme 4: Social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships



Figure 8.8: Family and social interaction

I realised that social and emotional learning requires meaningful dialogues and working collaboratively. I also understood that knowledge is acquired in a learning community. By choosing Figure 8.8, I took into account that learning is not isolated but that we learn from cultural, religious, and social experiences. I was intrigued to engage with my learners and gain knowledge from their experiences and thoughts. When presenting my collage, I explained the following:

Ntokozo: “This is a picture of a family. I do not want to isolate learning within a classroom only as I am conscious that learning takes place within our cultural and social backgrounds that we share within our social settings or communities. I also think this image is related to a socio-cultural perspective as it advocates for learning and teaching to take place collaboratively.”

I apprehended that crucial abilities such as being able to have self-control, self-awareness, and managing emotions can cultivate positive relationships. Durlak and Weissberg (2018) advise that social and emotional learning has been intellectualised in many ways, such as being a tool to gain and effectively apply knowledge and attitudes. My learners and I had to exercise social and emotional learning daily and adopt a positive approach to learning. We also had to

walk cautiously and consider different social backgrounds and experiences such as trauma, loss, and religious beliefs. I longed for my learners to feel and display compassion for others, create and preserve encouraging relationships, and make accountable decisions.

A socio-cultural perspective refers to channelled participation (McMurtry, 2015). I thus saw myself not only as a mediator, but also as a participant in learning. Gerhard and Mayer-Smith (2008) explain that, from a socio-cultural perspective, community building and collaboration are vital for development. Furthermore, through involvement and participation we are able to tap into our learners' experiences and discover who they are. In my view, learners who actively participate gain new social and emotional skills and experiences through evocative, collaborative activities that are assisted by a more experienced other.

I yearned to cultivate relationships in a pervasive and caring manner. Social and emotional learning allowed me to live in an environment where I encouraged justice, adopted an optimistic attitude, and found freedom. Figure 8.8 symbolises situations where the heart of justice unfolds and where love and compassion thrive. It also symbolises friendship within a family as the foundation of sound relationships is forged within the family circle.



Figure 8.9: Cultivating social and emotional relationships

Social and emotional learning undeniably cultivates healthy relationships that are spirited and inspirational. The above picture (Figure 8.9) symbolises a safe and joyful relationship within the family. I love the fact that this family represents happiness and contentment as mirrored by their facial expressions. Swartz (2017) reveals that having relationship proficiencies means having the ability to listen emotively, to collaborate with others, and to resist negative social pressure. In my classroom social and emotional learning fostered a resilient learning community as we shared heartfelt feelings for one another. My learners were able to embrace

hope and I knew that I would open the door to a journey of learning and development during which they would flourish. It was important that their relationships encompassed love, acceptance, support, and safety. I understood that social and emotional learning would embolden them to build nurturing, close relationships that would involve being compassionate and loving.

I found an example of cultivating social and emotional relationships in my musings of my personal history (Chapter Four: Reliving my childhood and adolescent experiences.) When I was 18 years old, I moved to Pretoria where I wanted to study. I encountered new people such as fellow students, roommates, and lecturers. I had to embrace diversity, work collaboratively, communicate, become involved in social activities, and be attentive to and cognisant of my relationships and interests. I recorded the following:

I fell in love with teaching at this institution, particularly as my Geography lecturers influenced my development. One lecturer, Dr Baker, had a vibrant personality and he engaged us in classroom discussions. He was also passionate and deeply concerned about the planet. He used different methods such as video shows and outdoor lessons and he encouraged critical thinking. He always urged us to do our best and inspired us to help the world become an environmentally friendly place. His students were encouraged to do presentations and share their concerns regarding Earth and the endangered species on it. Through his teachings, I became aware of the enormity of nature and its role in the lives of humans.

My relationship with nature allowed me to be reflective and to identify my emotions in a serene manner. This helped me to control my feelings in a positive way and I learnt to conquer my fears and manage stress. It also motivated me to remain hopeful and resilient. As a teacher, I became aware of how our relationship with nature shapes our human relationships. I wanted to preserve and conserve the natural environment and encourage my learners not to contribute to its deterioration. John and Kahn (2017) argue that learners with resilient social and emotional skills will initiate and sustain promising relationships and engage in teacher-student relationships that inspire deeper learning. I wanted my learners to participate in classroom activities and to engross themselves in learning. I wanted my learners

to feel content and be eager to contend with thought-provoking material and embrace challenging learning activities.

I was also able to identify patterns that cultivated social and emotional learning in my classroom. Another example of cultivating social and emotional relationships is a lesson I described in Chapter Six: Enlightening social and emotional relationships. My learners and I had read an article about Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* and I asked them to list the values we could learn from Mr Mandela. I was delighted to see that they had listened attentively and were aware of Mandela Day and that he would have been 100 years old that year. My learners and I established how we could preserve healthy relationships through sharing our feelings and being patient with one another.

Then Esihle explained, "*Ma'am, by being forgiving.*" Jaden raised his hand swiftly and he could hardly contain himself, "*Ma'am, by showing that you care! Showing respect!*" Kristelle, who seemed cheerful, stated, "*We can be graceful.*" Nathi was a bit reluctant to answer but managed to utter a sentence after raising her hand half-heartedly, "*Through listening to each other.*" Jessica seemed quite eager to give an answer. She shouted and waited patiently for my reassurance, "*Miss Mkhize, by appreciating what we have.*" I explained that what they had stated were some of the qualities and values that Nelson Mandela had shared with us. He had the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness and was loving and caring. I said that he had wanted everyone to be treated equally and for us to embrace diversity and not judge one another by the colour of our skin. I was reminded that he also taught us not to dwell in the past but to live together in peace.

It was challenging to stay optimistic at times and for me to be honest about my vulnerability with my learners. I realised that I needed to be patient with myself and my learners during this emotional journey and that I had to be kind, compassionate, and empathetic. A challenge was that I did not always know if my learners' relationships or emotional scars were healing and how to better respond to their harsh experiences. I also had to treat each traumatic incident in a sensitive manner that displayed sympathy and compassion. I also struggled to communicate my own emotions and to share my own traumatic experiences. I felt the need to be constantly strong because there was a need for me to my learners' pillar of strength. I somehow felt that

if they saw me in tears they would not view me as their pillar. In this regard, social and emotional learning became a daily reminder that we are all emotional beings; therefore, I should share my emotions and be open to being honest and vulnerable with my learners. This evolved when I reflected in my journal as well as during my lessons with my learners. I hoped that the example I set would also encourage my learners to embrace healthy relationships, humanity, and respect for one another. It took me time to express myself but I did so by drawing from my inner strength. I was enthused to pursue deeper knowledge by exploring emotional experiences of social problems that might have had a negative effect on my teaching and my nurturing of my learners. I realised that my learners could be healed by expressing themselves and sharing their perspectives.

I had to attend to my learners both verbally and non-verbally to reveal to them that they were understood. My learners also had to initiate and maintain conversations and to openly express their thoughts and feelings both verbally and non-verbally. Payton et al. (2000) point out that social-emotional learning encourages people to engage in expressive communication, helps them to negotiate relationship, and supports them when they seek help. They also emphasise the need for capacity building to identify emotional circumstances and barriers. I needed to identify my own and my learners' emotions to give them hope and to inspire them to interact with the world around them. I had to motivate them, offer a helping hand, and engage in unplanned acts of kindness. I could tell that my learners desired to help the people around them. I was pleased and excited to see my classroom transforming into a harbour where safe and secure relationships were welcomed.

I also looked for opportunities to enhance social and emotional learning in the curriculum by identifying relevant life stories. For example, we looked at the '67 Minutes' campaign (Chapter Six: Enlightening social and emotional relationships) that underscores humanity and respect. Referring to the principle of Ubuntu, I hoped to encourage my learners to show kindness and to embrace humanity and unity. I asked my learners to share what they would like to do in celebration of '67 Minutes' and Nelson Mandela's life. I was able to trace the seed of humanity through our classroom engagements that explored social and emotional learning. I noticed that my learners were now more sensitive to each other's differences and diverse experiences. They were able to respond in a thoughtful manner that showed compassion, sympathy, and respect for humanity. They were also more able to express their

emotions and share their own daily encounters that encouraged negotiating relationships, building healthy relationships and acknowledging that we are a learning community that thrives on “Ubuntu”. I stated that he had been an inspiration and that his spirit was alive and celebrated globally. Below is an extract from Chapter Six (Enlightening social and emotional relationship) of one of my learners’ responses to the call to develop humanity and to cultivate social and emotional relationships:

18 July 2018

“I can't wait for my ‘67 Minutes’ to begin because I want to practise random acts of kindness, show respect, and make people feel comfortable. For my ‘67 Minutes’, I would like to help people around me since I can't afford anything. I want to clean a house, organise a beach clean with children, and teach children about the environment. I am not expecting anything in return; I only want to see a smile on people's faces.” (Thabo Langa)

I was pleased to see that this particular learner also focused on having an eco-friendly environment. I acknowledge that social and emotional learning is not only about respecting people around us, but that it is also about taking care of our environment and ensuring that it is clean. In fact, we should respect and preserve everything around us. I understand that this helps us live in harmony and cultivates healthy relationships.

I took pleasure in acts of random kindness and in showing love and compassion. I was motivated to search deep into my own and my learners’ worlds for meaningful experiences that supported caring and denounced social disputes that had a deleterious power on teaching and learning. I continued to emphasise the importance of cultivating social and emotional relationships through acts of kindness and showing humanity. Meyers et al. (2019) stress the points that social and emotional learning reveals and validates learners’ social-emotional skills, builds positive relationships, ensures engagement, and encourages learning in the classroom. Positive relationships thus allow us to engage in insightful conversations and to search for humanity within ourselves.

I also reflected deeply on my lesson about Nelson Mandela and the ‘67 Minutes’ campaign. I learnt that this campaign can introduce positive change in people’s lives. This exercise

revealed insights into my learners' understanding of compassion and it allowed them to open their hearts. Below is an extract from my journal (Chapter Six: Enlightening social and emotional relationships):

Journal Entry: Mandela Day

18 July 2018

I realise that this was an important journey for all of us. I was an emotional journey that called us to act in kindness and compassion and to acknowledge that we are all worth receiving and giving good. It is a call that reminds us that we need to practise humanity and respect people's differences. When we express ourselves and our emotions, we heal invisible scars and wounds and we remind ourselves of our inner strength, our purpose, and the ability to think without hearts. Acts of random kindness, love, and compassion bring a new perspective to life. I am inspired to search deeper for meaningful experiences that aid and combat social issues that are having a negative influence on my teaching and nurturing my learners. I realise that my learners are capable of healing by expressing themselves and sharing their perspectives.

Reading my journal entry again highlighted the significance of practising random acts of kindness, feeling compassion, and ensuring that we cultivate healthy relationships in the classroom. Cobb (1994) refers to the importance of social interaction that builds knowledge within one's zone of proximal development as well as the role of culturally established sign systems as the psychological tools of thinking. I thus also looked at the relationships that I had shared with more experienced people in my life as part of my social and emotional learning. I am glad that this aspect of my growth comprised an important narrative of my learning experiences. I was able to nurture relationships in healthy and supportive environments which improved my communication skills and eased my sharing of my life experiences. For instance, when I arrived new at university I was exposed to different South African languages as well as cultures. In my first week at university I learnt about sisterhood, valuing optimistic relationships, and assertiveness. I learnt to be resilient. I recall that we had to honour and preserve our hostel's culture and traditions. We made this our home and our hearts were deeply entrenched in its rich values and ethos. Below is an extract from my personal history narrative (Chapter Four: Reliving my childhood experiences):

I remember late-night study sessions that were often interrupted by heart-warming conversations. I recall seeing strange faces in the cafeteria queue in the dining hall. Living with so many other girls, I was never lonely. We conversed freely and shared our stories and backgrounds. I gained strength by interacting with strangers at first, but we soon became friends who shared similar values and experiences. We participated in outreach programs to help disadvantaged communities and we taught these people the value of preserving and conserving water. We also forged learning communities involving learners with learning difficulties and challenges.

The above extract reminds me how I surrendered emotively and forged relationships with strangers who later became lifetime friends. I looked forward to listening to and sharing stories with them. I think these experiences enhanced my social and emotional learning and signalled the positive transformation of my life. I was taught to be independent and respect history and traditions and to socialise with people of different races and cultures. I saw this as a fundamental resource and tool for my future teaching profession as I built healthy and meaningful relationships. I thus wanted my learners to be transparent about their emotions and to engage in heartfelt conversations.

A socio-cultural perspective on learning posits that learning occurs when, amongst others, there is interaction between people and the culture in which they live. Cobb (1994) underlines the point that a classroom where a socio-cultural perspective is embraced supports a broad activity system that takes account of the purpose of school as a social institution and values the immediate interactions between teacher and learners. In other words, socio-cultural theory advocates that human learning is chiefly a social process that can take place in our communities, in the classroom, and among the people we encounter daily. I thus encouraged social interactions through discussions and shared experiences. I acknowledged the importance of social and emotional learning as well as social interaction. I was enthused to teach my learners to share their lived experiences, to work collaboratively, and to nurture relationships. Likewise, Shabani (2016) argues that a socio-cultural perspective endorses dialogic negotiations where a novice learner may engage the professional (i.e., the teacher) at their actual level of development and in an atmosphere of collaboration so that improvement may occur. I thus encouraged collaborative learning and the negotiation of relationships. I had

earlier learnt to have positive relations with the world around me, to enrich my social capabilities related to managing emotions, and to identify the emotions of those around me. I utilised my childhood memories of learning during classroom discussions such as the value of sharing chores, playing, and respecting nature. These encounters resulted in self-motivated relationships and I wanted my learners to negotiate such relationships at their young age as a foundation for their future development. The following is an extract from my personal history in which I reflected on my childhood adventures. I recalled how we lived as a community and worked as a team to prepare for celebrations and ceremonies. Based on my personal history, I had to acknowledge people around me who offered support and encouraged working collaboratively:

After careful thought, each got a turn to carry the heavy three-legged pot. Our hands would be painful and numb when we arrived home. Looking back, I realise how these rituals and traditional ceremonies allowed us to live abundantly and experience emotions of compassion and pure kindness. We learnt to encourage and motivate one another and we learnt about accountability and responsibility. We also built nurturing communities that forged warm and valuable friendships.

My memories of such heart-warming events drove me to engage in social and emotional learning. I hoped to teach my learners to share their lived experiences, to work together, and to respect and embrace nature. I saw positive interactions as a tool that would induce social competence and the ability to manage and identify emotions. I was invigorated to nurture healthy relationships, to celebrate life, to pray for peace, and to value a sound mind and spirit. I wanted my learners to flourish by engaging in positive learning experiences. I became a mindful teacher who wanted to be present in my learners' lives.

Social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships by aiding positive choices about personal and social behaviour. By cultivating such relationships, teachers can encourage a healthy sense of self-esteem. This theme underscores the value of curiosity and cordiality in any learning community and it supports positive engagements with others to understand their feelings and to grow lifelong wellness.

8.4 My Learning

As my discussion of the themes presented in this chapter revealed, it was quite enlightening to engage in social and emotional learning with Grade 4 learners and by means of my own memories. I was able to identify who I was and am as I was awakened to my emotional and social framework. I was encouraged to reflect on and acknowledge that self-awareness was and is an on-going process that is built on experience, poses self-reflective questions, and acknowledges emotions. It was thus vital that I did not disregard my emotions even in turbulent times. I also became conscious that self-awareness offers autonomy. When we are aware of our emotions, we respond and react appropriately to a given situation. In other words, I learnt to manage my emotions in an orderly manner. Self-awareness is undeniably a building block of social and emotional learning.

By acquiring self-awareness and acknowledging that social and emotional learning can promote self-awareness, a challenge that I faced was to identify my learners' unique skills as some of them were still inclined to imitate their friends or popular classmates. As a result, I had to search for what influenced the decision making of individual learners. However, in a class of 41 learners it was sometimes difficult to track and maintain individual development while also promoting self-awareness in every single learner.

Based on my data and experiences, I had to conclude that social and emotional learning can foster a sense of belonging. I realise that people are constantly trying to find common ground with other generations or different cultures and that they strive to learn how to preserve valued identities, especially in times of stress and tension. In my view, social and emotional learning encourages a sense of belonging within a learning community and empowers learners to balance their need and desire for individual identity and autonomy.

Looking back, I realise that I wanted my learners to feel acknowledged and valued. I knew that their emotional encounters would be attached to their ability to recognise domains and individuals around them, such as their families and friendship groups, and that their relationships with these significant others would influence their ability to collaborate and manage their emotions. Furthermore, I had to analyse and digest my learners' emotions and engage them in emotional encounters. I also needed to give them emotional support and

confidence. I thus accommodated my learners' different perspectives and feelings and, in the process, I discovered more about who I was as a teacher and as a person. I faced my uncertainties and found my inner power to relate to these young people and to be emotionally present in our interactions.

Social and emotional learning also supports safe and nurturing relationships. I realised that I had to cast off my armour, dance freely, sing joyfully, and realise that life is an adventure and that we cannot glide through it blissfully unaware of conflict and pain. Also, while I engaged in exploring social and emotional learning, I came to understand that friendship is our most valuable possession as it allows us to learn from one another and to work collaboratively. It was a lesson in humility and taught me to reach out for liberty and to be positive. It was an enchanting experience to nurture classroom relationships, to delicately identify expressions of emotion, and to forge a strong sense of belonging in my classroom.

In my exploration of social and emotional learning, I found that this type of learning cultivates social and emotional relationship moments when we may enjoy feeling both free and serene. I took pleasure in joining in my learners' conversations and encouraging and watching them work cooperatively. They also had to respect diverse perspectives, negotiate relationships, and learn to engage in conflict resolution when they encountered misunderstandings that threatened their healthy relationships.

It was challenging to encourage my learners to share their emotions in a classroom context. I felt that, at times, they just wanted to appear heroic and did not want to share their genuine feelings. Perhaps, because they were still so very young, this was normal and I had to understand that it would require time. I personally found that it was difficult for me at times to change the negative thoughts I had inherited from my past or toxic relationships. Looking and listening to San reminded me of my years as a primary school learner. At that time in my life, I often felt defeated and completely defenceless. I searched for heroic moments within myself, but I still felt isolated and not heard. I recalled having Mr B as my classroom teacher; he seemed detached from me and did not nurture my social or emotional development. I thus had to acknowledge that the broader community beyond the classroom could hinder social and emotional learning.

Because a classroom is a space that harbours so many diverse personalities from so many diverse backgrounds and households, instilling social and emotional learning in my learners as a school community that adhered to the school's ethos at all times was difficult. Thus challenges manifested in the persistent misbehaviour by some learners – albeit it a very small group.

To deal with the above and other challenges, I needed to be patient with myself and others and I needed to project beyond thunderous and low-spirited days. I had to be content that social and emotional learning elicited a sense of belonging and that this would cultivate positive feelings and outcomes for most of my learners at the end of our journey that year. Overall, I needed to be authentically true to myself and my learners because we were all learning and gaining knowledge and insights from one another. I was intrigued as I watched different personalities, manifestations of social backgrounds, and a growing awareness of emotions unfold inside and outside the classroom.

By taking cognisance of a socio-cultural perspective, I encouraged my learners to work collaboratively and to understand and respect one another's ideas and beliefs. Björklund and Ahlskög-Bjorkman (2017) highlight that a socio-cultural perspective supports meaning-making in subjects and working in a collaborative manner that aids social processes in which learning cooperatively is central for concept development. I would like to think that my adherence to the tenets of a socio-cultural perspective built trust and mutuality among my learners and helped me to present my lessons in an inductive environment that supported social and emotional learning. My learners and I learnt that we had shared goals and this encouraged us to get to know one another and to build supportive friendships.

8.5 Conclusion

In Chapter Eight I discussed four themes that highlighted my understanding of social and emotional learning. These themes were introduced by means of a social and emotional learning collage that I presented visually and in the form of transcriptions of key parts. I concluded by reflecting on my learning that was driven by a socio-cultural perspective. I also deliberated on my discoveries that were applicable to social and emotional learning. I presented the new insights I had gained that addressed the research topic and explained their

association with a socio-cultural theoretical perspective on learning and how this supported my understandings. I learnt that reflection induces emotive teaching and learning and explained how I utilised this concept to provide a foundation for a safe learning environment, which was my classroom. I also referred to my memories and described how they supported my classroom investigation into social and emotional learning.

By approaching social and emotion learning from within the frameworks of a self-study project and a socio-cultural perspective, I was well equipped to foster healthy relationships. I managed to teach my learners to share their lived experiences, to work cooperatively, and to adopt positive values such as being compassionate, kind, resilient, and respectful. I witnessed how they used affirmative relationships as a tool that helped them achieve social capability and pinpoint and manage emotions.

In Chapter Nine, I shall continue to discuss how and what I learnt through my self-study research. I shall explore the last three of the seven themes that informed my understanding of social and emotional learning.

CHAPTER NINE

AWAKENING HEARTS AND SOULS

9.1 Introduction

In Chapter Eight, I discussed four of the seven themes that informed my understanding of social and emotional learning. These themes were also displayed in my social and emotional learning collage that I present visually and in text in this thesis. The key points of learning that I acquired from the four themes were underscored by a socio-cultural perspective. I concluded that a key aspect of my learning was that reflection creates the foundation for a safe learning environment.

In this chapter I discuss my learning under the final three themes: 5. Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach; 6. Social and emotional learning is a source of emotional healing; 7. Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice. As explained in Chapter Eight, I was able to identify these themes by numbering the pictures in my collage and grouping them according to similar ideas and thoughts. These processes emerged from the data that were obtained by addressing both questions concerning the exploration of social and emotional learning in my classroom and from my personal memories. I title Chapter Nine *Awakening hearts and souls* because it summarises my understanding of social and emotional learning as a holistic, uplifting approach to learning. In my view, the soul is connected to the heart. This chapter thus reveals a loving energy and the humanity of the heart that stems from connectedness. It is interesting that most of us point to the area around the heart when asked to point at ourselves. I would like to think that our deeper nature arises from the heart and soul.

9.2 Thematic Analysis

9.2.1 Theme 5: Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach to life

In my exploration of social and emotional aspects of my personal memories and my Grade 4 learners' classroom activities, I share stories that relate my learners' activities and responses to my own childhood experiences. Our spirits were enriched through joyful commitment to our respective learning and teaching activities and our relationships. I learned that being optimistic creates openness, honesty, and sincerity. Durlak and Weissberg (2018) suggest that social and emotional competencies aid learners' academic performance, facilitate positive social behaviours, and strengthen social relationships. It was important to apply social and emotional learning in my teaching to minimise behavioural problems and psychological grief. I needed to support my learners on their journey to adopt an optimistic approach towards life. When presenting my collage to my critical friends, I explained my choice of the phrase *Share your stories* (Figure 9.1) as follows:

“I relate this to my own childhood experiences when listening to their stories relating to social and emotional learning and how these help them to build healthy relationships and to preserve those relationships.”



Figure 9.1: “Sharing stories”

When I looked back at the narratives of my personal history and the lessons I had learnt, I realised that sharing our stories contribute to resilience and elicits an optimistic approach to

life. Sharing my stories thus allowed me to locate my emotions and find my identity. Listening to others' stories also gave me opportunities to listen to different perspectives. I remember that storytelling was a natural feature of my childhood as stories provided a context to understand the world in which I lived and where I had to interact with diverse people and face life's challenges. Mansfield et al. (2016) state that resilient teachers are those who have the ability to flourish in challenging circumstances, are experienced in behaviour management, are able to sympathise with testing learners, are able to detain undesirable emotions and focus on the positive, and that they are people who experience a sense of pride in their teaching and [lifelong] learning. To enhance my teaching practice, the lesson that I learnt from family stories and conversations were tools that built my self-esteem, reduced my anxiety, and helped me to forge strong relationships. These stories helped me to gain a strong sense of control over my life. Moreover, by sharing my traumatic experiences and stories related to loss I learnt to be resilient and optimistic. Based on the value of these stories in my life, I knew how and when to be sympathetic to my learners' needs and emotions.

In the process of social and emotional learning, it is imperative to maintain an optimistic mind-set. Jones and Kahn (2017) stress the following: "Students with strong social and emotional skills are also more likely to initiate and sustain positive relationships with both their peers and adults, participate in classroom activities, and engage in learning" (p. 10). When I introduced this project, I imagined that a positive atmosphere in which my learners and I would be able to understand and identify different emotions would allow us to learn freely and preserve positive relationships. I wanted my learners to gain social and emotional skills that would encourage positive relationships. The following extract from Chapter Six is an example of my learners' negative outlook on themselves and how discouraged they felt when they had to be courageous. My learners and I hosted an assembly for the school that needed to be motivational, thought provoking, and evoke positive emotions. The theme of our presentation was 'courage'. I selected a powerful video on courage which was played during this assembly. In my view, watching motivational videos was a powerful start to my lessons as they excited and engrossed my learners in social and emotional learning. The message (or theme) of this video was later discussed during an English lesson. Soon the lesson developed into a reflection on my learners' most courageous moments. Below is an example of a creative piece written by Amahle:

Amahle shared similar thoughts stating, *“Having the courage to try... I used to be afraid and was nervous to swim. I was embarrassed and ashamed. I tried and tried until I could swim. Have the courage to try.”* Sethu wrote, *“When we had an assembly, we watched two videos on courage. They helped me to follow my passion and not to be anxious but to be joyful and excited. I wanted to have the courage to be brave, trustworthy, and to be honest with my family.”* Nandi explained, *“I don’t always have the strength to do something new. I can’t wait to do something new but I always get nervous and then I complain too much.”*

The extract highlights some of my learners’ challenges and how they were able to bounce back from their setbacks and adopt a positive mind-set. I was pleased to witness their positive approach to life regardless of times of uncertainty. They demonstrated resilience which gave them mental stability and they were able to recover quickly from lacking confidence and experiencing defeat or loss. They clearly had the courage to face their trials. I think this also built character as they were not afraid or intimidated easily. I often noticed that some were impulsive but not insensitive. I realised that there was a lot of self-talk that I still needed to do, such as not dwelling on the possibility of things not turning out okay or not being successful. I became aware that, at times, my negative thoughts caused exhaustion and pessimism. Trying to get my head in an optimistic frame forced me to share my most vulnerable moments with my learners. I thus learnt that I needed to be patient with myself and to be honest about my feelings.

Shabani (2016) explains that Vygotskian thinking shows that the source of knowledge construction should not be pursued in the mind but in social interactions. Vygotskian theory also emphasises that language is the tool of thinking. In the same manner, I became a mediation tool for learning in my classroom. Learning is not an individual process but it occurs most vividly through social interactions and the sharing of ideas and emotions.

It became apparent that developing resilience and an optimistic attitude towards life was a learning process. My learners and I did not have to be heroes all the time as we sometimes needed to accept defeat and reflect on how we could grow emotionally and socially. The following extract from Chapter Five shows that we experienced moments of defeat. We were not always optimistic and things were not always going our way. This lesson occurred almost

at the end of the school day. Before I started I asked my learners to rate their day from 1-10. I liked this ice-breaker because I felt that it would allow my learners to interact and to share their emotions and what they had faced that day. As I also shared what I had experienced that day, we were allowed to identify parallel experiences and feelings and to talk about how we had confronted our challenges and responded to our emotions:

My learners started the lesson by rating their day from 1-10. This is an ice breaker that was introduced to me by my research supervisor. I felt that it would allow us to interact by sharing our emotions and what we had encountered that day. We were also able to identify similar experiences and feelings and talk about how we had tackled our challenges and responded to our emotions. For example, San stated, *“I rate my day 3 out of 10. I was ill-mannered and mischievous in the hall this morning.”* I asked, *“Oh, so what happened?”* San replied, *“Mr S took away my first break. I felt bad and embarrassed.”*

It was courageous of San to be honest about how he felt about his day and for him to acknowledge that his behaviour had been unacceptable. His response displayed that he felt responsible and accountable. Looking back, this lesson gave me an opportunity to give my learners a voice and to build a perspective of themselves. They seemed to realise that it was important to acknowledge their mistakes and take responsibility. At the time, guiding my learners to self-awareness was a work in progress from which I also had to learn if I wanted to grow in my teaching. I had to be hard on myself at times.

Social and emotional learning is imperative if we want to gain a sense of self. It is when they learn this that learners begin to uncover their courage and explore their true feelings. I needed them to develop holistically and I accepted, based on my own stories, that childhood experiences are not assimilated in seclusion but occur during daily events and encounters. I looked forward to constructing heartening experiences that would impact my learners’ hearts and minds positively.

At times, we need to constantly revisit our thoughts and reflect on the values we learn at school and in the community such as harmony, courage, and integrity. Moyle and McRae (2019) argue that engaging in social and emotional learning fosters skills such as developing

resilience, understanding feelings, forging relationships, and solving problems. In my view, these are important skills that we gain through social and emotional learning as it helps us to become resilient and to fight the challenges life throws at us. Eventually, we endure as fighters and survivors.

When I presented my collage to my critical friends and supervisor, I explained my response to the word ‘Fighters’ (Figure 9.2) as follows:

“‘Fighters’ - I chose this word because I thought that social and emotional learning encourages us to be resilient and to conquer our challenges or whatever adversities we might encounter. I relate this to an article I read regarding bereavement. I also relate this to some of the learners who experienced loss and were trying to cope, so in that aspect they were fighters. They did not allow death to defeat them but they faced life and endured. I also have stickers that I use in my classroom that encourage and cultivate social and emotional learning, such as, “I was brave today” or “I was kind” for learners that displayed heroism such as finding money on the field [and handing it in] and reporting undesirable behaviour or avoiding conflict.”



Figure 9.2: “Fighters”

I understood that social and emotional learning aided me in developing resilience and having an optimistic mind-set. It allowed my learners and myself to speak our minds and created a safety net for emotional and social development. Below I present an extract from Chapter Five which is an example of how my learners could identify emotions and speak emotively. We read a text titled *What was Lulu like?* I hoped the activity would help my learners to better

understand emotions and that they would develop their emotional vocabulary. I prompted my learners by asking them what they could predict about the story by looking at Lulu's picture:

Amanda pointed out, "*The girl looks upset.*" Sihle agreed, "*Yes she looks like she is crying.*" "*That is true*", I responded and then asked, "*Can we guess why she is crying?*" Sim suggested, "*She may feel left out.*" I was surprised and pleased by my learners' ability to identify emotions and with how they conjectured about the sequence and the pattern of the story.

I felt that it was a highlight when my learners were able to identify emotions. They understood the pattern of the story and relationship dynamics outside the classroom. I felt that being able to identify different emotions would aid an optimistic approach to learning and social relationships. This meant that my learners would be able to express their emotions and give comfort, sympathise, and empathise with their peers.

Having an optimistic learning experience and classroom atmosphere was indispensable and helped to build my learners' characters. Burke (2002) suggests that social and emotional learning motivates us to be aware of and address emotional needs and to show respect for ourselves and others. I endeavoured to find useful ways of encouraging thinking carefully and having emotive conversations that would address the diverse social and emotional needs of the learners in my classroom. This is illustrated in another extract from Chapter Five that refers to a lesson when my learners reincarnated their emotions by listening to others' thoughts and feelings and explored their respect for nature. I imagined that an English reading comprehension regarding preserving nature would allow my learners to explore social and emotional learning. I sought to tap into their emotions. After we had shared our feelings and thoughts about trees, I encouraged my learners to hug trees and come back to share more of their feelings with the class. I hoped this would allow them to be in touch with nature and their emotions and that they would search deeper into their daily encounters to understand how they felt.

After they had each hugged a tree, I received a range of responses. San raised his hand and said, "*I felt happy and excited.*" I asked, "*But why did you feel happy and excited?*" He answered, "*Because, Ma'am it felt good and calm. I like hugging trees. It*

makes me respect nature.” “Is there anyone else who would like to share their feelings with us?” I asked the class. Tristen raised his hand and said, “I also care about trees. It felt good hugging a tree and I don’t think people should cut them down.” I responded, “Oh, what makes you say that?” Tristen replied, “Ma’am, trees do not harm anyone. So why destroy something harmless? They give us oxygen and help us to live.”

My learners were walking resources. They displayed the significance of nurturing encouraging relationships and experiences, of being hopeful, and of forming relationships that reflect honesty and trust. Cavioni and Zanetti (2015, p. 289) state: “How a child focuses attention and contributes to healthy peer relationships is associated with myriad positive outcomes in subsequent schooling and life experiences”.

Using my reflective journal, I pondered what the poetry writing session with my learners had shown me about how reading and writing contributed to the growth of my own resilience and optimism. I thus also reflected on my own learning and life experiences and what I had to learn from my accomplishments as well as my futile attempts (Chapter Seven):

Retrospective journal entry

17 February 2019

Looking back at my poetry session with my learners, I now realise that I was able to surrender to the moment and I acknowledge that I was astounded. While working with these learners, I was able to awaken a power and light within me that I thought had been doused. As a child, I found healing and strength in reading and writing. I remember that I fell in love with myself again and with my teaching which helped me to dig deep into my emotional and social experiences. Poetry has always comforted and counselled me during my most dreadful and painful experiences. I am delighted that my learners displayed such courage and that they achieved victory.

I encouraged my learners to use their own experiences as topics for their poems, which shaped an imperative universe in which they could express their feelings and reflect on their lives in a classroom milieu. Wiseman (2010) suggests that poetry has the power to encourage learners to use opportunities that convey their knowledge from the margins to the front and centre of classroom learning. Also, Cole (2017) emphasises that poetry offers a sense of

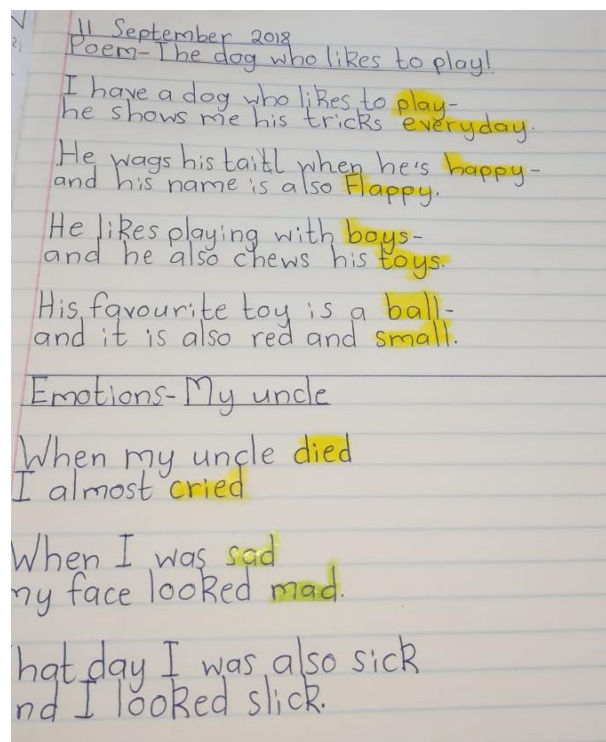
freedom in that the poet can play around with related and meaningful ideas outside formal grammatical structures.

The poetry writing session was used to stimulate my Grade 4 learners' personal reflections and critical analysis of real-life events at an age-appropriate level. It brought victorious and heroic moments, especially when my learners shared their traumatic experiences. I chose the poems of learners who were confident in writing and sharing their poetry. Below is an example of two poems (see Chapter Seven). One was written by Thabo and the other by Kristelle.

Hello Thabo is my name, I have not told anyone, but I am in love.

*She is bright like a holy dove
Soon, I will have time
In the future, she will be mine
When I am in my 20s in spring
I will give her an engagement ring
I have not told you but she is kind
Now you see that I am love blind.*

-Thabo Langa-



-Kristelle Smith-

Figure 9.3: Emotions and Poetry

By cultivating resilience, teachers are able to stimulate the hero within learners. Also, poetry allows learners to accept that art brings healing and that scars are part of the lessons life teaches us. When I reflected on my childhood experiences, I comprehended that sorrow enlivens us and awakens emotions we restrict. The adversities I faced and survived moulded my character and released my spirit from the chains that bound it. I achieved self-control, self-acceptance, and resilience. In the end, my past and childhood experiences, and what I learnt from them, allowed me to explore social and emotional learning and to forge friendships that allowed me to share my trials and triumphs.

Social and emotional learning also introduced me to independent, emotive, and collaborative thinking. I thus inspired my learners and myself to be authentic about our feelings and to embrace emotional resilience and optimistic thinking. I was enabled to remain unruffled when I encountered negative experiences and hoped that our experiences together would put my young learners in a position to do the same as they grew up. I was confident that I had put them on a path along which they would strengthen their intrinsic motivation and develop an inner force with which they would be able to sustain themselves and face the onslaughts of life with resilience. I know that I was taught to understand my shortcomings and to remain positive no matter the circumstances, and I wanted to put my learners on this path of learning as well.

9.2.2 Theme 6: Social and emotional learning is a source of emotional healing



Figure 9.4: The ability to listen...

The words *We hear you* (Figure 9.4) from my collage highlight that social and emotional learning can be a source of healing. I applied this insight by letting my learners know that they deserved to be heard, and I believe that this message alone brought healing to some extent. I told them that they were phenomenal and that their attitude towards negative experiences could heal their broken hearts.

I learnt that having someone who listens to us and who is able to read our emotions allow us to face our vulnerabilities and to acknowledge our flaws. At times we do not even realise that we are walking around with emotional baggage and we are constantly battling with depression and isolation. However, I believe that my social and emotional learning healed me by allowing me to converse about my emotional struggles, knowing that someone was listening to me. This helped me to acknowledge and accept myself. It was also emotionally liberating and uplifted my spirits. My exploration of social and emotional learning thus brought healing and capacitated me with the ability to be resilient.

I wanted to explore this process with my learners and found that, at times, we experienced vulnerable moments. Jones and Kahn (2017) stress that children who are exposed to difficulties, emotional trauma and depression are particularly vulnerable to challenges in the classroom. They also argue that those with diverse environmental, socio-economic, gender and racial/ethnic backgrounds can experience the same situation in different ways. It was therefore important for me to create a sympathetic and empathetic learning environment that allowed my learners and me to be brave and courageous. I also had to take into account that my learners had different emotional and healing needs. I therefore appreciated the fact that my introduction of social and emotional learning at Grade 4 level was early enough to transform my learners' feelings from sorrow and frustration to healing and resilience even at this young age. I believe that my 'interventions', albeit in the form of English and History lessons, served as an important source for building inner strength.

I learned that having courage meant trying even you have been defeated a hundred times. Long (2008) explains that, in the educational environment, we should travel beyond the emphasis on learning to finding nurturing values that will help us embrace a more inclusive model that promotes creativity and reasserts an optimistic view on life. This means that I had to forgive myself and those who wronged me. Along this journey, my growing courage to heal old wounds, the ability to express my emotions, and embracing unpleasant experiences of loss and bereavement was important. In essence, I learnt that when we have been through hardship we can mature emotionally by sharing our story.

Long (2008) asserts that the spiritual element is key when teachers wish to help their learners to cultivate gratitude and find their life's purpose. It is argued that spirituality improves our strength and resources to cope with adversity. I became cognisant that when I lost loved ones to death, it was important to grieve and to embrace the healing process. An example of my emotional healing is found in an extract from Chapter Four. I was in Grade 6 and 11 years old when my dad passed away. Even before he died I struggled academically and, when he passed, I did not have anyone to share my grief with. I felt that I had to be everyone's pillar of strength. As a mature teacher I could see myself in my learners who also encountered loss. I learnt that it is normal to have questions and wallow in dark emotions. However, I gained the ability to find healing in rewarding relationships where I could share my emotional needs and heal the trauma. I titled this particular section in Chapter Four *The darkest days of my life*:

My dad's passing on 10 June 2001 profoundly influenced my thoughts and daily routine when I was in Grade 6. I began to withdraw from extra-mural activities as I had to take responsibility for my younger siblings. I helped them with their homework and to understand certain concepts. I obviously took on the role of an authoritative figure and being the most knowledgeable sibling in the family. It was almost like playing school. I felt compelled to abandon my childhood and help my mom where I could. My academic development was deteriorating and my phobia of Mathematics and Afrikaans heightened. Recalling the passing of my father makes me realise just how much I wished he was still around to experience life with me and to witness my adversities and accomplishments. I am constantly reminded of his undying love for his family and the positive energy he fuelled in our home. I am reminded of all his consoling and comforting words in my darkest days. I am also reminded of his strength on days I felt weak and unloved.

Looking back at the misfortune of my father's sickness and death, I realise how journaling gave me a chance to communicate my feelings without fear of being judged or questioned. I never had the opportunity discuss these feelings with my peers or a teacher as my learning environment at that time did not accommodate the feeling of loss or bereavement. I recognised this gap in my own life and therefore, by exploring social and emotional learning, I gave my learners various opportunities to share their painful histories. Lytie (2018) highlights that, while younger students seem to prefer talking to a teacher, support from

friends seems to become more essential as we grow older. I thus wanted to break this barrier and create a sympathetic and comforting classroom with warm relationships among my learners and between them and myself.

The extract above reveals my father's resilience and his optimistic mind-set. He always instilled positive values in me and my younger siblings and strengthened us by using comforting and encouraging words. One insight that I persistently focused on in my classroom was that teachers need to be conscious of and accommodative of life changing experiences and bereavement that influence learning. I wanted my learners to draw strength from talking about and sharing their feelings as I was conscious of the importance of nurturing relationships and stimulating the champion within us.

I was constantly mindful of my father's love for our family and the optimistic drive he fuelled in our home. But when he died, I was exposed to desperate longing for healing and resilience (Chapter Four):

Even now, as I recall the passing of my father, I realise just how much I wish he was still around to experience life with me and to witness all my adversities and accomplishments. I learnt to be resilient and hopeful and to feed my faith by talking about my emotions, even if only in my journal and when I listen to music. I also learnt about the power of consistent prayer, fellowship, and praise and worship.

Payton et al. (2000) state: "An example of such awareness is being able to correctly name and distinguish among a variety of emotions, such as understanding how anger is different from sadness" (p. 182). I had to congratulate myself as well as forgive myself. I chose consciously to find my inner strength and voice. I needed to be graceful and unshackle myself of past tragedies. When my beloved aunt had passed away, I wrote in my journal:

Her death drained me emotionally and spiritually and my family was deeply bereaved. Her passing left a void that I have not filled to this day. She was unruffled in the face of adversity, had a determined spirit, and was unwaveringly optimistic. It was devastating to see her lying on the hospital bed, paralysed, and struggling to breathe on her own. All these machines and the tubes feeding her body were emotionally

wrecking. I longed for her to heal and for God to come and take away her pain. I asked why God was acrimonious and antagonistic. I watched everyone cry and saw unfathomable and palpable grief in their eyes. We were all so vulnerable but no one could help us.

My aunt's paralysis became critical and she could no longer breathe on her own. We had a family meeting six weeks after this tragic incident. Our biggest fear was about to become reality, as we had to make the decision to remove her from life support. We had said all our prayers and waited on the doctor's orders. We had no choice but to follow God's will. She soon departed and was enfolded by the angels. A part of me knew that she was in a peaceful place and doing more important and greater work than I could ever imagine... I remember her resilience and her ability to touch people's lives positively. Her helping hand was always there to help those in need. She carried herself gracefully and with courage and faith. I remember her beautiful and sincere smile that would light up the room. She had strength in times that were fuelled by adversity and resentment. Her personality and presence were enough to bring peace, unity, and reconciliation.

The extract above reflects how having courage and faith builds resilience. I strove for resilience as I knew it would be a significant attribute on my learning journey. I wanted to promote resilience in my teaching and embolden my learners to thrive and cope in the face of adversity and trials. Mansfield et al. (2016) posit that building resilience is an opportunity for on-going learning and improvement and that it should be integrated into the curriculum. Attaining resilience should not be assumed as solely a personal feature but as a multifaceted process that involves both personal and background elements.

As I grew in resilience, I began to value the experiences of adversity I had encountered and treasured the fact that I had survived. But there were times when I felt defeated. In my exploration of social and emotional learning, I thus had to be mindful of adopting self-control, seek self-acceptance, and embrace resilience. Ultimately, by learning from my childhood and student experiences, I learned that I could explore social and emotional learning by sharing my trials and triumphs with friends. I was 22 years old when my aunt passed away. She had been involved in a tragic car accident and had been in the hospital for almost six weeks before

she passed away. I kept a personal journal that I used for this self-study research. Here is another excerpt from my journal from that time:

Journal Entry

25 August 2012

The last trumpet is slowly sneaking in. Discomfort and a disheartening emotion erupt every time we meet in the hospital and when we have to pray. I hear silent prayers that are desperate for your presence...voices that long to embrace and see you in their arms again. And maybe there is some resentment towards God; a million questions that cannot be answered. I cannot stop thinking about your gentle touch, your quiet footsteps, your warm voice. Everyone's emotions are wrecked. I have dedicated weeks of prayer and fasting and pleading. I have surrendered all that I am and believe to have. I am praying for your spirit and body to find a resting place. I am certain we will always celebrate you – your laughter and your noble pearls of wisdom.

I kept a personal journal during a particularly emotionally challenging time in my life (2012-2013). I used writing to reflect and pour out my feelings when I faced adversities. I also used prayer and am grateful for the promises that were fulfilled by God to fight my disappointments and to learn to endure. Journal writing allowed me to narrate my thoughts and emotions, to document my daily experiences, and to express myself freely. In this way I was emancipated and stopped dismissing my emotions.

I resumed journal writing as part of my self-study research. Below is an example of a journal about a bereaved learner in my class, San (Chapter Four):

I admired his strength and bravery and his ability to assume leadership and to openly converse about this heart-breaking loss. I was surprised to discover that I had a learner in my classroom who experienced the same emotions as I had as a child. San was one of my most vulnerable learners who was constantly sharing his shortcomings and some of his painful experiences. He lost his mother at a very young age. She passed away while she was giving birth to his baby sister.

Yoon and Templeton (2019) state: “Listening is an active, engaged practice requiring adults to hear children’s intentions over their agendas and [to take note of] their ingrained

presumptions” (p. 57). I was encouraged to listen emotively and to allow San to express himself liberally. I did not want to pursue my own agenda as I valued what my learners shared with me and the rest of the class. I wanted in particular for San to feel safe and not to suppress his feelings. I wanted him to understand his vulnerability. This is illustrated in an extract from Chapter Four (Reliving my childhood and adolescent experiences):

I saw many similarities between San and myself, especially when I was about the same age as he when I experienced the loss of my father. I saw his anguish, the way he was constantly sharing short-lived memories of his late mom, how he always had an object or an artefact that reminded him of her. I remember the gentle yet pained smile he had every time he mentioned her name. The only difference between him and me was his courage. Unlike me, he could express himself freely and enthusiastically and engage in classroom discussions. I was determined to be his pillar of strength and refuge inside and outside the classroom whenever he needed me. I had a desire to explore social and emotional learning with all my learners, but San’s emotional world was so close to mine that I had a very special place for him in my heart.

I was able to identify my learners’ emotions by relating them to my own painful experiences. Payton et al. (2000) state that, when identifying our past emotional states, it is essential to be able to display and regulate our feelings. I thus wanted my learners to negotiate their relationships, conversations, and feelings in this manner when they expressed themselves. I wanted my classroom to become a haven of healing.

However, I admit that this was often emotionally challenging for me as their teacher. My struggles are illustrated in the following extract from Chapter Seven. In this lesson I played them a song on my phone by Wiz Khalifa featuring Charlie Puth. The song is titled *See you again*. In an imprudent moment, I played the song without considering how painful its message would be to some of my learners. They listened attentively. Afterwards I asked them to think about the song and write their thoughts and feelings about the song on a piece of paper. When they had finished, I asked those who felt comfortable to do so to share their thoughts and emotions with us. This is what I recorded:

There was ear-splitting silence in the classroom. As I wrote on the chalkboard, the squeaking sound of chalk on the board enhanced the mood. Some of my learners looked through the window and watched the branches of the trees waving their arms in the wind. I wrote the date and heading. Phiwe stood up dauntlessly and stated, *“Ma’am, I would like to share my thoughts. This song reminds of my friend who died at a very young age. I remember how we used to play and visit each other, how we shared toys and games. He was one of my closest friends. I think of him every day. I hope to meet him in heaven one day.”* Linda sat silently in the front of the classroom. We had often witnessed her emotional outbreaks when she shared the love she had for her late mother. Linda delivered a testimony, *“I miss talking to my mom. I miss hugging her and this song makes me feel like I will see her one day.”* I was heartbroken. I felt helpless and I desperately wanted to heal her emotionally and spiritually and to take away her pain.

My learners were deeply touched by the message of the song, and I felt helpless and heartbroken as I could not heal their pain there and then. I was lost for words and I did not have all the answers. They were able to relate the theme of the song to their own grief and the people they had lost. Reflecting on this incident taught me to be emotionally alert and sensitive to my learners’ needs, daily experiences, and challenges.

I was delighted to observe how friendships escalated to brotherhood and sisterhood. My learners shared a bond that could not be broken but one that they could treasure and cherish for a very long time. Digging into emotions was not an easy task but called us to be empathetic, to sympathise with others, and to be the voice of those who faced defeated. They were able to communicate true feelings that I hoped would heal those in pain. What touched me most was their honesty about their experiences. I realised that my learners developed intrinsic motivation and adopted a character that was resilient and responsive to social concerns – such a bullying and the death of a loved one – that threatened learning. I hoped that our exploration of social and emotional learning would promote self-discipline.

The following extract from Chapter Six revealed that my learners also had moments when they had to be resilient and courageous. I assumed that watching a video on courage would touch my learners’ hearts. We had hosted an assembly on the theme ‘courage’ that was

stimulated by a video. This was a pre-learning activity that stimulated and engaged my learners in social and emotional learning and sensitised them concerning building and exploring social and emotional learning. The following are examples of their responses. I found Kristelle particularly touching and precocious:

Kristelle stated, *“Having the strength to try something new with other people is sometimes good. The word courage does not mean you have to be anxious all the time, it means you can control your fear when something dangerous or difficult happens. Being nervous is fine but you still face your fear no matter what goes on. Some courageous people are honest and trustworthy.”* I then asked Kristelle to read her message aloud to the class, as I felt enthused and heartened that she understood and defined courage this way. Most of the learners were listening attentively. Asiphe shouted, *“Resilience!”* This was one of the words I had taught them when we discussed the importance of courage. I asked the class to remind us of these words and they yelled, *“Endurance, bravery, humility, determination, and being fearless!”*

The above extract shows that I wanted my learners to understand that life can be challenging at times and that they needed to be courageous. As a teacher I had to teach my learners to be brave without disregarding others’ feelings. I understood that they had all faced episodes of insecurity and uncertainty and would do so in the future. Mansfield (2016) states that relationships are critical in the development of resilience and should never be taken lightly. Furthermore, clear communication is imperative in the development of supportive relationships and for teachers to engage effectively with learners and their families.

There were times when we found ourselves in fearful as well as painful situations. Our learning about social and emotional development revealed the need to handle these obstacles adequately and cautiously. I believe finding courage is an on-going journey and I thus allowed my learners to appreciate and nurture pleasant and unpleasant experiences. At times they experienced anxiety and fear just like I had as a child, but enduring hardships can assist us to do even greater things and can also elicit a determined spirit. We faced challenges together and found resilience through the stories of others’ experiences which gave us strength. We formed supportive relationships.

At the beginning of my self-study research I struggled to model positive behaviour. It was also difficult to encourage my learners when I felt down or low spirited. I soon realised, however, that I had to encourage my learners to acknowledge their mistakes just as I had done as a student. As their teacher, I had to promote understanding of others' perspectives as I learnt that social and emotional learning teaches us to practise true humanity – which means being generous in spirit and showing kindness. In my teaching, I tried to be understanding and accommodative of my learners' differences. It meant that I had to be willing to learn from my learners, my critical friends, and my colleagues. I realised that humanity enthused us to work collaboratively to solve problems inside and outside the classroom.

Shabani (2016) supports social interactions and collaborative engagements in activities, arguing that interactions that are concluded before internalisation happens may not contribute to development. Moreover, social interaction must be outlined within an activity that has a clear resolution. I was thus eager to plan and conduct learning activities that would promote collaborative working and learning. For instance, my learners often worked in groups and shared their feelings and stories of traumatic experiences that could offer healing. I understood that, for social interaction to lead to development, it had to be situated in activities that had a clear goal, such as joint problem-solving activities. My learners had to have a common goal and work together to reach that goal.

This theme (emotional healing) underscores the importance of cultivating humility and dealing with our adversities. In applying social and emotional learning I adopted the tenets of acceptance and resilience. The theme also highlights the need to listen to others emotively, to be mindful and compassionate, and to be grateful for the life-time treasures we shared with the people who are no longer with us. It also encourages asking for help when we need it and to journal as well as reflect on our actions against the language of pride. I was motivated to have humanity, to be dedicated to engaging in different perspectives, and to share my own thoughts and feelings generously.

9.2.3 Theme 7: Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice

I wanted to encourage gender equality and non-discrimination and extend empathy beyond the social barrier of debilitating prejudice. I thus wanted to encourage my learners to practise

personal and social curiosity and kindness and to be non-judgmental. Hill et al. (2018) stress that being aware of equality regarding issues such as gender, sexuality, and racism is important for teachers. In my view, sensitivity to these issues allows us to take action and to strive for democracy, empowerment, and critical reflection. These in turn encourage healthy relationships and encourage social and emotional learning through activities designed to stimulate empathy and social justice. In my collage, the image of the girl and phrase ‘Mizz President’ (Figure 8.13) symbolise my desire to encourage a change in my learners’ perception of leadership development and to instil them with the consciousness that our world exists for all genders, racial groups, and cultures.



Figure 9.5: “Mizz President”: A symbol of social justice

I became mindful that it is vital to know our capacity to be effective teachers and school specialists. In my view, this capacity is based on our understanding who our learners are developmentally, academically, psychologically, and socially. I was pleased to comprehend that social and emotional learning is responsive to social justice and can be a tool to ensure democracy and equality. I wanted my learners to know that they were all capable of excelling and reaching for their dreams. I also did not want them to be defined by their social backgrounds, for example children who came from child-headed homes due to HIV-related challenges and sexualising young women based on social standards. I realised that many of my learners’ social and emotional development occurred in environments that did not provide the security and support that are so vital in children’s development.

Ungar, Connelly, Liebenberg, and Theron (2017) explain that encounters of social justice are concerned with how the youth perceive exposure to prejudice, discrimination, and empowerment. I was thus aware that my demeanour as a Black woman could influence my learners' understanding of social in/justice. I was also sensitive to the fact that my position,

and the power balance that I introduced in the classroom, would be a significant part of social and emotional learning about social justice. I thus needed to remind myself and encourage my learners to be responsive to social justice issues and to be sensitive to how easily others could be hurt. Long (2008) explains that, in the current educational climate, teachers are required to move beyond a focus on learning and raising academic standards to embracing a more holistic model that fosters creativity and reasserts the affective domain. As a teacher, I had to teach my learners to stand up for marginalised people or those that are oppressed in any form or manner. We had to move past old ways of thinking and avoid discrimination, labelling, and stereotyping. In doing so, we embraced and respected diversity. As a teacher, I needed to be responsive to the whole child and not just one characteristic of the child. I needed to respect my learners and understand that they had voices and that I could learn from them.

I needed to make constructive decisions that supported equality and a fair learning atmosphere. Cavioni and Zanetti (2015) reveal the following: “It is important that personally and culturally appropriate intervention strategies are provided to support young learners’ capacities to flourish” (p. 289). I also had to be cognisant of my learners’ personal behaviour, social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social experiences.

When I grew up I was never really exposed to gender discrimination at home as girls and boys were treated equally. My parents made joint decisions about finances, academics, and social interactions. I can honestly say the first time I realised that there was a contrast between girls and boys was during cultural and traditional ceremonies and rituals. My parents treated my siblings and me similarly and we were encouraged to follow all our ambitions, and no decisions or disciplinary actions were gender-based. I was the only girl at home with two younger brothers, but we shared all domestic chores equally and participated in outdoor activities on an equal footing.

My grandparents come from a small village situated on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The village is fairly traditional and some people still believe in a patriarchal society where men are seen as more valuable and dominant than women. The community is quite traditional compared to my current hometown which is situated near Durban. In this environment we see one another as equals and respect the differences that exist naturally. In fact, our perspectives

are not guided by patriarchy. The extract from Chapter Four below highlights the need to respect gender differences and understand different cultural experiences and religious beliefs:

However, instances of gender discrimination occurred in my childhood when I felt shut out and completely out of place. These episodes occurred during the school holidays at my grandparents' homestead and I became aware of them when I was 10 years old in 2000. Unknowingly, I was part of a patriarchal society in which men were considered more significant and treasured than women. I had begun to observe that I resembled the shape of women and that I shared unquestioned virtues with them. I was told to follow the example of other girls when I carried out certain household duties such cooking, washing, cleaning, doing beadwork, wearing dresses, plaiting my hair every Sunday, wearing nail polish, piercing my ears, and doing a number of other things that were related to being a girl.

These reflections highlighted that I needed to be responsive to social justice by educating my learners appropriately. I needed to locate my emotional competency along with my understanding of social justice in order to accommodate all my learners' needs and to respect their position in society. At times during my self-study research I did not understand my learners' perspectives or emotions and I had to constantly reflect on my actions. This involved listening with empathy and appreciating their realities regardless of my personal perspectives. I wanted my learners to understand and respect equality. To achieve this, I had to transform my learners' classroom experiences so that they would positively contribute to lifelong learning that is characterised by social justice.

My focus on social and emotional learning encouraged me to teach my learners to treat one another with respect. Yoon and Templeton (2019, p. 59) state that "children's ways of being are compressed by adults' reactions and mediations in their spaces, and their natural processes are muted by our constricted thinking". I did not want to restrict my learners' thoughts or feelings as every single emotion was important and valuable. I also had to open up and be sincere about my feelings and experiences. Therefore, their voices were not muted or boxed as we respected equality in the classroom. It was important to teach them about being democratic and fair and to embrace equality, particularly as it was relatively logical to assume that many households still adhered to a patriarchal belief system due to the prevalence of

traditional customs and beliefs among many in society. The following extract reveals my understanding of social injustice as reflected in Chapter Four:

I recall that our parents used verbal and physical aggression when disciplining us and reminding us that we were children, but there seemed to be no difference between the treatment of me as a girl and my brothers when we were raised. However, this perception changed as I grew up. I began to notice that women endured being treated like children in the way we were addressed by men, although this did not happen in my home. It seemed that women were considered primary caregivers and I gradually understood that this attitude confirmed our subjugation and our low position in the social hierarchy. Outside my home, I never had a chance to live in a space that was conducive to social justice and equal social and emotional learning.

To adhere to social justice, we have to embrace diversity and respect those who are marginalised socially. Skerrett (2006) states that socio-cultural theory emphasises that social background should be used as a point of departure when interactive lessons, which are aimed at transforming learners into social justice leaders, are designed. I was pleased to see that my learners understood the differences among them and that they were sensitive to learners with different needs and those that were physically challenged. They were able to contemplate respectful and compassionate empathy. My learners exuded sincerity and understood equality, which are attributes demonstrated in an extract from Chapter Seven. We read a story about Mary-Ann who wanted to buy a new puppy. In the end she chose a puppy that had been born with damaged hips which made it difficult for it to run and play. The manager of the animal shelter discouraged Mary-Ann from buying this puppy. My learners seemed troubled by this expression of discrimination and prejudice and showed great compassion and sympathy towards the puppy. The extract below reveals how important it is for us to accommodate differences and understand different needs:

The lesson finally took a turn when I introduced the theme of embracing differences. I asked, “*Which pet would you choose?*” They raised their hands and anxiously waited for me to point at one. “*Me! Me! Me, Ma’am!*” San shouted to draw my attention. Tristen decided to answer the question without raising his hand, “*I would take the dog with the purple collar!*” I wanted a more descriptive answer and asked, “*Why,*

Tristen?” He calmly stated, “Ma’am, we should not judge people just because they are different from us. You can still play with him even though he was born with damaged hips.” Nathi added, “He will not run around and break anything so I would choose him so I will not be in trouble with my mom.” I found this quite amusing as Nathi was concerned about the dog’s behaviour and how it would impact her relationship with her mom. “Who else feels like Tristen?” I asked. San still persisted and raised his hand again, and so I gave him a chance, “Yes, San?” He uttered a long sigh and said, “Ma’am, it is because you can take care of it and maybe it will get better.”

Various emotions were ignited during this lesson. My learners were building relationships, showed and described their emotions, and constructed their own learning by thinking critically about the differences among people. Social and emotional learning made me cognisant of their life experiences. Essentially, this lesson about pets taught me that I should be sensitive to things or experiences that are not present in my learners’ lives. It also encouraged positive attitudes towards pets which is an attribute that can enhance the development of trusting relationships with others. As a teacher I learnt that keeping a pet can elicit non-verbal communication and enhance our compassion. Their responses displayed a strong sensitivity for this little animal that was ‘different’, which also revealed a sensitivity towards the differences among people.

I observed the manner in which my learners talked and used gestures and how their behaviours were reminiscent of my childhood. I saw social beings with their unique yearnings and goals and remembered that I had also been exposed to different identities and perceptions. Yoon and Templeton (2019) highlight that children need support to impact their socio-cultural contexts and to co-construct cultures and understanding by critically examining their desires and transforming their understandings about identity and culture. To address social justice, I thus continued to ignite my learners’ positive mind-set by encouraging an enthusiastic approach to social justice and fostering positive and non-prejudiced social relationships. I watched my learners gain intrinsic motivation and espouse characters that were resilient and responsive to social disputes that impeded learning. I learned that, by exploring social and emotional learning, I was able to encourage the development of self-discipline among my learners.

Based on my experiences of social and emotional learning, addressing social justice consistently meant that I had to recognise and listen to my learners' opinions and concerns. Munford and Saunders (2015) argue that to be able to enact agency one needs 'a voice'. This means that, for the young children in this study to have 'a voice', they needed to be respected, listened to, informed, and involved in decision-making. I had to take the time to listen to my learners' views so that I would affirm their presence and forge meaningful relationships with and among them.

Social and emotional learning required that my class should work in harmony and that decisions should be taken in a democratic manner. All this took time while we built secure and trusting relationships. I often felt discouraged when my learners did not openly engage in conversations or when they withheld their negative experiences from me. However, I was pleased when I witnessed impulsive behaviours that demonstrated that they were responsive to social justice issues. For instance, we had to work together to minimise some individuals' dominance in the classroom as some of my learners had strong personalities that could easily overpower those who were shy or introverted. As a class we took action for democracy by empowering everyone, especially those who were vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice because they looked or spoke differently from the others. I also guided my learners to critically reflect on their actions that might have caused emotional and/or social injustice.



Figure 9.6: "Beauty"

My collage (Figure 9.6) contains an image with the words 'beauty', 'family traditions', and 'diary'. I learnt that social and emotional learning is founded on the lessons that life teaches us, such as dealing with loss, depression, bullying, disability, and forging friendships. The word 'beauty' symbolises an optimistic attitude towards life and the challenge to see beauty in everyone and to respect the beauty of cultural diversity. The word 'diary' highlights that we need to voice our opinions and reflect on them by writing in our diaries/journals, as this makes learning culturally responsive. In my own experience, by writing in my diary I came to understand that social and emotional learning made me independent and equipped me to face

social injustices such as genderism. Social and emotional learning also allowed me to see the beauty in myself and I could thus embrace my individuality and fight social injustices, no matter the circumstances. The phrase ‘family tradition’ symbolises my dream that my learners and I would become a learning community that would establish a new ‘family tradition’ in my classroom that would be devoid of harmful gender-based and racist perceptions and beliefs. I hoped that we would become a ‘family’ that believed in breaking social boundaries.

Bullough (2011) posits that hope is an important part of learning. During our growth and emotional development as children, it is hope that allows us to embrace courage. I also noted that social and emotional learning enriched my learners' insights and their lives. It also expanded their emotional vocabulary as well as their imaginations and creativity as reflected in their journal/diary entries. Applying social and emotional learning requires a positive attitude and the understanding that growth and learning come with milestones. The beauty of learning can thus be reflected in journal writings and other forms of communication that express our feelings. I enjoyed living in the moment during my lessons and not searching for perfection. Instead, it was rather fun to gain knowledge on occasions that were chaotic.

In my view, a socio-cultural perspective requires that teachers acknowledge social learning by enriching it with cultural activities in which learners participate. Gerhard and Mayer-Smith (2008) argue that learning goes beyond gaining knowledge as it can be explored through participation in activities that build relationships and identities. I thus needed to take into account that my learners were not empty vessels but social beings whose identities, values, and beliefs stemmed from their cultural and social experiences. In this context, it was vital to recognise their equality regardless of their diversity, as this form of respect addressed the requirement for social justice in the classroom regardless of the age of the learners.

9.3 My Learning

I discovered that emotions that seethe beyond the dawn of awareness can have a prevailing bearing on how we perceive others or react to them. I realise that, as a child, I did not have opportunities to explore emotional learning and enrich that vocabulary. When I grew up, in my household and even at the beginning of my schooling years sharing and questioning emotions were taboo. As a child my opinions and feelings were not perceptibly valued. Some

of my teachers and the adults in my world did not really offer children an opportunity to share their feelings. It was difficult for me to question or object to the way I was viewed or disciplined as a child. I was always afraid to be honest about my feelings and I thus constantly had to conceal my feelings or disregard them.

As a teacher, I need now need to instil an optimistic attitude in my learners. To do so, I need to wade into difficult and diverse emotions and social backgrounds. However, my study helped me to discover that social and emotional learning exposes us to unique experiences that unite us, help us reflect, and heals us. At times I felt defeated but sometimes I was able to transform the hearts of my learners by offering sound advice and helping hand. I was inspired not to dwell in self-pity but to rise above my troubles and soar. I eventually embraced healing and an awakening of the emotions that I had suppressed for years, such as allowing myself to be vulnerable and honest about my feelings. I had to move away from sugar-coating my pain and face my challenges boldly and fearlessly. It was disconcerting at first to step away from being a perfectionist and to aspire to be sincere and conscious of what social and emotional learning entailed even in chaotic situations. One challenge in my teaching was that I did not have anyone to support me emotionally at times when I experienced an emotionally draining day. On such days I had to encourage myself and be careful of burdening my learners with my problems.

Another challenge was that teaching poetry was difficult, as my learners found poems difficult to understand and were not used to reading them. However, I had experienced that writing and poetry sustained me as a child, and I thus thought that poetry writing would allow my learners to explore social and emotional learning as it is an emotional approach that helps us to understand ourselves and to appreciate rhythm and melody. This was a great idea as writing poetry was a stimulating and emancipating activity for my learners. I gained pearls of wisdom while I observed my learners desperately trying to understand themselves and to write their own poems. We read multiple poems and I tried to give each of my learners my undivided attention so that they could write theirs. It took some time to find poems that intrigued their emotional and philosophical apprehensions. I believe that poetry writing brought comfort, healing, and excitement into my learners' classroom experiences. However, I felt that several learners only wanted to please me and did not express their feelings sincerely. This made it difficult for me to see their true feelings and, in some way, this

hindered this aspect of my efforts to explore social and emotional learning. In fact, some learners with dominant personalities threatened this experience of social and emotional learning as they interrupted often and were loud and demanding. I learned that social and emotional learning is about mending and building relationships and questioning elements that threaten relationships. We had to step back a pace or two to redeem grace and compassion for others in our quest to embrace respect as an attribute and forge positive relationships.

It was difficult at times to foster an environment where everybody in the classroom was prepared to become part of a community. For instance, not everyone always felt related, supported and confident enough to engage in expressive conversations through poetry or journal writing. I constantly had to be mindful of urging my learners to reflect on and find messages of affirmation. Some life stories were shared haphazardly and some were restricted. However, I had to remain cognisant of the fact that these were 41 10- or 11-year-olds. I learnt to treat all traumatic stories, new or old, delicately through being cognisant of the nature of others' pain and how their life experiences influenced their learning and the way they built relationships.

During my childhood, when I visited my village in my homeland, I wasn't exposed to social justice as women's views were disregarded and girls' views were even less important. I realised that there were similar concealed feelings, values, and unseen laws that impacted the learners in my classroom and that separated women from men and girls from boys as gender subordination was – and still is – prevalent in much of our society, in my school, and among my colleagues. I noticed this when some of my girls were uncomfortable when they were required to assume certain roles. However, I was determined that social and emotional learning would help them to be responsive to social justice and that they would understand the tenets of equality for all. I acknowledge that social justice education is a journey that is not over yet but, hopefully, by starting with the active participation of all groups in my classroom on an equal footing, I just might prepare them for this journey at a young age and in the most appropriate manner possible. In fact, I see it as my responsibility to enkindle the spirit of reconciliation and respect for diversity among my learners.

A part of being engaged in social-emotional learning calls us to engage in soliloquies to constantly review and question why we feel the way we do and to understand what triggers

our emotions and how we respond to adversities. At times some of my learners were not prepared to be themselves or to embrace their individuality, but they searched for their identities in others. This gave me the valuable insight that we are constantly required to learn through *genuine* memories and experiences. We thus need to look deeply into emotions that we are acquainted with such as grief, loss, compassion, and empathy in order to discover what it is that will emancipate us from negativity and pain.

I had to ensure that my learners understood social justice and their place in society even at their age. It was challenging to teach my learners that this was a social responsibility because many were bonded by their cultural and religious differences. Such issues need to be handled with delicacy as we are all accountable for fulfilling this public duty. Some of my learners did not know that their comments or actions threatened social justice. This underscored the point that there must be respect for diversity and a balance between economic growth and the well-being of society and the environment.

A socio-cultural perspective demands that teachers engage with their learners by scaffolding their learning experiences and identifying the zone of proximal development that each learner has reached. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) stress the point that sharing responsibilities in the teaching and learning process enhances understanding in the classroom and aids working collaboratively. We also learned from each other by means of observational learning. I therefore had to model positive emotions, respect, compassion, and kindness. I acknowledged that my learners would not learn independently but that they needed my and their peers' assistance.

9.4 Conclusion

Chapter Nine resonated strongly with a socio-cultural perspective of learning. I discussed and evaluated the last three of the seven themes that emerged from the data and I illuminated how and what I had learnt through this self-study research. The themes were visualised in a social and emotional learning collage that I also transcribed and discussed. I elucidated my discoveries about exploring and applying social and emotional learning and highlighted the new insights that I had gained concerning my research topic and how taking a socio-cultural theoretical perspective on learning had helped me to understand and discuss these themes.

Through deep reflection on the themes presented in this chapter, I came to an appreciation of the fact that it is fundamental for children to be aware of who they are and to find healing by sharing their tragedies and reactions through age-appropriate, emotionally supportive means. I also showed how my learners responded to social and emotional learning and that it rendered them both honest and vulnerable. This equipped my learners with the social proficiencies that would help them face life's challenges and allow them to embark strongly on their journey to reach emotional maturity.

I explored different learning styles to accommodate my learners' needs and competencies. On a personal note, I acknowledge that learning is on-going and accompanied by feedback and reflection, and this self-study research allowed me to step into my professional learning by devising an action plan and using appropriate methodologies that launched my exploration of social and emotional learning. This process equipped me with sound knowledge in my field and the insights that I gained contributed to a new sense of confidence and wisdom in the classroom. I needed to become a learner to be a self-developing teacher and, in my view, this was accomplished more than adequately.

My exploration of social and emotional learning guided me to embrace values that celebrate diversity, gender equality, and respect for differences. The self-study research methodology also supported my learning based on my memories as well as my personal and professional experiences in a Grade 4 classroom.

In Chapter Ten, I conclude this dissertation by reflecting on how and what I learnt by engaging in self-study research. The chapter reveals that the chief purpose of this study was to learn about my own teaching practice by exploring social and emotional learning and by summarising the findings based on the seven themes that emerged from my data.

CHAPTER TEN

INHALE AND EXHALE

10.1 Introduction

I chose *Inhale and Exhale* as the title for Chapter Ten because I felt this phrase describes how my learners and I should deal with everyday challenges and adversities. I believe that breathing in and out teaches us to stay calm and to draw on our inner strength and peace. Throughout my engagement with this self-study project to enhance my teaching practice by focusing on social and emotional learning, I experienced times of uncertainty. But I found relief in inhaling hope, peace, and positivity and exhaling feelings of doubt, frustration, and apprehension. I hoped that I would be able to share the same remedy with people around me.

The chief purpose of this self-study was to explore social and emotional learning in my teaching. As an aspiring social and emotional learning practitioner, I sought to discover what I could learn from my own personal history as well as from working in the classroom with Grade 4 learners.

In Chapter Ten, I first present an overall review of my thesis by reflecting on how and what I learnt on this self-study journey. I then move on to discuss my personal and professional learning. I also present a collage that I created to deliberate on my methodological choices. I also shed light on what I aim to do in the future as a consequence of this study. In addition, I share my understanding of the conceptual and theoretical perspective in which my study was embedded and I contemplate the implications thereof.

In brief, I outline my personal and professional learning based on how this research assisted me to grow professionally in my teaching. I stress what I learnt from fundamental perceptions and how they were meaningful in enhancing my understanding and steering my progress. I exhibit a new outlook that was enlightened by this exploration of social and emotional learning. I highlight how these new findings are noteworthy and could be constructive in the educational field and how they could be applied in the classroom.

At the end of this chapter, I present a drawing to depict how I reimagined my classroom based on this self-study research. I discuss the kind of classroom atmosphere that needs to be cultivated by placing social and emotional learning and the child at the centre of learning. I conclude by revisiting the key responses to the two research questions.

10.2 A Review of the Thesis

Chapter One: *Heartfelt*

I titled Chapter One *Heartfelt* because I felt that this word represented my attitude and reasons for having a keen interest in exploring social and emotional learning in the classroom. I anticipated that having emotive conversations would bring warmth and show how healing someone by being compassionate, understanding, and sympathetic could release my own healing. I wanted to explore this notion in my classroom. I also introduced the focus and the purpose of my research. I then moved on to discuss the background of the study. This was followed by the rationale and the research questions that constituted the dynamic force that gave impetus to this research. I also defined the key concepts and the theoretical perspective that informed my research. A brief explanation of my self-study research methodological approach was also presented.

Through the study I hoped to identify and to explore the importance of emotions and to understand how they played a fundamental part in depicting and saying what words could not express. I realised that the purpose and the strength of emotions in our daily routines, and how we respond to the disputes we encounter, impact the building of relationships and the way we view ourselves. Therefore, by means of this doctoral research study, I explored how I could improve my teaching practice to create a secure and conducive learning atmosphere in the classroom. I hoped that this self-study research would allow me to re-evaluate my teaching and newly inform the way I would address social and emotional learning issues in the future.

I also explained that I had anticipated that social and emotional learning would allow my learners and me to understand and identify emotions, abilities, and needs in others. I was motivated to learn about and practise social and emotional learning to inspire my learners to achieve their full potential and to respect others' perspectives and feelings. I also wanted them

to learn to manage their emotions by exploring age-appropriate activities, vocabulary, and processes. I therefore set course on a path to investigate my own emotional competency and expand my emotional vocabulary.

In my explanation of my understanding of the concept of teacher learning, I reflected on my teaching and how I could learn to respond constructively to my learners' social and emotional needs and difficulties. I explained that a socio-cultural perspective on learning would help me establish relationships that would instil learning by allowing my learners to interact and work together. In this process, I explored collaborative learning through sharing ideas, experiences, and daily interactive as well as individual classroom activities. I explained that I also sought assistance from my colleagues to solve some challenges I encountered.

I also explained my choice of a self-study research methodology. I understood that self-study methodology would allow me as a teacher to reflect on and improve my teaching approaches and methods. Self-study endorses life-long teacher learning, inquiring experiences, and improves teaching practice. I understood that teachers need to re-examine and reconsider their teaching practices, and I thus endeavoured to develop and improve myself in the educational sphere where I had always been most comfortable.

Chapter Two: *Unpacking our Intuitive Voices*

I chose this title for Chapter Two as I sensed that my learners and I had to go on a quest for more reflective ways to understand our experiences related to social and emotional learning. I endeavoured to use creative methods that would evoke my memories and help me to explore my learners' classroom experiences as well.

I presented a comprehensive account of my research process in this chapter. I discussed the location of the study, the nature of the research participants, as well as the significance of having critical friends and how they facilitated my study and my learning. Additionally, I clarified the self-study methods that I used and elucidated that I anticipated that collage making would assist me in conceptualising answers to my research questions. I explained my use of a range of data sources such as a reflective journal, learners' exercise books with their written work, and audio recordings of lessons. I expected that the use of a variety of sources would facilitate the collection of data that would address the research questions and thus

enhance my professional and personal growth. I explained that I would use these data to document my emotions, elucidate my social and emotional experiences, and explore my perceptions as my study unfolded. I wanted to be able to identify my shortcomings as well as my conquests.

I also discussed the ethical issues that I had to consider and explained that I wanted to ensure that everyone felt comfortable and protected during my research study. My learners and their parents were given a full understanding of the possible risks involved or matters that might be sensitive. This allowed my learners and their parents to make a voluntary choice to participate in the study. I also paid attention to the principle of confidentiality by ensuring that my learners would remain anonymous. I explained that I would provide consistent feedback as the study unfolded and that I would be honest about my work in the interests of ethics and validity. Furthermore, I explained that how the validity of this study would be reinforced through the use of multiple data sources and reflection and interaction with others. I also listed some research challenges such as time limitations due to several public holidays that delayed my research. I was honest about the limitations of the study such as its relatively small scope and the fact that not all the parents of the 41 learners in my class had given permission for them to participate in the study.

By reflecting on Chapter Two, I am reminded of the insightful lessons I gained from applying self-study methodology. It was heartening to find my voice and to draw power and learning from my own personal experiences and those of my learners. Samaras (2011) underlines how self-study aids teachers to gain insights into ‘the self’. Self-study research allowed me to recall my professional experiences and express my professional learning related to social and emotional learning. I also became conscious of new insights and ways of looking at my past and present life. Most importantly, I was able to give attention to my intuitive voice that I had suppressed and ignored in the past.

Furthermore, self-study highlights the importance of working collaboratively. Self-study research also made me conscious that teaching is not a isolated task, but that it involves a community and unceasing collaborative reflection (Easton, 2008). By including my Grade 4 learners as research participants in this study, I nurtured learning and encouraged my learners to become energetic, emotional beings. In this process they hosted my learning as critical

constituents (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). In addition, I acknowledge the vital contribution of critical friends as proposed by Samaras and Roberts (2011). My critical friends consisted of two males who were both in managerial positions in education (one was a Head of Departmental and the other a school principal) and a female Grade 1 teacher. My three critical friends and I came from different backgrounds but shared similar challenges regarding teaching. We all represented the African Zulu ethnic group and our home language was IsiZulu. Their participation assisted me to find creative ways of making sense of my research and to enrich my teaching practice. My critical friends offered support and encouragement by providing honest and rewarding feedback. They were also able to assist me in identifying issues or gaps in my research that I might otherwise have been blinded to or that may have reflected researcher bias.

Chapter Three: *Nostalgic Feelings*

I entitled Chapter Three *Nostalgic Feelings* because I felt that this was an appropriate title for my reflections on my childhood experiences that evoked sentimental and nostalgic feelings. Being nostalgic improved my reflections and helped me to make meaning of my early life by lifting the doubts that had limited my well-being.

Moletsane (2011) explains that revisiting our past can be a destructive kind of nostalgia when it is used to prevent or limit progressive social change, especially with regard to gender equality and social justice for women and girls. Instead, she advocates a “productive nostalgia” that allows us to ask “difficult questions” (p. 206) about the past in order to reimagine the future. I followed this advice and this supported my research as I allowed myself to revisit my past with a critical eye and, based on my learning, to adopt positive ways of engaging in the teaching and learning process. I wanted to ensure that I viewed my learners as equals, that we adhered to democratic principles, and that we would be active agents of social change then and in the future. I thus addressed my desire to deal with social and emotional learning in my classroom.

In this chapter I began to respond to my first research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my childhood experiences?* to explore how evoking memories concerning social and emotional learning could improve my practice. This was followed by an overview of the research approaches that reinforced my efforts to make sense of my memories of childhood and my first encounters as a university student. I narrated chronicles

of my childhood and adolescent experiences in relation to social and emotional learning. When I recounted my memories, I acknowledged that being engaged in socio-emotional learning called me to evoke soliloquies in order to relentlessly review and question why my learners and I felt a certain way, what triggered our emotions, and how we responded to our adversities and successes.

I conceded that both delightful and hostile experiences in personal and educational encounters moulded me to become the teacher I am today. Similarly, Vilakazi (2013) enlightens that she “learnt that revisiting such memories can be a way of healing” (p. 85). By engaging with my memories as a self-study tool, I became aware of how the trials in my life influenced my learning and development. These reflections rehabilitated old emotional wounds that had been haunting me over the years. Furthermore, Brunke (2018) argues that teachers’ learning experiences can profoundly influence the way in which they approach creativity. I thus argue that my memory work was one of the most productive methods of extricating learnt experiences so that I could clearly see what had enriched my creativity and had helped me to identify those obstacles that may have held me back as an educator.

In responding to this research question, I learnt to embrace my past experiences and what I had learnt from interactions with diverse people from different backgrounds. I now understand how my past played a major role in how I created, and will continue to construct, my emotions and social relationships. The chapter disclosed how, through reflection on my memories induced by artefacts, letter writing, and journal writing, I unearthed new understandings and insights on how my lived experiences had contoured my thinking and redefined my approach to teaching and learning.

Chapter Four: *Reliving my Childhood and Adolescent Experiences*

In Chapter Four, I also reflected on my personal history in my quest to learn more about social and emotional learning. I continued to recount events that had unfolded in my childhood in the hope that this journey would develop new understandings of my teaching. I desired to become an established teacher who would be attentive to my learners’ life experiences and daily challenges.

I thus continued to attend to my first research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my memories?* Samaras et al. (2004) reveal that engaging in personal history self-study is for self-knowing and for the development of teachers' professional learning. I thus recounted various relevant stories of my childhood, and adolescent, and early university experiences. I focused in more detail on my childhood years because these would be most closely related to my current practice as a Grade 4 teacher.

I discovered that the tranquillity and peace of nature had given me valuable insights into social and emotional learning. For instance, genuine life experiences such as the sounds of nature, the splendour of natural spaces, laughter, and the mind-altering impact of untainted ecstasy can be enchanting. There were also times of doubt and tears and some questions remained unanswered during this research study. Such as seeking for perfect answers and forcing to remain optimistic. At times I found myself burdened with emotions and keeping a positive mind-set proved to be a challenge – almost a fantasy. I had to engage in introspection and be honest about the kind of relationships I had with people around me. Reflecting on my childhood allowed me to see how my life had unfolded and what had influenced my teaching practice. I also met inspiring persons and had encounters that shaped who I became.

The discourse in Chapter Four describes how I became conscious of powerful adolescent and childhood memories that were agonising and I admitted that I still had to unlearn parts of myself. I expressed gratitude that I had been – and still am – directed spiritually and emotionally by my faith and that I had found graceful moments that had impelled my inner strength.

Chapter Five: *Unpacking Emotions and Daily Encounters*

I used this title for Chapter Five as I felt it mirrored the meaningful classroom encounters my learners and I experienced. These classroom activities that illuminated social and emotional learning were described in some detail as they allowed us to celebrate our differences and to have emotive conversations that revealed our vulnerabilities and strengths.

I discussed three lessons I had presented, namely: Lesson 1 (English): Reading comprehension *The people who hugged trees* (3 May 2018); Lesson 2 (English): Reading Comprehension *What was Lulu like?* (30 March 2018); and Lesson 3 (Social Science -

Geography): *People and Places* (24 March 2018). I responded to my second research question: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my Grade 4 learners?* I related how I became more aware of my learners' relationships and emotions. I was delighted to learn that social and emotional learning and self-study research were havens where learning prospects were reconnoitred and where my learners could embark on learning encounters that allowed them to express themselves freely. Nevertheless, at times it was challenging to accommodate all my learners' needs because adopting only one way to express compassion and love was not ideal. I had to take the time to get to know my learners individually and to realise that they were remarkable and unique. Sadly, I had neglected learners' social and emotional stress caused by tragic experiences before I engaged in this self-study research. However, during this study I allowed my learners as study participants to find themselves through sharing their emotions and expressing themselves by means of journal, paragraph, and poetry writing. These activities, and the responses they elicited, encouraged growing self-identity and a sense of security among my learners.

To unpack the three lessons, I drew on my teaching developmental portfolio, my daily journal in which I reflected on my lessons, and my learners' written and drawing activities as well as their oral responses. I recounted how these lessons developed by presenting examples of my learners' classwork, activities, and verbal responses. I also employed excerpts from my reflective journal to show my reflections and to explain how my learning grew. I acknowledged the significance of interactive communication and warm and supportive relationships among my learners and between them and me. I learnt that positive learning experiences and a conducive atmosphere were indispensable in shaping my learners' understandings. I endeavoured to discover valuable ways that exhilarated unique thinking through creativity and emotive conversations. Social and emotional learning and self-study research were the anchors from which learning experiences were reconnoitred. My learners were allowed to be engrossed in social and emotional learning experiences that directed them to express themselves spontaneously. I wanted to kindle optimistic mind-sets, embolden passionate attitudes, and nurture social relationships.

New insights that I gained about myself as a teacher were that I needed to be patient and to search deeper for answers related to social and emotional learning. I also learnt that I had to be mindful of my learners' lived experiences and daily challenges. I explained in this chapter

that I had used suitable reading texts that were reflective of people, places and emotions to encourage social and emotional learning. Such texts support life lessons such as dealing with loss, depression, and disability and building friendships. I also utilised texts that related to different social backgrounds and nature and these texts elicited my learners' interest, helped build their confidence, and enhanced their experiences. They also expanded their emotional vocabulary, imagination, and creativity.

Chapter Six: *Echoing and Sharing Sincere Learning Experiences*

The title of Chapter Six summarises two key elements of my learning about social and emotional relationships, namely reflection and sharing. I envisaged that the chapter would resonate hope as I narrated how my learners interacted in sincere conversations. As a teacher I wanted to work consciously and collaboratively with my learners.

In this chapter I offered a comprehensive explanation of how my lessons echoed social and emotional learning. I presented four lessons, namely: Lesson 4 (History): *Learning from good leaders* (28 May 2018); Lesson 5 (English): *My emotions* (29 May 2018); Lesson 6 (English): *Nelson Mandela Day* (18 July 2018P; and Lesson 7 (English): *All about bullying* (1 August 2018). I continued to answer my research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*

In this chapter I continued to discuss my learning regarding social and emotional learning in the classroom. The discourse explored my learners' emotional responses to my lessons and revealed what I had learnt about social and emotional learning in relation to celebrating historical leaders and engaging in a sensitive topic such as bullying. I also deliberated on how social and emotional learning could support and nurture learning. These lessons ignited an optimistic mind-set in my learners and me, vitalised an enthusiastic classroom attitude, and cultivated social relationships. My learners became responsive to social issues that threatened learning and this stimulated their resilience to adversity. I had hoped that my exploration of social and emotional learning would promote self-discipline, and in many instances I became aware that this goal had been addressed.

I discovered elements of social and emotional learning that strengthened the relationships among my learners and between them and myself, and these discoveries, among others,

validated my research study. I was able to learn valuable lessons from my learners by allowing them to express themselves liberally and to dispute or object to certain topics. I was inspired to embrace their youthful spirit and insights and to let them drive my research by exploring their authentic experiences. In doing so, I learnt that children are influential in research and that their voices need to be considered and valued by society. I recognised that my learners and I were emotional beings who applied critical thinking that contributed to our learning. As an educator, I needed to respect my learners' abilities and unshackle their chains. I also needed to protect them against any physical and emotional harm.

In this chapter, as in the previous three chapters, I was able to enhance my learning by reflecting on my teaching and looking at the way I had presented my lessons on social and emotional learning. I cautiously reflected on the trials and emotions that had unravelled in the classroom by stepping into my learners' mind-sets to understand how they interpreted the world around them and what they found fascinating and significant in their daily lives. I learnt that my own learning experiences influenced my ability to teach and deliver learning. I was able to use multiple sources to promote deeper learning and was encouraged when I stepped into my learners' world and saw that they embraced different realities. I was thus enabled to better understand my professional identity and teaching practice.

Chapter Seven: *Enlightening Social Relationships and Emotions*

I used this title for Chapter Seven to reflect my continuing learning regarding social and emotional learning. In this chapter I continued to describe my learners' journey by discussing various classroom activities and illuminating what I had learnt about social and emotional learning. My sources were my learners' writing, their responses to music, and inspirational stories. I also deliberated on how social and emotional learning enabled nurturing and compassion.

I offered a comprehensive explanation of and reflected on my last set of lessons concerning exploring social and emotional learning. I presented three lessons, namely: Lesson 8 (English): *A new pet for Mary-Ann* (17 July 2018); Lesson 9 (Natural Science): *Music through emotions* (12 September 2018) (in this lesson I used indigenous African musical instruments); and Lesson 10 (English): *Fun with Poetry* (27 September 2018). I continued to

respond to the research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?*

Ice-breakers allowed my learners to share their thoughts and feelings. I discovered that my learners and I needed to release our thoughts and emotions and not confine them because of feelings of uncertainty and fear. I appreciated their feedback, their participation, and their vulnerability. I also learnt that social and emotional learning uncovered daily endeavours and disputes that motivated heroic moments. My learners and I were able to relate learning to our personal stories as we empathised with one another and used emotive vocabulary.

By exploring social and emotional learning through poetry writing and journaling, my learners and I shared fervent moments of amusement, self-inquiry, humour, imaginative visions, and uncertainty. I was able to detect that my teaching and learning was enriched by creativity and novelty and that it was deepened by collaboration.

I discovered that it was fundamental to establish mutual respect and forge positive relationships. I became mindful of creating a sense of community and belonging in my classroom. It was vital for me not to dismiss my learners' emotions or marginalise their personal issues. I learnt to provide support and hearten an intensive learning atmosphere as well as to treasure diverse perceptions and social backgrounds. I also realised that it was challenging to engage my learners in dialogues that made them feel uncomfortable and apprehensive when they expressed their thoughts and emotions. I realised that it was imperative for me to build a welcoming atmosphere and learning environment in my exploration of social and emotional learning.

This exploration brought insights about building healthy relationships as the strongest foundation for teaching. I became passionate about being an advocate for social change and social justice in my learning community. My lessons revealed the power of diversity and taught me to recognise and value different human experiences and perspectives.

Chapter Eight: *Social and Emotional Learning: A gateway to Nurturing Relationships*

The title of Chapter Eight represents my reflections on my teaching practice and my learners' shared lived experiences. In this chapter, I highlighted the need to work cooperatively in the

classroom and the value of adopting positive values such as being compassionate, thoughtful, and resilient. I reflected on assenting relationships as a tool to persuade the social capability of managing and identifying emotions.

I also continued my discussion on how and what I had learnt by means of this self-study research. I listed the seven themes that elucidated my understanding of social and emotional learning and discussed four of them in depth. These themes were encapsulated and illustrated in a social and emotional learning collage and a transcription of my presentation of the collage. I was able to name these themes by numbering the pictures in the collage and aligning these images with parallel ideas and thoughts. These themes emerged from two main data sources namely the classroom and my personal memories. I addressed the following four themes in this chapter: 1. Social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness; 2. Social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging; 3. Social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments; and 4. Social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships.

In terms of the theme *social and emotional learning promotes self-awareness*, I learnt that it promotes freedom of thought and that this form of learning is supported by both pleasant and unpleasant feelings. My learners were able to reveal growing self-awareness at an age-appropriate level as they were able to tune into their feelings, thoughts, and the consequences of their actions. At times they were able to reflect carefully on events and behaviours to find ways to react in a positive manner. Through reflection, they could also recognise other people's needs and feelings and comprehend how their behaviour affected and would affect others in the future.

The theme *social and emotional learning fosters a sense of belonging* revealed the significance of being aware of my own emotions and the type of relationships I have with myself and my learners. I learnt that self-knowledge requires awareness of personal emotions, thoughts, and a positive mind-set. In this context, social and emotional learning allowed me to find a sense of belonging and to convey this in my classroom. Social and emotional learning also fostered a sense of belonging among my learners and helped me to create an environment where learning blossomed. Most of my learners were open-minded and worked collaboratively and many felt safe to share their ideas. Their sense of belonging

created a safe and secure learning environment that guarded them against mental health problems and supported enhanced learning.

In terms of the theme *social and emotional learning supports safe and nurturing environments*, I learnt that my learners could manage their behaviour, work collaboratively, and could find ways to resolve conflict which addressed bullying and stimulated a more positive classroom climate that was favourable for learning. My learners' responses to an act of bullying as described in the literature inspired me with the knowledge that, in the future, my role as a teacher would be to find ways to combat bullying, to identify the learners involved, and to investigate the causes of bullying as it will be imperative that I support both the victim and the aggressor. I shall have to listen to both sides of the story to understand why the situation happened and offer guidance and alternatives to prevent it from happening again.

The last theme that I illuminated in Chapter Eight, namely *social and emotional learning cultivates social and emotional relationships*, elucidated the need for curiosity and cordiality in a learning community. I learnt that both teachers and learners need to cultivate a healthy sense of self-esteem. I described how my learners began to confidently engage with others and I envisaged how their understanding of one another's feelings might have lifelong benefits.

It was illuminating to engross myself in social and emotional learning. I was able to ascertain who I was emotionally and socially. There was an impulsive awakening of my feelings and I was encouraged to acknowledge that self-awareness is an ongoing process that allows the exploration of life experiences. This process is propelled by questions that are prompted by the need to understand emotions. I discovered that self-awareness offers independence when we are aware of our emotions and able to react appropriately. In other words, I saw how I could better cope with my emotions and adopt a more composed manner in challenging situations.

In this chapter I acknowledged that reflection prompts emotive learning and teaching and provides a footing for safe learning experiences. I became cognisant of my personal memories that underscored social and emotional learning. I saw my learners as resources and assets to

learning and teaching. Through my learners' shared lived experiences and their developing culture of working cooperatively, I gained confidence in my teaching and learnt to treasure collaborative learning. I was encouraged to adopt positive values such as being compassionate, kind, resilient, and respectful. I witnessed assenting relationships as an instrument that converted social capability concerning managing emotions and identifying emotions. I felt that I was invigorated to foster healthy relationships in my class, then and in the future.

Chapter Nine: *Awakening Hearts and Souls*

I titled this chapter *Awakening hearts and souls* because my findings enlightened my understanding of social and emotional learning as an all-inclusive approach to learning. The title links the heart and the soul as the discourse exposed the affectionate vitality and humanity of the heart that stem from its connection to the soul.

I presented the final three themes in this chapter, namely: 5. Social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach; 6. Social and emotional learning is a source for emotional healing; and 7. Social and emotional learning encourages responsiveness to social justice.

The theme *social and emotional learning develops resilience and an optimistic approach* encapsulates the fact that, for social and emotional learning to occur, it is imperative to embrace an optimistic approach to life. My learners and I had to strive for strong social and emotional skills to initiate and sustain positive relationships in our learning community. Additionally, this theme encapsulates my inspirational journey to create a sympathetic and empathetic classroom that would allow my learners and me to be heroic and courageous. I thus needed to acknowledge that my learners had different emotional and healing needs. Lastly, the findings related to this theme revealed how I could integrate social justice in my teaching and how my learners understood diversity. It also uncovered the need to respect learners/people with different needs and those who are physically challenged. My learners were able to contemplate diversity courteously and compassionately and they delivered evocative expressions of sincerity and their understanding of equality.

I discovered that I had to protect my learners and ensure that they understood social justice. In doing so, I noticed that it was challenging to teach my learners that this was our social responsibility because of their cultural and religious differences. I needed to handle this with care and sensitivity. Some of my learners did not know that their comments or actions endangered social justice. They thus needed to learn to be respectful of diversity and to start acquiring skills that would, later in their lives, equip them to find equilibrium between economic growth and the well-being of society and the environment.

Chapter Nine echoed my appreciation for the fundamental rights of children and the need that they should be conscious of who they are. My of my learners also needed to find healing by sharing their stories of tragedy and pain or, equally important, to just listen to these stories of their peers in order to learn from them. The discourse revealed how my learners reacted to social and emotional learning by being authentic and vulnerable. This fortified my learners for the journey of acquiring social skills, face life's challenges, and achieve emotional equilibrium. By recalling my own lived experiences, I unpacked my own struggles which allowed me to reshape my teaching. I also learnt that, as a teacher, I needed to be armed with knowledge and hands-on experience of how my learners interacted with their worlds. I realised that it was essential to continuously reflect on my own personal history and my professional practice to explore new ways of teaching.

I learnt that social and emotional learning embraces values that rejoice in diversity, gender equality, and respect for the environment. By means of this self-study research, I was able to draw knowledge from my personal and professional experiences and transpose it into my teaching. I anticipated that this would have a constructive influence on my knowledge as a professional and my relationship with my learners. I critically deliberated my encounters of exploring and applying social and emotional learning by evaluating my findings and the new insights I gained under the lens of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. I also reflected on how this theoretical perspective on learning supported my understandings and discussions of these themes.

10.3 Personal-Professional Learning

10.3.1 A mindful journey

At the beginning of this study, I anticipated that exploring social and emotional learning would be a memorable journey because I envisaged that it would give birth to an in-depth understanding of children's experiences and emotions. However, at times my learners and I encountered dilemmas that obligated us to express ourselves guardedly. In order to keep social and emotional learning conducive for educational development, I learnt to be cognisant of the importance of the enduring need to communicate my feelings honestly and to institute sound relationships with my learners and colleagues.

Often, in the midst of chaos and confusion, there were valuable lessons to be learnt. For instance, I learnt that having an optimistic attitude was crucial for me as I worked to build my learners' social and emotional growth. I also endeavoured to find worthwhile ways that exhilarated exceptional thinking through creativity and emotive conversations. My learners and I had rewarding and defeating days, but we strove to be courageous and to display cordiality and companionship in our learning community. I realise that this exploration of social and emotional learning stimulated my understanding of my emotions and the way I interacted with my learners, colleagues, and critical friends. I also learnt that nature stirs positive emotions such as feeling safe and secure, finding inner peace, and respecting people and the environment. Against this backdrop I hoped to build a supportive classroom even outdoors, to be empathetic, and to encourage collective trust and a classroom that allowed positivity to blossom.

10.3.2 Embracing diversity

In my search for wisdom about social and emotional learning, I did not want my own narratives to overshadow those of my learners. This meant that I sometimes had to mute myself and listen attentively to what they had to share. I learnt that this gave them a chance to form healthy relationships and relate to the world around them. It was imperative that I consistently uttered words of affirmation as my learners flourished on positive feedback. I had to be mindful that my learners needed to expressed love and communicate compassion. I had

to take the time to get to know my learners individually and understand that they were remarkable and unique. I recognised that I had to listen to them courteously and with understanding to build resilient relationships. By focusing on social and emotional learning, we had numerous opportunities to accommodate one another's differences and to respond to issues of social justice.

My learners blossomed in the presence of compassion and love. I aimed to make our lessons safe and secure spaces where healthy relationships were cultured and diversity was embraced. I had to be responsive to my learners' social and emotional needs and it gave me comfort to see positive and transparent emotions blossoming in my classroom. Moreover, in this conducive atmosphere the teaching and learning process occurred from both sides of the spectrum as I learnt that I could also learn from my learners. I was able to find humour in their responses, not to get lost in my own thoughts, and to appreciate the fact that all their emotions and experiences were valid. We worked hard collaboratively to instil and embolden positive self-talk, to inspire reconciliation, and to find ways of dealing with victimisation. I appreciated sharing their daily struggles, their fears, and what they did not like about themselves. My classroom became a powerhouse of emotions; an energy haven that radiated positivity. I appreciated that allowing my learners to share their imaginations, philosophies, and emotions freely and passionately endorsed my efforts, validated my study, and rendered my discourse vibrant and heartfelt.

Sometimes my learners were also able to transform negative thoughts of themselves and become positive. In my view, self-talk allowed my learners to embrace a positive mind-set and self-image. It also cultivated being patient, confident, and resilient in facing life's challenges. As a teacher I learnt not to deny myself but to freely share my emotions and my defeats and to revisit my childhood experiences. I was encouraged to create a space where it was safe for all my learners to be emotionally present and vulnerable.

10.3.3 A source of light

Exploring social and emotional learning enhanced my personal and professional learning, inspired me to teach emotively, and strengthened me to sustain emotional competency. It was also a valuable aid in preserving discipline and getting my learners to contribute to classroom

discussions by sharing their thoughts and feelings about their social interactions and backgrounds. I found intriguing ways to teach by drawing on their daily encounters, emotional battles, and letting them be present emotionally.

I experienced social and emotional learning as a source of light in my personal teaching and learning development. I realised that emotional learning can bring light in the darkness and that it is in this light that we are able to heal our wounds and become inspired through music, poetry writing, reading, watching motivational videos, and journal writing. My learners appreciated these activities and shared their feelings sincerely. They expressed themselves honestly and did not suppress their feelings or paint a perfect picture of themselves. I observed how being defenceless and showing our pain in a safe space with others who cared allowed us to heal ourselves and others. Being truthful about our feelings also introduced the ability to identify emotions, value different perspectives, and acknowledges diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

I was enthused to be an accommodating teacher who would also convey her own feelings. I am a human being and this means I also make mistakes. I witnessed how I could learn from my learners' experiences and that learning was not a solo activity but a social phenomenon.

I also discovered that my learning was continuous. I learnt that self-discovery and self-identity are pivotal in social and emotional learning. This insight opened up my relationships with my learners. I also learnt valuable lessons from my learners by allowing them to feel free to dispute certain topics. My learners thus enhanced and informed my research study with their own experiences and insights. It was clear to me that these children were powerful participants in the self-study research and I thus argue strongly that children's contributions should be considered as valuable in educational research and in the broader society.

To support this self-study research, I needed to undertake a range of analytical activities to detect and understand children's emotional language. For instance, they presented numerous verbal responses, wrote paragraphs, and drew images. Through these activities I was able to learn more about the emotional aspects of children's culture. It was necessary that I shared my discoveries with my learners in a meaningful manner. Sharing my discoveries with my

learners exposed new ways of learning and building mutual respect. It also helped me to understand the diverse learning abilities and life experiences of my learners.

I feel it is pivotal for us as teachers to display acts of kindness, to work in unity, and to know our identities. I now know that I need to devote more time to involving my learners in active learning and to trust their judgment. I became attentive to their traumatic and heroic experiences as well as their negative and positive emotions. I watched my learners as they supported one another and participated eagerly in classroom discussions. It was these experiences that planted the seeds that blossomed into healing, delight, and feeling secure. I also saw in my teaching that I became increasingly adept at identifying desirable and undesirable experiences and act appropriately. Self-study research gave me an opportunity to find creative and innovative ways to teach and to create a classroom where collaboration was pivotal.

10.4 New Discoveries

I learnt that self-study endorses the value of collaboration as a cornerstone of professional growth. The rewards of such connections are invaluable and underscore life-long learning. I was encouraged to nurture learning and to explore emotions and social relationships. I exercised reflection, and also heartened my learners to be reflective. I had to tap deep into social relationships and emotions to discover true meaning and I learnt that, by its interactive nature, self-study encourages learners' contributions as it highlights and acknowledges their insights. In fact, had it not been for my learners' contributions, this study would not have come to fruition. I was able to uncover and explore learning opportunities and realities through their eyes and I thus learnt that learning is not confined to what is in a textbook or what is prescribed by the curriculum, but that it stretches across immeasurable boundaries.

However, there were times during this study that I felt imprisoned and had to force myself to be optimistic. This was daunting and negated some genuine experiences. I had to fight to be liberated from negativity as it confined my thoughts and limited my creativity. At times I felt defeated or over ambitious, but I needed to understand that I did not have perfect learners, that I am not perfect, and that building relationships needed patience as it is a thorny journey.

Mostly, however, I was stimulated by becoming cognisant of my learners' emotional and social needs and I knew I had to mould them to restore fragmented relationships. I am now more sentient of children's emotions and life's challenges and view them as an incomparable healing resource in teaching and learning. I wanted my learners to be emancipated, to be themselves, and to express themselves unapologetically at a level that was appropriate for their age. In the process of engaging in social and emotional learning, I realised that my learners and I needed to face adversities and downfalls to grow from strength to strength. I realised that it was challenging to respond to all my learners' emotional needs and struggles, but I also realised that liberation would be 'an inside job' and that it would take time to manifest.

My learners' delightful sense of humour and love reinvigorated me and I was motivated to adopt a positive mentality towards my teaching. I learnt to engage in interventions that encouraged my learners' participation in a vigorous classroom. I strove to provide a sense of belonging by acknowledging diverse identities and embracing the knowledge that my learners carried into our learning environment.

10.5 Methodological Learning

10.5.1 Creating a collage

I created a collage (Figure 10.1) in which I reflected on how and what I had learnt through this self-study research. Creating this collage also aided me in defining and understanding self-study research. I was able to apply visual thinking, visually present my ideas, and to extend my understanding. I wanted to bring together visual elements to discover their coherences. Butler-Kisber (2018) elucidates that collage making has a reminiscent influence which deeply contributes to qualitative research, underlining that we are able to express what is said and unsaid through pictures. My collage thus epitomises the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that I had found difficult to say in words before.

I presented this collage to my critical friends and my supervisor and audio-recorded my presentation and the discussion. The presentation of this collage allowed me to extend my

methodological learning by collaborating with my critical friends and supervisor. Samaras and Freese (2006) highlight that, while reflection can be done independently, collaborative reflection is also crucial in a self-study project. My critical friends and supervisor helped me to move beyond my own personal understandings and to listen to and heed their diverse perspectives. Looking at and discussing my collage collaboratively also opened opportunities for new insights into my methodological learning.



Figure 10.1 “Who’d have thought?”

Overall, the collage depicts how self-study research added value to my teaching. Creating this collage opened my mind and called me to inquire deeper into my motivations and the processes that I had followed to learn about social and emotional learning. This professional journey helped to understand myself better, to know who I am, and to use that self-knowledge to assist others. I titled this collage *Who’d have thought?* because I had not fully anticipated how self-study research would encourage my learners to express themselves emotionally and to build healthy relationships. The process taught me to respond to my learners’ needs and this involved developing myself through learning with my learners. I came to see that teacher learning is a lifetime journey.

10.5.2 Meaningful conversations



Figure 10.2: “The inside story”

The phrase *The inside story* (Figure 10.2) evokes how my understanding of self-study required personal references. I needed to determine where I was and not to only focus on others’ narratives but to treasure my own experiences too. As a teacher, I had to look deeply into myself in order to answer meaningful questions such as “*How can I reach my full potential?*” and “*How can I rise above my not so pleasing experiences?*” Searching for *the inside story* helped me to understand that self-study research encouraged me to learn through reflecting and constantly asking questions that helped me to grow professionally.



Figure 10.3: “Tabloids and criticism”

In engaging in self-study research, I appreciated the importance of acquiring new perspectives and that new perspective would be introduced by my learners as well as my critical friends. Together they would represent a ‘tabloid’ that would offer positive ‘criticism’ – thus a ‘tabloid of criticism’ (Figure 10.3). Bringing other people into my study allowed me to reinvent teaching and learning and to identify my shortcomings. I was uncomfortable at times, because this meant that I had to be honest and accept criticism without being emotional or taking it personally. I had to acknowledge that bringing people into my self-study research would enrich my professional learning and my research.

In my view, this self-study research was a constant search to discover myself, which is why I had to look into my soul and find insightful ways to execute my research. I wish that I understood right at the beginning, when I began this self-study research, that I did not have to conquer every mountain or to find answers on my own. Luckily I discovered gradually that I had a supportive team consisting of my supervisor, my critical friends, and my learner participants.

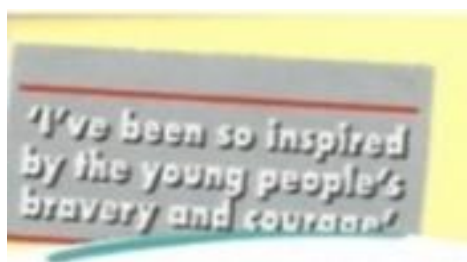


Figure 10.4: “Bravery and courage”

Figure 10.4, captioned *Bravery and courage*, means that this self-study research related intrinsically to social justice. It encouraged me to make space in my classroom to include my learners’ voices and opinions. I became more aware that, at times, adults marginalise children’s voices and often mute them completely. In response to this notion, I allowed my learners to share their perspectives and ideas and this made space for their valued presence in this study.



Figure 10.5: “Re-assess and revisit”

I acknowledge (Figure 10.5) that the re-assessing and revisiting processes in self-study research require us to be critical of ourselves, our teaching, and the way we address specific problems. I valued meaningful dialogues, self-inquiring questions that allowed me to rethink my teaching, deep enquiry, and seeking constructive responses that elicited positive transformation. My personal perceptions and reflections directed me to identify how short-sighted it is not to value feedback and dissimilar insights in a study of this nature.

10.5.3 Past experiences as the cradle of learning



Figure 10.6: “A heartening discovery”

The caption of Figure 10.6, *A heartening discovery*, reminds me how this self-study guided me to revisit my childhood experiences and to consider them in relation to what and how my learners were taught and what and how they learnt. Samaras et al. (2004) highlight that past experiences “form hidden personal narratives related to education” and that teaching “has a philosophical and sometimes headstrong power on the way teachers teach” (p. 908). The phrase reminds me that I was also able to address social and emotional learning through engaging in heartfelt conversations about my learning as a child and adolescent, and this insight was stimulated by self-study research.



Figure 10.7: “The inner child”

I was able to tap into my ‘inner child’ (Figure 10.7) to reflect on my teaching and learning. My inner child is honest, lives in hope, and always sees new possibilities. This was an ideal world where I reconnected with myself and encouraged myself to persevere without holding back. The child in me encouraged me to learn from my learners, to be creative, and to understand how my learners faced their insecure feelings and defeat.



Figure 10.8: “Sewing requires working delicately”

Figure 10.8 pictures my childhood experiences of sewing as an activity to knit things together and to create something new and practical. This is a metaphor for my voyage of enquiry into my own teaching practice where I had to create something new and practical in the classroom. The sewing machine also symbolises how I had to thread my interactions with my learners cautiously as I would be dealing with those who had had traumatic experiences as well as those who were shy, dominant, scared, aloof, or even disinterested. Like a sewing machine, I had to design and stitch together an intricate pattern as a learning model that would accommodate everyone’s size – thus their needs – in the classroom.

Furthermore, just like changing and adapting a stitching pattern, I was able to make delicate changes that heightened my teaching and my relationships with my learners. Mitchell and Weber (2004) state that self-expression taps into and exposes aspects of the self, thereby helping us to identify how we feel and allowing us to express ourselves. I used the metaphor of the sewing machine as an insightful way to reflect on my classroom goals and to inspire introspection. I acknowledged that it is fundamental for teachers to tap into their learners’ and their own emotional and social needs and to be conscientious about addressing them. I also apprehended that background influences would prevail in my classroom and have an impact on teacher-learner relationships throughout the year.

10.6 Looking in the Mirror



Figure 10.9: “Reflecting on my learning”

As a teacher, self-study allowed me to learn from my past experiences as well as from the present – i.e., the learners who were in my class at the time of the investigation. I needed to reflect, engage in continuous inquiry, and give myself constructive feedback that would allow me to cherish and develop my insights about social and emotional teaching. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) indicate that, for the ‘self’ to appear accurate in the development of teacher knowledge and practice, self-study essentially incorporates reflection. I thus engaged in self-reflection, frequent questioning, and filling in gaps about my teaching practice by cooperating with my learners, colleagues, and critical friends. Figure 10.9 made me realise that I had to look back at my teaching and learning to grow professionally.



Figure 10.10: “Uncomfortable questions elicited enlightening answers”

Figure 10.10 reminded me that I was eager to answer fundamental questions and to participate in meaningful life experiences that influenced my learning. I had to step into memories that lit my way and helped me to be a better teacher. Hamilton et al. (2008) underline the point that teachers who seek to improve their practice through self-study are obliging to pose questions to themselves and others that will drive educational transformation. However, Lui (2020) argues that instances of truth can often be uncomfortable. I found that moments of complete truth about my past and my learners were enlightening. I realised that I had to be driven by my classroom setting that was not perfect and I thus needed to ask myself uncomfortable questions and revisit thoughts that questioned my teaching approach. It was, like a candle burning on a dark night, enlightening to learn that this was a radical learning experience because it connected my inquiries with my learning, and my doubts with my certainties.

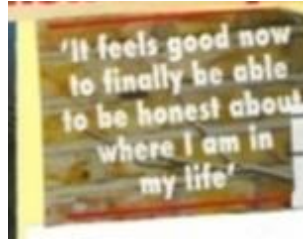


Figure 10.11: “Honesty”

Figure 10.11 verbalises that, in self-study, we have to be honest and transparent about where we are in our professional learning. I reframed, reconstructed, and revisited my thoughts and ideas consistently. I was conscious that self-study requires us to be transparent, honest, and true to ourselves in order to grow and improve our practice. Samaras et al. (2004) explain that self-study requires the opportunity to undress and uncover realities and to engross ourselves in introspection to find the truth about who we are as teachers. In this process we also need to participate in acute discussions and learn through the unconventional and often critical perspectives of others.



Figure 10.12: “Our flaws”

Figure 10.12 (*Our flaws*) and the earlier caption *Tabloids and criticism* reminded me that pre-empting answers in my mind was unproductive and resulted in discontent. I did not benefit anything from this practice. Pre-empting any answers set me up for disappointment and did not allow learning and teaching to flow naturally. It also prevented my learners and me from being authentic and I stopped this process very early as striving for a perfect learning experience was unrealistic and limited my learning. Lui (2020) encourages teachers to find their voice and to be authentic in their writing about their struggles. I comprehended that it

was acceptable to make mistakes, to learn from those mistakes, and to be flexible. I came to realise that self-study would be a constant journey that needed authenticity. In fact, there was always room for improvement.

10.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Learning

10.7.1 Social and emotional learning

I anticipated that exploring social and emotional learning would give birth to emotional development and a sense of balance. Corcoran (2018) advises a strong focus on managing emotions, adopting a positive mind-set, and gaining social and self-awareness to promote relationship skills and decision making. I appreciated that social and emotional learning might equip me with the necessary skills to provide instructional activities that would foster learners' competencies and support their understanding of managing their emotions. It was pleasing to see how my learners came to identify and understand their own emotions, needs, and abilities. It was also stimulating to learn that social and emotional learning would inspire my learners to reach their full potential and to quest for intelligence that is allied to respecting others' perspectives and feelings as well as managing their emotions.

I learnt to search for positivity and not to isolate my learners from participating in conversations that were related to building our classroom community. Rimm-Kaufman and Merritt (2019) state that forming a supportive classroom atmosphere prior to teaching and learning activities is essential. For instance, learners could establish customs or rules themselves which will create an optimistic social setting. I also learnt that, by tapping into my learners' emotions, I could expose them to problem-solving activities, evolving stress management skills, and conflict resolution and negotiating relationships at levels that were age appropriate. By exposing my learners to social and emotional learning, I also strove to help them overcome hurdles such as frustration, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. My learners and I engaged in collaborative learning which enthused us with hope. Open classroom discussions helped us to build trusting relationships and expand critical thinking.

In my view, if I had not accepted these children's opinions and feelings, it could have negatively affected the way I delivered my teaching and how learning was received. I thus

learnt to acknowledge my learners' prior experiences and learning as well as their memories, feelings, perceptions, and hopes. Moskal (2017) argues that allowing children to express their viewpoints through images can make their knowledge and concerns noticeable to grown-ups and can be the foundation for including children in ascertaining and resolving problems that affect them. My learners thus did various activities that I hoped would influence their eagerness to work collaboratively and to solve problems. It was amazing to note that both my learners and I were inclined to be swayed by feelings and thoughts that we were not fully aware of at a given moment. I was able to identify myself as a participant and a channel for positive change in my learning environment. I realised that, at times, my learners could be my heroes and a source of healing, sincerity, and light. I also established that social and emotional learning is not a path we walk alone – instead, we are called to learn collaboratively and to share both dreadful and joyous encounters.

10.7.2 Teacher learning

I learnt that teacher learning encompasses working collaboratively, sharing ideas, and teaching with undivided attention to the learners. Kelly (2006) acknowledges that teacher learning involves learning through experience and practice and by fully participating in classroom activities. I aimed to encourage and enhance interaction and participation in my classroom. Thus my learners shared their opinions and experiences so that I could learn from them about social and emotional learning.

I soon discovered that knowledge emerged from my own personal and professional experiences and I translated it into my teaching. Weare (2004) upholds that professional learning is constant and requires feedback and reflection on what has been gained through teaching and learning. For this reason, I decided to use my personal experiences to explore social and emotional learning. I was thus able to embrace values that rejoiced in diversity, equality, and respect for differences, and this had a positive impact on my knowledge as a professional and my relationship with my learners.

I am now mindful that I need to identify children in my classroom who have faced hurt, and I need to determine what kind of impact this has had on their social and emotional learning. I

learnt to listen to my learners' concerns and what concerned them emotionally, and this learning will stand me in good stead in the future.

10.7.3 A socio-cultural perspective

My learners and I learnt by participating actively in classroom discussions inside and outdoors and by communicating with people around us. Kortjass (2019) highlights that a socio-cultural theoretical perspective emphasises the importance of working together in educational settings to make sense of joint and individual experiences. I also acknowledge that learning occurs through social interaction – this means we learn by collaboratively participating in classroom discussions and activities. My daily contact with my learners played a vital role in nurturing their social and academic development. By observing and listening to them, I was able to identify my learners' dilemmas and I constantly supported them in finding themselves and preserving their identities. As their teachers, I learnt to create an environment that exuded friendliness and care and that bonded them in a classroom community.

A socio-cultural perspective also encouraged me to work closely with my colleagues from school and university, to create healthy relationships, and to understand that I would gain knowledge from my learning environment and social settings. Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) emphasise the prominence of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective when we take the backgrounds and the diversity of our learners into contemplation when we engage with them. A socio-cultural perspective thus enhanced my knowledge and guided me to devise activities that would ensure the participation of my learners in diverse activities to elicit and enhance their understanding and learning.

I am pleased that I managed participation in my classroom that helped my learners face and hopefully resolve some of the conflicts they experienced due to the social standards and beliefs in their communities and homes. I persistently applied a socio-cultural perspective when I planned my lessons. In brief, this means that my lessons required active participation and recognition of the prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and value systems that my learners imbibed at home and in their respective communities. It was exhilarating to be

alert to the social and psychological impact that various cultures and backgrounds might have on our classroom experiences.

10.8 Implications of this Study

I engaged in self-study research primarily to gain new perspectives on my teaching and classroom practices. I thus learnt from my childhood experiences, my learners' daily interactions, as well as from my critical friends who shared their insights with me. Bringing other people into my study allowed me to rediscover teaching and learning and to identify my shortcomings. In my view, this self-study research was a continuous search for who I was and who I am now, which is why I had to dig deep within myself to find insightful ways to bring this research to fruition. Along this journey I was inspired by my learners' bravery and courage. I saw that self-study research related to social justice and my learners' voices and views. I felt that, at times, adults tended to marginalise learners and mute their voices. My learners could thus share their perspectives and ideas through my study which gave them a voice and equity.

I realise that healing others by being sympathetic and understanding their different emotions also brought me healing. I was moved to guide my learners to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas and to be actively involved in my classroom. I had to locate my emotional competency as well as my learners' emotional spaces. I was thus called to listen to them emotively, to display sincere compassion, and to appreciate everyone's reality regardless of my own perspectives. I desired my learners to have open minds and hearts. As a learning community, we needed to cultivate the willingness to listen empathetically and I needed to model positive behaviours that reinforced and stimulated my learners regarding emotional and social learning. I needed to teach in a manner that fortified courtesy and respect and that taught my learners that the dignity and feelings of others mattered.

I would like to think that teachers, scholars, and school leaders will discover a number of patterns in my self-study. I had to allow myself to lose control and to simultaneously allow positive and uninvited energy to filter through my lessons. The journey was not a seamless one. I had to face my shortcomings such as being impatient and not probing deep enough for insightful answers related to social and emotional learning. I believe that my study

comprehensively demonstrates that social and emotional learning allows us – indeed, urges us – to engage in individual reflections and reflective dialogues and discussions in the classroom. It is also critical to apply collaborative thinking and to embrace diverse perspective through poetry writing, creative writing, journal writing, collage making, music, and drawing.

These new insights, which have been amply demonstrated in the discourse, are useful to teaching and learning as they inspire sincere learning, genuine feelings, and deep conversations. I encourage teachers and education researchers who wish to engage in self-study to be honest and transparent about where they are in their professional learning, and to be aware of where they want to go. It is also significant to consistently reframe, reconstruct, and reconsider one's initial thoughts and ideas and find appropriate ways that outline teaching and learning as something that needs to be beneficial to the participants and learners. Such a study should also benefit the researcher's own development as a teacher and an aspiring practitioner. It is thus important that prospective students who are interested in self-study research are intuitive, prepared to be analysed and constructively criticised, and critical of themselves. They should carefully consider their research questions and know that learning from their present as well as their past experiences is vital.

I discovered that emotions that fume underneath the birth of mindfulness can have a dominant impact on how teachers and learners behave or react. The study argues that teachers need to adopt and impart an optimistic mind-set about those in their care. The insights that the study uncovered were strongly influenced by painful emotions and diverse social realities. I discovered that social and emotional learning creates unique familiarities that unite us and offer healing. As teachers, we should always seek to transform hearts in pain and offer a helping hand. I learnt that social and emotional learning is about fixing and building relationships and questioning those barriers that impede positive relationships. It is thus important to always search for grace, courage, and strength to secure sound relationships.

My study opened my eyes to insights that teach us how to relocate teaching and learning in order to address social and emotional learning. The study drew knowledge from my own and my learner participants' lived experiences and the social and cultural settings in which they were shaped. I am pleased that the study clearly elucidates how on-going conversations with

my learners and critical friends supported my quest for personal and professional development. Social and emotional learning undeniably elicited a sense of belonging. It was a phenomenal experience to be reminded to be genuinely real to myself and my learners because we were all learning from one another. It was a captivating experience to be so aware of the dissimilar personalities, social upbringings, and diverse emotions that developed inside and outside my classroom.

The study also endorses the notion that learners and teachers do not engage in learning alone, but that learning requires a journey of collaboration. Moreover, a socio-cultural perspective urges that we have to participate in helping one another through scaffolding learning and identifying the zone of proximal development at age-appropriate levels. We have to share experiences and responsibilities in teaching and learning processes to encourage understanding. Furthermore, we learn from one another through observational learning such as displaying emotions, showing respect and compassion, and offering kindness. I acknowledge that my learners did not learn independently as they needed assistance by supporting one another emotionally.

Exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom revealed that self-study supports emotions and understanding of different social backgrounds. According to Whitehead et al. (2020), self-study facilitates professional development through self-knowledge and working collaboratively. It was against this background that I grew on a personal and professional level. I was able to revisit my teaching practice and identify my shortcomings. I also became aware of my social and emotional competencies that transformed the way I taught and introduced new concepts so that my learners could learn.

An important contribution of my study to the knowledge base of self-study research is my understanding and insistence that the voices of school children should be positioned at the forefront in self-study research in education in ways that respect their dignity and perspectives and acknowledge them as key research contributors. Luthuli, Phewa, and Pithouse (2019) have demonstrated how self-study teacher researchers can learn about themselves and their practice when working with children as research partners. Likewise, the detailed portrayals I gave of my lessons in this thesis gave prominence to my learners' lived experiences and perspectives (Luthuli et al., 2020). The study showed how I became aware of my learners'

lived experiences and how they influenced their own learning. As teachers, we need to be cognisant of and receptive to what is occurring in learners' lives. I conducted my self-study in a manner that showed that children's experiences are valuable as that my learners were valued active agents of social change.

I needed to give my learners feedback that was specific to their social and emotional needs. There were times during our lessons where I had to probe my learners about how they feel. For instance, when we were dealing with the issue of bullying and how it influences their relationships and self-esteem. I also encouraged my learners to share their emotional experiences related to bullying. This taught me to be emotive and intentional in my teaching. Luthuli et al. (2020) highlight that self-study research is built on an awareness that learning is a social experience that transpires between people related to cultural and social environments. Social and emotional learning thus provides a base for self-study research as it instils understanding of differences in culture, languages, social environments, and lived experiences. It also encourages being reflective and emancipates the researcher from strongholds of the past. Engaging in social and emotional learning fortified this self-study research as it allowed me to relook at self-awareness, which means that I was aptly and comprehensively able to identify the roles of emotions, values, and self-confidence in learning.

By exploring social and emotional learning through this self-study research, I came to understand the importance of controlling our emotions and impulses and expressing our emotions appropriately. This study demonstrated that these capabilities can also be imparted to and understood by very young children as old as 10 or 11 years. I also learnt the value of empathising with young learners and recognising and appreciating their similarities and differences. I gained relationship skills and was able to facilitate healthy and rewarding relationships in a classroom context among young learners.

10.9 Moving Forward

I plan to utilise the new insights that I gained about exploring social and emotional learning, teaching life lessons such as dealing with death, despair, bullying, and disability and building friendships. I want to kindle my learners' interests and their life experiences. I would like to

see transparency in their thoughts and an expansion of their emotional vocabulary and creativity. I shall endeavour to design and discuss probable classroom ice breakers and activities with my learners that uncover sincere emotions. I would also like to be more pioneering and work cooperatively with my colleagues in practicing social and emotional learning in schools.

I have always striven to find teaching methods and approaches that would inspire social justice in education. The Department of Education (2008), states that our colourful South African flag is a clear example of South Africa's pledge to non-discrimination. The unique design also liberates all South Africans to make the colours of the flag personally meaningful, as long as we remember to celebrate diversity. Inspired by my study, my thoughts are rooted in diversity but also in inclusive education as an instrument that nurtures teaching and learning in a multi-cultural environment.

The social justice journey needs equal participation of all groups in classrooms that are inclusive and meet everyone's needs. It is my responsibility now and in the future to emulate and encourage a spirit of reconciliation and respect for diversity. I would like to ensure that my learners understand social justice. In doing so, I shall encourage them to accept unequivocally that this is a social responsibility because of our cultural and religious differences. Issues that entail inequality and prejudice need to be handled delicately but assertively as we are all answerable to our public duty and social conscience. It is, in my view, essential to break social prejudices and boundaries that threaten social justice, beginning in the classroom. It is in our junior classrooms in particular that we must instil respect for diversity and find a balance between the well-being of society and the preservation and sustainability of the environment. If our young children accept and embrace these tenets, it will augur well for future generations.

All in all, I think it is vital to create and uphold a content-intensive and culturally approachable and significant curriculum for social justice. In this context, it will be my role as a teacher to ensure that all voices and emotions are deemed valid and that they are heard. It is critical to safeguard relationships that are not driven by discrimination or any form of prejudice. My classroom must radiate equality and democracy for all. The tenets of social and emotional learning and social justice in education advocate interactive learning that

allows us to share our stories and reflect on our experiences. It is in the classroom where learners ask questions, raise their fears, and express their hopes, and it is therefore the classroom that must be a safe space for them to have a voice and be heard.

10.10 Reimagining my Classroom through Self-Study

To encapsulate my learning based on this study, I present a drawing of my classroom because I want to welcome everyone who has never visited it into this space. I want them to be able to picture my classroom and hopefully understand the learning culture and the kind of relationships that manifested here because of my self-study research. The classroom drawing I created portrays my learners' perspectives as well as my own. Warm colours symbolise this community that thrived on practising social justice in education and explored social and emotional learning.



Figure 10.13: “My classroom”

The drawing shows how, through self-study, I became attentive to a learning culture that is informed by the principles of social and emotional learning that were tangible in each lesson. Looking at this picture, I am pleased to acknowledge that my learners built healthy relationships, expressed themselves emotively, cooperated, and were patient with one another. The bright colours of the classroom drew their attention and enhanced their interest. The drawing reflects their enthusiasm to learn and participate in different social relationships and

discussions. Fundamentally, my learners brought a positive mind-set into this learning space and coloured it brightly with their sense of humour and courtesy. These are important values to build and cultivate in learning.

The bright colours also symbolise that my learners explored their creativity and their love for colour during our lessons on social and emotional learning. The image of myself as the teacher in a central position shows my desire to cultivate my learning about my learners' personal, social, and emotional experiences. I wanted them to share their opinions and express their feelings in lively and interactive conversations. The learners seated at their desks and facing one another symbolise a lively classroom atmosphere, interactive learning, and a learner-centred approach. I desired to transform teaching in a positive manner. It was important that I instilled values such as working in unity, respecting equality, and embracing the beauty of diversity. My deepest desire was to share these values with my learners in the hope that they would share them with the rest of the world around them one day.

The drawing reflects light and warmth. The positive messages on the walls encourage social and emotional learning and my desire that my learners will achieve inner strength and resilience. The drawing overall depicts that my eyes, ears, and heart are open and receptive to my learners' emotions and what they long for. My classroom in this drawing is a safe and secure space where I shall persist, now and in the years to come, to acknowledge my learners' emotional needs instead of focusing only on their academic skills and what is written in the textbook.

10.11 Conclusion

My first research question was: *What can I learn about social and emotional learning from my childhood experiences?* In response to this question I recalled my childhood and adolescent memories related to social and emotional learning. Engaging with this question allowed me to make sense of these memories. By sharing these memories, I accepted that being engaged in social and emotional learning invited me to engage in monologues and dialogues to uncompromisingly analyse and question why my learners and I felt the way we did in particular classroom circumstances. I also needed to determine what elicited my

emotions and how and why I reacted to adversities as I did. I acknowledge that both pleasant and antagonistic experiences in my personal and professional worlds cultivated the teacher I am today.

When I addressed the second research question: *What can I learn through exploring social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom?* I became mindful of my learners' relationships and emotions. I learnt that social and emotional learning and self-study research could anchor explorations of learners' views. Together, my learners and I embarked on a journey of social and emotional self-discovery that allowed us to express ourselves liberally. Nonetheless, at times it was challenging to accommodate all my learners in every aspect of this learning process because embracing one way to express sympathy and love was not enough. I had to get to know my learners personally and acknowledge that they were remarkable and unique. Sadly, I realised that I had not paid enough attention to my learners' social and emotional well-being or their emotionally challenging experiences before I commenced this self-study research. I can now see that making social and emotional learning a focal point in my teaching allowed them to locate their emotions and thoughts through music, journal and poetry writing, and drawings, and these activities encouraged self-awareness and a sense of security.

I now appreciate the significance of the persistent need to interconnect and to build relationships with my learners and colleagues such as my critical friends. I learnt that having an optimistic teaching and learning climate is a prerequisite for learning, forging relationships, and building character. I endeavoured to devise effective ways to elevate thinking through creativity and emotive dialogues. Social and emotional learning by means of self-study research was thus a portal to personal self-awareness and emancipation. Moreover, the methodologies that I employed allowed my learners to embark on a journey of classroom and outdoor adventures that elicited social and emotional learning experiences and that supported honest and free expressions of both pain and joy in an age-appropriate manner. I became aware that, as a teacher, I wanted to ignite hopeful mind-sets, vitalise a fervent attitude to learning, and foster social relationships.

Exploring social and emotional learning called me to be more understanding, empathetic, and supportive of my learners' diversity. I became more sensitive in my teaching approach as I

became aware of my learners' diverse needs and the trials and tribulations of their lives. I was also compelled to be vulnerable myself. This means I had to be aware of my learners' challenges and emotional and traumatic experiences as well as my own. I had to be willing to selectively share some of my difficult and heart-breaking experiences with them. I thus had to become more transparent about my emotions and some aspects of my life.

This self-study research transformed me into a long-life learner as I learnt to persistently interrogate my teaching practices and methods. I was able to acknowledge and identify that my learners were capable of learning and that their insights into their learning were enhanced by our interactions and efforts to explore social and emotional learning. I saw my shortcomings and strengths through my learners, and their eagerness to participate inspired and motivated me. I learned insightful lessons and grew personally and professionally and as a self-study researcher. It was reassuring to discover my voice and to draw power and learning from my childhood, my professional experiences, and my learners.

I now realise that every day inside and outside the classroom is an opportunity to learn and share knowledge. Working collaboratively with my learners offered me endless opportunities to explore social and emotional learning in my Grade 4 classroom. The lessons I learnt inspired me to always be willing to connect with the hearts and minds of my learners by sharing our life experiences and engaging in emotive conversations. I want to set an example to young learners by adopting an optimistic mind-set and expressing myself freely yet appropriately. I also want to nurture the notions of self-love, self-awareness, and positive relationships. I shall thus always answer to the call to embody and emulate love, kindness, and humility.

REFERENCES

- Allison, V. A., & Ramirez, L. A. (2020). Employing self-study research to confront childhood sexual abuse and its consequences for self, others, and communities. In J. Kitchen, A. Berry, H. Guðjónsdóttir, S. M. Bullock, M. Taylor, & A. R. Crowe (Eds.), *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education* (Second ed., pp. 1-28). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- Allnutt, S. (2013). A few pieces of thread: Collage, intergenerational memory, and place. In T. Strong-Wilson, C. A. Mitchell, S. Susan, & K. Pithouse-Morgan (Eds.), *Productive remembering and social agency* (pp. 155-170). Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE.
- Austin, T., & Senese, J. C. (2004). Self-study in school teaching: Teachers' perspectives. In *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (pp. 1231-1258). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Babbie, E. (2008). *Introduction to Social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Bezuidenhout, W., Bosch, D., Engelbrecht, R., Marchant, J., Scott, A., & Volker, A. (2012). *Natural Science & Technology Learner's grade 4 Book*. Gauteng: Macmillian South Africa.
- Björklund, C., & Ahlskog-Björkman, E. (2017). Approaches to teaching in thematic work: Early childhood teachers' integration of mathematics and art. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(2), 98-111.
- Blake, S., Bird, J., & Gerlach, L. (2007). *Promoting emotional and social development in school*. London: SAGE.
- Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. New York: Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brunke, A. C. (2018). Memory and creativity: Finding a place where a heart may swirl. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 16(1), 23-35. Retrieved from: <https://jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/viewFile/40364/36364>
- Bullough Jr, R. V. (2011). Hope, happiness, teaching, and learning. In C. Day & J. C.-K. Lee (Eds.), *New understandings of teachers' work: Emotions and educational change* (pp. 15-30). Dordrecht: Springer.

- Burke, R. W. (2002). Social and emotional education in the classroom. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 38(3), 108-111.
- Butler-Kisber, L. M. (2005). Inquiry through poetry: The genesis of self-study. In C. Mitchell, S. Weber, & S. O'Reilly-Scanlon (Eds.), *Just who do we think we are? Methodologies for autobiography and self-study teaching* (pp. 95-110). London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Butler-Kisber, L. M. (2008). Collage as inquiry. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 265-276). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Campbell, B., & Mhlongo, B. (2019). Using photographs as memory prompt objects: Influencing pre-service language teachers to recognise reading as a driver of social change. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 8(1), 41-53. Retrieved from: http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za/view_edition.php?v=8&n=1#
- Cefai, C. (2008). *Promoting resilience in the classroom: A guide to developing pupils' emotional and cognitive skills*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.
- Cavioni, V., & Zanetti, M. A. (2019). Social-emotional learning and students' transition from kindergarten to primary school in Italy. In *Early Childhood Development: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 528-547). IGI Global.
- Chiu-Ching, R. T., & Chan, Y. E. (2009). Teaching and learning through narrative inquiry. In D. Tidwell, M. Heston, & L. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp.17-33). New York: Springer.
- Cobb, P. (1994). Where is the mind? Constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on mathematical development. *Educational Researcher*, 23(7), 13-20.
- Coetzee, M., & Jansen, C. (2007). *Emotional intelligence in the classroom: The secret to happy teachers*. Cape Town: Juta & Co.
- Cohen, J. (1999). *Educating minds and hearts: Social and emotional learning and the passage into adolescence*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cohen, J., & Maran, S. (1999). Social and emotional learning: A psychoanalytically informed perspective (pp. 112-123). In J. Cohen (Ed.), *Educating minds and hearts: Social and emotional learning and the passage into adolescence*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Coles, J. (2017). Planting poetry: Sowing seeds of creativity in a Year 5 class. *Changing English*, 24(4), 386-398.

- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2013). Guide for effective social and emotional learning programmes. Retrieved from: <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2013-casel-guide.pdf>
- Collins, C. S., & Cooper, J. E. (2014). Emotional intelligence and the qualitative researcher. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 13, 88-103. Retrieved from: <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/20516>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Discovering voices: College students and middle scholars explore identities, differences, and connections through the structure of a poem. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 20(2), 133-149. Retrieved from: <http://ijme-journal.org/index.php/ijme/article/view/1564>
- Corcoran, R. P. (2018). Children benefit from being taught social and emotional skills – but some methods are better than others. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: <http://theconversation.com/children-benefit-when-taught-social-and-emotional-skills-but-some-methods-are-better-than-others-90984>
- Corcoran, R. P., Cheung, A. C., Kim, E., & Xie, C. (2018). Effective universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for improving academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research. *Educational Research Review*, 25, 56-72.
- Cornwell, S. & Bundy, J. (2009). *The emotional curriculum: A journey towards emotional literacy*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Crosby, S. D., Howell, P., & Thomas, S. (2018). Social justice education through trauma-informed teaching. *Middle School Journal*, 49(4), 15-23. doi:10.1080/00940771.2018.1488470
- Denscombe, M. (2002). *Ground rules for good research: A 10-point guide for social researchers*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects* (4th ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). *Curriculum and assessment policy statement Grades 4-6*. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Education. (2001). *Education white paper 6: Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Education (2008). *My country South Arica: Celebrating our national symbols and heritage second edition*. Pretoria: Government Press.

- Department of Basic Education (2018). *Grade 4 Rainbow Workbooks Home Language in English*. Pretoria : Department of Basic Education.
- Dhlula-Moruri, M. N., Kortjass, M., Ndaleni, T., & Pithouse-Morgan, K. (2017). A stove, a flask, and a photograph: Learning together through object inquiry in self-study research. In D. Pillay, K. Pithouse-Morgan, & I. Naicker (Eds.), *Object medleys: Interpretive possibilities for educational research* (pp. 81-98). Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school based universal interventions. *Childhood Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Easton, L. B. (2008). From professional development to professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(10), 755-756.
- Ebrahim, F. (2012). *Viva Social Sciences: Learner's book. Grade*. Cape Town: Vivlia Publisher & Booksellers
- Engelbrecht, A., & Swanepoel, H. (Eds.). (2013). *Embracing diversity through multi-level teaching for Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase*. Cape Town: Juta and Company.
- Evans, D. P., Ka'ōpua, H., & Freese, A. R. (2015). Work gloves and a green sea turtle: Collaborating in a dialogic process of professional learning. In K. Pithouse-Morgan & A. P. Samaras (Eds.), *Polyvocal professional learning through self-study research* (pp. 21-37). Rotterdam: SENSE.
- Feldman, A. (2003). Validity and quality in self-study. *Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 26-28.
- Flemming, C. (2020). "Dear Matilda": Letter writing as research method. *Antistasis*, 10(1), 1-14.
- Forgasz, R., & Clemans, A. (2014). Feeling feminist? A self-study of emotion as a feminist epistemology in education practice. In M. Taylor, & L. Coia (Eds.), *Gender, feminism, and queer theory in the self-study of teacher education practices* (pp. 61-75). Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE.
- Furman, R., Coyne, A., & Negi, N. J. (2008). An international experience for social work students: Self-reflection through poetry and journal writing exercises. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 28(1-2), 71-85. doi:10.1080/08841230802178946

- Galman, S. (2009). Trading in fables: Literary and artistic methods in self-study research. In C. A. Lassonde, S. Galman, & C. Kosnik (Eds.), *Self-study research methodologies for teacher educators* (pp. 129-149). Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE.
- Gerhard, G., & Mayer-Smith, J. (2008). Casting a wider net: Deepening scholarship by changing theories. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*, 2(1), 1-11.
- Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Graham, A., Powell, M. A., & Taylor, N. (2015). Ethical research involving children: Encouraging reflexive engagement in research with children and young people. *Children & Society*, 29(5), 331-343.
- Hamilton, M. L., Smith, L., & Worthington, K. (2008). Fitting the methodology with the research: An exploration of narrative, self-study, and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1), 17-28.
- Hannon, L. V. (2020). Engaging my whole self in learning to teach for social justice. In J. Kitchen, A. Berry, H. Guðjónsdóttir, S. M. Bullock, M. Taylor, & A. R. Crowe (Eds.), *2nd International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education* (pp. 1-26). Singapore: Springer.
- Hausfather, S. J. (1996). Vygotsky and schooling: Creating a social context for learning. *Action in Teacher Education*, 18(2), 1-10.
- Heath, M. A., & Cole, B. V. (2012). Strengthening classroom emotional support for children following a family member's death. *School Psychology International*, 33(3), 243-262. doi:10.1177/0143034311415800
- Heese, S., Hill, A., Middleton Horn, J., Omar, N. & Swanepoel. (2012). *Platinum English Home Language Grade 4 learner's book*. Cape Town: Maskew Longman.
- Hill, J., Philpot, R., Walton-Fisette, J. L., Sutherland, S., Flemons, M., Ovens, A., ... & Flory, S. B. (2018). Conceptualising social justice and sociocultural issues within physical education teacher education: International perspectives. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(5), 469-483.
- Hill, M., & Wood, E. (2019). 'Dead forever': An ethnographic study of young children's interests, funds of knowledge, and working theories in free play. *Learning, Culture, and Social Interaction*, 23, 1-9.

- Holland, J. (2008). How schools can support children who experience loss and death. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 36(4), 411-424. doi:10.1080/03069880802364569
- Horner, C. G., Wallace, T. L., & Bundick, M. J. (2015). Adolescents' interpretations of the role of emotion in high school. *Teachers' College Record*, 117(5), 1-34. Retrieved from: <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=17916>
- Hooks, b. (1995). Writing autobiography. In M.Blair, J.Holland & S. Sheldon (Eds.), *Identity and diversity: Gender and the experience of education* (pp. 3-7). England: Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, 31(3-4), 191-206.
- Jurasite-Harison, E., & Rex, L. A. (2010). School cultures as contexts for informal teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(2), 267-277.
- Jones, S. M., & Kahn, J. (2017). The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. Aspen Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evidence-base-learn/>
- Kalpokaite, N., & Radivojevic, I. (2019). Demystifying qualitative data analysis for novice qualitative researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(13), 44-57.
- Kelly, P. (2006). What is teacher learning? A socio-cultural perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 505-519.
- Kortjass, M. (2019). Enriching teaching through artefacts: An Early Childhood mathematics teacher educator's self-study project. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 8(1), 70-85. Retrieved from: http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za/view_edition.php?v=8&n=1#
- LaBoskey, V. K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 817-869). Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Lane, D., Blank, J., & Jones, P. (2019). Research with children: Context, power, and representation. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(4), 693-704. Retrieved from: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss4/4>
- Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). "No rights or wrongs, no magic solutions": Teachers' responses to bereaved adolescent students. *Death Studies*, 38(10), 654-661. doi:10.1080/07481187.2013.840018

- Lantolf, J. P., Thorne, S. L., & Poehner, M. E. (2015). Sociocultural theory and second language development. *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction*, 1, 207-226.
- Liu, J. Y.-J. (2020). Finding authenticity through storytelling: Reflections from a high school classroom. *McGill Journal of Education*, 54(3). Retrieved from: <https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/9685/7520>
- Long, L. (2008). Narrative autoethnography and the promotion of spiritual well-being in teacher research and practice. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(3), 187-196.
- Lorber, J. (2004). "Night to his day": *The social construction of gender. Race, class, and gender in the United States: An integrated study*. 6, 54-65.
- Luthuli, K., Phewa, N., & Pithouse-Morgan, K. (2020). "Their drawings were eloquent": Learning about drawing as an arts-based self-study method for researching with children. *Studying Teacher Education*. doi:10.1080/17425964.2019.1690984
- Lytje, M. (2018). Voices that want to be heard: Using bereaved Danish students' suggestions to update school bereavement response plans. *Death Studies*, 42(4), 254-267. doi:10.1080/07481187.2017.1346726
- Makoelle, T. M. (2014). Changing teacher beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion in South Africa: Lessons from collaborative action research. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 125-134.
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 77-87.
- Masinga, L. (2012). Journeys to self-knowledge: Methodological reflections on using memory work in a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators. *Journal of Education*, 54, 121-137.
- McKay, L. (2019). Supporting intentional reflection through collage to explore self-care in identity work during initial teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, 102920. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102920
- McMurtry, A. (2015). Liked your textbook ... but I'll never use it in the courses I teach. *Teachers' College Record*, ID Number: 18058. Retrieved from: <http://www.tcrecord.org/ContentID=18058>
- McIntosh, P., & Style, E. (1999). Social, emotional, and political learning. *Educating minds and hearts: Social emotional learning and the passage into adolescence*, 137-157.

- Meyer, K., & Willis, R. (2019). Looking back to move forward: The value of reflexive journaling for novice researchers. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 62(5), 578-585. doi:10.1080/01634372.2018.1559906
- Meyers, D. C., Domitrovich, C. E., Dissi, R., Trejo, J., & Greenberg, M. T. (2019). Supporting systemic social and emotional learning with a schoolwide implementation model. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 73, 53-61. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.11.
- Mitchell, C., MacEntee, K., Cullinan, M., & Allison, P. (2019). Working with photographs: Seeing, looking, and visual representation as professional learning. In K. Pithouse-Morgan, D. Pillay, & C. Mitchell (Eds.), *Memory mosaics: Researching teacher professional learning through artful memory-work* (pp. 35-54). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Mitchell, C., & Reid-Walsh, J. (2002). *Researching children's popular culture: The cultural spaces of childhood*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, C., Weber, S., & Pithouse, K. (2009). Facing the public: Using photography for self-study and social action. In D. Tidwell, M. Heston, & L. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp.119-134). New York: Springer.
- Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(4), 18-23.
- Mkhize, N. S. (2016). *Integrating cultural inclusivity in a grade 4 classroom: A teacher's self-study*. (Unpublished MEd dissertation), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. Retrieved from <http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/14891>
- Moletsane, R. (2011). Culture, nostalgia, and sexuality education in the age of AIDS in South Africa. In C. Mitchell, T. Strong-Wilson, K. Pithouse, & S. Allnutt (Eds.), *Memory and pedagogy* (pp. 193-208). New York: Routledge.
- Moskal, M. (2017). Visual methods in research with migrant and refugee children and young people. In P. Liam-Puttong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 1-16). Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Munford, R., & Saunders, J. (2015). Young people's search for agency: Making sense of their experiences and taking control. *Qualitative Social Work*, 14(5), 616-633.
- Murchison, J. M. (2010). *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting, and presenting your research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Murphy, P., & Ivinson, G. (2003). Pedagogy and cultural knowledge: a sociocultural perspective. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 11(1).
- Nash, R. J. (2019). *Liberating scholarly writing: The power of personal narrative*. Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Pearson/AandB.
- Newberry, M. (2013). Reconsidering differential behaviours: Reflection and teacher judgment when forming classroom relationships. *Teacher Development*, 17(2), 195-213.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2010). Analysing qualitative data. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 98-122). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Nkopodi, N., & Mosimege, M. (2009). Incorporating the indigenous game of ‘morabaraba’ in the learning of mathematics. *South African Journal of Education*, 29(3), 377-392. Retrieved from <http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za/index.php/saje/article/view/273/158>
- Northfield, S., & Sherman, A. (2004). Acceptance and community building in schools through increased dialogue and discussion. *Children & Society*, 18(4), 291-298.
- Northwest, E. (2017). Understanding and cultivating social emotional learning. Retrieved from: <http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/understanding-cultivating-sel-508-v2.pdf>
- Notshulwana, R., & de Lange, N. (2019). “I’m me and that is enough”: Reconfiguring the family photo album to explore gender constructions with Foundation Phase preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 82, 106-116. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.011>
- Oslund, J. A., & Crespo, S. (2014). Classroom photographs: Reframing what and how we notice. *Teaching children mathematics*, 20(9), 564-572.
- Panayiotou, M., Humphrey, N., & Wigelsworth, M. (2019). An empirical basis for linking social and emotional learning to academic performance. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 56, 193-204. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.01.009>
- Payton, J. W., Wardlaw, D. M., Graczyk, P. A., Bloodworth, M. R., Tompsett, C. J., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Social and emotional learning: A framework for promoting mental health and reducing risk behavior in children and youth. *Journal of School Health*, 70(5), 179-185.

- Payton, J. W., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Pillay, K., Pithouse-Morgan, K., & Naicker, I. (Eds.). (2017). *Object medleys: Interpretive possibilities for educational research* (pp. 81-98). Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE.
- Pinnegar, S. & Hamilton, M. L. (2011). How is story research in teacher education? In Julian J. Kitchen, D. Ciuffetelli-Parker, & D. Pushor (Eds.), *Narrative inquiries into curriculum making in teacher education* (pp. 43-70). Bingley, UK: Emerald Books.
- Pinnegar, S., Hamilton, M. L., & Fitzgerald, L. (2010, August). Guidance in being and becoming self-study of practice researchers. In L. Erickson, J. Young, & S. Pinnegar (Eds.), *Proceedings of the eighth international conference on self-studies of teacher education practices*. UK: Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices SIG.
- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Masinga, L. (2009). Living and lifelong learning. In C. Mitchell & K. Pithouse (Eds.), *Teaching and HIV & AIDS* (pp.237-246). Johannesburg: Macmillan.
- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Weber, S. (2009). Self-study in teaching and teacher development: A call to action. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 43-62.
- Pithouse-Morgan, K., Deer-Standup, S. O., & Ndaleni, T. (2019). Stories blending, flowing out: Connecting teacher professional learning, re-membering, and storytelling. In K. Pithouse-Morgan, D. Pillay, & C. Mitchell (Eds.), *Memory mosaics: researching teacher professional learning through artful memory-work* (pp. 155-173). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Pithouse-Morgan, K., Madondo, S., & Grossi, E. (2019). The promise of poetry belongs to us all: Poetic professional learning in teacher-researchers' memory-work. In K. Pithouse-Morgan, D. Pillay, & C. Mitchell (Eds.), *Memory mosaics: Researching teacher professional learning through artful memory-work* (pp. 133-153). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Pithouse-Morgan, K., Makhanya, H., Downing, G., & Phewa, N. (2019). Picturing a more hopeful future: Teacher-researchers drawing early memories of school. In K. Pithouse-Morgan, D. Pillay, & C. Mitchell (Eds.), *Memory mosaics: Researching teacher professional learning through artful memory-work* (pp. 55-75). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

- Pithouse-Morgan, K., & Samaras, A. P. (2020). Methodological inventiveness in writing about self-study research: Inventiveness in service. In J. Kitchen, A. Berry, S. M. Bullock, A. R. Crowe, M. Taylor, H. Guðjónsdóttir, & L. Thomas (Eds.), *2nd International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education* (pp. 427-460). Singapore: Springer.
- Powell, W., & Kusama-Powell, O. (2010). *Becoming an emotionally intelligent teacher*. London: SAGE.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S., & Merritt, E. (2019). Let's power our future: Integrating science and social and emotional learning improves collaborative discourse and science understanding. *Science and Children*, 57(1), 52-60.
- Rosario-Ramos, E. M. (2018). "Why aren't there enough of our stories to read?": Teaching autoethnographies for radical healing. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 17(3), 213-227.
- Samaras, A. P. (2011). *Self-study teacher research: Improving your practice through collaborative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Samaras, A. P., & Freese, A. R. (2006). *Self-study of teaching practices primer*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Samaras, A. P., Hicks, M. A., & Berger, J. G. (2004). Self-study through personal history. In J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 905-942). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Samaras, A. P., & Roberts, L. (2011). Flying solo: Teachers take charge of their learning through self-study research. *Learning Forward*, 32(5), 42-45.
- Scharp, K. M., & Sanders, M. L. (2019). What is a theme? Teaching thematic qualitative communication research methods. *Communication Teacher*, 33(2), 117-12.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293-311.
- Shabani, K. (2016). Applications of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach for teachers' professional development. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1252177.
- Sikhakhane, H. N., Muthukrishna, N., & Martin, M. (2018). The geographies of bullying in a secondary school context. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(Supplement 1), S1-S11.

- Skerrett, A. (2006). Looking Inward: The impact of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class background on teaching sociocultural theory in education. *Studying Teacher Education*, 2(2), 183-200.
- Storrs, D. (2012). 'Keeping it real' with an emotional curriculum. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(1), 1-12. doi:10.1080/13562517.2011.590976
- Stott, J., NT, J. S., & Tidball, D. (1994). *God's good news for the world*. Downers Grove, III.: Intervarsity. Zondervan Publishing Company
- Strong-Wilson, T. (2016). Returns and departures through girlhood: Memory-work as an approach to the politics of place in mother-daughter narratives. In C. Mitchell, & C. Rentschler (Eds.), *Girlhood and the politics of place* (pp. 137-153). New York: Berghahn Books.
- Swartz, M. K. (2017). Social and emotional learning. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 31(5), 521-522. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2017.06.001
- Taylor, P. C. (2014). Contemporary qualitative research: Towards an integral research perspective. In S. K. Abell, & N. G. Lederman (Eds.), *Handbook on research on science education*. New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, M., & Diamond, M. (2020). The role of self-study in teaching and teacher education for social justice. In J. Kitchen, A. Berry, S. M. Bullock, A. R. Crowe, M. Taylor, H. Guðjónsdóttir, & L. Thomas (Eds.), *2nd International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education* (pp. 1-35). Singapore: Springer.
- Taylor, H. E., & Larson, S. (1999). Social and emotional learning in middle school. *The Clearing House: Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 72(6), 331-336.
- Taylor, L. P., & Newberry, M. (2018). Self-study of a teacher's practices of and experience with emotion regulation: Being and becoming through reflection and engagement. *Studying Teacher Education*, 14(3), 1-12.
- Taylor, L. P., Newberry, M., & Clark, S. K. (2020). Patterns and progression of emotion experiences and regulation in the classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 93, 103081. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103081
- Taylor, P. C., & Medina, M. N. D. (2013). Educational research paradigms: From positivism to multiparadigmatic. *Journal for Meaning-Centred Education*, 1. Retrieved from: <http://www.meaningcentered.org/journal/volume-01/educational-research-paradigms-from-positivism-tomultiparadigmatic/>

- Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156-1171. doi:10.1111/cdev.12864
- Ungar, M., Connelly, G., Liebenberg, L., & Theron, L. (2017). How schools enhance the development of young people's resilience. *Social Indicators Research*, 1-13.
- Van Schalkwyk, G. J. (2010). Collage life story elicitation technique: A representational technique for scaffolding autobiographical memories. *Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 675-695.
- Vilakazi, B. (2013). *Promoting lifelong teacher learning in the Intermediate Phase: A self-study of a Head of Department*. Unpublished MEd thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Socio-cultural theory. *Mind in Society*, 6, 52-58.
- Weare, K. (2004). *Developing the emotionally literate school*. London: SAGE.
- Whitehead, J., Delong, J., Huxtable, M., Campbell, L., Griffin, C., & Mounter, J. (2020). Self-study in elementary and secondary teaching. In J. Kitchen, A. Berry, H. Guðjónsdóttir, S. M. Bullock, M. Taylor, & A. R. Crowe (Eds.), *2nd International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education* (pp. 1-38). Singapore: Springer.
- Wiest-Stevenson, C., & Lee, C. (2016). Trauma-informed schools. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 13(5), 498-503.
- Wiseman, A. M. (2010). "Now I believe if I write I can do anything": Using poetry to create opportunities for engagement and learning in the Language Arts classroom. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 6(2), 22-33.
- Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (Eds.). (2014). Wherefore 'interpretive'? An introduction. In *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (pp. xiii-xxxii). New York: Routledge.
- Yoon, H. S., & Templeton, T. N. (2019). The practice of listening to children: The challenges of hearing children out in an adult-regulated world. *Harvard Educational Review*, 89(1), 55-84. doi:10.17763/1943-5045-89.1.55
- Zins, J. E., Bloodworth, M. R., Weissberg, R. P., & Wallberg, H. J. (2007). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to success. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17(2-3), 191-210.

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



12 February 2018

Ms Ntokozo Sibusisiwe Mkhize 213569420
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mkhize

Protocol reference number: HSS/0095/018D

Project title: Exploring Social and Emotional Learning in a Grade 4 classroom: A teacher's self-study Full Approval – Expedited Application

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 5 February 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yc

.....
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8360/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymann@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

1910 - 2010
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

117 Grantdene Road
Riverdene Drive
Newlands West
Durban
4031

Dear Sir/Madam

Informed consent letter for Grade 4 parents

My name is Ntokozo Sibusisiwe Mkhize and I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. I will be conducting a self-study research project on social and emotional learning with my Grade 4 learners. The objectives of my research study are to learn about social and emotional learning from my personal memories and to learn through exploring social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 Classroom.

To collect information for my study, I would like to work with my Grade 4 learners to explore ways and resources I can use to integrate social and emotional learning. I will design lessons in English, Natural Science, Social Science, and Life Skills in which I address social and emotional learning. All learners will participate in these lessons as they will form part of the Grade 4 curriculum. However I will only use data from the classroom activities/work of learners whose parents/guardians give their consent for them to participate in my study. Data will be collected as follows:

Classwork

I will use examples of Grade 4 learners' classwork (without their names) as evidence of teaching and learning.

Audio recording

I will audio record my lessons with my Grade 4 learners.

Photographs

I will take photographs of Grade 4 learners' classwork activities. For ethical reasons I will only take pictures of their hands and their classwork and not of their faces.

Please rest assured knowing that your child's confidentiality will be guaranteed, meaning their names and identities will not be revealed. Neither participation nor non-participation in the study will affect the learners' academic results or my attitude towards them. The data that will be collected will be used for research purposes only.

- Data will be stored securely and destroyed after 5 years if no longer in use.
- Your child will have the autonomy to participate or withdraw from the study and will not be penalised for making/taking such an action.
- Your child's involvement is merely for academic reasons only and therefore no financial benefits will be involved.
- I will share my findings with my learners, in a way that is suitable and understandable for their age group.

I can be contacted at: ladyntoko@gmail.com

Tel : 071 081 1576

My supervisor is Prof. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is located in Education studies On Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu Natal. Email :

Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za; Tel: 031 260 3473

The contact person in the Research Office is Mr Premlall Mohun- Senior Administrative Officer. Contact

Email; mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031 260 4557

Thank you for your contribution, your support and contribution is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Mkhize N.S (Ntokozo)

DECLARATION

I _____ parent of _____ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I give consent for my son/daughter to participate in this research study on exploring social and emotional learning in a Grade 4 Classroom.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my child from the research study at any time, should I desire to do so.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio record lessons/activities YES/NO

Photograph lessons/activities YES/NO

Use classwork from lessons/activities YES/NO

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN_____

DATE_____

APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT COVER PAGE

1/21/2021

Turnitin Originality Report



Turnitin Originality Report

Final thesis 20.11.21 by Ntokozo Mkhize
From Chapter drafts (Phd)

Processed on 20-Jan-2021 4:45 PM
CAT
ID: 1490756926
Word Count: 118537

Similarity Index	Similarity by So
2%	Internet Sources: Publications: Student Papers:

sources:

- 1 1% match (publications)
["Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific", Springer S Business Media LLC, 2017](#)
- 2 < 1% match (publications)
["International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Pr Science and Business Media LLC, 2020](#)
- 3 < 1% match (Internet from 20-May-2018)
https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/data/UQ_511814/s3756380_phd_finalthesis_Expires=1526906420&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJKNB4MJBNC6NLQ&Signature=ZS2zX7HLtV2DYu1KGVrQ39ESURAY66q8kkH-auo0uEVyZ-xSMBBMiK7KciCrySne5q2Q0OkCKoV0IQSsz3S22ieP4MJNePPWHVhZqVvJDxSRdqacGt2wtr2Ni8EpFARDcJCmpysTKnA-fAvGqu3pCBT9q8N6Uln7bEgsmn-gCT0QCc~NO2JrX2xUfxxjtRQe2xafKjImYwmV6RotdlwVObefGjqmpvlnS-vUS7IR5tW-XECKiWjLHR7pwpo2kE36EgWo~7NPMmWngkgNnOcHos7cMOjSN2LOYb9KF3rfc
- 4 < 1% match (Internet from 15-Jul-2020)
<https://flijphtml5.com/fkul/ypls/basic>
- 5 < 1% match (Internet from 10-Jan-2016)
http://146.230.128.141/jspui/bitstream/10413/11507/1/Masinga_Lungile_Rejo
- 6 < 1% match (Internet from 31-Oct-2017)
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-6545-3.pdf>

https://www.turnitin.com/newreport_printview.asp?eq=1&eb=1&esm=100&oid=1490756926&sid=0&n=0&m=0&svr=31&r=69.02284498208235... 1/221