

**A PERSONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO SUPPORTIVE
TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS**

BY

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

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EDGEWOOD CAMPUS

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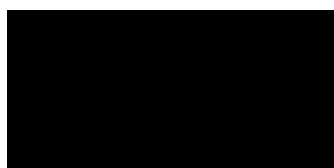
DECLARATION

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES DECLARATION – PLAGIARISM

I, **LUTHANDO MPHO MOLEFE**, declare that:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This dissertation 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 rewritten but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
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5. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the References section.

Signed



ETHICAL CLEARANCE



08 September 2021

Luthando Mpho Molefe (65276)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear LM Molefe,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003155/2021

Project title: A Personal Narrative Inquiry into Supportive Teacher-Learner Relationships.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 11 August 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) 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.

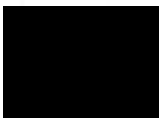
This approval is valid until 08 September 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



Professor Kathleen Jane Pithouse-Morgan

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research dissertation to my grandmother, Matsila Eunice Molefe. I will never have enough words to thank you for everything you have done for me, from the very first day I was given this life to date. I am who I am today because of the garden of love, support, warmth and hard work that grew and continues to grow in your heart. The treasured memories I shared and continue to share with you will always be in my heart and mind. *Kealeboga manganana!*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Almighty God for giving me the strength and courage to successfully engage with and complete this research dissertation.

With a deep sense of gratitude, I would like to thank my research Supervisor, Professor Kathleen Jane Pithouse-Morgan, for the guidance, encouragement, patience and support she invested in me during this journey. Her well-informed teacher-researcher character has helped me a great deal in gaining new insights through the journey of engaging with this research study. I will forever be grateful *Solwazi!*

I thank my fellow Master's critical friends, Miss Sanelisiwe Chamane and Sonam Maharaj, for their encouragement, support and insightful comments during our journey together.

I would like to thank my family members for the love, understanding and support that they have shown me, over the years, during my postgraduate journey at the School of Education.

To my selected family members, primary school and high school friends, and my university friend, who happened to be my research participants, thank you so much for opening my mind through the thoughtful ideas and opinions you shared with me during our engagement. I really learnt a lot from your different inputs.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my true friends and everyone else who has supported and believed in me and encouraged me to be at my best, even in the difficult times of putting together this research dissertation. I salute you.

ABSTRACT

I am a qualified teacher with just more than a year of teaching experience. While conducting this study, I was pursuing my Master of Education studies full-time. This research study examined my personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey. In the process, I wanted to learn how the phenomenon explored has influenced the individual I am today, and how it can continue to do so. Furthermore, I wanted to understand how I might better my future practices regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. Through a narrative inquiry research methodology, I learnt that in engaging with one's self and one's participants, a process of living, telling, and reliving and retelling stories gives rise to new thinking.

A sociocultural theoretical perspective helped me learn that development is a process. I also understood that learning is socially and culturally constructed in a given context. Therefore, teachers need to pay special attention to learners' personal, social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the "pedagogy of reinvention" concept by Mitchell and Weber (1999, p. 8) helped me understand how working with my memories could contribute to my learning concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships to bring about change.

Two research questions informed this study: (a) *What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?* and (b) *As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?* In answering these questions, I employed multiple data generation methods: memory drawing, artefact/object inquiry, journaling and informal conversations with selected family members, primary school and high school friends, and a university friend.

I learnt three valuable lessons that I will take forward from this personal narrative inquiry:

Lesson one: Supportive teacher-learner relationships mean responsibility for taking care of learners' internal (academic) and external (non-academic) needs.

Lesson two: At the heart of supportive teacher-learner relationships are teachers who prioritise self-awareness to be conscious of their learners' various circumstances.

Lesson three: Teachers who build and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships value and involve parents/guardians, learner peers, other teachers, community members, and other relevant stakeholders in teaching and learning processes.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
B.Ed. Hons	Bachelor of Education Honours
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CAO	Central Applications Office
COVID-19	Coronavirus pandemic
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HEIs	Higher education institutions of learning
HPS	Health-promoting school
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LoTL	Language of teaching and learning
NDoH	National Department of Health
NS	Natural Sciences
TDS	Teacher Development Studies

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CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS

1.1 Introduction

In thinking about and making sense of the importance of developing supportive teacher-learner relationships in learning spaces, my mind was prompted to create and produce something visible that would best present my position of what I thought about the phenomenon under examination. This was motivated by the thinking that visuals are able to break down information into manageable pieces that would be easier to absorb and make sense of. I was then quickly evoked to engage with and produce a metaphor drawing to depict how I view supportive teacher-learner relationships. Metaphor drawing can be explained as “an imaginative way of describing a situation using a drawn picture. A hand-drawn sketch of a metaphor may be used to explain how a teaching and learning situation is visualised” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2013, p. 90). Furthermore, Literat (2013) argues that “drawings are able to represent the relationship between visual elements in a way that would be impossible to express [in] writing or speech” (p. 87). Therefore, engaging with metaphor drawing in this case, I wanted to make visible what I thought best represents supportive teacher-learner relationships in both schools and higher education institutions of learning (HEIs). I rapidly developed a metaphor drawing of a mother hen with her chicks under her wings (see Figure 1.1). To me, this analogy represented how a teacher (hen), who is tasked with the responsibility of taking care of her learners’ (chicks’) needs, is supposed to operate. This includes taking care of learners’ internal (academic) and external (non-academic) needs. To me, this analogy represented a teacher who goes the extra mile in making sure that all of her learners – irrespective of the differences they possess in both the classroom and the whole-school context – are taken care of and treated equally by their caring and loving teacher. Therefore, at the outset of my study, this metaphor drawing depicted my initial understanding of how supportive teacher-learner relationships should look. Finally, this metaphor drawing pictured my aim to be a teacher-researcher who establishes and builds a culture of supportive teacher-learner relationships both in the present time and in the future.

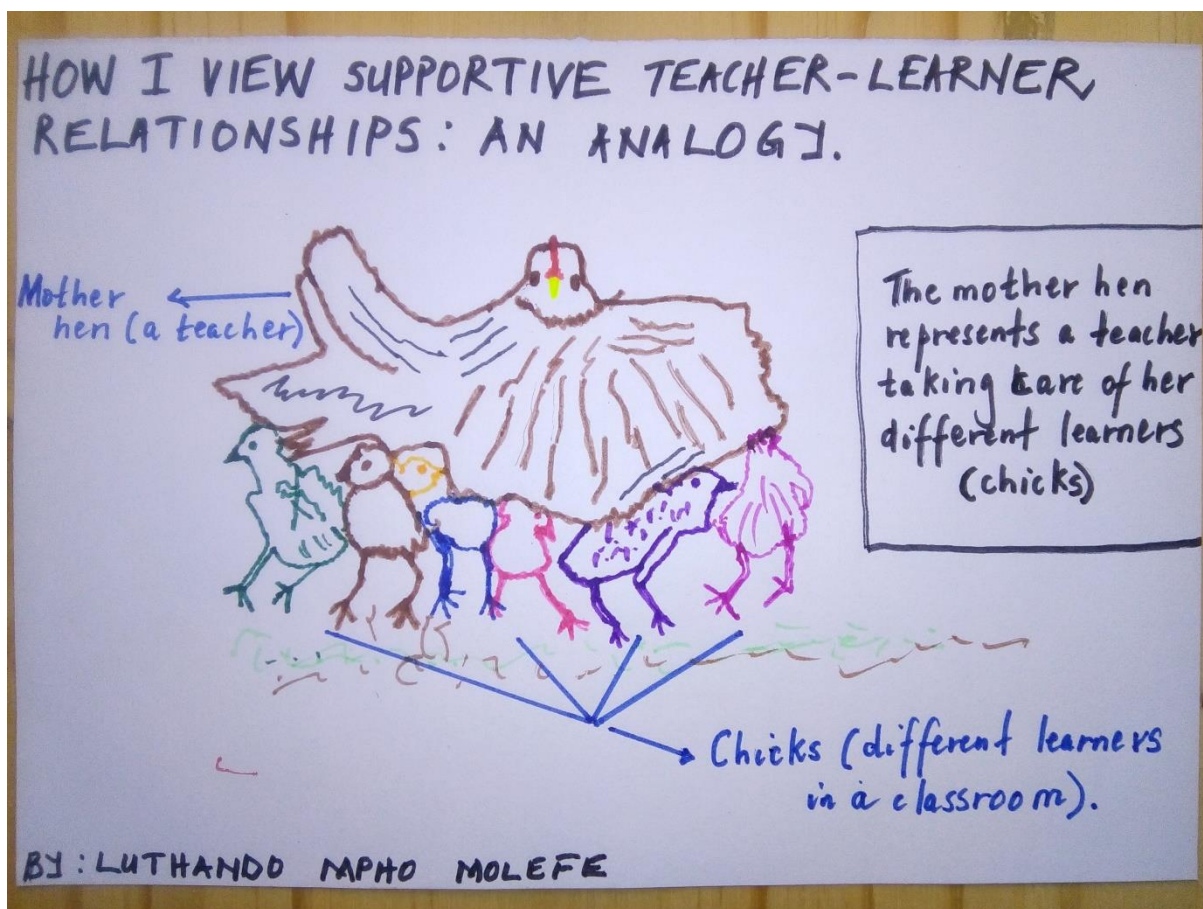


Figure 1.1: My metaphor drawing of supportive teacher-learner relationships.

This chapter first maps out the focus, purpose, background, and rationale (personal and professional) driving force of this research study. Second, it outlines my initial reading of the literature and the theoretical perspective underpinning this research study. Finally, it offers a brief overview of narrative inquiry methodology, the research objectives and the two research questions that underpin this research study.

1.2 Focus, purpose, background and rationale

1.2.1 Focus

Using a narrative inquiry approach, this research study puts my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships under the microscope. The supportive and

unsupportive teacher-learner relationships that I explored were formal and informal, across my educational journey, from my pre-school up to my postgraduate journey at a South African university.

1.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to reflectively examine my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey. I also wanted to reflectively explore some of the unsupportive relationships I experienced. In the process, I wanted to learn how the phenomenon explored has influenced and shaped the individual I am today and how it continues to do so in the present and subsequently in the future. Furthermore, I wanted to understand how I might better my future practices and experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships.

1.2.3 Background

I am currently a Master of Education student in the Discipline of Teacher Development Studies (TDS) in the Education Studies Cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am a qualified Life Sciences, Natural Sciences and Life Orientation teacher (undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree). After I finished my undergraduate degree in the 2018 academic year, the next year I worked as a Natural Sciences and Technology teacher at one primary school under Umzinyathi District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. The school I worked for was situated in a rural area, with limited and poor resources. Many learners that I taught came from poor socio-economic backgrounds, which resulted in many factors negatively affecting their academic success. The school also catered for learners with barriers to learning, such as emotional, cultural, mental, physical or social elements.

After just more than a year of teaching experience as a novice teacher at the basic education level, I returned to academia the following year (2020) to pursue postgraduate studies in education in the discipline of TDS. My interest in the topic of supportive teacher-learner relationships was inspired through engaging with a book chapter titled 'Picturing a more hopeful future: Teacher-researchers drawing early memories of school' by Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c). This was during my studies for my Bachelor of Education Honours (B.Ed. Hons) degree in TDS, which I gained with the highest distinction (Summa Cum Laude), in one module called Teacher Agency in Professional Learning, in Semester 1 of 2020. I was touched to the core, with mixed emotions, as to how South African teacher-researchers in the reading

communicated their most brutal, uncomfortable, and unsupportive relationships with their teachers at schools they attended in their early years of schooling in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Engaging with the reading opened my eyes and triggered me to think about and reflect on my own personal experiences concerning the relationships I had with my own teachers as a primary school learner up until my postgraduate journey as a student at a South African university. The reading also triggered me to think about the informal (teacher-learner) relationships in schools and societies. Having been a novice teacher myself at a South African primary school in KZN, I was also prompted to think about and reflect on the internal and external relationships that I had with my learners in school. This left me doing a great deal of deep thinking and many questions requiring answers to be carefully explored. That is what interested and encouraged me to further examine the phenomenon of supportive teacher-learner relationships in this research study.

1.2.4 Motivation

1.2.4.1 Personal rationale

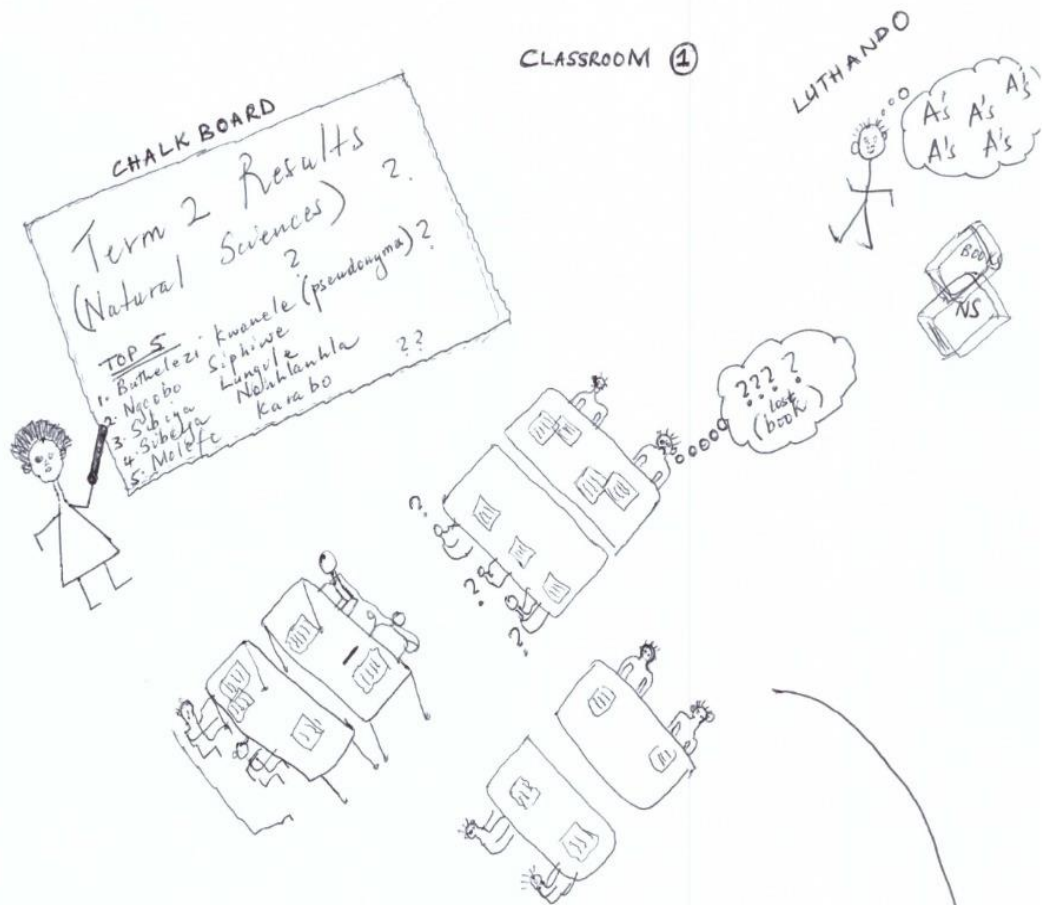
I was introduced to the concept of memory-work in the module Teacher Agency in Professional Learning within the TDS discipline when I was doing my B.Ed. Hons degree in the 2020 academic year. I was touched to the core regarding how powerful memories and stories of the past can be, and how influential they can be on who we are, what we presently do, and what we intend to do in the future (Molefe, 2020). Memory-work is done to understand and better the present and subsequently the future. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015, as cited in Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019c, p. 56) argue that such an exercise is enlightened by the idea of teacher professional learning that provides a directive on teachers being driven by a personal rationale in taking the lead in their own professional learning. Through teachers being in interaction and conversation with each other, continuing growth is enhanced for the benefit of others.

Firstly, as part of the module engagement in Semester 1 of 2020, I was asked to critically discuss my learnings about memory-work and memory drawing from Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c). Secondly, I was asked to draw one memory (good or bad) of my early school years about supportive teacher-learner relationships and share the story behind the illustrated

memory. I chose to draw one inspiring event of my early school years, portraying positive and supportive teacher-learner relationships in school (see Figure 1.2), titled 'Picturing my Primary School Memories through Drawing: A Case of one inspiring event'. This was followed

PORTFOLIO TASK 2

Picturing my Primary School Memories through Drawing: A Case of one inspiring event.



TEACHER'S OFFICE ③



- Teachers need to be conscious of their learners abilities and capabilities
- Positive relationships between teachers and their learners. (must create).
- Observe and address any changes they see in their learners.
- Acknowledge the differences that learners bring with them in class.
- Learners must be, i believe, "praised" for their "wrong answers" in order to encourage them in/for future participation

BY: LUTHANDO MPHOTO MOI FFE

Figure 1.2: My memory drawing ‘Picturing my Primary School Memories through Drawing: A case of one inspiring event’ (Molefe, 2020).

by an explanation of the story behind the drawing in the form of a written reflection letter (see Figure 1.3) titled ‘Teaching and Learning Beyond Measures’. As I read the book chapter and the drawing of my memory, I had mixed feelings and emotions. I was filled with joy, excitement, anger, and sadness simultaneously, remembering the good, painful and bad/sad stories narrated by teacher-researchers as past experiences of their early school memories. Similarly, in her engagement with memory drawing as a research tool, Nontuthuko Phewa cites Pithouse (2011), as she explains that meaningful engagement with pen and paper through drawing can make unclear memories explicit, with details of an episode and emotions corresponding with the experience (as cited in Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019c).

Teaching and Learning Beyond Measures

Dear Miss NT Mkhize

I write this letter to share with you one remarkable and inspiring memory that you instilled in me and left me with during my early years of schooling at a primary school level for years ringing in my ears and up until to date.

The process of teaching and learning does not only occur in a singular formal space which is the classroom setting but it also takes place in the informal setting. This is where teachers critically and actively engage with their learners as a means of examining how they feel and what is their take on issues being explored and the ones that are affecting them. Therefore, distinguished teachers, I argue, create a space for their learners to express themselves and their feelings. Therefore, it is no doubt that the above statement strongly describes who you are. This is evident in one inspiring and remarkable memory you instilled in me as earlier mentioned, where you had called me into your office after I had not passed well the Natural Sciences (NS) test in Grade 7. It was term two (2) in 2009 at Primary School. Which resulted to me not appearing in the top five (5) list of high achievers as I used to.

Vulnerable, weak and scared as I was during the process of trying to explain to you what had led me not to pass the NS test was that I had lost the textbook for the subject and I was afraid to report the case to you and in the school. This was because I knew that I was going to be beaten, punished and ordered to pay for the lost textbook, which we could not afford to pay for at home.

To my surprise, you reacted me the opposite way as I earlier thought you would, you gave me time to express my feelings and explain the events that had led me to lose the NS textbook and what had led me not to appear on the list of high achievers. The day was indeed one of the happiest and good days of my life as you made me to feel accepted, to be free to express my feelings. You did this by offering to help me by buying me a new textbook at no cost to me. In addition, you encouraged myself to look out for possible solution(s) in every problem I encounter in life instead of sitting back and thinking that the problem is going to fix itself.

Therefore, I have no doubt and I can attest that the above paragraphs really describe who you really are. You have been nothing but a good mentor to me, someone whom I look up to. By encouraging myself and others as your learners to express ourselves even out of the classroom setting/context because you cared for us. You made it your everyday job to know what is surrounding your learners at that time. What is affecting your learners that might have a negative impact on their education at the end of the day? You always created a room for us to express our feelings as your learners.

Recalling this memory could affect my professional learning in a way that as a part of my teaching career, I want to create an environment where learners' different backgrounds in a classroom setting and whole school space are considered and acknowledged. I want to motivate and encourage my learners to see an opportunity in their engagement in education. For them to see an opportunity to change whatever situation(s) they are facing at home and outside that might negatively affect and influence their education. Finally, to become better individuals and better versions of themselves and in extension of their families, their surroundings and to meaningfully engage and contribute to each individual they meet in life. As a teacher who is caring for the well-being and success of his learners, approachable in manner and not only on the issues that are affecting his learners within the classroom or whole-school context and development but also on the issues that are affecting his learners outside the school context is what I want my learners to remember about me in future and when reflecting.

Figure 1.3: My written letter reflection (Molefe, 2020).

In my meaningful engagement with drawing, accompanied by written reflections on portraying my experiences regarding positive, supportive teacher-learner relationships, I wanted to make dim memories vivid with detail on why supportive teacher-learner relationships are essential in schools. What I learnt is that memory-work and stories concerning supportive teacher-

learner relationships can help us as individuals to picture a more optimistic future (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019c) and, of course, in relation to the lives of other people as we interact and engage with them in our daily routines of living. Engaging with memory-work and stories on supportive teacher-learner relationships in that manner captured my interest in undertaking a personal narrative inquiry concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey.

1.2.4.2 Professional rationale

When I read the book chapter by Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c), I could ‘listen’ to teacher-researchers telling their stories, through drawings accompanied by written reflections on their experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in their early years of school. I was quickly ‘forced’ to think about, reflect and relate on what kind of teacher-learner relationships I had experienced, ranging from primary, secondary and high schools to, by extension, up until recently being a postgraduate student at a South African university. Also, having been a novice teacher for over a year in one primary school in the province of KZN in 2019, I was prompted to think about what kinds of teacher-learner relationships I had with my former learners (before I went back to university to further my studies). Furthermore, the engagement with the events and thoughts mentioned above also caused me to think about supportive relationships in general. This included relationships with our families, friends, community members, loved ones, role models, and the environment around us.

For the above reasons, I became interested in exploring my lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships as an essential phenomenon in education. Mann (2021) argues that “if a teacher embraces their own diversity, and brings all facts of their identity to the classroom, not only are they helping themselves, they are also helping to break down barriers to participation for students from non-traditional backgrounds” (p. 18). Likewise, I realised that it is vital that teachers prioritise self-awareness so that they can further be able to be conscious of their learners’ circumstances and support them where necessary. The rationale for engaging with this research topic was thus also to develop myself as a novice teacher and as a teacher-researcher.

The following section presents my learning from my initial reading of the literature on supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools and HEIs of learning.

1.3 Review of the literature

1.3.1 Why do supportive teacher-learner relationships matter?

1.3.1.1 Teacher-learner relationships in schools

Over the years, research has indicated that constructive relationships between teachers and learners in schools serve as significant predictors of academic engagement and achievement (Bosah et al., 2015; Bundick et al., 2014; Mensah & Koomson, 2020). From my initial reading on the topic, I appreciated that academic outcomes cannot be satisfactorily achieved for all learners without a deep understanding and intentional connection to the relational aspects of learning and teaching (National School Climate Council, 2015). Therefore, it is of pivotal importance for supportive teacher-learner relationships to be established and maintained to enhance learners' academic involvement and accomplishments.

Constructive teacher-learner relationships benefit teachers as well as learners. A study conducted in England and Spain by García-Moya et al. (2019) revealed that “positive relationships [are] frequently described as being strategic to achieve the teachers' goals, since they foster learning and can help reduce problem behaviour” (p. 7). Furthermore, these authors argue that for both parties (teachers and learners), positive teacher-learner relationships create an enabling environment for all as they engage with each other. Similarly, a study conducted in the United States of America (USA) by Paravato Taylor and Newberry (2018) concurs with this, arguing that “positive emotions also increase teacher performance by strengthening the teacher's involvement and internal motivation” (p. 2). Moreover, a study conducted in Belgium by Van Praag et al. (2017) further affirms that supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools increase teachers' and learners' motivation and sense of belonging, and promote sociocultural attachments. Additionally, these authors maintain that supportive teacher-learner relationships enhance high academic achievement and reduce school disciplinary problems. Therefore, I understand that positive teacher-learner relationships can serve as an essential element and source of both teachers' and learners' well-being in schools and achieve and promote success.

In considering the value of supportive teacher-learner relationships, teachers' behaviour can also be seen as creating an enabling environment where all learners feel accepted, loved, and encouraged irrespective of their circumstances. Suldo et al. (2009, as cited in Bundick et al.,

2014) show that “higher emotional engagement [in schools] particularly resulting from teacher support was productive of greater subjective well-being” (p. 2). Furthermore, Davidson (1999, as cited in Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017, p. 14) argues that “a positive teacher-[learner] relationship is important above all for [learners] who come to school already disadvantaged as compared to their peers”. Davidson contends that the dedication of teachers in creating supportive teacher-learner relationships can increase learners’ self-esteem and confidence as learners and their educational engagement. And as Bundick et al. (2014) highlight, several studies have shown that “the more [learners] are engaged in their schoolwork, the more likely they are to perform well academically” (p. 2). Thus, teachers need to build supportive teacher-learner relationships to create an enabling atmosphere where all learners feel welcomed, are shown warmth and empathy, and can realise their full potential.

What is more, a study conducted in Ghana by Mensah and Koomson (2020) showed that the absence of constructive teacher-learner relationships in schools is likely to negatively affect learners’ commitment in classrooms and, consequently, their academic success. Additionally, Mabunda and Mulovhedzi (2020) warn that dysfunctional relationships between teachers and learners in schools can lead to low self-esteem, lack of confidence and emotional trauma, among other things. This can, I understand, negatively impact learners’ lives.

Several studies in South Africa have highlighted the value of teachers establishing and maintaining supportive teacher-learner relationships. For example, a study conducted in the Gauteng Province, South Africa by Mokhele (2006) on teacher-learner relationships in the management of discipline in public high schools revealed that teachers who maintain constructive relationships with their learners tend to manage learner behaviour in positive ways by encouraging learners’ self-discipline and dignity. Furthermore, Mokhele (2006) found that teachers who develop supportive teacher-learner relationships are likely to involve parents, learner peers in the classroom, other teachers, and other relevant stakeholders in the process of teaching and learning. Overall, Mokhele (2006) asserts that teaching in schools is considered as ‘missing’ if teacher-learner relationships are not given attention. Similarly, a study conducted by Mabunda and Mulovhedzi (2020) in the Limpopo Province in South Africa showed that it is of paramount significance that teachers and learners cultivate beneficial relationships to enhance engagement in academic activities at school. Mabunda and Mulovhedzi (2020) further argued that supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools benefit learners academically and can assist them in becoming responsible, with well-

developed moral characters.

1.3.1.2 Teacher-learner relationships in higher education

In my literature search, I found a wealth of research conducted concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in primary and high schools. However, the research concerning such relationships in higher education appears to be still relatively scarce (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Xerri et al., 2017). Nevertheless, I did find that, as with schools, research has highlighted that supportive relationships between lecturers or educators (herein referred to as teachers) and their students in higher education learning institutions can lead to high-quality academic outcomes (Asikainen et al., 2017; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Xerri et al., 2017). For example, Furrer and Skinner (2003, as cited in Hogg, 2021, p. 61) argue that “[students’] sense of relatedness plays an important role in their academic motivation and performance”. Thus, one of the academic responsibilities that teachers in higher education are tasked with, among others, is to make sure that they create conducive relationships with their students. This is done as they transition from high school to their post-school destination, including their whole stay until they leave higher education spaces and beyond.

It has also been found that constructive teacher-student relationships can give students an enhanced sense of purpose and how they aim to achieve that purpose (Xerri et al., 2017). Thus, teachers in higher education spaces are encouraged to develop relationships with their students to help them understand their aims and goals (Xerri et al., 2017). Such support can help students understand the link between their chosen course of study and their overall career ambitions.

Furthermore, supportive teacher-student relationships can increase students’ participation and give them a voice to raise their thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas on matters affecting them and their teaching and learning spaces (Xerri et al., 2017). Supportive teacher-student relationships in higher education can create an atmosphere where students feel welcomed and safe to freely voice their opinions and ideas (Asikainen et al., 2018). It is also argued that when “students feel supported and valued by their teachers, motivation and attitude towards classwork is increased” (Hogg, 2021, p. 61). Thus, when students feel welcomed in all spheres, within the lecture rooms and institutional spaces, they are often prompted to invest more time and effort in their studies, which can lead to academic success (Asikainen et al., 2018).

1.3.2 What are supportive teacher-learner relationships?

1.3.2.1 Teacher-learner relationships in schools

Teacher-learner relationships are an essential part of the process of teaching and learning (García-Moya et al., 2019). In a study by Bosah et al. (2015) in Nigeria, teacher-learner relationships are defined as emotion-based experiences that emerge through an ongoing interaction between teachers and their learners in schools. Similarly, a study conducted in USA by Paravato Taylor et al. (2020) revealed that teacher-learner relationships take place in a social context where the emotions of teachers and their learners play a primary role. Paravato Taylor et al. (2020) indicate that challenging emotions, such as anger and frustration, and heartening emotions, such as excitement and joy, can emerge during the school day. Supportive teachers attend reflectively to these emotions in their daily engagement with their learners (Taylor et al., 2020). Bosah et al. (2015) further emphasise how teachers can develop supportive relationships by listening to and validating learners' feelings.

Mashan (2000, as cited in Bojuwoye et al., 2014) argues that effective and meaningful teacher-learner relationships involve establishing environments where learners feel appreciated and supported. Likewise, findings from the study by Bosah et al. (2015) indicate that “the achievement of success in education depends on the level of warmth and supportive relationships that teachers create with and among their learners” (p. 217). Bosah et al. (2015) further argue that the relationships between teachers and their learners in schools connect the two interacting partners. The authors explain that supportive teacher actions promoting the quality of supportive relationships include being positive, friendly, warm, sensitive and responsive.

Mensah and Koomson (2020, p. 106) indicate that “a good teacher-[learner] relationship is the one that ensures that [learners'] concerns – both academic (internal) and non-academic (external) – are one of priority”. Thus, they indicate that a positive teacher-learner relationship allows learners to easily approach their teachers concerning their academic work and personal lives. Friedman (2006, as cited in Veldman et al., 2013, p. 57) likewise argues that “personal involvement [and] altruistic care...characterize [teachers'] positive relationships with [learners]”. Therefore, creating and maintaining supportive teacher-learner relationships can foster learners' personal well-being and academic success.

Another critical factor concerning supportive and effective teacher-learner relationships was highlighted in a study conducted in the USA (National School Climate Council, 2015, p. 2), which revealed that:

... learning increases in classrooms that engage [learners] by allowing them to take ownership of the learning process. Such ownership can only take place in environments that are characterized by supportive [teacher-learner] relationships and that provide safe and trusting learning environments.

A study conducted in Belgium by Van Praag et al. (2017) concurs with the above research. It defines supportive teacher-learner relationships as the ‘acts’ of allowing learners’ voices to be heard and respected in the classroom and whole-school context. Therefore, a constructive teacher-learner relationship in a school setting acknowledges that teachers and learners are equally valued in education (Mokhele, 2006). From this, I recognise that teacher-learner relationships in the classroom should be characterised by mutual respect, trust, and understanding by both parties (teachers and learners). This can create a sense of belonging and ownership, enhancing learning.

1.3.2.2 Teacher-learner relationships in higher education

Teacher-student relationships in higher education have been described as developing connections between teachers and their students that change over time (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). It is said that these relationships depend on interactions with others. Thus, they refer to relationships teachers create with their students and can also include student-student relationships (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). Similarly, Mann (2021) argues that supportive teacher-student relationships also promote students’ wider engagement with other students and a broader higher education community. Furthermore, students are also expected to play a critical role in responding to and initiating such relationships.

Constructive teacher-student relationships in higher education can also be encouraged in spaces where the teaching and learning process is made student-centred so that students are allowed to express themselves (see, among others, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Xerri et al., 2017). This includes their feelings, thoughts, ideas, opinions, and lived experiences. It is thus argued that communication must be considered a critical aspect in establishing and maintaining supportive teacher-student relationships in the higher education space (Asikainen et al., 2018). Supportive teacher-student relationships are created where teachers respond with respect,

empathy, and caring, and actively support their students with internal (academic) and external (non-academic) factors that touch their lives. It is an environment where both teachers and students are active and critical, and feel motivated as they engage in their daily interactions.

1.3.3 What influences supportive teacher-learner relationships?

1.3.3.1 Teacher-learner relationships in schools

Many factors contribute to teachers establishing and maintaining supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools. Teacher-learner relationships are influenced by the actual behaviours, acts and qualities of both teachers and learners involved in the process. Furthermore, teacher-learner relationships are also affected by individuals' mental representation or working models of the relationships (Claessens et al., 2016).

Supportive teacher-learner relationships are affected by teachers' type and level of commitment (García-Moya et al., 2019). They grow in spaces where relationships are made the heart of the teaching and learning process (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; Bosah et al., 2015). Somech (2016, as cited in García-Moya et al., 2019) further affirms that teachers' investment in relationships with learners should always be emphasised as vital. Thus, teachers' commitment to recognising that positive teacher-learner relationships are critical to education is essential. In this regard, it must be acknowledged that as Clandinin and Connelly (1996, as cited in Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017) argue, teachers' practical knowledge is shaped by different cultures and social interactions in which teachers are situated, which subsequently impacts how they relate and respond to issues such as teacher-learner relationships.

It is argued that teachers' interpersonal behaviour is essential in building teacher-learner relationships (Sun et al., 2019). For example, Van Praag et al. (2017) argue that "the use of humour in the classroom helps [learners] and teachers to express themselves, feel they belong and to communicate in a less formal way" (p. 394). Furthermore, the use of humour also creates a space for both teachers and learners to find themselves moving closer to each other and fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging. Furthermore, positive teacher-learner relationships are grounded in learners' perceptions that their teachers care about them, communicate well with them, and provide academic and emotional support (Bundick et al., 2014).

In building supportive teacher-learner relationships, learners are invited to be cared for by the

teacher through various activities. Supportive teacher-learner relationships develop in environments where teachers become closer to their learners to the point where learners feel free to report their out-of-school problems to their teachers. They are also taught how to take care of each other as partners in the process (Mokhele, 2006). Thus, supportive teacher-learner relationships develop in settings where teachers acknowledge that different learners bring different social and socio-economic backgrounds and teach them (learners) to appreciate each other and the teacher and, lastly, find a way to coexist. Hence supportive teacher-learner relationships are formed in spaces where teachers create warmth, love and a sense of belonging for all their learners and create an atmosphere of free expression without fear but appreciation.

It can be helpful to for teachers recognise that building a relationship with a learner is a process that takes place over time (Newberry, 2010). In her study conducted in the USA, Newberry (2010) identifies two phases in building and maintaining positive teacher-learner relationships in schools: the testing and planning phases. Firstly, she (Newberry, 2010, p. 1698) states that the testing phase:

... consists of exploring limits and boundaries. This includes limits of personalities, authority, and roles as well as that of boundaries regarding interaction, conduct and classroom norms. In this phase, one may test the bounds of another's abilities, humour, kindness, patience, etc.

She further argues that learners may also look for limits of teacher authority in both the classroom and whole-school context and the limits of the teacher's strength. Secondly, she argues that the planning phase is dedicated to taking relationships to the next level. It includes reflecting on the present engagements and interactions to trace new meanings for future interactions. Therefore, as we build relationships, becoming aware of our observations of the other's personality, our interpretations of their motives and our reactions to it are not straightforward and require much attention. Furthermore, "understanding that building a relationship is a process, and becoming mindful of that process, increases the likelihood direct the trajectory of that relationship towards a mutually enjoyable outcome" (Newberry, 2010, p. 1702). Therefore, recognising what is involved in building and maintaining supportive teacher-learner relationships can make them more effective and longer-lasting.

Teacher-learner relationships are also influenced by the appreciation, acknowledgement, and commitment learners hold and show to their teachers (Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017). Furthermore,

a high level of teacher and learner agency and communication on all matters touching the union between teachers and their learners must be given a great deal of attention (Bundick et al., 2014). Thus, I understand that the concept of authority only being held by teachers should be done away with at some point so that learners can play different roles within the classroom and school setting. Supportive relationships can develop where both teachers and learners try to create a space to coexist, acknowledging and embracing each other's differences and contributions.

Finally, supportive teacher-learner relationships are best formed in school environments favourable to teachers and learners. Working together with different stakeholders can establish and maintain a school culture conducive to supportive teacher-learner relationships. The National School Climate Council (2015) argued that relevant stakeholders in education, such as policy makers and leaders, need to focus on conducive climates to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships for the benefit of learners and achievement of success in education. Furthermore, the National School Climate Council (2015) stated that such climates should be supported by the communities that teachers and learners are situated in. They argue that schools function best in communities with mutual understanding and always help each other.

1.3.3.2 Teacher-learner relationships in higher education

Teacher-student relationships in higher education are also influenced by many dynamics. One of the critical influences is developing and showing characteristics that deepen meaningful relationships, such as respecting and caring for others' well-being (Hogg, 2021). Similarly, Asikainen et al. (2018) assert that teachers who show proficiency in interacting with others and social behaviour tend to build supportive relationships with their students.

Furthermore, higher education teachers who encourage student-student relationships, irrespective of the many differences that may exist between them, and let them appreciate each other, tend to enhance supportive teacher-student relationships (Xerri et al., 2017). It is argued that social support from peers can increase engagement and therefore improve academic outcomes (Xerri et al., 2018).

Additionally, constructive relationships can be achieved in spaces where teachers actively

support their students with the academic and non-academic factors that form part of their education (Hogg, 2021). It is also argued that the provision of psychological and non-psychological support in higher education spaces may improve students' ability to engage in academic activities (Xerri et al., 2017). Thus, I understand that supportive teacher-student relationships are developed when teachers create room for their students to believe in themselves.

Supportive teacher-student relationships are moreover influenced by the underlying notion of higher education teachers treating students as partners in education and in the process of teaching and learning (Asikainen et al., 2018). For instance, Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019) argue that "collaborating together [between a student and a teacher], such as working on a thesis, especially if the topic interests both the teacher and the student, facilitates deepening of the teacher-student relationship" (p. 128). This includes making them (students) part and parcel of many things they (higher education teachers) do in HEIs and building trust between teachers and students (Hogg, 2021). Both parties should have a voice to express themselves in a working relationship.

1.4 Theoretical perspective

This research study aimed to reflectively and creatively examine my own personal experiences across my educational journey concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. Therefore, a sociocultural perspective influenced by Vygotsky (1978) and Mitchell and Weber's (1999, p. 8) concept of "a pedagogy of reinvention" was used to inform this research study.

A sociocultural theoretical perspective is primarily considered a developmental theory. It focuses on the development and change in behaviour over time, specifically changes that occur as individuals develop and change from childhood to adolescence and adulthood in the life cycle of living. Allman (2020) argues that "the theory attempts to explain unseen processes of development of thought, of language, and of higher-order thinking skills with implications for education in general ..." (p. 86). The theory's focus on a developing child is my rationale for referring to a 'child' when discussing this theory in the dissertation. However, Allman (2020) argues that many implications and practical applications related to sociocultural theory apply to learners of all ages.

Adopting a sociocultural theoretical perspective for this research study helped me to be mindful of looking at the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts when examining my own experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. One of the advantages of using this theoretical perspective is that it does not see individuals as isolated beings and empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge but offers a richer view focusing on the relationships between the self and others. Miller (2011) argues that a sociocultural perspective portrays the dynamic of a child acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes from the society in which they live. In turn, the child shapes the environment. Miller (2011) further makes an important argument that the sociocultural perspective recognises that children in “different historical and cultural circumstances may encounter different developmental routes to any given developmental endpoints”, depending on the particular social or physical conditions and tools available (p. 198).

Therefore, this perspective encouraged me to consider my formal and informal relationships in examining my personal experiences. Using this theoretical perspective, firstly, allowed me, as an entry point, the opportunity to study the relationships that I experienced in my social and cultural settings as a child and growing up (see Chapter Three). Examples here are the relationships with my family, extended family, friends, and community. Secondly, it allowed me the opportunity to unpack my own personal experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships in an institutional setting, which is the school, across all phases (Chapter Four). Finally, it allowed me to thoughtfully examine my own personal experiences on supportive teacher-learner relationships when transitioning from a post-school destination to an HEI, a South African university (Chapter Five).

I drew from Mitchell and Weber’s (1999, p. 8) concept of “a pedagogy of reinvention” to make sense of my learning through memory-work. They describe this as “a process of going back over something in different ways and with new perspectives of studying one’s own experience with insight and awareness of the present for the purposes of acting for the future” (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p. 8). These authors used the concept of memory-work to examine individual and collective thought-provoking questions about the past and the present and to picture a more optimistic future through remembering. They looked at school memories and stories of teachers they worked with to learn how it influenced them. In the process, they also wanted to know how teachers used their school memories and stories to bring about change and picture a more positive future for their practice. I, therefore, used this process of Mitchell and Weber (1999,

p. 8) – “a pedagogy of reinvention” – to understand how memory-work can contribute to learning about my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships, to bring about reinvention in my future practice as a novice teacher.

1.4.1 A brief overview of narrative inquiry

A narrative inquiry research methodology was employed in this research study. This section briefly describes my understanding of narrative inquiry research and what it entails. A detailed description of the narrative inquiry research methodology is given in Chapter Two.

Clandinin (2013) argues that narrative inquirers begin with inquiring into stories of experience because “narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (p. 55). Furthermore, Dwyer and Emerald (2017) state that “the stories people live and tell are a rich source of knowing and meaning making” (p. 1). Therefore, I understood that what has been lived and told (experiences) must be stories or narratives by their nature. Experiences are lived, described, and shared to make sense and meaning of what has been practised over time. These are some of narrative inquiry’s most essential features as a research methodology. Therefore, a narrative inquiry can yield richly detailed accounts of a single person or a case study, focusing on the particular, the unique, and the individual.

Consequently, the narrative inquiry research methodology was most suitable for this study, as it would allow me to reflectively examine and inquire into my personal experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. Through reflection, I wanted to attend to the places where my stories of experience unfolded to learn, make meaning of, and make evident the personal and social contexts that have shaped my understandings. Also, through engaging with narrative inquiry research, I wanted to think narratively about my experiences regarding the phenomenon under scrutiny to challenge the dominant story of the phenomenon as fixed and unchanging throughout one’s lifetime (Clandinin, 2013). I anticipated that employing narrative inquiry research would allow me to understand my past experiences to draw new meanings and perspectives and better my future practices.

1.5 Research objectives

This research study had three objectives:

- (a) The primary objective was to put under the microscope my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey.
- (b) The second objective was to learn how the phenomenon being explored has influenced and shaped the individual I am today and how it continues to do so in the present and subsequently in the future.
- (c) The final objective was to consider improving my future practices and experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships.

1.6 Research questions

The primary objective of this research study was to put my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey under the microscope. I, therefore, asked myself two key questions that guided me throughout this research study, as I wanted to learn how the phenomenon being explored has influenced and shaped the individual I am today, and how it continues to do so in the present and subsequently in the future. I respond to both research questions in detail in Chapters Three, Four and Five of this research dissertation.

The two key questions that guided my research study are as follows:

(a) What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?

This research question helped me look back on my past experiences regarding the relationships (both supportive and unsupportive), both inside and outside of the school environment, that I had with selected family members, teachers and friends. As data generation methods, I used memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journaling, and informal conversations with selected school and university friends and family members to help me recall my memories (see Chapter Two for further detail). As a teacher-researcher, this question helped me learn why it is vital to establish and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships.

(b) As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?

In answering this research question, I learnt more about characteristics and strategies to become a supportive teacher to my future learners.

1.7 Conclusion and overview of the study

In this Chapter One, I have mapped out the personal and professional rationale driving this research study. Moreover, I have outlined my initial reading of the literature and the theoretical perspective underpinning this research study. Finally, I have also given a brief overview of narrative inquiry research, the research objectives and the two research questions that underpin this study.

The chapter presents my initial understanding of why teachers in schools and HEIs must establish and maintain a culture of supportive teacher-learner relationships. This is to create an enabling atmosphere where learners and students feel welcomed, accepted, loved, warm, and empathetic, and therefore able to realise their full potential and achieve their goals. Furthermore, supportive teacher-learner relationships can foster increased learner and student engagement in academic and associated activities, leading to improved academic achievement.

Chapter Two provides a detailed discussion of the narrative inquiry research methodology. I also describe the location of the research and the participants. Furthermore, I unpack the data generation methods used in this study: memory drawings, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journaling and informal conversations with selected family members, school friends and university friends, to help me recall my memories regarding supportive relationships and supportive teacher-learner relationships. I describe my process of making meaning from my stories of experience. Moreover, I consider trustworthiness and research ethics issues. Lastly, I discuss some challenges that affected me during the research process.

In Chapter Three, I simultaneously engage with and respond to my two research questions. The stories in this Chapter are based on my personal experiences with supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village, and community settings. These are informal teacher-learner relationships in which members of my family, village, and community take on an informal teaching role. I begin by discussing supportive relationships I have had at home, in my village, and, by extension, in my larger community, and how these relationships have influenced me. Then I think about what I have learnt from them. My own memory stories are followed by presenting my learning from informal conversations with selected family members. Finally, I

consider my overall learning from remembering supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village, and community settings.

Chapter Four sees me continuing to respond to my two research questions. The stories in this chapter are based on my personal experiences with supportive (and, at times, unsupportive) teacher-learner relationships in primary and high school settings. My own memory stories are followed by a presentation of my learning from informal discussions with my chosen primary and secondary school friends. Finally, I consider my overall learning from this chapter's memory-work.

Chapter Five returns to my two research questions, this time looking back at my previous experiences with supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education. One memory of an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship in higher education is also described. I consider what I have learnt as a result of recalling these memories. My personal memory stories are followed by a presentation of my learning from an informal conversation with a university friend. Finally, I reflect on my overall learning from the chapter's memory-work.

In the concluding Chapter Six, I give an overview of the research dissertation. I explain how this study has personally and professionally influenced me as a teacher-researcher and a novice teacher. I also map out my methodological and theoretical learning. Lastly, I outline what I aim to do in the future due to this study.

CHAPTER TWO

UNPACKING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I first mapped out the focus, purpose, background, and rationale (personal and professional) that drive this research study. Second, I outlined my initial reading of the literature and the theoretical perspective underpinning this research study. Finally, I gave a brief overview of narrative inquiry research, the research objectives, and the two research questions that guide this study.

Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the research methodology, study location, participants, data generation methods, making meaning, trustworthiness and research ethics. Finally, some challenges I encountered in this research process are discussed.

2.2 Research methodology

This dissertation gives an account of a qualitative research study using a narrative inquiry methodology. The study sought a rich understanding of how I could make meanings and interpretations of my own lived experiences. Creswell (2009) argues that qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make meaning of what they observe, hear and understand. Creswell (2009) further argues that how these meanings and interpretations are made goes hand-in-hand with researchers' own backgrounds and histories, and the contexts they occupy. Moreover, Crimmins (2016, p. 484) asserts that "qualitative research invites researchers to inquire about the human condition, because it explores the meaning of human experience and creates the possibilities of change through raised awareness and purposeful action". Therefore, employing a qualitative approach was suitable for this study to analyse and understand my lived experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships to enhance awareness and future action.

The rationale for using a narrative inquiry methodology for my study was influenced by Clandinin's assertion that the stories we live by, and the stories we live in, are mostly marked for us all by stories of school experience (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin argues that school stories (and other institutional stories) are powerful influencers of the stories we live in and by. She

explains that institutional stories have shaped and continue shaping our cultures in our daily living routines and engagement. She also highlights the significance of personal stories, “which are stories planted in us early or along the way” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22). Since I intended to explore my experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships, qualitative narrative inquiry seemed suitable for looking closely at how these institutional and personal stories have shaped me and continue shaping me, and will subsequently do so in the future.

2.2.1 Most essential characteristics of narrative inquiry

Clandinin (2013) describes narrative inquiry research “as a fluid inquiry, not a set of procedures or linear steps to be followed but a relational inquiry methodology that is open to where stories of participants’ experience take each researcher” (p. 33). Nevertheless, from my reading, I understood that a narrative inquiry research methodology has some crucial characteristics that researchers need to pay careful attention to.

First, narrative inquiry focuses on stories, as lived, told and talked about, shaped by social, cultural, personal and institutional interactions and environments (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). These stories are lived, told, composed, relived and retold. People shape their lives by stories, and a story is a space through which a person enters the world and through which their experiences of the world are interpreted and made personally meaningful (Hamilton et al., 2008). Thus, narrative inquirers think *with* stories and not only about stories. Clandinin (2013) explains that “although we can think with stories both within and outside narrative inquiry, thinking with stories is primarily thinking relationally” (p. 30). Clandinin (2013, p. 20) further argues that:

... thinking relationally, for example – the relational between the person and his place; a temporal understanding of the relational between past, present and future; and the relational between events and feelings among other things, then, is part of thinking narratively as a narrative inquirer.

Therefore, I understood that thinking *with* stories for my research would mean looking at and thinking relationally about my lived experiences.

The starting point of telling stories can be where the researcher engages with their own experiences or with others. The participants or the researcher begin by telling their stories in both situations. Furthermore, Clandinin (2013) states that “frequently we involve participants

[including our own selves as researchers] in creating what we call annals and chronicles as a way to create a framework on which to construct their [and our] oral histories” (p. 113). Through the process of creating these “annals and chronicles”, participants, together with the researchers, begin to recollect their experiences and construct them in reflective conversations. We engage with memories, events, and stories of the past, transitioning to the present in this process. We may even reflect on stories far back into our childhood experiences in this critical process.

In narrative inquiry research, we try to understand, in detail, the experiences that have shaped us and that continue shaping us. We do so by looking more closely at these experiences and considering how they contributed to our developing beings. Dwyer and Emerald (2017) argue that “the stories people live and tell are a rich source of knowing and meaning making”. Crimmins (2016, p. 484) discussed that “[narrative inquiry research] is also ... concerned with ‘depth’ and eliciting ‘thick descriptions’ of lived experience”. Therefore, a narrative inquiry should yield richly detailed accounts of experiences as they unfold over time in a place or series of places, shaped by social interaction within the environment. The study of individuals’ experiences in narrative inquiry research must also seek understanding of how the personal and social aspects are constructed and connected over time. As narrative inquirers, we are part of past and present lives as they unfold in various ways and contexts, and we acknowledge that we are part and parcel of the cultural and social contexts that we find ourselves in.

Furthermore, engaging in narrative inquiry needs all of us and our efforts – it requires our remembering, understanding, and creativity regarding what we have experienced, together with what we hope and picture for the future. Engaging in narrative inquiry research requires us to gather and to listen attentively to how someone tells and positions their stories of experience. As Huber et al. (2013, p. 214) argued, “as generation after generation circle around the fire, stories flow endlessly, gathering us together”. Therefore, as we engage in storytelling through narrative inquiry, we make visible traces of the life stories we have lived.

Narrative inquiry research also requires thinking reflectively about the research phenomenon. As Clandinin (2013, p. 191) explains, “all narrative inquiries begin with an autobiographical inquiry into who the researcher is in relation to the phenomenon under study, which helps to set the personal, practical, and theoretical/social justifications and shapes the emerging research puzzle”. Thus, I realised that I must reflect on who I see myself being and becoming concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. In engaging with narrative inquiry research, one must

live amid the story. This means becoming part of the story being narrated. Huber et al. (2013, p. 215) affirm that “living in the midst of . . . stories, and our interaction with them, they become part of who we are and who we are becoming”. Furthermore, Clandinin (2013) argues that as we engage with these stories of experience, we generate a range of field texts (or data sources) to understand who we are, and are becoming, concerning the particular phenomenon being explored. Thus, one must walk with the telling of the story, through experiences of events as they unfold and with the participants as they go in and out of the stories. The process of going back to stories of the past by a researcher or a participant must be evident in the presentation of the research text (in my case, the dissertation). This meant that I could not stand outside the inquiry but was part of the phenomenon under scrutiny. I, therefore, needed to think as a relational inquirer. I needed to relate personally to the experiences and events I was engaging with, as they form part of the spaces in which my life is evolving and unfolding.

Engagement with telling stories of experiences in narrative inquiry research must have coherence and trace how these stories unfold over time. As Clandinin (2013, p. 107) affirms, “in search of narrative coherence, [a story must] have a plot line that helps to make sense of . . . life”. This grants us an opportunity to understand that if narrative coherences in the stories we tell are interrupted, we must search for ways to rebuild coherence. Furthermore, Masinga (2012) argues that “through telling stories of the past, important events are evoked and the manner in which they are later recalled is valuable to the formation and reformation of self” (p. 127). Therefore, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people, both researchers and participants, involved in drawing new meanings.

Narrative inquiry allows individuals such as teachers to reflect and write in ways that are true to themselves. Individuals such as teachers engage in telling and retelling their stories to interested parties in a given context through reflective conversations; as they do so, they also engage in the process of living and reliving the told stories. Li and Craig (2019, p. 920) assert that “[narrative inquiry] centres on how teachers construct and reconstruct experiences through narrative sharing and meaning-making in a community setting”. Thus, I was mindful that engaging in open, honest self-reflection and discussion about our experiences can open more doors for learning and provide us with a safe and open space to share and contribute meaningfully to developing ourselves and significant others.

Moreover, in narrative inquiry research, telling and retelling past experiences can make room

for critical engagement with the past (Dwyer & Emeralds, 2017). Furthermore, awakening and getting to engage with other parts of stories that one has not previously paid particular attention to, must be part and parcel of the engagement. This must be followed by probing such events and experiences to make sense and meaning. This opens up the possibility of more learning and improvement, adjustments and/or change of undesired practices to desired ones (Clandinin, 2013). In my understanding, the primary aim of using a narrative inquiry research methodology must be to improve human lives and practices for the better. As Clandinin (2006) asserts, “narrative inquiries study an individual’s experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others” (p. 42). Thus, in engaging with themselves and their participants, researchers must – through the process of living, telling, reliving and retelling stories – give rise to new perspectives and meanings for both researcher and researched. As Li and Craig (2019, p. 20) explain:

storytelling can engage teachers meaningfully with ideas, materials and colleagues, and it opens up possibilities for viewing ... experiences from alternative perspectives, which, in turn, impact teachers’ views of who they are and who they want to be in their own professional landscape.

Thus, as we inquire with ourselves and significant others, we engage in the process of opening up the possibility for growth.

2.2.2 Possible advantages and drawbacks of using narrative inquiry

2.2.2.1 Advantages

Like any other research methodology, using a narrative inquiry research methodology has some possible advantages and drawbacks. One of the advantages of working with personal narrative inquiry is that it allows one to study oneself, in a sequence of events, intending to understand how and why certain things happened in the way they did and what influenced them. As Morris (2000, as cited in Clandinin, 2013) explains, thinking with stories allows narrative inquirers to let the narrative process work on them. Therefore, working with stories can enable us to positively contribute to our development as researchers and those with whom we research. In and through narrative inquiry, questioning ‘who I am’ and ‘who I am becoming’ allows us to come to the questions of justification: the personal, social and theoretical explanations that will enable us to respond to our lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

By sharing stories of experience in narrative inquiry research, we can show why and how stories are a rich source of knowledge. Cardinal (2011, as cited in Clandinin, 2013) affirms that sharing stories of experience in narrative inquiry is a way of engaging with others. Therefore, through living and the telling of lived experiences – and also the retelling and reliving of them – it is believed that the story itself is a teacher. Thus, narrative inquiry fosters a creative and imaginative space in the process of engaging with the telling and retelling of stories of experience.

Furthermore, narrative inquiry allows researchers and participants to be present with each other and other things we interact with, continuing through generations. Our very identities as human beings are linked to the stories we tell of ourselves and those of the people and the environments we interact with. Therefore, the stories we tell one another serve as evidence of how our lives have unfolded over time. Thus, Clandinin (2013) argues that the more we engage with our own stories and those of our participants, the more we realise how connected our stories are. Moreover, narrative inquiry research can “give listening ears to the voices that often go unheard” (Crimmins, 2016, p. 488). In addition, narrative inquiry research and analysis can provide a space for the mediation of multiple perspectives and meanings.

2.2.2.2 Drawbacks

One of the possible drawbacks of working with the narrative inquiry research methodology is that there are no predetermined linear steps in engaging and telling the stories of experience in narrative inquiry research (Clandinin, 2013). One may get confused about which approaches to use to tell and retell the stories, causing confusion and anxiety. As Crimmins (2016) admitted, in her study, even though she felt excited about engaging in narrative inquiry research, she felt unsure about what approaches to use.

Furthermore, although interpretation is constantly underway as the inquiry is lived out with participants in the field, “at some point there is a move away from the close intensive contact with the participants to begin to work with the field texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). Therefore, I understand that the move away from close intensive contact with participants may cause doubt for the researcher in interpreting what messages, feelings, and thoughts the participants wanted to express. It may also cause conflict, as the researcher may interpret them through only their own lens of understanding, which may differ from what participants wanted to articulate.

Also, the studied experience might just be taken as an object, rather than a relational learning site for researchers and participants. If the researcher is not attentive, this may lead to not thinking about stories in multiple ways, instead portraying only one side, which Adichie (2018) refers to as ‘a danger’. Representing just one side of the story indeed poses a threat, as it may evoke undeveloped and limited conclusions.

Additionally, in telling and retelling stories of experience, one may not remember all of the lived experiences in a vivid and more detailed manner, resulting in silences and gaps in the telling and retelling. Furthermore, studying one’s own life experiences can be adversely influenced, just like any other research, regarding what one may wish to be exposed, ‘hidden’, or read and seen.

Moreover, in Mitchell et al.’s work (2019), Sifiso Magubane argues that “... our oral storytelling sometimes brought back some painful experiences that I may have wanted to quickly forget and move on” (p. 178). Additionally, Hamilton et al. (2008) argue that, in the process, there is always an inward look at the vulnerable self that is attached to the study of experiences. Therefore, going back to retrieve stories of the past may evoke painful memories that we may, at times, not want to remember or bring them back into our lives. Since feelings, thoughts and emotions are associated with told stories, they are made visible in the inquiry process. Pain and suffering associated with the related and retold events might arise at any time in the research process, causing the participants to go back to unwanted and uncomfortable spaces and experiences of the past that they may not have wanted to go back to.

Thus, just as in any other research, tensions may arise in a narrative inquiry process. Clandinin (2013) affirms this and says that “for many teachers, and indeed for many people, tensions are thought to have a negative valence, that is, tensions are something to be avoided or smoothed over” (p. 173). Nevertheless, I understand that we must not try to avoid tensions but must try to acknowledge that they will always be there as we engage with each other in the ongoing process of research. Therefore, we must seek ways to live with these tensions and work with them constructively in the process of telling, living, retelling, and reliving stories of experience.

2.3 Location of the study

Since this research study puts my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships under the microscope, it was done at home. My home is located in a rural

area in a place called Nquthu in northern KZN. This research study also included some of my school friends and family members to help me recall my memories. This was done through informal conversations, both face to face (keeping in place COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations) and online interactions.

2.4 Participants

In this research study, I played the dual role of researcher and participant. I am an African black male student in his mid-twenties at one university in South Africa. I am a teacher by profession, and I have over one year of teaching experience at one South African primary school in the province of KZN. I am currently enrolled for my Master of Education degree in Teacher Education and Professional Development in the TDS Discipline, Education Studies Cluster, at the School of Education, College of Humanities. I also included some of my school friends and family members in this study to help me recall my memories. I invited four school friends to participate in this research study: two from my primary school years, one from high school and one from university. Three are male and the other one is female. They are all in their mid-twenties and they are all black Africans. In addition, I included three family members in this research study to help me recall my memories, all of whom are female. Two of them are in their mid-forties and the other one is in her mid-sixties, and they are all black Africans.

2.5 Data generation

In generating data for this research study, I employed some arts-based methods. Jones and Leavy (2004) explain that arts-based research is seen as “any social research or human inquiry that adapts the tenets of the creative arts as a part of the methodology... the arts may be used during data collection, analysis, interpretation and/or dissemination” (pp. 1-2). Frans (2010) asserts that there are many dimensions to arts-based research, reflecting the large variety of art genres (such as performance, writing, painting, photography, collage and installation art). These genres can be used in various ways, for example, as a method or as technical, communication or aesthetic elements.

Furthermore, as Kara (2015) stressed, creativity in research is context-specific, depending on the knowledge, skills and abilities of those involved, when and where the research is carried

out, and other contextual factors. Therefore, using arts-based methods provided me with the opportunity to be physically, emotionally and reflectively engaged in the data generation process, as I engaged in hands-on activities through memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journal writing and visual journaling (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data generation methods used in this study

Data generation activities	Participants	Data sources/field texts
<p>Memory drawing: (July/August/September 2021)</p> <p>I drew portraits of events and of former teachers (from both basic and higher education spaces), friends and family members with whom I had supportive relationships (see Appendix One for prompts).</p>	Me	Memory drawings
<p>Object inquiry/artefact retrieval: (July/August/September 2021)</p> <p>I presented (in the form of photos and drawings) objects/artefacts that represent events and former teachers (from both basic and higher education spaces), friends and family members with whom I had supportive relationships (see Appendix Two for prompts).</p>	Me	Pictures and drawings of objects/artefacts
<p>Journaling: (July/August/September 2021)</p> <p>I wrote and drew journal writing/entries and visual journaling of portraits of events and of former teachers (from both basic and higher education spaces), friends and family members with whom I had supportive relationships.</p>	Me	Journal entries

<p>I also used my journal to record and reflect on my daily research process, going through the thoughts, ideas and feelings that arose along the research process (see Appendix Three for prompts).</p>		
<p>Informal conversations with friends and family in recalling my memories: (July/August/September 2021)</p> <p>I had informal conversations with my school friends and family to help me recall the events involving former teachers (from both basic and higher education spaces), with whom we had supportive relationships (see Appendix Four for prompts).</p>	<p>School friends and family</p>	<p>Audio-recorded Informal conversations</p> <p>(Through face-to-face (keeping in place COVID-19 rules and regulations) and online interactions.)</p>

2.5.1 Memory drawing

Memory drawing can make visible the details associated with particular events of the lived experiences of both the researcher and the participants. Garner (2008, as cited in Knight et al., 2015, p. 21) argues that engaging with drawings can enhance researchers’ creativity and critical engagement with ideas. Furthermore, Knight et al. (2015, p. 25) state that “drawing sometimes becomes a mediating tool to support the understanding [of] what is written in pen and paper”. Literat (2013) further posits that drawings can represent visual elements in a way that would be impossible to present in writing.

Therefore, as an entry point, I drew representations of relationships, accompanied by written reflections, that I experienced at early ages from various people I interacted with in my childhood years and upbringing. This included my family and extended family members, friends (that became family) and members of my community or community at large. I also included some of my school friends. This was done to trace my personal history of supportive (and unsupportive) relationships, and how this has influenced me in the past, the present and

will subsequently pave the way for the future. After that, I drew representations of experiences with my former teachers with whom I had teacher-learner relationships at school and in higher education. Engaging with these drawings, accompanied by written reflections, helped make visible my memories of lived experiences, and make sense of what these relationships meant and presently mean for me and what they taught me. My memory drawings are presented and discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five of this dissertation.

Memory drawing also helped reveal feelings, thoughts, and ideas associated with past events. Rattine-Flaherty and Singhal (2007, as cited in Literat, 2013, p. 87) argue that “[drawings] can better uncover subconscious or unrealised feelings and perspectives”. Therefore, as I drew to represent experiences with my former teachers (from both basic education and higher education level), and friends and family members with whom I had supportive (teacher-learner) relationships, ideas, thoughts and feelings were triggered. This allowed me the opportunity to ‘listen’ to my emotions and thoughts, to figure out what messages they were trying to communicate about my lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships.

2.5.2 Object inquiry/artefact retrieval

As Prown (1982, as cited in Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017) explains, objects or artefacts may have a particular personal, sociocultural, or historical significance to individuals and significant others. Thus, working with objects or artefacts can facilitate the construction of knowledge in memory-work. Cole (2011) argues that “memory is both a material piece of knowledge and an active process by which the knowledge itself is constructed” (p. 225). Therefore, objects or artefacts in memory-work can help individuals recall and make meaning of past events.

Since it can sometimes be hard to express something in written words only, the use of objects or artefacts in this research study facilitated remembering and explaining events in more detail, giving me more material to reflect on as I engaged with them. Drawing or taking photographs of specific objects or artefacts helped me represent remembered events and experiences. These drawings and photographs are presented and discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five. For example, I used a photograph of a Basotho blanket to demonstrate how my grandmother emphasised the value of education through her practices and motivations while she was wearing that blanket (Chapter Three). Furthermore, the use of objects or artefacts allowed me to ‘talk’ to objects in meaning making of teacher-learner relationships. Therefore, working with objects or artefacts served as a prompt for memories and the construction and presentation of

knowledge.

Working with objects or artefacts also allowed for self-reflection. As Cole (2011) describes, I found that using objects as prompts for written or oral deliberations can elicit self-reflection. Engaging in object inquiry provided another way to retrieve and make meaning of my experiences and myself as a learner and teacher. And, as Shanks (1998, as cited in Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017, p. 93) argues, “the artefact is itself a multiplicity. Its identity is multiple. It is not just one thing”. Thus, new possibilities, perspectives and meanings emerged through exploring my everyday engagement with objects.

2.5.3 Journaling

Reflective journal writing can be a tool for memory-work. Johnson (2001, as cited in Messenger, 2016, p. 140) argues that a “journal can be a self-portrait, a chance to reframe a life’s story ... where the personal and the professional mingle with affective, practical and theoretical dimensions”. Thus, journal writing can be a way of reflecting on past experiences and how they have influenced you and continue affecting your personal and professional being. Furthermore, through visual journaling, words/texts, numbers, drawings and metaphors are put together to present new meanings of particular events and experiences as they occurred. Therefore, in this research study, I employed journal writing and visual journaling to put together portraits of events and former teachers (from both basic and higher education spaces) with whom I had supportive teacher-learner relationships. This was done to probe and understand the events as they were remembered and unfolded. Also, this does not exclude the unsupportive teacher-learner relationships I had with teachers. Being open to both perspectives – of supportive and unsupportive teacher-learner relationships – gave me a more extensive scope of making sense and meaning of how these affected me across my educational journey and continue to do so, and what I can learn from them.

Masinga (2012) argues that working with memory through journaling can allow us to be continuous learners within a given context. Moreover, through probing our stories and memories, new perspectives and meanings can be gained to enable learning and reflection to take place (Masinga, 2012). Therefore, engaging reflective journal writing and visual journaling provided moments of reflection, remembering and interpreting past events, which have always been part of my life, as they happened. Journaling also allowed me to learn and

discover something new about my past experiences, that I may not have been aware of before and how they have influenced me. Excerpts from my memory-work journal entries are presented and discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

In addition to journaling as memory-work, I used my journal to record and reflect on my daily research process, going through the thoughts, ideas and feelings that arose along the way. For instance, the following extract is from a journal entry I made on 23 August 2021, from a supervision meeting with my research supervisor and fellow Master of Education students. I was sharing my experiences regarding engaging with my different data generation methods in trying to answer my two research questions:

Today, was such an emotional day for me as I remembered and shared the emotions I have been experiencing through my data generation methods. As I engaged with memory drawings, object inquiry/artefact retrieval and journaling as my data generation methods in trying to answer my two research questions. As I remembered the past events, particularly those that happened at home, in my community and in primary school. It was with such mixed emotions as I had to unpack the past experiences and face the reality.

In writing reflective journals, we write down our thoughts and feelings as they are remembered and date of an event as it unfolds. Integrating words, texts and numbers associated with thoughts, feelings and emotions helps us understand our experiences in detail and depth. Pennebaker (1991) argues that writing a journal allows us to express our innermost feelings, which subsequently can improve our health. We search for and express our feelings and beliefs through journaling to understand events as they unfold. Similarly, Furman et al. (2008, p. 75) argue that “the writing process may force the subject to reflect on emotions and feelings that were previously unexplored”. Reflecting on our past experiences/memories may elicit complex emotions and encourage us to interpret and understand them. In my case, journal writing helped me write down my thoughts and feelings about events that I had experienced with my teachers concerning supportive or unsupportive teacher-learner relationships. This helped me make sense and meaning and draw new perspectives.

2.5.4 Informal conversations with friends and family to help me recall my memories

In this research study, I included some of my school friends and family members to help me recall my memories. This was done through informal conversations in both face-to-face

(keeping in place COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations) and online interactions. Excerpts from these conversations appear in Chapters Three, Four and Five. IsiZulu and SeSotho home languages were both used to conduct these conversations. This aimed to enhance understanding between the researcher and the participants, since my participants were either Zulu or Sotho-speaking people. The prompts for these conversations can be seen in Chapters Three, Four and Five. I also invited my selected friends and family members to engage with some of my memory drawings, object inquiry/artefact retrieval and/or my journal writing and visual journaling. A number of these informal conversations happened at home, and one took place by phone call. These conversations each lasted from about 50 minutes to approximately 1h30 minutes. These conversations were audio-recorded using a cell phone and later transcribed into text by me.

Involving school friends and family members in this research study helped me remember events in detail and bring up memories that I might have forgotten or make sense of those that were not clear. Therefore, this helped me make sense of, create new meanings, and gain perspectives concerning the phenomenon under scrutiny.

2.6 Making meaning

In this research study I narrated my personal lived experiences across my educational journey concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. This was accompanied by making meaning of the data concerning the phenomenon under examination. This was guided by questioning what I could learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. Secondly, it was directed by considering how, as a novice teacher, I can build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships in my future practice.

This research study employed inductive reasoning in making meaning from the data generated. Bertram and Christiansen (2018) argue that we begin with specific observations in inductive reasoning. We start with the collected data and then trace patterns to make sense of and understand the phenomenon being explored.

Therefore, in answering the research questions that were put forward in this research study, I engaged with the data set that I developed. Keeping in mind my theoretical perspective (as

described in Chapter One), I adapted the following self-reflective memory-work analysis questions designed by Samaras and Freese (2006) to guide my inductive engagement with the data:

- What can I see about how social and cultural influences shaped me as a learner?
- What are my most valuable discoveries about myself as a learner?
- What new insights have I gained about supportive teacher-learner relationships?
- What am I still struggling to understand about supportive teacher-learner relationships?
- How can this memory-work writing assist me in understanding how learners' lived experiences at home and in the community can impact and shape their learning?
- How can this memory-work writing assist me in understanding how social and cultural influences can impact and shape supportive teacher-learner relationships?
- How can my learning from this memory-work writing inform my future learning and practice as a teacher?

Prompted by Samaras and Freese's questions, I looked in detail at the stories of experience revealed by the data sources. I also considered what I could learn from them in the present day and the practices and influences they instilled in me in paving the way for the future. As shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five of this dissertation, this was done through the process of zooming in and out (Chang, 2008) on my personal lived experiences across my educational journey regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. Zooming in meant looking closely at particular aspects of my stories. Zooming out involved stepping back to consider my accounts in relation to others' experiences and relevant literature, which enabled me to put my stories in a broader context and extend their implications. This helped me arrive at pertinent conclusions based on the data from this research study (see Chapter Six).

2.7 Trustworthiness

Researchers in any field need to ensure that the research they produce and present to their audience and the scholarly community is trustworthy. Dwyer and Emerald (2017, p. 5) assert that trustworthiness in qualitative research in the social sciences "typically necessitates the researcher adopting a reflective stance, whereby they acknowledge, question and reflect upon the ways in which their presence has shaped what is occurring". Similarly, Crimmins (2016) asserts that "self-reflexivity is understood to be an integral process in qualitative research where

the researcher reflects on how her/his own perceptions and actions impact upon the research process” (p. 485). Thus in giving an account of this narrative inquiry, I have attempted to put the process through which stories of lived experiences unfolded under scrutiny and track the progress of the work through narrative writing (Hamilton et al., 2008). Drawing from the suggested considerations in ensuring trustworthiness, I aimed to reveal and reflect on my presence in and impact on the research in writing this dissertation.

As a researcher working within the narrative inquiry research methodology, I used multiple methods of generating data, which helped me gain a deeper insight into and understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. I employed object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journaling, memory drawing, and informal conversations to make visible aspects of my personal experiences across my educational journey concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. Using more than one method of generating data to explore the phenomenon under scrutiny allowed me to look at my experiences holistically and produce detailed, rich stories, contributing to trustworthiness (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017).

Another way of maintaining trustworthiness in this research study was meeting with my research supervisor and two fellow research students each week. We discussed our individual stages and the progress of our research studies. In these meetings, each of us was given a chance to share the progress of our research study with the entire team. This platform allowed me to present my work and receive constructive feedback and criticism from my supervisor and fellow research students. This ensured that trustworthiness was maintained. Moreover, involving my friends and some family members to help me recall my memories was another way to enhance trustworthiness.

2.8 Research ethics

Researchers need to pay careful attention to particular ethical considerations associated with using narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2013) argues that narrative inquiry must be understood as ethical work. She advises that ethical issues must be carefully examined throughout the narrative inquiry process. Furthermore, ethical matters are not static but shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the centre of our inquiries.

We need to acknowledge how relational ethics live at the heart of narrative inquiry and how

we represent our stories and participants' stories in narrative accounts (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). Clandinin (2013) argues that relationships between the researcher and participants must give rise to new meanings and be about negotiation, respect, mutual understanding and feeling, and openness to multiple voices. We must engage in deep striving for being morally responsible to each other and to our negotiated relationships, as well as to our negotiated texts and interpretations (Clandinin, 2013). As we engage in narrative inquiry research, we must become aware of the responsibilities, commitments and obligations that come with the action of telling, living, retelling and reliving with stories of experience (Huber et al., 2013). Therefore, stories must be cared for, as they are at the centre of how we make meaning of our experiences of the world.

Thus, in this research study, I respected the authority and reputation of the people I wrote about in recalling my memories concerning the phenomenon under scrutiny. I also sought to write authentically and considerately when reflecting on my conversations with friends and family members who helped me remember. Moreover, engaging with past experiences may cause old wounds to reopen as we may engage with emotional experiences and recollections that may be hard to deal with (Mitchell et al., 2019). Therefore, I sought to be careful and sensitive when pondering my own stories and engaging with others and their stories during the research process.

As the researcher in this study, it was essential to conduct research that considered all research ethics protocols. Therefore, to be ethically cleared to conduct this research study, I applied for clearance from the university's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Approval by the university granted me the opportunity to conduct my proposed research.

Informed consent was sought and obtained from the participants, my friends and family members who helped me recall my memories (see Appendix Five). To protect the identity of the people involved in this narrative inquiry, my former teachers, friends, and family, I used pseudonyms where applicable. Where real names are mentioned, those individuals granted permission, and proof of such consent was recorded. Real names were used (where applicable) because I wanted to honour those people for the critical role that they have played and continue to play in my life over the years.

2.9 Challenges

This research study had a few challenges, but I was prepared to deal with them. The challenges I encountered were mainly to do with not being on campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations. Because of having to remain off campus, I could not gain access to some books from the School of Education Library that would be useful and contribute to the production of knowledge for this research study. I also could not use the computers and other resources in the School Research Commons. The solution was that the School of Education Library did offer some services using the off-campus online site and platform for its postgraduate students to access research and needed materials. Some online trainings were conducted offering the knowledge and skills to access those required services. Furthermore, as a rural student working online/remotely, poor/limited network and internet connectivity hindered my progress. To deal with this challenge, I often worked at midnight since the network and internet connectivity was better at that time, since fewer people were working then, with less ‘traffic’ on the web and better internet connectivity.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter mapped out the research methodology, study location, participants, data generation methods, meaning-making, trustworthiness, and research ethics issues. Finally, challenges that affected me when doing my research were also discussed.

Choosing to study supportive teacher-learner relationships in the form of a personal narrative inquiry helped me understand that not only the researchers’ and participants’ lived experiences are involved, but also the nested set of lives of those around us. My reading on narrative inquiry also helped me appreciate that meaning-making is not linear. It is shifting and presents multiplicity over time. I anticipated that taking a narrative inquiry stance would enhance my self-understanding, allowing me to respond in a more relevant and positive manner in promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships in both schools and higher education spaces. I expected that studying supportive teacher-learner relationships – having been a learner and a student, and a former primary school teacher – would help me probe my past and present practices to understand the ‘complex’ stories, including the people that had been part of my life. All of this would be done by relating to my past, present and vision of the future as an emerging relational inquirer in the field of narrative inquiry research. Therefore, engaging in personal narrative inquiry research could help me open my mind about how my past

experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships have influenced me in the past and continue influencing me in the present and will continue to do so into the future. Through narrative inquiry, I aimed to make a meaningful contribution to the topic of supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools and in higher education spaces.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss my experiences concerning (teacher-learner) relationships in my family, village and community settings. I will begin to engage with and answer the two research questions underpinning this study.

CHAPTER THREE

LEARNING FROM MY PERSONAL LIVED EXPERIENCES CONCERNING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS: UNPACKING MY FAMILY, VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY MEMORIES

3.1 Introduction

This research study involved a personal narrative inquiry regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. The supportive teacher-learner relationships that I explored were formal and informal and experienced throughout my educational journey, from my preschool years up to my postgraduate at a South African university.

In Chapter Two I unpacked the research process. I provided a detailed account of the narrative inquiry research methodology, study location, participants, data generation methods, trustworthiness and research ethics. I also outlined some challenges that disturbed me while doing this research. Lastly, I explained how choosing to study supportive teacher-learner relationships using a personal narrative inquiry methodology helped me understand that lived experiences should be understood within the nested set of lives among which each one of us lives.

In this chapter I engage with and simultaneously respond to my two research questions:

(a) *What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?*

(b) *As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?*

In answering these questions, I employed multiple data generation methods: memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journal writing, and informal conversations with selected family members and friends to help me recall my memories.

The stories shared in this Chapter are my experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village, and community settings. These are informal teacher-learner relationships where family, village and community members take on an informal teaching role in the society. These stories are primarily communicated in English; in some parts of this research dissertation, the words used are in either IsiZulu or Sesotho home languages with an

English translation. This conveys the distinctive messages that the IsiZulu or Sesotho words carry and how particular experiences, thoughts, and feelings were recalled and communicated.

In setting the scene, I start by sharing supportive relationships I experienced at home, in my village and, by extension, in my wider community, and how these relationships affected my thinking and practices. I then consider what I learnt from them. My own memory stories are then followed by a presentation of my learning through informal discussions with selected family members. Lastly, I reflect on my overall learning from my experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village and community settings.

3.2 Setting the scene: Unpacking and learning from the support I received from home

3.2.1 The Basotho traditional blanket object/artefact: On the importance of going to school

As explained in Chapter Two, working with objects or artefacts allows for a process of self-reflection through multiple ways of meaning making and drawing new perspectives. Naicker et al. (2017) affirm that working with objects serves as a mirror that reflects our own image and lived experiences. The photograph presented below (Figure 3.1) shows the Basotho traditional blanket. The word 'Basotho' is a collective name for Sotho-speaking people. It is common practice in my village for the Sotho women to wear their traditional blankets all of the time, although this is not compulsory. It is also to be noted that I live in a village that is a mixture of two ethnic groups, Sotho and Zulu. Both groups live in harmony and respect each other's practices and cultures.

Our village and community are situated in rural areas characterised by poor socio-economic conditions, and many people and families depend on the Government's grant for their livelihood.

I took the photograph seen in the figure because it reminded me of how my grandmother always emphasised the value of education while always wearing this blanket. My grandmother's educational background includes attending and completing only her primary schooling; presently, she is unable to read and write.



Figure 3.1: Basotho traditional blanket object/artefact: My grandmother emphasised the value of education

My brothers and I lived with our grandmother because our mothers were away from home and were in neighbouring towns, working and trying to make a living for us. They only visited once a month or even every two months. I remember how my grandmother used to wake up early in the morning and prepare hot water for myself and my other two siblings in the rondavel (round hut) that was considered the traditional kitchen. The three of us were all boys, and she would leave us in a warm rondavel and tell us to scrub each other's backs, because she wanted us to be completely clean and at our best when going to school.

By the time we finished preparing ourselves for school, she would have prepared us some breakfast. Ours was not an ordinary breakfast like that of everyone else; it was called *umfudumezo*. Roughly translated, it is the remains of yesterday's food. By referring to it as not being an ordinary breakfast, I mean that it did not include bread, among other things; many believed that an ordinary breakfast would always include bread. We were so happy about our meal, and we enjoyed it! My grandmother even used to joke about it, and would say, "*Bazukulu bami* [my grandchildren], please work hard and dedicate all your time to your books. One day when the three of you have graduated and are working, we will no longer eat this breakfast; we will eat an ordinary breakfast just like everyone else who has a child that finished school and

is working”. I remember these words vividly, as if they were said to me yesterday. They made me feel so motivated, and inspired me that my future was right in my hands. They sank deeply into my mind all the time. They would sink in deeply again and again in my mind and heart at school during my school days, as I pictured my grandmother wearing that blue Basotho traditional blanket, and repeatedly saying them to us before we left for school.

I was the eldest child among all my other siblings at home. Therefore, being the eldest child, I took these words as if they were directly said only to me, because I knew exactly what my grandmother was saying, and it was a goal to be reached by me first as the eldest child. These words rang in my mind throughout my basic education (Grade R to Grade 12), and by extension up until today. Moreover, our grandmother always prayed for us before we left for school, and that was one thing she would never forget. She would pray ‘Our Father, who art in heaven...’ to the Almighty God so that he guides and protects us during the day at school and blesses all the activities that we were going to do for the whole day at school and subsequently at home.

I recall that when I came back from school, I would see our grandmother from far away, going up and down the yard and doing the ordinary, cleaning the yard and taking care of her chickens and their chicks. Of course, I recognised her from the blue Basotho traditional blanket she was always wearing. As I always saw her in the yard from far away, I would respond by running home very fast to hug her, as my heart was always filled with joy and much excitement when I saw and was around her. Furthermore, we knew that our grandmother had prepared the traditional *isijingi* food precisely as we came back from school, a mix of maize meal and pumpkin. That is the food we ate most of the time when we returned from school. After eating, my grandmother would sit down with the three of us and ask each one of us to reflect on what we learnt at school and to tell her, in detail, about all the other events that happened at school. After we had done some home chores, she would then ask us to do our individual school homework.

I also recall that during my primary school parents’ meetings, our grandmother was always there to support the three of us as her grandchildren. The parents’ meeting used to be held at around 11h00 in the morning. From 10h00 to 11h00 exactly we children would be outside, because it was break time for us learners. During that break time, if a parents’ meeting was being held that day, I remember how we used to hang around at places such as by the school fence and on the school grounds to see our parents as they made their way to the school for the scheduled meeting. I recall how, during that process, I used to recognise and spot my

grandmother from far by her blue Basotho traditional blanket. This time around, she wore a different one in terms of print and design, but it was also blue in colour! This one was still new, as she used to wear it only on noteworthy occasions and events such as parents' meetings. She always supported us as her grandchildren, and she not only came to the scheduled parents' meetings, but sometimes would just show up at the school premises to check on our work and our progress. That is how my grandmother always emphasised the importance of education and valued education.

Therefore, what I learnt from my personal lived experiences concerning the abovementioned events of my grandmother supporting me together with my two siblings, is that parents and/or guardians can play a vital role in supporting their children in seeing the value of education. This can be done by taking the initiative to sit down with their children and motivate them to see the value of education. It would be emphasised that education changes lives and that education is one weapon that we can use to fight poverty. Furthermore, I learnt that parents can play a vital role in planting a positive idea in their children's mind: that education has the power to change their lives for the better. They can also encourage their children to believe that they have all the potential to make it in life with their parents' support.

As illustrated in my grandmother's words, as previously mentioned, she used to say to us *bazukulu bami* (grandchildren) that we must work hard and dedicate all of our time to our books. When we have graduated and are working, we will eat an ordinary breakfast just like everyone else who has a child who finished school and is working. Moreover, and more importantly, I also learnt that whatever the situation learners face at home and at school, this must not act as a barrier to prevent them from reaching their potential and goals; instead, they must use that situation as a stepping stone to a better life. A poor background does not necessarily determine where one's life is and will navigate to.

I also learnt that parents and/or guardians can contribute positively to their children's education by continuously participating in the process. Mokhele (2006) affirms that teachers who maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships involve parents, learner peers and other relevant stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. Also, like my grandmother, parents or guardians can take the initiative to fully participate in the parents' meetings regularly held by schools to be informed on all matters affecting their children's education. Likewise, in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019b), S'phiwe Madondo affirms that the role of schools and teachers in schools should include inviting parents to school meetings, where they can be appreciated

and shown how valuable their general knowledge and the teachings they continuously instil in their children's minds at home are. Moreover, he argues that even if they have limited formal education, parents and guardians at home can go the extra mile to develop their children's capabilities. Furthermore, he argues that "this demonstrates the need for schools to organise programmes where parents would be empowered on how they can play their part as important partners in their children's learning" (p. 140). Therefore, by extension, this can also be done through parents taking the initiative to voluntarily schedule regular meetings with and visit their children's schools to check on their work and progress in various subjects. Such visits can also be used to track their children's behaviour and participation in extramural activities, as well as all their other strengths and weaknesses.

As earlier described in my memory story, during break time on days when there was a parents' meeting, I remember hanging around near the school fence and on the school grounds to see our parents as they made their way to the scheduled appointment. I recall how some of the learners used to stay in those places until the very last minute before the bell rang and we had to go back to our classes. If their parents didn't make their way to the school, they were so sad; you could see that their hearts were broken that their parents or guardians did not arrive to support them, unlike many other children. When this happened, you could see tears rolling down some of the learners' faces. I learnt from this experience that unsupportive relationships with parents decrease children's self-confidence and lower their self-esteem at school. I acknowledge that those unsupportive relationships might be caused by parents not completing their own schooling and therefore lacking knowledge and confidence about how they can support their children on school-related matters. It might also be caused by parents having experienced unsupportive relationships during their schooldays, and therefore they might have no idea how to do it. If learners are not supported by their parents on school-related matters, they might not recognise the value of education in a broader sense. However, it is argued that if learners are supported on school-related matters, by their parents and all other relevant stakeholders, this can increase their self-esteem and self-confidence (Mokhele, 2006).

3.2.2 Emphasising the value of education through storytelling time

Chapter Two explains that memory drawing can be described as making visible and learning from the memories of lived experiences. The memory drawing presented in Figure 3.2 shows how my family and I gathered and sat around the fire at night during storytelling time. I drew

this memory because it reminded me of how my grandmother and other older family members at home always emphasised the value of education to us growing children through telling stories.



Figure 3.2: My memory drawing: My family emphasising the value of education through storytelling

The evening was always filled with telling folktales or stories about events that happened in the past. Many stories related to our upbringing. For example, my favourite folktale my grandmother used to narrate was that of a wolf and a cannibal, which goes as follows:

It happens that they were very close friends. They always played and ate together, and they performed many activities together. They always loved each other and promised that they would never eat nor betray one another. One day, a wolf, who was way beyond smarter than a cannibal, thought of a plan he would use to betray his cannibal friend by eating him. He quickly thought of a game

that they would play so that he could not see that he wanted to betray him. The wolf made a huge fire and asked his friend to play a game of cooking each other in the pot with boiling water to see who was stronger than the other one, and that the game was going to make both much cleverer. The wolf emphasised that they would play this game interchangeably and he himself was going to start. His cannibal friend agreed. The wolf quickly jumped into the pot that was on the fire full of hot water and the game started. After some few minutes he called his cannibal friend and said, "Open, the meal is ready to be served". His friend never delayed and quickly opened the pot and took him out. They played the game interchangeably until it was the third round, where the water was now very hot. When it was the cannibal's turn, he shouted several times to his wolf friend that the meal was now ready to be served, and therefore, he must open for it. The wolf just sat there and smiled that his cannibal friend was going to boil until he died, and therefore he would be ready for him to eat him. After some time the cannibal cried there, so helpless in a huge hot pot being boiled until he died, and that was the end of him. He became his friend's best meal for the day.

I learnt from this story that you must never, ever trust anyone with all your efforts or everything because people can just turn their backs on you any time they like and without notifying you. The people you trust with all your heart and all you have can betray you and bring you down. Not everyone comes to you intending to associate themselves with you to lift you up – some can be there just to pretend, and bring you down in the end. I live by the saying 'Love them all, but never trust them all'.

The storytelling was followed by asking us questions and asking us to tell them the paramount life lessons that can be learnt from those stories that were told. Little did we know that our family was teaching and training us to think critically and actively engage with issues presented to us. This taught us many thinking and problem-solving skills. It gave us an opportunity to think critically, creatively and independently.

Through the process of storytelling, our older family members, particularly my grandmother and my mother's sister, used to tell us stories of people who came from poor families but were able to make it in life through education. They argued that what allowed them to make it in life was working hard and dedicating all their time and energy to their books. I listened attentively and with much interest as I pictured these told stories. My face was filled with an endless smile

as my heart learnt that one does not need to come from a wealthy family to make it in life; instead, it is through hard work, dedication and perseverance. These words flew endlessly in my mind and heart, and always gave me hope. As Huber et al. (2013, p. 214) state, “as generation after generation circle around the fire, stories flow endlessly, gathering us together”. Furthermore, by telling us those education-related stories, our family wanted to plant them in our mindset so that we would never forget them and subsequently follow suit. That is how they supported us. That is the least they could do – giving us the best knowledge, skills and best advice they had. We appreciated these stories, as they helped us grow in life and have a clear vision for the future.

In researching the educational value of family storytelling, in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019a), Thokozani Ndaleneni argues how he learnt the skills of listening attentively, and oral communication through the exchange of ideas, thoughts and information, and how he felt the idea of belonging through family storytelling sessions. He later practised these skills as an English teacher at both secondary schools and an HEI. Furthermore, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019a) posit that “re-membering and storytelling can come together as evocative learning resources, through which teacher-researchers and others can engage with personal insights and culturally imbued ways of knowing and being” (p. 171). Therefore, storytelling can become a rich creative and critical tool for learning relevant knowledge, skills, and values that can transform individuals and their significant others in their daily interactions and learning routines. We learnt different listening skills and strategies for tackling various challenges through family storytelling. Family storytelling taught and presented us with an opportunity to support each other as family members, as elders took the informal teaching role in the process. This is where informal teacher-learner relationships were developed.

Moreover, during the storytelling time, we shared the events that happened at school during the day. Hearing about such events made our parents and other family members identify the gaps and come up with strategies for how they could continuously support us in our learning. This was also the time when we used to read our books and do our homework. Our parents and other family members helped us where they could, even though some did not finish school, and those who completed school had no university education. Through the support of our families, we indeed succeeded.

3.3 “I am, because we are”: unpacking and learning from the support I received from my village and the community

3.3.1 The importance of education was emphasised by community members

The memory drawing in Figure 3.3 below shows how community members used to come together in teaching and grooming us to be better individuals in general and through education. They used to do that in two related yet different ways. Firstly, through socialisation, we were taught and groomed separately as young boys and girls, on values and attitudes by elders in our community. For example, we were taught about how a young boy behaves and should conduct himself in society and outside to become a respectful and better man of tomorrow.

As a growing young boy in my community, I had to engage in cattle herding. Although my family did not own cattle or livestock, except for my grandmother’s chickens, I was expected to be part and parcel of that activity. I was required to be in the grazing field with other boys and looking after cattle. Similarly, in his personal story piece, S’phiwe Madondo, in Madondo et al. (2019), affirms that “even if your parents did not own any cattle, you were expected to take part and accompany neighbourhood boys” (p. 17). I, therefore, took part in looking after cattle with other boys in my village, especially my neighbours. Madondo (2019) further recalls that if you did not take part in this men’s grooming project, “you were considered a mother’s boy who would not grow to be a real man” (p. 17). Therefore, it was said that it was important for one to participate in this men’s grooming project to become “real men”. Furthermore, cattle herding was considered an essential project by elders in our village. They believed that this would teach us relevant skills and knowledge for growing up and becoming better men of the future, who would take care of their families and significant others in the community.



Figure 3.3: My memory drawing: On engagements and learning from the community teachings.

Another activity I was engaged in (shown in Figure 3.3) was *ukushaya induku* (stick fighting). Stick fighting generally involved wooden sticks, where two opposing warriors would fight each other to establish which one of them was stronger than the other. Through stick fighting, it was believed that we would learn the skills of being strong men in life and of tomorrow, and be ready to face whatever challenges we were going to come across in our lives.

Therefore, through these activities, and many others, it was believed that one would be better equipped, as a man, to be respectful, responsible and able to face all the challenges that might be thrown at one in life. The same happened with girls, as they were groomed by older women on how they should conduct themselves in society and outside to become better individuals of tomorrow. However, I think it is also to be noted and acknowledged that harm and suffering can sometimes be caused by gender stereotypes and patriarchal traditions. This is asserted in Ntokozo Mkhize's personal story piece, in Madondo et al. (2019), where she argues that "...in that community, we as girls were expected to be submissive, to be nurturing, and to be subordinate. We were supposed to know that men were superior in their households" (p. 23). Furthermore, Madondo, in Madondo et al. (2019), affirms that "Ntokozo's storywork further

enlightened me about how important it is for us as teachers to understand how issues of gender and power impact our classrooms and communities” (p. 24). It is therefore essential, I argue, that we start to initiate and negotiate about these kinds of debates, to assist us in redefining gender roles for all our benefit, and to do away with harm.

Secondly, the community used to come together in teaching us about the importance of education and being educated in life, for a better today and subsequently paving the way for a better tomorrow. They instilled in us that we can change our lives and those of our parents and other loved ones through education. By extension, we could change the community and the world we live in through the knowledge and skills acquired through education.

Although few people in our village were educated, many people who were uneducated always emphasised the value of education. They did this with distinction, as if they were the ones who had walked through that journey and were educated. They did this because they cared about us, loved us, and supported us. They always made an example of those few individuals in our village who were educated and living a better life. They narrated stories about their humble beginnings, coming from poor families and later making it in life through education. These educated people were much respected in our community, as they set an example to us and other future generations. Therefore, many individuals in our community supported us through this process.

For a person to support you through motivation and providing some help where they could and where necessary did not require that they were your siblings or family members. We were told “*izandla ziyagezana*”, which roughly translates as ‘hands wash each other’, meaning that we are all there to help each other as a community. Just as the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* puts it, “I am, because we are”. *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy that embraces the idea that human beings cannot exist in isolation. Similarly, Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017, p. 83) posit that

... in a South African context, a socio-cultural perspective on teaching and learning can be understood in relation to *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is an ethical philosophy that is encapsulated in the statement ... ‘*Motho ke motho ka batho*’, in SeSotho or, ‘A person is a person because of other persons’, in English.

Furthermore, Reddy et al. (2016, as cited in Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017, p. 83) argue that “*Ubuntu* highlights the value of communal human characteristics such as caring, reciprocity,

and respect for another person's dignity". Therefore, *Ubuntu* emphasises the idea of being oneself through others at the centre of everything we do and all the time.

I learnt from recalling these experiences that support from community members plays a vital role in children/learners realising their full potential and goals. It gives learners hope that they can make it in life through education. It gives them a positive mindset and energy through the belief that it is through education that they can change their situation for the better in future, and those of their families and other close people. Through the spirit of working together, community members play a significant role in supporting each other in everything they do and wherever the need arises. They can motivate and support children on the importance of valuing education and how it changes lives to be able to realise their potential and achieve their dreams.

3.3.2 The community playground object/artefact: Supportive relationships on schoolwork after playing

The object/artefact presented below (Figure 3.4) is a playground located just a few metres away from my home. This was not the main playground where everyone in our village used to play soccer. Still, it was designated, unofficially, for only those individuals or families who were close to it, or anybody who was able and liked to play on it during weekdays and weekend afternoons. This was originally – and still is – a large place where the village cows are kept during the school day for grazing when everyone is at school. The grazing cows are collected in the afternoon when everybody returns from school. We only used a small portion of this place in the afternoons to play soccer and do some homework and other related school activities, while those who kept cows at the grazing field were waiting for the right time to collect them and go home after we had finished everything.

We did not interfere with nature. This means that we only used the portion we needed for play and working on our school work, and did not interrupt cows in their grazing space on the other side of the area. I took this photograph (Figure 3.4) because it reminded me of how the playground became a playing and a critical learning space.



Figure 3.4: Going dual: The playground was both a playing and a critical learning space.

I remember how after playing soccer in teams of two with the older boys, who were in high school already at that time, we used to sit and reflect on the events that happened at school during the day. I remember vividly how we used to sit in a big circle with them to share those experiences. They made it their everyday duty to ask us young school-going boys about those events, and they would advise us where applicable. They used to ask us what lessons we could draw from the events. They always helped us with our homework, assignments, and other activities that we were given at school. They used to say, “Come here with your schoolwork; we will help you after playing”. Although they made it their everyday duty to help us with our schoolwork where we seemed to have a problem and were not grasping relevant concepts in different subjects, they did not spoon-feed us. They told us that they would only help us with those selected activities that seemed to be difficult for us.

The older boys wanted us to be independent, they wanted us to solve the problems that were presented to us, and they wanted us to be active and critical thinkers. Likewise, in his personal story piece S’phiwe Madondo, in Madondo et al. (2019), affirms that through the play of encouraging bulls to fight, in a veld during grazing, he learnt communication skills. He also describes how he learnt how to design musical instruments through his interactions with others.

In addition, in her personal story piece, Ntokozo Mkhize, in Madondo et al. (2019) affirms that play such as dancing and singing in the rain, among many others, introduced her to the “element of entertainment” (p. 22), where she learnt different communication skills and knowledge about interacting with diverse people in a community. Therefore, interactions with family, village and community members offered skills and knowledge that would be useful in the future.

I learnt from remembering these lived experiences that the older boys from our village ensured that they provided extra support with schoolwork. Furthermore, they supported our teachers by reinforcing the values taught at school, such as respect, care, empathy, loyalty, ambition, and resilience. In that manner, we were able, in a sense, to meet our teachers’ teachings halfway at school. These teachings that were instilled in us in our community, together with those developed by our teachers in teaching and learning spaces, created and maintained supportive teacher-learner relationships at school. It must have been easier for our teachers then to build supportive teacher-learner relationships with us, because we came to school rich in knowledge in terms of supportive relationships from home and our community. Therefore, all relevant stakeholders in education must work together to establish and develop supportive relationships between teachers and their learners in schools. Setlhare et al. (2016) concur that for success in schools, relationship building activity must be achieved among all stakeholders. Similarly, Veldman et al. (2013) argue that this includes “building a new niche in the changing environment” (p. 53) for all stakeholders for the achievement of positive outcomes. This can trigger high levels of engagement and subsequently lead to learners’ success in schools.

I realise that in that playground, not only were we helped and taught about school-related matters, but we were also taught about other significant life matters. Our older brothers made sure that they taught us the values of what it means to be a boy in that present time and subsequently as a man in the future – and not just an ordinary boy or man, but what it meant to be a good boy in that present time and a respectful man in the future. They instilled in us values and attitudes of care, protection, warmth, and empathy. Of course, such events occurred through the process of socialisation. I value this episode of my life because such teachings primarily involved and valued education more than anything. It taught me how to behave at school, talk with others, and, more importantly, live with and help other learners and people in general where I can. Through these encounters, I once again experienced the value of supportive relationships.

3.4 Informal conversations with selected family members in helping me to recall my memories on supportive teacher-learner relationships

3.4.1 An informal conversation with my grandmother

I invited my grandmother over for a coffee in our house yard. We sat down on her beautifully and creatively crafted carpet outside in the yard on green grass. It was around 17h00 in the afternoon, when birds and my grandmother's chickens were making some beautiful sounds as they started heading to their rest places to call it a day as the sun was setting. My grandmother is in her late sixties. She is both a Sotho- and Zulu-speaking woman. Therefore, we used both IsiZulu and SeSotho languages for smooth understanding and conducting this conversation, which I later translated into English for this research text. It is also to be noted that I chose to share some of my grandmother's words in the original language, because they better expressed a meaningful message in that way, and those are the words that she always 'sang' through my upbringing. Therefore, they were always special, and they continuously reminded me of the significance of valuing education and a hopeful future.

After explaining the focus and purpose of this research study to my grandmother, and after she understood what was expected of her and of both of us in this journey, I started to open my research portfolio. It contained my objects/artefacts, memory drawings, and journal entries as data for this research study. I then quickly picked up the Basotho traditional blanket object/artefact (Figure 3.1), my memory drawing on family emphasising the value of education through storytelling (Figure 3.2), and my memory drawing and object/artefact on engagements and learning from the village and community teachings (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

Our conversation was guided by the following prompts, which were developed in relation to the focus and purpose of this research study, and what I was seeking to explore and understand.

For my family members

1. Think back about my school days. Try to remember, in detail, teacher-learner relationships that occurred in my family, village and community settings.
2. Try to think and tell me what you can remember about those moments or events. Include as many details as you can remember.

3. Further explain these events by paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can we learn from this particular experience?

Then we started with our conversation, which is presented below.

Luthando: Granny, what comes to your mind as you are going through those materials?

Grandmother: *[After looking for some time at the materials, she then started smiling and answered.]* Ahhh *Seanamarena* (one Sotho word for the Basotho blanket). It brings back so many old memories of the past associated with mixed emotions.

Luthando: Can you please share those memories with me, granny, and include as many details as you can remember. You can also share the emotions associated with those events if you are okay with that.

[As I said this to my grandmother on the issue of sharing associated emotions, I quickly got fearful, and was unsure whether I had asked a sensitive question. I thought of issues like ‘What if the old lady shares emotional moments that I may not be able to handle and respond to them?’. As my head got stuck with that thinking, she answered my question.]

Grandmother: This blanket reminds me of many memories about your upbringing and schooling, mostly at primary school. It reminds me of how you, together with your brothers, I used to motivate you about the importance of going to school and finishing it. How I told all of you how you can change the situation at our home through education. And look at you, here you are, and you were able to do precisely as I told you. We are indeed proud.

Luthando: *[Smiling]* All thanks to you, granny, we are what we are today because of you. All your teachings and lessons indeed did not go down the drain with me.

Grandmother: This also reminds me of how important it is for us as parents to support our children on their school-related matters – no matter how illiterate one is as a parent. So that they [learners] will be able to achieve their dreams. What we were not able to accomplish during our time as parents must be achieved by our children and grandchildren, for now, there are many opportunities available, unlike in our old days.

[After about a period of a minute being quiet, she continued.]

Grandmother: Do you remember in your Grade 2 year when your class teacher sent some boys to come and collect you here at home to go for a school trip that you never prepared for? That is when I realised that you were indeed a hardworking, respecting and disciplined learner at school. Otherwise, your teacher would have not done that for you. I was so happy at this, and to me, it became a testimony that you indeed took my words and worked hard towards achieving your goals and changing our home situation.

Luthando: I can remember that day very well, granny. Both of us were sitting outside and talking, just like we are doing today; what a coincidence! My teacher really supported me on that occasion, and it was one of those events where I told myself that I really needed to continue working hard to achieve more. That event really inspired me. It taught me that teachers in school support you as a learner if you work hard, and, in addition, being humble and respecting adds as a bonus.

Grandmother: Exactly *mzukulu wami* [my grandchild]. Do you remember what happened immediately after that incident of your school trip? It was a week later, I think.

Luthando: *[After about a minute trying to think of the event that my grandmother had asked me, I could not remember, and I asked for another minute so that I could try to recall.]* No, no, no, I don't remember, granny. I have been trying to recall that memory, but I am failing to.

Grandmother: Well, I see that you can't remember. What happened is that I went to your school, to your class teacher to thank her about all the things she had done for you. Paying for you and giving you that opportunity to be part of that learning experience with other learners. She was so happy, and she told me about all the good things you were doing in your work and at school. She also later called you to join us in our conversation pertaining to your schoolwork. Therefore, I think that is how parents and teachers should build a working relationship with each other. That can make our children participate more in school, pass, and later achieve their dreams. That can also contribute to the building of supportive teacher-learner relationships.

[That is where we decided to end our informal conversation, as it was already late and starting to get dark outside. We, therefore, packed up our things and went inside the house.]

3.4.1.1 Lessons learnt from the informal conversation with my grandmother

I learnt from this informal conversation that I had with my grandmother that no matter how illiterate parents or guardians are in their respective contexts, they can still be part of their children's education. This is confirmed in S'phiwe Madondo's memory-work, in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019b), where he argues that "although my parents were illiterate, they made sure that I engaged in many writing activities such as writing invitations, short stories, and letters" (p. 139). Similarly, Pithouse-Morgan (2019) argues that although she is aware, through her students' memory-work research, that most mothers or grandmothers took an active role in supporting her students to read, what caught her eye is that parents and other family members did this while they were illiterate or semi-literate. Therefore, whatever their literacy levels, parents and other family members can support their children by motivating them on their school-related matters and through believing in them and that they can make it in life through education. This can also be done by regularly arranging meetings with their children's teachers to check their work and progress in school. In my experience, this has proved to work and is evident in my grandmother's arguments above during our informal conversation, as she acknowledged that she was illiterate, just like many other parents in our village. Still, she supported and motivated us as her grandchildren about the importance of education and how it changes lives.

My grandmother motivated us that our bright future was right in our hands. Therefore, we had the power to use education as a powerful weapon to fight poverty and change the situation in our own homes. Furthermore, she argued (as shown elsewhere in this research study) that those parents who got the opportunity to finish and further their education played a significant role as real-life examples in our village. Examples were made of them, as they showed that education was indeed a considerable weapon that one could use to change lives for the better.

Moreover, what I learnt is that teachers in schools become more interested and concerned to help and support their learners if the learners show interest and work hard towards achieving their goals (see, among others, Bosah et al., 2015; Newberry, 2013; Setlhare et al., 2016). This also includes behavioural aspects, such as being respectful and disciplined at school. This is evident in my experience. My grandmother argued that my teacher had discussed with her that it became a more straightforward process to support a learner who was respectful of both teachers and peers at school and was disciplined. More importantly, a learner who dedicated their time towards achieving their goals was appreciated and supported.

I also learnt that if parents or guardians can work closely with their children's teachers in schools, more effective relationships can be built for the benefit of a learner (see, among others, Lindo et al., 2014; Mokhele, 2006). This may subsequently lead to effective supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools. Therefore, it is vital that schools, teachers in schools, parents and all other relevant stakeholders take the lead in establishing those initiatives and relationships for the benefit of both teachers and learners. This can also lead to increased participation and engagement in both classroom- and school-related matters, and, subsequently, success in schools.

3.4.2 An informal conversation with other selected family members

Exactly after two days I had the informal conversation with my grandmother, I invited my mother, N'thabiseng (pseudonym) and her older sister Promise (pseudonym), whom I usually call my older mother. I asked them to have an informal conversation with me about the phenomenon under scrutiny. Our conversation took place at home in the kitchen, after they had finished their home duties for the day. I made sure that the discussion was held at midday before my younger sisters came back from school, so that they would not disturb us.

My mother, N'thabiseng, is literate, meaning she can both read and write everything in IsiZulu, SeSotho and English. However, she did not finish her schooling and the highest level she attained was Grade 10. My mother's older sister, Promise, can also read and write in all the languages mentioned above; she finished her schooling, and passed her matric. Both my mother and her older sister are in their mid-forties and are a year apart from each other in age.

Although our conversation was informal, it was guided by the same data generation guidelines mentioned in the above informal discussion.

After going through the same procedure as I did with my grandmother, unpacking the research focus and purpose, I then took out the same memory drawings, objects/artefacts, and journal entries that I had generated and previously shared with my grandmother. We then started with our conversation, as outlined below.

N'thabiseng: [*Laughing*] The famous Molefe homestead blanket! I really can't take my eyes off it.

Promise: Your grandmother, Lerato [a Sotho word meaning Luthando], really played a very big role in all your upbringing and education as her grandchildren during our absence.

N'thabiseng: Mhmmm, you can say that again, my sister. She really played a huge role, especially in teaching them about the importance of education and grooming them, together with the community's help, to be respectful men of tomorrow who will love and protect their families and many other people they meet.

Promise: Yes! That's absolutely correct. Speaking of the help from community members on their education, N'thabiseng, I remember how we used to ask uMaZungu [our neighbour] to stand in for us at parents' meetings and to check the progress of your work and that of your brothers when your grandmother was not okay. She really helped us by stepping in and standing in for your granny at school when she had no energy to go on her own, and she made sure that she reported back to her when she came back from school. She also reported to us when we came back from work on what had been happening in our absence. May her soul rest in peace.

Luthando: I must fully agree with you on that one. Our grandmother has been everything to us as her grandchildren and everyone else in this yard. She ensured that she supported us in both times of happiness and those of darkness. I actually have no amount of enough words to explain everything she has done for us. I am who I am today, all because of her. That woman is strong. She supported even a cat in this home!

[Everybody laughs]

Promise: She is indeed a gift from God. But one thing you must also note is that N'thabi and I also supported all of you on your school-related matters and in other areas where we were able to. Although we were not close to you because of work.

Luthando: Yes, *ngiyakhumbula mamkhulu* (I remember my older mother), and we will forever be grateful.

N'thabiseng: I remember how your teachers supported you at school, mostly during your primary school days. Most of the time, they made sure that they helped you with everything they had and sometimes it was beyond limits. When we met them in town, they told us how good your work was and how humble you were.

Promise: Don't remind me of the year when he [*referring to me*] was doing Standard 1 [*referring to Grade 3*], when his class teacher, Mrs Mngomezulu [pseudonym], bought him a dinner set for obtaining position 1 in his class.

N'thabiseng: [*Laughing*] Don't make me laugh about that incident, Promise! Of course, I remember, and that was when we were coming from work to home after we had been gone for two months that time, he came to us running very fast while he had a coffee mug and a plate in both his hands.

Promise: Wait! What followed was that he fell and broke his new plate before he even reached us. He was so excited about his new gift from his teacher.

[*Everybody laughs*]

Luthando: [*Still laughing*] Really? Is that so? I broke that plate?

Promise: Yes, you were so over the moon. Luckily you had three left because it was a dinner set. It was a 16-piece dinner set. I am sure that you told yourself that you were going to show us your gift first thing when we come back from work.

Luthando: [*Smiling*] I don't remember that incident very well. But what I can remember is that precious gift, a dinner set I got from Mrs Mngomezulu. It made me work even harder than before – it really motivated me. It also encouraged me, but it also motivated my classmates, as I was given it in front of them. I remember how everybody worked hard to improve their marks in the next quarter because of that incident.

[*After a few minutes we ended our conversation.*]

3.4.2.1 Lessons learnt from the informal conversation with my other selected family members

I picked up and learnt from this informal conversation that other family members, other than parents or guardians, can play a vital role in supporting children in both their home- and school-related matters. They remain part and parcel of the process (see, among others, Garcia-Moya et al., 2019). This is evident in the case above, where our neighbour uMaZungu was asked to stand in for us at school on behalf of my grandmother as our registered parent. In that way, we were not left behind, and we were updated on our school-related matters through her help. Such actions can increase supportive relationships within communities, leading to supportive relationships on school-related matters.

Furthermore, I learnt that if learners are applauded and praised for their hard work and dedication in schools, it can lead to them walking the extra mile in achieving more accolades (see, among others, Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017; Van Praag et al., 2017). For example, this is evident in my case where I was gifted with a dinner set by my Grade 2 teacher for obtaining position 1 in the whole class. This achievement motivated me to excel even more in my schoolwork, and many other achievements subsequently followed. It also encouraged and inspired many other learners in our class. Therefore, they worked hard on themselves and their schoolwork, and they later improved in their results. Consequently, I argue that praising and applauding learners for their quality achievements and attempts can make them eager to participate and engage in school activities. Subsequently, their academic outcomes can improve.

3.5 Reflection

From my memory-work and the informal discussions, I have understood that the cultural and social contexts in which we live play a significant role in shaping who we are in the present, and subsequently, who we are becoming in the future. As a learner, they shaped me to realise that the power is right in my hands through the value of education to positively influence my future and that of significant others.

First, by understanding and accepting your socio-economic background and all other motivations and inspirations passed from one generation to the next by elderly people and significant others in our families, villages and communities, one can realise what is it that one needs to work towards achieving. Second, my grandmother's and other family members' teachings and lessons – which repeatedly emphasised the value of education and how it changes lives and one's situation – made me work hard towards achieving my goals and changing my situation and that of my family and significant others. Hence, I have come to an understanding that those we interact with, in our daily routines of living in our respective contexts, shape us in one way or the other as we grow and picture a more hopeful future in our lives.

The most valuable discoveries about myself as a learner are that I have always stayed true to myself in remembering and putting into practice what I was taught by family, village and community members and teachers at school, such as respect, dedication, perseverance and working hard to achieve my future dreams and goals. I have learnt that my poor background

and upbringing have always acted as one of the motivating factors for me to work hard to change my life and those of my family and significant others. Furthermore, it has and continues to be a motivating factor and a stepping stone for me to achieve my future goals and dreams. Moreover, I have learnt that the values and attitudes we gain from our respective homes and communities, which we bring to school as learners, can play a significant role in influencing what we do and what we aim for.

The new insights I have gained about supportive teacher-learner relationships are that they can happen in any place and outside the ‘official’ learning spaces, as long as teachers and learners have a mutual understanding of working together towards making them a reality. Furthermore, I have discovered that a supportive teacher-learner relationship involves parents or guardians and other relevant stakeholders as partners in education instead of being objects waiting to be instructed and directed. Moreover, I have discovered that all relevant stakeholders in education need to develop practical ideas and thoughts that are negotiable in building and maintaining supportive teacher-learner relationships in spaces of learning. This means that the initiatives will apply to and be workable for all relevant stakeholders in education, with mutual understanding and engagement underpinning those initiatives and relationships.

What I am still struggling to understand about supportive teacher-learner relationships is how they will be built in schools that may not want to involve the parents and communities in which they are situated to be part of what happens in schools. These are schools where parents and other relevant stakeholders are not given a chance to voice their thoughts and ideas on the development of schools and their involvement with them (see, among others, National School Climate Council, 2015). I am also still struggling to understand what schools can do to encourage parents and guardians in communities where many parents and guardians still isolate themselves from the schools and do not appear to want to be part of their children’s education process.

This memory-work writing assisted me in understanding that learners in schools bring different lived home and community experiences that have shaped their learning in different ways. This subsequently tells me that they bring different socio-economic backgrounds and physical and intellectual abilities, among other things, which requires me as a teacher to engage and come up with different strategies in supporting them to reach their full potential and goals. Furthermore, this memory-work will allow me to discover what I can learn in working with others, so that I can explore different options for helping my learners at school and, where

applicable, refer them to others to get all the help they need may require. In that way, I think supportive teacher-learner relationships can be established and maintained to achieve success and well-being for all learners in spaces of learning.

This memory writing has assisted me in understanding that social and cultural influences play a significant role in shaping learners' practices in schools. I have come to a deeper understanding of how social and cultural influences hold such rich knowledge in influencing who we are and who we are becoming in the present and in the future. The practices that learners bring with them in the school setting are derived from their social and cultural upbringings and engagements. Therefore, as teachers in schools, we need to understand how we can acknowledge and integrate them with the formal learning from school to create meaningful education for all learners, moving from the 'known' to the 'unknown'. In that way supportive teacher-learner relationships can be established and kept alive in the learning environment.

Learning from this memory-work writing can inform my future learning and practice as a teacher. I aim to create an enabling environment for all learners, irrespective of the differences they bring with them, in both the classroom and school setting. This will allow them to realise their potential and reach their goals. In that way, when my learners think about me in the future, I want them to think about a teacher who showed them love, care, support and empathy, and who was approachable in manner and always made their voices feel heard.

Lastly, I have put a sociocultural theoretical understanding into use in this memory-work. This helped me look back at the broader social, cultural and historical contexts in examining my own personal experiences, concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey. I did not see individuals as isolated beings and empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge but instead focused on the relationships between the self and significant others. I was able to look back, in detail, at how these relationships contributed to my development and how they continue doing so in the present time and subsequently shall do so in the future (see, among others, Allman, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Steyn, 2011). Miller (2011) argues that a sociocultural perspective portrays the dynamic of a child acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes from the society in which the child lives. In turn, the child shapes the environment. Putting this perspective to use shaped my learning from recalling my memories.

3.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to engage with and respond to my two research questions simultaneously. I did this by unpacking my family, village, and community memories, using memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, and informal conversations with selected family members to help me recall and re-examine my memories.

In achieving this chapter's purpose, I started by setting the scene, where I described and later deliberated on my home support. This is where I scrutinised the importance of going to school through the Basotho blanket object/artefact discussion. I followed this by discussing my family, emphasising the value of education through storytelling by my memory drawing, and presenting my learnings from the memory drawing. I then considered the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which says "I am, because we are" in deliberating on the support I received from community members in engagements and community teachings. I unpacked this through a memory drawing. I employed a playground artefact/object to consider the supportive relationships in the community playground. This is where I characterised the playground as both a playing area and a critical space for learning. Lastly, I entered into informal conversations with my selected family members to help me recall and reflect on my memories concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. I then delved into lessons learnt from those informal discussions.

From remembering my personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships, I learnt that parents or guardians can play a vital role in supporting their children to see the value of education. Relatedly, Mokhele (2006) affirms that teachers who maintain good teacher-learner relationships involve parents, learner peers and other relevant stakeholders in the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, what I learnt through recalling the emphasis on the value of education through customary family and community activities, such as storytelling time, is that these taught me skills such as listening attentively and learning oral communication through the exchange of ideas and thoughts and information. These also taught me various problem-solving skills regarding the complicated issues often presented before us as children. In researching the educational value of family storytelling, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) argue that "remembering and storytelling can come together as evocative learning resources, through which teacher-researchers and others can engage with personal insights and culturally imbued ways of knowing and being" (p. 171). This means that recalling our experiences of customary family

and community activities can allow us to understand the meanings that are personally, culturally and socially embedded in us.

Supportive relationships with our families, village and community give us a positive mindset and energy that it is through education that we can change our situations for the better in future, as well as those of our families and many other people we interact with. For example, the older boys from our village ensured that they provided extra support for our schoolteachers by helping us with schoolwork. Furthermore, they supported our teachers by instilling the values taught at school, such as respect, care, empathy, loyalty, ambition, and resilience. In that manner, we met our teachers' teachings halfway at school. Through the teachings instilled in us in our community, together with those developed by our schoolteachers, supportive teacher-learner relationships were created and maintained in and outside of school.

The supportive relationships we have with our families, village and community play a significant role in shaping who we are and who we are becoming in the process and in future. They lay a foundation for what we aim to do in schools in our interactions with our own teachers and significant others. Furthermore, they play an essential role in establishing supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools, as they help learners realise their purpose in schools and work towards achieving it.

Finally, the memory-work presented in this chapter helped me as a teacher-researcher to learn, in more detail, why it is vital to establish and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships in families, villages and communities. This is important for children or learners to realise their potential and subsequently to achieve their goals in spaces of learning. Furthermore, it helped me realise how rich in knowledge the supportive relationships that are developed in our respective homes with family, friends, and many other people we meet in our daily routines of living and interacting with and in society at large. I have become more mindful of how the values and attitudes that underpin these relationships need to be taken care of and kept alive all the time.

In the next chapter, I continue to respond to my two research questions, recounting my primary and high school memories concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

LEARNING FROM MY PERSONAL LIVED EXPERIENCES CONCERNING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS: UNPACKING MY PRIMARY SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL MEMORIES

4.1 Introduction

This research study is a personal narrative inquiry regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. In the previous chapter, I began to respond to my two research questions. I looked back at my past experiences regarding supportive relationships, both inside and outside the school environment, with my family members, teachers, and friends. I shared the stories of my experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village, and community settings. These were informal teacher-learner relationships, where family, village and community members took on an informal teaching role in the society. My own memory stories were followed by a presentation of my learning through informal discussions with my selected family members. Lastly, I presented a reflection of my overall learning from the memory-work presented in the chapter. From this memory-work, I learnt that the social and cultural contexts in which we live play a significant role in shaping who are we in the present and who are we subsequently becoming in the future. Furthermore, I learnt that family and community members with varying levels of formal education could play a vital role in planting a positive idea in children's minds that education has the power to change their lives for the better. These family and community members can also play a vital role in personifying and enhancing supportive teacher-learner relationships.

I continue to respond to my two research questions in this chapter. The stories shared in this chapter are those of my experiences concerning supportive (and, at times, unsupportive) teacher-learner relationships in primary and high school settings. My own memory stories are then followed by a presentation of my learning through informal discussions with my selected primary school and high school friends. Lastly, I reflect on my overall learning from the memory-work in this chapter.

4.2 Unpacking my primary school teacher-learner relationships and learning from them

4.2.1 First-time engagement with writing: Learning the basics through vowels and consonants

The memory drawing presented in Figure 4.1 depicts my experiences of how I started to embark on a journey of engaging with pen and paper through learning and writing about vowels and consonants. Knight et al. (2015) argue that drawing offers us the capacity to visually record experiences and thoughts. Therefore, through drawing, in this case, I documented how my experiences of first learning and writing about consonants and vowels unfolded. As CohenMiller (2018) highlighted, “memory drawings or other art forms created by participants [and researchers] can help provide a way for individuals to think about, reflect, and actually see their experiences” (p. 6). Memory drawing provided space for me to think more deeply about my experiences as I reflect on them and in relation to others.



Figure 4.1: My memory drawing on first-time engagement with writing: Learning the basics through vowels and consonants.

I started my primary school education with Grade R in 2002 in the Umzinyathi District in northern KZN. The language of teaching and learning (LoTL) in the school was English for Grades 4–7 and IsiZulu home language for Grades R–3. The predominant home language in the community was IsiZulu. The school was located in a rural area with dusty roads surrounded by rocky mountains that sometimes were covered in snow in winter. The school had limited teaching and learning resources. It had only one small library full of old books, although they were still in good condition and were still being used. Each learner had their own book supplied by the school, and in cases where there were not enough books, they were shared by pairs and in rare instances by three children.

There were no science or computer laboratories; therefore, we did not do any Science and/or Technology practicals or experiments. Most classrooms in the school were in good condition and had a few resources displayed, such as charts and posters. The school was overcrowded, and each class had an average of 40–50 learners. The paid school fees were a mere R50 per year. This disadvantaged the school, as it could not buy the necessary material resources. Moreover, many learners who attended the school were from poor socio-economic backgrounds, with just one or none of the parents or guardians working. Many families and learners depended on social grants received from the national government. Despite all of the challenges mentioned above, the school produced good academic results.

I remember vividly when I embarked on my Grade 1 education in 2003. Coming from Grade R the previous year, I still did not know how to write my name in my exercise book, just like any other learner in our class who was coming from the previous class or starting school. The only thing I knew was how to pick my name and surname out of a basket full of other learners' names and surnames, as we had been taught in the previous grade.

Our Grade 1 teacher, Mrs Mostoeneng (pseudonym), gave us a warm welcome in her first class. She told us that we would start to learn about vowels and consonants. She always emphasised that “the teaching profession is more than just about teaching” – it was also about building positive and supportive relationships with your learners in school and all the other persons you meet on the school premises and outside. Explaining this in a child-friendly way, she meant that she was tasked with teaching us and taking care of us as her learners and her children at school. Since there were about 45 children in our class (if I remember rightly), she told us that first, she wanted to learn our names and surnames. During the first lesson in her class and every other lesson that followed, for about a month or so, she would call us alphabetically to make a

circle around her table in groups of 10, together with our exercise books, and she taught us the writing and pronunciation of vowels and consonants.

As I remember, the teaching and learning of vowels and consonants took about one month or so, and by that time, Mrs Motsoeneng knew all of us by our names and surnames. She no longer needed a class register to remind her or confirm our names. By that time, she already knew all our individual strengths and weaknesses as her learners in her class. Through this period, in terms of teaching and learning and going forward, we learnt in a different format and with different strategies and paces. I was one of the most competent learners in class, together with a few friends I had made and a few other learners in our class. We were the ones who were ahead in terms of curriculum coverage, and numbered only six, if I remember it correctly. All of the other learners were behind us, but at different stages and paces regarding curriculum coverage. That is how things were done in Grade 1. As a learner, you moved to the following stage of the curriculum coverage only when you were confirmed as ready to do so and had developed and gained enough knowledge and skills necessary for that stage.

Now those who were ahead and at moderate stages of curriculum coverage did not make a circle around the table of the teacher anymore. Things had changed: they needed average or less support from the teacher. Although that was the case, we were fully supported in our own and unique way. This time around, the teacher gave more support to learners struggling to grasp Grade 1 relevant concepts or the curriculum of English first additional language, IsiZulu home language, Numeracy and Life Skills. They are the ones who continued making a circle around the teacher's table. As a teacher myself now, looking back, I think that by doing this Mrs Motsoeneng wanted to pay full attention to them and carefully trace their progress. Therefore, with careful attention paid to each of us and with different strategies for her learners, we all made progress, although at different paces.

There were two Grade 1 classes in our school that year; Mrs Blose (pseudonym) was the other Grade 1 teacher. Another strategy that Mrs Motsoeneng used is that sometimes she would call Mrs Blose to come and teach us in our class, and in return, Mrs Motsoeneng would go into Mrs Blose's class to teach her learners. One thing I noticed at the time and through my process of moving from one grade to the next was that although Mrs Blose had her own unique way of facilitating the process of teaching, at some points, she used the same teaching strategies as our class teacher Mrs Motsoeneng. Mrs Blose was also observant and supportive, just like Mrs Motsoeneng. Moreover, many learners benefitted from changing teaching classes, and their

work improved. I also benefitted, as I was learning more. Hearing a different voice and observing another way of doing things helped us learn in different ways and allowed us to extend our teacher-learner relationships.

From recalling this time in my life, I learnt that it is vital that teachers establish and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships early on. This can be done by teachers presenting themselves as being approachable, in the process showing care, equal respect, and giving their learners voices to express themselves in their classrooms. This can also be done through teachers presenting themselves as individual beings who fully understand that the teaching profession is not only about teaching, but about recognising that other factors are attached to it, such as establishing and promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships (see, among others, Bojuwoye et al., 2014; Bosah, 2015). This is evident in my discussion above as expressed in Mrs Motsoeneng's words that "the teaching profession is more than just about teaching", and her actions. She acknowledged that many factors are attached to the teaching and learning process. She not only theorised what she narrated, but also practised it as she supported all of her learners with their different intellectual ability, strengths, and weaknesses.

Second, the other thing I learnt, and that is emerging through remembering this experience, is that teachers must explore and put into use different strategies in supporting their diverse learners. This can make all learners feel equal, cared for and appreciated by their teachers. Subsequently, it can make learners take the initiative in responding positively to their teachers' actions, allowing them to realise their potential and leading to their success stories.

Furthermore, inviting a different voice in facilitating the teaching and learning process can help expand supportive teacher-learner relationships (see, among others, Gracia-Moya et al., 2019; National School Climate Council, 2015). This is evident in the discussion above, where Mrs Motsoeneng invited Mrs Blose into her class. Mrs Motsoeneng did the same in return. Although according to my memories, they used some different strategies at times, they both built constructive relationships with the children. Therefore, I have become aware that inviting a different voice into a classroom or school can enhance learners' academic engagement and confidence.

4.2.2 A teacher understanding learners' socio-economic backgrounds

The journal entry presented below in Figure 4.2 depicts one of the best memories of my Grade 2 journey in 2004 regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. I wrote this journal entry because I recalled how my teacher used to go the extra mile in supporting us as her learners. She not only helped us with school-related matters, but took her time to ask about outside matters that defined who we were and that affected us, such as our intellectual ability and socio-economic background.

As explained in Chapter Two of this dissertation, through journaling, we can describe our experiences as a means of recalling them in detail. And, as Pennebaker (1991) states, writing in a journal can help us express our innermost feelings. Through writing a journal entry (Figure 4.2), I remembered, in detail, how our school had planned a trip for all Foundation Phase learners (excluding Grade R) early in 2004. (My grandmother also recalled this incident in our informal conversation presented in Chapter Three.) The journal entry shown in Figure 4.2 was prompted by an informal conversation I had with my grandmother, as discussed earlier in Chapter Three. Although the event unpacked was and is still one of the most remarkable experiences in my life, or perhaps in my primary school memories, I did not initially remember all the details associated with the event as it happened a long time ago when I was doing Grade 2. Therefore, having some light shed by my grandmother in this manner is what prompted me to write a journal entry. I wanted to discover, in detail, what it meant for me and to get some of the learnings from the experience.

The place that the school was planning to visit was over 100km from our town. Parents were informed early on about this event through ordinary parents' meetings, followed by written letters as reminders of the anticipated trip. I did not even bother to discuss my interest in that school trip with my family because I knew exactly where I was coming from. I knew my background, and my family could not afford to pay for such a trip. I remember one day when my mother's older sister asked me whether I was going with the school or not. I knew precisely that she was asking – not because she wanted to pay for me, but because she wanted to see if I had an interest in going with the school or not. She was not working, and I did not expect much from her because I understood her situation. Months and months passed, and the big day finally arrived for those who had paid to undertake the school trip. The day before the big day, teachers informed us that those who were not going on the school trip – including myself – should not bother coming to school the following day, because no teaching or learning was going to occur. We did not go to school the next day, as communicated.

27 August 2021 (Friday)
It was 2004 in Grade 2 and I remember the school had planned a trip for foundation phase. I did not bother myself about it because I knew my parents could not afford. On the day of the trip, those who were not going were told not to come to school. I indeed did so. To my surprise, it was around 09:00 in the morning when the group of 3 boys came home. They told my grandmother and I that my class teacher said I must bath quickly and take all the things I will need for the trip because I was going. For a moment I was surprised and happy at the same time. The boys waited for me and we did go to school after some time. My class teacher supported me because she knew that I was the smartest kid in her class and she understood my background.

Figure 4.2: My journal entry on my Grade 2 teacher understanding my socio-economic background.

It was around 09h00 in the morning on the big day of the school trip when a group of three boys entered my home premises. They were dressed to kill! Those three boys were my classmates. I was surprised at seeing them at my home, because I knew they had paid and were supposed to be on the school trip. They addressed both my grandmother and me, saying that our Grade 2 class teacher, Miss Mnikathi (pseudonym), had requested me, with my grandmother's permission, to quickly get ready and come to school, because the teacher had paid for me and I was now going with them. As the boys were waiting outside for me, I quickly prepared myself, having a conversation with my grandmother. As I got ready, it was with mixed feelings and emotions. I was still surprised that my teacher would pay for me and ask me to go with them, while I was also so excited about it. The boys waited patiently until I was ready, and we quickly rushed to school. I did not have any expensive clothes like them, but I was proud that I wore spotless clothes that my grandmother had bought within the year. I was happy with the clean clothes I had, and they meant everything to me.

After we arrived at school, my teacher Miss Mnikathi had a short conversation with me before we left on the school trip. She wore a beautiful smile on her face now that I had finally made it to the school and that the boys were able to come back with me. She told me that as one of the most competent and most respectful learners in her class, she found it very difficult to leave me behind. She emphasised that she understood my socio-economic background, and therefore she could not let it act as a disadvantage. She repeatedly motivated me, stating that the power was right in my hands to change the situation I was facing at home, through education. She emphasised the importance of education and how it changed her own life and that of her family. She related that she faced precisely the same situation as many other learners and me in our class and school when she was growing up. She told me that she used the same education that I was getting as a weapon to fight poverty, to change her situation and that of her own family – and by extension of her own community – for the better.

Through engaging with this one episode in my life, I saw the value of teachers going the extra mile, beyond their learners' academic needs. This means being informed about the internal (academic) matters that their learners face and the external (non-academic) matters. This is evident in how my Grade 2 teacher made it her duty to inquire about other related issues, other than academics, which defined who we were as her learners at school. She made it her everyday task to understand the socio-economic backgrounds we faced. This also made it easy to approach and talk to her about many issues that affected our learning. This led to the opening of an enabling space, where learners could share matters of any sort with their teacher that affected them (see, among others, Mensah & Koomson, 2020). Miss Mnikathi established and maintained positive teacher-learner relationships, characterised by warmth, care, and empathy.

4.2.3 “This is how it is done”: My Grade 5 teacher showing me how to use a gardening fork in a garden

My primary school teachers believed so much in agriculture that they even sang about it. They also made us sing those songs in assembly sometimes, or when there were agricultural events at our school. They believed in the school eating its own vegetables grown by both teachers and learners. Each day, in the morning or during break time, boys would be instructed to take care of the garden by watering it, and on Fridays by doing more work in taking care of it. This was done interchangeably by different classes in our school from Grade 4 to 7. It was an official schedule, and everybody knew about it. It became the culture of the school. Exceptions were only made on Friday, where all boys would be required to take great care of the school gardens.

Our school had four sizes of gardens situated in the school yard and between classroom block buildings. Additionally, it had one big garden at the back of the school yard. As boys, we knew that it was our duty to care for the school gardens, and nobody had to remind us. It was an added, hidden curriculum for us. Boostrom (2010) highlights that “hidden curriculum refers to student learning that is not described by curriculum planners or teachers as an explicit aim of instruction even though it results from deliberate practices and organizational structures” (p. 439). This means what we were asked to do was not prescribed in the curriculum books, but our teachers intentionally organised it. Other examples of the hidden curriculum may include the issue of creating a cleaning roster for both girls and boys in schools (see the discussion in Figure 4.6 below). Each class knew precisely when it was their turn to take care of the school gardens, and we did so with care and love because we were used to it.

Furthermore, at times we learners were required to carry 2-litre bottles full of water from the taps at our respective homes, when there was no water at all available at school. The water we carried was used to take care of the school gardens and used by the ‘aunties’ in the school kitchen to cook food for us. Moreover, we were also required to bring the traditional manure, called *ubulongwe* (the cows’ dung), to fertilise the school gardens. The good thing about this is that it was not bought from anywhere; we took it from our own respective homes. For those of us who had no cows, we asked for dung from our neighbours, extended family and friends who did have cows. This is how they supported us. This is another example of where supportive relationships were informally instilled in me. One other option was that, where necessary, we would go to the cows’ grazing field that I discussed in Chapter Three (Figure 3.4) to collect the cows’ dung. Although all this at times caused stress for our parents – as they argued that our school could be so demanding sometimes – they supported us to the best of their ability and knowledge. This also made our teachers support us even more and helped build those supportive teacher-learner relationships. They knew that many of us listened to them and did all the activities required us to do.

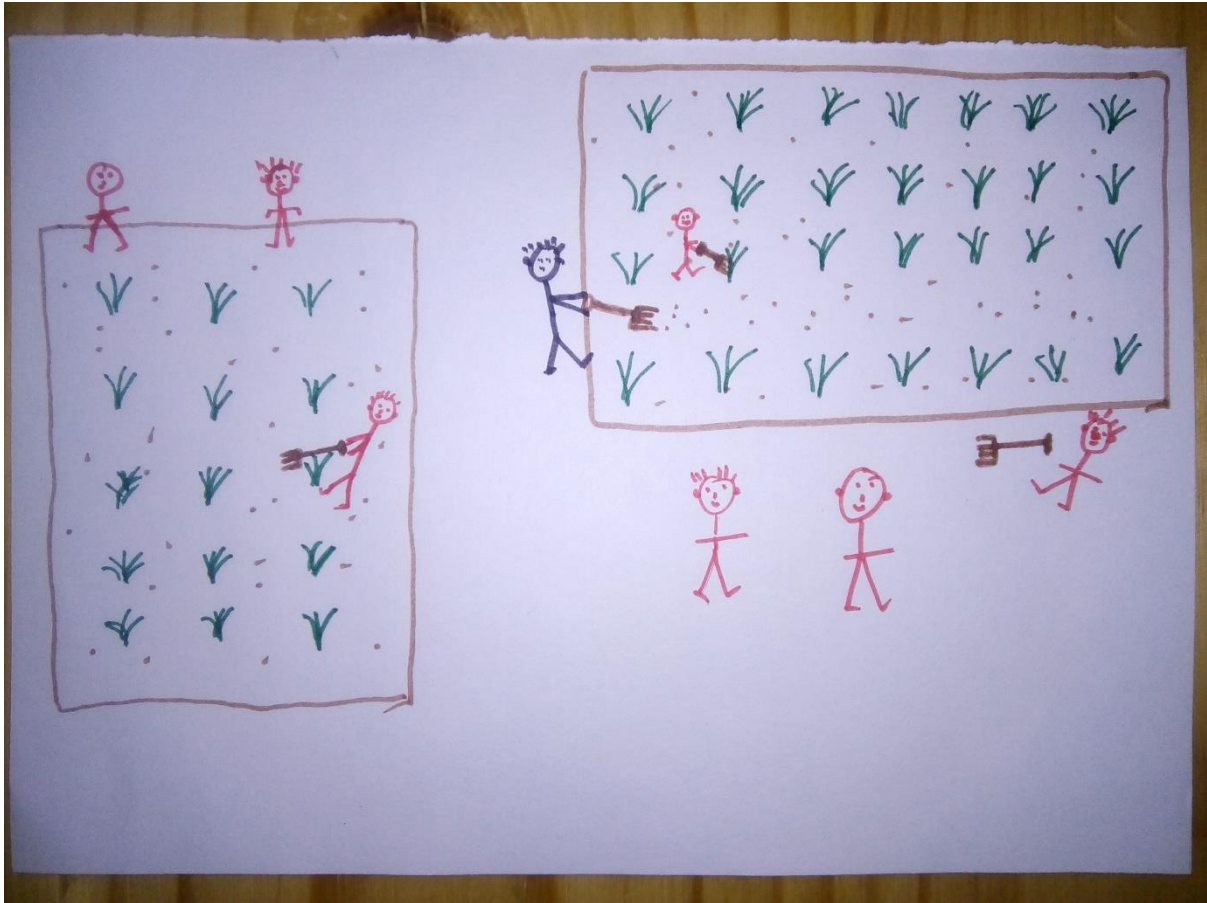


Figure 4.3: A memory drawing of my primary school garden work.

The memory drawing presented above (Figure 4.3) depicts my Grade 5 experiences in a school garden. It shows how my teacher used to teach me how the garden fork is used. It was 2007, and I was tiny, little and short at that time. I was still a mere child, and was considered ‘weak and vulnerable’ in terms of physical appearance. Although a few other boys in my class had almost the same body size, I was smaller than all of them. Although there was only a slight difference between us, it was me who they saw as ‘worse’. Many of the boys I was with in class were older than me and the other three boys who were about my size. These older boys had repeated grades. In most cases, they did not bother sharing equal roles with me and the few other boys in class who were almost my size. They did most of the work that needed to be done and were happy about it. I felt that they wanted to show their ‘strong and bold’ physique. Therefore, they gave me and the other three boys duties that they considered as on par with our bodily stature.

One day, during gardening hours, we were with our teacher who monitored our work as we took care of the school’s central garden. It was our Grade 5 schedule for the day. After over 30

minutes of our teacher observing us working in the garden, she called me and the other three boys who were almost my size aside. She said she wanted to have a small conversation with us. She told us that she wanted to teach us how to use a big fork in the garden and how it worked. She emphasised that she did not want us to be perfect, but she wanted us to learn and take it step by step. The next thing that I vividly remember is her next to me, demonstrating how the fork was used in the garden and how I should also use it. She carried out the process carefully and at a very slow pace for me to grasp it. I remember her saying, “This is how it is done”.

As it was my turn to do as she said, I took the fork with confidence – although my hands were trembling a little, because the eyes of all of the other ‘old’ boys were on me. They wanted to see whether I would do an excellent job, like I always did when it came to my books in class. I did not want to fail. I did not want them to see me as a failure and be considered as a ‘weak’ boy. (Of course, we had learnt this gender stereotyping through socialisation in our communities and societies, and we automatically entered class with that knowledge. Whether it was directly or indirectly, intentionally, or unintentionally, it was the case.) I did not do the excellent job I was known for in class, but I did my best considering my physical structure compared to the size of the garden fork. I did what was equal to my physique. My teacher was impressed by this. The other boys followed suit, did the task justice, and did what matched their physical appearance.

Our teacher continuously supported us throughout this garden project for the whole year she was with us as our class teacher. She was impressed with the progress we had made, and she gained much confidence in us. But the focus was more on myself, as I was considered as ‘the smallest among them all’. She supported me throughout this process, and I gained so much confidence and my self-esteem increased. My teacher equipped me with relevant skills that I used at school and applied at home and in other areas where applicable. Education then became relevant to the issues and challenges I came across in real-life situations.

By remembering this experience concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships, I learnt that teachers in schools can serve as a mirror to reflect skills and support that their students look up to. Their students can gain self-confidence and increased self-esteem through the support they give them (see, among others, Naicker et al., 2017). This is evident in my discussion above, where I argued that through the support offered to the other three boys and me at school through the training project in the garden, I was able to gain self-confidence and

my self-esteem increased. I was able to believe in myself that I could make it, through the support that I received from my teacher. Furthermore, I can now see how the support directed at learners by their teachers in schools can disrupt traditional and fixed beliefs that a particular group may or may not be able to complete a specific task. This is evident in the discussion where I mentioned that through being looked down upon and judged by my body physique, I was considered ‘weak and vulnerable’, and unable to complete specific tasks that I needed to do or had been asked to engage with. Thus, to my surprise and through believing in myself, I was able to complete it when I was tasked with the work that many had believed I could not do. Moreover, I can see the value of teachers in schools allowing themselves to observe their learners’ behaviours and what they are doing, so that they will be able to trace their progress. This can help teachers to get to know more about their learners.

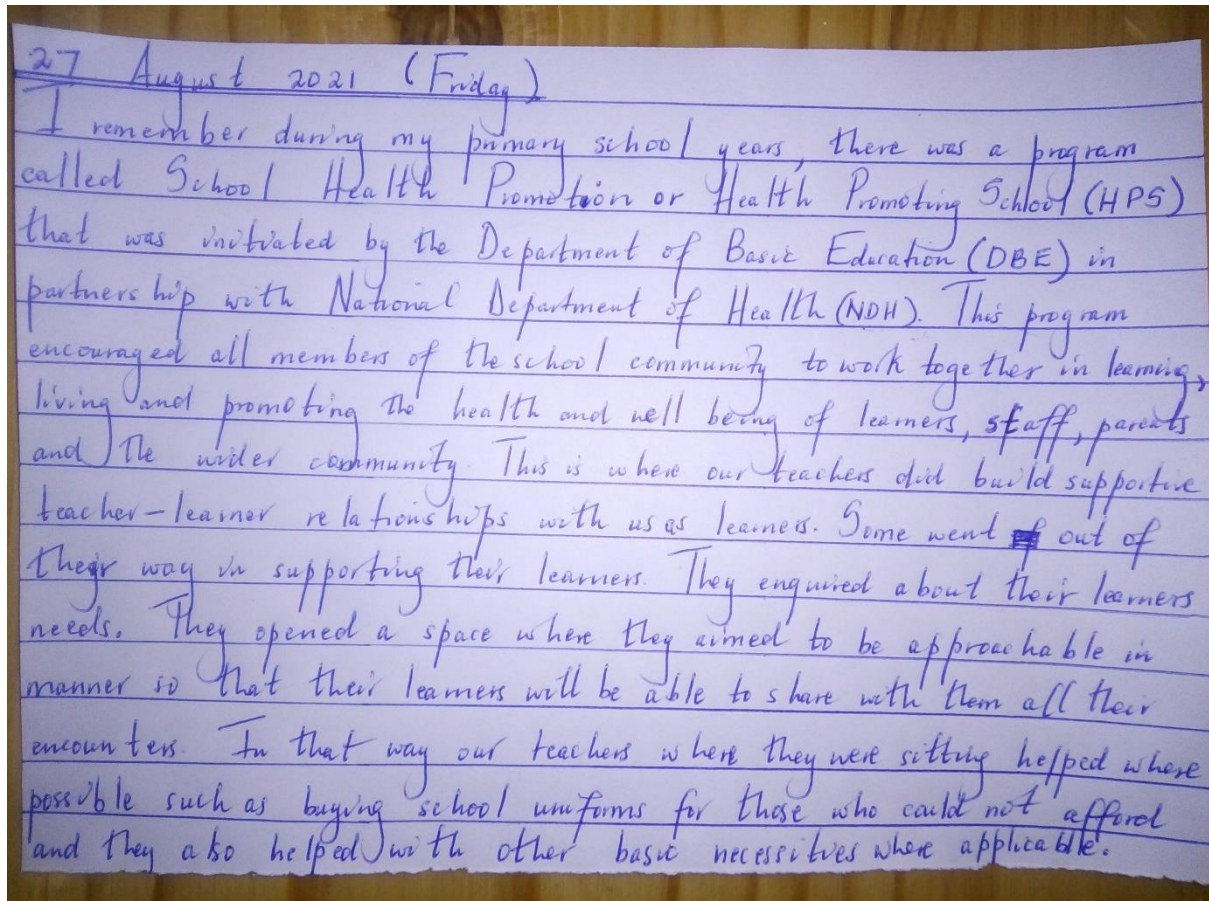
This memory also showed me that it is important that teachers take the initiative to teach their learners knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are not only applicable in the classroom or school context, but also to their everyday knowledge and the realities they face, to make a significant impact on their lives (see, among others, Mensah & Koomson, 2020). This was evident in my teacher equipping me with gardening knowledge and skills that I used at school, which became relevant to my everyday life as I used them in our garden at home. Furthermore, gardening instilled values and attitudes that I still use in my daily life. I believe that education should be about changing people’s lives for the better, and it must be relevant to the realities they face on the ground every day. This recollection showed me how supportive teacher-learner relationships in school can play a fundamental part in this project.

4.2.4 School health promotion: Extending and building on supportive teacher-learner relationships

The journal entry presented below in Figure 4.4 related to supportive teacher-learner relationships in my primary school concerning health promotion. As I wrote this journal entry, I remembered and pictured how my primary school teachers, through the health-promotion initiative, used to care for us as learners in an individual and collective capacity.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE), in partnership with the National Department of Health (NDoH), in 2008 launched a Health Promoting School (HPS) or School Health Promotion programme (DBE, 2008). This initiative aimed to promote the health and well-being of school learners, teachers and support staff, parents, and other community members. I believe

this was intended to promote effective teaching and learning by addressing health and social problems. Furthermore, I think it was designed to address barriers to learning and promote successful learning.



27 August 2021 (Friday)
I remember during my primary school years, there was a program called School Health Promotion or Health Promoting School (HPS) that was initiated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in partnership with National Department of Health (NDH). This program encouraged all members of the school community to work together in learning, living and promoting the health and well being of learners, staff, parents and the wider community. This is where our teachers did build supportive teacher-learner relationships with us as learners. Some went ~~of~~ out of their way in supporting their learners. They enquired about their learners needs. They opened a space where they aimed to be approachable in manner so that their learners will be able to share with them all their encounters. In that way our teachers where they were sitting helped where possible such as buying school uniforms for those who could not afford and they also helped with other basic necessities where applicable.

Figure 4.4: My journal entry on my primary school extending and building on supportive teacher-learner relationships.

Since this programme required active and critical engagement from all school members and the wider community, but especially from teachers and learners, it gave our teachers an opportunity to build supportive teacher-learner relationships. I remember how, through this programme, my Grade 6 and 7 teachers in their respective classrooms used to call upon those they saw as needier first to help them with their basic needs before they dealt with others. The basic necessities provided included school uniforms, sanitary packs and toiletry packs, among other things. The teachers carried out this process creatively and sensitively. They privately called learners to address and help them. Furthermore, our teachers went beyond the resources that the school had to offer in terms of helping us as their learners. The school resources were not always enough to assist every needy learner. At times our teachers would even use their own money to help those learners that really needed their help as their ‘second parents’. They

chose to approach these issues in this way so that learners did not feel embarrassed in the process.

Being helped by a teacher did not only include being given material things – talking to us was sometimes the one thing we needed most. I was one of those learners who were helped through talking. I remember how, in those years, 2008 and 2009 respectively, my teachers used to call me during break times to have those unofficial conversations with me. The discussions were full of laughter, cracking of jokes and talking generally. They asked about issues that did not form part of the school processes and operations. They asked about my home situation and circumstances and whether I needed any help from them. They did this because they cared for us. They did this because they cared for me. Having those unofficial conversations with my teachers played a crucial role for me, as it made me become open and built supportive teacher-learner relationships. Furthermore, through the engagement with different activities under the umbrella of the HPS initiative, inside and outside of the classroom atmosphere, our teachers, together with us as learners got the opportunity to be open and have our voices heard. The programme was a success, and it gave birth to many successful, positive interactions and critical engagements. For example, it created a safe, social, and healthy environment for teaching, learning, and living. Moreover, it strengthened the interaction between the school and the surrounding community.

I learnt from recalling this episode of my lived experience that positive teacher-learner relationships can be achieved through teachers creating thoughtful, active and interactive initiatives with their learners. Engagement with initiatives that put under scrutiny learners' internal matters (academic) and include their external matters (non-academic) can promote more interaction between teachers and their learners, and hence promote supportive teacher-learner relationships (Mensah & Koomson, 2020). Furthermore, teachers can build supportive relationships with their learners by presenting themselves as approachable and showing empathy, love, and care (Bosah et al., 2015). This can subsequently lead to learners taking the initiative to be open, voicing their opinions, ideas, and thoughts matters affecting their learning and lives.

4.2.5 Playground: Building supportive teacher-learner relationships through play

The visual journaling presented in Figure 4.5 depicts my experiences of how I was supported by my teacher as a small boy in Grade 7, together with others, on the soccer field through play.

I engaged with this visual journaling activity to depict how I was able to gain confidence in participating in extramural activities through the support I received from my teacher. As explained in Chapter Two, visual journaling is a creative process of turning inward and visually portraying your own feelings, thoughts and events that have been part of your life, intending to understand them better and in detail (Scott Shields, 2016).

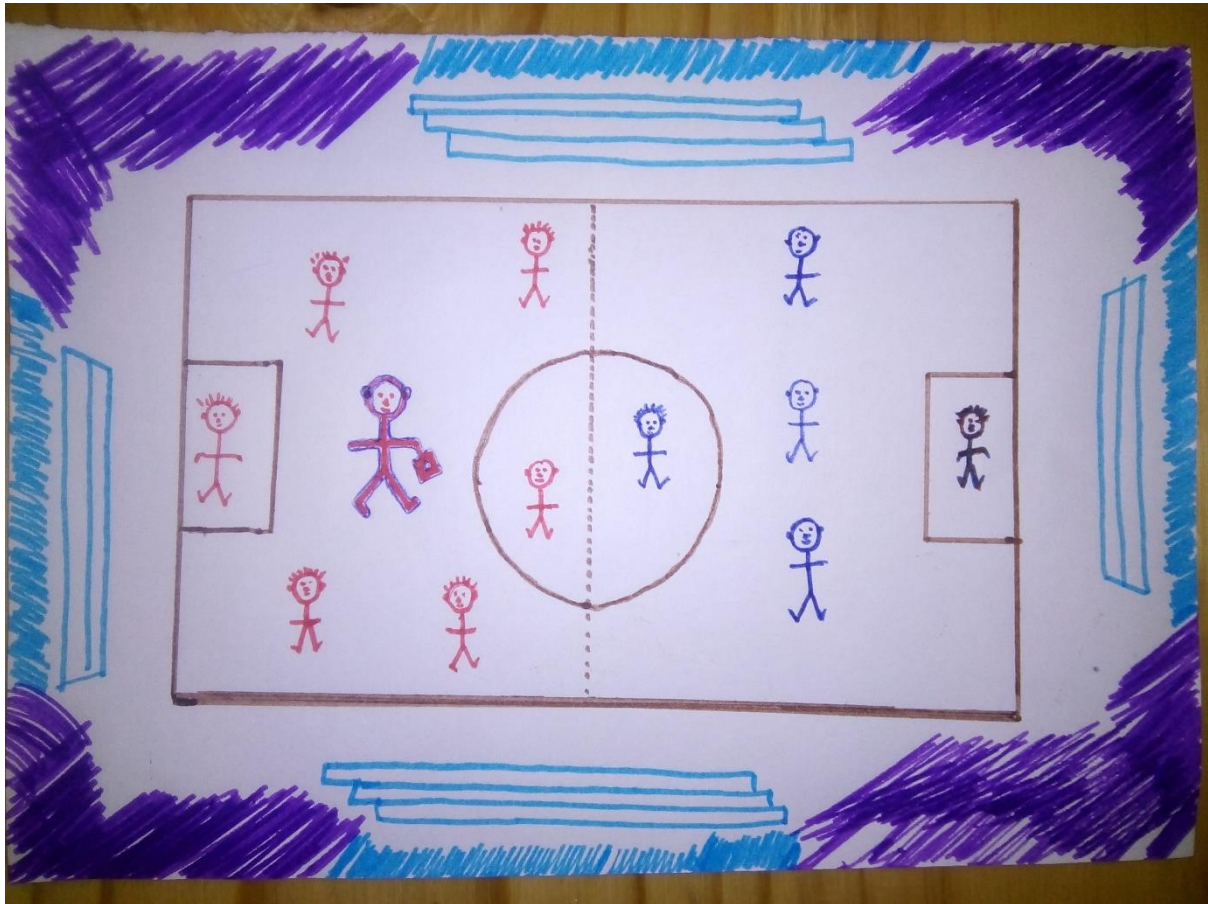


Figure 4.5: My visual journal entry on building supportive teacher-learner relationships on a soccer field through play.

While I participated in extramural activities in my primary school days, I remember that I did not participate in sports that much. As a learner who focused more on his books and was considered ‘smart’ and praised by the school, I found it hard to juggle my books and participate in sports activities such as soccer as I went from one grade to the next because it was demanding. The most popular sporting activity – and the only one available for boys in my school – was soccer. Although I played soccer with other boys at home, I found it difficult to play it at school. I had no confidence in facing the whole school playing soccer in the playground. Getting good academic results, and being smart and respectful was what I was

mostly known for at school. Therefore, I thought sports activities would disturb my studies, which was going to be followed by my grades dropping. Of course, I also knew very well that many other boys in my class and in the whole school played soccer and were much better at it than me. They were talented in the sport.

I remember one day in my class when we were planning a friendly match with another class at our school. As there were ongoing debates about who must be selected and so forth, my teacher asked me if I knew how to play soccer and would be available to help the class bring the trophy home. There was a moment of silence. All eyes turned to me, and I immediately felt like I was in the hot seat at a commission of inquiry and being cross-examined live. After a minute of being silent, I answered the question by explaining that I knew how to play soccer, but had never played it on the school grounds. Of course, I had played it with my few friends in our free time during break times now and then. I emphasised that I had only played soccer at home and in my village.

What followed was that my teacher called me to have a private conversation. It was as if he knew exactly what I feared, because that is where he first based and directed his discussion and reasoning. He knew my struggle of being concerned about having to juggle my schoolwork and extramural activities. As a teacher who had been in the teaching profession for some time, he indicated to me that I must calm down – he had faced the kind of issues I discussed with him before. We carried on and on with our conversation. He welcomed me with care, he took his time to listen to me, and he finally understood me. He took his own time to inquire what might be bothering me regarding the issue that was on the table at the time. He supported me through motivations and stories he had experienced before. After that, I decided to ‘take the plunge’ and play soccer at school. Playing with all of us as boys in our class as we were practising for a friendly match with the other class made things exciting and lightened the load of the pressure I felt to achieve academically. I became so relieved and gained the confidence to juggle my schoolwork and play soccer through that teacher’s support, dedication, and persistence.

Through recalling my lived experience, I learnt that teachers in schools should take their time in enquiring about their learners’ interests, way of doing things, and behaviours. This can bring them closer to their learners’ lives and bolster positive teacher-learner relationships. Furthermore, seeing their teachers show care and love towards them and what is happening in their lives makes learners feel that they can be open in engaging in critical and positive

conversations with teachers, resulting in changes to their situations. This was evident in my case, where my teacher engaged me in a positive discussion on the issue of soccer. It made me feel that I was given a lot of support. I engaged in this vital conversation, which led to positive results. Furthermore, the conversation made me gain confidence and increased my self-esteem regarding the issue I was confronted with. It also led to a beneficial relationship between my teacher and me. Therefore, I can now see how teachers can build supportive teacher-learner relationships by taking the initiative to support their learners in extra-curricular activities. The motivating power of extra-curricular activities can also be seen in memory-work done by Magubane (2016), who recalled how playing soccer in Grade 7 motivated him and made him feel more positive towards school. Magubane's memory story shows how the value of encouraging extra-curricular activities in school can also be strengthened through learners responding positively to the initiatives entered into by their teachers.

4.2.6 One event from an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship I experienced in primary school

The memory drawing presented in Figure 4.6 shows one of the most unsupportive teacher-learner relationships I experienced during my primary school years. It reminds me of one of the events that would make a learner go from their best to their worst behaviour and performance in a school setting due to how they were treated. We enter a schooling system where stereotypical gender roles are already in place and functioning (Notshulwana & de Lange, 2019). During my primary school days, boys were only expected to do 'man-power' work, as my teachers used to say. As boys we were expected to complete activities such as carrying desks and putting them together at the back of the class, so that girls were going to be able to clean the entire class without any disturbances. The 'tiny, little me' was not able to carry a desk alone because it was too heavy for my body and weight. As an alternative, we collaborated with other boys who had a similar body size and carried those desks in pairs. This was because the assigned duty was beyond our ability. We were not 'weak boys'; I was not a 'weak boy', the task was beyond our physical capacity.

I remember one day when it was cleaning time on a Friday at our school. We were in class and doing the usual for that time, which was cleaning. Unexpectedly, our teacher rushed into the classroom, so frustrated. We were all shocked as we did not know what had frustrated him. When he entered the class, we boys were still moving the desks to the back of the classroom,

while the girls were waiting for us to finish the task so that when we left, they could start with their own cleaning process. Girls' duties included sweeping and mopping the classroom.



Figure 4.6: A memory drawing of the one unsupportive teacher-learner relationship I experienced in primary school.

We could see that our teacher was frustrated while we boys continued our work. He had been standing there for some time and watching all our steps as we did the normal. For some minutes, I heard my name being shouted in a terrifying and disturbing manner a few metres away from me – my teacher's voice! I remember that the next minute I was immediately shaking, as I was so shocked. My teacher had never called me like that before. In my mind I immediately asked myself what mistake I had made regarding him or in the class that day. My self-posed question was immediately answered – according to my self-reflection, I had not done anything wrong for the day. My teacher continued to shout and asked me who had told me that desks are carried in pairs during the cleaning time. The focus was on me; he did not yell at the other boy who was carrying a desk, because he recognised that he was helping me. After all, it could be seen

that his physique allowed him to carry the desk on his own. I answered “Nobody said so, Sir” with a sad face full of disappointment and embarrassment. He continuously shouted at me until he instructed me to carry that desk to the back of the classroom on my own, just like many other boys had been doing. Several times I tried to carry the desk on my own and failed. My body size did not allow me to do this task. My teacher just sat there on his table, watching me continuously struggling to complete the job he had asked me to do. This was followed by some learners in our class, especially boys, laughing at me because I could not carry a desk alone. I heard some voices saying, “You cannot be a boy enough and fail to carry a desk”. They continuously laughed at me, and some said I was a weak boy. I could feel tears rolling down my face.

That was one of the worst days of my life. I had never felt so embarrassed and disappointed at that stage of my education. My confidence quickly lowered because of this humiliating experience. Everything just happened at once: I lost my self-esteem and spirit all at once because of that experience. My teacher had really thrown me. To make it worst, he did not even call my peers in class to order, as they continued and added to the debacle he had started. He did not care about the embarrassing situation he had put in. This was indeed the worst experience of my primary school days. On this day, I had experienced unsupportive teacher-learner relationships at their worst.

I learnt from this experience that learners in schools should feel safe under their teachers’ care and supervision. If they are not supported by their teachers in schools, they become vulnerable to all kinds of attacks, such as bullying by teachers themselves and other learners in their classrooms, and in the wider school context. Such an event can make learners lose focus, confidence, and faith in themselves and their teachers. Therefore, teachers in schools must respect their learners and protect them from any possible attacks that may be directed at them. Furthermore, as teachers in a study by Luthuli (2021) recalled from their own schooling experiences, continued attacks directed at learners in schools by teachers and other learners can bring out their worst behaviour and performance, leading to many negative consequences such as decreased participation in classroom and school activities. Furthermore, as shown in my case, such experiences can open wounds that may take some time for learners to recover from.

Remembering this painful experience has demonstrated why that teachers in schools must create a safe learning space for all their learners, irrespective of their many differences, such as their socio-economic backgrounds, physical and intellectual abilities, among many others

(National School Climate Council, 2015). This can help learners appreciate the differences they possess and learn to coexist in one enabling environment, which can also lead to increased participation, positive engagement and achievement levels.

4.3 Unpacking my high school supportive teacher-learner relationships and learning from them

4.3.1 Supporting ‘bright’ learners too: Helping them to also reach their full potential

I started attending high school in 2012 in the Umzinyathi District in northern KZN. The LoTL in the school was English and the predominant home language in the community was IsiZulu. The school was located in a township with a mixture of tar and gravel roads leading to the school from different directions. The school was located next to a big township library and therefore did not have its own library. The school was overcrowded, each class having an average of 45–55 learners. The school did not own enough books for all its learners and therefore, they shared them in pairs, or usually in threes and fours. Furthermore, there were science and computer laboratories. But these were rarely used, although they had many of the required equipment for doing practicals and experiments. Therefore we rarely did Science and/or Technology practicals or experiments, and where they were conducted, most of them were theoretical. Most classrooms in the school were in an adequate state, and a few displayed resources such as charts and posters. Moreover, the paid school fees were a mere R50 per year. Learners who attended the school came from differing socio-economic backgrounds, with two, one or none of the parents working.

The artefact presented in Figure 4.7 reminds me of one of the most supportive teacher-learner relationships I experienced at high school. It shows a photograph of a prescribed book that was used, for the first time ever, for the teaching and learning of the subject of Life Sciences in Grade 10 under the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) policy document. It reminds me of one subject I fell in love with immediately after I was introduced to it, and as I browsed the content in the prescribed book. I remember in term 1 when our results came back after we had written our very first examination in the new class for the subject, and I was named the top of the entire Grade 10 class in the very subject I had fallen in love with from the very first day it was introduced to me – Life Sciences. I was so thrilled and surprised at this landmark achievement, as I call it, as I had only achieved a numerical grade of Level 4, which is in the 50–59% range (adequate achievement).

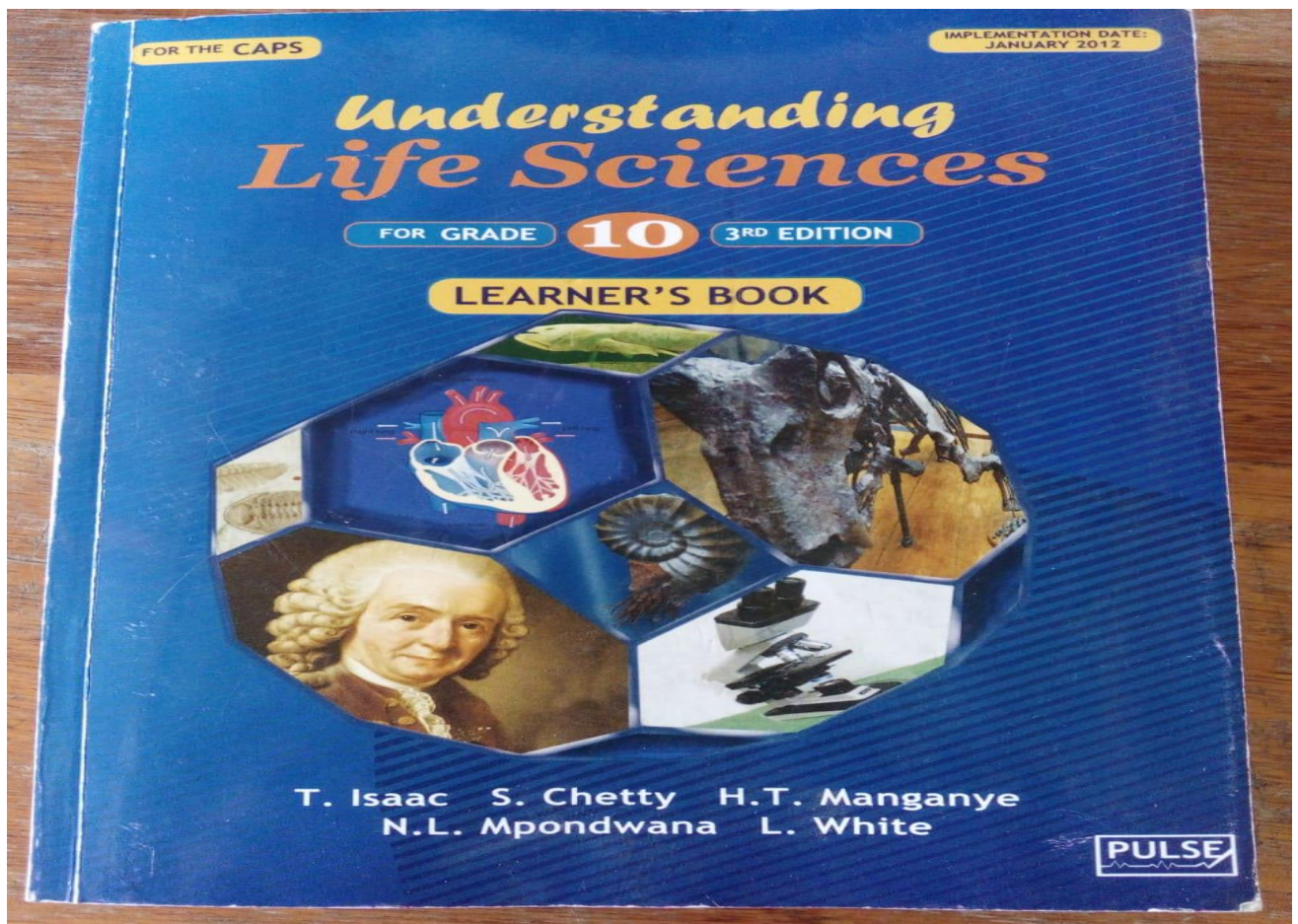


Figure 4.7: A book artefact: On supporting 'bright' learners' too: helping them to also reach their full potential too.

After this, my Life Sciences teacher approached me and told me that she wanted to support me, as she had been observing that I had so much interest in the subject, and hence had been doing so well in it. She wanted me to be at my very best and move up the ladder to do well in the subject and achieve more. She also advised me that having great love for Life Sciences must not mean that I would not give equal effort to attain good grades for the other subjects. She mentored and supported me with everything that came my way about the subject. Of course, I also went out of my way to get more information on my own, as I really loved the subject. From achieving that very first top place, I told myself that I wanted to pursue a career that had to do with the study of Life Sciences. I indeed later did so, as I specialised in Life Sciences Education for my B.Ed. degree when I progressed to the university level.

One good thing I learnt as I first entered high school in Grade 10 (in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase), was that the school not only focused on helping those learners who were struggling with their schoolwork, but also supported those who were doing well in their

schoolwork. Their approach was different from that other schools, which tended to focus more on learners who are considered struggling, leaving those learners who are considered smart to find their own way through with little individual assistance from their teachers.

I also learnt from this one event that teachers in schools need to focus on all their learners, irrespective of their intellectual ability, in giving extra help and/or direction towards achieving their goals. This means that those learners who are considered competent must be supported and offered aid as well as those who are considered struggling with their school work. Although I acknowledge that those learners who seem to be struggling most with their schoolwork must be given much attention, those considered intelligent must also be given room for consultation, improvement, and higher learning outcomes. As I described above, this is evident in my case, where I achieved higher outcomes than I did previously when given more support by my Life Sciences teacher. This resulted in me vowing to pursue a career that had to do with Life Sciences. Therefore, teachers in schools must support and mentor all their learners where they can and provide the best help they can for them to achieve their dreams.

4.3.2 Bridging the gap between traditional and online modes of doing things

It is to be noted that the journal entry shown in Figure 4.8 was typed rather than handwritten. I sometimes used handwriting and sometimes typed journal entries to give myself a varied experience of different modes of journal writing.

06 September 2021 (Monday)

It was around July/August 2014 when I was doing my matric. That is when my Grade 12 Life Sciences and Physical Sciences teacher approached me and offered to help me with my applications to higher education institutions of learning for study the following year. He downloaded a Central Applications Office (CAO) form for me using his own smartphone. At the time I had no smartphone, and I was using an old phone that would only allow me to communicate with my family and friends via calls and SMS's. My teacher knew the kind of phone I was using in Grade 12 since we were staying inside the school premises by the time and were under his supervision. Therefore, he helped me with an online application of which I had no idea how I was going to even start the process because I had not been exposed to technology. He supported me to bridge the gap between online and manual modes of doing things.

Figure 4.8: My journal entry on bridging the gap between traditional and online modes of doing things.

The journal entry presented above (Figure 4.8) recalls one of my high school experiences, where my Grade 12 teacher helped me to bridge the gap between manual and online modes of doing things by introducing me to online applications or admission to HEIs. It was 2014 and at the time I had no smartphone or smart gadgets that would allow me to make an online application. Neither I nor could my parents could afford a smartphone. My teacher knew my home situation, and he decided to offer me some assistance by helping me to apply online through the CAO to HEIs of my choice to be admitted the following year, 2015. At first attempt, I told my teacher that I would not be able to apply online because I had never done anything online before. I, therefore, preferred to make a manual application because it was what I was used to. I was afraid of taking up the challenge, and I saw it as a process that would embarrass me in front of my peers – the fact that in matric (my final year of school), I was not able to complete an online application. My other peers in class already knew how to complete online applications, and many of them owned one or two smartphones. Some even owned more advanced gadgets such as laptops or tablets. My teacher encouraged me not to care about what other people in class owned and were able to do, or what I could not do because of my background. He repeatedly supported me by guiding me step by step in making the online applications through the CAO until the process was complete.

From remembering this episode of my high school experience, I learnt that many learners in schools might be afraid of taking on new challenges because they lack confidence in themselves and are not motivated enough. They fear failure and are more influenced by approval by their peers. Therefore, teachers in schools must motivate their learners to believe in themselves in taking the initiative to face new challenges. Furthermore, facing new challenges will provide learners with problem-solving skills as they explore solutions to the issues they face and are of high importance. Moreover, teachers' understanding of learners creates a platform for guiding and motivating them with relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that they may need as they face different challenges that require critical solutions in life. Therefore, teachers in schools must give themselves time to study and understand all of their learners to offer them some help where necessary (Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017). In return, learners will gain confidence in interacting with their teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

4.3.3 One event from an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship I experienced in high school

The journal entry presented in Figure 4.9 depicts one of the most unsupportive teacher-learner relationships I experienced in high school in 2012. I remember experiencing this event that was unsupportive and uncalled for, directed at me by some of my peers in class and my class teacher. It was term 2, and during the day, I had been bullied by three boys who were older than me and the rest of the many other boys in class. I remember very well that it was a little bit hot, it was winter and the day was nearing its end. They bullied me by saying that I had such a small body and was short as if I was not eating. I could not protect myself from this bullying and opted to report the incident to the teacher, hoping that she would save me. To my surprise, instead of calling the three boys to order or to discipline them, my teacher further bullied me in the same way as those three boys. She repeatedly asked me what I found to be new from what the three boys had said, because it defined who I was. The event left me so sad and hurt and not knowing what to do next, since I had been embarrassed and further bullied by the person I thought would protect me.

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I remember very well, it was 2012 and it was in term two when I experienced an event that was uncalled for directed at me by some of my peers in class together with my class teacher. During the day, I had been bullied by three boys who were older than me and the rest of many other boys in class. I then reported the incident to the teacher. To my surprise, instead of calling the three boys to order or to discipline them, she further bullied me the same way that those three boys had bullied me. The event left me so sad, hurt, and not knowing what to do next since I had been embarrassed and further bullied by the person I thought would protect me.

Figure 4.9: Journal entry about one unsupportive teacher-learner relationship I experienced in high school.

I felt so vulnerable to any further bullying and other acts of violence, as the one person who was supposed to protect me – my teacher – had failed to do so. In the following weeks I lived in fear, and I felt so unsafe around those three boys and also my teacher.

From recollecting this episode, as with the unsupportive memory from my primary school days, I became even more conscious that learners in schools feel safe if they know that their teachers care for their well-being. They feel safe under their teacher’s supervision if they know that they

can trust them, and that their teachers will do their best to prevent their learners from being exposed to harm and see that they are protected (National School Climate Council, 2015). Moreover, I learnt that for success in schools, learners must also take the initiative and be there for each other, so that all feel part of the classroom or school family, and not like outsiders.

4.4 Informal conversations with selected school friends to help me in recalling my memories of supportive teacher-learner relationships

4.4.1 An informal conversation with my primary school friends

Over the weekend I invited my former primary school friends Siphso (pseudonym) and Thabo (pseudonym) for a few drinks at home. Siphso, Thabo and I have been friends since our primary school days till now, spanning 19 years of friendship together. Siphso and Thabo finished their basic level of education level (matric) and did not go to HEIs. Immediately after completing their basic education level they went into the world of work and are currently working in the private sector. They are both in their mid-twenties and are both Zulu-speaking. Therefore, this informal conversation was conducted in IsiZulu for easy communication and understanding, and was later translated into English by me to meet the requirements of this research study.

It is also to be noted that although our conversation was informal, it was guided by the following prompts:

For my school friends

1. Think back about our own school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary/secondary experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you or us feel either good OR bad about yourself or ourselves or anyone in our class as a learner/student.
2. Try to think and tell me what you can remember about those moments or events. Include as many details as you can remember.
3. Further explain these events by paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can we learn from this particular experience?

After explaining my research focus and purpose to them and what was expected from all of us as participants, we started with our conversation, which is transcribed below.

Sipho: *[Pointing to Figure 4.5 memory drawing]* Ahhh! This is one memory that will never fade away. This reminds me of how we used to recite the vowels “a, e, i, o, u” after Mrs Motsoeneng. You could hear her far, far away, even if you were not part of her class.

[Everybody laughs]

Thabo: Yes, that’s true. I remember how she supported us and many other learners who were struggling in our class. We used to gather around her table so that she was going to assist us closer and attend to our individual cases.

Luthando: That is absolutely correct, my brothers. She was everything. She made sure that she always went out of her way to support everyone in our class.

Thabo: That’s true, my brother ... but I don’t think I will have to agree with you on that one part where you say she supported everyone in our class.

Luthando: Carry on, my friend, we are listening. Feel free to voice out whatever needs to be voiced out pertaining to this conversation.

Thabo: I argue that although she supported us and many other learners in our class most of the time, there were also unsupportive relationships directed at us as her learners that we experienced from her. At the receiving end were especially those who were called “slow learners”.

Do you guys remember how she would throw your exercise book if you were writing at her table, and you could not understand what she said? She would get so frustrated that you were not getting her – while forgetting that we were not the same in our capabilities.

Sipho: Mhmmm, I remember Thabo; those were indeed very hard days. I can still picture all those unpleasant moments in my head.

Thabo: To be specific, do you guys remember how she threw Nokuthula’s (pseudonym) exercise book, to the point that it even got damaged? Do you guys remember how she cried and was chased out of the classroom? All because Mrs Motsoeneng was frustrated that she could not understand her.

Yes, I agree with you, she supported us most of the time, but some learners did experience some unsupportive relationships from her. I am sure they still remember those episodes as they are, wherever they are.

Sipho: I think Mrs Motsoeneng could have approached and dealt with Nokuthula in our absence, to enquire about her state. On what is it that was troubling her so that she could not understand or grasp what was said to her.

Thabo: For me, I think Mrs Motsoeneng should have taken Nokuthula to Mrs Blose's class, since Mrs Motsoeneng was not the only Grade 1 teacher, and they worked well collaboratively with her at times. I think that would allow Mrs Motsoeneng to trace how Nokuthula worked in the other class. That was going to allow her to trace whether there was any change or some improvements in her schoolwork. Therefore, in that way, she was going to deal well with her case.

Luthando: Thank you for bringing those insights, Thabo and Sipho. Yes, that's absolutely correct, and I remember all those incidents and they were really uncalled for, and it escalated to other learners and made them feel uncomfortable.

I also remember how teachers sometimes referred us to other teachers for help. I also remember how some teachers, at times, would even call parents to come to school to discuss their learner's progress, and to give them an opportunity to make suggestions on how they wanted their learners to be helped where they seem to be struggling.

Sipho: Yes, without supportive teacher-learner-parent relationships, for me, education becomes meaningless and irrelevant. I think it is important that they are always kept alive in schools.

[After about a minute being silent, we decided to end our informal conversation.]

4.4.1.1 Lessons learnt from the informal conversation with my primary school friends

As reminded by one of my friends, I learnt from this informal conversation that learners do not easily forget their school teachers who supported them beyond the normal. They always recall the memories of teachers making them feel loved, supported, and appreciated during their schooling years. This is evident in us, collaboratively, as we appreciated and relived the

memories of how our teacher Mrs Motsoeneng used to support us and many other learners in our class during our primary school days.

However, I have also discovered that learners do not easily forget teachers who made them feel uncomfortable and initiated brutal and uncalled for treatments during their school days. They do not easily forget the unsupportive relationships directed at them by their school teachers. This is evident in our conversation, where Thabo reminds us of the unpleasant memory involving Nokuthula, one learner in our Grade 1 class, where her exercise book was thrown to the point where it was damaged, and how that incident made her cry. This affected Nokuthula and many other learners in our class, as they became scared due to the frustration they had seen our teacher show, which was uncommon. Therefore, teachers in schools must support all of their learners, irrespective of the differences they bring with them. For it is these practices and behaviours that they show that these learners will remember in the future when they think about them.

Moreover, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, I was also reminded that teachers in schools can work collaboratively in supporting their learners to reach their potential. This means that if individual teachers cannot help their learners with their particular struggles, they may refer them to other teachers or other relevant personnel in schools, such as social workers, to help them. Such an initiative can play a significant role in supporting different learners with different capabilities and challenges. Furthermore, Thabo affirms this in our informal conversation as he argues that Mrs Motsoeneng could have referred Nokuthula to Mrs Blose, since there were two Grade 1 classes in our school. He further contends that perhaps taking Nokuthula to Mrs Blose would enable her to grasp the concepts she struggled with and improve her work. This made me consider how supportive teacher-teacher relationships can benefit both teachers and learners (Paravato Taylor et al., 2020).

4.4.2 An informal conversation with my high school friend

I invited a former high school friend to have an informal conversation with me by phone. His name is Siyabonga (pseudonym), and he and I have been friends since 2012 when we started our high school education together. He is in his mid-twenties, just like me, and he finished his basic education level (matric) and later went into the world of work in the private sector, where he still is to date. Siyabonga is a Zulu-speaking person, and hence this informal conversation was conducted using IsiZulu for easy communication and understanding between the two of

us. The text generated from this informal conversation was later translated into English by me, to meet the requirements of this research dissertation. It is also to be noted that since this informal conversation was conducted by phone, I had earlier sent Siyabonga some of the data sources that I had generated on my high school memories, so that he could have a look before we commenced with our informal conversation.

It is also to be noted that although our conversation was informal, it was guided by the prompts shown under section 4.4.1 above.

After explaining the focus and purpose of this research study to Siyabonga, we started with our informal conversation, which is transcribed below.

Siyabonga: I did look at your data sources. For me, one thing that stood out was your journal entry on one unsupportive teacher-learner relationship you experienced in Grade 10. That was the sad and unfortunate part to read, because it reminded me of how I was also unfairly treated in Grade 10 by Miss Buthelezi (pseudonym). This was when I was at my lowest and was very sick. I think you also remember that unfortunate incident.

Luthando: Yes, I do remember, my brother and I am sorry that you had to feel that way and that my journal entry on unsupportive teacher-learner relationships had to remind you of how you also experienced an unpleasant incident in the same 10th Grade.

Siyabonga: Don't worry, my friend, at times, we do need to talk about these experiences for the healing process, and so that they do not bother us anymore if we accept them as they are and as they happened.

Luthando: Thank you, Siyabonga. Therefore, you can continue telling me about that Grade 10 incident and how it made you feel.

Siyabonga: I think you can remember very well, my friend, how I became so sick in that year and how I missed a number of days at school since my sickness was serious. I thought I would not survive that year, the way it was so difficult. Thank God I'm still here today. I think you remember how I used to tell you and our other friends how serious it was.

When I started to feel better and came back to school, Miss Buthelezi body shamed me in front of the whole class on how I had lost weight, as I was reporting to her about my sickness. I will never forget that day; I was so embarrassed, and I felt like that was the end of the road for me.

I felt like never coming back to school, because I had not fully recovered by that time and that incident made me feel worse.

Luthando: I'm so sorry about that unfortunate incident, my brother, and yes, I can still remember everything that happened in class that day. That incident really left you so torn apart.

Siyabonga: It is through that incident that I never liked her again. I hated her. My self-esteem and self-confidence dived through that incident because I never believed in myself anymore. That is where my marks started to drop, because of that incident. I felt like all eyes were always on my body after I became sick. What Miss Buthelezi did in front of a whole class was so uncalled for!

Luthando: We can't shy away from that, my friend, because it is a true reflection. Unsupportive relationships directed at learners by their own teachers in schools are uncalled for. Those unpleasant memories you remember with Miss Buthelezi are exactly what I remember about her the most, and that is why I had to bring that into my journal entry.

I think I must mention that talking more often about that incident, at times, makes me feel healing and it makes me accept that the incident did happen and, more importantly, what it is that I can learn from it.

Siyabonga: I must agree with you on that one, my brother. Talking is indeed therapy. Although it brings back those sad memories, it heals in the process.

[After about a minute of being quiet, he continued talking.]

You, as a teacher, my brother, I think it is important to love and respect all your learners at school. It is important to create those supportive teacher-learner relationships with them all the time and maintain them. Because you know exactly how the opposite of that makes them feel, you did experience it, and I also did experience it. Therefore you do not want the same thing happening to them, because you know precisely all the pain and struggles it brings.

Luthando: Eish, you can say that again, my brother. I know it very well, and thank you for those kind words and advice.

[For about a minute, we wished each other some well on our different journeys and peaceful healing from our unsupportive teacher-learner relationship experiences in high school. That was then the end of our informal conversation.]

4.4.2.1 Lessons learnt from the informal conversation with my high school friend

I learnt from this conversation that teachers' unsupportive relationships with their learners in schools can have a significant adverse effect on their education. This is evident in Siyabonga's case. He argues that the unsupportive teacher-learner relationship he experienced in high school led him to lack self-confidence and self-esteem in his own abilities. Furthermore, he argues that his marks dropped at school because he experienced an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship. His story shows unsupportive teacher-learner relationships as a negative factor for learners, diminishing their emotional well-being and academic achievements.

Moreover, what I learnt from this conversation is that unsupportive relationships directed at learners by their own teachers in school can make them lose interest in classroom and school-related activities. Unsupportive teacher-learner relationships make learners isolate themselves and not participate in any of the activities and initiatives conducted at school. They fear that more unsupportive and unpleasant actions might occur. This again is evident in Siyabonga's case. He argues that because he experienced an unsupportive relationship with his teacher, he felt like isolating himself and never returning to school. That is when he was body-shamed by his own teacher after being sick for some time. As Luthuli's (2021) study of South African teachers' memories of their schooldays highlighted, "classrooms and schools should be places of emotional security and affirmative relationships to influence learners' attitudes and behaviour positively" (p. 156). Therefore, supportive teacher-learner relationships must be built and sustained in schools so that learners can gain self-confidence and be motivated to participate in classroom- and whole-school-related matters.

4.5 Reflection

From the memory-work presented in this chapter, my most helpful discovery about myself as a learner is that I have always valued and emphasised the idea of identifying a purpose for going to school. This was followed by identifying what I wanted to achieve as a learner at school, and going beyond that through going to school and engaging with the process of teaching and learning. I have realised that having those self-set guidelines at the centre of my learning process helped me work hard and dedicate myself to achieving my goals. They served as a reminder of what I was destined for as a learner at school and in the future. Furthermore, they also served as a reminder that I had to work hard to change my poor socio-economic background. Recalling my generally supportive relationships with teachers at school made me

conscious of how many of my teachers contributed positively to my sense of self and my sense of purpose and vision for my future. My teachers did this by helping me overcome barriers caused by my socio-economic circumstances and encouraging me academically and in extra-curricular areas such as gardening and sport.

From recalling my schooling experiences, I have realised that supportive relationships built with learners by their teachers can make learners realise that they have the potential to achieve what they aim to accomplish in their lives (see, among others, Bundick et al., 2014; Newberry, 2010). Moreover, they can make learners discover new insights about themselves in terms of academic and other capabilities that they may not be able to find out independently. Therefore, teachers in schools must establish supportive teacher-learner relationships for their learners to realise their full potential. This can be further achieved if all stakeholders in education, such as parents, support staff, and the community, are also included in the process (see, among others, National School Climate Council, 2015).

I struggle to understand what teachers must do and think about when their learners drop their school engagement and performance due to unsupportive practices by their own teachers or other school stakeholders. This raises the question of what it says to teachers about the issues of accountability, academic norms and standards that need to be adhered to and achieved in schools, teachers' purpose and the definition of teachers' roles (see, among others, Garcia-Moya, 2019; Paravato Taylor & Newberry, 2018).

Considering this memory-work from a sociocultural theoretical perspective has assisted me in seeing that development is a process and not merely a product. This means that the development of supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools cannot be achieved in one day. I saw how many of my teachers took the initiative, dedicated time, and worked with others to establish and maintain positive teacher-learner relationships (Luthuli, 2021; Newberry, 2010).

Furthermore, working from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, as influenced by Vygotsky (1978), exposed me to the idea learners are not isolated beings and empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Instead, this perspective offers a rich view focusing on the relationships between the self and significant others (see, among others, Allman, 2020; Bosah et al., 2015; Mensah & Koomson, 2020). In considering my schooling experiences, I saw how many of my teachers understood that learners in schools must not be seen as isolated beings, but instead must be supported by their teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, through this sociocultural theoretical perspective, I examined my own personal experiences in the light of broader social and cultural contexts. I was also able to look at my own personal experiences in relation to those of significant others, such as my school friends, in learning about developing supportive teacher-learner relationships in the present and subsequently in the future. Conversations with my friends highlighted the importance of mutual understanding and acknowledgement that learners bring many differences, such as socio-economic backgrounds and intellectual or physical abilities. This is necessary for building a culture of enabling teacher-learner relationships in schools.

Some of my own memories and those of my school friends centred on lived experiences in primary school and high school that were damaging and unsupportive. I became more conscious of how such experiences can decrease learners' self-esteem, confidence, and academic engagement and achievement. Moreover, it can cause the negativity they experienced to pass on to other people along the generations (Luthuli, 2021; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019c). These may only be the only acts these learners knew and were exposed to. Or, even if they did receive some supportive treatment at school, the effects of the harmful treatment might have outweighed the positive. When they become adults, these learners may automatically pass what they were taught from generation to generation. In that manner, acts of discomfort, brutality, and cruelty may continue to strike schools and families, negatively affecting learners' well-being and accomplishments and being taken as normality. Therefore, teachers and school communities must practice supportive actions that can positively shape learners' experiences in the present and future.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter continued to respond to my two research questions: (a) *What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?*; and (b) *As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?* I responded to these by recounting and reflecting on my primary school and high school memories. I employed memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval and informal conversations with my selected primary school and high school friends as data generation methods to help me recall and understand my schooling experiences.

I started by remembering my first-time engagement with pen and paper through learning vowels and consonants. I then unpacked other supportive memories of encounters with teachers

in primary school. I also mentioned and engaged with one unsupportive experience from primary school. I also went through my high school experiences, where I started by engaging with a book artefact/object that presented a teacher who encouraged me academically. I also recalled other significant memories of events in high school. I also described one unsupportive relationship that I experienced in high school.

In addition, I entered into informal conversations with former primary school and high school friends to help me recall and reflect on my memories regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools. This was not limited to supportive relationships, but included some of the unsupportive teacher-learner relationships we experienced or observed happening to other learners in school during our primary and high school days.

This memory-work will inform my future learning and practice as a teacher. It has reinforced my conviction that teachers must establish and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships with their learners in schools. This can be done when teachers fully understand that the teaching profession is about more than teaching the prescribed curriculum and recognise other factors, such as establishing enabling environments and compassionate relationships with their learners. Furthermore, when teachers in schools pay attention and observe learners' behaviours and actions in and outside the classroom, they can understand their circumstances, trace their progress and respond helpfully. In addition, teachers supporting each other can foster supportive teacher-learner relationships.

In the next chapter, I continue to respond to my two research questions by narrating my university memories regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING FROM MY PERSONAL LIVED EXPERIENCES CONCERNING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS: UNPACKING MY HIGHER EDUCATION MEMORIES

5.1 Introduction

I continued to engage with my two research questions in Chapter Four. I looked back at my past experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships during my schooldays. I was assisted in this by conversations with some of my school friends. Recalling these schooling experiences highlighted that learners do not easily forget the school teachers who supported them beyond the typical call of duty. They always remember where their teachers made them feel loved, supported and appreciated during their school days. These teachers can serve as a model of what their learners can look up to, with the learners gaining self-confidence and increased self-esteem through the support they give to them. Conversely, teachers who made them uncomfortable and initiated brutal and uncalled for treatments against them during their school days are also not easily forgotten. Therefore, teachers in schools must support all their learners, irrespective of the differences they bring with them to the classroom and whole-school context. It is the practices and behaviours that teachers show to learners that they will remember when they reflect on their schooldays.

Chapter Five again engages with my two research questions, now looking back at my past experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships in a higher education space. One memory of an unsupportive higher education teacher-learner relationship is also described. I consider what I learnt from recalling these memories. My own memory stories are followed by a presentation of my learning through informal discussions with a university friend. Lastly, I offer a reflection on my overall learning from the memory-work in the chapter.

5.2 Unpacking my higher education (university) supportive teacher-learner relationships and learning from them

5.2.1 Bridging the gap between university arms

I started attending an HEI in 2015, a university in the Province of KZN, to do my undergraduate studies. This is the same university where I am currently pursuing my postgraduate Master's studies. The institution is a teaching and research-led university with a proud and rich heritage of academic excellence. The university has five campuses, all located within the province of KZN. The School of Education campus I am situated in is the primary site for teacher education, and offers initial and in-service teacher education training. In addition, the School offers a wide range of higher degrees with various specialisations in education. It is also involved in research and community engagement as one of the university's major arms.

The visual journaling presented in Figure 5.1 depicts one of my experiences of how I started to embark on a journey of bridging the gap between the university arms, which are: academic excellence, community engagement/university service, and research (and leadership). It reminds me of how one academic in the School of Education, Science and Technology Education Cluster took her time explaining to me what it meant to excel academically and excel in community engagement and leadership. It reminds me of how I quickly became so interested in taking part in all the arms mentioned above of the university, being driven by the aim of equipping myself with relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for both my personal and professional development. It reminds me how I quickly learnt to balance my schoolwork and social life, including other areas of interest I was involved in.

As I engaged with this visual journaling, it reminded me how this lecturer introduced me to the concept of community engagement and leadership in 2016, on top of my outstanding record of academic excellence. She praised me for how I continuously excelled in my academic work. Subsequently, she encouraged and enlightened me on how I could have a successful career in academia and outside if I excelled in other arms that the university offered.

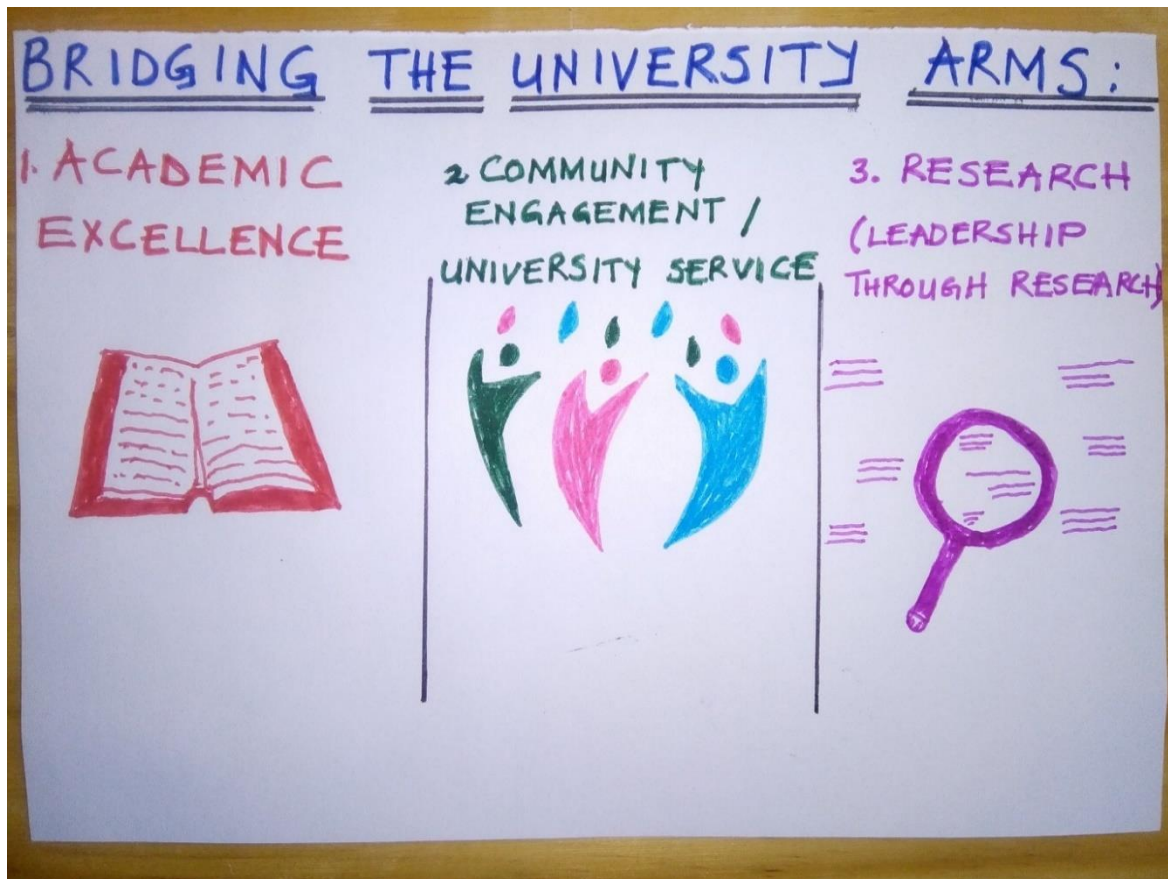


Figure 5.1: My visual journal entry on bridging the gap between the university arms.

This lecturer did not only theorise what she preached to me. Instead, she offered to guide and mentor me and suggested various community outreach organisations and initiatives I could join to make this a reality. She had predicted that I would have a great interest in having a successful career in academia in the future. I remember how she supported me by taking me with her to attend community engagement seminars, conferences, site engagements and workshops within the School of Education premises and outside. Furthermore, I remember that she would sometimes take me with her to various communities outside of the town where our institution was located. She continuously took me to engagement sites she was working with to show me how this part of the community outreach and leadership worked. This soon became a familiar routine to me.

As much as our union was mainly formed and based on equipping me with community engagement and leadership knowledge and skills, this lecturer also cared about my academic side, which was the main aim for which I was admitted at the School of Education. She was

my lecturer in one module in 2017, and later, as my former lecturer and mentor, she always made sure I was at the top of my academic game. She also supported me with reading materials that I could use in my modules, which informed me personally and professionally. I remember how she would sometimes invite me, with my peers who had similar interests in community engagement and leadership, to motivate her other students. She also reiterated how they could integrate their studies with the other arms that the institution offers.

I also remember how this lecturer invited me to be a guest observer and a judge in one of her modules within the Science Discipline, where students presented their work with communities over a whole semester through service-learning. It was not only a pleasant experience to celebrate being involved in that project, but it was also a learning curve where I became sure that I wanted to consider a career in academia. For that experience and many others, I will forever be grateful to her, for the critical role she played in building me into the person I am today, through the crucial knowledge and skills she equipped me with. It is because of her that I continue to excel in all of the various pillars that the university has to offer.

I learnt from this relationship that teachers in HEIs can play a crucial role if they engage with them to try to get a sense of who they are, what they do, what they like and what they aspire to do and be. Students respond positively to their lecturers' actions if they are concerned about and show interest in their lives and futures. Furthermore, more engagement between students and their lecturers can open a space for lecturers to introduce their students to various activities that they can get involved in within the higher education arena of learning and outside (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). This can also equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for self-fulfilment and meaningful engagement as members of society.

5.2.2 From failure to success: Learning from supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education

The memory drawing presented in Figure 5.2 represents one of the learning curves I experienced in higher education as I learnt from a failure that later resulted in success. It reminds me how I learnt from a collective group failure to become an independent, hardworking and dedicated student that excelled at an HEI.

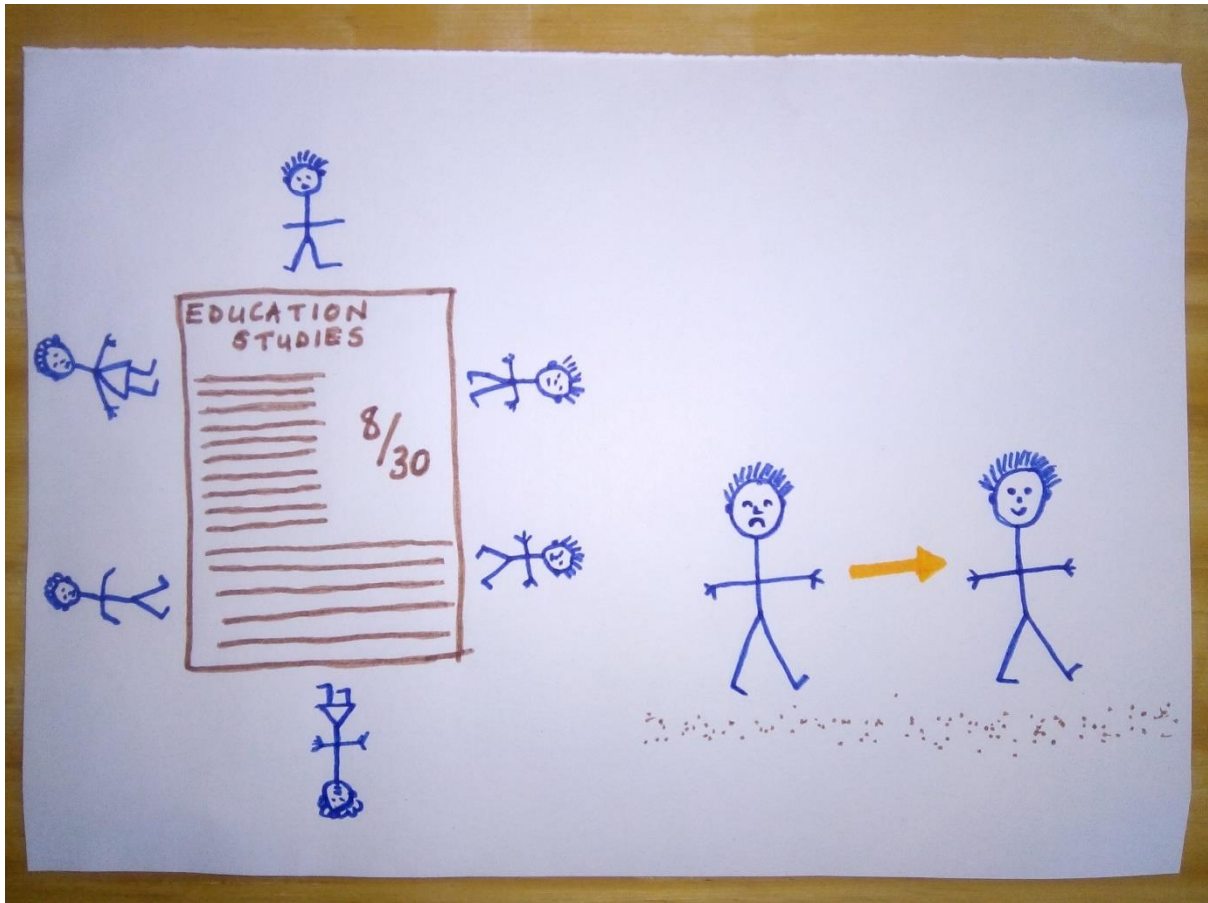


Figure 5.2: My memory drawing on learning from supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education.

It was 2016, during my second year of my undergraduate B.Ed. in Science degree at the School of Education. There was one module called Education Studies 210 (History of Education), an introductory module to the study of education. After we had been given a group assignment by our lecturer, as part of the module assessment, it turned out that my other nine group members and I had failed it. This failure resulted from the reluctance of some members of the group to participate and give their all to completing the task. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, we only got a score of 8/30, a dismal failure from 10 collective working minds. As the days passed after this incident, I became worried about the mark I had scored that had resulted from our carelessness as a group. We worked as a collective, so everyone would get the same mark of 8/30. I had never scored a mark of that sort before. I then told myself that since the other tasks that were left to make up the total marks of the module were for individual work, I was going to give it my all and work hard. This was not only to pass the module, but also to get the necessary skills and knowledge offered by the module.

After a week had passed, I decided to approach my lecturer to ascertain how I could do my best next time on the other tasks that I had left to achieve the best results. She welcomed me with open arms and advised me of many things I could practice to be at my best in academia. Among other things, she motivated me and mentioned that, firstly, I should use the lecturers' consultation times to ask and get a sense of things I did not understand or wanted to get some more clarity on. This included the issue of writing and communicating with my lecturers and all other relevant stakeholders within the School of Education through emails. Secondly, she mentioned that I should use the school library and computer laboratories to search for knowledge and equip myself with the relevant skills and know-how needed for those modules. Finally, she mentioned the issue of peer learning, providing the advantages and disadvantages of its use. I took all her advice on board and further explored how it would help me and how I could apply it to how I worked and operated. Weeks and weeks passed, and I finally found my place in the university setting and engaged with all of my modules, passed them very well, and competed to be one of the best students in the School of Education. That initial failure resulted in me doing self-reflection to improve my old practices. Through that failure, I learnt how success is approached with various skills and how it is not an easy process to master. Therefore, through learning from that failure, I was then able to achieve success.

From this one episode of my life, I learnt that if students can take the initiative themselves to self-reflect to identify who they are, what they want, and how they want to achieve it, success can be reached at HEIs. Furthermore, such a move and initiative can make their teachers in HEIs give them a warm welcome and respond positively to their concerns. Moreover, such an initiative can bring students closer to their teachers. Suppose higher education teachers can create room for engagement with their learners. This can make their learners take the opportunity to engage with them on many issues that could be troubling them, hence constructing supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education (see, among others, Xerri et al., 2017).

5.2.3 Integrating the personal and professional selves: Promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships

The memory drawing presented in Figure 5.3 below represents how I was introduced to and got the opportunity to learn about integrating the personal-professional selves. It reminds me of the importance of getting to know and understand the personal self and integrating it with

the professional self. It reminds me how, in a module called Teacher Identities and Teacher Change in the year 2020, I got the opportunity to sit down with myself and think about who I am as a person, before I came to think about who I am as a teacher in the present and will be in the future. It also reminds me of coming to terms with how everyone has their own identities, which may be similar or different from those of other people in one way or another. Further, I recall how beneficial it was to explore and integrate the personal-professional selves and the feelings, thoughts, ideas, and emotions evoked in the process.

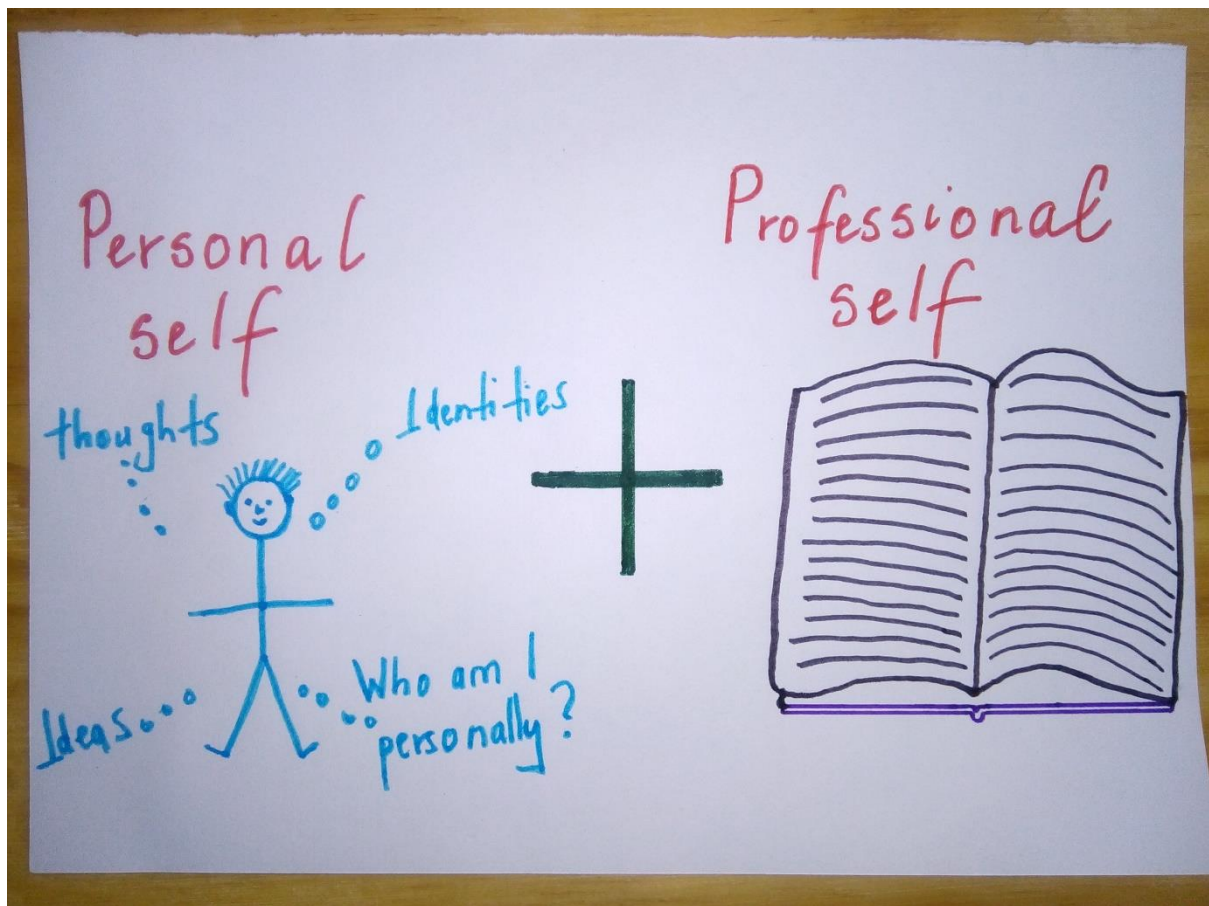


Figure 5.3: My memory drawing on integrating the personal and professional selves: Promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships.

This memory drawing reminds me deeply of my two female Professors in the discipline of Teacher Development Studies (TDS) in the School of Education, both of whom happen to be my current mentors. It reminds me of how they have supported and continue to support me in my academic journey and outside of it. These women also happen to be my former B.Ed. Honours degree (independent research project) and current Master of Education research

supervisor, respectively. It reminds me how these wonderful women accommodated me in their busy academic schedules by helping me when I needed it in my educational journey or my personal life.

For example, I remember how in 2019, when I had taken a huge life decision to resign from my primary school teaching position to return to further my studies, one of my professors supported me all the way, playing a critical role from the very first step of the process up to the very last step. I will never forget that journey, as it was such a big journey filled with mixed feelings and emotions. After qualifying as a teacher, I never thought that one day – or perhaps not so early – I would ever resign from work to pursue my postgraduate studies and academic career. Yes, by that time, I was so in love with the academy, and at the end of the day, I was going to take that big decision, but I never thought it was going to be so early on. My professor supported me through thick and thin until the whole process was completed – and for that, I will never forget her. She will always be in my heart, and I will always and forever be grateful to her, for she has played a critical and crucial role in my life.

I learnt from this students can believe in themselves more if they are shown more support by their teachers in higher education spaces. Furthermore, students can gain more confidence in taking big decisions and applying their problem-solving skills to issues they encounter if they are fully supported by their teachers (see, among others, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). This is evident in my case, as I gained a great deal of confidence in sticking with the initial decision I had made to resign from work to pursue my postgraduate studies and academic career, despite all of the difficulties and obstacles that had arisen along the way. Moreover, teachers in higher education spaces can encourage their learners to believe in themselves more by showing them support for their dreams and visions (see, among others, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). In that way, supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education spaces can be enriched, leading to more significant academic outcomes.

5.3 One event of an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship I experienced in higher education

5.3.1 “Only draw what you can see in the microscope”: Revealing unsupportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education through practicals in the laboratory

I remember, as I walked down the corridors of the Science and Technology Education Cluster, making my way to the Science Laboratory 1, I could smell the unusual that later became usual

smells from far away as I made my way to the laboratory. I remember how I always sensed the smell of a freshly cleaned bathroom or of metal, which always made me think I was in the big factory in town. That was the Science laboratory that we used to work in. It was where we used to conduct practicals each week. It was full of science apparatus such as test tubes, beakers, and Bunsen burners, among many others. It was surrounded by microscopes at the edges of the whole room, with writing tables facing each other.

I remember the second time we were in the laboratory; the first lecture had been all about learning the theory of safety in the laboratory and watching safety demonstration videos. For a moment, I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere when our lecturer told us that nobody would help the other and that each of us was on our own. Yes, we had read the practical instructions in the practical booklet we were given, but for some of us – me included – it was our first time seeing a real microscope.

I had only seen and read about a microscope in a textbook at school. As earlier mentioned, although there were science laboratories in my high school, they were rarely used. Also, although they had many of the required equipment for doing practicals and experiments, there were no microscopes. Therefore, at school, we rarely did Science and/or Technology practicals or experiments, and most of them were theorised in cases where they were conducted. Therefore, from this background, I faced one of the most challenging episodes of my life in higher education during practical sessions.

I remember when I switched on the microscope for the first time after some time focused on repeatedly reading instructions in the practical booklet. The microscope just responded by showing me some white light and waiting for me to do the action. I remember that I had an onion slide that had to be put under the microscope, which I did, but I could not see the image I was supposed to. The problem was that I did not know which knob to adjust so that I would be able to see the slide. While I was still in that confusion, I remember my lecturer shouting and saying, “Only draw what you can see on the microscope, not your own things”. Because of being too scared, I could not do anything positive next. Many of us just waited and stared at the microscope as if we were telling it to do some magic and operate itself. Many of us had never used or, in fact, even seen a real microscope before, and I was no exception. However, my lecturer appeared not to see and understand this. The struggle was written on the faces of many of us, and our lecturer seemed to choose to ignore it (Figure 5.4). When the session ended, I had only done a few things, and was so sure that I would fail that practical.

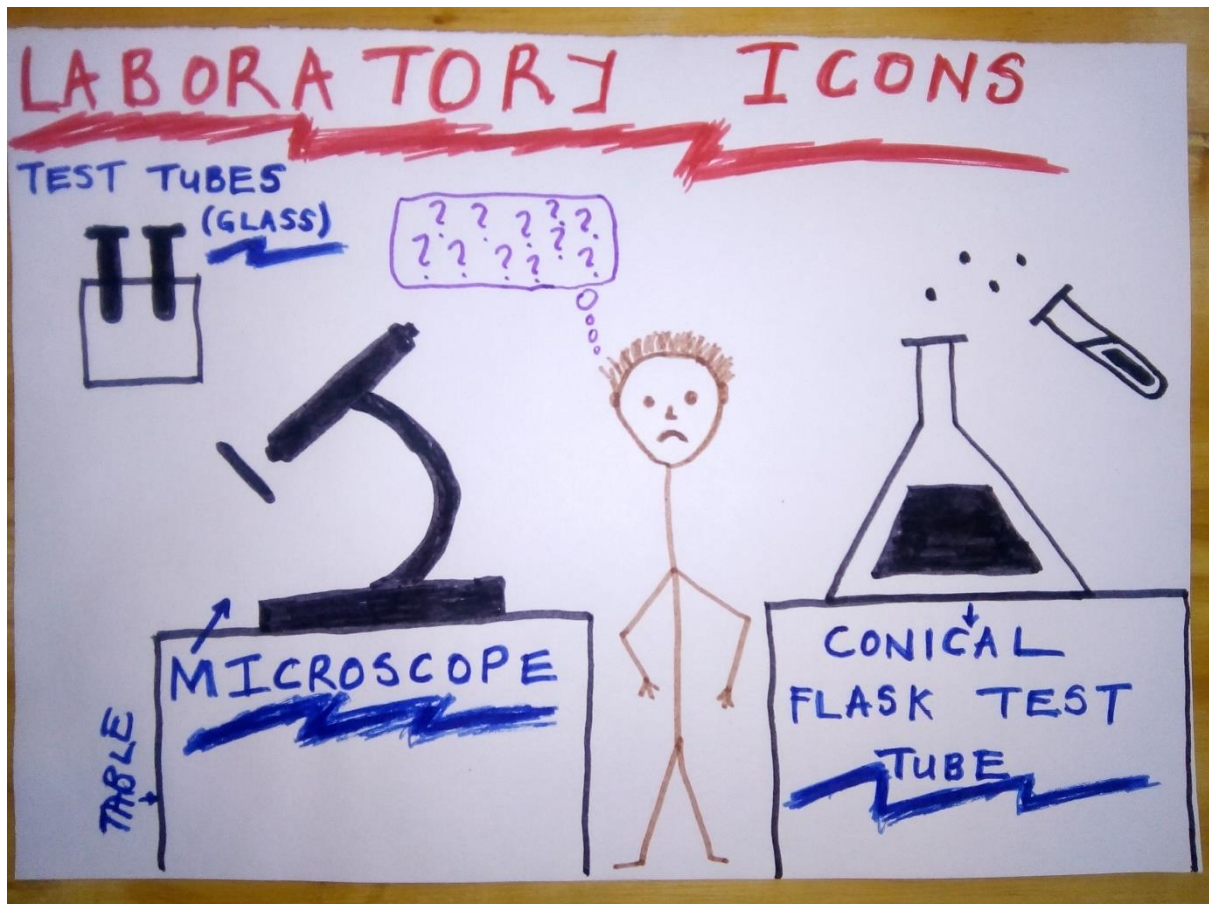


Figure 5.4: My visual journaling on unsupportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education through practicals in the laboratory.

Weeks followed, and other practicals continued to be done in the laboratory. My lecturer did not seem to care at all about our struggles – it became the onus of the student to do extra work to learn the basics and how the laboratory operates. The laboratory came to seem like hell to me, as I worked under pressure each time I was there. The place was filled with unsupportive learner-learner relationships as directed by our lecturer. It was also filled with unsupportive teacher-learner relationships directed at us as students (in this case referred to as learners) by our lecturer.

This event is one that I will never forget, as it showed me unsupportive teacher-learner relationships at their worst level at an HEI. This memory suggests that, in some circumstances, teacher-learner relationships in higher education continues to be a neglected domain, where only academic outcomes and fulfilling one's academic role are taken as the business of the day in the educational space (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018).

5.5 Informal conversation with my selected university friend in helping me to recall memories of supportive teacher-learner relationships

I invited my university friend to have an informal conversation with me by phone about the phenomenon under examination. Her name is Neli (pseudonym). Neli and I have been friends since 2015, when we started our undergraduate degrees at the School of Education. She is in her mid-twenties, and is currently a primary school teacher at a school within uMkhanyakude District in KZN; and has been teaching for two years now. Neli is a Zulu-speaking woman and therefore, this conversation was conducted in her IsiZulu home language for easy communication and understanding. The conversation was later translated into English by me. It is also to be noted that since this conversation was conducted over the telephone, I initially sent Neli my memory drawings and journal entries concerning university experiences so that she could look at them as prompts before we started our informal conversation.

Although our conversation was informal, it was guided by the prompts outlined below.

For my university friends

1. Think back about our own university days. Try to remember, in detail, university experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you or us feel either good OR bad about yourself or ourselves or anyone in our class as a learner/student.
2. Try to think and tell me what you can remember about those moments or events. Include as many details as you can remember.
3. Further explain these events by paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can we learn from this particular experience?

After I had explained the purpose and focus of my research to her, we commenced with our informal conversation, which is transcribed below.

Neli: Although I understand what your research is or this conversation is about, since it is not our first time talking about this, it is difficult for me to provide what is needed by your research in this case.

Luthando: Eh, why do you say so, Neli?

Neli: You know what a university setting is like, my friend. There are actually little or no teacher-learner relationships there. Everyone is only concerned about their own selves. Many students are only worried about studying, passing, and getting their qualifications, while many university teachers are only concerned about teaching and getting their salaries at the end of the month.

Luthando: Mhm! You can say that again, my friend, that is what mostly happens in many institutions of higher learning. Why do you personally think that is the case?

Neli: I don't know. A university setting is like another planet far, far away from where people live. If you can remember very well, nobody greets the other person there, only a tiny percentage of people do. We just pass each other in the corridors as if we are not human beings.

I think it's because of what we have been told that *akekho umuntu olandela omunye laphana* [roughly translated as "nobody cares about the other person in a university setting, each person is only concerned about their own selves"]. That is why it is difficult to recall supportive teacher-learner relationships at university during our time together. What I am sure of is that there are many unsupportive rather than supportive teacher-learner relationships.

Luthando: You have just mentioned a huge issue Neli, an issue of concern. I must concur with you on that one. Many people go to a university with the mindset of 'nobody cares about the other person there' because of what our teachers have told us in schools and many other people who have university experience. It is so sad how we, as students, most of the time, pass each other in the corridors without any greetings.

Neli: But for you, Thando, there are many incidents where particular lecturers at school, and mostly those you have worked more with, made you feel good about yourself as a student at the School of Education, more than the few bad ones.

I can recall when the Academic Leader for Community Engagement at the School of Education, Dr Ndebele (pseudonym), always made you feel over the moon about yourself. She always knew your interests, and the entire School of Education always knew that you excelled in all pillars that the university had to offer. You balanced your academic work with your leadership roles and community engagement well. The visual journaling (in Figure 5.1) is really a true reflection of those incidents. I applaud you even today for that, my friend.

Luthando: Ahhh, thank you so much for those compliments, my friend, they are so heart-warming, and you were always there to support me. You were always by my side, and for that, I'll forever be grateful.

Wait, before we forget, please tell me about that one incident that you recall where you said Dr Ndebele always made me feel good about myself.

Neli: I remember how she trusted you and how good you were in Science. That is where she encouraged you to apply for a Demonstrator and Academic Tutor position in your discipline [Science Education] in 2018, so that you would get some extra cash to send home. She really supported you and wanted to see you succeed in everything you were doing.

Luthando: You know what, you have just made my day Neli. How can I forget? She really trusted and supported me. That is one event I will never forget, and it still makes me so emotional.

Thank you for having this conversation with me Neli, I have really learnt a lot from it concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in spaces of learning.

[After a minute, we ended our conversation by wishing each other good luck on our different journeys.]

5.5.1 Lessons learnt from the informal conversation with my selected university friend

When Neli told me about her experiences, which were primarily different from mine, I saw through her eyes that a higher education space is sometimes taken as a journey that one needs to travel alone. It made me think of many students I saw who never seemed to care about what happened in our university, but only about passing their modules and getting their qualifications. I learnt from this conversation that a university setting sometimes continues to be considered a non-interactive space for both university teachers and their learners. This is where only academic matters are put at the helm of the HEI's operations, with little focus on supportive teacher-learner relationships. This makes university learners refrain from consulting their teachers when they experience difficulties on their learning journeys. This is evident in Neli's discussion with me above. This could subsequently decrease their engagement and participation in academic and school-related activities and lower their achievements. Therefore, supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education spaces must be

established and maintained in the quest for increased participation, engagement and support for university learners, and subsequently higher academic outcomes. This can also benefit both university teachers and their learners in establishing long-term relationships and goals for the future (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018).

From this conversation, I also recognised that learners who are introduced and exposed to more life-changing opportunities by their teachers may benefit personally and professionally. This is evident in what was recalled by Neli about how Dr Ndebele used to support me in my academic career as an undergraduate learner at university. She gave an example of when I was encouraged to apply for an academic job so that I would be able to make extra cash to support my family. Thus, I see that if university teachers can be aware of their learners' socio-economic backgrounds, they can, where applicable, build working relationships with them and support them.

5.6 Reflection

Being born and bred in rural areas of the northern KZN Province and spending most of my life there, including all my years at basic education level, kept me from the diversity of life that existed elsewhere. My social and cultural influences shaped me to believe that life was almost the same in any given context, irrespective of whether it was in a rural or an urban setting – which is not the case. Entering the higher education space exposed me to another life setting as a student. It taught me that people around the country and, by extension, around the globe, are diverse and come from various locations, and were and continue to be shaped by different social and cultural practices. Through the supportive teacher-learner relationships I experienced, as a student, I was influenced to acknowledge, respect, and understand other students at the higher education space of learning. As mentors, my supportive higher education teachers modelled how to be aware that we bring many differences, such as gender, race, socio-economic backgrounds, and physical or intellectual abilities. I was influenced to learn how to respond positively to diversity through interactions in the classroom environment and outside of it. Thus, my most valuable discovery about myself as a learner at an HEI is that although I was exposed to one way of life during my upbringing in a rural setting, I quite quickly adapted to another way of life with the support of university teachers.

As discussed in Chapter One, from my reading, I understood that supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education serve as a predicting factor for learners' achievement of

academic success (see, among others, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Xerri et al., 2017). This memory-work allowed me to see and reflect on how that has operated in my own life. Moreover, I became aware of how supportive teacher-learner relationships have contributed meaningfully to developing my personal and academic identities and my vision for my future (Xerri et al., 2017). From recalling my own experiences, I have understood that learners' supportive lived experiences can motivate them to reach their full potential and achieve their dreams. That is triggered by the trust that they receive from their teachers, through the actions of believing in them and creating an enabling space for them to feel loved, appreciated and supported. They, therefore, respond positively. In addition, through the mentoring I received, I gained new insights into how I could contribute to the development of the well-being and growth of others by getting involved in community outreach and leadership. Thus, I see how students' lived experiences of supportive teacher-learner relationships in HEIs can positively influence others in their future interactions.

What I am still struggling to understand about supportive and unsupportive relationships in higher education is that although the importance of the teacher-learner relationship has been emphasised in a wealth of research conducted concerning primary and high schools, the research concerning such relationships in higher education appears to be still relatively scarce (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018, Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Xerri et al., 2017). In addition, after my conversation with Neli, I am failing to understand why supportive teacher-learner relationships and learner-learner relationships do not appear to be given priority in higher education (or if they are, it is on a very small scale) (see, among others, Asikainen et al., 2018). It is vital for all stakeholders in HEIs to create and maintain a culture of supportive relationships.

What is more, taking a sociocultural theoretical perspective in this memory-work has assisted me in seeing that building a culture of supportive teacher-learner relationships is not a fixed or one-way process. It must also be acknowledged that the teacher-learner relationship is a developmental relationship between the two parties, and that it changes over time. Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019) affirm that the relationship between a teacher and a student continues over time and is subject to variation, depending on interactions. This means that it requires working hard, working together, and understanding each other by teachers and learners in higher education learning spaces. I have become aware of the importance of my own role in the relationships I have developed with my higher education teachers. Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019) point out that in working with their teachers in spaces of higher learning, students who

show enthusiasm and interest in the educational programme, as well as showing respect and carrying out their academic responsibilities, have greater chances of building working and supportive relationships with their university teachers. By extension, it requires all other relevant stakeholders in education, such as support staff and parents, to be part of the process. Through acknowledging and cultivating this multi-way process, teacher-learner relationships in higher education would develop and improve over time.

5.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to simultaneously respond to my two research questions: (a) *What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?* and (b) *As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?* I did this through returning to my higher education (university) memories through memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval and informal conversations with a university friend.

In achieving this purpose, I started by unpacking a visual journal entry on bridging the gap between the university arms: academic excellence, community engagement/outreach and research (leadership through research). Secondly, I discussed my memory drawing on learning from failure to success regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education. Finally, I considered integrating the personal and professional selves in promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education. I also recalled one event of an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship that I experienced at university and the lessons that emerged from it.

I then entered into an informal conversation with my selected university friend to help me reflect on supportive teacher-learner relationships in higher education spaces. This was not limited to supportive relationships, but included some of the unsupportive relationships we experienced or observed in higher education during our university days together.

I learnt from my personal experiences that teachers in HEIs can play a crucial role if they are involved in their students' lives. This means engaging with them and getting a sense of who they are, what they do, what they like and what they aspire to do and be. Students can respond positively to their lecturers' actions if they see that they are concerned and show interest in becoming part of their lives. Furthermore, I have also learnt that learners who work closely and

collaboratively with their teachers in HEIs might achieve better results and excel more in other activities conducted at their respective schools and outside. Moreover, these learners can also be introduced and exposed to more life-changing opportunities by their teachers, which may benefit their personal and professional selves.

Therefore, it is crucial all involved in spaces of higher learning create and maintain a culture of supportive relationships. Learning from this memory-work can inform my future practice if, as I hope to, I become a higher education teacher one day. I have become aware that learners in higher education need to be supported just like any other learner at any given education level.

CHAPTER SIX

REACHING MY RESEARCH DESTINATION: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

6.1 Introduction

This research study aimed to put under the microscope my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. The supportive teacher-learner relationships I explored were formal and informal and occurred throughout my educational journey, from my pre-school days to my postgraduate studies at a South African university.

In Chapter Five I looked at stories of my experience concerning both supportive and unsupportive teacher-learner relationships in my higher education setting. I also considered how these relationships influenced my thinking and practices and discussed what I learnt from them. My own memory stories were followed by a presentation of my learning through an informal discussion with a university friend. Lastly, I presented a reflection on my overall learning from memory-work presented in the chapter. I argued that learners in higher education, like any other learner at any level of education, require support, and that everyone involved in higher education should strive to create and maintain a culture of supportive relationships.

In this concluding Chapter Six, I review my research dissertation by briefly going over what was covered in the previous chapters. Furthermore, I reflect on what I have learnt from this research study in terms of my personal-professional learning, methodological learning, and conceptual and theoretical learning. I then outline the most important lessons that I will take from this personal narrative inquiry as an early-career teacher and explain my further research ideas. Lastly, I present a metaphor drawing, showing how my understanding of supportive teacher-learner relationships has evolved.

6.2 Review of the research dissertation

Chapter One started with a metaphor drawing of a mother hen protecting her different chicks under her wings. To me, the mother hen represented a teacher tasked with taking care of her diverse learners' needs. This includes learners' internal (academic) and external (non-academic) needs. Therefore, this analogy presented my initial understanding of supportive teacher-learner relationships. Furthermore, I zoomed in on how my interest (personal and

professional) to undertake this research study was driven by recalling some of my school experiences where I engaged with reading a book chapter by Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c). This opened my eyes and made me conscious of this vital topic of supportive teacher-learner relationships.

I proceeded to map out my initial understanding of the importance of developing teacher-learner relationships in schools and higher education learning spaces. I explained how research, over the years, has indicated that the positive relationship between a teacher and a learner (and a student in cases of HEIs) serves as a significant predictor of academic engagement and achievement (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; Bosah et al., 2015; Mensah & Koomson, 2020). I further explained that academic outcomes cannot be satisfactorily achieved for all learners in learning spaces without considering how these are connected to social and emotional well-being. Therefore, it is of pivotal importance that supportive teacher-learner relationships are established and maintained in learning institutions to create access and promote success and well-being for both learners and teachers. I further explained how this research study was informed by a sociocultural perspective influenced by Vygotsky (1978) and by Mitchell and Weber's (1999, p. 8) concept of "a pedagogy of reinvention". Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theoretical viewpoint helped me understand that learning is culturally and socially constructed in a given context. Mitchell and Weber's (1999, p. 8) "pedagogy of reinvention" helped me appreciate how memory-work could aid me in learning about my own personal experiences to reinvent my future practice as a novice teacher.

Chapter Two explained that this research dissertation presented a qualitative research study using a narrative inquiry research methodology. The study aimed to reflectively examine my personal experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships across my educational journey. I provided a detailed discussion of my understanding of narrative inquiry research methodology. I explained how I expected that adopting a narrative inquiry mindset would help me better understand myself, allowing me to respond in a more relevant and positive manner to promote supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools and higher education. I expected narrative inquiry would help me recall and reflect on my past and present experiences to understand the 'complex' stories, including the people who had been a part of my life.

Chapter Two also described the location of the study and the nature of the participants. Furthermore, I clarified the data generation methods for this study: memory drawing, object inquiry/artefact retrieval, journaling and informal conversations with selected family members,

school friends and a university friend to help me recall my memories regarding supportive and unsupportive teacher-learner relationships. I also explained my meaning-making process as zooming in and out (Change, 2008) of the memory stories. Zooming in meant focusing on specific aspects of my stories. Zooming out entailed stepping back to consider my accounts in relation to other people's experiences and relevant literature, allowing me to place my stories in a broader context and extend their implications. Moreover, I considered trustworthiness and research ethics issues. Lastly, I also outlined some challenges that affected me while undertaking this research study.

In Chapter Three I engaged with my two research questions: (a) *What can I learn from my personal lived experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships?* and (b) *As a novice teacher, how can I build on this learning to develop supportive teacher-learner relationships?* I looked back at stories of my experience concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in my family, village, and community settings. These were informal teacher-learner relationships where family, village and community members took on an informal teaching role in the society. I started by sharing supportive relationships I experienced at home, in my village and, by extension, in my wider community, and how these relationships influenced my thinking and practices. I then described what I learnt from them. My own memory stories were followed by a presentation of my learning through informal discussions with my selected family members.

I presented my overall learning from the memory-work in this chapter. I explained how I learnt that family and community members who possess different formal education levels could play a vital role in developing informal supportive teacher-learner relationships and supporting formal supportive teacher-learner relationships. This memory-work made me more conscious of why informal supportive teacher-learner relationships in families, villages, and communities are so meaningful. It also made me realise how rich in knowledge are the supportive relationships we form with family, friends, and various other people we meet in our daily lives and interactions.

In Chapter Four I again responded to my two research questions, in this case looking back at my past experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in my primary school and high school settings. A few events demonstrating unsupportive teacher-learner relationships were also included. My own memory stories were followed by a presentation of

my learning through informal discussions with my selected primary school and high school friends.

Reflecting on my schooling experiences, I realised that teachers' supportive relationships with learners can help them believe that they have the potential to achieve. Furthermore, teachers can help learners discover new information about themselves regarding academic and other abilities that they might not have realised otherwise. Conversations with my friends emphasised the importance of mutual understanding and acceptance that students come from various backgrounds, including socioeconomic status and intellectual or physical abilities. This is necessary for schools to develop a culture of enabling teacher-student relationships. Some of my own memories and those of my classmates were shaped by damaging and unsupportive experiences in primary and secondary school. I became more aware of how such experiences can negatively impact learners' self-esteem, confidence, academic engagement, and achievement. As a result, teachers in schools must commit to supporting all learners. When learners reflect on their schooldays, they will remember the practices and behaviours that teachers demonstrate to them.

In Chapter Five I once again engaged with my research questions, in this case, looking back at my past experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships in a higher education space of learning. One event showing an unsupportive teacher-learner relationship was also described. My memory stories were followed by a presentation of my learning through an informal discussion with a selected university friend.

In reflecting on my overall learning, I highlighted how, as a student, I was influenced to acknowledge, respect, and understand other students in the higher education learning space because of the supportive teacher-learner relationships I had. This memory-work also allowed me to see and reflect on how supportive teacher-student relationships aided my academic success in higher education. Furthermore, I became aware of how positive teacher-student relationships aided in the development of my personal and academic identities, as well as my long-term goals. I understood more about how students' supportive experiences can motivate them to reach their full potential and achieve their goals, based on my own experiences. Furthermore, I recalled how the mentoring I received assisted me in gaining new insights into how I could contribute to the development of others' well-being and growth by participating in community outreach and leadership. As a result, I was able to see how students' lived experiences in HEIs with supportive teacher-learner relationships can positively influence

others in their future interactions. I also realised how important it is for students to appreciate their role in developing relationships with higher education teachers. When my friend Neli told me about her different experiences, I saw that a higher education space is sometimes taken as a non-interactive setting in which relationships are not prioritised. I concluded that higher education learners, like any other learner at any level of education, require support. Everyone involved in higher education should work to create and maintain a supportive, relational culture.

6.3 Personal-professional learning

Doing this research has changed my educational outlook. I have learnt that supportive teacher-learner relationships in learning spaces are essential – to more of a degree than I could imagine – for the effective engagement of and achievement of academic success by learners and their social and emotional well-being. Understanding my personal journey has made me conscious that supportive teacher-learner relationships help learners appreciate that they have the potential to achieve their dreams and that they can aspire to goals that might have seemed out of their reach. This can subsequently lead to them working hard towards making those dreams and goals a reality.

This research also showed me how social and cultural backgrounds play an essential role in learners' learning in different contexts. Therefore, teachers must pay full attention to their learners' social and cultural environments and the significant people in those environments. This can enable the teacher to employ appropriate strategies and involve families and communities in supporting learners.

A narrative inquiry seeks to improve human life to better position the present and subsequently the future (Clandinin, 2006). Hence, this research will influence my future educational practice. Inquiring into my personal stories concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships taught me about the significance of being there for each other, and how we need each other for our own personal and professional development and that of significant others. Thus, I will strive to be a responsive, approachable teacher. I also aim to be a teacher who shows love, empathy, and perseverance to all learners as they bring many differences. Such differences include socio-economic backgrounds and physical or intellectual abilities, among others. Lastly, I will endeavour to be a teacher who gives learners a chance to voice their opinions and ideas on

issues that concern their education and other issues affecting their lives. This personal narrative inquiry has made me critical and conscious of the importance of treating all my learners with care and always looking out for the best in them. This means that I should be active in knowing all their strengths and weaknesses, so that I will be able to explore and develop relevant strategies in supporting them as they bring many different factors with them. I will also work with their parents and guardians to identify their needs and see how they can get help.

6.4 Methodological learning

Through a narrative inquiry research methodology, I have learnt that in engaging with one's self and one's participants, a process of living, telling, and reliving and retelling stories gives rise to new thinking. Studying supportive teacher-learner relationships helped me delve into my past and present experiences to understand the multifaceted stories I have lived. Moreover, Clandinin (2013) adds to this scholarly conversation that the "unexpectedness also lives in, and through, the unfolding relationships between researchers and participants. Living one's life in the midst of others' lives opens us up to the possibilities of what this experience will call forth and lead into" (p. 203). These possibilities are not only expected in narrative inquiry, but are also one of its features. As we inquire with ourselves and significant others, we engage in opening up the possibility for growth. Awakening and engaging with other parts of the stories that I had not previously paid much attention to was part and parcel of the inquiry. For example, as much as I praised my Grade 1 teacher, Mrs Motsoeneng, for the critical role she played in providing us with relevant knowledge and skills, I did not pay attention that she directed some brutal treatments at my peers. One of my primary school friends reminded me of this in our informal conversation. This helped me understand that a story can have different sides, depending on who remembers it. It also highlighted the value of involving family and friends to offer their perspectives on my memory-work.

Furthermore, Clandinin (2013) argues that the way people tell their stories and what their stories tell are shaped by "cultural conventions and language usage ... [and] reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's culture" (p. 191). Therefore, the cultural, social, and institutional settings in which we are embedded form part of who we are becoming. For example, the engagement with my grandmother at home taught me about the importance of my cultural heritage through recognising the value my family and community placed on education and the positive impact of this on my educational journey.

In my meaningful engagement with arts-based drawing and object/artefact retrieval methods, accompanied by written reflections and informal conversations, I wanted to make my memories vivid with detail and colour. Engaging with these methods captured my interest and allowed me to gain new insights and understandings. Using various methods enabled me to elicit and share rich information and ideas that I and my participants and readers could engage with and learn from. Furthermore, arts-based research methods allowed me to be creative and flexible in the process of generating data, its presentation, and its exploration – and, more importantly, in learning from it.

Lastly, I would like to advise other students interested in employing a similar methodology that narrative inquiry research is fascinating to work with. It opens one's eyes and gives rise to new meanings and perspectives for the researcher and the participants. Narrative inquiry can also be beneficial to its readers; engaging with the researcher's and participants' stories of experience can help them recall and reflect on their lived experiences. Therefore, when choosing this research methodology, the aim of novice researchers should be to be open to a broader learning space as they reflect on their past and present experiences or those of the people they engage with. This will subsequently give rise to new meanings as they search for a more hopeful future.

6.5 Conceptual and theoretical learning

As explained in Chapter One, a sociocultural perspective influenced by Vygotsky (1978) and by Mitchell and Weber's (1999, p. 8) concept of "a pedagogy of reinvention" informed this study. The notion of "a pedagogy of reinvention" helped me understand how memory-work could contribute to me learning from my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships to bring about reinvention concerning my personal and professional identity and future pedagogic practices. When I was introduced to the concept of memory-work, I was touched to the core about how influential memories can be in terms of who we are, what we presently do and what we intend to do in the future (Molefe, 2020). I understood that memory-work is done to understand the past to improve the present and future. Moreover, as Hamerton (2001, as cited in Masinga, 2012) explains, "memory-work enables people to make explicit the ways in which experiences and identities are constructed within particular socio-cultural settings" (p. 121). Therefore, in working with memories, sociocultural perspectives and meanings can be drawn on to allow learning and reflection.

Taking a sociocultural stance helped me understand that teacher-learner relationships are culturally and socially influenced. This means that teachers must pay much attention to learners' personal, social, and cultural backgrounds as they engage with them in their daily interaction routines. Furthermore, being aware of learners' upbringings can inform the teacher about the relationships learners have formed with their families and community members. This can also make teachers conscious of how family and community relationships can impact those they create with their learners in learning spaces. This study has shown me that learners' relationships with families and community members are vital resources that teachers and schools can appreciate and draw on. Teachers can learn about and build on learners' existing relationships in developing supportive teacher-learner relationships.

6.6 Moving forward

6.6.1 Lessons learnt

Below I outline the most important lessons that I will take forward from this personal narrative inquiry as an early-career teacher.

Lesson one:

Supportive teacher-learner relationships mean responsibility for taking care of learners' internal (academic) and external (non-academic) needs.

As an early-career teacher, I am tasked with going the extra mile to ensure that all of my learners are taken care of and treated equally well by their caring and loving teacher. This will include all of my learners, irrespective of their differences in both the classroom and whole-school contexts. Just as many of my teachers did for me, I will help learners overcome barriers caused by socio-economic or other circumstances and support them academically, in extra-curricular areas, and in terms of their social and emotional well-being.

Lesson two:

At the heart of supportive teacher-learner relationships are teachers who prioritise self-awareness to be conscious of their learners' various circumstances.

This means that at the heart of the teaching and learning process, I will prioritise self-awareness to work effectively with learners and significant others. Remembering and interpreting past

events that have always been part of my life have allowed me to make valuable discoveries about myself and my experiences that I can apply when seeking to understand and build relationships with learners. I am committed to moving forward as a teacher who engages in open, honest self-reflection and discussion about my experiences to open more doors for learning about and responding to learners' circumstances and needs.

Lesson three:

Teachers who build and maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships value and involve parents/guardians, learner peers, other teachers, community members, and other relevant stakeholders in teaching and learning processes.

As an early-career teacher, I must involve all relevant stakeholders in education, such as parents, learner peers, other teachers and community members, to benefit learners. In particular, this research has shown me that learners' relationships with their families and community members are valuable resources that I can appreciate and draw on. Understanding how others can contribute to learner-teacher relationships can enhance my relationships with learners and increase the support for learners with challenges they may come across in learning spaces and outside.

6.6.2 Future research

In future, I would like to engage in further research on this very same topic of supportive teacher-learner relationships in schools, but using a self-study research methodology. Samaras and Freese (2006) highlight that self-study research is about examining oneself to improve one's professional practice. This means that it allows innovative self-reflection intending to better the present and future. In this case, I would also like to include my future learners as participants in engaging with this topic. Engaging in self-study research and my prospective learners will help me gain more insights from them. Furthermore, it will help me as a teacher-researcher acquire new meanings and perspectives of how I can improve and/or modify my teaching and learning process, and how I view and approach things concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. Therefore, engaging in this type of research will help me critically and actively inquire into my personal and professional practice to become a better and more responsible teacher-researcher regarding the phenomenon under scrutiny.

6.7 Conclusion

Through my journey of engaging with this personal narrative inquiry research, I have learnt that supportive teacher-learner relationships should be at the heart of the teaching and learning process. This includes all of our engagements and interactions in the classroom and whole-school contexts and in the external environment. Strong and constructive teacher-learner relationships can allow learners to feel welcomed, appreciated, and protected, with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, I believe that the relationship between teachers and their learners should serve as a connecting element between the two parties, providing a better space for learning. Moreover, success and well-being in education depend on the enabling environments and supportive relationships teachers create with and among their learners. Therefore, it is of pivotal importance that supportive relationships are always kept at the heart of teaching and learning processes and all interactions in education.

I conclude with a metaphor drawing (Figure 6.1) which represents my current view on how supportive teacher-learner relationships in spaces of learning should look:

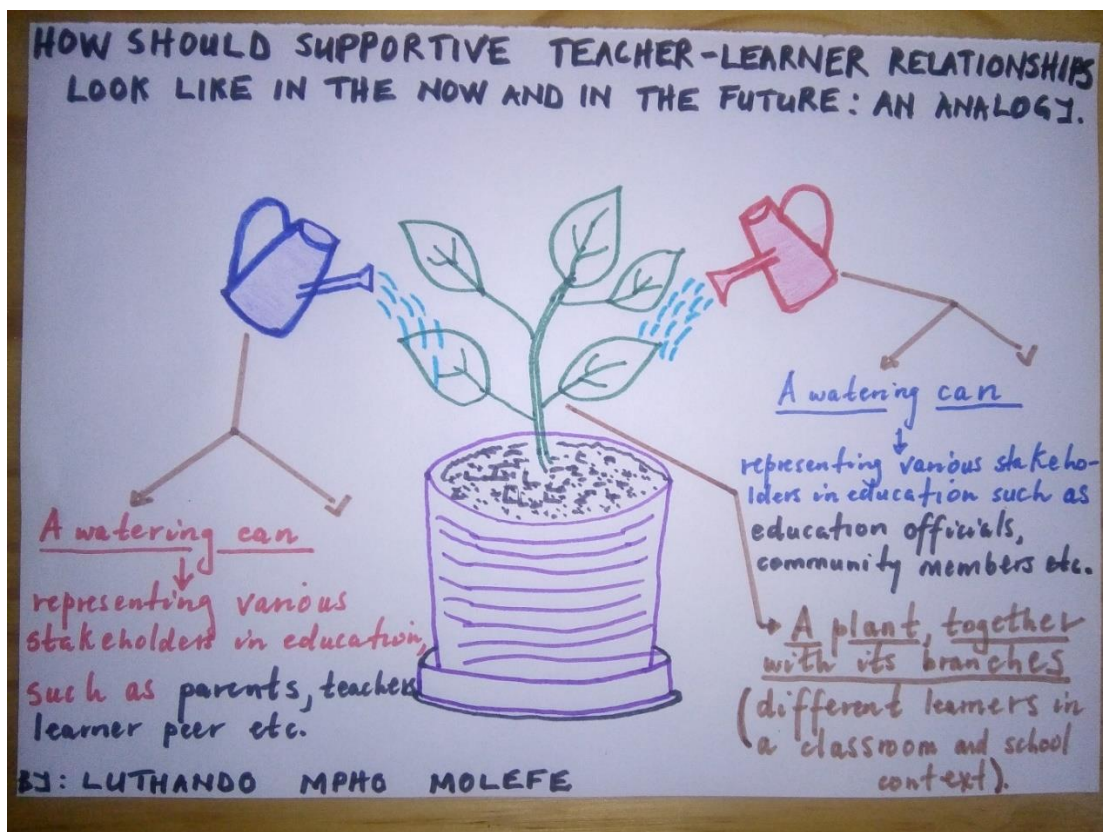


Figure 6.1: My metaphor drawing of my view of how supportive teacher-learner relationships should look in the present and in the future.

The watering cans in the metaphor drawing (Figure 6.1) represent various stakeholders in education, such as teachers, parents, learners and their peers, and community members, who all can play a critical role in developing a learner. The learner is represented by the plant that receives water from the watering cans. In this way, learners can receive support from various stakeholders to realise their potential and recognise and reach for their dreams and goals.

My understanding of supportive teacher-learner relationships has grown from what was portrayed in the first metaphor drawing in Chapter One, to this final concluding metaphor drawing. My initial metaphor drawing showed only the teacher and learners as involved in teacher-learner relationships. I have learnt that promoting supportive teacher-learner relationships in learning spaces needs us all. Teachers who maintain supportive teacher-learner relationships in education involve and appreciate parents/guardians, learners and their peers, other teachers, community members and other relevant stakeholders in teaching and learning processes and pertinent other engagements and interactions.

In the end, I am going to say, “May God be with us” as we continue this journey of searching, understanding, and putting into practice supportive teacher-learner relationships in education in striving for a more hopeful future.

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APPENDIX ONE: MEMORY DRAWING PROMPTS FOR MYSELF AS A PARTICIPANT-RESEARCHER

1. Think back about your own school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary, secondary and University experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you feel either good OR bad about yourself as a learner/student.
2. On a blank piece of paper, use a pencil or any type of a pen to draw a picture of this memory story. Try to include as many details as you can remember on your memory story.
3. Explain your drawing in reflection, paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things.
4. Give your drawing a title and few sentences underneath to describe what is happening in your drawing or picture. What can you learn from this particular experience?

APPENDIX TWO: OBJECT INQUIRY/ARTEFACT RETRIEVAL PROMPTS FOR MYSELF AS A PARTICIPANT-RESEARCHER

1. Think back about your own school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary, secondary and University experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you feel either good OR bad about yourself as a learner/student.
2. On a blank piece of paper, draw or provide a picture of an object/artefact that represents this memory story. Try to think about/include as many details as you can remember on your memory story.
3. Explain your object/artefact in reflection, paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things.
4. Give your drawing or a picture of an object/artefact a title and few sentences underneath to describe what is happening in your drawing or picture. What can you learn from this particular experience?

APPENDIX THREE: JOURNAL WRITING AND VISUAL JOURNALING PROMPTS FOR MYSELF AS A PARTICIPANT-RESEARCHER

1. Think back about your own school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary, secondary and University experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you feel either good OR bad about yourself as a learner/student.
2. On your journal or visual journaling write or picture (write and draw) this memory story. Try to think and include as many details as you can remember about your memory story.
3. Further explain your memory story, paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can you learn from this particular experience?

APPENDIX FOUR: PROMPTS FOR INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH SELECTED SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS TO HELP ME IN RECALLING AND REFLECTING ON MY MEMORIES-PROMPTS

For my school and university friends

1. Think back about our own school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary/secondary and/or University experiences where a teacher/lecturer made you or us feel either good OR bad about yourself or ourselves or anyone in our class as a learner/student.
2. Try to think and tell me what you can remember about those moments or events. Include as many details as you can remember.
3. Further explain these events by paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can we learn from this particular experience?

For my family members

1. Think back about my school days. Try to remember, in detail, primary/secondary and/or University experiences that I may have told you or discovered by yourself or others where a teacher made me, or my friends feel either good OR bad about myself or ourselves in our class as learners/students.

2. Try to think and tell me what you can remember about those moments or events. Include as many details as you can remember.
3. Further explain these events by paying particular attention to describing feelings, thoughts, sounds and colours, among other things. What can we learn from this particular experience?

APPENDIX FIVE: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

80245 ZICOLE AREA

NQUTHU

3135

15 July 2021

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Luthando Mpho Molefe (Mr), I am currently a registered Master of Education student in the School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am based in the Teacher Development Studies Discipline in the Education Studies Cluster. My contact details are as follows: Cell: 078 049 1558, Email: 215029529@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

I invite you to participate in a research study entitled: *A Personal Narrative Inquiry Into Supportive Teacher-Learner Relationships*.

The purpose of this research study is to reflectively examine my own personal experiences, across my educational journey, concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships. Firstly, in the process, I want to learn how the phenomenon explored has influenced and shaped the individual I am today and how it continues to do so in the present and subsequently in the future. Secondly, I want to better my practices and experiences regarding supportive teacher-learner relationships. Finally, I also want to reflectively examine some of the unsupportive relationships that I have experienced across my educational journey.

The focus of this research study is to put under the microscope my own personal experiences concerning supportive teacher-learner relationships, using a narrative inquiry approach. The supportive teacher-learner relationships that I am going to explore are both formal and informal, across my educational journey, meaning from my pre-school up to my postgraduate journey at one South African University. In this research study, I will be playing a dual role of being a researcher and a participant at the same time. In this study, I am also going to include some of my selected school friends and family members to help me in recalling my memories.

Therefore, this will be done through informal conversations in both face-to-face (keeping in place the COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations) and online interactions. Therefore, potential participants were identified such that they met a specific criterion. Those are my close school friends (basic education level) and University friends (higher education); and selected family members whom I spent most of my time with and who know a lot about me and our union (relationships and experiences).

Including you as my selected school friends and family members in this research study will help me to remember, in detail, and make sense of the memories that I might have forgotten or that are not clear to me. This will be done, in different stages of the research and where necessary, through the process of inviting you my selected school friends and family members to engage with the portraits of the memory drawings/object inquiry/artefact retrieval and/or the journal writing and visual journaling to help me in recalling my memories. This will then therefore help me to remember, in detail, and make sense of the memories that I might have forgotten or that are not clear to me. It will also help me to make sense of and make new meanings and perspectives in relation to the phenomenon under scrutiny.

You will not be required to express content/information that you feel is uncomfortable or you are unwilling to share with me due to personal or related reasoning. The recording tool will, with your approval, be a smartphone/laptop. In each of the online sessions that are going to be conducted in the research study, we will focus on the data (reflections) that are going to be generated by the researcher using his selected research methods as mentioned elsewhere in this letter.

Please note that the information you give will be strictly confidential and will be used for the purposes of writing the research report to meet the requirements of the Master of Education degree and subsequent academic publications. All names of participants will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity or unless indicated otherwise through your permission. All recorded data will be kept in a secure space to be accessed by only the researcher (student) and the supervisor.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage you feel like doing so and for any reason. Your refusal to engage in the activities that will be done or withdrawal from this research project will, in no way, result in any form of discrimination or disadvantage.

Should you agree to being a participant of this research please be aware that you will be doing so free of charge. There will be no rewards given by the researcher to the research participants.

Please take some time think carefully about your willingness to participate in this research project. Just as it will be beneficial for me as the researcher, you as the participant also stand a chance of engaging in professional learning and development.

Thank you.

Luthando Mpho Molefe (Mr)

Master of Education (Professional Development) Student

PARTICIPANT DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I (name and surname) have been informed about the study entitled: *A Personal Narrative Inquiry Into Supportive Teacher-Learner Relationships* by Luthando Mpho Molefe (Mr).

I understand the purpose, focus and procedures of the study. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction. I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any penalties that may be directed to me for taking such action. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher or the supervisor of this research study.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a research participant, or if I am concerned about any aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Researcher : Luthando Mpho Molefe (Mr)
School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Email: 215047767@stu.ukzn.ac.za
Cell: 078 049 4558

Supervisor : Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (Professor)
School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Email: pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za
Cell: 084 027 5991

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio record my online meeting sessions YES / NO

Participate in the engagement with memory drawing part of the study YES / NO

Participate in the engagement with object inquiry/artefact retrieval part of the study YES
/ NO

Participate in the engagement with journal writing/visual journaling part of the study YES
/ NO

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

APPENDIX SIX: TURNITIN SIMILARITY REPORT



Full dissertation 17 November 2021 by
Luthando Molefe
From Coursework and dissertation (MEd
self-study)

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- 5 < 1% match ()
[Magubane, Sifiso Eric. "Cultivating intrinsic motivation for learning technology : a teacher's self-study.", 2016](#)

paper text:

CHAPTER ONE UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS Introduction In the process of thinking about and making sense of the importance of developing supportive teacher-learner relationships in spaces of learning, I was quickly evoked to engage with and to produce a metaphor drawing that was going to depict how I view supportive teacher-learner relationships. Metaphor drawing can be described as "an imaginative way of describing a situation using a drawn picture. A hand drawn sketch of a metaphor may be used to explain how a teaching and learning situation is visualised" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2013, p. 90). Furthermore, Literat (2013) argues that "drawings are able to represent the relationship between visual elements in a way that would be impossible to express [in] writing or speech" (p. 87). Therefore, engaging with metaphor drawing in this case, I wanted to make visible what I thought best represents supportive teacher-learner relationships in both schools and higher education institutions of learning. I, therefore, quickly developed a metaphor drawing of mother hen with her chicks under her wings (see Figure 1.1). To me, this analogy represented how a teacher (hen), who is tasked with a responsibility of taking care of her learners' (chicks) needs is supposed to look. This includes taking care of learners' internal (academic) and external (non-academic) needs. To me, this analogy again represented a teacher who goes an extra mile in making sure that all her learners, irrespective of the differences they possess in both classroom and the whole school contexts are taken care of and are equally treated by their caring and loving teacher. Therefore, at the outset of my study, this metaphor drawing depicted my initial understanding of how supportive teacher-learner relationships

APPENDIX SEVEN: PROFESSIONAL EDITING CERTIFICATE

Leverne Gething, M.Phil., t/a WHIZZ@WORDS
PO Box 1155, Milnerton 7435; cell 072 212 5417
e-mail: leverne@eject.co.za

2 December 2021

Declaration of editing of a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Teacher Development Studies)

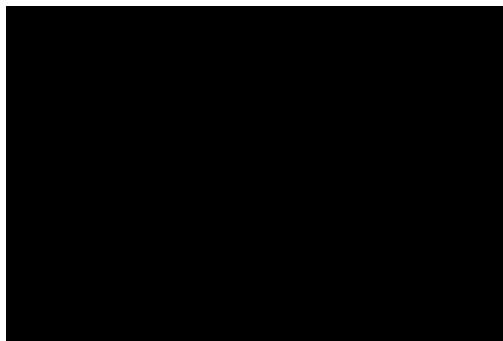
TITLE: A PERSONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO SUPPORTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS

I hereby declare that I carried out language editing of the above thesis on behalf of Luthando Mpho Molefe.

I am a professional writer and editor with many years of experience (e.g. 5 years on *SA Medical Journal*, 10 years heading the corporate communication division at the SA Medical Research Council), who specialises in Science and Technology editing - but am adept at editing in many different subject areas. I have edited a great deal of work for various academic journals, universities and publishers.

I am a full member of the South African Freelancers' Association as well as of the Professional Editors' Association.

Yours sincerely



LEVERNE GETHING leverne@eject.co.za