EXPLORING CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE AS A RESOURCE FOR ENGLISH CREATIVE WRITING IN AN ISIZULU-SPEAKING GRADE 6 CLASS:
A TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

I am an isiZulu-speaking teacher in a primary school in a semi-rural area, serving an isiZulu-speaking community. The school uses English as a medium of instruction, and it is taught as a First Additional Language. My study aimed to explore children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in my Grade 6 class. A sociocultural theoretical perspective helped me understand teaching and learning as culturally and socially constructed. My methodological approach was self-study of practice. I was the primary research participant, and the other participants were the learners in my class. I worked closely with three critical friends (fellow teachers and doctoral students). My first research question was, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* In response, I recalled my past experiences of children's popular culture to learn from them as a resource for teaching creative writing. I also explored my own past experiences relevant to the teaching and learning of creative writing. I recalled and narrated my fun experiences as well as memorable educative experiences using self-study methods, i.e., memory drawing and artefact retrieval. My second question was, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In response to this question, I conducted English, Social Science and Technology lessons that integrated children's popular culture content as a resource for teaching and learning creative writing. I provided a detailed description of what transpired during the teaching and learning with examples of classwork produced by learners. I employed collage and poetry as arts-based methods to analyse and reflect deeply in searching for meaningful answers. This study enabled me to learn from my learners as they taught me about what was in their hearts. I experienced how popular culture content and forms can elicit creative writing and keep children motivated and inspired. Self-study encouraged and empowered me to improve the way I teach. Furthermore, this study has recognised the significance of children's perspectives and expertise and considered them as valued partners in educational research and practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: ENTERING THE UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY OF CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE AT SCHOOL

Introduction

I am an African male teacher with 18 years' experience in the teaching profession. My initial teacher qualification was a Secondary Teachers Diploma. However, I got my first teaching post at a rural primary school as there were no higher posts available at that time. From then, I gradually developed a love for teaching young children. Hence my entire teaching experience is based at primary schools. I am experienced in teaching Grade 6 and 7 learners. In the past years, I have taught English, Social Science, Technology and Natural Science subjects. My ethnic group is Zulu; therefore, I speak IsiZulu as a home language. The values and norms instilled in me as a Zulu person when I was growing up prioritised humanity and respect. This was the responsibility of my parents, family and the entire community I lived in. They had an old saying, "it takes a village to raise a child". I was made aware of my cultural identity and heritage at a young age at home and school.

I am currently teaching at a primary school situated in a semi-rural area. The social ills prevalent around my school community are: substance abuse; poverty; domestic violence; high levels of unemployment; and HIV infections. Therefore, our school is categorised as quintile two by the Department of Education, which means it is a no-fee paying school and has a school nutrition programme learner feeding scheme. For a school to qualify to be in this quintile, it has to be located in a rural area or in a community where many residents are unemployed and have low income. The quintile two schools enrol learners without paying school fees. The school also has a kitchen where they prepare meals to be received by each child every school day. The Department of Education allocates subsidies for these schools depending on the enrolment. Some of the learners I teach come from home backgrounds where they are under single parents' or grandparents' guidance. The majority of our learners are children of the youth or young adults, and they are recipients of the child support grant given by the Social Department. Some young parents did not complete school and some old grandparents are not educated at all. This makes it difficult for them to assist their children with schoolwork.

The community is close-knit and respect is of paramount importance. The authority is from the house of traditional leadership. The traditional chief and his indunas (senior officials) hold significant power in the ruling of society. The common home language that is spoken in the

community is IsiZulu. The cultural background of the community is entrenched in the traditional Zulu customs and cultures. The community upholds Zulu cultural norms in dressing and acting when having traditional wedding ceremonies and other vital functions. The community members prioritise and value humanity as everyone in the village knows one another.

The school uses English as a medium of instruction, and it is taught as a First Additional Language. English is used as a medium of instruction because it is a universal language in the world of work and all public schools have to offer two official languages. The first language used by learners is IsiZulu as it is a home language. Many learners struggle to understand and comprehend English texts' content because most of them lack English vocabulary. At home, children often do not get parental support with English activities to reinforce what they learn at school. Therefore, children perform poorly due to a lack of comprehension, not a lack of effort.

Through my Master's study of nurturing and developing a flair for English written communication among my IsiZulu-speaking grade six learners (Madondo, 2014), I learnt that every learner has the potential to write creatively. I also understood that developing a flair for written communication demands sustenance from all significant stakeholders in learners' education. Moreover, written communication development does not solely rely on what the teacher is doing in the classroom; instead, it should be a joint effort of all concerned (Madondo, 2014). Thus, my doctoral study aimed to explore children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class. As I taught English, Social Science and Technology, I planned to use some periods from these three subjects for my research. All these subjects are conducted in the medium of English and require learners to write creatively in English. Hence, my aim in this research was to find ways of using what interests learners and matters the most to them as a resource to teach and learn creative writing.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by discussing the focus and purpose of the study. I explain my motives for doing this research. Next, I state the critical research questions that guide this study with a brief explanation of how I responded to each question. To follow, I introduce the methodological approach of the study. I identify and explain the self-study of educational practice as a methodological approach suitable for the study's focus and purpose. I offer my understanding of international and local literature on self-study and present my knowledge of

self-study in a collage form. I then discuss how I approached the learning and teaching of writing from a sociocultural perspective. Lastly, I explain my preliminary understandings of children's popular culture and creative writing teaching and learning. Finally, I give an account of how this chapter has achieved its purpose and a detailed explanation of how the thesis is structured.

Focus and purpose of the study

My research focuses on exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching English creative writing with IsiZulu-speaking primary school learners. During the initial stages of thinking about a topic for my research, my focus was more on finding new strategies to support learners' writing development by using what is "in" or "trending" as a popular culture for them. I thought to myself, if I use what children believe is important to them and what they love, it might ignite that spark of writing creatively in English. I then composed a lantern poem to help me clarify my research focus. A lantern poem is a five-line verse shaped like a Japanese lantern with a syllabic pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4, 1 (Pithouse-Morgan, Deer-Standup, & Ndaleni, 2019). In a doctoral supervision session, my fellow doctoral students and I helped each other brainstorm many different words to best describe our research focuses. Subsequently, I had to select words from the list that best suited and defined my research focus. The word choice depended on the number of syllables in each word so that it matched the arrangement as required by the lantern poem pattern. Below is the lantern poem that I composed to express my research focus.

Lantern poem

Fame

Culture

Impact

On writing

Skill

Lastly, through some deliberate discussions of my lantern poem with my fellow students and my supervisor, I succeeded in developing my research topic: "Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study". My understanding was, for teachers to teach creative writing successfully, they need to capitalise on, use, and focus on what learners are familiar with and

are of interest to them to write about. I aimed to find new strategies for teaching creative writing and instilling a love for writing by using popular culture as a resource for motivation.

Rationale for the study

This topic was crucial to me as a teacher because I sought to improve how I support, instruct, and impart knowledge to my learners. What led me to undertake this study was that as part of my Master's research (Madondo, 2014), I realised that my learners struggled with English language written communication. Furthermore, what made me concerned about this phenomenon was hearing people from all spheres of life complaining about the low literacy levels at primary schools. This made me feel incompetent and discontented with my teaching of creative writing. Moreover, parents and other stakeholders concerned in education measure teachers' success and competency by learners' performance, especially in literacy, which is reading and writing. In my Master's study (Madondo, 2014), I explored ways of nurturing a flair for written English communication in a Grade 6 class. In this doctoral study, I sought to investigate and explore children's popular culture as a resource for creative writing in my Grade 6 class. I believed that this study could equip me with new ways of utilising what children regard as very important and meaningful in their lives in teaching creative writing. I also hoped to share my findings with other teachers and educational researchers.

In my understanding, children's popular culture can play a vital role in developing children's literacy, particularly creative writing, because popular culture preoccupies and fascinates children's minds. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) highlighted that researching children's popular culture is essential because it requires researchers to consider children's perspectives, respect children's knowledge, and consider them as experts. Furthermore, Broomly (1996) maintained that it is essential to consider children's interests and concerns when developing activities and strategies for teaching and learning creative writing in class. In the same way, Venn (1996) asserted, "bringing popular culture into the classroom…can be constructive and can lead pupils into a wider range of texts and experiences" (p. 147). However, schools often prohibit children from bringing in popular culture objects (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). In my view, institutions of learning and teachers should not deny the existence of children's popular culture because that is where children's interests are. I anticipated that children's popular culture could be a stepping stone and a constructive influence on creative writing

development. In my understanding, learners can never be short of words when writing about things that they are fond of and familiar with.

This study is warranted as it sought to comprehend what happens when primary school learners' experiences of and interests in popular culture are used as resources for teaching creative writing in a South African classroom context. The study will contribute to research literature as similar popular culture studies were conducted in other parts of the world but not in my South African educational context. Furthermore, this study is unique. Other studies had only children as participants and investigated children's interaction with popular culture; however, I am the researcher and a participant with the Grade 6 learners in this study. This is so because self-study research methodology compels the researcher not to be the spectator or an outsider but to play a significant role as a participant. This means that I had to also explore and deduce my learning from my childhood popular culture experiences to improve my teaching approach. In the same way, Alvermann and Xu (2003) advise that it is ideal for teachers to begin by learning about their own experiences with popular culture. They maintain that this knowledge can assist teachers to better understand and appreciate the entertainment and pleasure children get from the various forms of popular culture.

There are similar studies conducted with children as the participants. For example, Buelow (2017) highlights the significance of integrating popular culture into the curriculum. It improves the teacher's pedagogical knowledge, develops literacy skills in learners, and allows them to find their voice when expressing issues. Similarly, Alvermann and Heron (2001) argue that studies that integrate popular culture into the curriculum are crucial for teachers because they can learn how to facilitate literacy activities that are meaningful and relevant to their learners' experiences. Furthermore, Alvermann (2002) argues that teachers should strive for effective classroom literacy instruction that is relevant by trying to bridging the gap between the school curriculum standards or requirements and the cultural funds of knowledge that children possess from their home and community environments.

My study does not explore interacting one particular popular culture phenomenon into the creative writing curriculum. Instead, it considers several popular culture aspects because learners' knowledge is vast, and I wanted to ensure that all learners in my class would be represented. Similarly, Buelow (2017) states that she initially began her research to incorporate a particular popular culture phenomenon into the curriculum but realised the need for a broader

scope because learners are knowledgeable with various popular culture aspects. Moreover, Alvermann and Xu (2003) state that learners appreciate teachers who show interest and curiosity in what matters to them. This kind of teaching could tap into various forms of popular culture knowledge, encouraging children to engage in writing activities in the classroom. Furthermore, this study also explores today's children's popular culture linked to technological developments.

Hilton (1996) maintained that we cannot deny that today's children are widely exposed to a flood wave of popular culture in such forms as videos and toys. Likewise, Mitchell and Reid-Welsh (2002) concurred that learners that we teach today are advanced in surfing websites that engage them with children's popular culture taking place in virtual space. Broomly (1996) explained that children learn from videos that they watch at home and that teachers should use such knowledge in their classrooms to be carefully looked at and developed further.

Furthermore, Hilton (1996) suggested that teachers should acknowledge the gender narratives gained from watching videos as a part of popular culture that should be integrated into and explored critically in classrooms. Moletsane (2005) pointed out that engaging children in creative writing exercises can provide learners, especially girls, with platforms to freely express their thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences of law-breaking and violence against themselves and important individuals in their lives. This makes it clear that teachers and educational researchers need to consider children's popular culture when intending to develop teaching and learning of creative writing.

In my experience, the approach to the teaching English creative writing by some teachers in the past has focused on producing a final piece of writing. My Master's study (Madondo, 2014) showed me that teachers need to develop lessons that spark and develop creativity rather than promoting rote learning. However, as Peterson (2014) highlighted, "Writing is far more than a technical exercise to create products that conform to standards" (p. 504). Similarly, Bright (1995) observed that more recent research on teaching writing has shown a mind shift from focusing on the polished final piece to concentrating on writing as a process. As Graves (1983) explained, the writing process is learnt by getting involved in it. In other words, learners can be taught the process, but they still ought to come to know the process by actually doing the writing and using written words to speak their minds.

Likewise, Culham (2015) concurred that that writing should be taught as a process and stressed that it depends on the quality and level of writing instructions given by the writing teacher. Correspondingly, Bright (1995) maintained, "what the teacher says to set up the writing task, monitor its progress, and end the session is important to how students come to view writing and to how and what they write" (p.16). In my understanding, as a creative writing teacher, I need to develop my highest level of writing instructions during the writing process for learners to succeed in creative writing.

Culham (2015) cautioned that teaching creative writing as a process is not easy as it consumes many hours of reading and writing feedback or giving comments on learners' work. Additionally, Bright (1995) pointed out that research in creative writing is difficult and takes time because it demands that researchers observe writers at work during the writing process. This showed me that researching creative writing would not be easy for me as a teacher seeking to improve my teaching practice. I would need patience, understanding, innovation, and dedication for cultivating creative writing with learners with different capability levels.

Similarly, the South African prescribed curriculum approach to creative writing requires teachers to develop learners in the writing process. For instance, the Grade 6 English Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) advises teachers to use a process approach when teaching creative writing (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This means that developing learners' creative writing should be done in the process stages of two hours each in two-week cycles of each theme. The document also suggests possible creative writing activities to be done in class; however, teacher can also develop their own activities, but these must be done in the specified time. According to CAPS, the suggested number of words is 150 or 3-5 paragraphs per creative writing activity in a Grade 6 class (Department of Basic Education, 2011). CAPS states that the benefit of creative writing is that it compels learners to process the language, acts as a catalyst to language acquisition and increases accuracy.

Overall, I anticipated that this study would help me understand the complexity of teaching, learning, and researching creative writing at school. It is central for teachers to comprehend what learners know and the next level where they need to be taken to because teachers need to move from what is known to the unknown when teaching creative writing (Culham, 2015). According to Gregory (1990), when the learner shows an aspiration to write creatively, she is signalling to her teacher and her family that her level of thinking is at its highest level.

Research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Question 1: What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?

In answering this question, I recalled my past lived experiences of children's popular culture to learn from them as a resource for teaching creative writing. I also explored my own past experiences relevant to the teaching and learning of creative writing. I recalled and narrated my fun experiences as well as memorable educative experiences using self-study methods, i.e., memory drawing and artefact retrieval (see Chapters Three and Four).

Questions 2: What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?

In response to this question, I conducted English, Social Science and Technology lessons that integrated children's popular culture content as a resource for teaching and learning creative writing. I provided a detailed description of what transpired during the teaching and learning with examples of classwork produced by learners (see Chapters Five and Six).

Methodological approach

The research was qualitative. As Nieuwenhuis (2010b) maintained, qualitative research investigates humans or systems by working with participants in their ordinary surroundings and paying attention to their meanings and explanations. Correspondingly, my study involved looking at my teaching practices and meaning-making in my everyday school context. As a teacher-researcher, I was the primary participant in the research. I tried to understand and learn from my childhood past experiences of popular culture and creative writing to find better teaching strategies. The other participants of the study were the Grade 6 learners that I taught. I paid attention to their interests as children as resources for their creative writing development.

The methodological approach used in this research was the self-study of educational practice. LaBoskey (2004) explains that self-study is a methodology for the researchers who want to study themselves in their professional practice contexts to excel in their teaching. According to

Feldman (2009), self-study is a methodology suitable for teachers who intend to improve their professional practice and develop new knowledge about teaching and learning. Likewise, Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) explain that self-study is a tool for researchers to raise self-focused questions that bring educational improvement. Similarly, Austin and Senese (2004) concur that self-study is for "teachers to find their own voices, to improve their practices, to extend their relationships and to discover and document their potential as leaders of change" (p. 1231). Samaras, Hicks and Berger (2004) emphasise that self-study can change our relations to who we are, our learners, and the prescribed curriculum. In my understanding, this means that as a teacher-researcher, this methodology was well suited to my study because my aim and focus were on bringing change and improvement in my teaching of creative writing to English First Additional Language learners.

The most critical features of self-study are questioning one's own practice from observations and personal experience, working with critical friends, and trying out new teaching methods to improve learning (Samaras, 2011). According to Samaras and Freese (2006), self-study can promote and inform education programme restructuring and policy decisions while contributing to teachers' pedagogic knowledge and practice. Likewise, LaBoskey (2004) maintains that self-study researchers are concerned with the enriched understanding of pedagogical knowledge and professional practice improvement. In addition, Peercy and Sharkey (2020) state that self-study research that focuses on English language teaching is valuable because it provides much greater development for the content area and transformation for pedagogy.

Self-study methodology was appropriate for this study as I had identified the issue of teaching creative writing using popular culture as a resource. I aimed to extend and transform my understanding of and improve teaching and learning of creative writing. Easton (2008) argues that teachers often find the need to change what they do daily, as they react to the needs of the learners they teach, which requires them to engage in learning. Likewise, Samaras and Freese (2006) concur that "self-study is a process that gives you permission to change your teaching philosophy without incurring guilt over past practices and beliefs" (p. 42). I believed the self-study methodological approach would help me change the way I teach and offer new knowledge with improved teaching strategies for better learning outcomes.

My understanding of the international and local literature on self-study

I interacted extensively with international and local literature on self-study of educational practice. According to Samaras and Freese (2009), in self-study, the teacher's self becomes the centre of the study. Likewise, LaBoskey (2004) concurs that "the self is central and that means the whole of the self – past and present, emotional and cognitive, mind and body" (p. 826). Samaras et al. (2004) affirm that a personal history approach in self-study empowers teachers to view themselves as experts and knowledge creators. I chose to employ self-study because it involved viewing my life experiences holistically to narrate and learn from my personal history. To improve the way I teach, I needed to study and scrutinise my past experiences' effects on how I teach my learners in the present (see Chapters Three and Four).

Self-study research focuses on the teacher-researcher's professional learning in a professional context to enrich the development of professional practice and wisdom (Pithouse-Morgan, Makhanya, Downing & Phewa, 2019). Similarly, Hamilton et al. (2008) affirm that self-study is used to look at an individual in action commonly within educational settings. Moreover, Samaras et al. (2004) emphasise that "past experiences create hidden personal narratives about education, school, and schooling that have a profound and sometimes intractable impact on the way teachers teach their students" (p. 908). This means that I needed to narrate my personal history using my childhood memories because I want to improve myself in the present at a professional and personal level.

Furthermore, my self-study aimed to generate and contribute to professional knowledge for the pedagogy of creative writing. LaBoskey (2004) asserts that researching educational practice results in the generation of knowledge of teaching and enriches the pedagogy because the application of new knowledge occurs immediately. Likewise, Fieldman (2003) notes that "self-study is seen as a research genre that generates knowledge and understanding that is to be shared and used by others". According to Hamilton et al. (2008), self-study is suitable for the generation of professional knowledge and a better understanding of the setting in order to improve the practice. I aimed to discover new teaching strategies by studying my past experiences and my current teaching approaches to creative writing. To contribute to the professional knowledge of creative writing pedagogy, I made use of children's popular culture content to teach creative writing lessons (see Chapters Five and Six). The knowledge discovered

could inform other teachers and me about improving English creative writing teaching and learning (see Chapter Seven and Eight).

Self-initiated and self-focused

Firstly, my study had an essential self-study element because it was "self-initiated and focused" (LaBokey, 2004, p. 842). In my understanding, this means I identified the phenomenon I needed to study to improve my practice in my professional context. Hence, this study was initiated by me because I was the one doing research, being studied, and my focus was on producing knowledge of teaching creative writing using popular culture as a resource. Pithouse-Morgan, Madondo and Grossi (2019) explain that self-study is self-focused because the researcher pays attention to improving her own professional context and practice. In this study, the self and the setting were crucial because I was the one who could be the catalyst to bring change in my practice. In this study, I aimed to look at my personal and professional experiences as they both impact the teacher I am today. Moreover, my research was based on my classroom practice as a language teacher. Hamilton et al. (2008) concur that self-study comprises premeditated and methodical probing of individuals' own practices to reveal practical knowledge.

Improvement-aimed

The second crucial characteristic of self-study is that it is "improvement-aimed" (LaBoskey, 2004). I aimed at improving the way I impart knowledge for creative writing to my learners at my school. According to Galman (2009), self-study research is improvement-aimed, emphasising reimagining teaching to benefit learners and improve the school context. Similarly, Mitchell, Magubane, Burkholder and Saloojee (2019) state that important events are recalled by narrating stories of the past. How they are later recollected is valuable to the development and improvement of self. LaBoskey (2004) argues that self-study is an ideal methodology to improve the practice through developing detailed and thorough insight into the context.

In this study, I thoroughly scrutinised my professional context where I taught creative writing to Grade 6 learners. To improve my professional practice, I had to research new teaching strategies for creative writing. LaBoskey (2004) concurs that social justice is one of the fundamental principles for self-study researchers because they intend to emancipate themselves as they take the initiative and responsibility to transform their own educational practices. By conducting self-study, I wanted to find new pedagogical knowledge to enhance my teaching

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practice and improve my learners' learning experience. This study also intended and aimed to offer teaching ideas to other teachers.

Interactive

Another critical aspect of self-study methodology is that it is "interactive" (LaBoskey, 2004). My study employed an interactive element during the process of knowledge development. Galman (2009) emphasises that self-study creates opportunities for many forms of interaction and collaboration during and after the research project. This means that through the self-study journey, the researcher comes into contact with many other ideas and individuals. During the study process, the interactions that happen offer possible ideas to address the phenomenon identified in professional practice. Such interactions benefit self-study researchers because they get multiple ideas, knowledge for new understanding and production of new professional practices.

In the study, I had to consult and negotiate with significant others to broaden my perspectives about the phenomenon under investigation. Feldman (2009) argues, "it is not possible to determine whether or not the self-study has led to an improvement in practice without including the perspectives of these others" (p. 45). LaBoskey (2004) mentions that self-study researchers work together with professional colleagues from a distance and closely, working on diverse professional practices to gain multiple perspectives.

As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, I interacted closely with three colleagues who are professional teachers and fellow doctoral self-study researchers. I refer to them as critical friends (Samaras, 2011, p. 5) because we all had a similar interest, improving our professional practices. We also shared our thoughts, advice and valued each other's perspectives in our meetings and workshops. Austin and Senese (2004) suggest that self-study must include interaction with critical friends or reliable colleagues who can offer another or different perspective. I needed to interact with critical friends to check my thoughts and opinions with valued and trusted others.

Furthermore, self-study is collaborative because it integrates reflections (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). I incorporated reflection elements in my study because I recollected my personal history (Chapters Three and Four), focusing mainly on my childhood experiences of popular culture and creative writing. Mitchell et al. (2019) argue that memory-work self-study

allows teacher-researchers to intensely engage with past educational experiences and learn from them. I also reflected on my current teaching practice. When researching, I reflected at the end of each lesson that I conducted with my Grade 6 class (Chapters Five and Six). Reflection is crucial for every teacher to evaluate the failures and successes at the end of each lesson or educational activity. I reflected in different ways. I wrote reflections in my journal that I kept noting the critical moments of my research journey. I reflected at the end of every lesson conducted with Grade 6 learners. McKay (2019) explains reflection as a meaning-making method by using experience and connections with others and materials that affect personal transformation. Likewise, Feldman (2009) notes that "when teachers engage in critical reflection, they consider the social and political complexities of teaching and schooling, and the ways in which these can be hidden causes of what happens in classrooms and schools" (p. 42). This means that schools do not operate in a vacuum, and therefore teachers need to acknowledge the social influence children bring to their teaching in classrooms. For this reason, I intended to explore the social influence of learners' interests on the teaching and learning of creative writing.

As a self-study researcher, I have interacted with various texts to extend and deepen my understanding of my professional practice and the concepts underpinning my study. LaBoskey (2004) states that self-study researchers interact with "texts" of numerous kinds in varying manners. I had to interact with previous studies conducted in the South African context and international contexts on children's popular culture and creative writing teaching and learning to better understand the phenomenon under investigation and argue for the study's rationale. I also had to interact with literature to understand theories and methodologies suitable for my research study. Many of the text forms that I consulted were books and articles. I used other forms of texts, such as emails and mobile phone messages, to interact with my critical friends. All of the above different forms of texts had presented me with many different perspectives, theories, and many alternatives in data generation and analysis. The numerous forms of interaction in self-study play a crucial role because having multiple perspectives helps us triangulate our findings, which then gives credibility to the study (LaBoskey, 2004).

Also, as a teacher-researcher, I had to interact with learners regularly as they were crucial participants in the study. As I explain in Chapter Two, learners were very important because they were a primary data generation source. I had to interact with the Grade 6 learners to who I taught the English language. Since my research aim was to improve my practice in my

educational setting, I directly interacted with learners when I conducted classroom activities. The learners' work contained responses to inform me about how to better teach creative writing using popular culture as a resource. LaBoskey (2004) concurs that self-study researchers interrelate with their students or learners in many ways because self-study is about improving teaching and learning. Learners' work regarding the issue under investigation is vital as it may be a primary data source. Hence, as I explained in Chapter Two, I had to consider ethical concerns by asking for learners' consent and that of their parents or guardians to use their work as data for the research. As discussed further in Chapter Two, Mitchell et al. (2019) advise researchers to give extensive attention to informed consent when working with vulnerable people such as children and young people.

Multiple methods

Self-study researchers use many different methods to provide the required evidence to improve and understand their practices (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020). According to Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019), self-study research methodology involves many different self-study methods, the best of which is determined by the phenomenon you are trying to comprehend and how it helps you achieve that understanding. Feldman (2009) argues that the multiple methods to be used should be the ones that have been approved and accepted by the research community to enhance trustworthiness in the self-study. For example, Galman (2009) asserts that many self-study researchers have used arts-based methods to enhance the study's quality and depth. In this self-study research, I chose to use several different ways to generate data as evidence for my past experiences and for my current practice of teaching creative writing using popular culture as a resource (see Chapter Two).

LaBoskey (2004) argues that using different methods allows the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding and different perspectives on the phenomenon under scrutiny. Hamilton et al. (2008) concur that using various methods enriches triangulation, which establishes the trustworthiness of data. Furthermore, Feldman (200) asserts that giving a clear and comprehensive account of research methods used to generate data and explain what counts as self-study data reinforces the research's validity. I understood that I should give a detailed report of my choice and use of various data generation methods to increase the research findings' trustworthiness and authenticity (see Chapter Two).

My understanding of self-study presented as a collage

To explain in my own understanding and learning of what self-study is, I created a collage to help me elaborate on this methodology. As a self-study researcher, I used collage as an art form to prompt and represent experiences and thoughts that were not easily recalled or written in words (Luthuli, Phewa & Pithouse-Morgan, 2020). The collage I made was presented in a supervision meeting with my supervisor and fellow critical friends who were also doing doctoral studies. As I explain in Chapter Two, my critical friends were also teacher-researchers at primary schools in different locations using self-study methodology. During the presentation, they had valuable points that they raised and contributed for further clarity on self-study. Using a collage with pictures helped me explain my understanding of what I had learnt from the literature. I explained what each image on the collage depicted about my understanding of self-study as a methodology. Correspondingly, McKay (2019) concurs that "collage helps unformed and fragmented thoughts to come to consciousness and develop a logical form" (p. 3). The collage assisted me in developing new thoughts for the practical application of the self-study. It also helped me to understand the advantages of using self-study as a suitable methodology for the phenomenon I wanted to investigate in my teaching practice. Below is the collage with words and pictures, which helped me to explain my understanding of self-study as a methodology suitable for the research.
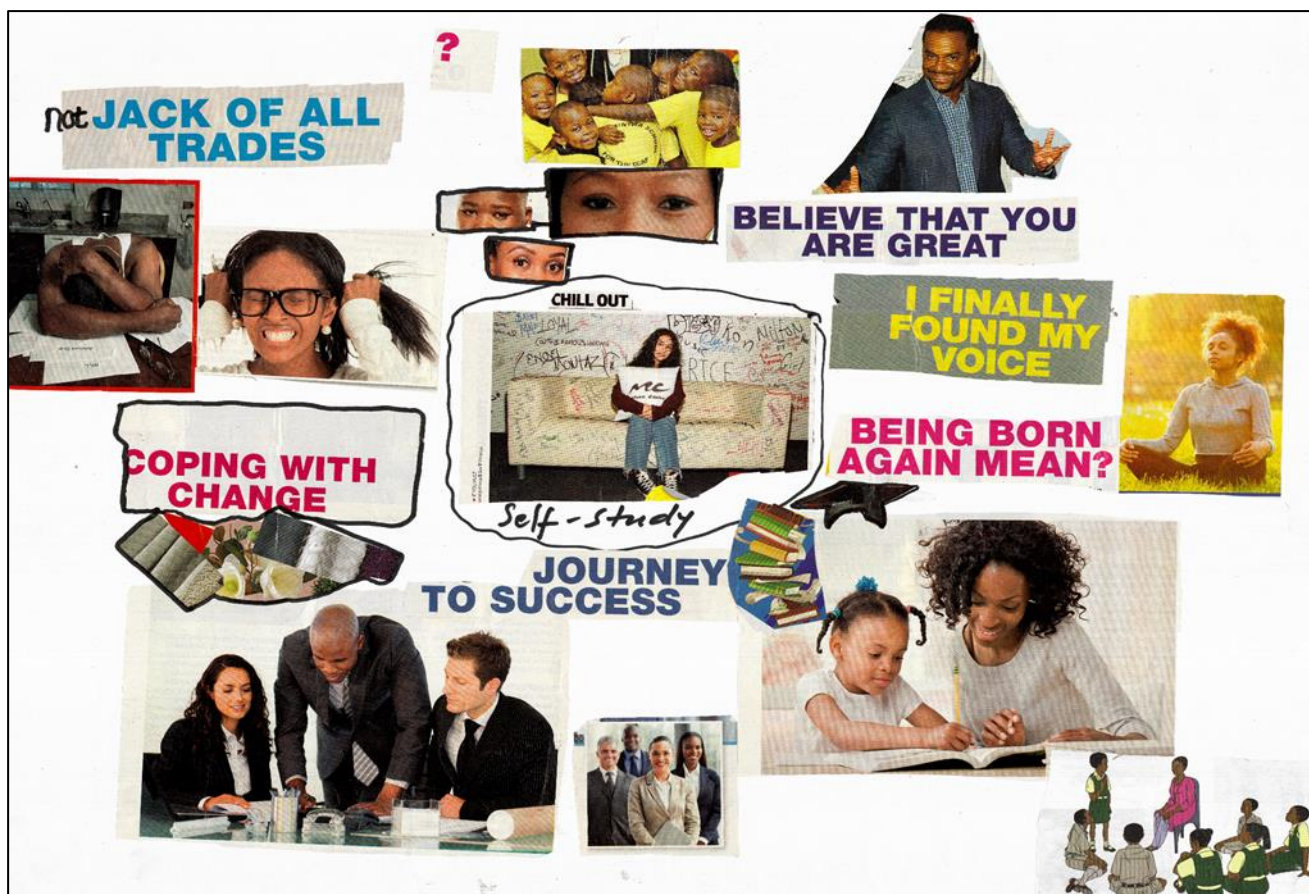
Figure 1.1: The collage used to elaborate my understanding of self-study

Figure 1.2: The focus is on 'me' in self-study

In my collage, the image of the lady holding a cushion with the word "me" in the centre (Figure 1.2) shows that the focus of the study is on the well-being of the researcher. Self-study is like taking a remedy to heal the body from illnesses so that it can be healthy. This methodology focuses the attention on the individual doing research. I think this is because teaching depends more on the input of the self as a teacher in the professional context. And, for the contextual change to happen, it should start with the individual initiating the improvement (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Thus, self-study is for teachers who want to shine in their respective professional contexts.

Figure 1.3: Self-study helps to deal with frustrations

Self-study is suitable for teachers who have issues that frustrate them in their teaching practice and context. This is evident in the picture of a gentleman with his face down, showing how troubled he is (see Figure 1.3). Teaching is a profession that involves different emotions. Teachers need to identify these impairments that stop them from performing at their best level and producing good learning outcomes for their learners. Self-study helps us attend to our personal faults and those hindrances we face from the external forces and practice context (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Weber, 2009). Self-study teachers are brave individuals because they admit and acknowledge their weaknesses. To initiate and engage in change is an admirable decision because the transition is not always a pleasant experience. Sometimes, teachers have to give up habits that they were used to before. They begin to tackle head-on their adversities to improve teaching and learning. This means that they are willing to go the extra mile and seek professional help to make their practice better. Furthermore, they adopt an open-door policy in their classrooms, meaning that they welcome constructive opinions and professional support from the other education stakeholders (Samaras & Freese, 2006). This connects with a picture on the collage where teachers sitting at the table have discussions showing that they are willing to learn from one another (Figure 1.4). Self-study enhances professional collaboration and learning among teachers.

Figure: 1.4: Self-study promotes collaboration and professional learning

I included a picture of learners surrounding and hugging a teacher, showing that every child should get a piece of the teacher's attention (Figure 1.5). A self-study teacher-researcher cares about and seeks to cater to the learners' academic, social and emotional needs (Luthuli et al., 2020).

Figure 1.5: Self-study encourages teachers to take care of learners' emotional needs

Teachers who choose self-study even have to be willing to be observed in action and provide all professional work evidence to different people who could offer assistance, such as departmental officials, fellow teachers and parents. As a self-study teacher-researcher, this equips and empowers you to account for everything you do in the classroom (Samaras, 2011). As teachers are in the public domain, there is much interest from the people in all other spheres of life. This relates to the picture of eyes looking in the collage (Figure 1.6); these eyes could be of many different stakeholders who have a great interest in public education. The work teachers do has a direct impact on the type of citizen schools produce, so we receive much criticism and scrutiny from many stakeholders.

Figure 1.6: Education stakeholders inspect teacher's work

Figure 1.7: Constant questioning of the practice in self-study

Self-study begins with the premise of continually questioning yourself about different ways to improve yourself and your teaching approaches. I included a question mark in the collage (Figure 1.7), representing many questions that self-study researchers ask themselves. This

methodology enriches teachers to have autonomy for the accountability of their actions and the kind of knowledge they impart to learners because they research and develop their own learning (LaBoskey, 2004). They can provide a cogent rationale to education officials and all parties concerned for every action that they engage with while executing their duties.

Figure 1.8: Self-study researchers acknowledge that they do not know everything

For teachers to engage in self-study, it signals that they are not a 'jack of all trades' (Figure 1.8), meaning that they do not have all answers. They are not experts in everything regarding teaching, and they keep on learning new techniques and skills. Self-study is an ideal tool for teacher-researchers who want to discover working strategies to enrich their pedagogical knowledge and professional practices. In the teaching and learning space, there is always room for improvement.

Figure 1.9: Self-study helps to deal with mixed emotions

Self-study empowers teachers to cope and deal with emotions during the research process and the uncertainty and frustrations that come with change. I can see that when I look at the picture of the young lady pulling her hair and showing unpleasant emotions (Figure 1.9). One method employed by self-study is memory-work, where reflection is done by reliving past experiences (Samaras, 2011). Therefore, intense feelings can emanate from recalling past personal experiences during the research process. Sometimes self-study helps the teacher-researcher face and deal with the past's painful dormant emotions and get the healing to move on (Pithouse-Morgan, Makhanya, Downing, & Phewa, 2019). The teacher-researcher might also go through different emotions during the research process because it is a back-and-forth, tiring process.

Figure 1.10: Self-study helps teachers to bring change to their practices

I pasted the words 'Coping with change' (Figure 1.10) in the collage because I understand that self-study helps teachers deal with the change that comes with the modern times we live in and the learners of the 21st century that they teach (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Furthermore, change comes about because of the different contexts that they find themselves working in. This connects with the picture showing many different colours, meaning that teachers need to be camouflaged to fit in diverse professional contexts. This demands that teachers find the courage to face the change and adapt to every professional setting and excel in their teaching. The means to deal and cope with the change is to use self-study to lessen the teaching and learning context's frustrations. Interaction with others is also vital in trying to cope with change (Samaras, 2011). Teacher-researchers need to consult others in the profession because they could offer different viewpoints. These could be colleagues in the same discipline or subject. In my case, the interaction with critical friends was crucial because they are also teachers from different contexts, so their perspectives were often different (Chapter Two).

Figure 1.11: The researcher feels pleased and satisfied professionally

Self-study teacher-researchers need to feel fulfilled after the research process because initiating and engaging with it shows how bold the teacher is in bringing change in the professional context. This is indicated by the picture of a teacher smiling with thumbs up signalling that everything is well with his practice (Figure 1.11). This methodology gives the researcher satisfaction and confidence in doing his professional work. Engaging in self-study shows that he wants what is best for the children in his classroom (Austin & Senese, 2004). This links with the words, 'believe that you are great' in the collage (Figure 1.12); these words motivate teachers to always seek what will make them believe in themselves. If the teacher-researcher

is proud and happy with the study's findings and with what he is doing in the classroom, the learners might be motivated as well.

Figure 1.12: Researchers can perform better and have intrinsic motivation

'Being born again mean?' (Figure 1.13). I pasted those words in the collage because I believe that teachers who engage in self-study intend to be revitalised in the execution of professional duties in their professional contexts. Moreover, self-study transforms the teacher-researcher as it brings out new habits, new thinking strategies for doing things in the classroom (Pithouse et al., 2009).

Figure 1.13: Self-study researchers are determined to re-invent themselves

Teachers become born again in the teaching practice and at a personal level. This happens when they implement the newly discovered teaching strategies or knowledge. This means that this methodology rebuilds the teacher as a professional person and reshapes his teaching skills and approaches to excel and improve learning outcomes. I think the main aim is to develop teachers into somebody new in professional and personal aspects.
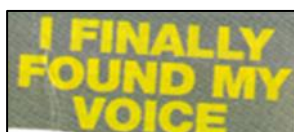
Figure 1.14: Teachers have a say in what they do in their teaching practice

When the practice of teaching and learning improves at schools, the teacher-researcher gets job satisfaction and self-fulfilment. This relates to the words "I finally found my voice" (Figure 1.14), meaning that after undertaking self-study, the teacher will be empowered to argue for every decision taken in bringing change and improvement to the professional practice (Austin & Senese, 2004). If the setting is changing for the better, learners will be more likely to get what they need to perform at their highest level academically. Galman (2009) states that self-

study "can also be joyful, satisfying and powerful work" (p. 130). This means that the self-study research process could bring happiness and peace of mind to the teacher. This relates to the picture of the teacher with gestures showing that she is stress-free and feeling peace of mind (Figure 1.15), which is a result of undertaking self-study research.
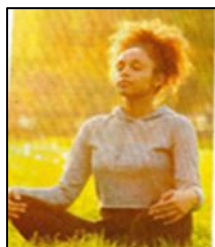
Figure 1.15: Self-study teacher-researchers becomes open-minded and at peace

Furthermore, self-study is influential because it can transform the teacher-researcher, the learners, and the curriculum taught in class. In my understanding, it is every teacher's responsibility to seek the best methodologies to improve the learning in their classrooms. Therefore, this links with the words in the collage 'journey to success' (Figure 1.16).

Figure 1.16: Self-study is a journey for self-improvement

Lastly, the image of a child and a parent (Figure 1.17) symbolises the contentment that parents can have if we as teachers do our best to help their children at school. The teachers who engage with self-study methodology want to exercise social justice because they believe that parents entrust them with their children (Samaras, 2011). Hence, parents and their children deserve the teacher's best performance, resulting in the best learning experience.

Figure 1.17: A parent assisting the child to develop academic skills

A sociocultural perspective on learning and teaching of writing

To better understand the learning and teaching of writing, I adopted a sociocultural theoretical perspective. A sociocultural perspective emphasises the consideration of contextual and cultural issues as "it positions teachers to draw on their local knowledge to contextualise learning for their students" (Woodard & Kline, 2016). Lantolf and Thorne (2000) explained sociocultural theory as the developmental practice that occurs through partaking in cultural, linguistic, and historically designed settings such as household life and same-age group interaction and in established contexts such as schools, structured sports events and workplaces. This means that home experiences and interactions with others that encompass knowledge from popular culture are essential in forming the primary knowledge learners bring to school. Souto-Manning (2016) highlighted that learners bring different literacy histories from their home backgrounds. Furthermore, Broomly (1996) concurred that home experiences play a vital role in developing literacy for schooling purposes. Likewise, Hill and Wood (2019) argue that funds of knowledge from different sources of children's lived experiences such as everyday occurrences, popular culture, and media together with children's interests can stimulate learning. This forms the necessary foundation for teachers to build on with formal schooling. Teachers can develop further, starting from that prior knowledge gained at home. Thus, according to a sociocultural perspective, taking into account learners' interaction and experiences at home and within their social environment plays a crucial role in developing learners at school.

The sociocultural theoretical concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) helped me understand that I should assist learners in developing their independence in creative writing as a teacher. Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Lantolf and Thorne (2000) explained the ZPD as the space between what a learner can do with help from the teacher at a particular time and what she will be capable of without support in the future. Similarly, Hill and Wood (2019) note from a pedagogical perspective that ZPD is a space where a teacher can help lead learners to reach their full maximum mental independence. Mkhize (2004) explains ZPD as where teachers or competent peers support learners to grasp the knowledge and skills essential to becoming accomplished and mature in solving academic and real-life problems. Harman and Varga-Dobai (2012) argue that second language research emphasises the significance of integrating learners' sociocultural

interests with the prescribed curriculum and giving them prudently-crafted classroom activities to support their ongoing development. I realised that it would be vital for me to provide structured activities, guidance, and support to learners to realise their full potential and maturity in their creative writing. Furthermore, Hill and Wood (2019) point out that a child-led ZPD can enable children to choose the critical knowledge, decide on what they think they need and want to learn, as well as the directions taken by their learning activities. Thus, I hoped to create some opportunities for learners to take the lead in developing as creative writers.

I saw a sociocultural perspective as helpful and suitable for self-study research because it reveals that personal learning is influenced by the context, cultural and social interactions. LaBoskey (2004) argues that self-study shows that change begins and happens within the self and that personal history and cultural context are considered vital for learning. According to Samaras and Freese (2006), individuals are significantly influenced by what they learn from their historical and cultural settings. An investigation of that effect can assist teachers in considering the repercussions of culture on learning and teaching. In the same way, in this self-study, I aimed to examine the influence of children's popular culture on my childhood experiences and the learners I currently teach. As a teacher, I sought to consider the implications of children's popular culture in my current teaching.

Through the interaction with South African literature on taking a sociocultural perspective, I have understood that this theory is also applicable to our local context. My intention in this study was to make my teaching and learning based on and relevant to learners' daily contact with children's popular culture. I saw that English creative writing could be developed by engaging with exciting and fun writing topics pertinent to the local environment that learners come from. Kortjass (2019) asserts that sociocultural theory supports teaching that centres on the knowledge that learners bring from their home environments and their everyday experiences. Dhlula-Moruri, Kortjass, Ndaleni, and Pithouse-Morgan (2017) acknowledge that, from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, teaching and learning are collaborative, interactive, and culturally instilled through everyday experiences. Mkhize (2004) explains that from a Southern African perspective, an individual is always in dialogue with the nearby environment, as a social activity that enriches the individual's knowledge and thinking. As a teacher, I have to build on this local knowledge to develop academic knowledge and skills.

Teachers utilising cultural artefacts for teaching can spark learners' interest and challenge old teaching practices (Kortjass, 2019). Consequently, Dhlula-Moruri et al. (2017) assert that teachers can ask learners to bring objects of popular culture into class from their local environment to understand and make meaning of the topics taught. They argue that the use of such items can make teaching and learning more learner-centred. Moreover, Mkhize (2004) emphasises that individuals are a product of their immediate environment. Therefore, as a teacher, I knew that I should develop lessons that emanate from and relate to learners' real-life experiences. I wanted to keep in mind that learners' general knowledge is influenced by different interactions with cultural artefacts, which could be used in class to enhance understanding and make meaning of what is being taught. As a teacher-researcher using the sociocultural approach, I believed that creative writing should be fun and thrilling. It should be related to the children's experiences and the environment that learners come from (Kortjass, 2019).

Furthermore, there are different interactions that learners engage in when participating in cultural activities. As a result, learners come to school with the knowledge they gain through participation in various communities' interactions. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) argue that "in a sociocultural perspective, thinking occurs in the relationship between the individual and the environment, where the environment is seen to encompass both the physical environment, and its historical and social surrounds, as well as internal aspects such as individual's beliefs and knowledge" (p. 5). Likewise, Bjorklund and Bjorkman (2017) explain that sociocultural theory emphasies how individual learning is mediated through human interaction and communication with others. Similarly, Samaras and Freese (2006) concur that "learning, thinking, and knowing arise through collaboration and reappropriating feedback from others" (p. 50). In my understanding, this means that it is essential to consider how social and cultural interactions can enhance learning and teaching

Learning and teaching of creative writing is an activity that should be strongly built on the foundations of experiences based on social interactions and conversations of learners in particular environments. Through social interactions, learners get a chance to express their thoughts and views and validate their knowledge. Inagaki and Hatano (2008) highlight that "social interactions can be sources for generating recognised inconsistencies or disco-ordinations in individuals' existing knowledge systems, because different perspectives are presented in the interactions, and they can also be sources for providing possible solutions" (p.

258). Likewise, Murphy and Ivinson (2003) concur that "the social norms and values encountered in these communities, such as family peer group and friendship groups, are taken up by students, and influence their negotiation and management of their participation and hence their learning in classroom settings" (p. 6). Harman and Varga-Dobai (2012) found that when a teacher integrates learners' sociocultural interests and interactions as essential components in the actual curriculum, learners become more absorbed and enjoy participating in classroom discourse.

Through the sociocultural lens, I also saw that it is vital for teachers to develop healthy relationships through interaction with learners. Northfield and Sherman (2004) emphasise that teachers must promote healthy relationships between teachers and learners and learners with each other in their classroom practices. According to Jones and Kahn (2017), learners who feel at ease with their teachers and peers are keener to tackle challenging material and persevere with more challenging learning activities. Jones and Kahn (2017) further note that "given the substantial amount of time children spend in school, interacting with other students and adults, early childhood educational settings and schools are a primary and critical context for intentionally and rigorously building and cultivating social, emotional and academic skills" (p. 9). Healthy relationships between the teacher and learners can improve the academic performance and social development of learners.

I understood that a sociocultural lens could assist me as a teacher to understand the significance of making use of the knowledge gained during the learning of creative writing in real-life situations. Woodard and Kline (2016) mention that "sociocultural teachers pay attention to the kind of work and learning accomplished during the production of written genres, not just the surface features of the textual form. They move beyond asking if writing looks right to understanding what students are doing and accomplishing with their writing" (p. 210). Likewise, Jones and Kahn (2017) concur that the quality of teaching and learning is enriched when learners can interrelate with others to make meaningful connections to the subject content. In my understanding, this means that it is vital for teachers to ensure that teaching writing should develop and empower learners to be independent writers even out of a school context.

Understanding children's popular culture
A critical concept that I intended to explore through my study was children's popular culture. I embarked on my research with the following understanding of children's popular culture: it is

what learners consider as fascinating and of importance to them as part of a particular age group, at a particular time. It could be something that most of them want to be part of and to be identified (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). In children's terminology, it is what is "in", meaning in fashion or in style. Thus, popular culture gives children a sense of belonging and identity. As Northfield and Sherman (2004) explain, "young children, as well as early adolescents, experiment with issues of both individual identity and group identity and young people strive to satisfy needs for safety, security and a sense of belonging within a valued social group".

Popular culture can be defined as what many people love (Bowmer & Curwood, 2016). According to Sudiran (2020), popular culture can be interpreted as lifestyles and attitudes associated with daily life interactions and popular culture objects. Buelow (2017) states that popular culture is embedded in and exists in everyday life as it includes people's social experiences with artefacts they use to participate in popular culture.

Several studies investigate the implications of popular culture for effective English teaching in various countries, such as the United States of America, Australia and China. According to Buelow (2017), integrating learners' popular culture funds of knowledge into the classroom curriculum improves teaching and learning of literacy. Likewise, Bowmer and Curwood (2016) propose that popular culture can be used by teachers to enhance teaching approaches in English by amalgamating the learners' home and school worlds in exciting ways. Moreover, these authors advise that teachers need to understand children's popular culture to integrate the relevant content into their English language teaching and maximize learner activity engagement. Liu and Lin (2017) concur that it is vital for teachers to capitalise on learners' knowledge of popular culture to design meaningful English literacy activities that will enhance and motivate them to engage. In the same way, Sudiran (2020) states that such lessons designed by teachers must kindle children's interests in learning and ignite creativity and an enjoyable learning experience. Also, Gajdos and Korpas (2019) suggest that teaching and learning English literacy should meet the changing trends among children as they are highly engrossed in the world of popular culture. Furthermore, Gajdos and Korpas (2019) assert that teachers need to tailor their lessons by considering learners' interests so that they feel relaxed, eager to learn, and feel part of what is being taught. These authors argue that this will benefit teachers as they will be aware of how learners live and what they enjoy doing. To sum up, research from various contexts shows that popular culture knowledge can motivate and keep learners eager to learn

English as it is relevant to their lives. My study was necessary to explore such issues in my South African educational context.

According to Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002), children's popular culture includes clothing children love wearing, videos they like to watch at home, and the type of music they want to listen to. All of these speak volumes about children's popular culture. This means that children's bedrooms and play spaces are rich with popular culture objects with special meanings and memories. Also, Mitchell and Reid-Welsh (2002) confirmed that children can engage in popular culture in virtual space. The websites and social media that many children enjoy using on their digital devices or parents' cell phones, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, are part of children's popular culture.

Teachers and parents need to be willing to engage with popular culture as it has a significant influence on children's lives (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). However, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) pointed out that schools and early childhood centres often have a negative attitude towards artefacts of children's popular culture. Learners are usually not allowed to come into learning institutions' premises with their favourite toys, clothes, videos, and cell phones. According to Mitchell and Reid-Welsh (2002), schools control the culture within their premises by specifying what should be used for educational activities. In that way, learning institutions are often seen as "spaces of resistance" (p. 16) to children's popular culture.

I anticipated that when children's popular culture is considered in the learning and teaching of creative writing, it could help children develop a love for writing. Broomly (1996) highlighted that it is essential that teachers consider children's interests and concerns when preparing literacy activities that will be conducted in school. Reilly and Reilly (2005) argued that learners prefer writing about artefacts that have personal meaning rather than to write about topics prescribed by the teacher. Moreover, as Woodard and Kline (2016) maintained, children should be offered a chance to use technology and media when learning to write in schools. In my view, teachers who incorporate children's popular culture through technology and social media can make creative writing more meaningful to their students. In my understanding, institutions for learning at all levels should not prohibit some of these children's popular culture artefacts and technologies in classrooms. Changing such rules could help teachers consider looking at children's popular culture as a source of topics and inspiration for creative writing.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) pointed out how popular culture elicits gendered narratives as it makes learners aware of their gender in particular ways. This begins with parents, long before children are born, as they start buying clothes and preparing the baby nursery based on the gender of the baby. There are toys designed for boys, and there are those made especially for girls. Advertising plays a significant role in ensuring that gendered narratives are recognised even by parents who are the ones who buy all these toys in stores (Hilton, 1996). For example, The Disney Corporation has parents as their possible market target to buy their children's products (Mitchell & Reid-Welsh, 2002). Hilton (1996) highlighted that toy companies play a role in contributing to gender narratives and concepts. The repercussions of these gendered narratives later surface in children's lives. This can have severe and damaging consequences such as "the gendered nature of violence, with men and boys as perpetrators and some victims of violent crime, and women and girls as most victims" (Moletsane, 2005, p. 160). Hence, to me, the gendered narratives that popular culture perpetuates should become part of what we explore in the classroom.

Understanding the teaching and learning of creative writing

A useful perspective that has helped me understand the teaching and learning of creative writing is that it is "preparation of artists" (Eisner, 2004, p. 4). In my view, this refers to the educational preparation of learners to be able to assemble words to make meaningful sequences artistically and skilfully. In my understanding, for learners to be artists in writing, they should be taught creative writing as a process and not as a once-off activity. Graves (1983) emphasises the process approach to teaching and learning creative writing. Similarly, Bright (1995) argued that a writing process takes time as it is not linear practice but instead a back and forth process. Similarly, Culham (2015) confirms that "writing is not a linear series of prescribed steps but writing itself is a highly individual, creative process that requires the writer to grapple with thoughts and get them down in a clear coherent way" (p. 219). However, Gregory (1990) cautions that as writing and rewriting could be very tiring, some learners may be tempted to avoid it. This means that learners need to experience the phases involved in the writing process to keep them aware of what is expected. As a result, their understanding of the creative writing process can be improved, and they can gain confidence as writers.

Recent international literature shows the value of integrating children's interests into the school curriculum of teaching creative writing. For example, Healey (2019) asserts that learners often

perceive schools as places where they are expected to write artificial compositions that have no link to the real world in which they live. Xerri (2017) concurs that the cultivation and development of creativity in classrooms is impeded by an exam-driven curriculum, limiting participation in creative writing practices. However, Healey (2019) argues that teachers can play a pivotal role in changing the current perceptions. They can motivate learners to take ownership by offering them a wide choice of topics and activities, evoking ideas and words for authentic expression. To promote effective creative writing lessons, teachers need to grant learners the freedom of choice for the topics to express themselves with spontaneity and without any teacher interference (Xerri, 2017).

In a South African study, Assaf, Ralfe and Steinbach (2016), working with teachers in a professional development project, encouraged teachers to allow learners to freely write about what mattered to them and not prescribe topics and length for pieces of writing. Assaf et al. (2016) emphasise that to inspire learners' creative writing, teachers need to acknowledge language resources that learners bring from their everyday interactions outside of school to use them as tools in their writing instructions. These authors argue that this will assist learners in making a connection between the writing content and their lived experiences. This research indicates that children can take ownership of their piece of writing if they are offered an unusual degree of freedom when choosing content for their topics and given fewer rules to follow.

In my opinion, creative writing can be more successful if learners are writing about what matters and what is of interest to them. Learners need to be allowed to decide about subjects they want to write about rather than teachers prescribing topics. Graves (1983) concurred that learners learn by making decisions about writing topics when examining their lives and interests, choosing, and then writing. Peterson (2014) noted that if learners write about things they are familiar with and concerned about, significant issues will provoke writing from the heart because the most fantastic storytelling is driven by desire. Similarly, Bright (1995) affirmed that learners need to choose their own topics because that keeps them encouraged throughout the writing activity. This means that learners can be motivated to write about issues they are interested in. This can lead to a free flow of ideas and thoughts that could result in meaningful writing pieces.

Writing instructions from the teacher play a crucial role as these could be destructive or constructive in eliciting creative thinking and writing from learners. Creative writing requires

a conducive environment where the mind is free from fear of failure. In my understanding, creative writing requires the motivation to take risks to do things in a unique and exciting way (Simplico, 2000). However, this is unlikely to be developed if the environment or teaching approach is not suitable (Simplico, 2000). Woodard and Kline (2016) noted that writing and writers improve through constructive communication and reaction from others over time. Furthermore, Culham (2015) pointed out that to help learners succeed with writing, teachers should have diverse discussions, offer different talks, and give learners a range of comments. Suppose a teacher frequently utters negative comments about the incorrect language usage to a learner. In that case, the learner may be demotivated to engage in writing, which may have long-lasting negative repercussions (Woodard & Kline, 2016). Moreover, Bright (1995) explained that writing instructions are a crucial contextual influence on the development and the learning of writing. This means that teachers need to do self-introspection on instructions that they offer to learners during the creative writing process, which may influence or hinder progress.

Giving feedback on learners' work is very important in developing creative writing. Feedback is about providing constructive comments and praise to improve the writing. Reilly and Reilly (2005) confirmed that as writing is a thought-provoking and demanding process, learners could become discouraged and demotivated. Therefore, the teacher has to provide optimistic feedback on learners' efforts and accomplishments. Similarly, Gregory (1990) concurred that nothing is more motivating than acknowledgment and commendation in a conducive writing environment. Peterson (2014) highlighted the teacher's significance and role in providing feedback as it informs the learners of the effects their writing has on an audience and how well it engrosses the reader's mind, heart and feelings. However, Culham (2015) cautioned that teachers should not offer excessive feedback and that they should provide it throughout the writing process as an alternative to afterward when marking papers for mark allocations. This means that I need to ensure that I provide constant feedback, either orally or in writing, as the writing process unfolds.

Writing conferences or discussions are crucial in the learning and teaching of creative writing. These develop learners because they can gain confidence when speaking about their writing. Graves (1983) affirmed that writing conferences allow learners to talk about what they know, and the teacher learns from the information learners share and comes to understand how learners write. Similarly, Bright (1995) noted that an oral language is an essential tool through which

the business of the day of teaching and learning is carried out, and it influences the learning of writing. This means that a productive writing conference has benefits for both the teacher and the learner.

Some international scholars highlight the importance of using different art forms in classrooms to promote creative writing among learners. To illustrate, Gardiner (2017) argues for using an artistic teaching approach, which employs drama as a strategy to motivate learners to see themselves as creative and makes learning more fascinating. Cole (2017) demonstrates that creative writing can be developed in a classroom of young children through poetry writing. Poetry has a shorter length than a story, especially for learners who struggle a lot with writing. I think creative writing lessons should integrate poetry, performance, music, and drama because these art forms are part of children's popular culture and fascinate them.

Writing poetry could elicit creativity as it can be personally fulfilling to the writer. However, in my personal schooling experience, poetry writing was an activity intended to impress the teacher for assessment and grading (Madondo, 2014). By contrast, Young (1982) argued that poetic writing, unlike transactional writing, is not predominantly written to impress readers but rather for the writer's satisfaction. Likewise, Gregory (1990) concurred in writing poems, the writer carefully selects specific words to express the writer's experiences and mood. This means that using poetry to teach creative writing could provide a space for learners to be original and honest in their writing because it demands "the human spirit, the heart and soul" (Gregory, 1990, p.1).

I was concerned that teaching creative writing in an additional language such as English was not easy in my school context. I found that learners tended to lack the vocabulary for expression. I observed how this promoted rote learning, where learners would reproduce a particular text they had read somewhere even if it was not relevant to the topic. Moreover, from my own school days, I recall that teachers teaching the first additional language sometimes did not value learners' home language and the culture embedded in it.

The creative writing teacher using the first additional language should learn to be patient and not to quickly desert learners when they are not performing to his satisfaction. According to Souto-Manning (2016), teachers should have high academic expectations for the additional language learners they teach by offering support and a conducive environment. Disney (2012)

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argued that additional language learners need to have a sense of identity acquisition when introduced into creative writing in the additional language because they need to feel like themselves in the language they speak at home. Furthermore, Souto-Manning (2016) concurred that in teaching bilingual and multilingual children, it is essential to see them as capable, learn from them, and communicate their importance in the curriculum (p. 269). This means that teachers must develop bilingualism and multilingualism by allowing additional language learners to bring their knowledge from their home languages into English creative writing. In doing so, teachers will be proving to learners that all languages should inform one another. This means that as an IsiZulu-speaking teacher, I should demonstrate to learners how to utilise home language content to develop creative writing. I should help learners understand that what they know from their home language is valuable to learning an additional language. This will show that English creative writing teaching and learning cannot happen in a vacuum or isolation but is related to other languages already acquired.

Conclusion and overview of the thesis

In this chapter, **Chapter One**, I have discussed the focus and purpose of the study. I gave clarity on why I sought to investigate how I could use children's popular culture in teaching English creative writing by exploring the influence of my personal history and my current teaching. I introduced myself as a primary school teacher. I provided relevant background information for understanding my personal and professional contexts and the community where I come from. I explained why this research topic was important to me as a teacher, and I referred to my previous research done as part of my Master's study that led me to undertake this study. After that, I presented the research questions that guided my research. This was then followed by a discussion of the methodological approach of self-study. I elaborated on why I chose self-study as a suitable research methodology for the study and presented my own understanding of self-study in a collage form. Next, I explained how I adopted a sociocultural perspective to understand the learning and teaching of writing. Finally, I discussed my initial understandings of children's popular culture and creative writing teaching and learning.

In **Chapter Two**, I give a comprehensive explanation of my self-study research approach. I describe the setting of the research project. Next, I clarify my twin role as a teacher-researcher and describe my research participants (the Grade 6 learners) and critical friends (three fellow doctoral students). Additionally, I give details of the self-study methods and data generation

strategies I used. I describe my approaches to data representation, analysis, and interpretation. I reflect on ethical issues and trustworthiness. Lastly, I discuss some of the difficulties that I dealt with in the research journey.

In **Chapter Three**, I begin responding to my first research question, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I narrate memory stories about my childhood popular culture and consider how particular lived experiences contributed to developing my creative writing learning. The memory stories represented in the chapter all relate in some way to my education. Some of these childhood memories I drew from home and school settings. I selected significant artefacts and did memory drawings to elicit my memories and consider how I could learn from them to enhance my teaching approach to creative writing.

In **Chapter Four**, I carry on responding to my first research question. I reminisce about encounters with popular culture outside of official schooling. I focus on experiences that brought me pleasure and satisfaction as a child. In composing the memory stories in this chapter, I again created memory drawings to educe and convey remarkable childhood experiences.

Chapter Five responds to my second research question, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In this chapter, I build on the awareness gained from my memory-work (as expressed in Chapters Three and Four) to explore the potential of incorporating children's popular culture into English creative writing. I relate what took place during research lessons conducted with my Grade 6 class in the English and Social Science subject areas. I consider my learning about using popular culture to improve my creative writing teaching.

Chapter Six continues to address the second research question. The chapter presents lesson stories that show the interaction between children's popular culture and creative writing development. This chapter gives an account of lessons conducted in the English and Technology subject areas that were intended to spark learners' resourcefulness and inspiration in English creative writing activities.

In **Chapter Seven**, I simultaneously respond to my first and second research questions. I revisit the data generated from evoking my childhood experiences and the classroom lessons I taught (as represented in Chapters Three to Six). I explain how, for the interpretation and analysis of data, creating and presenting a collage and composing poetry helped me establish three main themes. In this chapter, I offer my understanding of the first two main themes: *1. Children's popular culture is dynamic; and 2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to*. The second theme is arranged into two sub-themes: *a) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family;* and *b) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers.* To introduce my discussion of each theme or sub-theme, I present an interpretive poem. For each theme, I consider what I have learnt about children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class. The thematic discussion is exemplified by carefully chosen pieces from the collage and extracts from Chapters Three to Six.

In **Chapter Eight**, I present the third theme: *Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.* This theme is arranged into five sub-themes:

(a) *Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings;*

(b) *Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media;*

(c) *Children's popular culture can be shared through sports;*

(d) *Children's popular culture can be expressed through music;*

(e) *Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing, and*

(f) *Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television.*

The discussion of each sub-theme is prefaced by an interpretive poem. My learning is illustrated by selected pieces from my collage (Chapter Seven) and excerpts from my memory and classroom stories (Chapters Three to Six). This is followed by concluding reflections on the third main theme.

Chapter Nine is the concluding chapter of this self-study thesis. In this chapter, I reflect on what I have learnt and discovered from my self-study research. I first discuss my personal-professional learning where I reflect on and explain how doing this research has influenced me as a researcher and educational practitioner. I then consider and reflect on my methodological learning. Thereafter, I contemplate how taking a sociocultural theoretical perspective helped me to understand the key concepts in a way that was useful for my study. Finally, I discuss the

study's implications and make clear how I plan to move forward based on what I have discovered in my study.

CHAPTER TWO: MY PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE SELF-STUDY RESEARCH APPROACH

Introduction

In this self-study research, I aimed at engaging myself in a journey of reflection. I intended to reminisce and examine my lived childhood, schooling and professional experiences to learn and find ways of using popular culture as a resource to teach English creative writing. The study's other intention was to explore innovative practices in my classroom for teaching creative writing with primary school learners in their first additional language.

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I gave details of how the study was conceptualised. I discussed the objectives and reasons why I wanted to conduct the research project. Next, I clarified the research questions that guided this study. Furthermore, I introduced the methodological approach of self-study. I then explained how I embraced a sociocultural theoretical perspective to better understand the learning and teaching of writing. After that, I considered the preliminary understandings of children's popular culture and creative writing teaching and learning that informed my self-study. I concluded by providing an overview of the chapters of this thesis.

In this chapter, Chapter Two, I give an in-depth account of my self-study research approach. I describe the immediate and broader environment of the research project. I then explain my dual role as a teacher-researcher and describe my research participants and my critical friends. Furthermore, I elaborate on the self-study methods and data generation strategies I used. I discuss my approaches to data representation, analysis, and interpretation. I consider ethical issues and trustworthiness. Lastly, I discuss the challenges that I encountered in the research journey.

Research setting

I conducted my self-study in my own professional context of educational practice. The location is a rural primary school. It is a public school situated in the semi-rural area west of the city of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The school is not regarded as a deep rural school by the Department of Education because they evaluate and grade schools by looking at infrastructure availability. According to the school rating system, the school is in quintile 3,

which means that it has basic necessities such as electricity, water, and all roads leading to the school are tarred. The schools in lower quintiles are schools that are regarded as in deep rural areas and very needy. Higher quintiles such as 4 and 5 mean that the school is in the urban areas where many resources support teaching and learning. The parents of learners in these areas are regarded as well-off financially, so they have to pay school fees for their children.

The school where the research took place is a non-fee-paying school because of its quintile. This means that learners are provided with stationery at the beginning of each year. There is also a feeding scheme in the school provided by the government which gives learners lunch. Our school is regarded as poorly-resourced compared to urban schools with libraries, green sports fields, and swimming pools. The school is a small primary school with less than 500 learners and 15 teachers. The learner-teacher ratio is 32 to 1 as per the government teacher norm. However, most class sizes are at an average of 50 learners. My class size comprises about 55 learners.

The English language is the medium of instruction in all subjects, and it is considered a First Additional Language to teaching and learning. The majority of our learners use IsiZulu as their home language. The same applies to all staff members. They all speak IsiZulu as their mother tongue. Some teachers code-switch between isiZulu and English when teaching. Others only use IsiZulu instead of English. In my view, that puts learners at a disadvantage in mastering and understanding English. Some learners find it difficult to express themselves in English when responding to classroom activities. Some learners face the challenge of a lack of English language support from home, which contributes to them not gaining the essential vocabulary for school. I have observed that a lack of vocabulary can cause learners to be discouraged from taking part in learning activities in the first additional language.

The community around the school is closely-knit, as they know one another in the village. Respect is of paramount importance and promoted among young people. The social hierarchy is based on age and leadership. The elders hold on to traditional values and norms of the Zulu culture. The chief and his assistants (indunas) are the ones who restore order at all times and authority to rule the villagers.

The society is characterised by high levels of unemployment and poverty. Some of our learners are children of single parents. Some parents are still teenagers, a few of whom were school

dropouts. Other learners we teach are orphans because of HIV and AIDS. Others are under the guardianship of grandparents.

Research participants

In this study, I was the main research participant because of the methodological approach, which focuses on the self. I am a 44-year-old African professional male teacher. I have 17 years of teaching experience at the primary school level. The majority of my experience is based on teaching in a semi-rural primary school context. I currently teach English, Social Science and Technology in Grade 6 and Grade 7.

I played a dual position in the study – as a teacher and researcher. Thus, I was conscious that I should critically and reflexively reflect on both research roles (Samaras, 2011). I was aware that the dual role might cause tensions and challenges as I switched between roles (Masinga, 2012). I was conscious that my viewpoints as a researcher would be influenced by participating in the study. However, the advantage of the dual role was that it allowed me to learn as a participant (teacher) and improve my research skills as a researcher.

The other participants in this study were 55 learners (30 girls and 25 boys from age 11 to 13) in my Grade 6 class in 2018. The learners were all selected to be the research participants by virtue of being in the class that I taught that year. The entire class took part in the research activities that happened in the classroom because they were aligned with the content of the teaching plan prescribed in the curriculum for Grade 6 classes. The learners were African natives speaking the IsiZulu language. The learners were taught in English as the medium of instruction and the first additional language. English was adopted by the apartheid government as an official language after they imposed Afrikaans as a language of instruction, which resulted in the 1976 education uprising (Kallaway, 2002). English then became a universal language amongst all South African races representing a rainbow nation of African, White, Indian and Coloured people.

Because of some unforeseen disruptions to the school calendar in 2018, I could not complete all planned research lessons that year. Hence, with continuing permission from the school management and learners' parents and guardians (see the Ethical Considerations section below), I conducted an additional research lesson in 2019 when I taught the same class of learners for Technology.

Critical friends

It was vital for me as a teacher in the self-study process of researching my practice to be involved in forming a critical friend team (Samaras, 2011). This critical friend community was a source of my strength and support for the completion of study. According to Samaras (2011), "critical friend(s) could be from a grade-level or discipline-based school or a group of teachers from diverse disciplines in your own school or even across schools" (p. 117). She further explains that it is a learning community of trusted colleagues who ask questions to clarify the research and constructively offer different views. Like me, my critical friends are part-time doctoral students specialising in teacher development studies and conducting self-study research. These three critical friends (Khulekani, Ntokozo and Nontuthuko) are professional primary school teachers of various genders and ages. They all speak IsiZulu as a home language.

We met twice fortnightly each month for three years, together with our research supervisor on the university campus. We sometimes arranged additional meetings as critical friends to vent out our frustrations and critically review one another's work and provide constructive feedback. According to Samaras and Roberts (2011), critical friends' role in self-study research is to support and encourage each other and offer essential points of view for the research development. During our meetings, my critical friends and I discussed and shared our thoughts on issues that were embedded in our topics. My three critical friends came from different backgrounds, and they had diverse learning and teaching experiences. Thus, their answers and views differed, and they offered me a range of perspectives on my research. They were also pillars of strength when the journey was challenging and were there for each other with moral support.

Together as critical friends, we worked as a team and critically shared ideas to reach our common goal, improving our practice. Trust was another crucial aspect that we developed in each other, which helped us critically evaluate data and offer genuine perspectives. Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo and Kulkarni (2007) affirm that doing research analysis as a group can reduce fixed ideas and allow for deeper thinking about the data. They also highlight that researchers' trusting relationships are crucial for exploring potential susceptibilities in their responses to the data. Furthermore, being part of a critical friends' team in self-study research

can strengthen the data analysis and interpretation process's credibility by allowing diverse people to think deeply and offer possible explanations.

Working with critical friends helped me extend my understanding of the term 'critical friend' and what it entails, as it offered a shoulder to lighten the burden of my research study. Luthuli et al. (2020) explain that self-study teachers work with critical friends who are a learning and supportive community to improve their professional practices through sharing experiences and ideas for better teaching. Similarly, Pithouse, Mitchell and Weber (2009) contend that "the support of caring, sensitive, and interested critical friends to help us through the study can make it easier to remain open to further learning and professional development" (p. 47). Similarly, my critical friends were the source of my strength because they gave me motivation and encouragement in the research process's challenging times. When the going was tough, they encouraged me not to despair. Help and knowledge were shared among ourselves in different aspects of studies. For example, I got assistance in brainstorming ideas of content for research lessons to conduct with my Grade 6 learners (see Chapters Five and Six).

To illustrate, the following is a list of possible lessons that I recorded in a journal entry during a group research supervision session with my critical friends:

Supervision meeting
Time: 15h30
Venue: Supervisor's office

Suggested lessons:
1. Let them read books or chapters and let them retell the story in writing
2. Stories about their toys
3. Write about their favourite music or artists
4. Design movie posters
5. Watching movies and writing about certain scenes they like

Our discussions from all the meetings were audio-recorded, so I had a chance to refer and repeatedly listen to my critical friends' opinions and suggestions when I was writing. As a critical friend team, we created a WhatsApp group as a social media platform (Figures 2.1, 2.2,

2.3). This helped us to improve the level of our communication. We formed the group solely to discuss concerns, issues and questions that related to our studies. This mode of communication helped to develop mutual relationships among ourselves. We would comfortably switch between isiZulu and English in these conversations. I learnt to share my progress and the challenges I encountered during the research and writing of the thesis.

Figure 2.1: A WhatsApp social media platform we used to have conversations

Figure 2.2: A screenshot taken from the WhatsApp group conversation

Figure 2.3: The testimony of the support we shared

For ethical reasons, I contacted my critical friends to get permission for their real names to be shown as above. It is evident in the above screenshots that my critical friends offered me a platform where I openly shared my thoughts, knowledge, and the adversities we met along the writing journey. We developed trust in each other. We even met to help each other by reading each other's work and gave constructive comments for further developments.

<center>**Data generation**</center>

Self-study methods

I used a range of methods to generate data for my study. For the first research question, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I used memory-work self-study, looking at specific episodes of popular culture and creativity in my own life experiences (Samaras, 2011). My memory-work data sources included journal entries, artefacts and memory drawings. As Samaras (2011) explains, self-study methodology involves numerous and diverse self-study methods. The methods you select rely on the phenomenon you are trying to comprehend and how a particular method helps you reach that understanding. The methods I chose were appropriate to generate data because my aim was to look back at influences that had contributed to my development concerning children's popular culture and creativity. Through memory-work self-study, I learnt to pay attention to my past by recalling relevant experiences to help me answer my research questions. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019a) explain memory-work methodology "as a research practice of recreating, telling, and responding to personal stories of lived experiences" (p. 156). Likewise, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c) state that memory-work is about appreciating and reminiscing about positive and negative experiences and finding space to heal. Through memory-work, some previously inexpressible stories can be articulated.

For the second question, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 class?* I used a developmental portfolio self-study method (Samaras, 2011). I kept everything that was evidence of my professional work or practice in teaching creative writing using popular culture as a resource. My teachers' file, lesson planning notes, lesson reflections, and learners' written work were data sources. I also took photographs in class during the data generation process, but, to protect the children's identities, the pictures did not show learners' faces. Additionally, I audio-recorded lessons to reflect on my teaching practices.

The second question was also answered using arts-based self-study (Samaras, 2011). I explored visual arts, performance, music and poetry to develop and research my creative writing teaching using popular culture as a resource. For example, I used poetry writing (Butler-Kisber, 2005) with learners. According to Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo and Kulkani (2007), poetry can be seen as a tool used to communicate human experience. As Langer and Furman (2004)

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explained, a poem may more precisely convey the strength of emotions that may not be expressed in a more extended narrative. Likewise, Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) stated that a poetry writing process could be a valuable instrument that encourages reflection on previously unknown emotions and feelings. I felt that poetry as a tool would help to surface vital issues embedded in learners' popular culture (see Chapter Six).

Data generation strategies

Table 2.1: Data generation summary

Research Question	Data Generation Activities	Participants	Data Sources
1. What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?	Memory-work self-study	• Myself	• Artefacts Memory drawings • Journal entries
2. What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 class?	Developmental portfolio self-study & Arts-based self-study	• Myself • Critical friends • Learners	• Teacher's file • Lesson plans and reflections • Journal entries Audio-recorded discussions with critical friends • Audio-recorded lessons • Learners' work, presentations

			and performances

Journal writing

I was first introduced to keeping a journal as a Bachelor of Education (Honours) student specialising in teacher development studies. I was expected to submit journal entries for a specific module. From my self-study Master's research (Madondo, 2014), I also used journal keeping, where I reflected almost daily at the end of each research lesson about everything that transpired. I also wrote down my personal thoughts in my own way and noted all emotions I experienced along the research journey of my studies for my Master's degree. According to Gregory (1990), "the journal is a collection of daily writings that give witness to your life. It can simply include details of events: who you saw, what you talked about, how green the mountains were, how much snow was predicted and how much you actually got. Journals are valuable for several reasons" (p. 2). Likewise, Masinga (2012) emphasises the use of journals by self-study researchers and participants as a vital tool where they can reflect upon experiences, feelings and observations of their lives, as well as in the classroom.

In the beginning, it was not easy to get used to the idea of journal writing because the only similar thing I knew of was the diary, which assisted me in getting organised. I concur with Makhanya (2010) when she explains that writing about emotions and ideas has not been a common habit in our black African culture in South Africa. Thus, I had to get used to the culture of writing down reflections in my journal. Pithouse et al. (2009) explain the value of journals for teacher development. The journal provides a space where the teacher can write about their own ideas informally without being judged and not conforming to a particular genre's structure or layout. Thus, a journal allows an individual to write his or her thoughts freely. As Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) explained, journal writing can enable individuals to express feelings, explanations and decisions.

In my journal, I wrote about my feelings and reflections on successes and challenges immediately after each research lesson I conducted with the Grade 6 learners. All my daily journal entries needed to have the date to help me easily remember thoughts and issues that

came across my mind. I discovered that journal writing is private because writing entries sometimes involves bottled emotions and thoughts about certain events in your personal life. There were some moments where I had mixed feelings about what had transpired in the class. To illustrate:

> *I am having mixed emotions about the music lesson I presented today. I was excited that I had learners who had understood the task of recalling the song's lyrics and performing it. Learners were enthusiastic, they showed interest in the activity and they all participated. What disappointed me was the chaos I had in my classroom. I could not control the noise level because learners had to sing their songs so that they could remember the words of the song. In actual fact, this was a more disruptive lesson than other classes.*
>
> (My personal journal, September 2018)

As my journal entry highlights, "including journaling recognises and therefore allows for the inclusion of emotions in the process of teacher development" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 836). In my experience, writing about some emotional experiences sometimes helps you to reconsider strategies in dealing with the same occurrences in the future and can provide you with a new meaning.

Artefact retrieval

I have learnt that artefacts are not just like any other objects because they can elicit many kinds of emotions and evoke some discussions about specific experiences, particularly with my memories of popular culture (Samaras, 2011). According to Mitchell et al. (2019a), artefacts are objects that represent certain things and can assist in expressing research interests without using words. Correspondingly, Mitchell (2011) explained that artefacts are objects that carry personal memories and can evoke personal narratives when scrutinised to answer specific questions about their significance to the possessor. Likewise, Allender and Manke (2004) state that artefacts are objects that can offer "tangible evidence of the realities of teaching and learning" (p. 20).

In my study, I chose some important artefacts and used them to help me recall my personal experiences to learn about how better to use them to teach and nurture creative writing in class. I thought back and remembered some artefacts related to my research that were potentially able to evoke new meanings for my professional development and learning. This is evident in Chapters Three and Four where I re-examine my lived childhood popular culture experiences by using artefacts to prompt inner conversation. Artefact retrieval has expanded my understanding of the significance of the objects I encounter in my experiences. I now see that they might become artefacts that can have profound implications when analysed in a personal narrative.

Some examples of artefacts I selected included clothing items, craftwork, a music cassette and posters of movie stars, and so on. I retrieved objects and did memory drawings of those objects that I had long forgotten about, which had to do with my childhood popular culture. Allender and Manke (2004) assert that "artefacts come from our past, and are often found in file drawers and dusty boxes" (p. 21). An artefact that I was able to find was my music cassette. However, there were some objects that I could not find in boxes and files. For example, I could not find any of the craftwork that we did at primary school and or a fashion item replica of Michael Jackson's pants. Hence, I sketched memory drawings of these objects.

Memory drawing

I used memory drawing to remember and to relive my childhood experiences. I understood that it was not of utmost importance to draw a perfect sketch, but the crucial part was the new ideas and meaning they generate during the process of drawing (Samaras, 2011). Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c) assert that memory drawing as a research method is more than just creating pictures. It involves participants drawing, talking or writing about the connotation entrenched in their drawing. I thus produced some memory drawings of significant experiences related to my childhood popular culture, for example, FM radio for listening to dramas or stories (see Figure 3.5, Chapter Three).

Drawing sketches of my reminiscences brought back mixed emotions depending on the events that I was recalling. Pithouse (2011) explains that through drawings, self-study researchers can gain entry to and represent facets of their personal experience that they might not remember or have ignored. Similarly, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c) concur that using memory drawings can make blurred memories vivid, full of the details of events from the past and feelings connected with the experience. Self-study drawing helped me look back at things in my subconscious mind (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019c).

Memory drawing helped me recall and relive the experiences I once had, and it triggered the expression of all details of each episode. According to Onyx and Small (2001), memory-work has the advantage of assisting the individual in tapping into the past because everything recalled can be used for self-development. Cole (2011) explains that memory-work lets us investigate various feelings, which could be good or bad. It plays a significant role in examining teacher beliefs, teacher development and teacher self. For my study, I employed memory drawing, artefact retrieval, and personal narrative writing to recall past experiences relevant to my learning and development in teaching English creative writing**.**

Developmental portfolio

The developmental portfolio self-study method involved compiling a portfolio of evidence, including research data generation lesson plans and learners' work (Samaras, 2011). The lesson plans were inspired by listening to the audio recordings of my conversations with critical friends. My journal entries helped me design lesson plans that became part of the research process. The audio-recorded discussions and journal entries offered me suggestions and new ideas for the content of lessons that had to link with contemporary popular culture.

As a teacher and a researcher, I worked with Grade 6 learners in 2018 as participants in teaching English and Social Science lessons to achieve my desired research outcomes. I conducted an additional research lesson early in 2019 when I taught the same class of learners (then in Grade 7) for Technology. The lessons were aligned with the curriculum policy document for all public schools in South Africa named the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2012). The lessons that I designed and taught had to be aligned with the ones prescribed in the annual teaching plan (First Addition Language Document, 2012), which specifies what is to be taught and when. The English CAPS document focuses on four skills to be achieved and mastered by First Addition Language English learners in the respective grades. These are: reading and viewing; writing and presenting; listening and speaking; and language structures and convention. All four skills are taught and emphasised in all four terms of the school year in each grade (Grades 4, 5 and 6). Writing is one of the four vital skills and is allocated three hours per two-week cycle. The learning activities that I designed for my research, as well as the learners' responses to those activities, are demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six. As explained above, I documented all the lessons in my teaching portfolio.

Data representation

In self-study, I believe it is crucial to represent lived experiences to help the reader relive all the experiences and the meanings of those experiences through the researcher's lens. Correspondingly, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) declare that the intention of narrating stories of lived experience in self-study is to allow the reader to feel as if they went through the experience themselves.

In Chapter Three and Chapter Four of my thesis, I represent memory stories of my own childhood experiences in response to my first research question, *What can I learn about*

children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories? As explained above, my personal history's memory stories were generated by using artefact retrieval, personal narrative writing, and memory drawings. I composed memory stories about my past lived experiences of children's popular culture and learning about creativity and creative writing. I also recalled memory stories of occasions where I interacted with popular culture to have fun and entertainment as a child. The evocative memory stories are visually illustrated with drawings and images of artefacts.

In Chapters Five and Six, I narrative stories of what transpired in the research lessons I conducted with my Grade 6 class in response to my second research question, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 class?* All lessons were audio-recorded to capture the details as I intended to provide the reader with a clear, vivid picture of what transpired in my classroom. I offer a comprehensive account of the lessons, visually illustrated with photographs and examples of learners' work.

Making meaning (analysis and interpretation)

I used an inductive approach to make meaning of my memory stories and classroom stories as represented in Chapters Three to Six. According to Elos and Kyngas (2008), inductive content analysis is an approach that is not based on earlier theories or models. Instead, themes are generated from engaging with the data. Likewise, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain the inductive approach as a method of coding data without using or checking it against a prior prepared coding frame.

An inductive approach was appropriate because, at the start of the study, I did not feel I had enough knowledge about the particular phenomenon under scrutiny: *children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 class* (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Hanauer (2012) argues that a key challenge in teaching language is finding ways to make language learning contextually relevant and meaningful to the learners. My initial literature review showed me that there was much to be learnt from exploring popular culture as a resource to make learning English creative writing meaningful and relevant to primary school children's everyday interests (see Chapter One). For instance, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) reveal that children's popular culture artefacts can bring to mind particular fanciful and lively interpretations, meaning that teachers can capitalise on the popular culture

knowledge children have to make creative writing meaningful to learners. Reilly and Reilly (2005) agree that children like to write about topic content with personal meaning and linked with real-life experiences. Broomly (1996) concurs that it is essential for teachers to pay attention to the significance of children's popular culture in teaching writing.

Nevertheless, I did not find any research on this topic explicitly with IsiZulu-speaking learners or in a similar sociocultural context. Therefore, I decided that an inductive approach was suitable for the study because I was unsure what kind of information to classify from the data generated in my particular context. Hence, I did not develop the categories in advance to code data, but instead, I constructed them from engaging with the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a). In data analysis and interpretation, I sought to make new "patterns, links, concepts and clarifications" (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a, p. 107) as I investigated a multifaceted teaching and learning phenomenon. In the inductive approach I used, themes and patterns were created through zooming in and out (Chang, 2008) of the data represented in Chapters Three to Six. This approach provided me with a flexibility that allowed me to ensure that I generated themes strongly related to the unique research data.

I worked with a group of critical friends (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 43) to get different viewpoints on specific issues during the inductive data analysis and interpretation process. Peercy and Sharkey (2020) highlight the vital criterion in self-study of interaction with critical friends to question and interrogate the study's analysis and findings. Getting different perspectives from different individuals increases the validity and trustworthiness. Having others' viewpoints helped me evaluate and reflect on my thoughts to avoid spurious claims and false understanding. My critical friends offered honest opinions from a different angle of an outsider from the study.

The thematic approach used in this study was influenced by the procedures described by Braun and Clarke (2006). I started by re-familiarising myself with the memory stories and classroom stories represented in Chapters Three to Six. I also listened to and transcribed relevant audio-recordings from the group discussions with my research supervisor and critical friends. I rechecked all transcripts against the audio recordings to see if they captured all details accurately. I followed Elos and Kyngas's (2008) advice by reading and rereading Chapters Three to Six to gain different perspectives and made notes in particular sections to describe my evolving learning. Every episode of my childhood experiences and all lessons conducted were

given thorough and equal attention. I used highlighters to colour-code to identify sections from memory stories and classroom stories that seemed most relevant and essential to my learning about using popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning creative writing.

I also employed the visual arts by creating a collage to make visible my initial understanding (Chapter Seven, Figure 7.1). According to Butler-Kisber (2002), arts-based methods provide numerous ways of looking at research data and may lead to new insights and perspectives on the researcher's part. DeHart (2019) agrees that employing art-based methods "transforms the research process in profound ways that have the potential for challenging dormant forms of representing knowledge, increased self-awareness and gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (p. 848). Likewise, McKay (2019) argues that using art-based methods "provides an avenue to express feelings, emotions and ideas surpassing the limitations of using words alone" (p. 9). Furthermore, Weber (2008) explains that art-based modes can bring to mind emotional as well as intellectual responses. LaBoskey (2004) offers an additional advantage of using art-based methods by explaining that it can capture and divulge those features of our experiences and insights that cannot be expressed in words.

I used a collage as an art-based method to visualise and express my preliminary learning from my memory stories and the stories of the lessons conducted in class. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2020) describe collage as a useful technique to search for answers to self-study research questions. Furthermore, McKay (2019) argues that "collage can be used to facilitate reflective discussion that allows the collage maker opportunity" to revisit experiences collaboratively (p. 4). In my understanding, this means that collage was a suitable method to begin to reflect on and convey my professional learning from my research activities.

To create the collage, I collected pictures and words from magazines to represent critical aspects of what I was learning in response to my research questions. I pasted the images and words on an A3 size chart, with the vital concept of children's popular culture in the centre. All pictures portrayed specific ideas about issues I picked up on in re-reading Chapters Three to Six. Van Schalkwyk (2010) explains a collage as a poster or visual representation where one uses pictures and words from magazines and other media that tell a story. Creating a collage assisted me in thinking more in-depth about my own professional learning through self-study. According to Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c), visual images can help researchers access those indefinable, hard to express ideas that might otherwise remain concealed or disregarded. The collage

provided me a chance to have more to say than only writing (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020). As McKay (2019) explains, "the use of images evoke deeper layers of thinking than words alone and allows different levels of meaning to be exposed because of its capacity to activate emotional responses and trigger memories and ideas" (p. 4). I think this means that pictures sometimes speak louder than words and can elicit even more meanings embedded in experiences.

I presented my collage to my three critical friends (Khulekani, Ntokozo and Nontuthuko) and my research supervisor (Prof. Pithouse-Morgan). With their permission, I audio recorded the presentation and transcribed the discussion. After my collage presentation, they made comments. For example, Khulekani suggested that children's interest in fashion could be linked very well with creative writing about fashion on a civvies (informal clothing) day when they wear colourful clothing instead of the school uniform. He argued that children write well when they have tangible things in front of them. Nontuthuko observed that children's popular culture is influenced by the environments where children are coming from. She pointed out that popular culture is also influenced by the times because it changes as time changes. She mentioned that previously when she was growing up, there were no computers for children to play with, but today they use them. Lastly, she observed that most collage pictures showed what learners enjoy and can relate to and that they can easily discuss these issues if asked to write about them.

Prof. Pithouse-Morgan noted that the collage showed vividly that schools are not colourful with popular culture artefacts, which means that schools are left behind as times change. This showed me that our schools and classrooms need to be exciting, enjoyable, absorbing, and energetic places to match contemporary children's popular culture. Prof. Pithouse-Morgan also pointed out that fashion was important in my childhood memory stories and in the activities that learners did in the classroom. This showed me that fashion remains an integral part of children's popular culture.

For the interpretation and analysis of data, using a collage also helped me to form themes. Likewise, Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that it is useful at this stage of research to use visual representations in sorting different information into themes. The interplay between the collage and the color-coding of the memory stories and classroom stories helped me to begin to articulate the main points as themes concerning the study's questions. I highlighted sections in Chapters Three to Six according to these themes. To qualify as a theme, I ensured that each

critical issue had enough relevant highlighted areas from each of the chapters. As Elos and Kyngas (2008) advised, I collapsed some similar sections to minimise the number of themes. To illustrate, I used blue to highlight all sections with information relevant to the first theme I developed, *children's popular culture is dynamic* (Chapter Seven). I then used red for the second theme, *children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to*. (Chapter Seven). I did the same with different colours for all other themes presented in Chapters Seven and Eight.

From there, I had to think deeply and critically about each theme's importance and its implications for teaching creative writing using children's popular culture as a resource. Similarly, Elos and Kyngas (2008) concur that creating categories offers ways of describing the phenomenon to enhance understanding and produce knowledge. I had to interact with relevant literature to support and extend my understanding of each theme. The interaction with literature and critical thinking as each theme developed helped me deepen my understanding of how I could best use popular culture to advance creative writing in the classroom. I worked to make sure that each theme was developed to match the overall story the analysis tells. I also sought to ensure that the themes would form a unified body, complement each other, and yet differ from each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In Chapters Seven and Eight, I present the final themes. Claims made are illustrated by excerpts and examples from the memory stories or classroom stories. Furthermore, the carefully selected vivid extracts are related to the literature, resulting in producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

I also used interpretive poetry to distil my learning from my personal history and the classroom activities. In Chapters Seven and Eight, I present a poem to communicate each theme in a concise, evocative manner. Coen, Tillmann, Ergler, McGuire and Gilliland (2018) describe working with poetry as a complex way of meaning-making, as a poem can be interpreted in different ways by dissimilar people. Poetry interpretation differs in various places, and poetry is a rich language format that reduces the data while at the same time, painting a full picture of the experience. Likewise, DeHart (2019) argues that poetry produced from research data collected in the field can capture the complexities of the experiences and representation uniquely to better understand the data. Moreover, Furman, Langer and Tyler (2010) indicate that poetry is an evocative method for depicting data that tells the researcher's lived experience.

It was crucial for me as a researcher to find a meaningful way to represent my learning and that was through using poetry. I found it a precise and compressed way of selecting and representing events and ideas that mattered the most from my childhood and lesson activities.

Furthermore, poetry can highlight the powerful emotions that were once felt by the researcher from past experiences. Langer and Furman (2004) explain that "the poem may more accurately express the intensity of emotions conveyed that may be lost in a longer narrative" (para, 14). Similarly, Gregory (1990) states that poetry uses well-chosen words to describe the experience; therefore, a poem is generally shorter than a more extended narrative. Lapum (2011) says that poetry may be used as an instrument that captures readers' emotional immediacy of the experience. Furman et al. (2010) believe that poems can contain intense emotions and the most influential descriptive information made by a few carefully selected words. This has made me understand that poetry can express feelings from the self-study researcher's past experiences and capture the reader's attention to relive the experience.

Pithouse et al. (2019b) point out that "poetic language is the language of reimagination and hope, and also, equally importantly, of expressing and empathising with pain and uncomfortable feelings. Through carefully selecting and arranging words in poems, we encounter, articulate and become immersed in thoughts, feelings and lived experiences that might be difficult to communicate in propositional academic language" (p. 150). Likewise, Dobson (2010) explains that poetry gives the researcher a chance to disclose what he could not have divulged in a more traditional research writing method. Cross and Holyoake (2017) explain 'found poetry' as an evocative distillation of data representation through which the researcher seeks to understand and interpret their personal experiences, professional practice, and research ideas. Some of the words used to compose my found poems came from my childhood memory stories (see Chapter Three and Four). Other poems' words and ideas came from the stories of the lessons I conducted based on children's popular culture (see Chapter Five and Six). Found poetry was a suitable arts-based mode to construct meaning to represent my overall learning from the research journey.

Ethical considerations

Cuenca (2020) explains that engaging in research regarding self and interrelating with other individuals brings to the fore confidentiality and informed consent issues. I considered the child-parent-researcher partnership to seek informed consent from my learner participants

(Lambert & Glacken, 2011). Water, Payam, Tokolahi, Reay and Wrapson (2018) declare that researchers need to explain in detail to parents how they will ensure that the research will protect participating children from any possible harm.

I understood that learners are not legally able to make decisions about what they participate in at school. Hence, after having received permission from the school principal and ethical clearance from my university (Appendix D), I prepared consent letters for parents to sign on behalf of their children to use their classwork in the study (Appendix A). I then called all the Grade 6 learners' parents to a meeting at the school. I unpacked the content of the study to parents in the IsiZulu language as they all spoke it. I informed them and got their consent.

However, as Harman and Varga-Dobai (2012) warned, "children and adolescents must be seen as subjects and not objects in research" (p. 3). Graham, Powell and Taylor (2015) highlighted that it is essential to always get children's informed and on-going consent and show respect for each child's autonomy and dignity when doing research with children. Luthuli et al. (2020) pointed out that, when doing self-study, teacher-researchers must ensure that children are honoured throughout the research process and that it bears maximum potential benefits to the children participants. As a researcher, I had to consider the learners as autonomous individuals and respect their views and knowledge. Similarly, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) caution researchers of the ethical obligations they have towards child research participants in terms of interacting with them, such as selecting age-appropriate words to say and the tone of voice to use during the data collection process.

According to Lambert and Glacken (2011), if parents have granted their consent, children may then be approached and informed about the study and then asked for their own permission to participate. Likewise, Phelan and Kinsella (2013) concur that it is crucial to respect the child's dignity in the research by getting the child's assent signed after elaborating on the purpose and the child's role in the research project. This is in addition to informed consent by parents.

Water et al. (2018) explained that it is vital for the researcher to explain to the participant the study, their role in the research, and the potential benefit or harm in the study before signing their consent. As a result, I had designed learner consent letters to ask them for their assent to participate in the study (Appendix B). In cases where learners or their parents did not consent, I did not draw examples of that classwork in my research. There were only four learners for

whom I did not obtain consent to refer to their work in my thesis. These were learners whose parents did not attend the meeting to brief them about what the study entailed.

I was also conscious of ethics related to power issues in my dual roles as teacher and researcher. As a researcher, I did not have control or power over the entire data generation process. However, as a teacher, I had power and control in certain activities that the learners had to do for assessment purposes. I needed to distinguish between activities for research purposes and prescribed work to be covered for the subject. As a teacher, I had to be very strict with due dates and offered rewards for on-time submission as a subject requirement. With research data generation activities that were not formally assessed, for example, the Twitter, Instagram, and music lesson activities, I was more lenient because the learners had an option to do it and submit or not. I also made sure to inform the learners and their parents that their participation in the study would not affect their subject marks.

My second research question for my study was, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* A self-study method I used to respond to this question was the developmental portfolio (Samaras, 2011), including my lesson plans, research journal, audio recordings, and learners' written work. The developmental portfolio allowed me to collate data to learn from it about bettering my current teaching. As part of the data generation, I took photographs of learners when engaging in different classroom activities. The photographs helped me give a detailed account of what transpired in the classroom during the lessons (Chapter Five). When the pictures revealed learners' faces, I decided to blur the photographs to protect their identities. I had promised parents that their children's identity would be kept anonymous at all times. Phelan and Kinsella (2013) advise that when choosing to use photographs of the participants in publication, the researcher might decide how to ensure the child's identity remains anonymous by blurring the faces or pixelating the image.

Furthermore, in ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, the examples of learners' written classwork included in the thesis do not reveal their names. Graham et al. (2015) emphasised that privacy and confidentiality are fundamental human rights and are the most crucial to ethical research practice.

In response to my first research question, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I used a memory-work self-study method to recall episodes of my childhood. I also used memory drawings to evoke inner speech and relive some experiences. I considered the relational ethics in self-study (Cuenca, 2020) when I discussed consent with my family members and friends featured in the memory stories. According to Ellis (2007), relational ethics are the researcher's responsibility to acknowledge and recognise mutual respect and dignity of intimate others featured in personal history stories represented in our research texts.

I had to do what was necessary to maintain interpersonal bonds with those featured in my memory stories. Ellis (2007) cautions that "when we write about intimate others who are alive, we have an opportunity to discuss with them what to tell" (p. 17). As a self-study researcher, I understood the need to consult with intimate others before I wrote my stories to not hurt them by what I disclosed or revealed. For example, the memory drawing of the music cassette helped to elicit the memory story of musical experience (Chapter Three). This episode of music involved my sister, who helped me to listen to, write and rewind the song of Brenda Fassie. I first explained to her orally the purpose of reminiscing about my childhood musical experience. Then, I asked her to give me oral permission to narrate and draw from the experience that involved her. By recalling and drawing about my love of music, I realised my friends' and siblings' influence on me participating in children's popular music culture.

I also consulted my mother to help me reminisce vividly the memory story of listening to radio dramas. I wanted to make my mother aware of my intention to use my childhood experience of popular culture, in which she was a dominant character. It was very humorous and special when we talked about our memorable moments as a family, listening to stories from the radio. She even helped me to remember some parts that I had forgotten. In our discussion, I got a new understanding of her frustrations due to living and growing in poverty.

Also, I approached two of my friends who were implicated in my memory stories to address ethical issues. Luckily, both of my childhood friends were still alive. These meetings happened before I started to narrate my memory episodes to ensure the consideration of ethical issues. The first meeting was with a friend that influenced and taught me how to write love letters (Chapter Three). This friend encouraged and helped me put words together to propose love for girls in the class. The other meeting was with the other friend who helped me submit craftwork

for assessment (Chapter Three). I first asked them for permission to include these past experiences in my study. They helped me recall details of my experiences and we laughed together at some funny moments that were childish.

Trustworthiness

Peercy and Sharkey (2020) state that a rigorous account that details data generation methods, data sources and analysis processes used, convinces the reader of the strong foundations of a self-study's trustworthiness. Similarly, Galman (2009) argues that a self-study's trustworthiness is enriched by transparency about methods and the teacher-researcher's roles and actions. Hence, in this thesis, I aim to offer a detailed, candid account of all aspects of my self-study research process.

LaBoskey (2004) notes that self-study researchers use various methods to generate useful information to better understand their practice. Likewise, Hamilton et al. (2008) affirm that self-study researchers can enhance trustworthiness by using several different data generation methods. This self-study's trustworthiness was also enhanced by using different data generation methods, data sources, and representation and analysis processes. As described in this chapter, I used various ways to generate, represent and analyse data. As Pithouse (2011) emphasises, employing a range of strategies empowered me to study my self and individual experience from many perspectives.

Samaras and Freese (2006) caution self-study researchers to increase their studies' credibility and validity by committing themselves to scrutinise data and interpretations with critical friends to widen options and challenge viewpoints. According to Feldman (2009), "an important way to increase the validity of self-studies is to include others in all facets of the research process. This includes the collection and analysis of data as well as critique of the self-study report" (p. 47). Thus, I considered different perspectives from critical friends to challenge and validate my thoughts and viewpoints throughout my self-study research process. This allowed me to be open-minded to various facets and ways of thinking about children's popular culture and teaching creative writing.

Research challenges

My first challenge in doing my research was during the data generation period. All my lessons were planned to take place from term two to term three of the school academic year of 2018. The content knowledge was planned to be taught in a two week cycle as per the CAPS notional time. I started with my first lesson, which was to emanate from watching a movie (Chapter Five). Initially, I did not foresee that time would be a challenge to my study. However, when learners watched a movie, it took almost two or three hours instead of one hour, which was more than I anticipated. This was caused by the duration of each film. Learners could not finish the movie in the first specified period of one hour, so they insisted on watching in the next period. That was fair enough for them to complete it. This meant that each lesson content had to be stretched into two or three weeks. I also had to learn to be patient and let them be entertained to the fullest.

The new writing activities I developed for this study also took a lot of time. Most learners did not complete these creative writing activities in one hour, as prescribed in the CAPS document for the English first additional language. The learners' writing pace was very slow compared to what I had experienced before when using the generic writing tasks outlined in the CAPS document. Creative writing inspired by children's popular culture was time-consuming, and it required patience from me as a teacher. It took several periods to complete one piece of writing. This meant that I had to adapt to the unforeseen circumstance of what had to transpire during the actual activity. I also had to adapt to my participants by taking into consideration the learners' pace. This was a limitation to the progress of the study.

During the data generation process, I also went through personal adversity, which caused a major setback to my research process. The inevitable enemy, death, came unexpectedly and took one of my family members. The death brought very sombre feelings and frustrations to all of us, because it was such a sudden scenario. As a family head, I had to lead the funeral arrangements and took full family responsibility. While trying to grapple and assimilate the sad reality of losing someone at a very young age, death struck my family again. The second death was a result of hypertension. I believe different individuals deal with grief differently, so I think this family member failed to accept the reality of losing someone very close. She succumbed to death when the funeral service was in progress. We all had to take emotional strain to deal with the situation, and to know that I had to arrange the second funeral completely shattered

me. Having to adapt to the new normal of losing two people was unbearable, resulting in me having a nervous breakdown. For almost six months, I had to seek professional psychological counselling. I was confirmed to have been suffering from severe depression and stress.

Teaching and researching in a semi-rural school had its own challenges. The infrastructure development of my school was in a poor state. The roof leaked, and the yard was very dusty, so much so that some educators had been admitted to hospital due to dust inhalation. The school also had no proper permanent building for learners' toilets.

The toilet issue had been a concern for the School Management Team and School Governing Body for the past seven years. The Department of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education) hired a company from which they rented mobile toilets. The Department of Basic Education understood that they should provide the school with many toilets, but they could not because of financial constraints. The school had been operating with the use of four mobile toilets, which serviced above 400 learners. Two were for boys and the other two for girls. The learning environment was inhumane and degrading to the South African learners in the post-apartheid era. The mobile toilets were supposed to be dislodged two times a week, but the service provider opted to do it once a week because the department was not paying him, and later, he resorted to not cleaning them at all. The conditions within the premises could not be tolerated because learners could not get into the toilets to refresh themselves.

As teachers we had to understand if learners were absent from school because some were sick because of the unhygienic conditions. The principal then wrote letters to invite parents to a meeting to discuss the dilemma. In the parents' meeting, the decision was taken by the majority that they had had enough of mobile toilets used by their children. All parents agreed that they should go to the streets to demonstrate their anger at the department's actions (Figure 2.5). They decided to do so to attract the media to publicise their concern.

Figure 2.4: Parents on strike using rubble to block the main road

Immediately, departmental education officials came to listen to parent's demands. The environmental health officials also came to inspect the situation and decided to close the school for a week. In the second week, the matter was escalated to the Provincial head office infrastructure division managers, who promised the school that the water sanitation project would commence in August. Together with the district director, they pleaded with parents to avert the strike and prioritise learning and teaching. They hired eleven additional mobile toilets and renewed the contract with the service provider, who had a new plan for dislodging toilets and cleaning every week. They promised that it would take six months to have proper toilets completed. The Department of Basic Education honoured their promise, and within three months, the contractor was appointed and came to start building permanent structures for flushing toilets (Figure 2.6). However, all of this disruption meant that I had to keep delaying the start of my research project until the matter was resolved and the regular teaching and learning schedule had resumed.

Figure 2.5: The construction of new ablution facilities

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have given an in-depth account of my self-study research journey. I have shared my research setting with the reader and described the research participants and my critical friends. I have also given a detailed account of data generation strategies and self-study methods that I employed to scrutinise the phenomenon under investigation. I have then discussed how data representation, analysis and interpretation was done. Moreover, I presented ethical issues and discussed the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, I described challenges encountered during the research process.

This chapter highlights the multiple data generation methods that make self-study distinct from other research methods. The variety of data generation methods assisted me to represent my relived my past experiences vividly for the reader and provided a space to reflect on lessons I taught. Another highlight of the chapter, is how self-study taught me the importance of establishing a learning community of critical friends who are from different contexts, but within the same fraternity. Working as a group was ideal as it promoted deep thinking among many people about issues compared to a single individual with fixed thoughts. Critical friends offered

different constructive viewpoints, which were helpful to improve the phenomenon under scrutiny. Another essential message highlighted in this chapter is the consideration of ethical issues when having children as participants in a self-study study. For the teacher-researcher, it is vital to acknowledge and value children's rights in the research process. Moreover, it is crucial to for children to give their own permission to take part in the study in addition to parents' or guardians' consent. As a teacher-researcher, I had to show respect for each child's dignity and autonomy.

In the following chapter, Chapter Three, I relive past experiences relating to my own childhood children's popular culture. To help me narrate those long-forgotten experiences, I employed memory drawing and artefact retrieval to engage the reader to relieve, feel, and visualise those touching episodes of my lived experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: MY EDUCATIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF POPULAR CULTURE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I gave a detailed account of my self-study research process. I presented my research context and described the participants. Furthermore, I elaborated on self-study methods used to generate data for the study. Lastly, I addressed the study's ethical consideration and trustworthiness and highlighted and discussed the main challenges I encountered.

In this chapter, Chapter Three, I am responding to my first research question, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* In answering this research question, I remember some past lived experiences of children's popular culture. I also explore some experiences relevant to the teaching and learning of creative writing. Some of these childhood memories I drew from home and school settings. As a young, growing Zulu African boy at home, we had popular culture experiences that were not exactly the same as those that we had and enjoyed at school as learners.

Narrating my educative childhood experiences

Pithouse et al. (2009) explain personal-narrative writing as a creative method of self-study used by practicing teachers in the process of revising their educational experiences and practices for understanding and learning new possibilities for their professional development. Likewise, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019a) argue that in researching teacher professional learning through storytelling, teaching and researching are linked and connected with teacher-researchers' past, present, and future lives make a new understanding of themselves expressed through stories. My past lived experiences narrated below involve activities that were mostly related to my learning at school.

As explained in Chapter Two, I selected significant artefacts in creating the memory stories embodied in this chapter. I also did memory drawings of my past lived experiences to prompt my inner speech to better understand my experiences and consider how I could learn from them to enhance my teaching approach to creative writing. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019c) pointed

out that creating a memory drawing can allow self-study researchers to look deeply into their personal experiences from many different perspectives. Memory drawings can elicit emotions and incite consideration of the effects of past events on themselves and others. Using memory drawing helped me relive my past experiences, as it evoked details and even the emotions I once felt.

Teachers' handwritten messages

Writing messages on a piece of paper was an ideal communication mode for people in my childhood in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a very cheap and convenient way to get messages across. At my home, the writing was done in the form of letters. My parents were illiterate; nonetheless, they dictated and instructed us, children, to write meaningful messages for them on paper. Letters were written to be sent via the post office to those people that lived far from us. Sometimes, my parents dictated short notes or messages that were to be hand-delivered by us, such as invitations to nearby relatives and neighbours.

Hence, writing was a common practice at my home as well as at school. When we entered school, I had already started writing informally. I tried to copy what my elder sister was doing, as she used to write after school. She sometimes tried to teach me how to hold a pencil. We were using old pieces of cardboard as slates, and we used coal as pencils to write. At that time, slates were used by schoolchildren to write on. They were brittle, rectangular, black, and made of a stone-like substance trimmed with a wooden frame to keep them intact if they got broken. My sister intimidated me by saying that teachers would give me a harsh beating if I could not hold the pencil correctly. Corporal punishment was the norm in school in those days.

Sometimes, my sister and her friends played school at home. One of them would be a teacher, and the others would be a learner. That was when I observed practising writing as an activity. I refer to it as writing, even though I now know that what I wrote did not make sense because nobody had taught me how to write. There were no pre-schools during my childhood years to lay the foundation and develop the necessary skills for primary schools to nurture and take to the highest level.

At school, I was exposed more to writing letters that later made sense when combined to make sounds. When I started my first year (now called Grade 1), teachers demonstrated how to write on the chalkboard. At primary school, we also practiced writing in our exercise books.

Teachers did not only teach writing but also used it to communicate among themselves in school. During that time, technology was not as advanced as it is today. There were no computers and cell phones, which have changed communication. All the technological devices we have now have changed traditional writing culture using paper and pen to screenwriting. These tools are much faster than paper and pen because they send messages instantly. Nowadays, teachers communicate through social media platforms using their cell phones. They create staff groups where they share and send messages to each other. In some schools, they use intercom systems where they share emergency announcements for the whole school community. They also use computers to access the internet, making it very quick to interact with each other.

Our primary school teachers also taught us to be good messengers at young ages. Children in the first and second grades were believed to be very innocent and honest when sending messages. Young learners were thought to be very quick when sending messages. Teachers had their own select-individuals in their respective classrooms who they used as their messengers. The only problem with them was because of the way they used words to convey messages, they sometimes got mixed up. Teachers wrote short letters because we were young, and they understood that the message could be distorted somehow along the way to the recipient if sent it verbally. Sometimes, they wrote short notes to gossip about other teachers who were not their favourites.
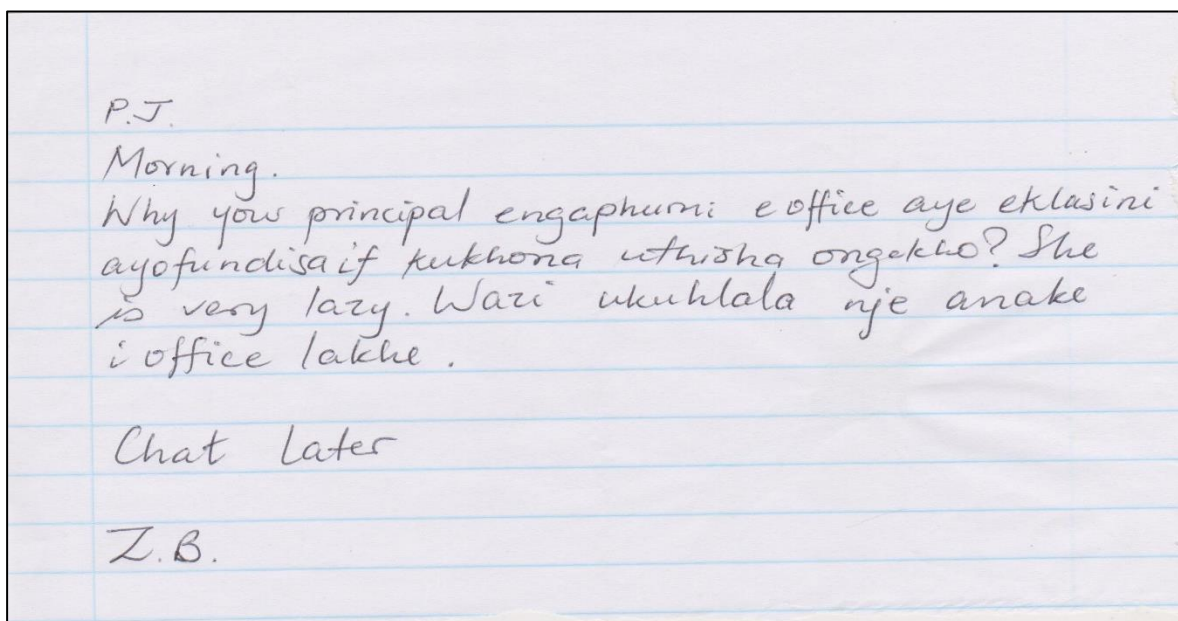
Figure 3.1: Handwritten messages exchanged by teachers

I recall one incident when I was doing my second year (Grade 2). My class teacher asked me to send a written note (Figure 3.1) to the Standard Two (Grade 4) teacher. The Standard Two classroom was the second door along from our classroom. We were separated by the Standard One (Grade 3) classroom. At that time, teachers were teaching all the subjects and were not specialising. Therefore, that meant class teachers were in their classrooms full time, all day. When I got to the class, a teacher was sitting on the chair. To me, all teachers looked the same. Without a glance, I just greeted her and handed her the letter. The letter was not directly addressed with a name; however, that did not prevent the teacher I found in class from reading the note. She unfolded the note and read it. I then stood and waited quietly for her written response to take it back. If I had been old and smart enough, I could have read her body language to see that she was not happy with her note. She was frowning and her lips were mumbling some words to herself. Her gestures portrayed all the negative emotions she had. However, because I was a young child, I could not realise what mistake I had made.

As it turned out, I had given a message to the wrong person, and it contained gossip about her. The person I gave the letter to was the headmistress. My teacher did not know that her friend was coming in late on that day. That was the reason the principal was occupying the class while waiting for the teacher to arrive. My class teacher was asking the other teacher why the headmistress just sat in the office if there was one teacher sick from work. The note was describing how lazy and incompetent the headmistress was. The message also mentioned that the only thing the headmistress best knew how to do was to caress her office table. The headmistress responded to my teacher in her little note, which I took back: "See me in my office now".

When I handed my teacher the note, she shouted, calling me to come back near her table just before I could sit down. Her voice was very frightening and scary. She could not even control her anger as she wanted to hit me with everything on her table. In the meantime, she sent someone to search for a stick in other classes so that she could give me the harshest hiding on my buttocks or my back. She administered a severe form of corporal punishment by hitting me everywhere on my body. I endured excruciating pain. I could not explain anything, and she did not want to listen to a single word of my explanation. She kept on shouting how foolish I was. She went into the headmistress's office and came back into the class in tears. I did not know what had transpired in there, but everyone could tell that the principal had reprimanded her. I

was very angry with myself that I had let my teacher down, as every learner aimed to be in the good books of his or her teacher.

This memory-work has taught me that, as teachers, we should be mindful of what we practise in front of learners, as it is easy for learners to emulate what we do. Teachers are the ones who should preserve the culture of writing among themselves so that their learners can also get used to the idea. Suppose it is the staff culture to communicate on social media such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook or other means of modern technological communications. In that case, that might mean we are in the process of producing learners who might not be able to write on paper with flair or confidence. Teachers at primary school have a significant influence on what learners become later in their schooling life. Learners even imitate how we behave and how we do things. For example, they mimic how we talk to each other as teachers and how we teach them. If they see us writing to each other, they might then realise that it is crucial to be able to write. The handwriting on paper and on the chalkboard that we use as teachers is also evident in their writing styles later in life. So, whatever popular culture that we portray as teachers might surface in learners' lives later.

I learnt from recalling my class teachers' ill-treatment that teachers should change their behaviour towards learners. As a teacher, I learnt that I should not emulate how some of my past teachers acted towards learners. We should consider learners as very fragile individuals, as far as feelings are concerned. Any negative experience imposed on learners by the teachers has an everlasting impact on the child's mind.

Love letters

Writing small love letters was one of the things we enjoyed doing as young boys at school. Recalling this popular culture activity from my childhood brings back memories of my friends who influenced me in learning to write juvenile love letters. I can remember one friend, Henry, who was a bit older than the rest of us in the class. He was very knowledgeable about love matters. Writing small love letters was something that we did due to peer pressure. We did not even know what love was, nor its meaning, as we were young children at the primary school level. Moreover, we did not know what a girlfriend was. However, due to peer pressure, we learnt to scribe or, if you resisted, someone would appoint a girl to be your proposed lover and write a letter on your behalf stating how you were feeling about her. Some of my friends were

cleverer than the others, and consequently, they had a significant influence on the way we did things during our childhood.
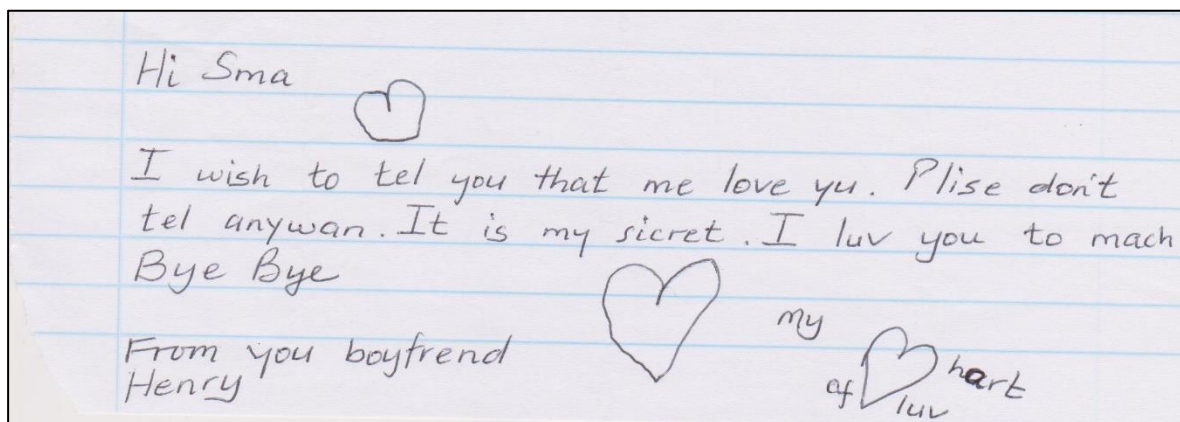
Figure 3.2: "Love letter" we wrote to ask for love

It was a note of love, roughly written on a piece of paper (Figure 3.2). When writing these letters, we were not worried about the spelling and grammar, but we made sure the message of love got across. The letter was sent folded and without an envelope. Usually, it was nameless and not addressed on the outside because it was hand-delivered through the chain of friends. We wanted to make sure that those letters never landed in the wrong hands, so they were handled with extra caution. Sometimes these letters were sent to the recipients by moving under the desks.

Girls were very fussy sometimes when they received such letters. Sometimes the girl would approach the boy to confirm what was in the letter. They sometimes took those love letters to the class teacher, and you would be punished by getting corporal punishment or your parents being invited to a meeting with the class teacher. According to the adults around us, it was totally unacceptable for young children under 12 years old to talk about love matters. Even at home, you were given a severe beating if caught uttering words of affection or talking about kissing, sex, loving, and many other topics.

I remember a day when my class teacher caught my love letter. It was one of the saddest and worst days of my schooling. It was just after the break when it all started. During the break, I approached a friend of mine to help me write a note for that lovely girl I thought I was in love with. When the letter was ready, I asked my friend to give it to the girl's best friend. I instructed him to handle that letter with extra caution. I also told him that her friend must make sure that

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she got and read it after school because I knew what trouble it could cause if found by the wrong person.

During the English period, my friend tried to make a move to get my letter to the girl's friend. However, while putting the letter in her pocket, it fell down on the floor. The English teacher asked for it to be directly handed to her. She stopped teaching. I felt as if my stomach had butterflies and even felt a bit of urine release. Immediately, the teacher started to read my letter aloud to the whole class. She could not complete reading as she was fuming that we were not listening to her. The teacher called me to stand in front of the class. She gave me a harsh hiding on my buttocks. I felt very embarrassed in front of the whole class.

I can learn about the teaching of creative writing from this memory story because I should acknowledge that children are not empty vessels. After all, they can send each other messages of love. If they can express their thoughts and feelings on paper personally, this suggests that they can write creatively with flair. Hence, as a teacher, I should not be focusing on the grammar when reading their creative writing, but on the content of the message or story to be conveyed. Moreover, I have learnt that learners will try their best to express themselves if their interests and concerns are the issues they write about. So, for children to be motivated to write, I should ensure that the creative writing topics are of interest to them and should come from them.

Craftwork

During my primary schooling, handwork or craftwork was done at schools as a subject. We were encouraged to use our hands to make different things that were useful in real life. We were taught to make objects such as weaving plastic to make doormats, using wood for carving wood spoons, and other kitchen utensils. Sometimes we used clay for moulding different items such as a tea set or domestic animals. Girls did craftwork that needed less physical power. They were doing needlework and knitting most of the time. Boys were expected to do craftwork that required much more physical strength, such as carving wood, as it needed them to chop tree branches or to dig for clay. This subject was exciting to me because it never required any complex written answers. It was the only subject where we experienced the freedom of choosing whatever object we wanted to make for craft submission. We really enjoyed that opportunity to decide what to make for. We made craftwork to get marks at the end of the term or year. Mark allocation depended on the artistic finishing of the product. Each term, we were expected to submit different objects to teachers for assessment purposes.

Sometimes we had to walk long distances to get material if it was not available in the local area. We enjoyed taking these walks because we did this as groups of friends during or after school hours. It was not a big deal for some teachers if you only brought the finished product to school, but some wanted us to come with material and process it at school to create finished products. Some learners cheated by buying objects at craft markets or were tempted to get older people to make their craftwork.

I remember an incident when I did something that I felt ashamed of. The school term was about to end, and my teachers were busy compiling mark sheets. I was doing Standard 3 (Grade 5) at the time. I can remember that I had not done my handwork, and it was the day for the submission. The handwork teacher had no qualms about accepting finished products; besides, she was a forgetful old lady. She was calling one student at a time for the assessment, and she would then take the object to keep it.

I negotiated with one of my friends, who had made a wooden spoon, to help me with his craftwork. We planned that he had to submit the spoon first, and he was then going to play a trick to get it back for me to resubmit in my name. While he was going in to submit, I held my breath and crossed my fingers for our ulterior motive to succeed. Fortunately, the teacher forgot to ask my friend to leave the object with her. I was very excited and, at the same time, nervous when he handed his spoon to me. I did not know if it would materialise in my favour. I was very scared when my name was called to submit. I never even thought about disciplinary measures that would be imposed against me if I was caught cheating. My aim was to get marks because I did not want to fail such an easy subject. We hoped that the teacher would not recognise the spoon. When I handed "my work" to Mrs. X, she took her time with my project asking questions about it and looking closely at it. I nearly collapsed with my guilty conscience when she mentioned that it was identical to a spoon she had already seen. I insisted that that was my work. I was relieved when she wrote down marks on her mark-sheet, and I went straight out of her sight as fast as I could. However, I was shaking because I knew that I was so close to being caught. In the end, I got a pass on the subject (Figure 3.3), but my heart was not at peace, as I had a guilty conscience.

Scholar's Report

Name of School ... St. Lawrence C.P.

Type ... Community Circuit ... Mbumbanga Region ... Kwa-Zulu

Name of Pupil ... Madondo Siphiwe Standard or Class ... Std 3

Address ... born on 07.04.75

House No. ... Report for Term / Year* ending on 12.6.87

Times present during Term / Year* ...

Number of Pupils in Class 29

School re-opens ... 14.7.87 Position in Class 12 - A

Subject	Max. Marks	Pupil's Marks	Subject	Max. Marks	Pupil's Marks
Religious Education	100	56	Afrikaans Reading		
Zulu Reading			Afrikaans Speech		
Zulu Speech			Afrikaans Spell. & Dict.	50	23
Zulu Spell. & Dict.	30	18	Afrikaans Composition	30	5
Zulu Composition	80	36	Afrikaans Language	70	22
Zulu Language	60	18	Afrikaans Total	150	50
Zulu Total	150	72	Writing		
English Reading			Health Education	100	30
English Speech			Environment Study		
English Spell. & Dict.	50	23	Social Studies	100	37
English Composition	40	19	General Science	100	32
English Language	60	21	Needlework		
English Total	150	63	Gardening Theoretical Practical	100	63
Mental Arithmetic	40	26	Handwork	100	53
Written Arithmetic	110	68	Ubuntu.	50	26
Arithmetic Total	150	94	Music		
			Grand Total	1250	576 PASSED

General Report on Pupil's Work ... Kabho uyazama kodwa maku-quinise futhi kwalothu

General Report on Pupil's Conduct ... Uyahlonipha.

Figure 3.3: "My report card" with Handwork subject marks

This memory-work has informed me about my creative writing teaching. I realise that it is vital for children to write about objects of their popular culture because there might be exciting stories hidden behind the finished products. Sometimes, these objects evoke emotions and

unforgettable experiences related to them. It is crucial to let learners tell their own lived experience stories with pen and paper rather than only asking them to write a fabricated story. These objects from their popular culture, such as the spoon in my story (Figure 3.4), can prompt learners to write authentically and with confidence.
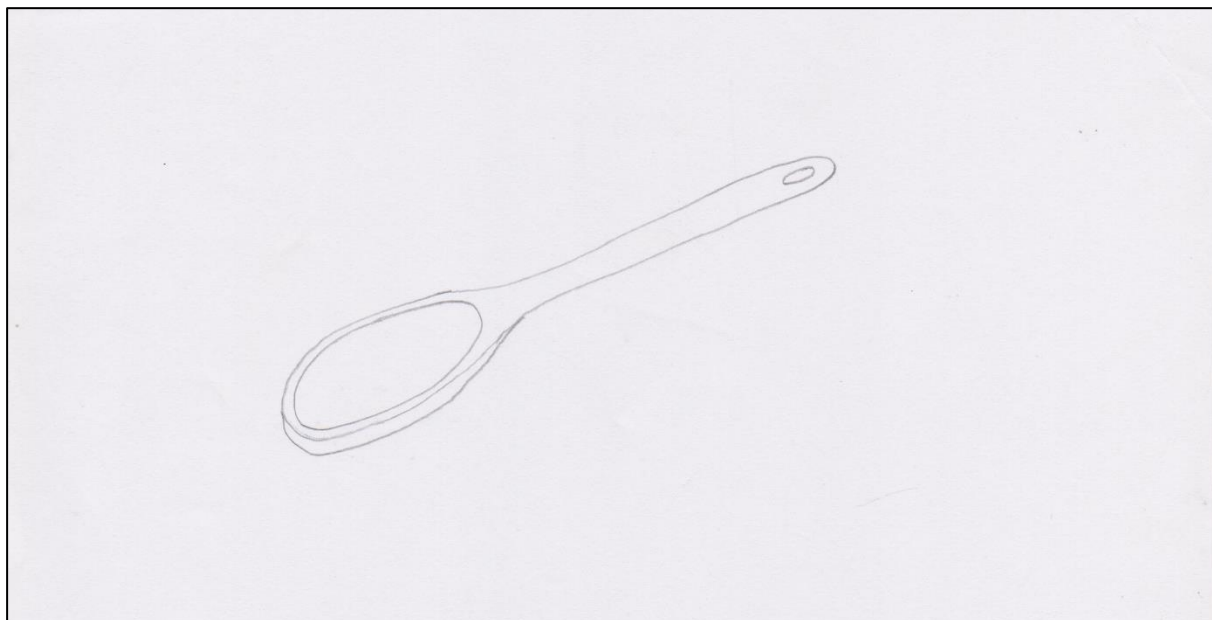
Figure 3.4: Craftwork - A carved wooden spoon

Nowadays, my learners do not do craftwork at school as a subject. In the current prescribed curriculum, craftwork or artwork is incorporated into other subjects such as Life Skills (Creative Arts) and Technology. It is taught and assessed differently from the way we were taught during craft or handwork periods. These subjects aim to develop learners' creative thinking because they can design their own creations in the performing arts, visual arts or technology. This is done within school hours, and it is stipulated in the Department of Education curriculum document for each subject or content. Each subject's curriculum documents clearly prescribe what the teacher has to cover with the learners in each term. The content is supposed to be the same for all learners at different schools. Today, according to the prescribed curriculum, boys and girls are regarded as equally capable of developing their creativity. The emphasis of teaching and learning is not just on the end product that learners submit for marks, but it is also concerned with the entire process and every stage in making the finished piece of art or craftwork. The teachers' assessment rubric also awards each step a certain number of marks, forming part of the final mark. There is no way that learners can just submit a finished piece of

art or craftwork at the end of the term because every stage of development must be assessed by the teacher.

Similarly, teaching and learning English creative writing requires learners to be given a chance to design and develop their own original stories. To write unique ideas, they can tap into their past personal experiences and reflect on them. This can involve the retrieval of popular culture artefacts. Furthermore, the focus of creative writing should also not only be on the finished polished piece of writing, but should instead be on the entire writing process. The teacher has to ensure that essential stages involved in the writing process are considered and explored by learners when writing. The stages of the process approach to writing that teachers need to unpack can include planning, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading and presenting (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Attentive listening

FM radio (Figure 3.5) brought joy and entertainment during the days of my childhood. In my view, this is equivalent to virtual or cyberspace entertainment and cellular phones for today's children who often spend most of their time on computers and using cellular phones. In my community, radios were affordable to most of our parents, who were struggling financially. It was important to own a radio for our parents or adults because it brought current events and news worldwide and dramas.
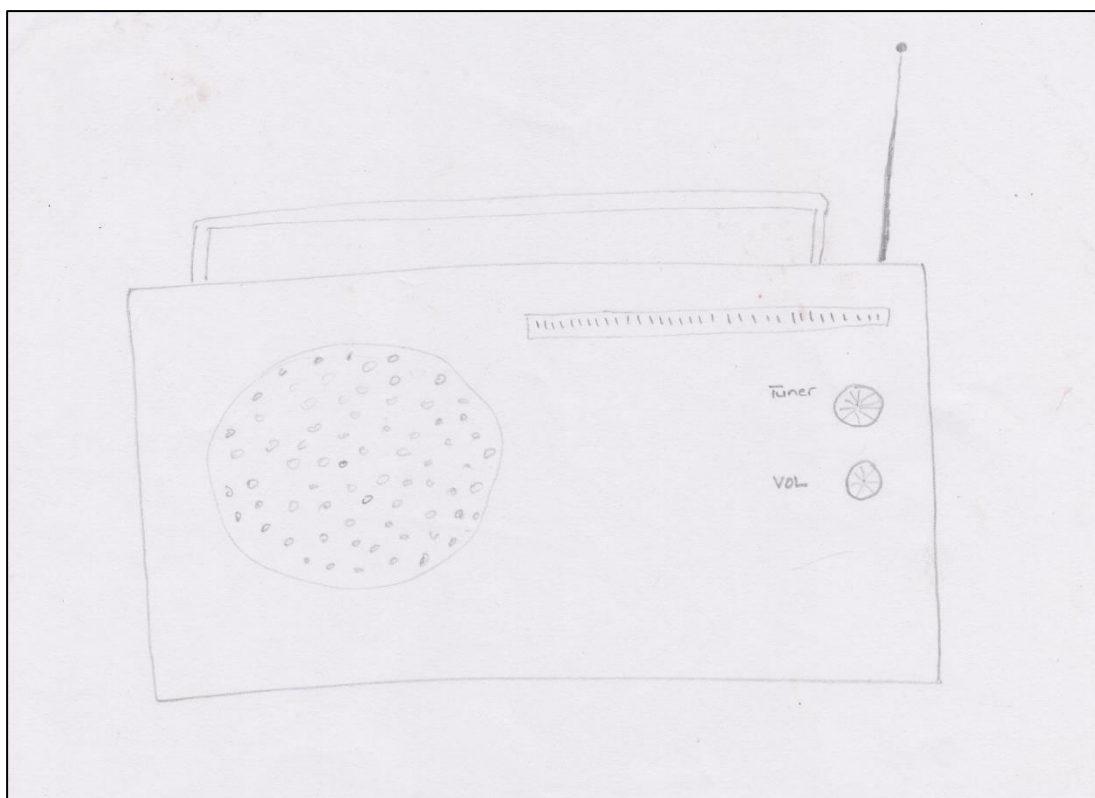
Figure 3.5: Attentive listening to FM radio

However, televisions were only found in homes of those who were of high social-class and who were economically well-situated. Their televisions were small boxes with black and white screens, and there no coloured televisions. They used car batteries to get power for their televisions. They had to use these batteries sparingly as they quickly ran out of power. This forced them to watch specific programmes only. They had to pay a certain amount of money when recharging their batteries. I can recall that some of these families who owned televisions started something new: to charge children who wanted to come in and watch televisions. They charged different amounts, ranging from 10 to 20 cents. We also learnt to save small monies to watch our favourite television programmes on certain days.

Like the television, the radio also worked with the current from batteries as we had no electricity cables in the village at that time. Sometimes the sound of the radio cut off unannounced when the battery went flat. Batteries had different names. Some were called "ever-ready PM9's", which were short and four-cornered. The others were called "ever-ready PM10's", and these were double the size of the PM9's. Batteries came in different colours, some were red, and the others were black. The black batteries had great power, and they lasted much longer than the red ones.

Radios brought the whole family together at certain times when listening to specific programmes. Even if the family members had separate or different houses, as it used to be in a rural homestead, they would gather in one hut or room at a particular time to listen to the radio. Neighbours who did not have a radio were welcomed into my home to listen to their favourite programmes that were popular at that time. Sharing was common in the village, as no family had everything. Even children were brought up by the whole village, which signalled that everything was shared. Sharing began at home when people shared food. Children especially were taught to eat from the same bowl or plate. This instilled love for one another and sharing most of our belongings. Furthermore, it was a village norm that one could not eat if a neighbour was hungry and in need of food. Also, if one family grew and harvested more of the same crop, they would then exchange it with neighbours that had produced different crops that they needed.

The radio symbolised attentive listening to drama and storytelling, which was part of my childhood popular culture. Our listening was improved by the radio and the different programmes. Dramas were enjoyed by all family members but most appreciated by children. We called them stories. We had to rush home if it was time for the story as no one wanted to miss it. If somebody had not heard a particular episode, we were expected to give him or her an update on the plot. Listening was sometimes hindered by the movement of cockroaches inside the radio, which made the sound inaudible. We were very annoyed if such incidents happened while things were heating up with the story. After listening, we enjoyed talking at school about how the story unfolded during the previous episode. We sometimes retold the whole story over and over again to our friends. Sometimes we even had heated arguments and took sides to defend certain characters.

Listening to stories on the radio was very popular at that time. People even believed some of the events that were taking place in the stories. For example, the social issue of witchcraft was also trending back then because stories were talking about such matters that some people believed and others denied the existence of. Witchcraft is when people have faith and believe that *muthi* can do magic such as to cause someone sickness. Usually, witchcraft is practiced by people who are jealous of others' success. Traditional healers and diviners are the providers of such magical medicines.

Furthermore, the names given to children were influenced by popular radio dramas and their characters. Many children were named after popular characters that were in stories that were aired back then. This was because some people loved certain characters and the way they played their parts. An example of a popular name of a radio drama character was *Deliwe*.

I remember one incident when a top-rated drama was aired on the radio at 19:00 in the evenings, and which everyone enjoyed. It was entitled *Mthathe Sgidi*, which means "Take him, Sgidi". It was a terrifying and emotional drama where people were being killed by a serial killer. I was petrified to be outdoors at night during those days, as I thought the story was real. So, on that specific day, I forgot to put the battery in the sun to be recharged from solar energy, as it had gone low on power. Then, after we had had supper, everyone was sitting quietly around the radio. My mother switched the radio on, and no sound came out. Everyone was very angry with me. I was given a very harsh tongue lashing from my parents. I was also disappointed because it was the last episode of the drama. The social issue of serial killers brought to the fore by the story made people believe that they should not allow anyone to be outdoors at night. However, this could not be halted because of some circumstances which required people to be out at night.

The above memory story informs my thinking about teaching creative writing using children's popular culture. This memory-work has shown me that learners could tell and write stories they have listened to in real-life experiences. As teachers, we should not limit them by instructing them to write about things that they not familiar with or interested in. This means we should make use of the knowledge that they already have. Furthermore, this memory-work has made me aware that retelling stories could improve the coherence and sequencing of events in a story when writing.

Another vital thing to do as a teacher is to let children talk about their stories before writing them, as this can enrich their vocabulary. This is also important because it can sharpen their memories and factual recounting for writing purposes. When talking about their stories, they could even get others' input to enrich their thinking and writing.

However, in my experience, today's learners do not listen to radios as we did in my time. They do not have time for radios because this would require them to sit down and listen to what they often refer to as dull, fabricated stories. Today's lives are preoccupied with modern technology that has taken away such experiences that were precious in my childhood. The new

technological inventions of mobile phones or cellular phones have replaced the culture of radio listening. Cellular phones are designed to be used for many functions such as listening and speaking, texting, watching videos, playing games and much more. For instance, mobile phones have made it easier for learners to access their favourite music. I have observed learners of today are obsessed with music. As music is easily accessible by the use of the internet on cellular phones, most of them now listen to their music through headphones. Headphones are earpieces that are connected to cell phones, which help to listen and talk hands-free. In my view, our learners prefer to listen to music because it is what they use to identify themselves. Their style in clothing is much influenced by the type of music they listen to, as well as the personality and taste of fashion of their favourite musician. Their favourite music also gives them a sense of belonging. For example, those who admire hip-hop musicians like to wear oversized clothes, big necklaces, and big caps. Therefore, their style of clothing portrays the genre of music they prefer. Popular music genres for learners in my school are hip-hop, rap, gospel, jazz, kwaito and house music.

I have realised that the popular culture of listening to music by children could be a resource for teaching creative writing if learners are asked to compose songs of their choice for their favourite music genres. Composing music lyrics requires a certain kind of creativity and originality. The process of writing music lyrics would be similar to creative writing. Children will be writing about something that they are passionate about and which is of interest to them. They could also write descriptive paragraphs about their favourite musicians. This will give learners a chance to get to know more facts about their chosen superstars. Having the freedom of choice for writing about who their favourite musicians could allow them to enjoy writing. I could also ask them to write about their favourite fashion items, which are influenced by their music taste.

Music

Playing music was another way of entertaining ourselves during our leisure time in my childhood. However, we only enjoyed music when adults were playing it. As children, we could not touch the stereo system that played records. I remember the stereo system that we had at home for my eldest brother, who worked in another province. He only used it during the December holidays when he was back home for the festive season. We were not allowed to use it during the year, and we did not have money to buy batteries or charge the car battery that it was using. Those record players were big and very delicate because they had a very tiny, fragile needle that read music from the record track. Record player stereo systems were outdated in the 1990s when radio cassettes were introduced and became popular.

Radio cassettes players (Figure 3.6) came in different sizes. The big sizes were called hi-fi radios. There were also small radio cassettes players that were portable. As children, we sometimes saw adults, especially males carrying radios around playing their music loud because those cassette players were easy to carry. The new cassette players used batteries as a source of energy. These were small batteries that were light in weight. The radio cassette player had two sections, the radio tune, different radio stations, and a tape player section with buttons. For the tape player, one needed a cassette. We were lucky at home because my mother had saved money and bought one for herself. That was when we, as children, started to have access to play our own music on the radio cassette player.

Figure 3.6: A radio cassette player

A cassette was a small plastic object that had tape inside. On it, the name of the artist and the title of the album were written in bold. It had two small holes, which allowed it to roll. The tape moved to one side when it played music. It was called an album for the musician. One side played half of the songs of the album; the other side had the rest. To play all songs in the album, you had to turn the cassette over. The tape inside the cassette was very delicate and easily stretched. Nobody wanted to play a cassette that was stretched. If the tape got broken, it was not easy to mend, and that would always remain as a scratch when playing music.

The hi-fis and small radio cassette players were only operated manually. It was not easy to repeat the song on the tape. You had to press the backward button and then guess where it should be and press the play button. The music that I loved then was afro-pop, kwaito music and soul. We did not have money to buy music cassettes, but we knew popular songs at that time. We made plans to get some tapes to play at home. We even borrowed one another's radio cassette players, even though we did not own one. We would take tapes from home and swap

them for the music we did not have at home. We all wanted to be up to date with the latest music.

We did not have money to buy cassettes from music shops. When we wanted a particular album or a song, we dubbed music. 'Dubbing' meant to copy somebody's tape. We had to buy blank tapes and then record music over on the tape. We did not know that we were committing a crime, and we robbed our favourite musicians because we did that without their consent. The only excuse we had was that we did that because we loved their music. One of the popular cultural activities that we enjoyed doing was to imitate the popular songs. So we had to have real music to play and sing over it. It was easy to pause and reverse songs with the radio cassette until you got the words correct. It was more difficult with English songs because we had to replay them several times before figuring out words and pronunciations. I think it was easier for girls because they kept their music books where they wrote songs. Usually, girls would visit one another and then transcribe song lyrics from the cassette on to paper and learn them off by heart for singing. I recall that girls were very good at emulating songs of artists and performing them.

I can remember one song that we all enjoyed singing at primary school. The song was composed and sung by the late South African afro-pop music artist, Brenda Fassie. Most of her songs were loved and sung by everybody, young and old. The one that was popular at that time was titled, *"Too Late for Mama"* (Figure 3.7). The lyrics were:

Ten kilometres barefooted on the bush,
Started raining on the way to fetch some water
Poor woman had a baby on her back,
Was struck by lightning on her way,
To fetch some water…
She tried hiding under a tree to save her child,
Poor woman had no place to go,
Lightning caught her with her baby on her back
Friend's relatives ran for her
But it was too late
It was too late… too late for Mama
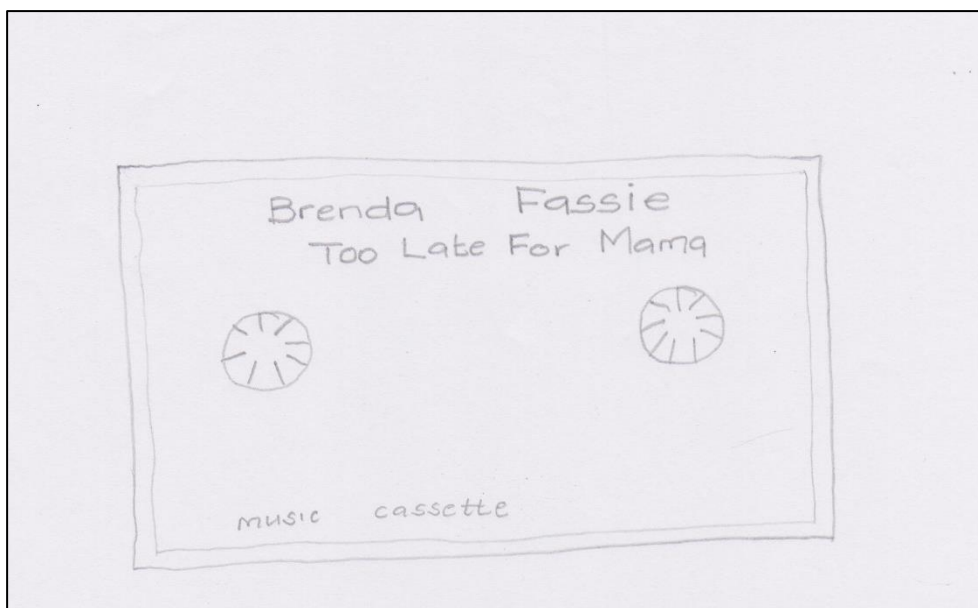
Figure 3.7: Drawing of a music radio cassette

Growing up as children, we loved and enjoyed popular music very much. During recess at school, we sang the songs of our favourite musicians. In the groups of friends we belonged to, it was very embarrassing if you were not musically-inclined. We did everything to be updated with popular music. Music cassettes were circulating amongst groups of friends. Those circles of friends assisted one another to be up to date with song lyrics, as they borrowed each other's music tapes. We did not mind listening to fake or original music. Indeed, we were not able to differentiate between the two. I remember asking a friend of mine to lend me his music cassette. I wanted to listen to the song that was a hit of that time. We could not listen to music anywhere we liked because it was not easy to move around with the radio cassette player. However, children of today are fortunate because devices of technology have made their music lives more entertaining, as it is easy to access their favourite music anywhere without any inconvenience.

I can recall a friend I considered more privileged than myself because his parents could afford to buy him luxury items such as toys and bicycles. I did not own any music cassettes unless it happened that somebody would have dubbed it for me. My friend had told me that his parents had bought him a music cassette with that popular song that was in demand. He was a very kind person and was always willing to share his belongings and even his toys. He understood my socioeconomic status, and so he lent me his shoes on special days. For example, when we had some school outings, I used his shoes as he had more than one pair (Figure 3.7). Most of the time, my shoes were in bad condition.
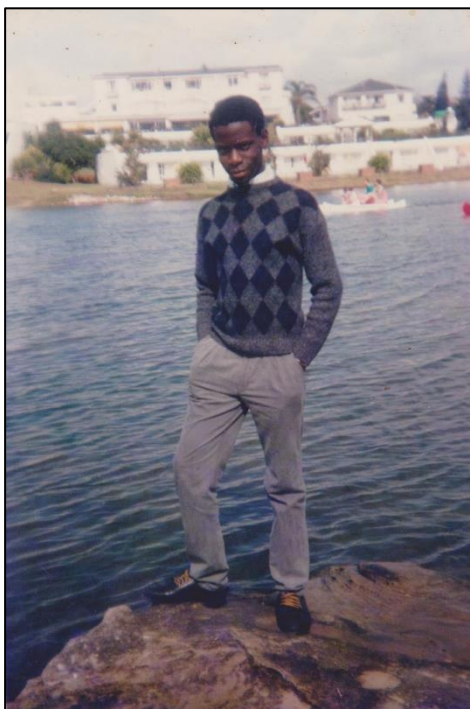
Figure 3.8: On a school outing wearing my friend's shoes

I was very excited about the day he lent me his cassette. I could not wait for school to finish as I looked forward to getting home to listen to music. Fortunately, my mother was not there when I got home, but my eldest sister who also loved music, was there. I did not change out of my school uniform or put my school bag away as I was too excited. I was also exhausted, as I was sweating because I had walked home from school, and the heat was intense on that day. I needed a quick rest. I told my sister that I had brought music and showed her the cassette. She screamed when she saw it. She was over the moon, and she quickly rushed to get her music exercise book from the school. She said I could help by operating the cassette player as she focused on transcribing the lyrics. She also brought the radio cassette player, and I sat next to her on the bench in my school uniform and my school bag lying on the floor. It was tranquil in the house as it was only two of us, which created a perfect setting for listening to the hit song's words. She pressed the button to open the slot where the cassette was inserted and closed it. I pressed the play button to start the music. The opening song of the cassette was the hit song that we had anticipated listening to. We listened attentively to the song, and we tried to mumble the words from the beginning to the end. We made a lot of noise trying to sing out loud.

I then decided to start playing and pausing music so that she could write the words. Where we missed some words, I pressed the rewind button to repeat that specific part of the song. We kept

on doing that until we finished the whole song. Finally, we decided to play the music while we were reciting lyrics from the music book. My sister was very good with her vocals, and she had an excellent memory to remember the words by heart. While we were having fun, music playing very loud, and busy dancing and singing, mom entered. We were very shocked and scared because we had not asked for her permission to use her radio cassette player. She was furious and started shouting at us. She went straight to switch off the cassette player. She pressed the eject button to get the cassette out, and then she started pulling out the rolled-up tape haphazardly all over the floor. We just sat in the corner, waiting for her next action, which we thought would be a harsh beating. Fortunately, we endured the cruel punishment from my mother.

What had made her so upset was that she had tried to save the battery to listen to her favourite radio programme. I was despondent and disappointed at what had happened to my friend's music cassette. I was worried that my mother's actions could have ruined our friendship. I wanted to stay absent from school the next day, but I had no valid reason to give to my parents. So, I had to go to school and face my friend and explain my ordeal. I was astonished at how he reacted after I had explained what had happened to his music cassette. I expected him to be angry and immediately stop our friendship; however, he responded very politely by saying that I should not worry because he had made a copy of the original album.

Retrospective reflections on memory-work writing

In retelling the stories presented in this chapter, I can see how social and cultural influences shaped my interactions in developing relationships with other children. Growing up in an environment where humanity was valued, I learnt to live well with others and share my belongings. I was also able to grasp and understand what my peers taught me. I think it was easy to learn this way because it was my choice to participate. As a teacher, I can see how social and cultural influences have shaped the values that I have instilled in learners that I teach, such as helping each other and maintaining healthy relations in all encounters.

My most useful discovery about myself as a learner was that some valuable skills required at school were developed at home, such as listening and sharing. My childhood social and cultural experiences also developed my writing and listening skills in ways that helped me at school. As a teacher, I should understand that children's learning is based on social interactions at home,

in the community, and at school. I should build on external interaction experiences that children bring to school and integrate them when teaching curriculum content to learners.

An understanding I have gained about children's popular culture is that no adult can dictate to children what to choose to like. Children voluntarily decide on what they enjoy. I see how popular culture activities can bring joy, contentment and give a sense of identity and belonging. Many children like to do what other children of the same age group are doing, so it is peer-influenced.

An insight I have gained about creative writing is that it should be related to the authentic experiences of children's popular culture. Children are inspired to learn to write when they want to know about and are interested in the topic's content. Linking creative writing to children's popular culture can make it a meaningful and exciting experience for them. I am still struggling to understand what I should use as topic content for children's interests as a base for creative writing activities. However, this memory-work writing has helped me understand how children's popular culture experiences can impact and shape their learning in and out of a school context. They lay a foundation on which teachers can further build.

Social and cultural influences can impact and shape teachers' learning because teachers have to be lifelong learners to improve their teaching. Writing my memory stories has helped me understand that recalling and reflecting on the social and cultural influences on teachers' learning is crucial for the teacher to design lessons that consider children's knowledge of all their experiences.

Memory-work writing can inform my future learning and practice as a teacher because I now understand that it is helpful for the teacher to consider learners' contextual knowledge. Teachers need to find out what children know so that the lessons' content is relevant to them. Teaching children content with no connection to their social and cultural settings is not likely to interest them. The social experiences of learners in and out of the school context are valuable to the teacher as they offer ideas that can inform teaching content and strategies.

Conclusion

This chapter has narrated some experiences related to childhood popular culture and creative writing in and out of the school environment. I also looked at the implications of some of my experiences for my creative writing learning and teaching. The memory stories discussed in this chapter were all about or related to education, as most of them involved developing abilities that schools teach for academic progress. These recollections and reflections have helped me remember how much I was obsessed with the popular culture of my time. I have also become more conscious of the gaps between what we wrote about in prescribed creative writing tasks at school and the knowledge of popular culture in my childhood.

I undertook this memory-work to improve my teaching practice as a classroom-based teacher. According to Samaras (2011), concerning looking at education-related life history experiences, "it is only when the teacher understands, reflects, and looks at events that shaped his/her own educational experiences and beliefs that real growth or change can occur in their teaching." My intention was to learn from my past experiences to develop new strategies for teaching creative writing (as illustrated in Chapters Five and Six). By taking part in memory-work, I have become more aware of the potential impact of personal experiences on how I teach and interact with learners during creative writing lessons. Reminiscing about and reliving past experiences episodes has offered new understandings and new ideas when recollecting those memories. Composing and reflecting on memory stories can help us as teachers to see how we can improve our practice. Memory-work is a powerful tool that can assist individuals who want to re-build themselves to excel in executing their duties to improve their professional contexts.

Reflecting on my memory stories helped me see more clearly that I do not want to repeat what my past teachers did to me, but instead, to do things differently in every interaction I have with my learners. Looking back now, I can see how my own teaching habits were shaped by my former teachers and experiences. Therefore, this shows the need for a change if I want to improve my creative writing teaching.

In the following chapter, Chapter Four, I continue to respond to my first research question. I focus on exciting episodes of my childhood encounters with popular culture outside of formal schooling. Furthermore, I reflect on how I can learn from my memories stories to develop and maintain my strengths and address my weaknesses to nurture learners' creative writing.

CHAPTER FOUR: RECOLLECTION OF MY AMUSING CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES WITH CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Three, I narrated memory stories about my childhood popular culture and considered how particular lived experiences contributed to developing my creative writing learning. The memory stories discussed in the previous chapter were all in some way related to my education.

In this chapter, Chapter Four, I continue to respond to my first research question, *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I recollect encounters with popular culture outside of formal schooling that gave me excitement and contentment as a child. In creating the memory stories represented in this chapter, I again produced memory drawings to evoke significant lived experiences. Mitchell et al. (2019a) state that when teachers narrate stories of the past through the visual arts, significant events and feelings are evoked. They point out that *how* the stories are remembered is vital for reinvention and rebirth of the teacher's self and practice.

My fun childhood experiences

In the stories that follow, I recall fun activities that allowed me to enjoy being a child and grow up happily. Most of the activities were infused with playing with objects of popular culture. As children, we all wanted and wished to take part in such activities.

"Cinema at school"

Looking back at my childhood popular culture, I can see that all children loved and enjoyed certain things, such as watching movies. However, that entertainment did not frequently occur. It was not organised by our parents, but rather by our primary school teachers and those who intended to make money. Our teachers arranged for us to watch what was then called '*bioskop*'. Although the *bioskop* happened at school, it was not considered part of our formal schooling. Instead, it was seen purely as an after-school entertainment. As children, we loved the teachers who were the organisers of the entertainment events because we considered learning at school a tedious activity and did not like it.

The word *bioskop* is in the Afrikaans language, meaning "cinema". A *bioskop* was a machine with big tape rolls that projected pictures and sound on the wall (Figure 4.1). *Bioskops* were our cinemas because we knew so little about cinemas. Even if we knew and had money, black people could not mix and sit with white people at cinemas during the apartheid era. This means that the cinema was brought to school because teachers understood that our parents were poor and could not afford to take us to town as it was far to go to watch movies at cinemas. Consequently, *bioskop* was brought to school maybe once or twice a year. *Bioskop* was of great interest to us as children, and we all anticipated it keenly so that we could be part of the action and conversation afterward in our groups as friends and classmates.
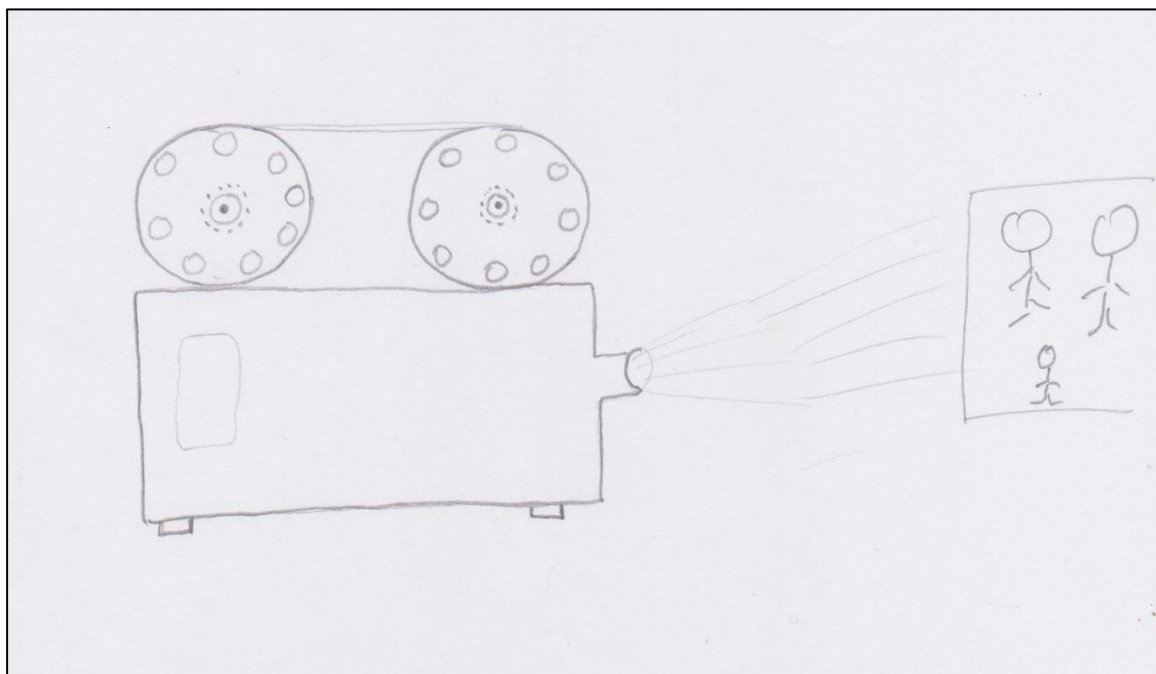
Figure 4.1: "Bioskop" - A machine used to show films at schools

Bioskop was advertised maybe a month earlier than the actual day of the movie screening. Large handwritten posters were pasted on school walls. Every morning, teachers announced *bioskop* after devotions in the assembly so that we could save money for admission into the school hall. We all had to make sacrifices by not spending our money on treats during breaks and lunches to save for the movie. Class teachers collected the entrance fees, which was about 20 cents that time, and rollcall was done at the door.

I recall the day I watched a *bioskop* for the first time. I was doing Standard One (Grade 3). I was seven years old at that time. It was on a Friday afternoon. There was a lot of commotion and excitement around the school as we were getting ready for the movie. The bell rang, and we all went to queue next to the school hall. Those who had not paid were dismissed and were heartbroken for missing such a privilege of school life. Teachers were calling our names to get in, and finally, my name was called, and I went into the hall. We all sat down, and the doors were closed. It was very dark inside the hall, as windows were covered with newspapers and black refuse bags. The school did not have electricity, so there were no lights. I recall that we couldn't see each other and we only recognised one another by voice. We felt very hot and profusely sweating because the heat was intense in the hall due to overcrowding. However, we did not mind the heat.

The loud noise in the hall became less as the generator, which was a source supply for power, started to make its loud, irritating noise. Firstly, words began to roll up, followed by pictures projected onto the white cloth hung on the front chalkboard wall. I remember that it was a horror movie and it was terrifying. People were being shot, and there were many fights and blood spilled everywhere. I was petrified and felt emotional in such a way that I felt as if I was in some characters' shoes.

The English language spoken in the movie was not a problem for our understanding of the storyline because we used pictures to comprehend. We could even tell our parents at home what had happened or the plot of the movie. That was the most memorable day of our popular culture of that time, and we talked about it for months. We also enjoyed dramatising some scenes from the movie at school during break time or at home. Some even acted out and demonstrated to others the dangerous moves that were done by the stars. Others enjoyed being called by the name of a character who they referred to as their hero. All in all, we truly enjoyed watching that movie.

This memory story informs my teaching of creative writing. It reminds me that I should consider the previous knowledge of learners gained from popular culture activities. For example, when writing creatively, they could be using the skill of narrating or describing events from a popular movie. Discussions and retelling of the story orally can assist learners to organise events in the correct sequence. This could also help learners understand that when they argue for their point of view during discussions of popular movies, they need to give supporting reasons, as they

will again be doing when writing. Furthermore, as a teacher, I should offer learners a chance to have the first-hand experience of this kind of entertainment because some learners are less privileged if they are born to poor families and thus are unlikely to afford to go to the cinema.

Dangerous toys

Playing with the spinning top (Figure 4.2) was a prevalent activity among boys during my childhood. Most boys enjoyed playing with this toy as most owned one. The negative thing about this game was that to participate, you had to have a top. A spinning top was a cone-shaped piece of wood with a sharp steel needle at the bottom. It was coated with varnish for a smooth finish. It was not big; it could fit in the palm of a hand. It required a string of about 30 to 50 centimetres, which we made ourselves. The top was designed to spin rapidly upright on its axis with its needle on the ground.
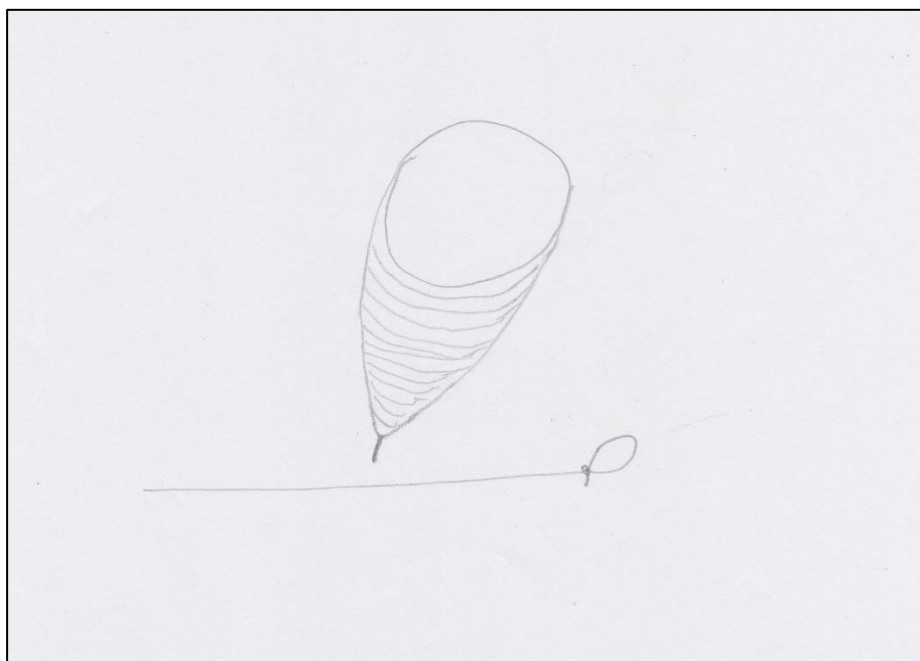
Figure 4.2: "Dangerous toys" - A spinning top used by boys to play

This toy was sold at nearby shops in the local area, and they made a lot of money out of it. Every one of us, as boys, saved the little funds we carried from home to buy treats to own a spinning top. Toppies (as we called them) were small in size, and we, therefore, brought them to school. However, they were prohibited in the school premises because of the danger they posed. We hid them in our school bags and took them out during lunchtime. We played with them on the sports field or in places that were out of sight to teachers. Teachers confiscated the

tops if they were found in your possession, and you were also harshly disciplined through corporal punishment. As an adult, I can now see that banning these toys was meant to be in the best interest and safety of us, as the learners. If someone was mistakenly hit by a toppy, it could leave a lifetime scar on the feet. Our feet were exposed to danger because we came to school barefooted. Children's culture played a role in this artefact because we all wanted to participate in the game and wanted to belong to these groups of friends who owned toppies.

To enjoy playing with a spinning top, one required a group of friends or participants with sets of strings and toppies. This reminds me of my primary school friends who even taught me how to make homemade toppies, which was extremely dangerous because we made needles with iron nails. They taught me to improvise in case I did not have the money to buy one.

I recall how the group would stand in a circle. We would draw a circle in the centre of the ground surface, and we all had to start by spinning our toppies and catching them using strings to pull them up. The last person to pick up his spinning top would be the first one to leave it in the centre of the circle drawn on the ground for other participants to use their toppies to hit and damage it while it lay down. We would hit it hard so that the needle would leave a scratch mark or crack and even break it. It was such an outstanding achievement to crack or break a spinning top belonging to another competitor. Sometimes we would miss hitting the toppie, and it would accidentally hit the foot of a person, and that was when the trouble began with teachers.

Looking back, I can see how we developed friendships with other participants. Social interaction improved as we shared ideas on surviving painful situations in life and protecting our belongings. We learnt that sometimes in life, we lose things that we adore and love. Playing toppies taught me about surviving difficult times in life as sometimes our spinning tops got scratches or were broken beyond repair. Playing toppies also required precision to not miss the target, and we had to act or move very fast.

I remember when I had bought a new toppy with the money that I had saved for quite a long time. It was on a weekend when I got it. I was longing for Monday as I felt that time was so slow to get to school. When Monday came, I was very excited and wanted to show the toppy to my friends. During the lunch break, we went to play with spinning tops at the sports ground. When it was my turn to leave my toppy at the centre of the ground, I was very nervous because I was so attached to it, as it was brand new. I did not want any scratches on it, as it was looking

good. Every member of the circle started to hit hard on my toppy. However, most of them did not manage to dent it, as it was slippery because of the varnish. At last, one boy hit it with his homemade toppy, precisely on the centre, and it cracked wide open. They all laughed at me, and I was speechless. My heart was bleeding deep inside, and I was fuming with anger and frustration because the toppy was new.

I could learn from this memory-work that learners could gain a sense of pride when they play and win games of popular culture. Victory is important for learners participating in such activities. This shows that teachers need to consider the experiences learners have had with their precious objects such as toppies when writing creatively. It is essential to give them a chance to write about such experiences. Taking part in popular culture activities could also boost confidence and ignite intrinsic motivation within learners. The objects or artefacts of popular culture can create a special feeling for the owners because they take care of them, as they do not want to lose or damage them. This means that such objects are special to learners, and they learn to have a sense of ownership of their belongings at early stages.

My cheerful upbringing

As we were growing during the 1980s as young African boys in a rural setting, our area was underdeveloped. This was the era of apartheid when the then government marginalised black people (Clarke & Worger, 2016). Black African people were considered as the inferior race group of all the citizens of the country. As Pithouse-Morgan (2019) explains, "a hierarchy of racialised privilege and dispossession ensured that people labelled as white benefited from high levels of government spending and access to superior facilities and resources in all domains (including education), while people labelled as African, Coloured, and Indian were disfranchised and oppressed" (p. 20).

Apartheid had even made education department boundaries for specific races, aiming to produce different kinds of citizens, such as labor forces and employers (Kallaway, 2002). Bantu Education policy was designed specifically for black children and The Department of Education and Training for white children. These schools were different because white schools were allocated more funds, making them more well-resourced than black schools.

Blacks mostly had their residential areas deep in rural areas or in the countryside, where life was a challenge in many ways. The Group Areas Act stipulated where different races had to

live. Service delivery and infrastructural development were only taking place in urban areas for white people. Even if the blacks could afford to live there, the law prevented them.

In the rural areas, we had to walk on dusty gravelled roads without any maintenance. We lit up candles or paraffin lamps in the evenings. We cooked on the fire, and we had to collect wood from nearby forests. Even before we went to school in the mornings, we had to make a fire to warm our bathwater. This means we had to wake up early in the morning to prepare for school.

We had no safe drinking water. The only source of drinking water was a nearby river. We fetched water using 25 litre containers on wheelbarrows. As children, we enjoyed bringing water because we got a chance to push one another with wheelbarrows (Figure 4.3). We improvised for our play enjoyment. Playing with a wheelbarrow required a lot of power as we pulled and pushed the load. Balancing skill was also necessary because we had to be very careful when pushing one another. It was sometimes dangerous, as there was a risk of falling because it was easy to hurt yourself. We had to take turns; the pusher would be the rider and vice versa.
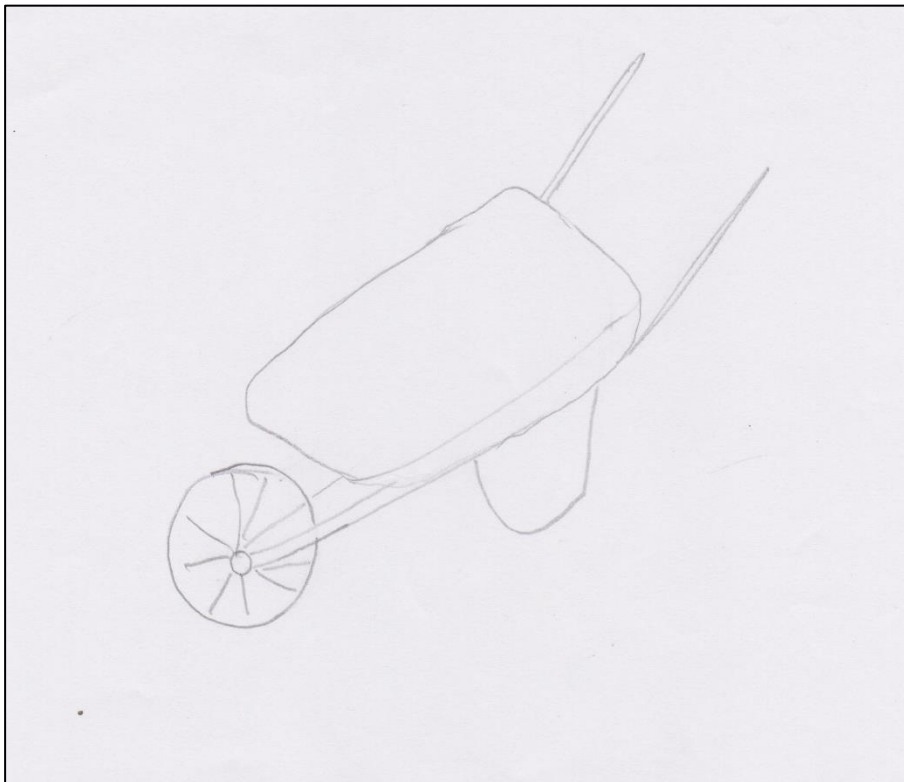
Figure 4.3: Wheelbarrow - A tool we used to push one another

The water we fetched for house chores and drinking was used untreated and sometimes contaminated. Our parents were not very concerned or worried about waterborne diseases. They knew very little about water safety. Fetching water and collecting wood were some of the chores expected to be done by girls or women. In the Zulu culture, this was done to prepare young girls or ladies for marriage. However, boys and girls were all expected to do it. We had to do it in the afternoon after school.

Our home dwellings were made of mud and wood from the local environment. Some village houses were roofed with corrugated iron, and some were thatched with grass found in the local vicinity. Each homestead had a few rondavel huts, which depended on the number of family members. A rondavel was a traditional cone-shaped round hut popular among the Zulu ethnic tribe. It was made up of mud walls with a grass thatched roof covering the frame structure made of logs and tree branches. The rondavel huts were surrounding a *kraal*. The kraal is a round shape enclosure for domestic animals like cows, goats, and sheep. It is made of logs or hard tree branches, which are skilfully constructed next to each other. Kraals were usually at the centre of the homestead. This symbolised that the cattle were at the heart of the community as they were safely kept and visible at all times. Having cattle was valued as a treasure of that time. Most homes kept animals such as chickens, dogs, cows, goats, and many more and grew crops such as mealies, millets, vegetables, and many more for subsistence purposes. In our family, this also supplemented my father's low income.

My father was a security guard, and my mother was a house-wife. My parents were not financially stable. My siblings and I were struggling just like all other children in our community. However, I cannot recall a day when we went to bed hungry because my mom had her vegetable garden. Most often, we had vegetable curries of potatoes, pumpkins, and spinach for our meals. These curries were sometimes cooked without the cooking oil, meaning they were just boiled. The days I hated and devastated me were when we would come hungry from school and only find that the only food was boiled sweet corn. Therefore, that is why even today, as a grown-up person, vegetables are not my favourite. Most of these curries I do not like eating now because I had enough of them when growing. The only dish I still enjoy today was my favourite back then: beans curry with steamed bread *(ujeqe)*. As a grown man, I always enjoy having that meal, and I cannot get enough of it.

Toy invention

As children, we never had proper toys because my parents could not afford to buy us any. Well-manufactured toys were not common. We only had a chance of seeing such toys at the homes of those lucky children, of whom there were very few. Therefore, as children, we had to improvise by using the available objects to play as toys.

For example, one of the boy's popular culture toys that we used to play with was pushing an old tyre with two sticks (Figure 4.4). We got our tyres from a nearby motor mechanic because he had scrapped cars and many tyres in his yard. We requested and played with tyres that were worn or had defects. The two sticks for support had to be straight to keep the tyre in an upright position. We would then push the tyre so that it would have linear and rotary movement. It was not easy to push it if someone was holding something else in their hands. The tyre's friction and where the two sticks met made it challenging to get the desired movement. We had to put water in the tyre for smooth and easy flow for improved and better play. We later improvised by using milk carton containers to improve the tyre's flow where the sticks came into contact with it. This kind of game improved our balancing skills, and it demanded energetic physical movement because, for the tyre to move, it needed to move very fast. It also enhanced our concentration and awareness of danger as there was a high probability of falling over the two sticks when pushing and running with the tyre. In my view, this play promoted a healthy competition because we all wanted to win the tyre races.
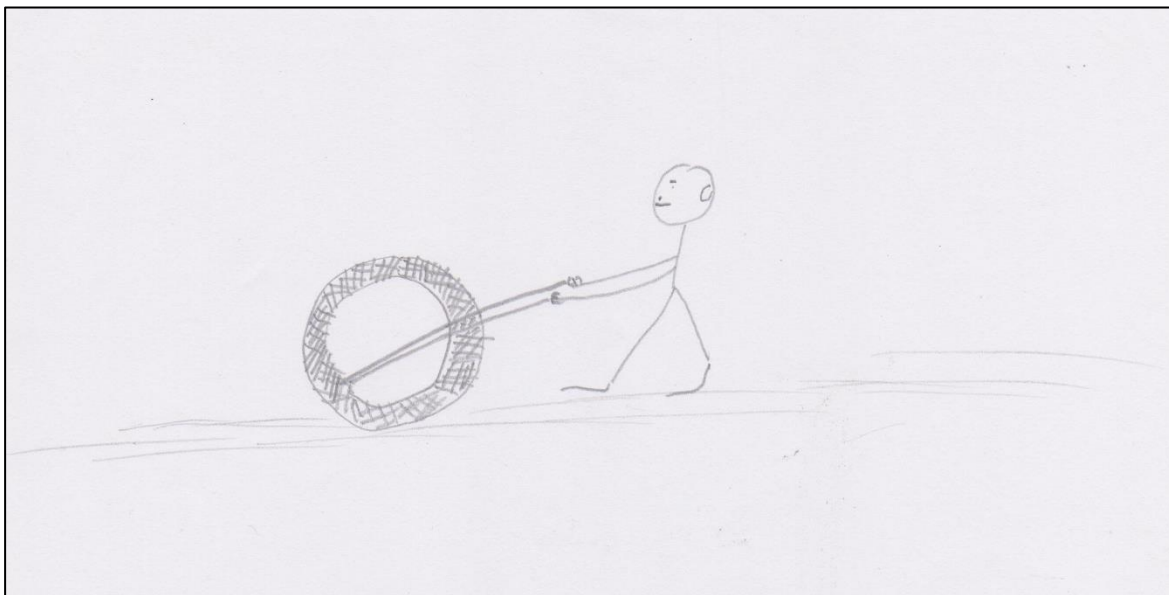
Figure 4.4: An old car tyre we played with

Cow herding

One of the crucial activities expected to be done by most African boys when growing up was cow herding. The community emphasised gender-oriented cultural activities to prepare children to become men or women. The community members expected all boys to take part in this popular activity that was assigned to boys. They believed that if boys took part in such an activity, they would grow up to be real men. It was considered an informal school as the boys learnt various things and survival skills. The highest level of the community's social hierarchy was traditional leadership, and elderly people emphasised cow herding as one of the essential traditional practices that parents should ensure that their boys engage with. They believed in a saying that it takes a village to nurture and grow a child. This means that everyone in the community has full responsibility to ensure that all children are taught valuable traditional survival skills so that they grow up to be competent, responsible adults. Cow herding also taught boys important African values such as respect and humanity, which need to be preserved and passed from generation to generation.

As a growing young African boy, I had to engage in the cow herding activity *(ukwalusa).* My parents considered this very important because they believed it prepared boys to grow to be strong men and taught many skills. All boys were expected by the community members to take part in this popular culture of cow herding. It did not matter whether your parents owned cows or not. Boys were expected to participate with neighborhood boys. However, if you did not participate, you were given names by other boys in the village, such as "mother's boy" (*umnqolo*). When going for cow herding, we would leave home very early in the morning and come back very late in the afternoon during weekends and school holidays. We never carried any food for lunch, but we had to make some and improvise to alleviate hunger in the veld.

There were so many activities that we did and learnt while looking after cattle. Usually, we did our activities in the afternoon when the cattle had had enough from the pastures or bushes. We met and interacted with other boys from other villages, and we sometimes had to learn to fight if the need arose to defend our village mate from brutal attacks by other village boys. We taught one another stick fighting. If we fought, we never reported back at home because our parents understood that it was part of what we had to learn.

I had to also learn to communicate with the cattle. Whistling was used as a means of communication in the veld. Your cattle needed to understand your commands. For example, if

I had to stop them from getting into a *mealie* (maize) field. I also had to learn to sing praise songs for the cows. Praise songs emerged from the names of the bulls. Bulls knew their names as they were given at birth. When praise songs were repeatedly sung, that caused and provoked bulls to get involved in a fight. The bulls knew the voice of their herders and responded appropriately. It was a proud moment if your bull fought and won.

Another activity that we learnt and enjoyed was designing and making musical instruments that we used for music (Figure 4.5). By playing music, we learnt to entertain ourselves and avoid boredom. Some boys were good at playing instruments while others composed songs. We told our thoughts and feelings through our music songs. Through music, we also learnt to compose praise songs for each other that each boy would use in his manhood. Some boys were good in both composition and singing music. We also learnt to do a traditional dance to the beat of our musical instruments. Most of our songs were happy songs because they were about the environment around us and our veld experiences. However, that did not stop those who felt the need to express their sad moods in the song's composition.

Figure 4.5: Activities we enjoyed during cow herding

To avoid starving, we learnt to improvise for lunch meals. We invented special tools for hunting animals for meat. We made bows and arrows for shooting and baits to trap animals. We sometimes stole chickens while we were cow herding. We knew that it was morally wrong to steal, but we had to learn to provide for ourselves. We made fire with wood or set alight an anthill to braai or grill meat. We also went to nearby mealie fields to steal some sweet corn to braai on fire. Most of the days, we enjoyed eating wild fruits such as berries. All this helped us to survive lunchtime hunger in the veld.

Another activity that I enjoyed doing on hot days was swimming (Figure 4.5). Swimming was a dangerous activity because we did it without adult supervision. However, some boys claimed not to be amateurs, and they acted as our coaches. The boys with more swimming experience saved us when we were about to drown in water. Sometimes we competed to get across the

swiftly moving river water or to just cool down the heat in dams. Another danger that we were exposed to was crocodiles in rivers and the water depth. However, that never deterred us from enjoying swimming.

I can recall one day of cow herding, which was in summer. When we left home in the morning, it was clear that the heat would be intense as the day went by. When we got to the veld, we were sweating as the heat was getting intense. We were sweating profusely at midday, and the shade could not help keep us cool while looking after cattle. We were following cattle through thick bushes as the cattle were still hungry and were grazing hastily. There was a lot for cattle to graze, as everything surrounding was green due to a lot of rain. It was still too early for us to engage in our daily activities as cattle were still moving around. A few hundred metres down was a big river.

While we were looking after cattle and sweating, we could hear the sound of water rolling and tumbling onto rocks on the bank. It was a very tempting situation. I could imagine myself and my friends cooling off in the water. I then asked my friends if we could quickly have just five minutes cooling off in the water. They all agreed and said we should get out of the water every 30 minutes to check if cattle would be still on sight. We all ran down to the river, and all jumped with our clothes on. We knew that it would take a few minutes to dry them off after we get out of water because of the extreme heat. We enjoyed swimming because many other boys came and joined us. After 30 minutes, I went to check if cattle were still around. Indeed they were still grazing. Also, my friends did the very same thing after some time. We continued with our plan, and it was successful. However, one of our friends forgot to look out for the cattle's whereabouts in the end. This happened when it was about time to head back home with our cattle. Therefore, that meant we were all in trouble because we knew that no cow herder could come back home if there was one missing cow. It was a non-negotiable matter, so we had to bring them back as they were when we left in the morning.

Therefore, we all had to quickly get out of the water and rush to search for cattle. We all went in different directions because no one had any idea of where they were. We agreed that we had to meet at a certain point to see if we had found them all before we went back home. We got into the forest, which stretched about 5 kilometres, and we could find one cow. At the end of the forest, we saw the cows in some homesteads' mealie fields on the village's outskirts. All the cattle were in the mealie fields, and the crops were about to finish. The owner of the field

was already herding our cattle into her kraal with her boys. We definitely knew that we were in trouble. When we got closer to the house to ask for our cattle, the old lady who was the owner of the fields was fuming and shouting aloud. When she saw us, she was more annoyed and never said anything except that she wanted to speak to the elders. Then she went near the dogs' kennel, and we thought she wanted to set free her dogs. Nobody said a word to each other, but we knew that we had to run away. If we did not run away, we would have been given a harsh beating by the owner of the fields and her sons. On the way back, home nobody said a word because we knew what was coming our way.

We were in a dilemma, as no one wanted to go home, and we could not stay in the veld forever. At some point, we had to decide. When we got home without the cattle, they told us not to even think of setting foot on the premises. My father was so angry that he never said a word. I had to ask and beg my mother to come with us to talk to the old lady. I believed that she would talk some sense to the woman and, therefore, would reach a point of compromise. When we got to the place where our cattle were impounded, my mother told us not to enter the house. The negotiations then started, and only adults were discussing these issues. So, she went in for about an hour for the meeting. We were waiting with great anticipation of a positive outcome. We were so relieved when we finally saw my mother coming out. When she appeared, she looked relaxed, and the old lady had a little smile on her face. We were only told that we could open the kraal and take the cattle home. On the way back home, my mother never said a word of their agreement or how she compensated the grandmother. When we got home, it was already dark, and we were called into the house and thought we were to be reprimanded. When my father entered, he just closed the door, and he never said a word. He beat us until we could not cry anymore. He said it must be the last incident where he had to pay for our carelessness. He said my mother had paid the lady a lump sum of money.

Fashion items

During my childhood, fashionable clothing items were popular and loved by young people of that time. The children of the élite were the ones who set the trends for the rest of us because they first owned most of those items as their parents could afford to buy them. The élite children were considered lucky by the rest of us because they were exposed to different media at home, such as magazines, newspapers, and televisions that informed them of the latest fashion styles. The fashion styles were mostly copied from famous musicians, radio presenters, and movie stars. At my home, we were not financially stable, and that made me ill-informed about fashion.

I daydreamed of wearing popular fashionable clothes, even though I could not. I only saw these worn by other children at school during school excursions or school concerts where we were allowed to wear clothes of our choice rather than the school uniform.

At my home, we only had two chances in the whole year to get or to buy new clothes. The first was during the festive season when we were buying new outfits to wear on Christmas Day. The second time was in January when we approached school reopening days. It was optional to get stylish clothes. My parents made it a privilege for those of us who had passed at the end of the school academic year. In actual fact, it was set as an incentive for good academic performance at school. We all had healthy competition amongst ourselves at home to do well at school. I would strive to attain impressive results by the end of the year, as I knew it came with a prize. However, getting new clothes did not happen every year. Sometimes our parents would say they did not have enough money, despite us having performed well. We would be very disappointed if that was the case in that particular year. However, my parents thought that the school uniform was compulsory, and it was necessary to be purchased every year despite their financial constraints.

During my primary schooling years, I recall that the popular culture clothes were the fashion items that were worn by the then-popular musicians such as Michael Jackson and Boys-to-Men from America and Brenda Fassie, the South African songbird. Boys-to-Men was an American vocal group that sung R&B music. Their music was very soulful. Locally, Brenda Fassie was a charismatic singer of afro-pop music. She made all South Africans dance to her music. Her fans affectionately knew her as MaBr. She was a trendsetter for girls with fashion styles.

Nonetheless, as school children growing up at that time, we loved Michael Jackson very much. He was a worldwide icon of pop music. I was very excited when I listened to his music or songs on the radio. We sometimes mumbled words from his songs at school because we could not understand the language he used for singing. We enjoyed practising and acting his move styles when dancing. However, this was difficult for most of us. Michael Jackson had a scintillating flair for dancing on stage, which made him distinct from other musicians. Many young people looked up to him as their role model. I also liked Michael Jackson's dance moves!

Michael Jackson's style of clothing was very unique when performing on and off stage. He liked wearing suits that had tight pants that looked under-sized for him, together with shining

shoes. His pants also revealed his socks. He wore a white glove on the one hand. Sometimes he would put on his hat and make funny moves with it when dancing. The item that was most popular at that particular time was to wear tight under-sized pants. Many young people were buying their trousers and then making alterations to make them look like Michael Jackson's pants. As growing young boys, we dreamt of owning pants like his (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: "Slim fit pants" - from Michael Jackson, a fashion trend setter

I remember a day towards the year-end when I went to town with my parents to buy Christmas clothes. I had made my parents proud because I had passed my Standard Three (Grade 5) very well, which meant I was progressing to the next class, Standard Four (Grade 6). I was over the moon with excitement when my parents confirmed that they had enough money to spoil us with new Christmas clothes. In my mind, it was obvious what I wanted from that small shopping spree.

One of the most essential items on my priority list was tight pants that were a replica of Michael Jackson's. I woke up very early to get ready, as I could not sleep the previous night. It was on a Saturday morning, and the sun was shining brightly as it was a summer day. I was very excited to go to town. I finished long before my family had gotten ready for the road. I told my mother that we should catch a taxi because it was faster than the bus. I intended to get to town very

early to have more time to get into as many shops as possible to find my ideal crucial item. The distance from home to Durban was about 40 kilometres, which took less than an hour by taxi.

We got to Durban before the heat got intense, as it was a hot summer day. It was a hectic day as many people were moving on the streets. In front of the shops, salespeople were shouting and calling customers to come in to buy. Clothes were hanging outside on the store's verandas. We started getting into the shops. The first few shops were not selling what I was looking for. Then we crossed the road to where many shops sold stylish clothing, including the popular clothes among youth. However, the clothes that I found were very exquisite and very expensive. That meant they exceeded my parents' budget. We had to move from shop to shop comparing prices.

My mother was then getting annoyed and tired of moving around the shops. I realised that I had to choose before she changed her mind. I decided and bought pants that were exactly my size. But they were not precisely the same design as those of Michael Jackson. I was thrilled in the end with my choice, but I knew I would have to reshape the pants with some alterations.

When we got home, I did not waste time. I took my black cotton striped pants to a professional and popular tailor in my community. I instructed her to cut the pants shorter and to reduce the cut to be tight. I left my pants with that old lady with great anticipation. I had to find money to pay for the alterations. I then asked the mother to pay for it even though she was not pleased with such changes as she did not see any reason for them. The lady assured me that she would not disappoint me as she was familiar with the popular fashion items.

I planned to wear my pants on Christmas Day when everyone would show off with their new clothes. Hence, I had to collect the pants the day before Christmas. I did not try on my pants when I collected them as I was in a hurry to get home because we were busy cleaning the yard for the big day. I just paid for them and then went straight home, hoping they were the right size.

On Christmas Eve, I was ready to try on my new pants, and everybody at home was ready to see them. I had even boasted to everyone that I was the only one at home who had a good eye for fashion. I had told them to invite me when going for a shopping spree. However, when I tried to wear the pants, I could not get them up past my thighs. The pants were too small and

too short in such a way that they looked like shorts or three-quarter pants. I tried to force them up, but some stitches were loosened and opened up. I was not comfortable in those pants. I dreaded the mockery I was about to experience.

When I went to show them off, I was very disappointed. My family members could not control their laughter, some were pointing at the problem with my pants, and others were making ridiculous comments. My mom was shouting at me, saying that she had wasted her time and money. I could not even look at my family as I also felt tears rolling down my cheeks. At the same time, I was furious at what I was going through and at the tailor who had utterly destroyed my new fashion item. On Christmas Day, I wore my old, clumsy clothes that many children had seen before. I was very embarrassed and freaked out entirely when others asked me about my new clothes that I had been bragging about.

Recalling this experience has taught me that popular fashion items can have an extraordinary significance in children's personal lives. This means that asking them to write about the importance of popular fashion clothing could elicit writing based on hidden stories. The story of my popular culture fashion item has made me aware of the emotions that I once had and that I associated with it. Similarly, how my learners got their fashion items could be very emotional and explain what made them unique. Some of these fashion items, learners might get as presents from certain significant people. There are also special days that learners could associate with their outfits. They could also write about and describe their groups of friends that they belonged to when they got a fashion item and how it made them feel to be part of those groups. The learners could write many stories about their fashion items because they are close to their hearts.

Retrospective reflections on memory-work writing

Memory-work can inform my future learning and practice as a teacher because it has provided the space to rethink and reconsider. Looking back, I can see how social and cultural influences shaped me as a child to be receptive and cooperative with others because the gist of my childhood social interaction was on sharing and working as a team. It also shaped me not to be mindful of my social status or background. Looking back, I can see that this resulted in me being happy instead of miserable. It influenced me to be content and to appreciate the little that we had.

Furthermore, childhood influences have shaped me as a teacher to value social and cultural diversity in my classroom. This has helped me learn to accept and have good relations with all my learners, regardless of their social status. I understand that learners are coming from different home backgrounds, resulting in various social and cultural experiences.

My most useful discovery about myself through memory writing was that creativity was dominant in many of my childhood experiences outside of school. Creativity played a crucial role in most of my popular culture activities, and it brought fun elements. As a teacher, my most valuable realisation was that my past teachers never explored ways to build on the creativity developed outside of school. I have learnt that I should use learners' personal experiences of creativity in class. My teaching also has to tap into their contextual experiences to make sense to learners.

Recalling my past experiences has shown me how children's popular culture keeps evolving with time and is always relevant to a particular generation. Popular culture keeps on changing and because of new development, such as modern technology. In some ways, my childhood popular culture was very different from today's learners' popular culture. I understood from early stages the community's expectations of me as a boy growing up, and that was why most of my activities I engaged in were gender-oriented. As a child, I strived to attain a social status that gave me a sense of belonging, which was natural among young people. My childhood experiences bear the testimony of the popular culture that was dominant throughout my upbringing. During those years, everything I did and took part in gave me identity and status. For today's children, different activities might do the same for them.

Furthermore, I have become more aware of how popular culture preoccupies children's minds and influences how they behave at school and outside school. So, popular culture plays a crucial role and needs to be considered in their development, and it should inform the way we teach. I think the curriculum should be aligned with what matters in learners' lives and what interests them. Regarding the teaching and learning of creative writing, topics should of interest to children so that they have a lot of vocabulary to use when writing, and there is a free flow of ideas. Using a popular culture topic could improve learners' confidence and instil a love for writing creatively.

However, popular culture often involves objects that schools and other educational centres prohibit on their premises because they believe these have nothing to do with the prescribed curriculum. I am still struggling to understand how to bring children's popular culture objects into school settings because they are forbidden on the premises. Some such prohibitions are for good, of course, because they consider the safety precautions for learners.

Overall, I should keep in mind that learners already know a lot from their childhood experiences. I should learn to accept that my learners have various aptitudes and interests and try to cater to them. If my teaching feels relevant to learners, they could gain confidence and feel contentment and satisfaction.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have recalled my experiences of childhood popular culture. The narrated personal history episodes were fulfilling to me as a child because they entailed fun and excitement. The memory stories in this chapter highlight experiences that took place outside of the formal school environment. These reflections and recollections have helped me remember how I developed creativity outside of school and consider the effects of my informal education. Recalling and reflecting on my memory stories has helped me see the need to understand children's popular culture to make creative writing meaningful and exciting. Therefore, this calls for a change to do justice to my teaching by developing a flair for creative writing among my learners.

I embarked on this self-study research to improve my professional practice as a classroom-based teacher. A key objective was to learn from my childhood experiences to discover possibilities for teaching creative writing. Remembering and reliving some memory stories of my childhood experiences has provided deeper understandings and new ideas. Writing and reflecting on memory stories can help teachers see how they can advance the way they conduct their lessons. Memory-work is an excellent instrument for teacher-researchers who wish to rebuild themselves by refining their teaching techniques to be more fascinating and compelling to children. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019a) concur that teachers' memory-work stories that draw on the narrator's personal lived experiences are narrated for the purpose of professional learning. In my understanding, this means my memory-work is crucial for the future improvement of teaching and learning in my educational context.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five, I begin to respond to my second research question, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In searching for answers to this question, I build on the memory-work insights expressed in Chapters Three and Four to explore the promise of integrating children's popular culture into English creative writing lessons. I narrate what transpired during research lessons I conducted with my Grade 6 class. I reflect on my learning from each lesson about using popular culture to improve my creative writing teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S INTERESTS INTO CREATIVE WRITING LESSONS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, Chapters Three and Four, I recollected and reflected on my childhood experiences. This was in response to the study's first research question: *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I used artefacts and memory drawing to evoke and narrate my stories vividly. The memory stories in Chapter Three were all in some way related to my education. Chapter Four focused on encounters with popular culture that gave me pleasure and gratification as a child. Reflecting on my childhood memory stories provided insights and ideas about children's popular culture as a resource for creative writing teaching.

A valuable discovery about myself as a learner was that my childhood social and cultural experiences at home and in the community developed my writing and listening skills in ways that helped me at school. This made me more conscious that, as a teacher, I should recognise and build on the sociocultural learning experiences that children bring to school.

I also saw how childhood popular culture activities brought me joy and gratification and gave me a sense of identity and belonging. I became more aware of how popular culture preoccupies children's minds and affects how they conduct themselves at school and outside school. So, as a teacher, I need to consider how popular culture plays a crucial role in children's development and lives. Recollecting my past experiences also showed me how children's popular culture keeps evolving with time, so I need to learn from today's children about their popular culture interests and activities.

I became more mindful of the gaps between what we were required to write about in creative writing activities at school and the knowledge of popular culture in my childhood. I saw how I might close those gaps by relating creative writing tasks to children's authentic popular culture experiences. My memory stories also showed me how children can be motivated to learn to write when they are fascinated by what they are writing about.

Through memory writing, I discovered that creativity was present in many of my exciting childhood experiences outside of school. Indeed, creativity played a vital role in most of my popular culture activities. I realised that my former teachers missed opportunities to build on the creativity we developed outside of school. I became conscious that I should tap into learners' personal experiences of inventiveness and imagination in my teaching.

In this chapter (Chapter Five), and the following chapter (Chapter Six), I address my second research question: *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In these two chapters, I demonstrate how I built on the memory-work insights expressed in Chapters Three and Four to explore the promise of integrating children's popular culture into English creative writing lessons. I describe and explore written communication activities that were carried out in my classroom as part of the research project. The activities done by learners were all based on their popular culture knowledge. All lessons were designed differently to cater to different interests and aspects of children's popular culture. They included various creative activities that I anticipated would be exciting and satisfying for the Grade 6 learners. Luthuli et al. (2020) caution that children are unlike adults, so to gain insight into their lives and opinions in self-study research, it is vital to use diverse approaches appropriate to their capabilities, understanding and interests. In narrating and reflecting on the lessons, I draw evidence from my developmental portfolio (Samaras, 2011), including my lesson plans, my research journal, audio recordings, photographs, and learners' work. To complement each lesson's story, I present a lesson reflection inspired by reflective self-study guidelines developed by Samaras and Freese (2006). In the lesson reflections, I consider my professional learning and highlight dilemmas and my most useful discoveries.

Exploring and integrating children's popular culture in curriculum activities

As explained in Chapter Two, I worked with Grade 6 English First Additional Language learners in this study as my research participants. All learners in that class were IsiZulu speakers from the same ethnic group, and most were from similar home backgrounds. The class consisted of 55 learners, with 30 girls and 25 boys from age 11 to 13. I chose to work with this class for my self-study research because it was the class I was teaching at the time. I taught English, Social Science and Technology to this class and made use of some periods from three subjects for my research lessons. All these subjects are conducted in the medium of English as the

language of learning and teaching. I had observed learners struggling with inspiration for English creative writing in all subjects. In the prescribed curriculum policy for English (Department of Basic Education, 2011), creative writing development is allocated two hours per two-week cycle. Social Science is a content subject that consists of two disciplines of Geography and History. In both fields, learners are expected to be developed to write creatively in the medium of English. Technology is a practical subject that equips learners with knowledge, skills and resources to solve everyday problems. Learners are encouraged to be innovative and creative in designing and making products to satisfy people's needs.

For data generation purposes, I audio recorded the lesson discussions and presentations in selected English, Social Science, and Technology periods. Although I encouraged learners to have discussions in English, every so often some of them tried but then resorted to speaking IsiZulu. This happened because they wanted to make their views clear to be understood by everyone in class. I had no qualms about switching to their home language as long as they never derailed from the lesson discussion.

Photographs were also taken of learners while they were working. To protect learners' identities, some pictures were taken from the back of the class, and some were captured in a position that did not reveal faces. In other photographs, learners' faces were blurred. The main aim of taking photographs was to show learners engaging in classroom activities.

Furthermore, all the classwork of the 55 learners was collected and read. For selecting learners' work to be presented in this thesis, I chose examples that illustrated a particular point I wanted to discuss and demonstrate. I only used examples of work from learners whose parents or guardians had given consent. Anonymity was maintained, and pseudonyms were used to protect the children's identities.

The generation of data through the lessons started in the second term of the school year. At the beginning of the second term, learners were also briefed, and we discussed how classes based on popular culture would be held. As indicated in Chapter Two, I explained what the research participation would involve and sought the learners' assent.

I placed the popular culture lesson activities on the annual Grade 6 teaching plan to avoid any confusion or work overload for learners. I designed the lesson activities intending to enhance

learners' flamboyance for creative writing by using popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning. The activities were mainly integrated and infused to match the prescribed knowledge and skills as per the English curriculum policy document (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Each activity was designed to fit in a two-week cycle of hours per the notional time for writing skill development. Some of these activities were to be used for mark allocation purposes. Additionally, I also did one lesson in Social Science and one in Technology (see Chapter Six). I thought these two lessons would directly relate to children's popular culture as they required learners to use content knowledge of their interests.

The lessons presented in this chapter are from the two subjects. The English lessons involved watching movies, English creative writing as a process, music and music performance. And, the lesson in Social Science involved diary entries.

Watching movies

I chose to include watching movies as part of the research lessons because I had recalled how exciting it was to watch films at school when I was a child (Chapter Four). I was also aware that my learners enjoyed watching television. My learners often recounted stories that they watched on television screens. I decided to start by asking learners to choose their favourite movie. Learners were given a chance in class to write down any three movies of their choice. They were instructed to write without asking any questions of anyone. It was a fascinating exercise because they were swift to complete the task. The three top movies on their list were: *3 Ninjas* (Turteltaub, 1992), *Kidnap* (Prieto, 2017) and *The Expendables* (Stallone, 2010). The aim was to find out if they were all familiar with movies and their interests because I did not want to impose a choice on them.

On the first day of the movie activity, learners were inquisitive about what time they were going to watch the movie. Most of them came to my office to remind me of my promise, and I confirmed to them that indeed it was going to happen that day. It was on a Thursday afternoon because English had the two last periods of the day.

I had to begin by preparing the classroom, and I asked the learners to help. The classroom to be used was full of double-seater wooden desks, with one big table and a chair in front used by the teacher (Figure 5.1). The learners assisted by moving desks from groups to make rows so that they could all face the front (Figure 5.2). The classroom was facing south, and so the back

windows needed to be adequately closed with newspaper and black plastic bags to make the classroom dark as the sun was approaching west in the afternoon.

Figure 5.1: Normal teaching and learning seating plan

The boys were very active, and some were also assisting by closing windows with newspapers to block the sun rays from obstructing their viewing. They knew that they had to make sure that the classroom was dark enough for the clear picture on the television screen. However, the newspapers and black plastic bags I had brought were not enough to cover all the windows. Learners had to improvise by using A4 papers on some windows.

Many learners were very excited when I brought the television to their classroom. The school owns some useful technological and electronic devices such as a video recorder, home theatre radio, overhead projector and television. Our school television is a big 74 centimetre, flat screen. It can work by pressing buttons manually or by the remote. Learners do not often see

this technology used in their classroom because it is not always available for safety reasons, as the school usually experiences burglaries every year. Some teachers are also not technologically enlightened, and they seem to be scared of changing from the traditional "chalk and talk" teaching methods. Hence, they do not often use available technology in their classrooms.

Some learners were screaming, and others whistled, which signaled to me a high level of excitement. This caused the classroom to be very chaotic, which also invited attention from other teachers. I immediately called the children to order because they were inviting attention from other classes, and they were disturbing teaching and learning in our next-door Grades 5 and 7. They then worked quietly to prepare the classroom for the activity. I was surprised by some of their comments. For example, one girl said, *Sir, you are the coolest teacher because you bring entertainment to the classroom. If learning was like this every day, I would not want to miss a day of school.*

Three boys helped me connect the input wires from the television to the home theatre DVD player. They volunteered to help me because I told them that I was not good at connecting electronic appliances or making them work. These boys proved to be very efficient when it came to setting up electronic equipment. They were very familiar with all the wires that were to be connected. However, when we did a sound check, the television was not audible enough to be heard throughout the classroom. One boy suggested that we should also connect all the speakers of the home theatre. This idea proved to be a good one because the volume was then very loud, and we had to control it to not be heard by our next-door classes. Finally, everything was ready for the movie to start. The learners all settled down, and they all focused and listened very quietly (Figure 5.2). They were all smiling and excited at the fun they were about to have.

Figure 5.2: The new seating arrangement in class

I inserted the DVD and started to play it. The targeted movie was number five from the list. When the first movie started, the learners said I should not skip the one displayed on the screen. They all insisted that they want to watch that one. The movie was an American film. It was entitled *The Kidnapper* (2017, Produced and directed by Luis Prieto). The learners watched the film from the start to the end without any disruptions or commotions, such as asking *Sir, may I be excused to go to the loo?* or *Excuse me, Sir, may I drink water?* I think they were so attentive because they were doing something they had an interest in and fascinated them. Moreover, doing something unusual in a different environment ignited concentration and enjoyment.

The movie was about some criminals who were kidnapping children from their parents and then later demanding large amounts of money for children to be reunited with their parents. So, in this movie, a boy was kidnapped by the criminals at a restaurant and his mother quickly became alert and a chase ensued. There was a lot of commotion as she was getting closer to find her little boy. She showed her bravery by fighting with whatever power she had, no matter what the circumstances were. The boy's mother later found her own child. She also discovered that many other children were separated from their parents in the same way as her boy. She assisted all the children by asking police to help rescue the children and to arrest the perpetrators of the devil's work on innocent souls.

While learners were watching the movie, there was great excitement. Some children were screaming and clapping hands when the mother successfully eradicated some of the impediments that were along her way to finding her child. She was also an excellent driver with control and accuracy when chasing other cars. It was gratifying watching a movie with the class. They all clapped at the end when the mother finally rescued all the kidnapped children. This showed me that they were impressed with her actions, and she was like their hero. I reflected on the experience in my research journal:

Journal entry

02 May 2018

Today, I'm feeling pleased to start with my first data generation activity with my Grade 6 learners after disruptions of curriculum delivery.

The learners were very excited to get such a thrilling chance to watch a movie in class. Even the quiet learners showed great interest in the activity. I also enjoyed sitting on the desk and watching with them. They seemed all relaxed as they laughing out loud during funny moments. This activity really caught their attention as they were all sitting still and glued on television. I just hope that I will get the desired learning outcomes from this activity.

The next day, it was time for paper and pen. I started by asking the learners some questions based on the movie they had watched the previous day. Examples of questions were: *Did you enjoy watching the movie? Who was the main character and explain why you choose that person? How were you feeling during and after the movie? Did the movie end the way you expected or not, and why do you say so? Can you retell the incidents of the story to someone that has not watched the movie?* Many learners were talking about what they could remember. Some examples of different answers I got from learners are presented next.

Aphiwe answered, *Yes, I enjoyed watching it because it was an action movie. The main character was the mother of the kidnapped boy*. Slindile raised her hand and gave the following answers: *Yes, the movie had a good ending because the main character's problem was solved when he saved his boy and other children from those kidnappers. The kidnapped boy's mother*

showed resilience when she fought against dangerous criminals to save his child from abduction.

Later, I asked them to choose certain scenes they enjoyed from the movie and write about them. One boy asked, *If I liked everything about the movie, should I write the whole story?* I answered: *It is good that you liked all scenes and you could remember everything, but no, you need not write the whole story. You have to choose one part of the story that you enjoyed watching or that made you have special feelings.* I then wrote the instruction on the chalkboard: *Choose one scene or event from the movie you watched and write two or three paragraphs about it. Explain what was happening and give more descriptions of things that were there and the people involved.* The learners all seemed keen to write and to have understood my instructions. I observed this through their facial expression: they looked happy, and they all got ready by taking out their writing paper and pens. They then started writing. Before they wrote, I asked them if they all had something to write about from the movie. They all agreed.

Learners took the whole period to write, and they were all busy. I was very anxious to see if what they were writing was relevant to the movie. At the end of the period, only a few of them handed in their writing. When I asked the rest if they needed extra time for completion, they agreed. So I had to give them another extra hour to complete their writing. This meant that one lesson I had planned for writing had to take two periods. Time for writing was of concern for me because it was a time-consuming activity. From the few scripts handed in, I realised that I would face a challenge reading their stories. This was because some had opted to write the whole story of the movie. To comment and give feedback was going to be difficult as it would have taken me a long time to hand them back to learners. That was why I did not follow the writing process with the movie lesson conducted. The learners were not asked to write second drafts to improve on their first attempt. I only read their scripts to see if they could recall events and write them down on paper. Below are some examples of their descriptive essays based on the film. The following examples bear testimony that learners do not run short of words when writing about topics they know and that are of interest to them.

There was a mom and called baby called

There was a mom and a little boy who called Frank they were living at America at New York.

Mom was to Park going to park with his son Frank When she arrived, his boy Frank were was very happy to see Park. Mom and Frank get lost each other. And there was a man and a evil woman, want to kidnap Frank, they got frank, and Frank's mom saw kidnappers kidnap frank. frank's mom want to catch them but she fail, Frank cry. Mom went to his car was want to catch them, kidnappers ran faster kidnappers stop at the grassland and she stoped. kidnappers wanted a reward and mom gave him money, bank card everything. kidnappers ran, mom was want to catch them and they ran very fast. kidnappers made an accident and they ran, mom was want to catch them, petrol was low in that time, when petrol going through endings and car stoped. car kidnappers now want to chase mom, mom ran. She get to his car and kidnapper point mom with a gun at that time mom push handbreak car go down with the man. Man died mom survive. and evil woman with frank. Evil woman get to her house to hide the baby frank. Mom's got frank and they were other children, babies 1 boy 3 girls in the hole, A hole was in the roof she got boy when she want to take girls it arrive a man and that was also evil he tried to trick mom and he failed mom kill him a spade in a face, evil woman get into the dam and mom kill evil woman at water.

Figure 5.3: A descriptive essay giving details of events from the movie

The Lost Children

At the park they were a lost child

At the park there was a stolen child. His name was franky, ~~his mother Leu~~ people were there was Louis, Brad, Brian & Sussie.

franky's mother saw the 2 men and a woman forcing her child in the car. She tried to run as fast as she could but the thiefs mannage to get in the car and runaway. She traced the car, she couldn't ~~catch~~ catch it. She get in her car. She followed the thie car. The thiefs car stopped and a man came out holding a sharp knife. Sussie get out of the car holding her wallet she throw it on the ground and she told him her band pass word. The man took it to car then a huge women came out holding Sussie's wallet. She wanted a Reward of ~~10 000 #~~ # 10 000. She told Sussie to open a door so sussie did open the door the huge Lady tried to kill sussie but she mannaged to survive. She followed the car that the thief was driving.

finnaly sussie find ~~out who~~ where other children they were kidnap These thiefs ~~ad doduct~~ children. We have found that these thiefs was Louis, Brad and Brian

Figure 5.4: A descriptive essay based on the movie

kidnap

In the city of Cape town there was a mother called Hannah and she had are [a] son called John.

Hannah worked in the coffe shop. When she goes to work she us to go with John hier son. One day Hannah's shift was over then she took John to the park and when they got to the park Hannah's Phone was ringing then Hannah left John [sitting on the] chair and she answered her cell Phone, and Every minte she looked behind. When she droped her cellphone when she turn back John was not, where she left him. Hannah was [got] turning crazy asking people "did they see a young boy wearing a red shirt with a blue pants". Every one did not see the boy and when she turned back she saw a man taking John to the car and Hannah ran and ran to hand [catch] that but she did not carch [catch] it and she went to her car to go find that car and she was in the back of that car it was a blue car. She tryed to find that car but she did not find it. She went to the Police station. She told the police every thing. She wanted to make a call and she asked the police if she could use the Police's cell Phone and the Police said "you can use that cell phone but you cannot yse my cellphone and hannah ran out. When he saw that car waiting for her. When she asked what they want they said they want R100 000 and she gave them her walliter [wallet] with all her credit cards.

She found her son with two little girls. They were in a house of those kidnapers.

03 May 2018

Today, I'm very happy with my learners because my lesson went well, as they could remember almost every part of the movie when I asked them. I'm hoping that they would be able to transcribe what they had told me on paper. I am pleased to know that they can recall so much information from something that was for entertainment, but they were experiencing difficulties in recalling knowledge from their school work. Looking forward to reading their writings.

A few days later, I wrote a more in-depth reflection on my learning:

Lesson reflection

10 May 2018

This has taught me how essential it is to embed popular culture elements in my teaching because it brings joy into their learning. I think learners would describe the activity as entertaining because they enjoyed watching the movie. Maybe a few were frustrated because they did not understand the language. I also think that learners' emotions need to be positive for effective learning to take place in class. Using movies as a means of integrating popular culture into learning could produce good results. This lesson was different from other lessons before I began my self-study research because I now see that they were boring and did not bring fun to learners. I wish to continue to use modern technological resources as my teaching aids because it fascinates learners. I also want to try to teach them in a different setting more frequently instead of doing what they are used to. This has also shown me that learners do have a good memory of things that matter to them and are significant in their age groups.

Diary entry lesson

The next lesson was in the Social Science subject in the discipline of History. In Social Science, I had started by teaching Geography content knowledge in the first five weeks of the term, then the next five weeks were on History.

I chose this History lesson as part of my data generation activities because it linked well with an English lesson I had taught on diary writing. I had taught the diary lesson during the first term before I began my research lessons. In the lesson in the first term, learners explained that a diary is a book that helps someone get organised and with time management for the day or the year. Others said it was a book where someone writes his or her secrets. They emphasised that a diary was something personal to them. Moreover, I added that dairy could be used as a silent friend that listens to your sad or happy stories. I told them that in a diary, they could write what we call diary entries, where they write about their highlights of the day. When writing a diary entry, I told them that they should start with the date and write the greeting "Dear Diary", similar to writing to a friend. Furthermore, I explained that they could write either about good or bad experiences each day when they feel like writing.

I anticipated that a diary writing activity would suit my study well because it could involve writing about children's interests. By integrating diary writing into a History lesson, I aimed to show learners that English content knowledge goes across the curriculum and creative writing can be used in many subjects.

This lesson was planned to be taught and completed in two periods of the week. The first session was about teaching, learning and some discussion with learners. The second period was set aside for learners to write using the knowledge from the previous lesson. In the first period, the content knowledge was about the Dutch East India Company (VOC). I introduced my lesson by teaching them that citizens from a country called Holland or Netherlands are called the Dutch. I then asked them to find and locate Holland in the atlas. Each group was given a few minutes to find the place in the atlas. I asked them to name its continent and provide the coordinates as they had learnt map skills in the first term. All groups were swift to raise their hands to give their answers. For example, Slindile answered, *It is found in the Europe*. Aphiwe said, *Netherlands coordinates are 52.13 N 05.29 E.* I then gave them a brief explanation of the country, such as its economic status.

The lesson presentation's essence was explaining what journeys the VOC ships went on, as they wanted to control over the sea route to the East so that they could make a profit. The lesson's aim was also for learners to know about the life of a sailor on a VOC ship and to understand the hardships that sailors encountered on their journeys. This was the case for many ordinary people in Holland because they were destitute, and the only job available was on VOC ships. I named a few adversities they encountered. For example, they were separated from their families for a long time, and they slept on open decks, and got the flu through being wet in the wind and rain. The learners learnt that it was not easy to find safe drinking water as there were worms and insects in their water, and they had to drink water with their teeth closed so that they would not swallow the dead insects and worms.

I also explained that sailors often got sick and died from a disease called scurvy. It was a severe disease that made their gums bleed and was caused by not having enough Vitamin C in their diet. It also caused their teeth to become loose. The learners were terrified to see a picture of the person that suffered from that disease. While I was teaching and explaining adversities that sailors encountered, learners were touched by an extract we read from a sailor's diary entry. The entry gave a brief, shocking account of experiences of travelling in the VOC ships. The diary entry read:

We were three months and 20 days without any kind of fresh food. We ate biscuits that had turned to powder, swarming with worms. The biscuit powder stank strongly of the urine of rats. (Adapted from a diary in the Dutch East India Company Archives) (Platinum Social Science learners' book, Grade 6)

Some learners showed their disbelief about what they were reading. They started asking questions. Some empathised with sailors. For example, Zama said aloud, *Shame, I feel pity for them!* Sipho asked, *How could a human being survive after eating inedible food?* Aphiwe interjected and said *I would not have taken even one rotten biscuit into my mouth.* Slindile shared her comment, *My mother said we should not eat food that has been preserved in the fridge for about a week. For them to eat such rubbish meant their lives were in danger.* After reading this extract, learners started to understand the miserable life that sailors experienced in these journeys.

After teaching and learning, the learners were expected to engage in the writing activity. The work that they had to do was to compose a diary entry for a sailor on a VOC ship. The actual instructions were: *Imagine you are a sailor on a VOC ship, write a diary entry of two paragraphs explaining the difficulties you experienced on a particular day. Explain how you felt, what you missed back home.* These instructions came from the learners' book, and I modified the last sentence to allow learners to include their interests and experiences.

After giving them instructions, I told them that they were allowed to mention things of their popular culture that they were missing when writing their entries. I chose to say this so that they could write about things that of interest to them and that they are familiar with as youth of today. I did not want them to write about things that were not relevant and outdated.

I then gave them a chance to ask questions of clarity before they started writing. One boy asked me, *Sir, can I mention my favourite home-cooked dish that I missed back home?* Zama commented, *I would have missed using my cell phone, and my parents.* Sifiso also said, *I would have missed toys and my play-station.* I made it clear to them that they could write about anything that happened in the journey and things they missed that mattered the most to them while they were away. They all seemed relieved that I gave them the freedom to write about anything of their time and what they know best. I told them that they had to think and plan their diary entries at home because the bell rang signalling that the first part of the lesson was over.

During the next period, that was the following day, I explained that I expected them to start writing their diary entries. They seemed all busy writing as it was quiet in the class. The following are examples of work done by the learners.

04 September 2018

Creative writing

Dear diary

Today was a very bad day. My day today was bad because it is my birthday. And I couldn't do it in an nice place such as home. I didn't enjoy my bithday because my family was not here so I miss them so, so, so much. I did not eat some nice cake because we are stuck here with my friends and neibourghers that I met in this coontry. I wish we could find a way back home.

When I come home I wish I could see my Parents. I wish that day when i find my way to home to my Parents. When I arrive i will tell my mother buy cacke for my bithday and tell my father to buy me soccer boots for me to play soccer. Soccer is my favourite sport that I miss while im here in this ship.

Figure 5.6: Birthdays, family, food, clothing and soccer are children's interests
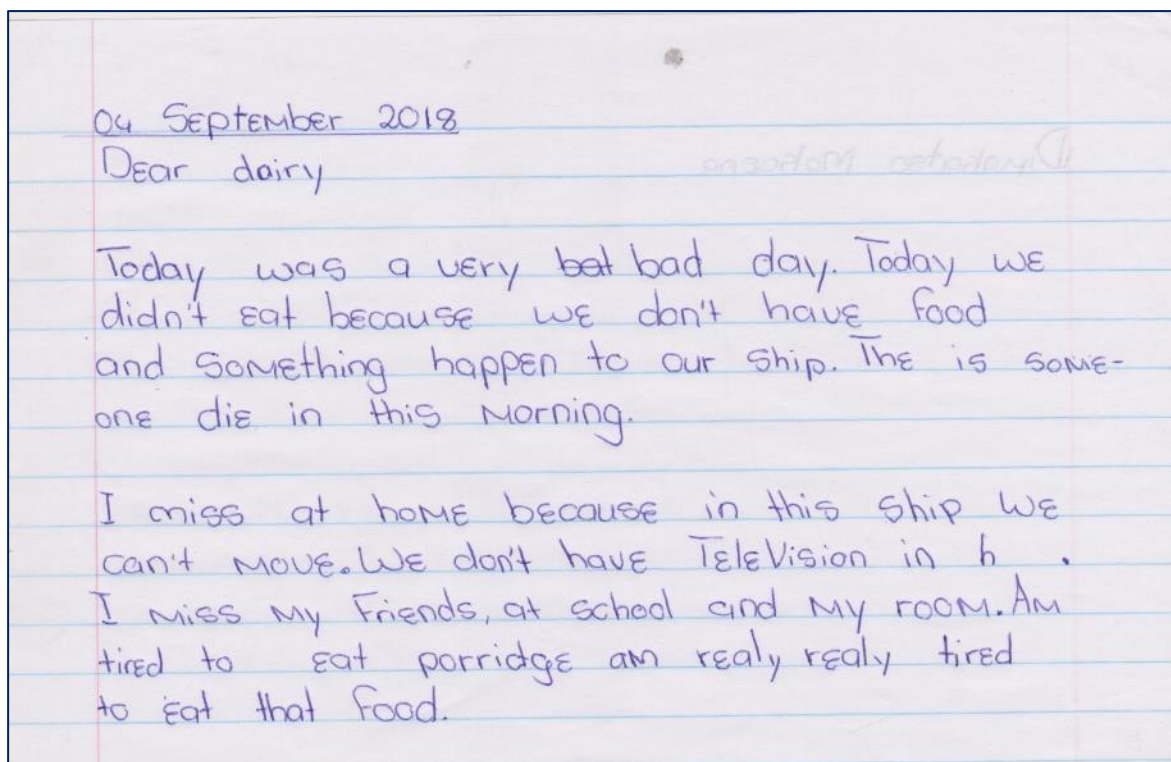
Figure 5.7: An entry showing television and friends as children's interests
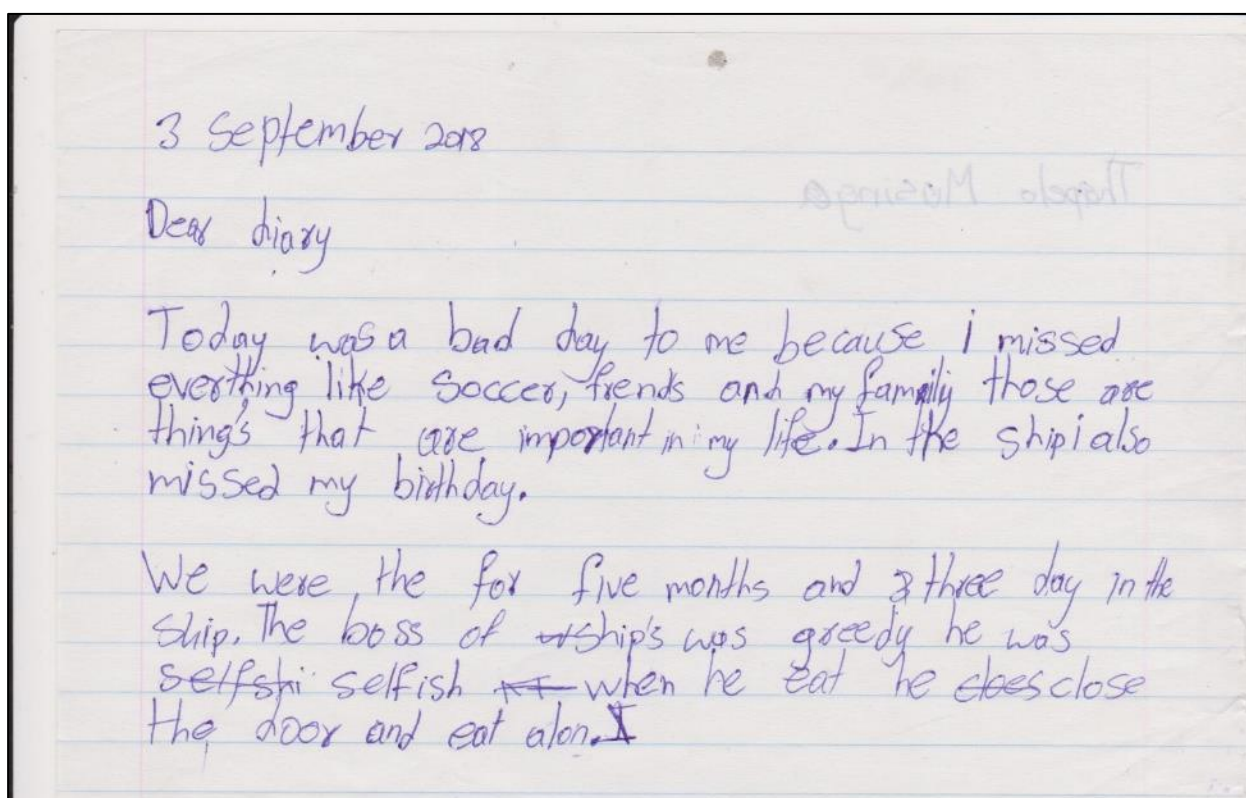
Figure 5.8: A diary entry mentioning children's popular culture

Journal entry

04 September 2018

The diary writing lesson seems to have gone well because learners were asking relevant questions. They also gave good examples of their favourite objects, which means they understood what I expected to write. I just hope they would still remember the format for diary writing. I'm looking forward to reading about things that they could have missed back home.

Lesson reflection

05 September 2018

The most useful discovery that I made in that lesson was that learners can apply the content knowledge learnt from a specific subject across the curriculum. This means that the content knowledge that learners learnt in English was integrated into a Social Science lesson activity. I think the learners would describe the content of the lesson (the conditions on the ships) as very shocking, and they might have found it challenging to make connections with some occurrences they heard about. However, as far as creative writing is concerned, learners would describe it as a relevant lesson. This activity was different from other previous History tasks because they could write about things they knew. I wish to continue to entrench popular culture in my teachings so that learners can write with confidence and knowledge. The new insight I have gained is that I can bring popular culture into all subjects that I teach. Learners were interested because they talked and wrote about things relevant to their lives at the present moment. I think they were honest in their writing because they wrote about their favourite things that they would not want to lose or miss in their lives.

English creative writing as a process

The next lesson was in English creative writing. Leaners were expected to write two or three descriptive paragraphs about a special object, person or animal. This was associated with language structures where they had learnt how to use adjectives. The lesson was planned to take two hours in two English periods.

The day before the actual lesson, I asked my learners to bring special objects to school. I told them that they could bring items of their popular culture. I also explained that it could be anything that each individual cherished. I told them that they should not bring dangerous objects that could put classmates at risk. Learners started asking questions to ensure that they would bring relevant objects for the task. One girl asked, *Sir, teachers don't allow us to bring cellular phones to school because it is against the learners' code of conduct. What will happen to me if I get caught? Will it not be confiscated?* I responded to her, *If your special object is a cell phone, please bring it to me first thing in the morning so that I will keep it in a safe place.* Another boy asked me, *Sir, I have a big toy car controlled by a remote, can I bring it?* I replied, *Yes, you can bring it.* Another girl asked, *I have a teddy bear, can I bring it?* I answered her, *Yes, bring it.* I concluded by emphasising that it should be something that they were comfortable to show and to share its story with the other classmates. I also reassured them that their objects would be safe with me in my office.

The first of the two English periods was planned for the object discussions. In the morning, some learners came privately to ask me to keep their objects safe. I then brought them to the classroom and gave them back during my period for English. The following photograph (Figure 5.9) displays some of the artefacts that learners brought into the classroom.
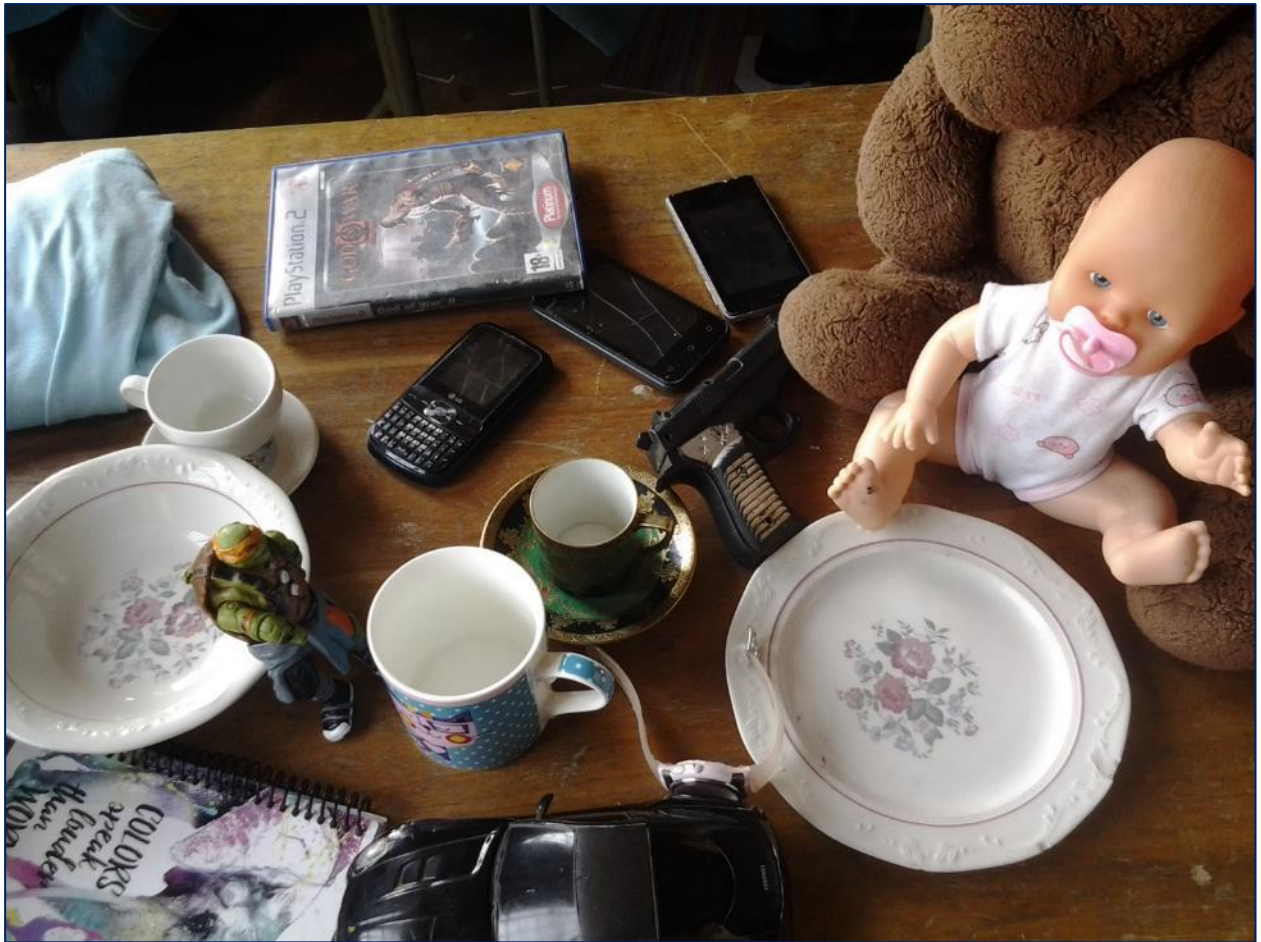
Figure 5.9: A variety of artefacts brought to class by learners

I had prepared some probing questions so that learners could describe their popular culture objects:

What is your object? Describe it in detail, e.g., name, colour, size, etc.

How does it work? What is it used for?

How old is it? When did you get it?

Who gave it to you?

Why is it so special to you?

Who does it remind you of?

How do you feel about your special object?

To break the ice in the lesson's introduction, I started by showing the learners a popular culture object from my childhood. I had brought in a music cassette to show them (Figure 5.10). I described the object orally by responding to the questions I had prepared. As I answered the questions, I wrote my responses, making two paragraphs on the chalkboard.

I began by explaining the object's physical structure. I explained that the object was called a cassette, and it was popular before the year 2000. It was a hard plastic object with two small holes. It was white in colour. The name was written in bold black capital letters. There was the name of the musician and the album title. The music was by *Omama Benqaba Yama Khatholika* (the ladies of the Roman Catholic Church), a gospel group that dominated in the 1990s. The album is entitled *Nans' Inqola* (meaning, *Here is the cart*). It was very light in weight. It contained a couple songs from one artist. Music cassettes were sold at music shops that are selling CDs now. They were phased out by the introduction of CDs in the late 1990s.

Figure 5.10: The gospel music cassette by *Omama benqaba yamaKhatholika*

I told the learners that the object was used mostly by young people if they wanted to listen to a particular artist's music. To listen to music, required a radio cassette. The radio had to have a section that had some buttons to be pressed down to insert a cassette, for the tape to unroll from one side to the other and for music to be audible.

My cassette was over 20 years old. I got my music cassette from my cousin, and it was not a gift; I had borrowed it to listen to. I had forgotten to take it back, and that is how I owned it. The cassette was very special to me because the content of its music was spiritual and was healing in some way, as the genre was gospel music. My special object reminded me of the

original owner, who had passed away. Every time I play it, it brings back memories of him singing some of its greatest hits.

Later, I gave the learners a chance to talk about their artefacts. The learners were reluctant to start talking. No one wanted to share his or her object with the class. I was concerned and wondered if they were shy to share their artefact stories or experiences with the whole class. Perhaps their artefacts reminded them of past bad experiences that they never wanted to re-live? Maybe they had had bad experiences with their artefacts? I explained to them that they should grab the chance to speak because they were all expected to write about their objects. Furthermore, I explained that sharing with the class would help them elicit the critical information to be included in their writing. However, this did not get them talking.

I then changed my approach and called them all to bring their objects to my table. That was when I noticed that not all of them had brought in their objects. In fact, only half of the class had brought objects.

To get them talking, I then decided to choose one object. I asked for the owner, and then I started asking probing questions about it. The owner of the object was Aphiwe. He gave a detailed description of his object. He said it was a shiny black toy car, and it felt very smooth to touch. His toy car looked real, just like a sedan; however, it was very tiny compared to a real car. He explained that he owned the toy car, and he played with it with other boys when they met after school and on weekends. He said most of his friends had such toys. The toy was given to him by his mother when he celebrated his seventh birthday. It was special to him because it reminded him of the fun he had at his first birthday celebration when he was seven years old. Owning a toy car made him feel part of the group of friends as they all had toy cars.

Another girl called Sphilile decided to stand up to talk about her cup. She described it as a ceramic cup. It was white in colour. It was a fragile cup that had to be handled with care. It had a picture of a smiling kitten on the outside. She received it from her friend as a present on a Christmas Day. She said she received it in a very colourful carrier bag. It was special to her as she had looked after it for the past four years. When she sees it, she feels thirsty for anything that it might contain. The cup reminds her of her friend that presented it to her.

Another popular culture object owner was a girl called Cindy. Her object was a teddy bear. She said she had owned it since she was five years old. Her teddy bear was brown in colour and very cute. It felt very soft and fluffy to touch. She said she feels comfortable when sleeping with it, especially on cold days. She even mentioned that her teddy is like a special friend that she enjoyed talking to because it listens to her without interruptions.

After discussions of these three objects, other learners showed interest in sharing their popular culture objects with the class. Even those who had not brought in their real objects to class wanted to share their object stories with us. I explained that if they wished to do so, they would have to give more physical descriptions so that we could visualise and have a clear image of the object in mind. Aphiwe raised his hand to tell us about his object. He described his fashion as a stylish black jacket. His father bought him his jacket when he passed Grade 5. His jacket was special to him as he wears it on special occasions, such as attending parties or going to town on weekends. His jacket made him feel very warm in winter on the inside. On the outside, it is made of soft cotton. He said this object reminds him of his father, who loves him a lot.

The first period showed me that children enjoy talking about their special objects of popular culture. During the second period, I gave them instructions to write about their objects. The instruction was: *Write two descriptive paragraphs about your special object or any object that is very important to you. It could be anything from your childhood or the present. You should have it in front of you when writing.* I told them to have their objects on top of their desks, if possible. They then started to write their first drafts. The following are examples of work produced by learners:

30 August 2018
My Favourite Tedy bear.

My special toy is my Tedy bear. My Tedy bear
is woring ^while cap. and The colour of my body, teddy bear is brown
and it has red drawing of a Heart on the center
of it. The name that I gave it is Buby. My
Tedy bear is small. It helps me to play when
it is cold because mom tells me don't play outside.

This tedy bear reminds me of my uncle
that was died in 2017. I got it from to my dad
When it is my on my birthday i was born on 2 september
2006. And I feel comfortable in pain when I see it
because it reminds me of my uncle, because when
i saw it i see my uncle because he was
like to woring cap. It is important and
special to me but when i got it my mom
was on in the pain. My Tedy bear was made in
Compart and it is feel soft. My teddy bear is very

Figure 5.11: A descriptive essay about the favourite object.

> 17 September 2018
> My Favourite Teddy bear
>
> My special toy is my teddy bear. My teddy bear is wearing white cap. The Colour of teddy bear is brown and it has red drawing of heart on the Center. The name I gave it is Buby. My Teddy bear is small in size. It helps me to play when it is cold because mom tells me not play out side.
>
> My teddy bear reminds me of my uncle that died in 2017. I got it from my dad on my birthday on 2 September 2006. I feel pain when I see it because it reminds me of my uncle. It is important and special to me but when i got it my mom was in pain. My teddy bear is very soft and compert. It warms me during winter days.

Figure 5.12: The learner's essay second draft

These writing pieces were produced by the learners in the class through the writing process that I employed in teaching creative writing. The learners followed the writing process stages with my guidance. The above work shows the significance of feedback (see first draft – Figure 5.11) in the final draft development (see second daft – Figure 5.12). A challenge I encountered was when I had to give written feedback to the learners. The large number of learners in class made it difficult to provide written feedback to all learners in time. It took a lot of time to read, reread and comment on each piece of learners' work. Nevertheless, I was mindful that feedback is crucial for learners because it helps them develop written piece.

In my journal, I recorded my mixed feelings about the lesson:

Journal entry

30 August 2018

Today I'm frustrated because things never went the way I anticipated. Almost half of my class did not bring their objects for discussions. I did not get their maximum participation during discussions because half of the class had left their objects at home.

Anyway, some learners managed to bring their artefacts, which encouraged me to continue with my lesson. The lesson went well even though the pace was slow at the beginning, as they needed guidance and assistance. They seemed to have understood the gist of the lesson, which was to write about their favourite objects. I think that learners that had brought in their objects had found it easier to describe their objects in writing. I wonder what I will read from those that did not have anything in front of them!

Lesson reflection

31 August 2018

My challenge with this lesson was to get all my learners participating by bringing their popular culture objects to classroom on the day of discussion and writing. I was concerned that they would have found it difficult to visualise and describe objects without them in front of them. Next time, I will collect their artefacts a few days early to avoid glitches in my lessons.

A useful discovery from this lesson was that it becomes easier for learners to discuss concrete objects in front of them. I think learners would have described this lesson as a very practical activity to evoke stories and meanings for those objects, resulting in good writing ideas. Before I began my self-study research, my previous lessons were too abstract because learners had to write about things that were out of their reach and had never seen or been in contact with.

Another insight I have gained is that it was helpful to have probing questions to evoke writing about the object. The questions give the writers some sense of confidence to begin writing.

For an extension of the lesson to follow on from the writing about children's favourite objects, I decided to give them another writing activity to do at home. The aim was to allow learners to have enough time to complete their writing at their own pace. The learners were supposed to submit their first drafts after a whole week, giving me a chance to provide written feedback and give them one on one writing instructions to individual learners. I expected this activity to be completed in four weeks with the second final draft. The learners were at liberty of choosing a topic of their choice, which had to be about their keen interests. The actual instruction was: *Choose a topic of your choice about a sports code or a sports star that you like very much and describe him or it. Write a descriptive essay of about two to three paragraphs. You can paste a picture of your interest to help you with description.*

The learners submitted their second drafts after a month. Both the first and second drafts of learners' work for the writing process were collected. Because they had a long time to complete their work, only a few learners did not submit. The following are examples of the work that was done by the learners.

My Favorite sport is Soccer [favourite written above]

Soccer is my favorate sport is because it easy to play. it [favourite, soccer, it inserted] But they are many rules as same as other sports. Some times, you can comit a foul without even tauching another player. [There, commit, touching corrections]

Fifa rules, Which are known as the laws of a Game, Say that a foul is the act of kicking, triping, Jumping or at Charing, Striking or pushing an opponent. If a player comit a fail, the referee will punish him and his team by handing over the ball to the other team. They then get a direct or indirect Free Cick. [makes for the game, tripping, for refereeing the, Commits foul, kick corrections]

Very good.

You get a red card When you hit or do someting to an opposing player, and intentionally hitting or stepping on Fallen opponent. However, a player is allso shown a red card if he has had two yellow cards. [something terrible bad, For example corrections]

Figure 5.13: The first draft of the essay about favourite sport

My Favourite Sport is Soccer

Soccer is my favourite sport is Soccer because easy to play. There are many rules as same as other sports. Sometimes you can commit foul without even touching another player.

Fifa makes rules for the game wich are known as the laws for refeeing the game. Foul is the act of kicking, tripping, jumping in or it at Chaning Striking or pushing an opponent. If a player commits a foul the referee will punish him and his team by handing over the ball to the other team. They then get a direct or indirect free kick.

You get a red card when you hit or something terrible bad to an opposing player for example intentionally hitting o stepping on fallen opponent. However, a player is also shown a red card if he has had two yellow cards.

Figure 5.14: The learner's edited second draft of the essay about sports

My Favourite Sport Star

Nerymar Jr

Neijmar Junior

this is my ~~favourite~~ soccer player. He is a very famous striker. His name is Nerymar Jr. this is one of the youngest soccer sta

I think he is 28 years old.

He is a skilled and loved player. He play's for P S G and he is very rich, he is the team their captain. Nerymar is from Brazil. I like this player because he play's soccer and he play's well. ~~this favourite teammate is Kioter Mbappe~~ He likes to score goals in every a match. He is very rich. (what he owns??)

That why he is my role model and favourite sport star. Nerymar Jr a very talented soccer player.

Figure 5.15: A first draft with teacher's comments

My favourite sportstar

Neymar Junior

Neymar Junior is my favourite soccer player. He is a very famous striker. He is one of the youngest soccer stars. I think he is 28 years old.

He is a skilled and loved player. He play's for PSG and he is the team's captain. Neymar is from Brazil. I like this player because he play's soccer and he play's well. He like's to score goals in every match. He is very rich. He owns a mansion house and a big chevrolet car

He is my role model and favourite sport star. Neymar Jr a very talented soccer player.

Figure 5.16: The learner's final draft of the essay about sports

My favourite soccer star

My favourite soccer star is khama Billiat. This player plays for kaizer Chiefs. I like this player because he is a good at soccer. Khama Billiat is the best player for Kaizer chiefs. When kaizer chiefs had a Match to plays, Khama Billiat would be there at all the times. This player had a good expereance to play soccer. His jersey number is 11 (eleven). khama Billiat, People like him so much. They come in big numbers to see him playing soccer. Khama Billiat is a good player and He is known as a famous soccer star. Khama Billiat lives in Zimbabwe Khama Billiat his family is rich because he work hard to archive his goal and He knows what he wants in life This sport changed his life style completely.

Figure 5.17: A first draft of the essay with teacher's comments

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Figure 5.18: A second draft of the essay about sports

Music lesson

I chose to focus this research lesson on music because music featured so powerfully in my childhood memory stories (Chapters Three and Four). I felt that music plays an equally crucial role for today's youth. Just like when I was a child, many of today's children's dress codes or fashion styles are influenced by their taste in music and their favourite artists. My memory-work showed me that music is popular with children because it gives them a sense of identity and belonging. Nowadays, music is easily accessible anywhere and at any time with mobile technology devices.

I had planned the lesson to be completed in two English periods. I introduced my lesson by bringing my cellular phone into the classroom. To amplify the sound, I connected my cellular phone to a speaker. I asked the learners to listen very attentively to the sound from the device. The music was loud enough to be heard by all learners. The song that I played was by a South African female jazz artist called Lira.

When the song started playing, all the learners had smiles on their faces. That showed that they were relaxed and were enjoying listening to music in an unusual setting. The classroom usually is perceived as a place where serious work has to happen. While they were listening to music, I also observed that they were singing together with the song because they were familiar with the song's lyrics. I instructed them to lower their voices to avoid possible disturbances that we might cause for other classrooms. Some of them moved very gently sideways on their desks to the song's beat, which was slow in tempo. That showed me that they enjoyed the music, and if it was not in the classroom, they would have stood up and danced.

After they had listened, I asked them to name the singer of the song. Most of them knew the artist, and they raised their hands. Aphiwe answered, *The musician is called Lira, Sir.* I then asked a follow-up question about the title of the song. A few of them shouted without being recognised, *Nom'ungahamba ngeke ngilile* (in English it means that *You may leave me, I would not cry*). Lastly, I asked them to tell me the genre of music that Lira sings. A girl called Zama answered, *She sings jazz music and pop*. I explained to them that Lira was my favourite jazz musician. I went on to say that every song that she sang had profound meaning. The meaning in the song I chose meant that she would not cry if her lover left her because she had had enough, and now he could leave her. I told them that Lira was my favourite singer because she sings about real things that she generally observes from daily life experiences. Many people can relate her songs to their personal understanding. For me, her songs are similar to poems. Poetry and music are alike because there are similar things that they demand. For example, there are certain elements such as rhymes that need to be featured in poetry and music as well as in some performances.

Later, I asked if the learners liked to listen to music. They all answered excitedly, *Yes Sir, we like music because it entertains us.* I also asked them where they usually listen to music. I got many different answers. Many said they listen to music through their headphones connected to cell phones. Others said they listen to music from radios and others from televisions. A few said their parents buy CDs of their favourite musicians and play them on their home theatres.

I then asked them to name different genres of music that they knew. They gave me a long list of music types, which I wrote on the chalkboard. The list included: house, kwaito, hip hop, jazz, gospel, R and B, *Maskandi* and pop music. Many of them were familiar with music because

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they could mention the genre and give an example of an artist singing that type of music. They even provided some explanations for each genre. Some gave amusing descriptions of music genres. For example, Andile said, *Maskandi is the music for the uncivilised people because they like fighting.* They all laughed and said to him, *No,* showing their dissatisfaction. Asanda raised her hand and said, *R&B music are the slow jam songs for lovers.* They all agreed and said, *Yes Sir.* Sphilile raised her hand and said, *Kwaito is township music for dancing and is loved by young people.* Osmos said, *Hip hop music is music that we all like and it is trending. The music styles incorporate rhyming and rhythmic words, which then form the beat for the song.* Aphiwe added, *It is for musicians that have fashion styles like wearing oversized clothes with big caps and jewellery.* I then asked them if they all looked up to their favourite musicians and they all said yes.

After listing all the music genres on the chalkboard, I then asked them to tell me their favourite musicians. Osmos responded, *I like AKA, my hip hop star.* Sphe said, *My favourite Maskandi artist is Khuzani for the blue nation.* Aphiwe answered, *My gospel artist is Thina Zungu.* Lastly, Fezeka raised her hand and said, *Destruction Boys for house music are my favourites.* They all raised their hands, and they wanted me to point at them to give their answers; however, I could not take all the answers. Later, I then asked them to name the type of music genres each learner enjoyed the most. I asked each learner to choose one music genre from the chalkboard by writing it down on a piece of paper. After that, I asked all those that chose the same music genre to get together as a big group. Immediately, they moved around to different groups.

I discovered that the most prominent group was house music, which needed to be divided into smaller groups. That showed how popular house music was amongst my learners. I then separated them into three groups of six learners. Hip hop music lovers were divided into two small groups. I did the same with *Maskandi* lovers, which had two groups. And there was one group for gospel music. The instructions that I gave to the learners were: *Get into groups of your favourite music genres. In your groups, discuss and choose one song that you are all familiar with. Write all the lyrics of the song down on paper and be sure that you can perform it for the class.*

While they were working in their groups, it was very noisy in the classroom. I then decided to start moving around from group to group to control the level of noise. I also wanted to check if they were writing their songs and making positive contributions to the song writing. In many

groups, I discovered that group members were trying to sing their songs out loud to remember the correct song lyrics. After that, they were spelling out words for proper dictation to the scriber of the group. One group told me that it was not easy to recall song lyrics by heart so they had to sing the song. I also understood their concerns. The activity of writing songs took the whole period, and they still needed more time.

During the second period, they continued with their writing. When the period was about to end, I started asking the children if they were about to finish writing. I started with one of the three groups for house as they were close to my table. House music is common among young people, and music instruments are dominant. It is composed to make people dance. A girl from a house music group raised her hand and asked me, *Can we write another song Sir? We have finished the first one.* They wanted to show me their confidence in what they were doing by singing some song highlights for me. However, I stopped them and responded to them that if they all agreed on the song and were all familiar with it, they could then write it. They then all came together to start discussing their second song.

However, the other two groups from the same house music genre were stuck still with their first song. Andile from the group asked me, *Can we change to another song, Sir? The one we chose is too long and we are now getting bored.* I agreed with them to start another one, but I made them aware that they had to choose the one song they enjoyed the most from the two songs. Similarly, the other group was having trouble because they were not all participating in the song writing. Other members of the group confirmed to me that they were not familiar with the song chosen. They then met and decided on the new song to be written.

The other five groups were making good progress with their song writing. The gospel group was doing very well because they were done with the first song and wanted my consent to start the second song. Gospel music is spiritual music as it has to do with faith and religion. Furthermore, it is the music that is healing and soothing listeners' souls.

Similarly, the *Maskandi* groups were ahead as they were busy writing the second song. There were two groups of *Maskandi* music. They were also very confident about what they were doing. *Maskandi* is a Zulu traditional music where musicians usually sing about things related to their culture and praise themselves. Most artists of this kind of music wear traditional clothes

usually made of animal skins and beads, and they are skilful traditional dancers. They always write their music in their vernacular language.

The last two groups were doing hip hop music. They were both on track with their song writing as they were about to finish their first songs. Hip hop is music that involves both vocals and instruments beats. It embodies some poetic elements such as rhymes and alliteration with repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.

Lastly, I asked all the groups to use their spare time or lunchtime to practise the songs they had written to perform them for the class on the following Friday. They all replied excitedly, *Yes!* Their response showed great enthusiasm for the next coming activity, and I anticipated an electrifying show time just like a real television talent show. When I was about to leave, one boy from the two hip hop music groups said *Sir, Sipho wants to render just a few lines of his hip hop songs that they had composed at home with his friends!* They all shouted and clapped hands, *Yes, yes, yes!* I then gave him a chance.

Below are examples of different kinds of songs written by the groups.
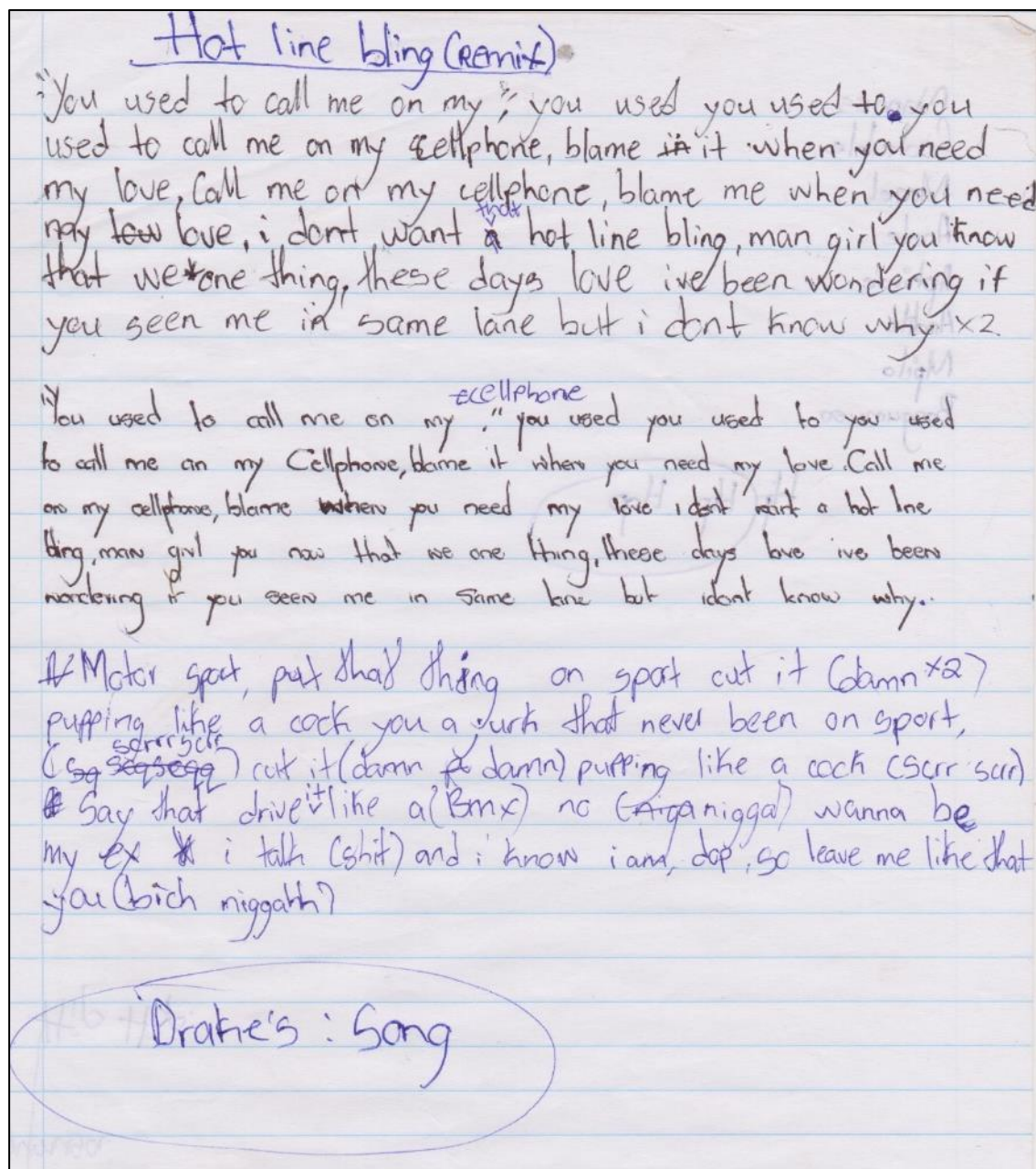
Figure 5.19: A hip hop song

Sfiso Ncwane

Ingateno, ngiculia ngihlabelela x2
ngobu jesu wehla wangiphakamisa

Wena walizwa izwi lomthulelo wami
Ukube wena wanu ngtcho ngabe
angicange ngibelapha engitnona namhlanje

Ngiphakamisa izandla zami ngibheka turat
Sengithanda ukubonga ngihlabelela ngoobujesu
wehla wangikamisa.

Ingateno, ngiculia ngihlabllela ngobu jesu
wehla wangiphakamisa, tyi jesu lo uyinkosi
yam

ubani ongangaba uma inkosi isiyumile x2

Figure 5.20: A gospel song
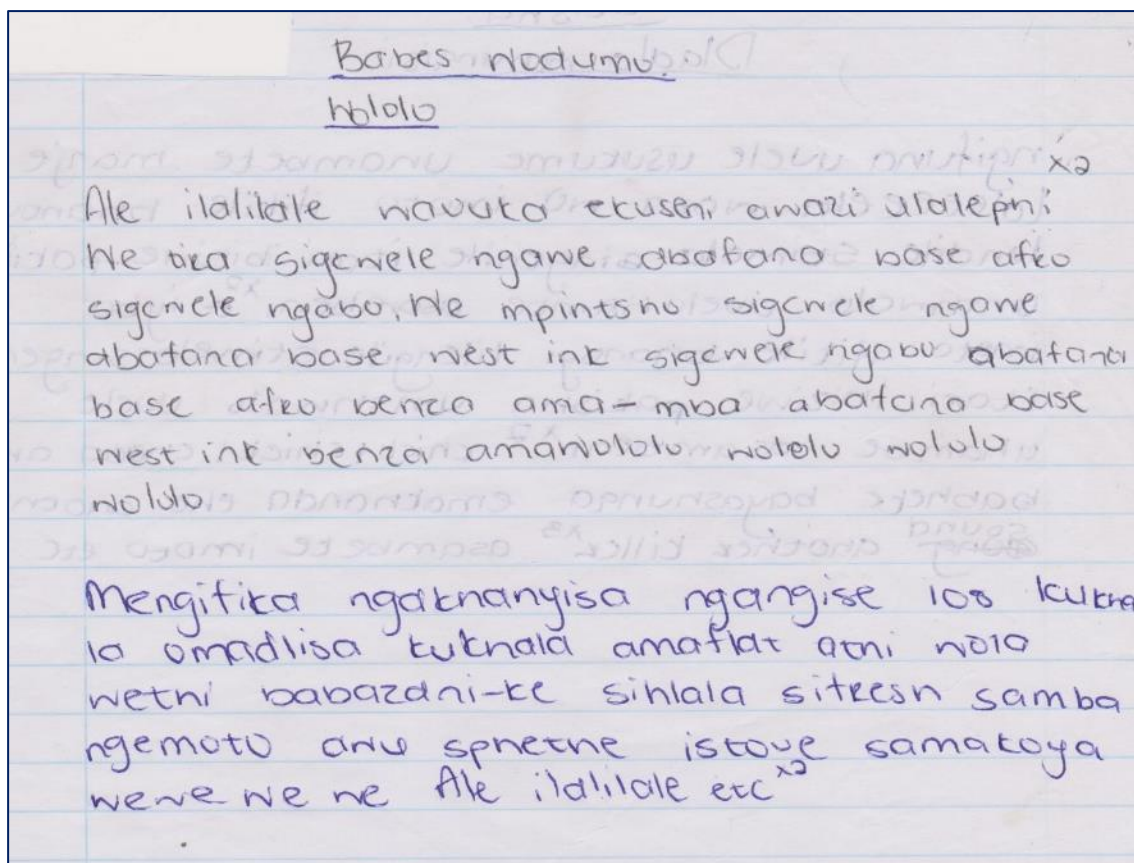
Figure 5.21: A house music song

Journal entry

14 August 2018

Today, I'm feeling good because my lesson for song writing went well. The excitement level was high as learners were doing what they loved and knew it very well. I'm worried about some groups that have chosen long songs; maybe they will not remember all words when performing. Looking forward to listening to good music!

Lesson reflection

16 August 2018

My dilemma was to get enough time for teaching this lesson from my tight teaching schedule so that I could accommodate all learners as they worked at different paces. Another challenge was to control the learners' level of excitement due to the nature of the lesson. The children were overwhelmed by joy, which made the lesson disturbing to other classes. My most useful discovery was that music can change a tense and serious classroom atmosphere to a relaxed and carefree environment. I also observed learners

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doing their work in a happy mood. I think playing music encourages learners to think creatively and to see how artists feature creative elements in their songs. Learners would describe the lesson as exciting and touching, as they showed their emotions by singing and dancing. This was my first lesson where children listened to music with the purpose of learning during the teaching period. Many of my previous creative writing lessons used the old traditional approach that I experienced as a schoolchild, where teaching writing occurred in a strict, quiet environment. I wish to continue to use children's interests to spark creativity for writing development in learners that I teach.

Music performance

Another period was set aside for the learners' song performance. I chose to use the last period of the day on a Friday so that the class would not disturb other classrooms with noise due to superb performances. I thought all eight groups would come prepared to perform their songs. During the week, they were coming to me individually to confirm and ask if they were still having that session to render their favourite songs for the class. They kept on pestering me even when I intended to do other lessons. To me, that signalled their readiness for the song performance activity. I also assured them that I would grant them a chance to get ready with their rehearsals before the performance.

The day of the performance arrived. I came to class early to give them time to prepare themselves; I had told them that those who wanted to could dress appropriately to their respective music genres. Many groups confirmed that they were ready to start, and so I did not waste time. I asked for the first group to volunteer to come to the front.

The first group was a *Maskandi g*roup. Unfortunately, their performance was not attractive to the class as they were not dressed accordingly. And what made it even worse was that they forgot their lyrics. The second group of the *Maskandi* genre performed better than the first group vocally, but they were not dressed for the music genre. Nevertheless, they knew their words, and their dance moves were perfectly executed.

The three House music groups performed very poorly. They were all not ready as their lyrics were mixed up. The one and only gospel group tried their best. The song leader did her best. She was very active, and her voice was lovely; however, her backing singers were letting her down.

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Lastly, one of the Hip Hop groups tried to do their best. Some group members were dressed according to the music genre. They started the song nicely, but along the way, they got stuck with lyrics. The final Hip Hop group performed most disappointingly. They did not even try to start the song. They were just looking at each other, meaning they had forgotten the lyrics and did not rehearse the song enough.

All in all, many groups could not remember song lyrics. Therefore, they asked me to adjourn their performances as the audience was laughing at them. I think this was because they did not give themselves enough time for the rehearsals. The audience was not happy with some songs that were performed as they said they had many faults. Some group members were pointing fingers at each other as they thought they were betrayed by others. Only two groups of eight were able to give their best performances. They remembered the words of their songs, and they were well dressed to represent their music genres.

At the end of the period, I agreed to let them go back to rehearse and polish their performances for the following Friday. This research lesson was not successful in the sense that many of the groups were not ready for the stage. However, they were all delighted that they would have another chance to improve their acts. In the same way, we both learnt that the creative process is not a once-off act and is time-consuming. Nevertheless, I was not contented because this was another delay for the next research activity. My journal entry bears the testimony to this:

Journal entry
21 August 2018

Today was not a productive day as I did not achieve my research objective with the music performance. I thought I would be done by this time, but I still have to give my learners a chance to rehearse their songs before performing them.

However, together with the whole class, we enjoyed watching those messy and funny performances by different groups. I'm sure they learnt something: If you don't give yourself enough time and dedication in everything you do in life, it doesn't succeed. This taught me to be patient with my learners if I want something of good quality and to know that not all lessons will go according to what I had anticipated.

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The following photographs[1] show the first attempt at music performances by different music genre groups:

Figure 5.22: A *maskandi* group performance (traditional music)

Figure 5.23: Another performance by a *Maskandi* group

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[1] For ethical reasons, the photographs are blurred to protect learners' identities.

Figure 5.24: A gospel music group performance

Figure 5.25: A better first attempt performance by a hip hop music group.

The last period I allocated for group performances was again on a Friday afternoon to provide them with freedom to make a high noise level. Many groups were looking forward to this day because they felt they had now had enough time to prepare. During the break, some learners asked if they could change from House music to Afro-Pop music. I agreed with them, but I insisted that they should be ready by the time I came to their classroom.

When I came to class, they were very excited. Many groups were already dressed for the stage. I started by asking them which group should we begin with. They said we should start with the groups that performed last the previous time.

To make it fun and to have groups performing at the highest level, we all agreed to rate performances on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being poor and 10 best. The mood was very relaxed as I told them they were allowed to express their feelings as the audience when they felt like doing so, but not to distract the performers. Clapping of hands and screaming were allowed at the end of an item. I then started with the Hip Hop groups on stage. I requested learners that were in the audience to respect the group performing in front of them.

The first group was performing a song titled *Thank you* by Emtee, a South African artist. It was a long song, but all lyrics were in the right sequence. One member of the group improvised and used a desk to create the beat for the lyrics. I did not know the song; however, I could follow it, and it made sense. The class clapped and screamed at the end. They rated the performance at 8.

The second group performed a song by Drake, an American artist. The group was well dressed to represent the genre. Their dance moves were very well-rehearsed and choreographed. In the end, they were given a big round of applause and rated at 7 out of 10. After these two performances, I then asked the class to explain how members of the groups should dress when singing Hip Hop. Melokuhle raised his hand and said, *They wear very expensive clothes and a lot of bling.* Aphiwe interjected and said, *Sunglasses are a must and straight caps with bandela doeks wrapped on heads.* Slindile laughingly said, *Sir, their pants are put just below buttocks as a style.*

There was one Gospel group that followed the Hip Hop. The audience was singing together with the group. The group sang a very soul touching song, *Ingakho ngicula* (*And that is the*

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reason I sing) by Sfiso Ncwane, a South African music artist. They sang very well. The lead singer commanded the group backing vocalist to be strong, which made their performance very special. The group members were dressed smartly. Before they could finish, the song the clapping of hands began. The audience rated them 9 out of 10. I then asked the class to explain how gospel musicians dress. Sipho said, *They wear long dresses with high heeled shoes and suits with long nose shoes.* They laughed and clapped.

The next group to perform was the only Afro Pop group. They sang a song titled *Ngicela ungidinge* (*Please need me*) by a local musician, Cici. The song was very long, but all lyrics were well-rehearsed and were correctly sung. I did not know the song, but I could comprehend what it meant, and I followed it from the start to the end. It was a slow beat song. It only required a very gentle movement. The singers' attire was very stunning and it suited the type of music they were singing. The other class members were singing together with the group, and some were moving slowly to show their appreciation. Before the group could finish, the audience was already clapping, and some were shouting *Ten, ten, ten!* They could not stop clapping and screaming for the best performance. The group was already rated before they could finish the song. When I asked the class why they were shouting, they said it is because everything was perfectly done. They said they represented the Afro Pop genre very well. The way they dressed was precisely the way the real musicians dress.

Figure 5.26: The afro-pop music group performance

The next two groups were performing the House genre. The two groups performed local music by Babes Wodumo and Mlindo. Both groups did not do their best as they performed precisely the same song. Their songs had very short messages, and they kept on repeating the same thing. House music is very appealing to young people who love having fun and dancing. The dance moves of both groups were complicated. However, there was no uniformity and precision in their choreography. The dance moves were not mastered by some group members, which then detracted from their performances. The rating for both groups was not pleasing as it was 5 and 4 out of 10. I think the two groups felt very sad because other group members laughed at them and they were very quiet to see themselves at the bottom of the rankings. All the other groups were very proud of their performances. When I asked the class to explain how to dress for the House music, they said there was nothing much to say because house music artists sometimes wear shorts and takkies (sneakers), bum shorts and crop tops. One boy raised his hand and said, *Sir, girls sing half naked.*

Finally, the last two groups to perform were the *Maskandi* music genre. The two groups had chosen songs from two artists that are enemies in the local music industry. Even their fans of both musicians have developed that hatred because artists were instigators of hate speech about each other. The first group was not well prepared. The artist that they had chosen was Khuzani, affectionately known as *The blue nation* because his fans wear blue colours everywhere he performs. The title of the song was *Ishende.* The song was performed in a very short version. There were no dance moves. They rushed to finish the song. Their attire was not appropriate to the music genre. The rating for the group was 4 out of 10. I think they deserved to be at the bottom of the rating table.

The second group had chosen a song by the rival, Mthandeni, known as *Igcokama Elisha* to his fans and followers. The song title was *Ngishela intombi iyabaleka.* (In English, this song means *I propose to a girl and she runs away*). The group was well dressed in traditional clothing that well represented the music genre. Their dancing routines were well executed. The class clapped and screamed for the group and they rated them at 8 out of 10. When I asked the class to describe the *Maskandi* genre, many raised their hands. Aphiwe said, *The dress code for Maskandi musicians are traditional items such as those made of animal skin.* Sphilile said, *They do not wear expensive clothes as opposed to Hip Hop music*. Andile said, *Maskandi musicians sing*

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about their everyday life experiences, traditions and love. The last performance ended the session on a very high note.

Figure 5.27: The good performance by a *maskandi* group

All learners were thrilled with the class activities that took place. The groups that were that were not highly rated understood that not everybody will be at the top. In the end, they were content with what they got compared to other groups. They also concurred with the rest of the class with high ratings for other groups. They thought it was fair.

I was also pleased with how the lesson turned out:

> **Journal entry**
> 31 August 2020
>
> *Today, I'm feeling very content with my lesson because learners loved it and were very happy with their performances.*

It was worth waiting and giving them a second chance because they all performed very well compared to last week's performances. This has taught me as a teacher to have patience with lessons involving creativity. Many of them loved being on stage and representing their music genres and their favourite superstars. I'm also impressed even with the ones that got very low ratings last week. They tried their utmost best today. I enjoyed the show!

Lesson reflection

03 September 2018

My dilemma was to find the extra time when teaching this music-related lesson. The most useful discovery from the lesson was the highest level of excitement brought in to class by using sound amplifiers of music. This means that if I can use audio equipment as my teaching resources in my class, I can have maximum participation because it snatches their attention and plays what they enjoy. I think learners would describe this lesson as the most exhilarating experience to ever happen in their classroom during teaching and learning time. This lesson was different because it offered them a platform in class to be whom they admire in their real lives. I wish to continue giving more freedom of choice to learners when choosing topics they want to write about. Now I understand the importance of allowing learners to learn through play, which is popular-culture oriented. When preparing for their music performance, there was a lot of play when interacting and assisting one another, fine-tuning the song, and choreographing the dance moves. It also improved synergy amongst the group members as they learnt to help each other for the best performance. It enabled them to gain a sense of group identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Chapter Five, I have described how I explored children's popular culture as a resource for teaching English creative writing in Grade 6 English and Social Science lessons. Creative writing development was embedded in the content of children's popular culture. Still, I ensured that all lessons conducted were aligned with the annual teaching plan's subject matter.

I undertook this self-study research intending to improve my educational practice. I intended to learn and reflect on the lessons and find working strategies for teaching creative writing in an inspiring way to nurture children's creative writing with authenticity. Building on insights from recalling my childhood memories, I aimed to discover what topics were fascinating to learners and how this popular culture knowledge could be used as a resource in developing creative writing. Therefore, in this chapter, I presented the lessons that had to do with children's interests, such as movies, diary writing, artefact writing, music and performances. I gave a detailed account of what transpired in the class during teaching and learning. For each lesson, I reflected back on dilemmas and most useful discoveries (Samaras & Freese, 2006).

This chapter's lesson stories show how learners' attention and focus are attained for creative writing if the content is relevant to their social interactions and interests. The learners are fascinated when teachers make the learning and teaching pleasurable by encompassing popular culture content. Dulby and Burton (2013) concur that creative writing teaching should be done through innovative and exciting activities such as performances. Popular culture topics that can captivate learners' minds and focus in creative writing activities can include movies, sport, and music. This chapter shows how learners are inspired to express themselves creatively if they feel connected to the topic.

In the following chapter, Chapter Six, I continue to present lesson stories that show the synergy between children's interests and creative writing development.

CHAPTER SIX: TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING LESSONS BASED ON CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE CONTENT

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Five, I began to respond to my second research question, *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* I presented stories of creative writing lessons in English and Social Science that integrated elements of children's popular culture. Critical aspects of these lessons were inspired by my childhood memory stories concerning children's popular culture and creative writing (Chapters Three and Four). At the end of each lesson's account, I offer a journal entry and share reflections based on self-study questions posed by Samaras and Freese (2006). In these reflections, I deliberated on my attempts to teach creative writing in a way that acknowledges learners' knowledge from their social contexts. Furthermore, I reflected on my attempts to support my learners to develop inventiveness and independence in creative writing in English as a first additional language. Wang and Kokotsaki (2018) argue that "pupils with limited foreign language knowledge could engage imaginatively and enthusiastically in classroom activities, as long as a supportive environment and conditions is offered and the teacher is skilled and patient to draw out children's creative potential" (p. 117). Similarly, I aspired to facilitate a supportive environment and conditions to draw out my learners' creative promise.

This chapter, Chapter Six, continues to respond to the second research question. I narrate how I designed, introduced and integrated activities related to children's interests in the Grade 6 annual teaching plan (DBE, 2011). Geo-Lin Lim (2015) cautions that "creativity is important in the classroom and should be encouraged even within a rigid curriculum" (p. 339). The lessons presented here were intended to spark learners' imagination and motivation in English creative writing activities.

Exploring and integrating children's popular culture in curriculum activities

This chapter gives an account of lessons conducted with the learners in two of the three subjects I teach: English and Technology. The three English lessons presented in this chapter involved

poetry, Twitter (social media), and reading comprehension. The last lesson given was in Technology and involved the use of Instagram (Social media).

Poetry

Teaching poetry elements and learners reciting poems is prescribed in the Grade 6 English curriculum (DBE, 2011). During speaking and listening periods, the teacher is supposed to demonstrate by reading poetry aloud for the class. The learners are expected to read and perform poems with suitable gestures. During the third term, I was scheduled to get into detail on the elements of poetry. In the prescribed curriculum, teaching elements of poetry is allocated two separate hours in language and reading skills periods. Writing poetry is allocated another hour. This means that teaching poetry is given almost three hours, according to the English Grade 6 CAPS document for Term 3.

The first lesson I prepared was based on teaching sound devices in poetry. It was planned to take an hour. I mentioned to the learners at the beginning that there was a particular way of using language when writing poetry. I explained that the language used in poetry often involves figures of speech. The words are carefully selected to fulfil specific poetic requirements. I then explained what a rhyme is. I told learners that rhymes refer to words that have the same end sound when pronounced. I also mentioned that writing music and writing poetry have some common features, such as rhyming words. I told the learners that artists in music and poetry require almost the same creativity because songs are poems written in verse to music. I wrote three sentences with rhyming words on board, and I asked learners to read aloud and note the end sound. For example:

1. Let me tell you why birds fly.
2. Birds' feet are neat.
 3. They hold their hymn book and fold pages.

I asked them to do the following, *In each sentence, identify one set of rhyming words*. Thembi raised her hand and answered *Me and tell*. The whole class said, *No*. They kept on raising their hands seeking my attention. I then pointed to Zama to answer the question and she said, *Why and fly*. I said, *Yes, they both have the same end sound*. For the second sentence, Phila answered, *Feet and neat have the same end sound, Sir*. Andile answered for the third sentence, *Sir, the rhyming words are hold and fold*. I asked them to give themselves a big clap of hands for their attempts at answering.

I asked them to give me some examples from what they knew about rhymes. Most of them shared some hip hop music lines that have rhymes. I noticed that boys came up with more examples than girls. I think this was so because learners, especially boys, liked the hip hop music genre.

Sipho gave few lines from a song by the hip hop artist Emtee:

Pearl Thusi

She's the best

I don't see the rest

I don't need the best

With all due respect

Phila gave two lines from a JayZ song:

Would life, I dabbled in crazy weight

Without rap, I was crazy straight

Aphiwe also gave lines from Rick Ross song:

When it comes to tools, fool I'm a pep boy

Secondly, I explained that poets sometimes use or write words next to each other that begin with the same consonant sound or letter, and have the same sound. I explained to them that that is called alliteration. I taught them how to identify alliteration in a poem by looking for pairs of words that begin with identical letters. I then wrote them some examples on the chalkboard:

Football fever fuels fans.

She sells seashells by the sea-shore.

I then asked them some questions based on the given sentences on the chalkboard. For the first question, I asked them, *Can you identify alliteration in the first sentence?* A few learners raised their hands to answer. Aphiwe answered, *Sir, it is the 'f' sound.* I answered, *Good, that is the correct answer.* I then underlined the first letters in all four words in the sentence. Secondly, I asked them to identify the letter or the same sound repeated at the beginning or closely related words in the second sentence. Zama raised her hand and said, *It is the " 'sh' sound.* Lwandile interjected and said, *It is the 's' sound, Sir.* I said they had to clap hands for Lwandile as she got the correct answer. I then asked a follow-up question, to explain why she said it was an 's'

sound. She said, *The consonant that is found in most of the words in the sentence is 's'*. To me, this showed that they had understood how to identify alliteration in poems.

I also asked them to give me some examples either from music or poetry.
Aphiwe raised his hand and said, *Baxakekile oxamu amaxoki*

Thirdly, I taught them the element of poetry called onomatopoeia. I explained that onomatopoeia is when words recreate the sound like the object they are describing or actions they refer to. Usually, poets use such words to make the description more expressive and clear for poetry readers' imagination. To be able to use onomatopoeia words, they need to ask themselves questions based on how something sounds. I then wrote two examples on the chalkboard:
Tyres screech before collision.
Hissing sound signals a snake.

I then elaborated that the screech is the sound of the friction between tyres and the tar on the road. The written word is precisely the same as the sound it makes when brakes are applied to stop the car immediately. I asked them to imitate the sound of a braking car. They then all started making screeching noises very loud. Others made very high pitched noises that made my eardrums vibrate. They enjoyed making noise so much that they did not want to stop, even after me telling them to stop. Secondly, I asked them to make the sound of a snake. They sound common in class was *'ssssss'* I explained that "hiss" refers precisely to the sound made by a snake. Lastly, I wrote two sentences on the board and I asked them to identify and underline the onomatopoeia.
He bangs the door to show his anger.
I decided to zip my bag.

Sipho raised his hand and came forward to underline the word *bang*. Aphiwe did the same and he highlighted the word *zip*. They all seemed to have understood how to identify the use of onomatopoeia.

Later, I read them a poem entitled: *The Sausage Whistler* (Platinum, English First Additional Language. Grade 6 Learners' Book). I asked them to listen for rhyming words in the poem.

The Sausage Whistler By Allan Ahlberg

One day a boy went walking,

And walked into a store.

He bought a pound of sausages

And laid them on the floor.

The boy began to whistle

He whistled up a tune,

And all the little sausages

Danced around the room

I then read the first stanza and asked them to identify a set of rhyming words. Zama answered, *Tune and room rhymes.* I said, *That is a good answer.* Snazo, at the back, raised her hand and I pointed at her to answer, *Day and boy rhymes, Sir.* I then asked the whole class to read aloud both words to determine if they rhyme. They all responded, *No, it is not rhyming.*

Lastly, I read the second stanza and waited for their responses. Sipho raised his hand answered, *Store and floor.* I responded, *That is a correct answer.* This showed that my learners had understood rhymes as the element of poetry.

Secondly, I gave the learners a poem titled: Today for lunch. I then asked them to identify alliteration in the first five lines. Aphiwe said, *Line number 2 has 's' sound.* Andile answered, *Line number 3 has 'b'' sound.* They now all had their hands up. I then asked them all to answer, as song line number 4 has a '*c*' sound. They then did the last sentence. To conclude the lesson, I then asked them to complete the exercise individually by underlining the rest of the unidentified alliteration in the poem.

Today for lunch By Ian Souter

Today for lunch I had

10 sizzling spoonfuls of specially spiced soup,

9 beautiful bites of brown baked bread,

8 chewy chunks of crispy crinkly chips,

7 black bits of burnt baked beans,

6 terrific titbits of tasty tender tomatoes,

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5 fat finger of freshly fried fish,

4 pleasing pieces of perfect pecan pie,

3 creamy cups of cool clotted cream,

2 jumbo jars of juicy jolly jelly

Which left me with

1 big bulge of bursting burping belly.

During the second English period for language, I taught the learners the other poetry elements called comparisons. I first asked them what comparisons do. One boy responded, *It compares two same things, Sir;* I then asked a follow-up question, *Does that mean we can only compare things for similarities only?* They all responded *No.* Sipho raised his hand and answered, *We can use it when comparing different things, looking for differences.* I explained to them that we have two types of comparisons, namely, similes and metaphors.

I explained to them that comparisons are commonly used by poets when writing poems. They compare things that share common features or differences. Poets use comparisons because they also want their readers to make their own interpretations and understandings of the words' meaning. Poems could be interpreted in different ways by different individuals. I taught them how they can recognise similes; this type of comparison uses words such as 'like' or 'as' in sentences. It compares two things that share the same similarities or differences. I then gave them an example of a simile: *As cold as ice.* They then recognised the use of as. They also shared with me other similes that they knew. Zama raised her hand and said, *As green as grass.* Aphiwe said, *As hot as fire.* Many learners shared with the whole class similes that they remembered. I also explained that other similes use like. I gave them an example on the chalkboard: *Life is like a journey.*

After giving this example, I substantiated why I was comparing life and journey. I told the learners that it was because of the common features that life and journey have. I explained that both have ups and downs, and we sometimes find pleasure or encounter challenges along the way.

Furthermore, I explained to learners that there is another type of comparison called a metaphor. This comparison compares two things by saying that something is something else because of the same features. This comparison does not use the words 'like' or 'as', but it directly calls

something else. I explained that this comparison calls life a journey, and it directly refers to it as something. This comparison is usually used for things that have shared similarities. After explaining all types of comparisons, I gave them classwork to identify the simile and metaphors. The instruction to learners was to state the kind of comparison in the following sentences.

1. *Slippery as a slide.*
2. *Raindrops of vinegar.*
3. *Her face is like a picture.*
4. *Star is a diamond in the sky.*
5. *Education is the key to success.*

To conclude the lesson, I gave them two poems to read and answer questions. The first poem was to be done as classwork, then the second as homework, as I gave it to them as handouts. The following is the first poem:

The Sea

The sea is a hungry dog
Giant and grey
He rolls on the beach all day.
With his clashing teeth and shaggy jaws
Hours upon hour he gnaws
The rumbling, tumbling stones,
And, 'Bones, bones, bones!'
The giant sea-dog moans
Licking his greasy paws.

And when the night wind roars
And the moon rocks in stormy cloud,
He bounds on his feet and snuffs and sniffts,
Shaking his wet sides over the cliff,
And howls and hollows long and loud.

Questions
1. *Who is the poet?*

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2. *How many verses/stanzas are in the poem*

3. *What is the poet comparing the sea to?*

4. *What type of comparison is this?*

5. *Find two sets of rhyming words in the poem.*

6. *Find four words that describe the actions and noises that the sea makes.*

This was the assessment activity to check if the lesson outcomes were achieved through my teaching.

The following poem was a homework task that they had to complete before the next writing lesson:

Everyone has a choice – don't land on your knees

Diplomas for some and others get degrees

University or 'uni' is like a school

Classes daily is the rule

Adults you will be – there is no time to waste

Trading or business – I bet you can't wait

Into industry, inventions or IT

Only you can decide – when you get to grade eight?

No, do it now – do not be too late!

Questions

1. *What is this poem about? How do you know?*

2. *Name the different types of qualifications spoken about in the poem.*

3. *Find two sets of rhyming words.*

4. *University is compared to something else. Find this in the poem.*

5. *What type of comparison is this?*

6. *Find words next to each other that begins with the same letter and have the same sound.*

7. *What is the poem telling you to do?*

The third lesson period was based on poetry writing for the whole class. I first started by motivating my learners that poets are not only adults, but there are also young poets. I explained that poetry is learnt and improved through writing practice as they grow. I mentioned that they could even pursue a career as professional poets because nowadays, there are people that are

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well known for their poetry work. I asked them to name some famous poets they knew from the radio. Sphilile put up her hand and said, *I have listened to 'Sbo the Poet'"*. Sipho answered, *Lebo Mashile is the poet that performs on television functions.* I responded, *Good answer.* Lwandile also raised her hand and answered, *Ntsiki Mazwai, sister of the famous jazz musician, Thandiswa Mazwai.* I responded to her, *That an excellent example.* I was very impressed that they knew so much about things that I never thought they were aware of. Both of these poets mentioned are television personalities that learners had watched on television functions and reality shows.

I explained to them that not all poems are about things that are real and around us. Sometimes they are about things that we cannot see and are out of reach. Poems are written about anything that poets wish to express their thoughts and meanings in words, or they could write poems to praise someone or their objects. I then told them that they were to write a two-stanza poem. Their poems could be about their favourite items that they had written descriptive paragraphs about (see Chapter Five). Another option was to decide to write about something else that they cherished. I reminded them that they had to think of words to be used and infuse the poetry elements that I had taught them in their poems.

I then asked them to decide on choices of objects or topics to write their poems about. The learners seemed keen to start writing. They were motivated to see how poems are written. The planned activity was short, but it took them a longer time than I had anticipated to hand in their work. I observed that the task required them to think a lot before writing. Many of the learners had rough papers where they were putting together ideas to try poetic elements such as rhymes, alliteration, and so on.

At the end of the lesson, only half of them submitted, meaning half of them struggled to complete their two stanza poems. Some poems used poetic elements and showed creativity. Many learners wrote about their special people, not objects. (see Figure 6.1, Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3)

My home

You are like a protective shield

You protect me in all kinds of weather

You are amazing

In every storms that comes

You are still stading where you are

You always remain where you are

You are firm and stable

Oh, what a shelter!

You are a shining shield

I always feel protected under you

Wow, what a shelter!
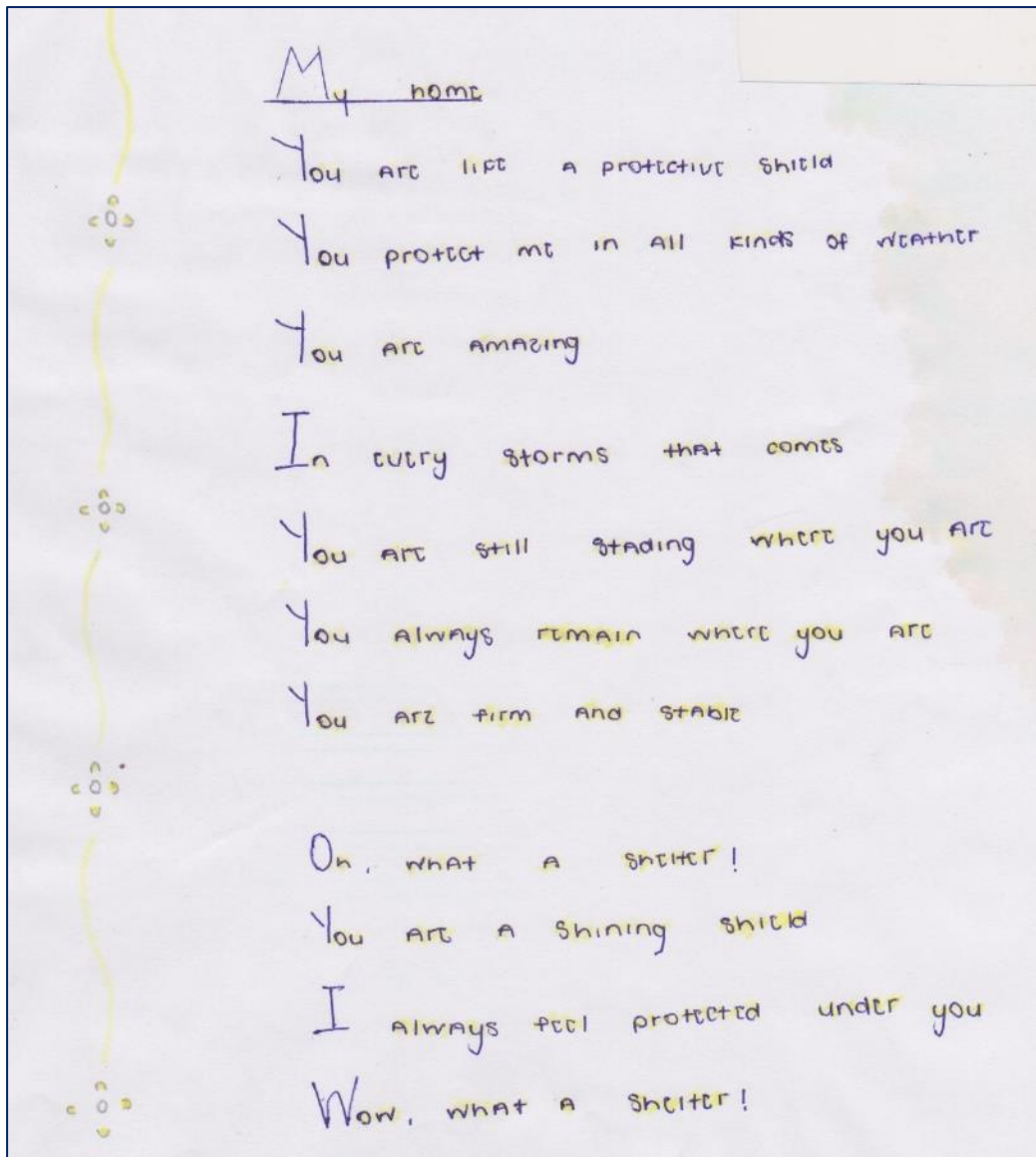
Figure 6.1: A praise poem written by a learner about home

Poem

My brother

My brother is like a big lion.
He likes to bully me.
AS if I am nothing
but I am Something

He roars and roars
Talk to me like I am a doll.
Only when my mom is not home.
I am his quiter
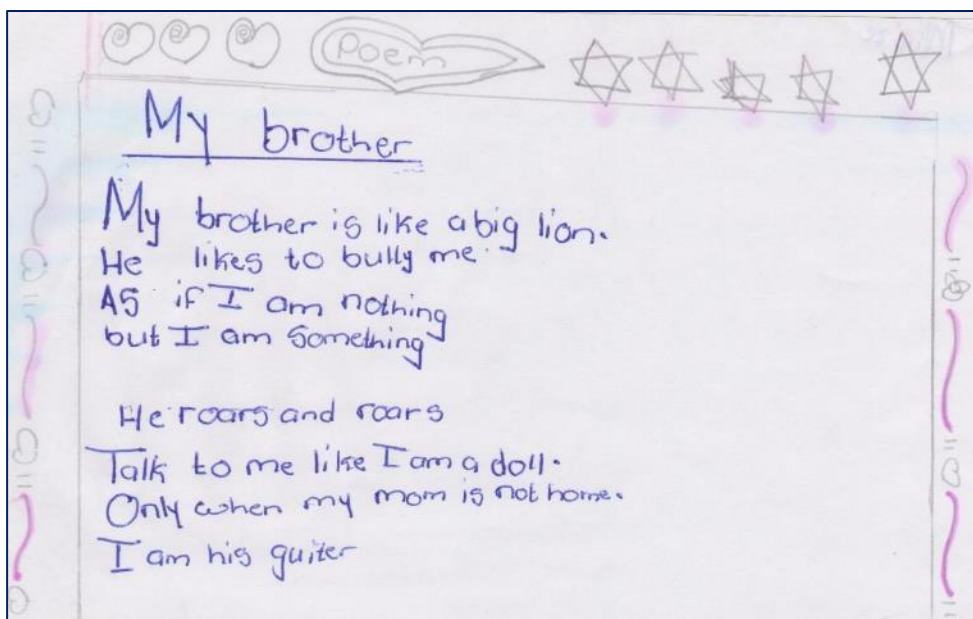
Figure 6.2: A very touchy poem about a cruel brother

My mom light's my way

I love my mom
She shine's like a star
She brightens the things I dont know
You are my special star

My mom is so kind and beautiful
I do not fear the darkness
Because my mom is my star
My beautiful star
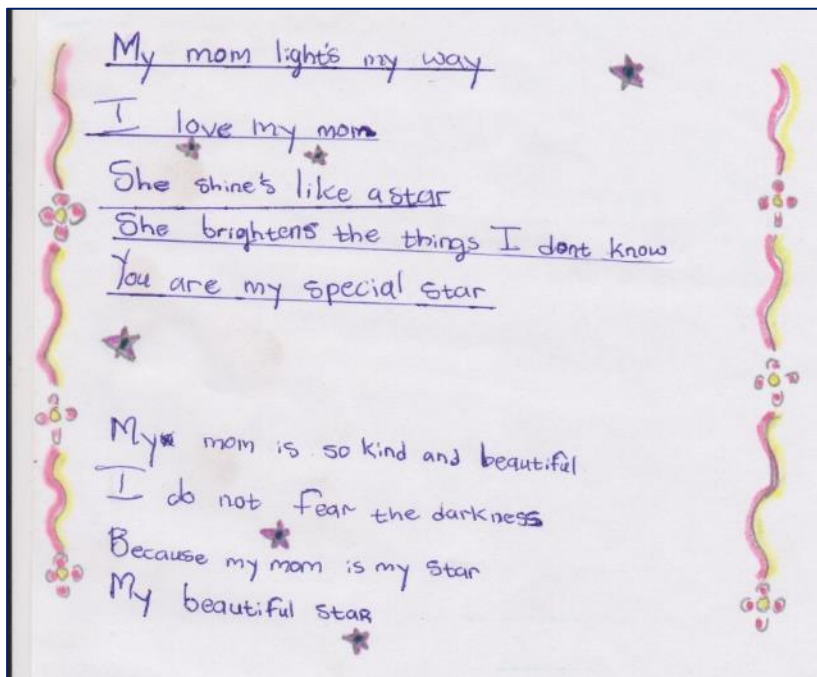
Figure 6.3: A praise poem about a mother

Journal entry

13 August 2018

The introductory poetry lesson that I taught was a success because I never thought learners would find it easy to give the answers and examples in poems. But I'm feeling anxious to see if they would be able to compose their own poems with poetic elements about their favourite objects or people.

Lesson reflection

14 August 2018

My initial goal was to make sure that learners understood the poetic language because it is not as simple as writing a story. The most useful discovery was that learners were able to give relevant examples of poetry elements, which meant I had underestimated their knowledge. I also now understand that it is essential to use easy to understand and relevant examples of poetry when teaching.

I think my learners would describe the poetry writing as very challenging because they were quiet and some were asking me to give them the English words for clarity. I think the main challenge was about word choices. This lesson was different from the previous poetry lessons because I allowed my learners to write poems about things they owned and cherished. In previous lessons, learners were given set topics and were all expected to write about them whether they were familiar with them or not. I wish to continue assigning learners poetry activities based on what is popular with learners at that particular time.

Twitter (Social media)

This was another research lesson, but it did not take a full English period as it was done in the last 20 minutes of a period. This lesson was linked to work done in Term 1 for English under the theme 'Connecting with Friends… and the World'. In Term 1, learners were supposed to learn how to give and follow instructions when sending messages or using communication devices or smartphones.

Learners were very fascinated when I told them that they were going to learn about social media. I began by asking them to explain what social media was. They raised hands, and Sphilile said, *It is what people are using to communicate through cellular phones and the internet*. I then

asked them to name a few social media platforms they are exposed to at their homes. I was surprised with the answers they were giving because all were correct. The learners that are usually quiet in class were speaking and giving answers. Andile responded, *Sir, Facebook is social media.* Slindile said, *It is Instagram and Twitter.* Lastly, Dalisu said, *WhatsApp is also a social media*. All the learners' answers showed that learners were familiar with social media as it was easily accessible from smartphones or modern gadgets.

I then listed various social media platforms on the chalkboard. I then asked them to choose one from the list that was most popular with them. Aphiwe raised his hand and said, *It is Facebook, Sir*. Andile interjected without being recognised and said, *WhatsApp is used by everyone Sir, so it is number 1 from the list*. The others said *Yes, that is true*. Thembelihle said, *We use it at home every day on my mom's phone.* Furthermore, I asked them to substantiate their preference of social media. Andile said, *Facebook has a disadvantage because when you post something you share it with other people you may not know.* Sphilile commented, *On Facebook you can even get a comment from a very famous person and that is what I like*. All those that were in favour of Facebook agreed by saying, *Yes Sir!*

However, I then asked for the disadvantages of Facebook. Lwandile said, *I do not like Facebook because everybody can read it, even your enemies.* Fezile added, *I would not feel comfortable to speak to strangers. It is not safe! Other people use Facebook to lure others for human trafficking mostly young girls and children using social media at young ages. You cannot post something personal or very delicate because they will make a joke of you*. My learners identified several disadvantages of using Facebook, including that some people might use it to spread spurious allegations about others. Sipho said, *WhatsApp is the best because you only chat with people that you know and are on your phone book. The people on your phone book will have access to see and respond to your posted messages, not strangers. In my understanding, these are the people that can sincerely share your feelings, either of joy or sadness. WhatsApp is where people get emotional and moral support because there are individuals that are significant to them. People get updated with the latest news happening around them and some useful information*.

After listening to all the disadvantages, learners that were in favour of Facebook changed their thinking and said they were now in favour of WhatsApp as it is safer to use.

I then told them that they were going to use social media in the classroom. Learners clapped excitedly after my statement. Aphiwe curiously interrupted and said, *Sir, are we going to bring our cell phones to class?* Andile said, *We need to have Twitter handles to be a Twitter participant*. I answered, *No, wait I was not done explaining when you asked the question*. Other children confirmed that they did not know anything about this social media platform. This showed me the need to familiarise all learners with the relevant activity to move from the same level of understanding.

Next, I explained that they were not expected to bring any devices to school, but they would do pretend writing on a social media page called Mimic Social Media (Al-Bahrani, Patel, & Sheridan, 2015). The social media page was to be printed on paper, which the learners were to write on. I confirmed what Andile said about the need to have Twitter handles as it is like an address for a person to access his or her account with messages. I told them that I would allocate them a space on the wall to paste their messages using pre-stick, which is used to stick or paste wall charts.

I made it clear that the content of their messages had to be things that are not too personal. I explained that this meant that they could not divulge any secret that they might feel uncomfortable about when known by other classmates. I elaborated that learners had to ensure that they wrote things that they felt free to share with anybody as they would be free to read them on the classroom walls in any spare time. I had to capacitate learners to engage in this activity in the classroom media because I realised that not all learners are exposed to smartphones at home with social media platforms.
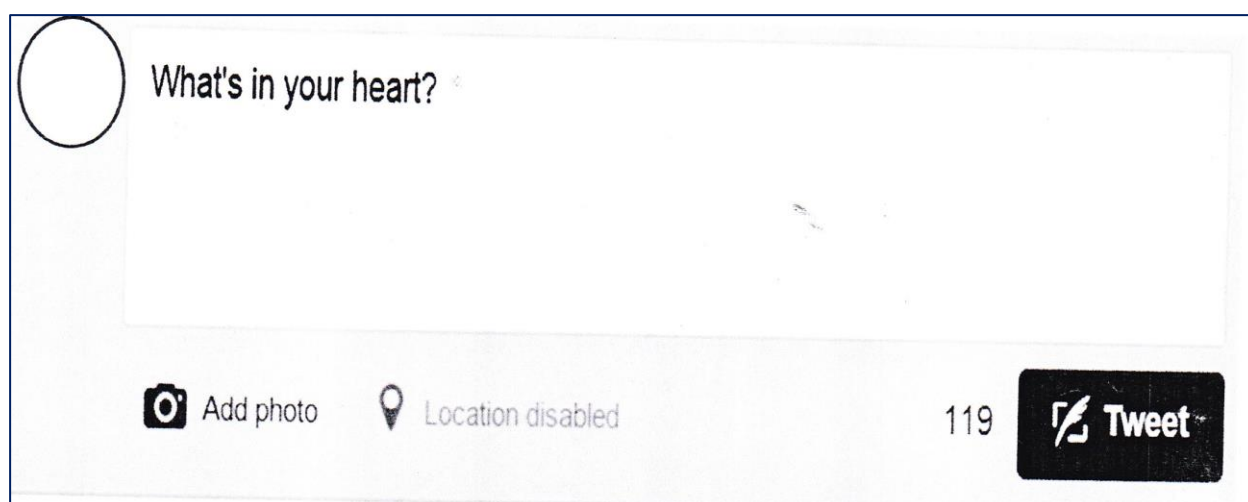
Figure 6.4: A blank page of a social media platform called Twitter

I then showed them a blank page of Twitter as shown in Figure 6.4 above. I then asked them if they could see the space where they needed to write a message. They answered and said it had to be written in the space below *What is in your heart?* I explained that they could not add a photograph as we were using paper, but we could improvise by using smiley faces and emoticons. Learners had learnt about this in Term 1 when doing independent reading about the new fun language of smiley faces and emoticons that had developed. They learnt that emoticons are used to show emotions and are often meant to be funny and make you smile or laugh. They learnt that usually, it is added at the end of the sentence to show what you really mean.

However, for this Twitter page, I asked the learners to draw a smiley face or emoticon representing what was in their heart. I asked them to start by drawing their emoticons before writing their messages because I knew that they loved using emoticons in their writings. They were very excited when I gave them that privilege, and I also mentioned that they did not have to provide full details, but just a few sentences expressing how they felt. I then handed out the blank Twitter pages to the learners and kept one to fill it in. They were very noisy and excited while I was handing the sheets out. Afterward, they were busy drawing emoticons and writing what was in their hearts. I also sat down and did the same for my Twitter message.

The following are examples of work produced by learners (see Figure 6.5). In their tweets, the learners wrote about their interests such as special days, television programmes, favourite objects and their emotions:

What's in your heart?

I am happy because today it is my Birthday.

Add photo   Location disabled   119   Tweet

What's in your heart?

Master Mind will be back on kuZalo

Add photo   Location disabled   119   Tweet

What's in your heart?

I feel very happ I get a I fell very happey because I will get a new cellphone.

Add photo   Location disabled   119   Tweet

What's in your heart? My heart is broken because my uncle died in the car accidente.

Add photo   Location disabled   119   Tweet

Figure 6.5: Examples of handwritten Twitter pages with learners' mixed emotions

Journal entry
18 August 2018

Today was a productive day because my lessons for the day went well, especially the English lesson.

My learners surprised me because I never thought they were so familiar with social media. It had nothing to do with schooling. They could even tell me the social media platforms that are popularly used at their homes. Many of my learners agreed that they have used social media. What surprised me even more was to get responses from the quiet learners. This showed me that children know what matters to them. However, I'm looking forward to reading meaningful messages on their Twitter pages. I think they will enjoy it even more when they get another chance to mimic another social media page.

Lesson reflection
21 August 2018

When I had to teach about some social media that I had not even used myself, such as Twitter and Instagram, I encountered the dilemma that learners had more knowledge of how it works.

The most useful discoveries that I made from the lesson were that I should value and use modern gadgets as teaching aids for creative writing. These technological gadgets have brought social media, which was very popular amongst all learners of all ages. The learners would describe the lesson as fascinating, although they were not using a real cell phone to write, because they were more informed on how to use it. Theriault, Allaire and Gagnon (2018) confirm that schools are main places where children write the most and that circumstances could be shifting because of the greatness of social media usage for individuals. This means that teachers should change their traditional teaching approaches at schools and integrate social media into teaching creative writing.

This lesson was different from past lessons of creative writing I have taught because learners could practice their popular social media culture, which is usually prohibited at school. This has taught me that I should continue to feature the learners' popular culture in my creative writing lessons to make them relevant and meaningful. I have gained a new understanding because I need to use what learners like doing as a resource for my successful creative writing teaching. This will also make sense to them and broaden their knowledge about using school knowledge in their real lives.

Reading comprehension

The lesson on reading comprehension was done during the revision week prior to the yearly examinations' commencement. This week was when the teachers, together with the learners, recapped the work done for the year in preparation for the final formal assessment. The examinations are the assessments that determine whether the learner passes to the next grade or fails and remains in the same grade the following year.

This lesson was going to serve the purpose of revision, and at the same time, infuse reading comprehension with the content of popular culture. Furthermore, it was my intention to give my learners a chance to read something relevant and something that matters to them as young people. The extract was taken from a South African magazine called *Drum.* This magazine is popularly read by young people. I felt that the passage was relevant because it was about their favourite Hip Hop Musician, Jabulani Tsambo, popularly known as *HHP,* who had just passed on the previous week.

To start the lesson, I began by explaining to learners that they were about to read a comprehension related to their favourite music, which some of the learners enjoyed, as was evident during the music lesson. I mentioned that the first task was to answer comprehension questions, and the second task was a free writing activity of a short message.

I told them that the passage was about a Hip Hop musician. I then showed them a magazine page with a picture and then asked them to name the artist. They all shouted, *It is Double HP, Sir*! I then confirmed that indeed it was about HHP by referring to the caption on the page. They all laughed at me and said, *No Sir, he is not called HHP, he is called Double HP.* They laughed because I read literally as it was written HHP and not as Double HP. I then asked them to tell me whatever they knew about him. Andile said, *He was found dead last week in his*

house, I saw it on Television news. Sphilile interrupted and said, *On news they said he killed himself.* I then asked them if they knew the word for used for someone who killed himself. They were all silent, meaning that they did not know. I then wrote on chalkboard the word 'suicide' and asked them to look for the meaning. Slindile found the meaning and said *It means self-murder.* I wrote it on the chalkboard.

I then asked them to browse through the passage for all the words that they did not know. They gave me words, I wrote them on the chalkboard, and asked them to look for the meaning in their dictionaries. After, I explained all the words with their definitions on the chalkboard. I then asked for volunteers to read different paragraphs. There were about eight paragraphs to be read. The learners had to put their hands up to be noticed to get a chance to read. I observed that some were already reading silently. They were so enthusiastic about reading, and I think it was because they loved what they were about to read about, as it was about a real incident that had just happened.

I then pointed to one learner whose hand was up to start reading the first paragraph aloud, and after, I assigned all other paragraphs to different individuals. They continued reading each paragraph until the end of the extract. For the second time, I asked them to do independent reading quietly. I gave them about ten minutes to finish their reading.

When they were all finished reading, I asked them two questions to answer orally. The first question was, *What is the real name for HHP?* Aphiwe answered, *His name is Jabulani Tsambo.* I then asked the second question and they answered. After, I wrote all 10 questions on the chalkboard and asked them to answer them all on paper. It did not take them too long to answer all questions. The questions varied from the lowest to the highest order questions to cater to all cognitive differences. The questions were as follows:

(a) *What is the real name for HHP?*

(b) *What does the abbreviation HHP stand for?*

(c) *What was the cause of his death?*

(d) *Who was he married to?*

(e) *How were the mourners dressed?*

(f) *Why should mourners dress in that colour?*

(g) *Name any popular mourner that was at the house of HHP? Explain how you know him or her/ what is she or he popular for?*

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(h) Describe HHP in few words.

(i) Find a metaphor in the last paragraph?

(j) What do you think of suicide? Should people kill themselves if they have problems?

Many of the learners were able to respond to many questions that were asked. The learners participated from the beginning until the end of the lesson. They showed great interest and knowledge of people that are socially in the spotlight. This is evident in the following worksheets (see Figure 6.6 and Figure 6.7) of learners' responses:
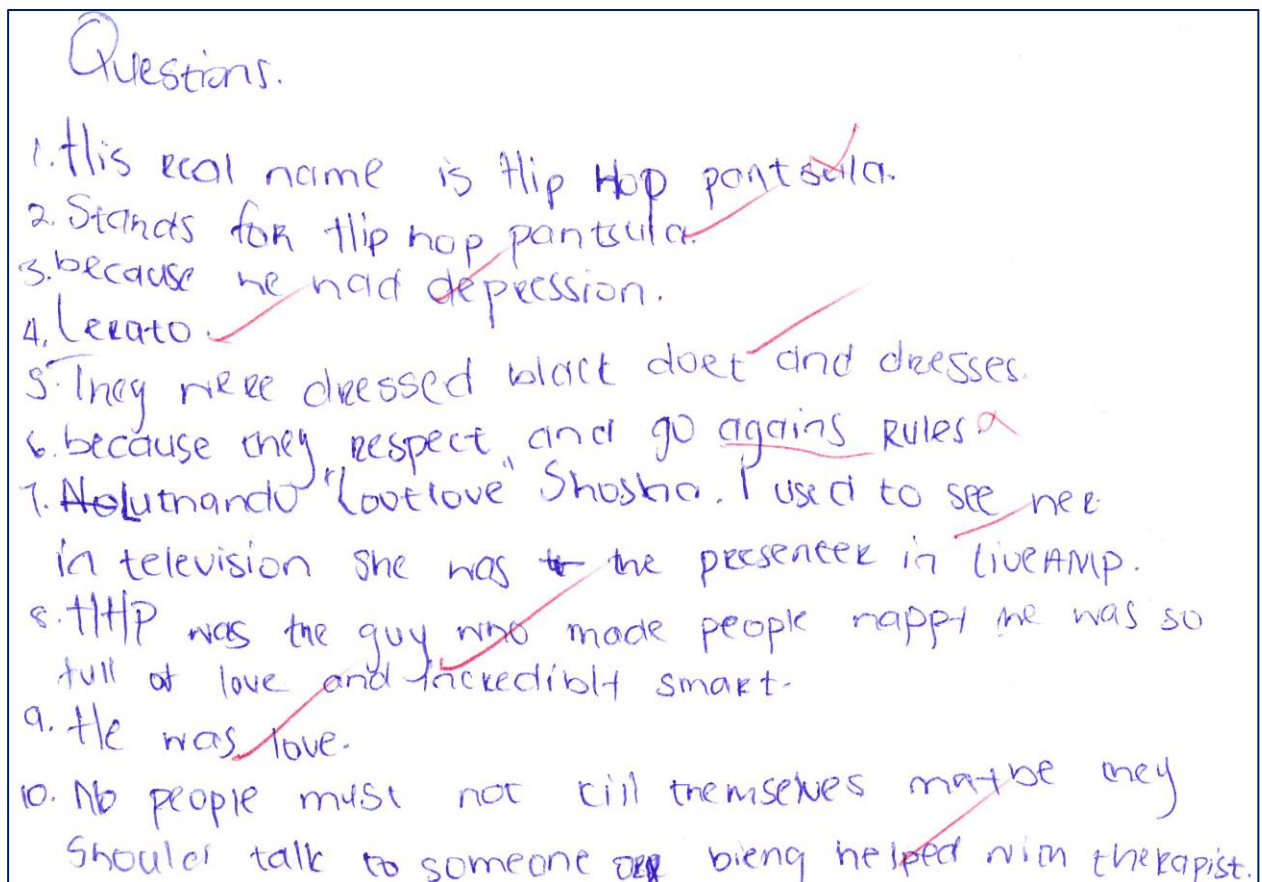
Figure 6.6: The learners' responses to the comprehension questions

Figure 6.7: The learners were able to answer the comprehension questions

The second task was to do a free writing activity emanating from the comprehension. Learners were expected to write a short message about HHP's passing and express their feelings about this. This activity was done during the second period after reading the comprehension. At the beginning of the period, I handed out worksheets to learners and explained that they had to write about how they felt since HHP passed on. There was no set structure to be followed, but they had to write any way they liked. I even mentioned that they could choose to send condolences to the family of HHP. I did not know what to expect from learners in this activity because they are not used to writing without following a specific format. The learners were all engaged and busy writing on their papers. Many seemed to have messages for the family, and they could share something to express their emotions. They were swift to complete and submit their messages.

The following are extracts (Figure 6.8) that show what learners expressed in their writings. The examples of what learners communicated include their emotions, messages of hope to the bereaved family, questions they had, and so on:

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> Rest in Pease ..HHP you be always
> ~~beamy~~ my favoriet musician. I feel like
> the is no music ~~ae~~ know but
> your music will last forever.

> A Giant has fallen. Jabba had left us. We are
> all frustrated & dissapointed. He killed himselve because of
> depression.

> Why did you kill yourSelf HHP
> if the was something that hurt
> you your should tell your familly
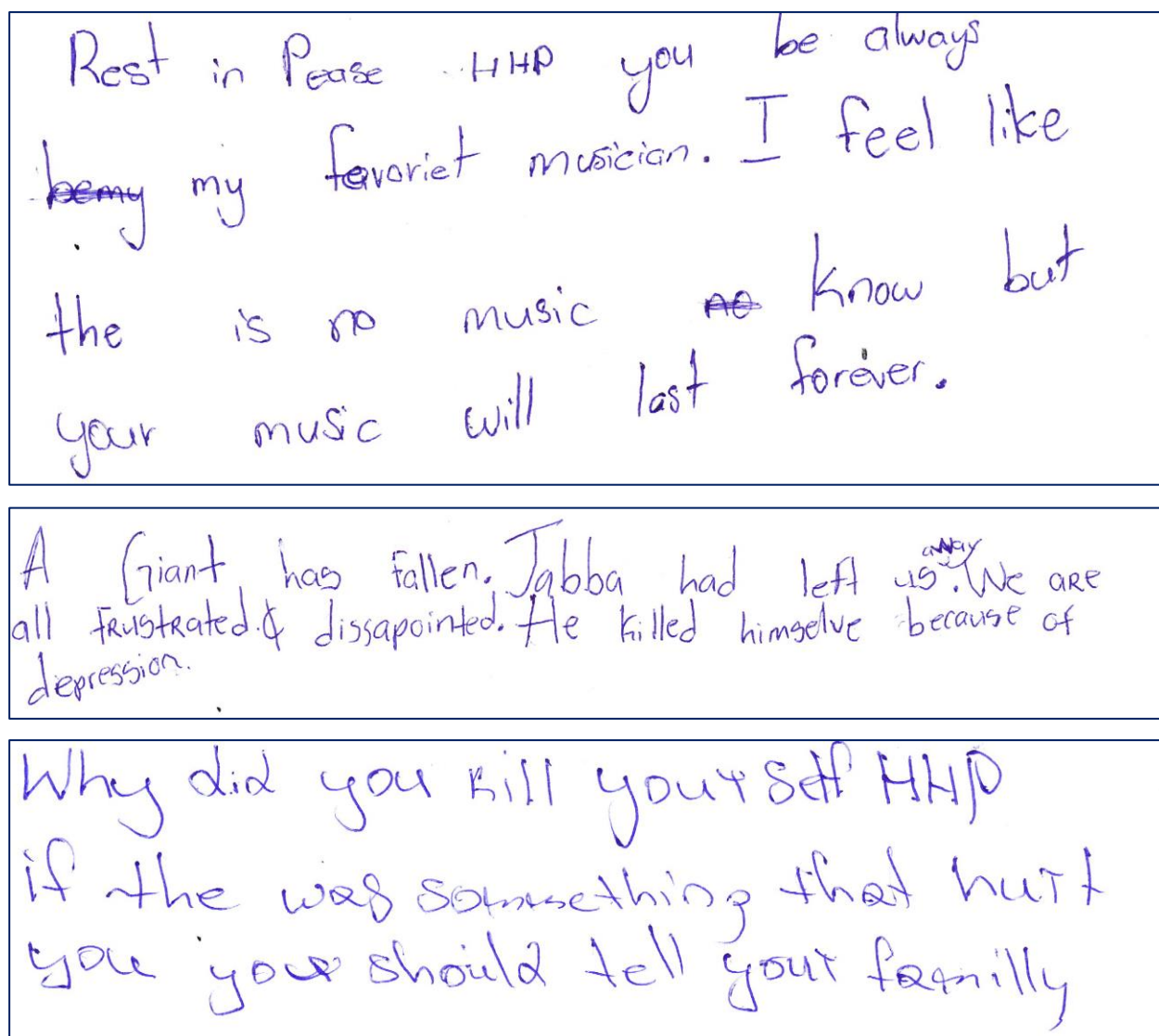
Figure 6.8: Examples of learner's messages from the free writing activity

Theriault et al. (2018) suggest that teachers should motivate learners to tackle creative writing topics that they are familiar with and interests them as it will inspire their commitment. Similarly, the above extracts of learner's work show that learners can write meaningfully and with a dedication to getting the message across through words if the topic is about their interests.

Journal entry

23 October 2018

I'm very happy that my lesson has gone well. My learners seem to have understood everything in the comprehension. It surprised me how they were listening attentively to the story. They know a lot about things that are happening in the entertainment industry. They could even tell which celebrity is doing what job. I just hope they are responding appropriately to my questions.

Lesson reflection

25 October 2018

The dilemma I encountered was to choose a reading comprehension that would fascinate all learners, not just specific individuals, because that would disadvantage other learners when responding to the given task.

My most useful discovery from this lesson was that all learners actively participated in the activity because they were familiar with the article's subject matter and it was relevant to their experiences. I think my learners would describe the lesson as enjoyable because it speaks about one of their favourite superstars, and it also allowed them to speak their mind in writing. The previous reading comprehension lessons were based on content knowledge that learners had no idea about. Such lessons were relevant to teachers who prepared the tasks and textbook writer, but irrelevant to children. I wish to continue to spend my time preparing comprehension lessons based on children's popular culture so that they can engage with interest in the activity. A new insight I gained about myself is that I can make learning and teaching relevant and meaningful to children by taking time to design reading and writing activities about children's interests.

A second comprehension reading was done after the creative writing activity. This was done in another English period on another day. The second comprehension was based on a different musical genre from the first one. I wanted to try to cater to the various music tastes. The English curriculum policy document (Department of Basic Education, 2011) stipulates one hour-long period per week to complete one reading comprehension activity. I decided to make this lesson

relevant to what learners knew and love. I had realised that the reading comprehension texts given in the learners' textbooks were typically about things that they were unlikely to be familiar with or interested in. I sourced a reading comprehension passage that was suitable for my study and for the learners because it was related to music, a vital part of children's popular culture. I felt it could be a resource for future creative writing. The passage was taken from the youth magazine called *Move*. *Move* is a South African magazine that appeals to young people. The passage was about a gospel queen called Rebecca Malope. She is well-respected by the gospel community. She is a gospel living legend because she has sung for more than three decades, with more than 30 Gospel music albums.

I first showed them the front page with a big picture of Rebecca and then asked them to name the person they saw. They all said, *It is Rebecca Malope*. I then told them that they were about to read a story about her. I then asked learners to tell me more of what they know about her. They then started to put their hands up. Slindile said, *She is a gospel music singer. We usually see her on television*. Sphilile said, *She has her own television talk show on SABC 2 on Sundays*. I responded to him immediately and said to him, *No, Rebecca does not own a talk show, but she is a music programme presenter*. Then I asked them to name the show that she presents. Aphiwe said, *It's Gospel Time and is shown on SABC 2 between 9 and 10*. Andile put up his hand and interjected, *I saw her on television selling MaQ washing powder*. Other learners agreed and said, *Yes it is true, Sir*. I said, *Yes, he is correct, but she is advertising the washing powder for us to go to shops to buy*. Learners were quite excited and were talking to their partners about how they knew Rebecca. Everybody wanted to tell me how and where they knew her.

I then told them that we would read Rebecca's life story and answer questions at the end. I started by asking them to find words that they did not know so that they could comprehend what they were about to read. I wrote the words that they did not understand on the chalkboard and then I asked them to find meanings in their dictionaries. Once I was done explaining words on the chalkboard, I asked them for volunteers to read aloud the passage.

Different learners from different groups started reading aloud. They understood the story because, when they got to read where it said that Rebecca went for the radio interview and did not understand any English words and she just laughed at the DJ, all learners laughed at that unpleasant experience of hers. Others could not believe what they were reading, as they knew

her as someone of high class and fluent in English when she speaks on television. I asked them some questions, probing them to speak out their minds of what they thought of her. Sphilile commented, *It is unbelievable that Rebecca never went to school as she is so successful and very good at expressing herself*. After they had finished reading, I asked them to answer questions based on the passage. The questions that were asked are:

1. *Rebecca Malope is popularly known as who in South Africa?*
2. *Where was Rebecca Malope born?*
3. *Which town or city is referred to as a City of Gold?*
4. *Which talent competition did she enter?*
5. *How do you think she felt at the end of the competition when she entered the first time? Why did she feel that way?*
6. *What was she invited for on Metro FM radio station after winning the competition?*
7. *Why did the DJ end up playing her music for an hour?*
8. *Which other music genres can Rebecca sing?*
9. *Is it true that nothing can stand in her way? Why?*
10. *What lesson have you learnt from this story?*

Unlike reading comprehension passages from textbooks, the learners did not seem to have challenges with understanding and responding. They were all quiet and busy re-reading and writing. No learners asked me for clarity on any questions. This was unusual for an English reading comprehension task and suggested that they felt confident that they understood everything. The following are examples of learners' responses to the questions (see Figures 6.9 and 6.10):

1. South Africa's queen of gospel
2. At kwanyamazane in Mpumalanga.
3. Johranesburg
4. fame talent search competition
5. She felt sad, because the competition was unsuccesful
6. To ask how is she feeling after winning the competition
7. Because Rebecca couldn't answer him.
8. Pop music
9. It is true because she couldn't speak english but that did not let her down.
10. That nothing should let you down.

Figure 6.9: Answers given by the learner after reading the comprehension about a popular gospel singer

1. Yvonne Chaka Chaka
2. At kanyamazana in Mpumalanga.
3. It is I-Goli.
4. Shell road to fame, talent.
5. She felt bittly bit sad. Because it was ha first time
6. To interview
7. It is that she did not Answered questions and she doesn't know english
8. PoP
9. Yes. Because she is a person who did not give up and she tried to complete her challenges.
10. Not only Man are strong and not to give up.

Figure 6.10: An example of answers given after reading the comprehension about the Gospel musician

Journal entry

29 October 2018

Learners were very excited and shocked at the same time to read about some real experiences encountered by their favourite musician. They even learnt the artist's private life, besides her music career. They were very attentive and focused in their reading as they laughed and sympathised where it was necessary. I just hope they will be able to respond to questions in writing.

Lesson reflection

30 October 2018

My most useful discovery was that learners know more than what is written in the comprehension text if it is about their favourite artists or people in the entertainment industry. Answering questions about a comprehension text based on a popular star becomes an enjoyable task for learners. I think learners would describe the lesson as thrilling and very informative because it relates to a person they know very well and not a stranger, as is the case with most reading comprehension tasks. This lesson was different from other lessons I did before I started self-study research. Previously, I was using comprehension passages about complete strangers or people not familiar to learners. I wish to continue to prepare comprehension tasks with content of their popular culture so that they are able to respond with enthusiasm. A new understanding I have gained is that it is possible to make teaching and learning of reading comprehension meaningful and fascinating by using comprehension texts with the content of children's interests. Next time, I wish to ensure that I include a question or section to write creatively about the comprehension subject matter. If time permitted, I would have done a creative writing lesson where learners would write a descriptive essay about the person they read about in the comprehension lesson.

Instagram (Social media)

This was one more research lesson that was done in early 2019. This was in Technology, which is a subject I teach in Grade 7. Because of the delays experienced in 2018, I continued with my research project for one more lesson in the first term of 2019. The learner participants had now progressed to Grade 7. The learners I worked with in Grade 7 were the same group I had worked with the previous year. I still had consent from their parents or guardians to participate in the research.

I felt the need to do another social media lesson to follow on from the previous year's Twitter lesson. I wanted to see if there was any connection between the two lessons in terms of the content shared by the learners. Furthermore, I wanted to explore how visual images can be used by learners for creative expression. Luthuli et al. (2020) suggest that visual methods are stimuli for communication when used by children. These authors explain how visual images can motivate children to express their thoughts and feelings orally or in writing. Moskal (2017) concurs that using visual method strategies can be child-centred as it can prompt inner speech that could be expressed in writing or orally.

During the first term in Technology, the work scheduled to be taught was communication skills. Teaching communication skills involved introducing graphical communication where learners had to learn how to use pictures and symbols to communicate a message in some way. Therefore, it was for that reason that I decided to integrate the Instagram lesson with graphical communication, because they both employ visuals in sending messages.

I had planned for the lesson to take one hour because Technology is allocated only two hours per week. I introduced the lesson by explaining the purpose of graphics: pictures paint a thousand words. I then asked learners to identify some informative signs they might have seed on the road and elsewhere. Each group was allocated a symbol to explain. Sipho from the first group said, *The picture shows that there are toilets around that area for boys and girls.* I agreed. From the second group Slindile answered, *The picture shows that you are close to a garage if you need petrol.* They all said, *Yes* meaning it was the correct answer. For picture number three, I asked Sipho to answer. He said, *The picture shows that you should not make noise by hooting your car in that area.* I then told them that all their answers were correct and that they could now realise how pictures convey messages without using a single word. People can interpret what pictures show in their own way.

I then explained that people who converse on social media also use graphic communication to clarify certain points and get the message across. Aphile raised up her hand and said, *WhatsApp has emoticons that we can send without writing words to show our feelings.* I agreed with her answer. I then asked them if they had heard of Instagram and to explain what they knew about it. Some learners raised their hands to give answers. Many of them seemed to have no idea about Instagram. I think this was so because they had stated in the first lesson that WhatsApp and Facebook were the common platforms to them and many family members. I also understood that some were not exposed to smartphones at home. I then pointed to the boy called Thokozani, who said, *My mom is on Instagram. She likes to post on it.* Nokwanda interjected and said, *Instagram is for people who like to show off about their lavish lifestyle.* Dalisu said, *Instagram is for high-class people that can afford things.* I was also learning from them because I was not familiar with this social media platform, as I was not part of it.

I then explained that Instagram is used mostly by people who like to share pictures with others. The message is sent through using visuals rather than words. People want to use this social media to show themselves in good places or to advertise their products. Other people like to post and share their objects of interest with their friends and contacts. Posting on Instagram is viewed only by the contacts that you know. Posts are not accessible to strangers. For people to have access to Instagram, they need to have an account that acts as an address so that messages get to the correct individual. Finally, I showed them a blank page of Instagram and explain what each part was for and where to post pictures. I then gave them instructions for the work they had to do at home: *Use the Instagram page and post your favourite pictures of your interests or popular culture. Look for and cut out pictures of your interests from magazines and newspapers, then paste them onto the sheet.*

For the learners' activity, I handed out Instagram worksheet papers to all learners. I told them that they could ask their parents to help them find magazines to get pictures. At the end, I asked them to suggest the submission date for their worksheets. Dalisu put up his hand and answered, *One whole week will be enough, Sir.* I agreed as it was enough time for them to collect, cut and paste pictures. The learners looked happy to participate in the task after being informed that Instagram uses visual images to convey messages to others. Many of the learners readily submitted their work, and that showed me that they enjoyed doing it.

The following are examples of learners' interests posted on the Instagram page worksheet (see Figures 6.11- 6.13). The learners' posts were about their interests, such as fashion, toys, the latest cell phones and many more. I saw the learners' posts as a form of creative visual expression and felt that the objects posted by learners could be used as resources for future creative writing tasks:

Figure 6.11: Fashion posted by a learner on Instagram page

Figure 6.12: Instagram page with children's interests of music and toys

Figure 6.13: Instagram page by a learner with modern gadgets

Journal entry

13 March 2019

My English lesson from last year on Twitter blended well with the Technology lesson. Learners that were advanced with social media responded to my questions and understood the task. However, learners that are not exposed to Instagram on cell phones were not fully engaged in the lesson. But, they understood the task they were to carry out after teaching them about Instagram. I just hope parents will assist them with magazines and newspapers to get pictures of their interests.

Lesson reflection

14 March 2019

The dilemma I encountered in teaching the Instagram lesson was that many learners did not know much about it. I was worried that if learners were not familiar with the content, they would not carry out the task with a full understanding of it. My most useful discovery was that learners easily understand visual language and can interpret it. If all learners could be given a chance to have access to real Instagram, they could learn and become experts because it works with cellular phones. I think learners would describe the lesson as enjoyable, because it involved working with pictures of their favourite objects as children.

This lesson was different because, in previous Technology lessons, I did not deviate from the content stipulated in the curriculum policy document. For this lesson I drew on the children's visual communication knowledge from social media and merged it with the communication content that was to be taught. I think visual expression can help children compose and write creatively by using the pictures as their central reference point. If time permitted I would have extended this lesson by asking learners to write a descriptive paragraph about their posts.

I wish to continue to integrate the general knowledge of children's interests with prescribed content. Because not all learners are fortunate enough to own cell phones or are familiar with different social media platforms, next time, I need to bring and show

them, from a real cellular phone, how people use Instagram, so that every learner can
have a better understanding.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Chapter Six, I have portrayed how I explored children's popular culture as a resource for English creative writing in three Grade 6 English lessons and a Grade 7 Technology lesson. I intended to reflect on the lessons to learn from them about teaching creative writing in a stimulating way, to nurture a flair for it. In this chapter, I represented lessons that had to do with children's interests, such as music and social media. I gave a detailed account of what transpired in the class during the teaching and learning. For each lesson, I reflected on the dilemmas I faced and the most useful discoveries from each lesson.

I showed how I planned my lessons to try to elicit creativity and originality. I conducted. I also explained how I changed my teaching methods to create a teaching environment where learners' knowledge from their social backgrounds is used to develop creative writing. These lessons helped me realise that children are unique individuals from different backgrounds with diverse social experiences that need to be recognised and applied.

Children are the custodians and are knowledgeable of their popular culture. Creative writing can be nurtured by the teacher who envisages improvement in their teaching strategies by using learners' real-life experiences and interests as reading and writing topics. This chapter highlighted that learners' attention and focus can be attained in creative writing lessons if the content is about their interests. The learners are fascinated when teachers make the learning and teaching pleasurable by incorporating popular culture content. Learners may fail to be inspired to write about topics based on the teacher's ideas and outdated popular culture.

Consideration of learners' social interaction is paramount for the successful teaching of creative writing. Therefore, the writing teacher must create an environment that is encouraging and full of opportunities for learners to freely express their knowledge of popular culture and fill in the teacher's knowledge gaps. These lessons have shown me that creative writing can be taught as an imaginative process. However, this requires support from a dedicated teacher because it is time-consuming and demands a lot of planning and effort on the teacher's part, especially in a large class.

In the following chapter, Chapter Seven, I re-examine the data generated from remembering my childhood experiences and the classroom lessons I taught (as represented in Chapters Three to Six). I use collage and poetry as arts-based modes of analysis.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MY LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING USING CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

Introduction

In this chapter, Chapter Seven, I simultaneously respond to my first and second research questions. The first research question is: *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* In answering this question, I draw on memory stories in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. The second research question is: *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In responding to this research question, I draw on the lesson stories in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

I consider my learning about children's popular culture and creative writing from a sociocultural perspective. As Woodard and Kline (2016) point out, taking such a stance acknowledges that "writing is not just a cognitive process but social and cultural one" (p. 207). Likewise, Peterson and Rajendram (2019) note that, from a sociocultural standpoint, writing is seen as a social exercise positioned in certain times and spaces. This highlights the importance of considering social and cultural influences and social settings when teaching creative writing.

I began my self-study research expecting that exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching creative writing could provide me with alternatives and appropriate strategies. Theriault, Allaire and Gagnon (2018) contend that for young children, creating a piece of writing is a complex task, which demands teachers to reflect on dynamics that can be instrumental to the improvement and sustenance of learner enthusiasm to keep on trying. Similarly, I was concerned that the learners I taught found it challenging to approach creative writing with flair. Reilly and Reilly (2005) point out that "not all children like writing about imaginary situations and prefer to connect their writing with real-life experiences, so it is important to give choices to include both the imagined and the real world for children who prefer more factual writing" (p.78). Likewise, I anticipated that using popular culture could allow learners to choose topics of their choice, relating to personal experiences and tangible, real objects they like and own. I hoped this will not confine them to a specific topic or limit their vocabulary and thoughts.

Popular culture dominates children's minds and it forms parts of their everyday lives and childhoods. Yoon and Templeton (2019) mention that children are "social beings with their own desires and intentions, and understanding and critically examining these desires transforms our own understanding about identity and culture" (p. 60). Engel (2011) explains that interest is crucial in primary school children's development because when they work on tasks based on topics they have continued interest in, they are more motivated. They also acquire more knowledge and remember what they have learnt for a more extended period. In my understanding, this means that teaching writing using what learners desire is more likely to help them remember what they are learning. And as teachers, we will learn more about who they are and their cultural backgrounds.

Making meaning through collage and poetry

In searching for meaningful answers to both research questions, I employed collage and poetry as arts-based methods to analyse and reflect deeply to inform and transform my teaching practice. As explained in Chapter Two, I created a collage to distil and reflect on my learning from my past lived experiences and the classroom lessons. The collage was made of pictures from magazines pasted around the central concept of 'children's popular culture' on a big chart (Figure 7.1). Each image represented an aspect that I had constructed from my learning through the data generation process. This process helped me gain a deeper understanding and express my thoughts visually before the writing stage. According to McKay (2019), as a research practice, "collage can be used to facilitate reflective discussion that allows the collage maker opportunity to re-examine experiences and develop self and personal skills for the future" (p. 4). Thus, this multidimensional arts-based process was vital for me to think back and look forward in ways that could result in personal and professional growth. It also prompted an oral presentation and reflection when I showed my collage in a supervision session with my critical friends and research supervisor.

During the presentation, I elaborated on what had transpired and stood out for me in the classroom when I conducted my data generation lessons. At the same time, I gave an account of my learning from my memories concerning children's popular culture and creative writing. My critical friends and the supervisor had a chance to contribute at the end of my presentation, sharing their thoughts and ideas on certain issues. The whole presentation was audio-recorded and then I transcribed it. The collage presentation and discussion helped me filter and explain what I had learnt and understood through my memory-work and the lessons I conducted.

Figure 7.1: The collage representing my learning about children's popular culture

For the interpretation and analysis of data, creating and presenting a collage helped me establish three main themes (explained in Chapter Two):

1. Children's popular culture is dynamic;

2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to, and

3. Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.

From there, I had to think deeply and critically about each theme's significance and its implications for teaching creative writing using children's popular culture as a resource. I ensured that the claims made could be illustrated by excerpts and examples from the memory stories or classroom stories (Chapters Three to Six). Furthermore, I had to relate the carefully selected exemplars and examples to relevant literature, to provide scholarly context "[deepen] my writing, [extend] its implications, [ground] its insights and, most of all, explicitly [acknowledge] the contributions of others to [my] thinking" (Nash, 2019, p. 67).

As another arts-based component of developing the themes, I composed 'found' poetry (Cross & Holyoake, 2017), using words from my memory stories and lesson stories. I used this poetry to distil my learning from my personal history and the classroom activities. I created a poem to

communicate each theme in a concise, evocative manner. I used poetry as an arts-based process because it supports a profound and rich reflection that includes different emotions during professional transformation (McKay, 2019). Pithouse-Morgan (2019) explains that poetic professional learning enhances self-insight and helps teachers further understand their professional experiences. She argues that its primary purpose is to use poetic language for educative intentions of researching and enhancing professional learning of the teacher-researcher. Furthermore, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019b) advocate that poetic professional learning has the potential not to only change professional habits; it can increase self-insight and compassion and result in positive social change and advancement. Likewise, Furman et al. (2008) assert that writing poetry is a useful strategy for personal understanding and self-reflection and exploring the world. It helps the writer explore individual strengths, potentials, and mistakes. Hanauer (2012) explains that writing poetry is a useful strategy that can help the writer create and explore her deepest thoughts and experiences. Therefore, engaging in poetic learning helped me realise the most personally and professionally meaningful aspects of the stories in my research data representation chapters.

Writing poetry helped me extract and reflect on important issues and emotions embedded in my stories. I then selected the most significant ones and changed them into poetic form. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019b) argue that poetry is a creative approach to analysing and interpreting qualitative research data. Writing interpretive poetry helped me select and highlight each theme's main points in an abridged version. Furman et al. (2010) argue that poetic forms of writing are usually highly condensed and thus can be easy to absorb. Coen et al. (2018) concur that "poetry is an economy of words that at once shrinks content while painting a holistic picture of experience" (p. 560). I think each of the poems that introduce my discussion of the themes gives a clear understanding of the thematic focus. I carefully selected words for the poems to provide accurate, clear, and to the point portrayals of my learning. The topic titles of poems also helped me to name the themes that I was constructing. Gregory (1990) points out that a poem creates images because its words are specific, full of life, information, meaning and paints a fuller picture for the mind to see. I offer an interpretive poem for each theme to invite the reader to feel and create mental pictures of my learning.

My learning about children's popular culture and creative writing

In what follows, I present my understanding of the first two main themes: *1. Children's popular culture is dynamic; and 2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to*. The second theme is organised into two sub-themes: *a) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family;* and *b) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers*. I present the third theme in Chapter Eight.

To introduce my discussion of each theme or sub-theme, I present an interpretive poem. I then focus on what I have learnt about children's popular culture. After that, I consider what I have learnt about children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class. In both sections, I discuss my learning about children's popular culture as an aspect of interest for individual children.

Theme 1: Children's popular culture is dynamic

The dynamic popular culture
Popular culture is evolving
It is like a chameleon
Changing its colours
It does not remain the same
Because of the time and place

Every time is changing
Every place is changing
From generation to generation

Gone are the days of letters
When children wrote
Using paper and pen
Now, they text each other
Using technological gadgets

Gone are the days

When children enjoyed
Play with improvised toys
Now they play with
Manufactured toys and computer games

Popular culture was changing
And currently is evolving
However, popular culture
Will always be there
One replacing another
For all generations to come.

As a teacher of the 21st century, I have learnt that I need to consult with the learners to be at the same level with what they know of children's popular culture as it is continuously changing with time. In taking a sociocultural perspective on learning, Lantolf and Thorn (2015) note that "developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic and historically formed settings such as family life and peer group interaction, and in institutional contexts like schooling, organised sport activities and work places, to name only a few" (p. 197). Furthermore, Lenters and Winters (2013) articulate that all teaching approaches to reading and writing are entrenched within contextual practices and cannot be separated from or comprehended out of context. This means that teachers need to familiarise themselves with all aspects of children's popular culture because children have cultural experiences of different settings and interactions that are important for the classroom developmental processes. Likewise, Yoon and Templeton (2019) argue that interactions across different locations develop our understanding as teachers of what learners do and say at any given time. This means that children's interactions and contacts with others from various social contexts influence their academic performance.

Popular culture is indeed dynamic. In the past, we enjoyed participating in children's popular culture that now seems old-fashioned. Some of my childhood popular culture objects and activities do not exist anymore now. Therefore, this means that children's popular culture is dynamic because it does not remain the same throughout all generations. Even though, as Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) point out, some objects of popular culture remain prevalent for several decades, they keep on reinventing themselves as new versions for new generations.

In other words, children's popular culture is seasonal because it comes with time and new developments. Much of the popular culture common to us during the 1980s is somehow not relevant to today's children, although the primary purpose for the inception remains the same. Sometimes, the children do not even know the objects we used for our past children's popular culture or sometimes make it a joke if I show them objects that we once used. Today, children consider those things such as music cassettes as outdated, and they have no special meaning for them. This change happened because the world at large is experiencing significant developments in all spheres of life.

Therefore, the lives of children of today are dominated by modern children's popular culture that is different in many ways from what I experienced in my childhood. In my memory stories in (Chapter Three), I make a note of this comparison:

> *During that time, technology was not as advanced as it is today. There were no computers and cell phones which have changed lives for the better with communication. All the technological devices we have now have changed traditional writing culture using paper and pen, to screenwriting. These tools are much faster than paper and pen because they send messages instantly.*

I made a note of this when I recalled my memories of teachers' handwritten messages at school. However, during my childhood days, we used the old traditional method of getting the message across through paper and pen. This means that the objects or tools used for communication with other people have evolved because of technological developments. Therefore, even schools require to be 'modernised' to accommodate today's children (Theriault et al., 2018). Furthermore, I make a note of what was popular for communication in my childhood in the following extract from Chapter Three:

> *Writing messages on a piece of paper was an ideal mode of communication for people in my childhood. This was a very cheap and convenient way to get messages across. At my home, the writing was done in the form of letters. My parents were illiterate; nonetheless, they dictated and instructed us, children, to write meaningful messages for them on paper. Letters were written to be sent via the post office to those people that lived far from us. Sometimes, my parents dictated short notes or messages that were to be hand-delivered by ourselves, such as invitations to nearby relatives and neighbours.*

We sometimes created our objects of popular culture ourselves, or we improvised to have them. According to Yoon and Templeton (2019), researchers of childhood must see children as cultural participants and producers because they influence their sociocultural context and give meaning to culture. For example, in recalling my childhood memories, I saw that our popular culture objects did not entirely depend on the money we had to buy them. Instead, we often produced them out of our creativity in our own space. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) argue that informal public play settings provide children with the freedom to enjoy play with their choice of popular culture objects. There are no strict rules that govern those places and there are is nothing that could incite adults to comment. These authors argue that this promotes abstract thinking and brainstorming. Similarly, in my childhood, we had to think out of the box to create playthings of our popular culture. Today's children are not necessarily familiar with such objects because they were not designed to be toys. As children of that time, we thought and created items to entertain ourselves or play with. The following extract from Chapter Four bears the testimony to this:

> *We had no safe drinking water. The only source of drinking water was a nearby river. We got water using 25 litre containers on wheelbarrows. As children, we enjoyed and loved fetching water because we got a chance to push one another with wheelbarrows. We improvised for our play enjoyment. Playing with a wheelbarrow required a lot of power as we pulled and pushed the load. Balancing skill was also necessary because we had to be very careful when pushing one another. It was sometimes dangerous, as there was a risk of falling because it was easy to hurt yourself. We had to take turns. The pusher would be the rider and vice versa.*

The above extract shows that children can use the available objects in their space to fit into the popular culture of play. Furthermore, financial instability never deterred us from owning popular culture items that we liked. To illustrate that money was not the main issue for the children's popular culture of my time, the following extract from Chapter Four reveals how we shared knowledge for the creation of objects of popular culture:

> *To enjoy playing with a spinning top, one required a group of friends or participants with sets of strings and toppies. This reminds me of my primary school friends who even taught me how to make homemade toppies, which was extremely dangerous because we*

made needles with iron nails. They taught me to improvise in case I did not have the money to buy one.

The above extract shows that children can do whatever it takes to own a popular culture object. We were motivated to share knowledge because our common aim was to possess the item of popular culture.

When teachers research and develop themselves concerning the current popular culture that can make their teaching more meaningful and relevant to learners' creative writing. This knowledge is crucial to teachers because they can use it to stimulate creative writing in their lessons. When I compare my childhood culture and today's popular culture, there is a big difference. I make a note of this advancement in the following extract from Chapter Five:

> *Learners started asking questions to ensure that they were bringing relevant objects for the task. One girl asked, Sir, teachers don't allow us to bring cellular phones to school because it is against the learners' code of conduct. What will happen to me if I get caught? Will it not be confiscated? I responded to her, If your special object is a cell phone, please bring it to me first thing in the morning so that I will keep it in a safe place. Another boy asked me, Sir, I have a big toy car controlled by a remote, can I bring it? I replied, Yes you can bring it. Another girl asked, I have a teddy bear, can I bring it? I answered her, Yes bring it. I concluded by emphasising that it should be something that they were comfortable to show and to share its story with the other classmates.*

The above extract shows that today's children often own modern toys to play with, unlike my childhood friends and me, who could not afford to buy toys. Mitchell and Reid-Welsh (2002) highlight that a child's bedroom at home is rich with popular culture artefacts because children are in charge of their territory. Therefore, to make their teaching relevant, teachers need to understand how children live and their school community. This means that if teachers understand what matters to children, they will realise that they need to adapt to current knowledge of culture and expect to read about popular culture objects in children's writing.

Teachers also need to understand that the socio-economic status from home plays a significant role in determining the knowledge of the culture learners bring to school. Teaching creative

writing using children's popular culture as a resource with some learners from impoverished home backgrounds was challenging. The challenge was that these learners from under-privileged homes came to school without any knowledge of modern children's popular culture. For example, these children from financially unstable families did not own modern technological devices such as televisions, cellular phones, hi-fis, and so on. So they sometimes had difficulty writing because they lacked content knowledge for topics of children's popular culture. This challenge is illustrated in the following extract from Chapter Four:

> *Furthermore, as a teacher, I should offer learners a chance to have the first-hand experience of this kind of entertainment because some learners are less privileged if they are born to poor families and so are unlikely to be able to afford to go to the cinema.*

Furthermore, this is also evident in the following excerpt from Chapter Six:

> *Other children confirmed that they did not know anything about this social media platform. This showed me the need to familiarise all learners with the relevant activity to move from the same level of understanding....I had to capacitate learners to engage in this activity in the classroom media because I realised that not all learners are exposed to smartphones at home with social media platforms.*

As a teacher, I had to find ways to make sure that learners could understand how social media worked by planning lessons that would let them engage in the activity in the classroom before they could write independently. This also contributed to the delay in my completion of research lessons.

To sum up, teachers need to continually update their knowledge of popular culture and understand its potential impact on creative writing. Because of the dynamic nature of children's popular culture that is continuously changing, teachers need to familiarise themselves with the latest trends. Peterson (2014) explains that if teachers understand the children's passions, they will value the importance of offering children freedom of choice when they decide topics for creative writing.

Furthermore, teachers need to understand the sociocultural upbringing of the children that they teach. This is important because much of the children's popular culture that learners bring to

school is constructed at home, an important stakeholder in education and the school community. Yoon and Templeton (2019) argue that "children's school lives and performance are intimately tied up with their creative and social lives outside of school". As Moletsane (2005) highlighted, teachers must recognise that childhood is socially created and experienced through practices and social relationships in homes, societies, and social organisations.

Theme 2: Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to

By reflecting on my childhood popular culture, I have seen that people children are close to can influence children's popular culture. As they are essential in children's lives, their actions, behaviours, and interactions with children impact children's upbringing, culture, and attitude towards learning. Mitchel and Reid-Walsh (2002) argue that children are born into and steeped in culture by parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends even before they are born. Through re-examining my memory stories and lesson stories, I have identified two sub-themes about people that are close to children. These are*: (a) children's popular culture can be influenced by family; (b) children's popular culture can be influenced by peers.*

(a) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family

Family
The first teachers of children
Are their family members
Parents, siblings, guardians
and grandparents are
All the best teachers of
Popular culture, morals and values

Parents teach respect
Parents teach survival skills
Siblings teach to hold a pencil
Siblings teach writing
Friends teach how to socialise
And keep themselves entertained

Home experiences and interactions

Both lay the strong

Solid literacy foundation for

The teachers to build on

Parents instil a love for popular culture

That they value and afford

I have realised that the family can influence children's popular culture. Yoon (2014) asserts that "children are part of multiple social and cultural worlds before entering school spaces" (p. 112). Likewise, Bromley (1996) argues that home experiences and interactions play a crucial role in developing literacy for schooling and academic purposes. Every learner is shaped and moulded by interactions at home before coming to school.

The parents and other family members are the first teachers of informal knowledge, including children's popular culture. Mitchel and Reid-Walsh (2002) state that close family members to the unborn baby await the birth with popular culture artefacts, which are often gifts. Every family has its values, norms and cultures that they want to preserve and instil in their children at young ages. Therefore, most parents and family members strive to provide such thrilling experiences to their children's upbringing. The following image from my collage (Figure 7.2) shows my realisation of family importance for children's popular culture.
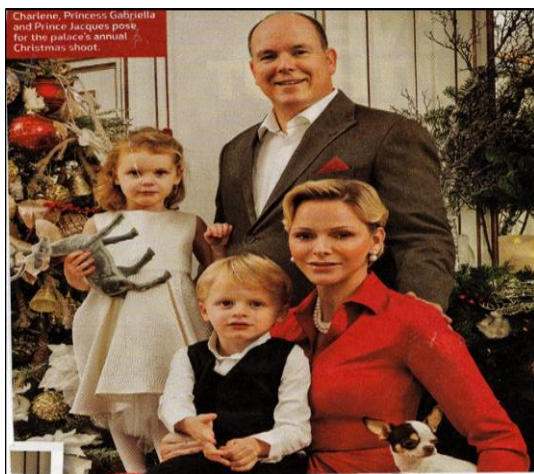

Figure 7.2: Families are custodians of children's popular culture

Families instil and orientate their children with knowledge of popular culture at a tender age. This begins and occurs when parents prepare for the new-born baby at home. They often start

buying children's popular culture objects and preparing a child's bedroom based on their gender. Likewise, Mitchel and Reid-Walsh (2002) highlight that the baby clothing is gender- and colour-coded and is often purchased before the birth of the baby, as well as bedroom linen. After that, children continue to receive these objects with the influence of others close to the family and commercial industry advertising. Parents like to give children a sense of identity through cultural orientation (Micthell & Reid-Walsh, 2002).

The following extract from Chapter Four bears the testimony of my parents' influence on my childhood popular culture:

> *As a growing, young African boy, I had to engage in the cow herding activity (ukwalusa). My parents considered this very important because they believed it prepared boys to grow to be strong men and taught many skills. All boys were expected by the community members to take part in this popular culture of cow herding. It did not matter whether your parents owned cows or not. Boys were expected to participate with neighborhood boys.*

Other significant family members such as brothers and sisters are also custodians of children's popular culture. The interactions they have create a longlasting effect on children. To illustrate, in the following extract from Chapter Three shows my sister's influence on me:

> *When we entered school I had already started doing writing informally. I was trying to copy what my elder sister was doing as she used to write after school. She sometimes tried to teach me how to hold a pencil. We were using old pieces of cardboard as slates and we used coal as a pencil to write..*

A home is a rich place with children's popular culture experiences that could be linked to writing activities at school. Clark (2018) agrees that the pleasure of writing, writing consistency and mind-set towards writing are influenced by the children's home environment. Likewise, Heppner (2017) argues that writing is allied with the conviction that young people learn to write better if they get more chance for writing, meaning they should be more exposed to writing. Also, Bromley (1996) concurs that children come to school with the experience of a wide variety of writing practices from home. This means that they come with some writing knowledge that teachers at school need to develop further. On the other hand, significant others

such as family members can motivate and encourage children to engage in writing tasks in and out of school at the early stages.

I noted how my learners wrote poems about their family members' influence on them. This is demonstrated in the following stanzas from learners' poems in Chapter Six:
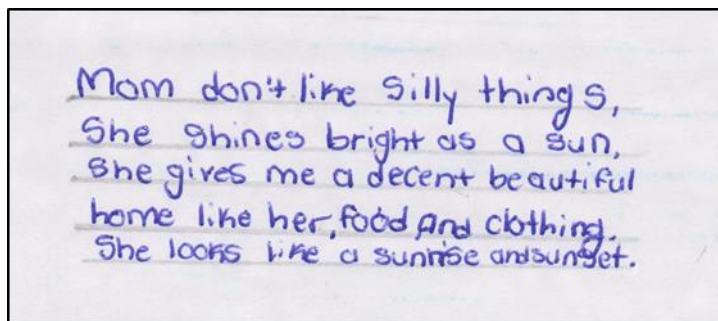
Figure 7.3: "Mom": An extract of a stanza from a praise poem about mom
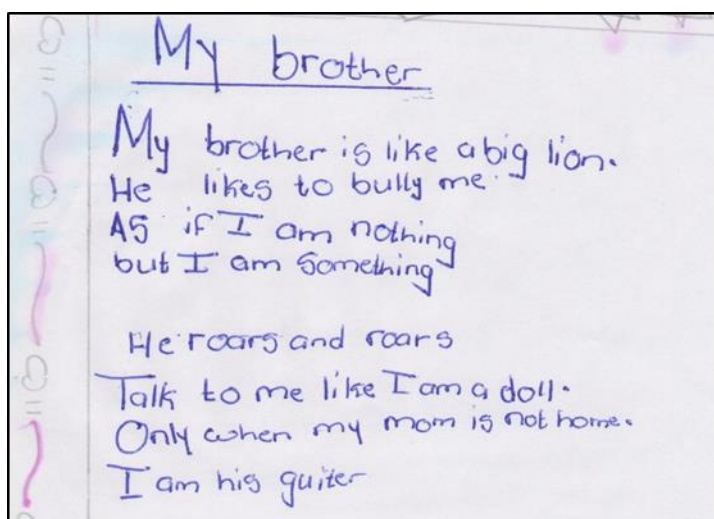
Figure 7.4: "My brother": A two-stanza poem written by a learner

The first poem above demonstrates how family members can play a crucial part in providing popular culture resources at home. Unfortunately, however, as shown in the second poem, family members sometimes create an unpleasant lived experience. This could be something that learners can write about in creative writing.

As shown by my memory stories, a family's financial status does not necessarily deter children from participating in children's popular culture. However, if parents are not financially stable, they might not find it easy to provide their children with fashionable objects. For example, the children may want toys from a toy shop. If they do not receive these, they may feel left out and

not part of the 'in' group when they are playing. In my lessons, I noticed that the children who were lucky enough to have such popular culture objects often felt more confident because they could make conversation about certain things in discussions with peers. For children to own manufactured items of popular culture, they sometimes need to get financial assistance from adults or parents. The following extract from Chapter Three shows this impediment:

> *I can recall a friend I considered more privileged than myself because his parents could afford to buy him luxury items such as toys and bicycles. I did not own any music cassettes unless it happened that somebody would have dubbed it for me. My friend had told me that his parents had bought him a music cassette with that popular song that was in demand. He was a very kind person and was always willing to share his belongings and even his toys. He understood my socioeconomic status, and so he lent me his shoes on special days. For example, when we had some school outings, I used his shoes as he had more than one pair. Most of the time, my shoes were in bad condition.*

This memory showed me that children often do anything in their power to keep abreast of current popular culture, and they are willing to share it among themselves.

(b) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers

Peers and influence

Peers are perpetrators of popular culture

They know how to persuade one another

To be part of the group

They make one another

To feel welcomed

Peers build strong relationships

Which results in friendship

Teamwork takes priority

Unity gives them strength

Achievements are celebrated together

Disappointments are also shared

Peers can influence could be

Negative or positive influence

The individual has a choice to make

By studying children's popular culture, I have learnt that peers greatly influence others to participate in the culture. In the circles of peers and friends, learners get pleasure because there are rapport and interaction. Peers play an essential role in children's popular culture because they can make the cultural experience lively and joyful. Peers can influence the children's popular culture because they learn to value and understand others' opinions. Peer culture offers children a chance to learn from one another, work towards the same goal of teamwork, and share things such as objects, emotions, success, and knowledge. The following picture from my collage (Figure 7.5) illustrates the value of peers:

Figure 7.5: Peers in celebration after participating in sport

Peer culture sometimes encourages and builds unity and teamwork amongst group members of peers. Most of the time peers are united by engaging in play. Children also learn to socialise and to make decisions while engaging in play. Yoon (2014) claims that "play flows out of friendship and friendship flow out of play" (p. 110). This means that play is a common factor for friendship. Similarly, Gregory (1990) believes playing is about learning at ease because when children play different games they learn some valuable skills. For children to enjoy and indulge in children's popular culture, they need others with the same interests and age group.

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This is highlighted in the following extract from my childhood memory story about cow herding (Chapter Four):

> *There were so many activities that we did and learnt while looking after cattle. Usually, we did our activities in the afternoon when the cattle had had enough from the pastures or bushes. We met and interacted with other boys from other villages, and we sometimes had to learn to fight if the need arose to defend our village mate from brutal attacks by other village boys. We taught one another stick fighting. If we fought, we never reported back at home because our parents understood that it was part of what we had to learn.*

When I recalled memory stories of my childhood popular culture objects, most of them reminded me of my peers with whom I shared my childhood experiences. I was reminded of those peers because they had played a crucial part by contributing positively to making me feel part of the culture. Similarly, Yoon and Templeton (2019) note "children in schools collaborate in play, performing their ideas through social interactions. They publicly declare their relationships with others through literacy, classroom events, and the formation of social group" (p. 60).

There are objects of popular culture that have a special connection with certain peer individuals. Some peers contributed positively and others negatively, but they all had an everlasting impact on my childhood memories. Looking back, I see how peers are teachers of children's popular culture because I learnt from them. I allude to this in Chapter Three:

> *Writing small love letters was one of the things we enjoyed doing as young boys at school. Recalling this popular culture activity from my childhood brings back memories of my friends who influenced me in learning to write juvenile love letters. Some of my friends were cleverer than the others, and consequently, they had a significant influence on the way we did things during our childhood.*

The above extract reveals the influence of peers on others' engagement in the popular culture of love letter writing. Gregory (1996) endorses that writing is a journey to the internal territory of the individual, which comprises "the human spirits, the heart and soul" (p. 1). We succeeded in writing and sending love letters because we knew what we wanted to voice out to be heard by the letter's receiver. We opted for letter writing because we were scared of verbal

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confrontation consequences. Gregory (1990) agrees that "writing is a completely silent way of talking; you write something down, then you let people hear your words without even being there to move your mouth. Tomorrow they can read it and know your mind again" (p. 34). I think we preferred a silent talking to girls so that they could have enough time to reread our minds over and over.

The peers' influence on children to engage in popular culture could provide learners with rich experiences that they could use at schools to write about real-life experiences for creative writing topics. And, as shown in my memory story, peers can contribute to the development of motivation and means of creative writing. According to Woodard and Kline (2016), writing and writers can improve through social contact with peers or friends over a period.

Furthermore, Bright (1995) states that learners need to choose their creative writing topics to become encouraged to engage in creative writing activities at school. Teachers could ask learners to select creative writing topics from currents popular culture trending at that particular time. It could be about fascinating issues such as sports or fashion. By so doing, teachers will find out what learners know and think about the topic. I also believe that this will help learners apply and use their informal knowledge for schooling purposes and show their experience's relevance. Woodard (2016) emphasises that "we must move from the narrowly prescribed school writing discourses found in most school district and stretch them into areas that can readily applied in the real world" (p. 210). This means that writing teachers have to modify their teaching plan to allow learners to apply knowledge from the real-world to creative writing.

Reflections

A useful discovery is that children's popular culture is a fascinating and essential aspect of children's lives, and it is very close to their hearts. From my childhood memories, I have discovered that love for children's popular culture was instilled in me by significant others close to me. These people had an everlasting impact on me because I can even now relate and associate them with particular objects of my childhood popular culture. It was not difficult to recall popular culture objects from my childhood because they were important as they gave me a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, I have realised that I need to know and understand the children's significant others in their lives because that will help me understand their experiences and what they are exposed to. The people in children's lives greatly influence who they are. Their influences could be positive or negative, but learners could choose when writing if they want to write about memories of unpleasant experiences. My role is to use this knowledge as a premise to move from to make the teaching of creative writing relevant to children's encounters.

A sociocultural theoretical perspective on learning has helped me to understand that creative writing is a process that is closely linked to learner's experiences of family life and peer group interaction. I have realised the importance of the learners' social interaction with significant others in their lives and that learners' contextual experiences significantly impact their learning at school.

Furthermore, a useful discovery regarding children's popular culture and creative writing is that all memory stories, whether of educative or non-educative experiences, could be used by teachers to inform the creative writing process and content. I have realised that the knowledge of popular culture outside the school setting needs to be utilised by teachers. In my schooldays, teachers seemed rigid and did not seem to consider children's popular culture relevant to teaching creative writing.

I also discovered from my memory-work that using popular culture in creative writing can give learners expressive freedom. The children can easily express their minds or themselves with pen and paper because they are at liberty to select what they feel comfortable writing about. They also want to show off to others that they are known and part of the larger crowd immersed in popular culture. Even if they struggle with writing, they will strive to find words that will send the reader's content message.

As a teacher, I must know that all knowledge and experience learners bring from outside school must be valued. I should use it to my advantage in improving the way I teach creative writing. Merging the prescribed content with popular culture knowledge can make learners realise that school and real-life experiences inform one another. I have seen how I can manoeuvre the teaching plan for creative writing to infuse such knowledge in the prescribed curriculum teaching plan.

I should be prepared to shift from my comfort zone and be prepared for extra work in planning lessons. Furthermore, I discovered that it could be a challenge for the teacher to control children's excitement because popular culture fascinates them. The children quickly increase the volume when they discussing topics of interest. Everybody wants to show how familiar they are with the topic, and then the level of noise gets high. This could also send an incorrect perception of a disruptive classroom among others in the school.

By exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching creative writing, I have realised I have to be very receptive and adaptive to children's dynamic culture. If I accept that culture is evolving and embrace it as an essential part of children's lives, it will help me understand them better and know them as individuals.

As a teacher and a learning programme inventor of the 21st century, I should be adaptive and not dwell on using my childhood's old fashioned popular culture. If I am familiar with modern popular culture, I will try my best to infuse it when planning and teaching creative writing because topics will be relevant to them. If subjects are applicable, children are likely to be eager to write more. If they write what they are interested in, they should strive to impress themselves and not me as a teacher to score marks. I believe that could lead them to write from the heart and about true stories. That could benefit the learners because they could see themselves as fluent writers. When learners can express themselves in writing, it can bring self-fulfilment.

Teaching English to first additional language learners requires a teacher who will make learners' school life more comfortable. In my experience, it is often problematic for them as they can lack vocabulary and grammar accuracy for expressing themselves. It can be challenging for English first additional language learners to think and write about an abstract topic in a foreign language. Bright (1995) acknowledges that "teaching writing is craft, yet it is difficult to initiate and maintain" (p. 23). In my view, this craft is even more complicated when one is not writing in one's home language. Hence my support for my learners in the writing classroom is crucial (Heppner, 2017). Likewise, Bright (1995) emphasises that teachers impact how learners perceive themselves as writers and that teachers have a vital role in learners' developing understanding of writing. Furthermore, Theriault et al. (2018) argue that "novice writers need to be supported, which requires scaffolding provided by the teacher to model proper use of recognised writing strategies" (p. 360). Therefore, my role is to support children in learning creative writing because, without encouragement, learners can become demotivated.

Conclusion

This chapter responded to my first and second research questions simultaneously. I identified and discussed themes that had emerged from my data representation chapters (Chapters Three to Six). The themes discussed in this chapter were: *1. Children's popular culture is dynamic; 2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to.*

A key message is that teachers need to acknowledge that children's popular culture knowledge changes with time. It does not remain the same throughout, and teachers should recognise this and use it to their advantage in teaching creative writing. It is also essential to recognise and harness the influence and knowledge inculcated by family members and peers close to the children.

In the following chapter, Chapter Eight, I present the third theme I developed: *Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.*

CHAPTER EIGHT: FURTHER LEARNING ABOUT CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE AS A RESOURCE FOR TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Seven, I explained how I used collage and poetry as arts-based methods to analyse and learn from my past lived experiences (Chapter Three and Chapter Four) and classroom lessons (Chapter Five and Chapter Six). I described how I constructed three main themes to respond to the two research questions guiding the study. I communicated my understanding of the first two main themes: *1. Children's popular culture is dynamic; and 2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to*. The second theme was organised into two sub-themes: *a) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family;* and *b) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers.*

In this chapter, Chapter Eight, I present the third main theme: *Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.* This theme is arranged into five sub-themes:

(a) *Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings;*

(b) *Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media;*

(c) *Children's popular culture can be shared through sports;*

(d) *Children's popular culture can be expressed through music;*

(e) *Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing, and*

(f) *Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television.*

I begin my presentation of each sub-theme with an interpretive poem composed of words found in the memory stories and lesson stories in Chapters Three to Six. Lapum et al. (2011) argue for using arts-based methods such as poetry because they sometimes capture elusive details from the research data that are not easy to articulate yet may profoundly affect one's thinking and actions. Similarly, Langer and Furman (2004) concur that interpretive poems amalgamate essential information about the subject under scrutiny and the researcher's understanding. Coen et al. (2018) state that "poetry can prompt readers to connect on an emotional level with themselves and others, as well as self-reflect on their own experiences vis-à-vis those expressed in poetry" (p. 560). This means that poetry is an ideal tool to elicit emotions for the researcher that could also impact the reader's emotions. Composing poetry has helped me to reveal my

feelings and my learning. It has offered new perspectives on and knowledge of my experiences as a child and as a teacher.

Each poem is followed by a discussion in which I explain my understanding of the subtheme and consider its implications for teaching creative writing using children's popular culture as a resource. This discussion is illustrated by selected pieces from my collage (Chapter Seven) and excerpts from my memory and classroom stories (Chapters Three to Six). I follow the presentation of the sub-themes with my overall reflections on the third central theme. After that, I conclude the chapter.

My learning about children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing

Theme 3: Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests

Through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an Isi Zulu-speaking Grade 6 class, I saw how children's popular culture can be observed in various children's interests. I understand children's interests as what excites children and preoccupies children's minds most of the time.

To improve my creative writing teaching, I must learn from children and integrate children's interests in lessons so that their learning will be fascinating. Hanauer (2012) argues that "learning a language is a significant, potentially life-changing, event. Furthermore, it is an event that that involves the whole human being, beyond just the intellectual abilities" (p. 105). Likewise, Yoon (2013) argues that teachers need to make their classrooms dialogic spaces when teaching writing. In my understanding, in a dialogic classroom, I must invite learners' voices and interests to teach creative writing in an exciting and meaningful way. Teachers need to consider welcoming popular culture topics and objects into the creative writing classroom to access the knowledge that is easily accessible and close to learners' hearts. Healey (2019) highlights that teachers "can motivate students to take ownership [of creative writing] by providing choice of genre and topic promoting positive writer identities. This means opening writing classrooms up to a choice of objects and movements leading to rich affecting engagement with ideas and words" (p. 193). I need to allow my learners to begin to take

ownership in the creative writing classroom by expressing their opinions and preferences as experts on children's popular culture.

I have encountered many challenges in teaching English creative writing to isiZulu-speaking learners. This is exacerbated when the prescribed creative writing tasks focus on topics that have little relevance or hold little interest for them. I have realised that children's interests are particularly useful for designing appealing topics and activities for teaching creative writing with English first additional learners. Nino and Paez (2018) stress that "teaching English [as a foreign language] to children or beginners should be an appealing process in which planning in creative ways is really essential" (p. 103). This means that, as a creative writing teacher with English first additional learners, I must exhibit the motivation and inventiveness that I hope to foster in my learners.

In what follows, I offer my evolving learning about how I can recognise and appreciate children's popular culture in my quest to become an inspired teacher. I consider how I can draw on different aspects, instances and artefacts of children's popular culture to teach creative writing in responsive and innovative ways.

(a) Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings

Toys and playthings
Toys and playthings are magical
They bring children together
They appeal to children of all ages
Toys and playthings are charismatic
In all children's gathering
Toys and playthings dominate
Childrens' conversations

Toy industries target children and parents
As their potential clients to buy
Toys are designed for certain genders
They portray gender narratives
Further instilled by parents

Toys are part of children's everyday lives

They make all means to own one

It fascinates them as they spend

Most of their time playing with

And exploring with them

However, schools prohibit

Toys and playthings objects

Even the teachers do not value

And utilise the of knowledge

Of popular culture wherever possible

Toys and other playthings can be used as a popular culture resource to teach English creative writing to learners. The images of children interacting with toys from my collage (Figure 8.1) show how children use toys and other playthings as valuable objects in their social lives. Similarly, a sociocultural perspective on learning does not detach individuals from the social but confirms that children develop through social interaction (Lantolf & Thorn, 2015). The children at school come with different experiences from the social interactions that happen outside of school contexts. Toys and other play objects are central to these interactions. Many children like to own these objects to have a sense of belonging to a group of peers.

Figure 8.1: A picture with different children's toys

By reminiscing and examining my childhood memory stories of popular culture, I became aware that not owning commercially manufactured toys does not hinder children from playing. When children do not own such toys, they make means to find other things to play with. For instance, Hilton (1996) concurs that "if a girl or boy wishes to mother and nothing else is available, they will mother even a stick or a plastic skittle; if they wish to stage a fight, they will set a pencil against a teapot" (p. 21). Similarly, Dyson (2003) asserts that "children actively participate in the production of popular culture" (p. 329). I make a note of the children's creativity in the following extract from my memory story in Chapter Four:

> *As children, we never had proper toys because my parents could not afford to buy us any. Well-manufactured toys were not common. We only had a chance of seeing such toys at the homes of those lucky children, of whom there were very few. Therefore, as children, we had to improvise by using the available objects to play as toys. For example, one of the boy's popular culture toys that we used to play with was pushing an old tyre with two sticks.*

Children spend much of their time playing with toys and other popular culture playthings, whether commercially manufactured or improvised from available objects and materials. And, according to Yoon (2014), "children make decisions on how play will be organised, who will be invited to play, how norms of participation will be established, and what resources will be used" (p.112). Playing is a central part of children's lives because it gives them pleasure, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging. Thus, teachers need to capitalise on the knowledge that children gain from playing with toys and other playthings

However, in my experience, schools often do not allow these objects of children's popular culture on their premises. Mitchel and Rid-Walsh (2002) concur that many schools openly prohibit such objects. Many schools still confiscate objects of popular culture such as toys and other playthings from children. When children are found at school in possession of such objects, they can be disciplined severely. In this sense, schools have not changed much since my schooldays, as described in Chapter Four:

> *Toppies (as we called them) were small in size, and we, therefore, brought them to school. However, they were prohibited in the school premises because of the danger they posed.*

We hid them in our school bags and took them out during lunchtime. We played with them on the sports field or in places that were out of sight to teachers. Teachers confiscated the tops if they were found in your possession, and you were also harshly disciplined through corporal punishment.

As an adult, I do see that banning these particular toys was linked to safety concerns. However, I believe that a blanket ban on toys and other popular playthings at school can result in schools being left behind if they do not want to accept children's popular culture objects' educational potential. Schools should find safe and appropriate ways to allow toys and playthings as resources for learning and teaching in exciting, interesting, and absorbing ways.

In particular, I would like to see special provisions made in school policies to allow toys and playthings to teach and learn creative writing. Yoon (2013) notes that limiting children to only prescribed topics can make writing seem irrelevant to them. Bromly (1996) argues that "it is important for teachers to recognise the significance of children's [popular culture] and not regard it as less valuable than traditional school-based literacy practices" (p.80). Hence, school policies should not detach children from popular culture objects such as toys and other playthings. I have learnt that these items can be vital to developing creative writing flair in children as they have exciting stories to tell about their popular culture objects.

Bringing toys and playthings to school could be particularly beneficial for learners who are doing creative writing in English as a first additional language. For learners to have the real objects in front of them could elicit oral language usage and the latent narratives about the object, which could then be expressed creatively in writing later. Geok-Lin Lim (2015) subscribes to the 'show and tell' principle in creative writing teaching with English first additional language learners. She explains how learners can be motivated to start their writing assignments by having real objects to show. They can tell about these artefacts and related experiences in any way they like. This means that the show and tell will encourage learners to write with confidence because they are familiar with their chosen objects. They also try to use their available vocabulary to describe their items as they look at them. This is illustrated in my learners' descriptive writing about their favourite objects in Chapter Five, such as the essay about "My Favourite Teddy Bear" (Chapter Five, pp. 132-133).

Creative writing teachers need to be extra vigilant when deciding to use popular culture objects at schools because of school rules that do not permit them in the school premises. This could be a challenge for teachers. As shown in Chapter Four, the learners, too, know that it means that they are transgressing school rules if found in possession of such objects. My learners were concerned about the possible repercussions of bringing special objects, such as a toy car and teddy bear, to school. For instance, "*One girl asked, What will happen to me if I get caught? Will it not be confiscated?*"

Teachers need to ensure that all learners are safe from the dangers of having such objects at school. The teacher's principal and immediate supervisor should be aware of such popular culture lessons to avoid the teacher or learners getting into trouble with the school authorities and parents. Teachers also need to ensure a strict control system of toys and other objects to ensure learners' safety and that the precious items do not get lost. This places a great responsibility on teachers.

In considering their potential educative value, I am aware that toys and other playthings often reflect and instil certain perceptions about gender. For instance, Yoon (2014) asserts that toys are "cultural materials or texts that children use to try out their femininity" (p. 111). I understand that girls and boys use certain toys and other playthings in gendered ways. In the commercial industry, toys are manufactured to target certain genders. These toys can become part of narratives of what it means to be a girl or boy. To illustrate, in a study of the toy and media industry, Hilton (1996) found that young girls were given dolls as part of a narrative connecting feminineness and motherhood, and young boys were assigned toy soldiers as part of the powerful story of aggressive masculinity. Similarly, Yoon (2014) asserts that gender is a publicly created concept that children reconstruct through social play with other children.

The following extract from Chapter Five bears testimony to toys and gender in children's popular culture:

> *The owner of the object was Aphiwe. He gave a detailed description of his object. He said it was a shiny black toy car, and it felt very smooth to touch. His toy car looked real, just like a sedan; however, it was very tiny compared to a real car. He explained that he owned the toy car, and he played with it with other boys when they met after school and on weekends. He said most of his friends had such toys. The toy was given*

to him by his mother when he celebrated his seventh birthday. It was special to him because it reminded him of the fun he had at his first birthday celebration when he was seven years old. Owning a toy car made him feel part of the group of friends as they all had toy cars.

The above extract reveals how certain toys such as cars are considered masculine and made to appeal to boys. It also shows how owning and playing with a toy car gave Aphiwe a sense of status and belonging as a boy. Similarly, the following extract from Chapter Five offers an example of a girl's favourite toy:

Another popular culture object owner was a girl called Cindy. Her object was a teddy bear. She said she had owned it since she was five years old. Her teddy bear was brown in colour and very cute. It felt very soft and fluffy to touch. She said she feels comfortable when sleeping with it, especially on cold days. She even mentioned that her teddy is like a special friend that she enjoyed talking to because it listens to her without interruptions.

Cindy's statement demonstrates how girls are often encouraged to develop mothering and traditionally feminine traits in their early years when playing with their toys.

From my childhood memories and interactions with my learners, I understand that socially and culturally constructed gender narratives can give children a sense of belonging and orientation. Nevertheless, as Moletsane (2005) points out, I am also aware that dominant gender narratives can perpetuate unequal gender power relations. For instance, she highlights how girls are often silenced by the unequal gender power relations that favour boys in the school, the community, and the home. Moletsane argues that creative writing can enable girls to construct their own representation of their realities and their responses to them. Thus, I see how teachers can use popular toys and playthings as creative writing resources to engage critically with dominant gender narratives. Hilton (1996) advises that "a model of literacy teaching that works with growing consciousness [of gender] can build on the products and freedoms of the popular culture industry" (p. 44). This is something that I hope to explore more in my future professional learning and practice.

(b) Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media

Cell phones and social media

Cell phones the modern gadget

Cell the technological innovation

Machines that have dominated

Everybody's lives young and old

Despite geographical locations

Social hierarchy, financial status

Everybody is immersed in it

Cell phones have changed

Traditional communication mode

Paper writing was replaced by

Texting messages on cell phones

Personal contact replaced

By internet and social media

Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram

Are social platforms where children

Engage in individual or group conversations,

They post pictures and share information

With all contacts and public at large

By exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching creative writing, I have realised that modern technological gadgets that they use to engage in children's popular culture fascinate children. As a sociocultural teacher, my focus was not on attending to such gadgets' technical aspects but rather on the various social practices made available with digital technologies (Woodard & Kline, 2016). According to Dyson (2003), children's developmental stages are moulded by the social and symbolic objects of their own childhoods and popular media is the dominant factor.

In my popular culture lessons, I have observed how children of today grow familiar with cellular phones because, most often, parents use them at home to view pictures or listen to sounds such

as voices and music. It is children's home culture to use cell phones. Similarly, Yoon (2014) agrees that children are part of numerous social and cultural spheres outside of school.

There are applications on phones that bring fun and entertainment to children of all ages. They also use cell phones to play games sometimes. Hence, in general, children fall in love with cellular phones at young ages and can use them to socialise and access relevant information – preferably, this should be age-appropriate and under adult supervision.

As shown in my collage (Figure 8.2), I have learnt that many children use cellular phones to practice their popular culture. Children love cellular phones because they are portable and easy to use. Likewise, Clark (2018) points out that an annual literacy survey in the United Kingdom revealed most children regularly use cell phones for written communication in the form of text messages and instant messages. The survey also found that some children use cell phones for creative writing, such as writing short stories or fiction and song lyrics. In contrast, pen and paper were used to send messages or for creative writing during my childhood. I make a note of this in my memory stories in Chapter Three.
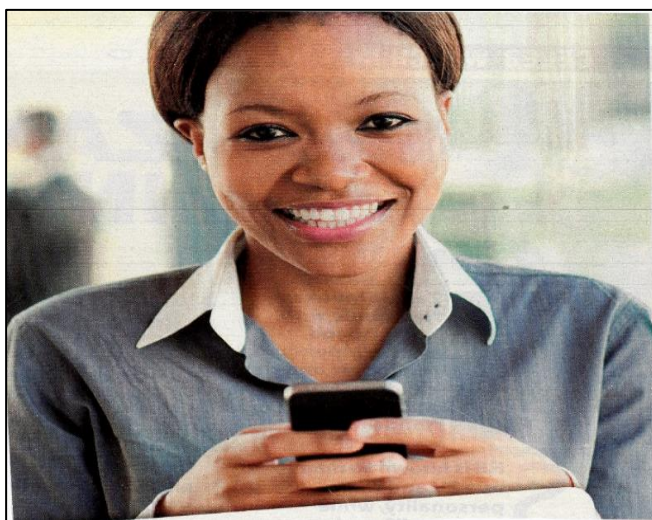

Figure 8.2: An example of what children spend much of their leisure time on

I have learnt I should be preparing my learners for the world outside the classroom because there are significant developments and changes taking place. As teachers, we need to change

the way we do things compared to the past decades and employ new strategies to make creative writing exciting and inspiring to learners.

For instance, cellular phones and computers have provided a different range of communication platforms between individuals. The children we teach today are exposed to different communication platforms on cell phones and other technological devices. Woodard and Kline (2016) note that doing writing activities with learners encompassing technology may convert old-fashioned school practices. I have also realised that learners are excited when they can use social media platforms in the classroom. The following extract from Chapter Six bears testimony to this:

> *Learners were very fascinated when I told them that they were going to learn about social media….The learners that are usually quiet in class were speaking and giving answers…. All the learners' answers showed that learners were familiar with social media as it was easily accessible from smartphones or modern gadgets.*

This extract shows that children are often familiar with communication platforms available on the internet because many are exposed to cell phones or other devices at home. Mitchell and Reid-Welsh (2002) concur that children's popular culture activities and interactions often happen at home in a virtual space.

I have observed that many children are knowledgeable about and interested in technological devices and social media platforms they use and see in their everyday lives. These offer many possibilities for creative writing teaching. Likewise, Woodard and Kline (2016) believe that technology gives teachers ways to incorporate popular culture in writing lessons meaningfully for learners. Dyson (2003) argues that "opening up classrooms to children's textual resources and literate processes means opening them up as well as to the pleasures and challenges of children's everyday lives and to the multimedia of the emerging and ever-changing textual scene" (p. 357). Similarly, Theriault et al. (2018) recommend that social media provide stimulating benefits for young children to write for a real audience and that writing teachers must harness this new social media context. This suggests that teachers need not shy away from utilising the latest communication platforms to incorporate them into our teaching to modernise creative writing for children. I understand that this can give children intrinsic motivation and they will be writing with great enthusiasm.

However, some children are less privileged at home and not exposed to digital devices with social media platforms. This makes it difficult for these learners to use such popular culture knowledge, and they are in danger of being left behind the others. As a creative writing teacher, I need to close the gap by capacitating those learners to understand and be able to do the activities assigned to them. This is highlighted in the following extract from my journal entry in Chapter Six:

> *My English lesson…on Twitter blended well with the Technology lesson. Learners that were advanced with social media responded to my questions and understood the task. However, learners that are not exposed to Instagram on cell phones were not fully engaged in the lesson. But, they understood the task they were to carry out after teaching them about Instagram*

(c) Children's popular culture can be shared through sports

Sports
Sports is in children's hearts
They live and sleep sports
They are always thinking about
Their favourite sports stars
And their lavish lifestyles

Children strive to master
Skills of sports through practice
As they dream of possessing flair
Like their role sport stars

Taking part in sports
Gives them a sense of belonging
Playing develops interpersonal skills
Furthermore, it cultivates friendship

Sports keep children

Entertained and focussed

Media sources keep children informed

Watching television

Listening to radio

Reading magazines

Inform children to be sport experts

Sports knowledge helps

To engage in sport dialogues

With their friends and classmates

Sports promote unity and

Synergy among the children

Sport is a topic children know

Looking back at my childhood memory stories and my lessons on children's popular culture, I have realised that sports are often close to learners' hearts. This is made visible in my collage (Figure 8.3).
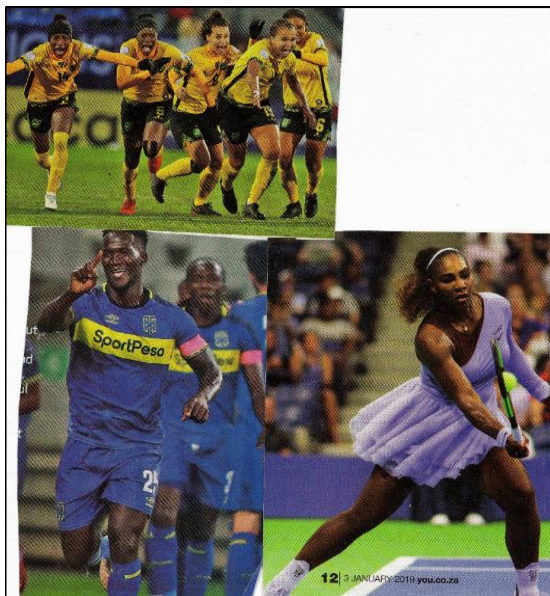

Figure 8.3: The picture shows different sports popular with children

During my childhood, I was also interested in sports. For example, my friends taught me a few skills for swimming. I make a note of this in the following extract from my memory story about cow herding (Chapter Four):

Another activity that I enjoyed doing on hot days was swimming. Swimming was a dangerous activity because we did it without adult supervision. However, some boys claimed not to be amateurs, and they acted as our coaches. The boys with more swimming experience saved us when we were about to drown in water. Sometimes we competed to get across the swiftly moving river water or to just cool down the heat in dams. Another danger that we were exposed to was crocodiles in rivers and the water depth. However, that never deterred us from enjoying swimming.

I have observed that many children at my school love sports and are motivated to be knowledgeable about and participate in sports. They are familiar with their favourite sporting codes and their sports stars. Children also spend leisure time enjoying and participating in sports with their friends. Yoon (2014) explains play as a social activity where youngsters discover their identities and friendship with other children. I have come to understand that sport as a kind of play is pleasurable and develops relationships. Children often have a lot of content knowledge and interest in sports that teachers can use a resource. From a sociocultural perspective, involvement in culturally significant activities, such as sports, are essential to learning. I understand I must consider infusing sports into my teaching. I can use sports to elicit learners' interest and inventiveness in creative writing.

Children gain content knowledge of sports from different media sources such as televisions, magazines, newspapers, the internet and radios. Many children voluntarily consult these sources to access their favourite sports news. Learners strive to advance their knowledge of sports so that they can feel welcome by other children or groups of friends. Many of them have posters of their favourite sports stars from magazines and newspapers. If they have this knowledge, they can become confident to engage in sports dialogues and argue with their peers. Some children like to feel part of the sports conversations that they have with peers. And, as Hanauer (2012) explains, "learning a language involves an interaction with everything that makes up the experience and understanding of the learner, including issues of identity and self-perception" (p. 108). This suggests that teachers need to consider the knowledge that learners have when preparing creative writing activities. Teachers can make a link between sports and

writing activities to enhance writing flair. I believe that many learners will be interested and write resourcefully if the topic is related to sports. The essays written by some of my learners on their favourite sports and sports stars (Chapter Five, pp. 136-141) bear testimony to this.

(d) Children's popular culture can be expressed through music

Music is the language
All children speak
They use it to express emotions
It defines who they are
And it gives children identity

Music is a popular culture
For the young people
Hip hop, Rap, Gospel and *Maskandi*
Are music genres loved by children?
Dress code and behaviour for
Children are influenced by music genre

Children are knowledgeable of music
Televisions, radios and cell phones
Make music accessible
Children come to school
With musical knowledge
So, teachers can learn about music
From children as they bring
Diverse musical tastes

Children know all about
Their favourite music artist
They follow them on social media
They know about them in magazines
They watch their documentaries
All that empowers them

To be musical inclined

My childhood memory stories reminded me that music plays a central creative and expressive role in children's lives. For instance, in Chapter Four, I recalled how my friends and I would design and play musical instruments. We would also compose songs:

> *Another activity that we learnt and enjoyed was designing and making musical instruments that we used for music. By playing music, we learnt to entertain ourselves and avoid boredom. Some boys were good at playing instruments while others composed songs. We told our thoughts and feelings through our music and songs.*

My friends and I bonded over our mutual love for particular musical genres and artists. My memory stories reveal that I did not have easy access to listening to recordings of my favourite music at home because we were financially unstable. However, I did have a generous friend who shared his precious music cassette with me:

> *I can recall a friend I considered more privileged than myself because his parents could afford to buy him luxury items such as toys and bicycles. I did not own any music cassettes unless it happened that somebody would have dubbed it for me. My friend had told me that his parents had bought him a music cassette with that popular song that was in demand. He was a very kind person and was always willing to share his belongings and even his toys. He understood my socioeconomic status….I was very excited about the day he lent me his cassette.*

Interactions with my learners showed me that loving music is still a common trend among children. This is highlighted in the picture from my collage showing an excited crowd of young people dancing to electronic music (Figure 8.4). Another image (Figure 8,5) shows some of the famous South African musicians my learners admire.

Figure 8.4: A picture of a music Dee-Jay playing for a crowd of young people

Figure 8.5: This picture shows some famous South African musicians

Today's children are highly exposed to many music genres as they are easily accessible via technology. Cyberspace and the internet have made recorded music easier to find than in my childhood. It is convenient for children to carry and play music because they now have mobile phones and other gadgets in which they can store or play music at any time and anywhere. I have observed how children learn about music artists and genres when they watch music videos and access information via social media, websites and television. The children that I teach can

articulate their music knowledge verbally. In the following excerpt from a music-focused lesson I did with the learners (Chapter Five), I make a note of this:

> *After listing all the music genres on the chalkboard, I then asked them to tell me their favourite musicians....They all raised their hands, and they wanted me to point at them to give their answers; however, I could not take all the answers. Later, I then asked them to name the type of music genres each learner enjoyed the most. I asked each learner to choose one music genre from the chalkboard by writing it down on a piece of paper. After that, I asked all those that chose the same music genre to get together as a big group. Immediately, they moved around to different groups.*

The above extract reveals that learners are insiders of popular musical culture as they can demonstrate their knowledge of and preferences for music and artists (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). This means that teachers can learn from and capitalise on children's understanding of popular musical culture to develop creative writing in their classrooms.

I have realised that music can elicit children's creative writing. Dalby and Burton (2013) indicate that connecting musical performances and creative writing can offer a fun, stimulating and meaningful way for children to learn. Similarly, Lenters and Winters (2019) urge primary school teachers to use the arts and digital media to develop creative writing approaches that move beyond the conventional emphasis on paper and pen text.

In exploring children's popular culture, I have realised that music has vital artistic elements to encourage creative writing. As teachers, we should allow and provide learners with space and stimuli to practice their artistic flair through music-based activities. As shown in my memory stories, such activities can contribute to friendships and personal and social identities. My music-based lessons also showed me the educative potential of bringing music into the classroom. I agree with Ewing (2019), who argues that "arts-rich English and literacy pedagogies are critical for [children's] social and emotional wellbeing as well as [their] academic success" (p. 7). My lessons highlighted how music was exciting and inspiring for my learners of English as an Additional Language. Similarly, Wang and Kokotsaki (2018) assert that "artistic activities such as drawing, singing and role playing were often mentioned as more favoured approaches to foster creative thoughts, create a stimulating environment and motivate children to learn in the EFL [English as a Foreign Language] classroom" (p. 125).

My lesson reflection from Chapter Five bears witness to this:

> *My most useful discovery was that music can change a tense and serious classroom atmosphere to a relaxed and carefree environment. I also observed learners doing their work in a happy mood. I think playing music encourages learners to think creatively and to see how artists feature creative elements in their songs. Learners would describe the lesson as exciting and touching, as they showed their emotions by singing and dancing.*

Writing songs requires selecting and combining words in a flamboyant way to express themselves and convey messages. I think learners that know through songs they can express themselves very well with words.

Previously, I was mostly teaching creative writing in the same limiting ways that my past teachers taught me. My past teachers seemed to forget that we had so many exciting stories to tell about our favourite music genres of that time. Furthermore, my primary school teachers did not utilise our knowledge of the music we loved to perform and listen to in developing our writing. Likewise, before I embarked on this self-study research project, my learners were not given the freedom to write about their popular musical culture or express themselves in musically inspired ways.

I have learnt that creative writing teachers need to be well organised when they want to employ music as a creative writing resource. It is easy for the learners to be uncontrollable because of the excitement that comes with exploring children's musical interests in the classroom environment. When I was teaching writing using music, the learners were very noisy, and I was concerned about disturbing other classes. I was worried that other teachers might think I lacked classroom management skills. The following excerpt from Chapter Five illustrates this challenge:

> *While they were working in their groups, it was very noisy in the classroom. I then decided to start moving around from group to group to control the level of noise. I also wanted to check if they were writing their songs and making positive contributions to*

the song writing. In many groups, I discovered that group members were trying to sing their songs out loud to remember the correct song lyrics.

This means that teachers need to carefully plan music-inspired lessons to minimise things that could invite negative attention and incorrect perceptions from other teachers or school managers. They can also take time to explain their rationale for using music to improve their teaching.

(e) Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing

Fashionable clothing
Fashionable clothes are
Popular culture objects
Close to children's hearts
Media sources make fashion
Easily accessible to children

Superstars and media personalities
Set fashion trends
They influence children
To be obsessed with fashion trends

Children can do anything
To own a fashion item
It makes them feel part of
The group or social community
Furthermore, it gives them social status

Through recalling and reflecting on my memory stories, I have realised that I was obsessed with fashion during my childhood. My friends and I loved stylish clothes such as pants, shirts, t-shirts and shoes worn by famous people. Music superstars such as Michel Jackson and other people in the entertainment industry influenced the style of clothing fashion we loved. The following extract from Chapter Four demonstrates this:

Michael Jackson's style of clothing was very unique when performing on and off stage. He liked wearing suits that had tight pants that looked under-sized for him, together with shining shoes. His pants also revealed his socks. He wore a white glove on the one hand. Sometimes he would put on his hat and make funny moves with it when dancing. The item that was most popular at that particular time was to wear tight under-sized pants. Many young people were buying their trousers and then making alterations to make them look like Michael Jackson's pants. As growing young boys, we dreamt of owning pants like his.

We knew about fashion through others who were lucky enough to have televisions at their homes, or we saw it in newspapers and magazines (as highlighted in my collage in Figure 8.6). We also relied on our peers to update and advance our fashion knowledge. As young as we were, we did our best to save our little money or ask our parents to get fashionable items when buying us clothes for Christmas holidays. However, like the learners at my current school, we never had a chance to show off our stylish fashion items at school because we wore uniforms.

Figure 8.6: Fashion clothing advertised on magazines and newspapers

I have realised that fashion is one aspect that fascinates children's minds and they could say a lot when they write about it. Many of today's children have access to a variety of media that introduce them to fashion. From my popular culture lessons, I have learnt that, like my childhood friends and me, many of my learners like fashion because they feel it defines who they aspire to be. For instance, the children associate particular dress codes or fashionable

clothing items with a specific music genre. Others fall in love with certain styles of clothing because of the status they identify with them.

Many of the children I teach are fortunate enough to own fashionable items, which means they can describe these as concrete objects when writing. I give an example of this in the following extract from Chapter Five:

> *Aphiwe raised his hand to tell us about his object. He described his fashion item as a stylish black jacket. His father bought him his jacket when he passed Grade 5. His jacket was special to him as he wears it on special occasions, such as attending parties or going to town on weekends. His jacket made him feel very warm in winter on the inside. On the outside, it is made of soft cotton. He said this object reminds him of his father, who loves him a lot.*

The above extract shows that learners could give detailed oral descriptions to their peers of stylish items close to their hearts. This taught me how children's popular culture portrayed through fashionable clothing can stimulate creative writing with Grade 6 learners. According to Yoon (2014), peer interactions about popular culture objects can be valuable in teaching academic writing activities. Likewise, Peterson (2014) asserts that harnessing a learner's passion can produce the finest story writing. Because fashion is another distinctive facet of popular culture that appeals to many children, it is a valuable resource to incorporate into my teaching.

(f) Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television

Movies and TV
Children like to spend their leisure time
In front of a tv
They have content knowledge of movies
They easily follow the story in movies

Language is not a barrier
Vocabulary is not the issue
Children can recount the story

In their own way, by telling
Verbally or dramatizing

Children like watching
Movies with action
Privileged children go
To watch movies at cinemas

Television and movies bring
Joy and entertainment
TV guide is the key
For planning time for watching

Children are familiar with
Latest movies on show
Movie production companies
Aim to target children as
Their target market

Young girls fall for Sophia
Young boys fall for Ben 10
Teens fall for action movies
All children love watching
TV and movies

Through exploring my childhood experiences, I have realised that children can readily grasp and share stories narrated through movies and television shows, even when watching in a language that is not that familiar to them. As Dyson (2003) points out, the audio-visual nature of films and television shows promotes children's learning opportunities. And as, Bromly (1996) highlights, when children watch the same movies or shows, they are encouraged "to share, negotiate and compare their views with each other because of the shared context" (p. 89). This means that audio-visual stories can inform and empower children and give them the courage to participate in peer discussions. My memory was good when retelling stories and

remembering the plot of films I had watched because I was interested. This is evident in the following extract from Chapter Four:

I remember that it was a horror movie and it was terrifying. People were being shot, and there were many fights and blood spilled everywhere. I was petrified and felt emotional in such a way that I felt as if I was in some characters' shoes….The English language spoken in the movie was not a problem for our understanding of the storyline because we used pictures to comprehend. We could even tell our parents at home what had happened or the plot of the movie….We also enjoyed dramatising some scenes from the movie at school during break time or at home. Some even acted out and demonstrated to others the dangerous moves that were done by the stars.

I have discovered that most children I teach spend time in front of television screens because nowadays, almost every household has a television set. Yoon (2014) concurs that television and films are popular culture resources that children use to construct knowledge. Usually, my learners watch television at their homes. The television schedule (shown in my collage – Figure 8.7) helps children plan time to watch their favourite programmes. Some wealthier parents take their children to cinemas in towns because they can afford movie tickets.

Figure 8.7: An example of a television schedule with different programmes

I have observed that, like my childhood friends and me, my learners like to watch action movies where there is a lot of commotion and tension. The children can focus and listen attentively when they are watching movies. I allude to this in the following extract from Chapter Five:

The learners watched the film from the start to the end without any disruptions or commotions….I think they were so attentive because they were doing something they had an interest in and fascinated them. Moreover, doing something unusual in a different environment ignited concentration and enjoyment.

After watching the movie, just like my school friends and me, the learners could retell the movie's whole plot. I noted this in my lesson reflection (Chapter Five):

…they could remember almost every part of the movie when I asked them….I am pleased to know that they can recall so much information from something that was for entertainment as they were experiencing difficulties in recalling knowledge from their school work.

Watching movies brings joy and excitement to children. They enjoy watching movies for the experience itself and discussing with their friends later about certain episodes or objects they have seen. I have found many even know the latest releases on show at cinemas because it fascinates them.

I have observed that children who watch movies and television programmes in an additional language are empowered with language development as well as content knowledge. They can learn new vocabulary and how to tell the story of what they have watched. According to Bromly (1996), "young children can learn much from the videos that they watch and…they can make such knowledge explicit. Those who work with young children should take account of such wisdom and make space in their classrooms for it to be explored and extended" (p. 71). I have learnt that I should find innovative ways to use this wisdom as a resource for teaching creative writing with my isiZulu-speaking learners.

I understand that it is crucial for writing teachers to search for and provide different teaching approaches to spark creativity. Teaching creative writing using movies and television can create vivid memories that last for a long time in learners' minds. The learners recollect such experiences, especially when, as is the case for children in my school, they do not often occur in their schooling lives. I have realised this from the learners' comments made during the movie lesson (Chapter Five):

I was surprised by some of their comments. For example, one girl said, Sir, you are the coolest teacher because you bring entertainment to the classroom. If learning was like this every day, I would not want to miss a day of school.

Furthermore, I made a note of this in my memory story about 'Cinema at school' in Chapter Four:

Looking back at my childhood popular culture, I can see that all children loved and enjoyed certain things, such as watching movies. However, that entertainment did not frequently occur....Our teachers arranged for us to watch what was then called 'bioskop'. Although the bioskop happened at school, it was not considered part of our formal schooling. Instead, it was seen purely as an after-school entertainment. As children, we loved the teachers who were the organisers of the entertainment events because we considered learning at school a tedious activity and did not like it.

The above extracts reveal that learners remember teachers who bring such thrilling experiences into their teaching and learning environment, even if it only happens outside of school hours.

My learning about children's popular culture revealed that movies and television can be used as a resource for creative writing teaching. As I was taking a sociocultural stance, I focused on the type of work, content, and learning grasped during the making of a written text. I was not concerned with the accuracy of the language but with the comprehension of what learners were doing and achieving with their writing (Woodard & Kline, 2016). I have realised that for teachers to successfully teach English creative writing, they can capitalise on children's knowledge of and interest in movies and television. As Engel (2011) argues, inviting learners to explore what fascinates them can help them learn school subjects.

Reflections

Exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching English creative writing has helped me understand the need for formal institutions like schools to accept and harness the impact of the popular culture knowledge children bring with them. I have become aware of how my past teachers did not seem to value the existence and the knowledge of children's popular

culture to advance our creative writing. I believe they taught us writing the way that they were taught when they were at school. Their approach was typically very dull because they gave us set topics we usually did not know or care much about. We were all compelled to sit down, be quiet and write about these topics within a limited time. We often had to reproduce a 'model' essay that was written on the chalkboard by the teacher. Furthermore, corporal punishment exacerbated the problem. If we failed to reproduce the model essay, we were severely beaten and given low marks. This discouraged us because writing carried the most marks for assessment purposes. What we knew and loved as children were seldom used to our advantage in our schooling life. We were very informed about, and we took part in that time's popular culture, but it was ignored in the classroom. We had our own fascinating interests in toys, music, sports, fashion and movies that could have been used by our teachers to make our creative writing experiences thrilling and fulfilling.

I have learnt that children enjoy creative writing if topics are related to their interests, especially popular culture. Furthermore, using various facets of popular culture – such as toys, cell phones and social media, music, sports, fashion and movies – will cater to learners with different interests. Peterson (2014) advises teachers that they should allow learners to write about things they are fascinated by because they will be writing meaningfully and from the heart. According to Yoon (2013), "if writing [teaching] fails to make connections with children's lives, in and out of school, it becomes a merely a set of structures and rules" (p. 171). This calls for teaching and learning creative writing activities aligned to the real world and technological developments that affect today's children in their everyday lives. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) advised that "writing should be meaningful to children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life" (p. 118). Thus, acknowledging children's expertise in popular culture can give them a sense of purpose and ownership. This can encourage them to try to express themselves in writing. Likewise, teachers will be reading writing that is interesting and expressive.

Through my research, I have seen the usefulness of artefacts of children's popular culture in creative writing teaching. For example, I have discovered that teachers can ask learners to bring popular culture objects to school so that they can first tell the class and then write about them. Learners who use English as a first additional language often experience creative writing challenges because their vocabulary is limited and they lack confidence. Reilly and Reilly (2005) argue that "writing is a complex process, which takes time and effort to achieve, and is

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difficult to master in a second or foreign language. Consequently, children can easily become discouraged" (p. 17). I have found that a 'show and tell' approach (Geok-Lin Lim, 2015) as part of a creative writing process gives children a chance to share something they know and acquire more vocabulary during the discussion.

What I have realised is that I need to be an agent of change in my classroom. A vital part of my role as a teacher is to translate the prescribed teaching programme into meaningful lessons to benefit the learners. For instance, I have learnt that I can design exciting, playful activities based on popular culture – such as toys, cell phones and social media, music, sports, fashion and movies – to provide learners with an environment conducive to fostering creativity. Likewise, Ewing (2019) agrees that "play is a serious work and imaginative play is central to children's intellectual and affective development. It enables children to creatively process new experiences, to take risks and to deepen their understanding of people, their culture and community" (p. 10). This has broadened my understanding of the importance of play in children's lives. Teachers need to understand that if their teaching approaches infuse play elements, it can promote creativity and intellectual development.

Wang and Kokotsaki (2018) highlight that "a supportive and rewarding environment is an important external resource to display the creative ideas residing within children through stimulating, encouraging, evaluating and rewarding creative ideas" (p. 125). Furthermore, these authors argue that teaching English as an additional language should allow learners to have joyful and fulfilling experiences through involvement in creative activities that inspire them to take a chance in using the second language. Likewise, according to Nino and Paez (2018), "writing is not an easy process for the majority of the students [learning English as an additional language]". These authors argue that it is thus "essential to enhance writing and to look for non-traditional strategies in order to foster children's interests in producing texts" (p. 102). This should start with me by using children's popular culture as a resource for teaching creative writing. The knowledge of children's popular culture I have gained from this study will help me understand how to prepare relevant, fun, and creative lessons.

A challenge I encountered in teaching creative writing in new ways is that it was time-consuming. According to the curriculum policy document, English writing is only allocated two hours per two-week cycle (Department of Basic Education, 2011). To effectively and genuinely teach creative writing, we need to slow down the pace set in the curriculum so that

there is sufficient time for learners to explore, share, and experiment. Hence, I need to find a way to re-arrange the time allocation to suit the learners' pace and ensure that there are enough innovative activities. I have started this by integrating creative writing activities into subjects such as Social Science and Technology. Furthermore, as Culham (2015) explains, effective teaching of writing takes many hours of planning, reading and providing feedback on learners' work, irrespective of the grade or skill level. This means that teachers need to be prepared to devote time to this and this needs to be supported by school managers and department officials.

Conclusion

I decided to engage myself in this self-study journey because I wanted to bring change in the way I teach creative writing to learners. In this chapter I presented the third main theme I constructed from analysing my memory stories and lesson stories: *Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.* This theme was arranged into five sub-themes: (a) *Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings; (b) Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media; (c) Children's popular culture can be shared through sports;* (d) *Children's popular culture can be expressed through music; (e) Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing, and (f) Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television.*

In this chapter, I discussed how influential children's popular culture was on my own creativity and how it sparked elements of creativity in the activities I conducted in the classroom. I also considered how other teachers and I could benefit from integrating popular culture into teaching creative writing. This chapter's key message is that, despite the prescribed curriculum's limitations, innovative, child-friendly approaches to creative writing can be developed by teachers who envisage themselves as agents of change.

In the following chapter, Chapter Nine, I reflect on what I have learnt from the self-study journey I undertook. I discuss what I have learnt about using self-study methodology. I also consider and look at my professional learning as a practising teacher. To end, I explain how I will move forward in teaching creative writing using children's popular culture as a resource.

CHAPTER NINE: EXTRACTING PEDAGOGIC LEARNING FROM THE FASCINATING WORLD OF CHILDREN

Introduction

In this final chapter, Chapter Eight, I conclude by reflecting on what I have learnt and discovered from my self-study research. I begin with an overall review of the thesis to draw attention to each chapter's key features. I follow by explaining my personal-professional learning and then consider my methodological learning. Then, I discuss how taking a sociocultural perspective helped me understand children's popular culture and creative writing teaching. To follow, I consider the implications of the study for the field of education and the knowledge base of self-study research. Lastly, I explain how I plan to move forward with enhancing my teaching. I end by summing up my overall learning from the study.

A review of the thesis

In the introductory chapter, **Chapter One**, I conveyed the focus and purpose of the study. I clarified why I wanted to explore children's popular culture as a resource for teaching English creative writing with isiZulu-speaking learners. I introduced myself as a primary school teacher. I supplied pertinent background information on my personal and professional contexts and the community where I come from. I discussed why this research topic mattered to me as a teacher, and I referred to my earlier research done as part of my Master's study (Madondo, 2014) that led me to embark on this study. After that, I presented the research questions that guided my research: Question 1: *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* Question 2: *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* I elaborated on why I chose self-study as a suitable research methodology to improve my teaching practice. I portrayed my understanding of self-study in an arts-based collage form. I further discussed how I adopted a sociocultural theoretical perspective and shared my preliminary insights into children's popular culture and creative writing teaching and learning. This chapter shows how engaging with prior experiences and relevant literature persuaded me that children's popular culture could be an invaluable resource for improving my teaching of English creative writing to isiZulu-speaking learners. A meaningful understanding that I shared was that I recognised the teaching and learning of creative writing as the "preparation of artists" (Eisner, 2004, p. 4). I offered my viewpoint that

creative writing can be a more meaningful and creative experience if learners are writing about and in relation to what matters and what is of interest to them, such as children's popular culture.

Chapter Two offered a comprehensive explanation of my self-study research approach. I described the research setting: a rural, comparatively poorly-resourced primary school serving an isiZulu-speaking community. Next, I acknowledged my roles as a teacher participant and researcher in the study and recognised the need to critically reflect on both roles. I described my research participants (55 Grade 6 learners) and critical friends (three fellow teachers and doctoral students). I highlighted the value of the support and input offered by my critical friends. Also, I identified my chosen self-study methods: memory-work self-study, developmental portfolio self-study and arts-based self-study. I gave particulars of the data generation strategies I used, including journal writing, artefact retrieval, memory drawing, documenting lesson plans and learners' work, and audio recording lessons. I describe my inductive, arts-based approach to data analysis and interpretation, explain my use of collage and poetry as interpretive tools. I reflect on ethical issues, highlighting the special moral obligations towards child research participants. I explain how I sought to establish a strong foundation for my self-study's trustworthiness. Finally, I discussed some of the difficulties that I had to overcome in the research journey, such as curriculum time constraints and delays in the school's teaching and learning schedule, as well as personal adversity.

In **Chapter Three**, I responded to my first research question: *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* I recounted memory stories about my childhood popular culture and deliberated on how some of my lived experiences contributed to developing my creative writing learning. The memory stories in the chapter all connect in some way to my education. Some of these childhood experiences took place in home and school settings. I chose meaningful artefacts and created memory drawings to stimulate my memories and reflect on how I could learn from them to enrich my creative writing teaching. This chapter demonstrated how, through memory-work, I realised the impact of personal experiences on my learning and teaching. Reminiscing about and reliving some episodes from my childhood offered new understandings and new ideas about how I could capitalise and build on the knowledge and experiences learners bring to school. Reflecting on my memory stories helped me realise that I should not repeat what my past teachers did to me but instead do things differently in every interaction I have with my learners. I realised that memory-work is a

powerful tool that could help teachers who want to rebuild themselves to excel in executing their professional duties.

In **Chapter Four**, I continued to respond to my first research question. I reminisced about my playful experiences of children's popular culture outside of formal schooling that provided entertainment and fun. In composing the stories represented in this chapter, I once again sketched memory drawings to elicit my inner speech to better comprehend my experiences and consider how I can learn from them to improve my teaching practice. The chapter's stories show how remembering and reliving childhood experiences provided new understandings and ideas on making learning fun and exciting for learners. My memory stories helped me see the need to up-to-date with knowledge of popular culture to make my teaching and learning of creative writing meaningful and exciting to learners in the class. I became even more conscious of a need for change to do justice to my teaching by developing a flair for creative writing among my learners.

Chapter Five addressed my second research question: *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* In this chapter, I described how I explored children's popular culture as a resource for teaching English creative writing in Grade 6 English and Social Science lessons. Creative writing development was embedded in the content of children's popular culture. Building on new understandings from evoking my childhood memories (as expressed in Chapters Three and Four), I sought to discover what topics were fascinating to learners and how this popular culture knowledge could be used as a resource in developing creative writing. Therefore, in this chapter, I presented lessons that had to do with children's interests, such as movies, diary writing, artefact writing, music and performances. I gave a comprehensive account of what transpired in the class during teaching and learning. I draw evidence from my developmental portfolio, including my lesson plans, research journal, audio recordings, photographs, and learners' work. For each lesson, I reflected back on quandaries and beneficial discoveries. This chapter demonstrated how learners' attention and focus can be drawn to creative writing activities if they are pertinent to their social interactions and interests, such as movies, sport, and music. The lesson stories revealed how learners can be motivated to express themselves creatively if they feel connected to the learning activity and subject matter.

Chapter Six continued to address the second research question. The chapter presented further lesson stories that explore the interface between children's popular culture and creative writing development. This chapter offered an in-depth account of lessons in the English and Technology subject areas that were intended to spur learners' creativity and motivation in English creative writing activities. The three English lessons involved poetry, Twitter (social media), and reading comprehension. The Technology lesson involved the use of Instagram (social media). The chapter demonstrates how I designed my lessons to try to elicit learners' inventiveness and motivation. It also shows how I altered my teaching approaches to foster a teaching environment where learners' social and cultural experiences and knowledge are used to develop creative writing. The accounts of the lessons show how creative writing can be taught as an imaginative process. The chapter emphasises that this requires a dedicated teacher because it is time-consuming and calls for much preparation and energy from the teacher, particularly in a large class.

In **Chapter Seven**, I concurrently responded to my first and second research questions. I reconsidered the data generated through recalling my childhood memories and teaching classroom lessons using popular culture (as represented in Chapters Three to Six). I clarified how, for the interpretation and analysis of data, creating and presenting a collage and composing poetry helped me form three main themes. In this chapter, I presented my understanding of the first two main themes: *1. Children's popular culture is dynamic; and 2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to*. The second theme is organised into two sub-themes: *a) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family;* and *b) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers*. My discussion of each theme or sub-theme, is prefaced by an interpretive poem. For each theme, I deliberate on my learning about children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class. This discussion is exemplified by some carefully chosen pieces from the collage and extracts from Chapters Three to Six. The chapter coveys my understanding that teachers need to recognise that children's popular culture knowledge and experiences evolve over time. As teachers, we should acknowledge these changes and incorporate current popular culture in teaching creative writing. It is also vital to recognise how other people in children's lives, such as family members and peers, greatly influence who they are and what they value. We must use this knowledge as a premise to move from to make the teaching of creative writing relevant to children's lives and concerns.

In **Chapter Eight**, I presented the third theme: *Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests.* This theme was organised into five sub-themes:

(a) *Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings;*

(b) *Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media;*

(c) *Children's popular culture can be shared through sports;*

(d) *Children's popular culture can be expressed through music;*

(e) *Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing, and*

(f) *Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television.*

Each sub-theme was introduced by an interpretive poem. My learning concerning the sub-themes was demonstrated by selected pieces from my collage (Chapter Seven) and examples from my memory and classroom stories (Chapters Three to Six). This was followed by closing reflections on the third main theme. This chapter highlights how influential children's popular culture was on the development of my own creativity. This realisation ignited elements of creativity in the activities I designed for the classroom. The chapter also argues for the educative benefits of integrating various facets of popular culture – such as toys, cell phones and social media, music, sports, fashion and movies – into creative writing teaching. This chapter's most vital message is that, notwithstanding the prescribed curriculum's confines, inventive, child-friendly creative writing teaching methods and activities can be conceived by teachers as change agents.

My personal-professional learning

This topic was crucial to me as a teacher because I sought to improve how I support, instruct, and impart knowledge to my learners. I also wanted to have most of my learners developing confidence and flair in creative writing. What instigated me to undertake this study was that as part of my Master's study (Madondo, 2014), I became aware that my learners struggled with English creative writing. In my Master's study, I explored means for nurturing flair for written English communication in a Grade 6 class. In the doctoral study, I wanted to explore children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning creative writing in my Grade 6 class. I believed that this study would greatly benefit me if I could develop new methods of utilising what children regard as very important and meaningful in their lives in teaching creative writing. I also hope to share my learning with other teachers and educational researchers.

As an educational practitioner and a researcher, I now have hands-on experience of how children's popular culture knowledge can be integrated into teaching, to keep children fascinated with creative writing activities. Doing this research has helped to rebrand my teaching outlook. It has given me a new professional identity as a teacher. Before doing self-study, I did not know that I was capable of reforming the prescribed teaching content to make learning meaningful and relevant to learners' sociocultural backgrounds. I have gained confidence in trying out new professional approaches for executing my duties as a teacher.

When planning creative writing lessons, I now consider and integrate children's knowledge of popular culture. I appreciate the importance of contextualising teaching and learning to connect with learners' experiences and interests. I have learnt to be assertive in arguing for the alterations I make to the prescribed topic content for writing activities. I am no longer teaching the way I was taught by my past teachers. I have learnt how not to repeat some of the mistakes of my former teachers. Doing this research has changed my educational outlook because it has helped me be an agent of positive change. The knowledge gain from this research can benefit me and other teachers at my school as I have realised the need to share my learning with others. Some of the other language teachers have already approached me and asked me to help them to find ways to have more learners that are keen and willing to tackle writing activities. I have shared my new insights and strategies with my colleagues who are in the intermediate and senior phase. I have used staff development workshops and planning meetings to share the information.

Previously, my learners had a negative attitude toward English writing activities and considered them tedious and difficult. This called for the re-invention of my teaching approach. Doing this research has changed my learners' attitude towards creative writing. Using popular culture content and forms sparks creativity in children, making them excited about writing activities. It also generates original ideas that enhance the authenticity of the writing. They are now interested in and keen to engage in creative writing activities. Using popular culture as a resource has also made learners gain confidence because they see that they have the content knowledge from their own experiences.

I now know that adults are not the only source of information in teaching and learning processes. This research has made me realise that there is much that I do not know, yet children have vast knowledge. I have understood that children can be my teachers so that I can appreciate their

modern popular culture. This is so because children are taking part and are engaging in popular culture. This means that I can learn from children to keep posted with modern children's popular culture. This means that this requires me and other teachers to be life-long learners. From now on, I should never undermine children's knowledge because it is close and matters to them. The knowledge children have of popular culture plays a vital role in shaping their lives and identities. Therefore, this knowledge should be valued by adults in children's lives.

As a teacher, I have changed how I think about all aspects that learners struggle with or find a challenge in all school subjects. Before I engaged with the research, I had just accepted that there were concepts and skills that learners were struggling to grasp. I had also assumed nothing I could do could change the status quo. Now, I have realised that the cause of the problem might not lie in learners' lack of comprehension or the task's difficulty. I see that it could be my teaching approach that needs to be reviewed.

My methodological learning

I have gained new insight into self-study as a research methodology that is suitable for me as a teacher who intends to change for the better in my professional practice. Self-study prepares and develops your mental strength to adapt and transform into new habits because change is often not an easy or pleasant experience. The focus of this methodology is on the individual engaging in the research. I now understand that this methodology is suitable for teachers who can identify areas of weaknesses in their professional teaching practice to improve their classroom contexts. It inspired and empowered me to make some changes personally in the way I perceive things and develop my teaching.

Personally, this methodology has made me learn to extract positive lessons from negative past experiences. It has also taught me not to dwell on past experiences and let them influence my present actions. Self-study is like therapy because it helps the researcher reflect and deal with negative emotions embedded in past experiences. Reminiscing and reliving my past experiences have helped me vividly re-experience the feelings I once felt as a child. As an adult now, I can see how self-study helped me bring the past emotions to the fore so that I can heal as an adult. The painful feelings I once experienced as a child will no longer haunt me when remembering my childhood. I can also celebrate my joyful childhood memories.

Professionally, self-study has prepared me for accountability in every decision that pertains to choices I make in selecting appropriate teaching methods and content. After doing self-study, I can now argue for the deviations I make from the prescribed curriculum to improve learners' performance. It gives me the autonomy to be the teacher I want to be. I can choose the kind of knowledge and aptitudes I wish to impart to learners, and I can provide the rationale to education officials and all parties concerned if they require it. Self-study has given me the courage to find reasons to sharpen and revive my teaching practice.

My advice to others interested in using self-study methodology is that it is suitable for bold people who can admit and acknowledge their weaknesses. It will help them address the adversities prevailing in their context. It is an ideal methodology for the discontented teachers who want to make their professional environment better. They should understand that there is room for improvement in everything that we as teachers do. This means that we must take the initiative to seek professional help to improve ourselves and our practice. Using self-study as a methodology will help us to cope with our frustrations about the occurrence under scrutiny.

Some practical advice I would give to others interested in using self-study as a methodology is that they should be prepared to learn new habits such as keeping a journal. A journal is where the individual freely writes entries about thoughts, feelings and highlights of the day. The journal provides writing space, especially for reserved individuals to publicly express their feelings. Writing about feelings may allow an individual to heal, and it can give new meaning. Writing releases resentment and soreness. Journal writing allows a researcher to write freely and without following any structure. Journal keeping also helps the researcher reflect on study developments every day and track their own behavioural, emotional, and intellectual changes through the self-study journey.

I would advise others interested in using self-study methodology to be willing to share their professional knowledge and learn from colleagues and others who might be concerned. This is because self-study enriches professional collaboration and learning among teachers. This means that they must adapt to a style of working as a team and a learning community to improve their professional selves and context. The meetings of learning communities are crucial because they can gain different viewpoints and advice on doing things.

I would also let others know that self-study is about learning through personal experience and learning with critical friends. My critical friends were my fellow doctoral students who are teachers from different school contexts. This group of critical friends was vital for me because I gained a lot of strength, courage and support for completing the study, with essential guidance. My critical friends offered me ideas for new strategies for the teaching and learning of creative writing. I also asked them questions and shared my thoughts about my research and they provided constructive feedback and viewpoints. Therefore, others should value the establishment of such learning communities because they will be sharing the same goal, that is, to improve themselves in their professional contexts. This will strengthen the study's credibility and trustworthiness, especially in the analysis and interpretation process as different people think deeply and give their perspectives.

My theoretical and conceptual learning

As explained in Chapter One, to better understand the study's fundamental concepts, I adopted a sociocultural perspective. A sociocultural perspective on learning emphasises the consideration of contextual and cultural issues as vital for creative writing advancement. This helped me realise that English creative writing should involve working with exciting and fun topics and activities relevant to the local environment that learners come from. Taking a sociocultural stance helped me take into account the interaction and experiences of learners from home and with their social environment, all of which plays a crucial role in the development of learners at school.

A sociocultural perspective was helpful and suitable for self-study research because it showed that personal learning is influenced by one's context, cultural and social interactions. In this study, I scrutinised my personal lived experiences, which were socioculturally formed. I extracted my learning from the data generated based on the knowledge gained through social interaction in my childhood environments. The knowledge I have represented in the study pertains to objects and interactions with popular culture. This study reveals how sociocultural interactions enrich and dominate learners' minds: even time can never erase this.

Children's popular culture

Children's popular culture is what learners consider to be of interest and importance to them as part of a particular age group, in a specific time. It could be something that most of them want to be part of and to be identified with. In children's terminology, is what is "in", meaning in

fashion or style. For many children, the bedroom is their space at home and it is vibrant with popular culture objects. Objects such as toys, music, movies, digital devices and clothing items are found in bedrooms and they have special meaning to the owners. Children like to carry and to show off their popular culture objects to their friends and peers at school because they love them. However, schools often do not allow objects of children's popular culture into their premises; as they control the culture, they specify what could be used for educational purposes. However, children often prefer writing about artefacts that have personal meaning rather than writing about the teacher's topics. I believe that schools should not prohibit popular culture in their premises because it can be a source for selecting creative writing topics and can be used in creative writing activities.

Creative writing

What I have learnt about creative writing is that it must actually involve lived experiences of creativity. I understand that creativity requires being motivated to do things uniquely and excitingly. Creative writing requires creative thinking and action. Therefore, this demands excellent planning and patience from the teacher's side. Creative writing involves a multifaceted process; it is not a once-off or linear activity. That is why the teacher's writing instruction has to be very supportive and positive to motivate learners to put sustained effort into their writing activities. The teacher also has to provide learners with pertinent feedback and genuine praise.

Creative writing teaching does not happen in a vacuum. It is influenced by the contexts where learners come from, the types of culture they are exposed to and social interactions. Learners often like to choose writing topics from a variety that they are familiar with and interested in. The creative writing teacher has to gather children's popular culture knowledge to make writing topics relevant. The popular culture concept has made me realise the need to utilise the knowledge that learners have in my teaching. I am also aware of the knowledge gap I had in terms of the content of children's popular culture. I was teaching writing in the present with the past's content rather than with contemporary knowledge. The concept of popular culture had broadened my understanding to change my attitude as a teacher about allowing the objects of popular culture in class. I have adopted the show and tell style in teaching creative writing with children's popular culture artefacts.

The creative writing concept has made me realise that creative writing forms such as poetry demand some elements of art. When writing poetry, you gain freedom because it allows a flow of words, recollections, and emotions that come across our minds and hearts to be expressed on pen and paper. The study has taught me and helped me to understand the practicality of the idea. Through using interpretive poetry, I have gained some hands-on experience in arranging words artfully. It has helped me to better express my experiences and understandings because with poems the arrangement and selection of words are often concise and to-the-point. Therefore, by bringing creativity into my research process, I learnt first-hand about developing creative writing before teaching learners in the class. I now see how using poetry in creative writing classes could provide a space for learners to be original and honest in their writing because it demands sincerity from real experiences. After writing poems to express my professional learning, I better understood some incidents and gained some healing as a teacher.

Implications

Teachers and school leaders should understand the importance of acknowledging learners' knowledge of children's popular culture in their teaching. They should also allow artefacts reflecting children's interests in their institutions because they can be a catalyst for creative writing development.

This self-study contributes to the field of education by offering other teachers of language inspiration and practical ideas and strategies for using children's popular culture to teach creative writing. This study also makes a distinctive contribution to the knowledge base of self-study research on English language teaching. In a recent review of Self-Study and English Language Teaching (ELT), Peercy and Sharkey (2020, p. 823) proposed that "scholarship that engages in various forms of self-inquiry in ELT would benefit from rigorous use of self-study methodology". This thesis has demonstrated my conscientious and resourceful use of self-study methodology. To my knowledge, this is the first self-study to focus on English creative writing teaching with isiZulu-speaking primary school learners.

Whitehead, Delong, Huxtable, Campbell, Griffin, and Mounter (2020) state that many once passionate practitioners at school level are losing interest in the teaching profession. The study offered me professional knowledge and a better understanding of my learners and their

contextual influences. It has promoted my professional development and enriched my teaching knowledge to improve my practice (Kitchen, 2020).

According to Whitehead et al. (2020), self-study is for the teachers who want to keep evolving in their professional understanding. They argue that it ensures that the voices of teachers are heard, respected and recognised. My study can show other teachers that to enhance certain aspects of their professional practice and contexts, they can directly engage in self-study and not let others only conduct research and make recommendations about their profession.

The study was a shared research journey where I, along with the children I taught, wanted to improve what we were doing in classroom. According to Luthuli et al. (2020), school teachers who undertake self-study as a research methodology often work with their learners as research participants. These authors argue that children's views are of utmost importance to the teacher-researchers' learning. Likewise, Whitehead et al. (2020) agree that learners' voices in the form of feedback are crucial in self-study because they inform what should happen in educational practice. My self-study research demonstrates how learners can become active, expert research participants who have a voice in their education and are not treated as objects in the study. Therefore, I offer my self-study research as a response to the question posed by a child research participant: "Why is it only grown-ups that write about learning, when it is us that do the learning? Why haven't they asked us?" (cited in Whitehead et al., 2020, p. 27).

My guidelines for using popular culture as a resource for teaching creative writing

As a consequence of this study, I plan on moving forward with teaching creative writing, with the following guidelines in mind. I share these guidelines as resources for other teachers to build on:

1. Children's popular culture is dynamic

I plan to acknowledge that popular culture plays a crucial role in young people's lives and can sometimes dramatically impact what we teach for developing creative writing. Teachers' knowledge of children's popular culture may be outdated and irrelevant. So it is vital for me as a teacher to be updated with the latest developments and expertise so that creative writing lessons are relevant and relate to what learners are familiar with. Teachers must realise and acknowledge that teaching in the 21st century is different from teaching in the past century,

because culture keeps changing with time. Therefore, their knowledge of popular culture must involve contemporary youth and children's interests, which may be integrated into content and teaching and learning activities.

2. Children's popular culture can be influenced by people that children are close to

(c) Children's popular culture can be influenced by family

The families that learners come from have a significant influence on the culture that is instilled in children before they come to school. Teachers have to take into consideration the knowledge of the culture that learners bring to school. The home experiences and interaction children get from their siblings and parents lays a foundation for teachers to develop language and literacy learning. This knowledge is crucial because teachers have to use this knowledge to make learning and grasp concepts more comfortable and relevant. Teachers should understand that learners are the product of the family; therefore, it is significant to know the culture they bring into class. This will inform teachers' preparations, as they design lessons based on familiar content and concepts.

(d) Children's popular culture can be influenced by peers

I plan to consider the influence peers have on developing children's popular culture for creative writing purposes. Children's popular culture depends on peer circles because this is where they engage in various social interactions and where they find pleasure and learn at the same time. Valuable life attitudes and skills such as tolerance, respect and teamwork are developed from peer interactions. Peer influence may encourage one to participate in a certain kind of sport or game. Modern children are engaging in virtual space communication through technological devices. Being part of these interactions make learners experts. This enriches the learners' knowledge of popular culture, which could be developed further at school such as in creative writing.

3. Children's popular culture can be observed in children's interests

(a) Children's popular culture can be conveyed through toys and other playthings

I plan to use toys and other playthings as resources to teach creative writing. I believe children like to play with toys and other play objects because these are valuable in their social lives. Children's use of toys and other playthings can increase the knowledge that they bring to school. As a result, I will prepare lessons that will encourage children to use vocabulary concerning toys. Furthermore, I will allow learners to bring toys and other playthings objects into school

premises to use for the show and tell sessions. Bringing these objects to class will assist learners in prompting and articulating inner speech for creative writing.

(b) Children's popular culture can be communicated through cell phones and social media

I plan to utilise cell phones and social media to access the children's popular communication culture for creative writing development. I have discovered that many children are absorbed in children's popular culture shared through modern gadgets and social media platforms. Today's children are exposed to cell phones as a means of communication, and they are often technological wizards. Therefore, schools should not deny the existence of cell phone communication culture, but should allow judicious use of cell phones in classrooms. Using this kind of content and technological knowledge for teaching could benefit all children. It can also prepare less affluent children who do not own cell phones to confidently fit into the outside world which is dominated by modern technological developments.

(c) Children's popular culture can be shared through sports

I will use sport as a popular culture to make creative writing fascinating to the learners. I understand that much of children's social interaction happen through sports. Through sport, they develop valuable life experiences, values and abilities such as friendship, respect for others, healthy competition, communication and teamwork. Sport is in learners' hearts, and they like to watch it and be part of it. Most children advance their knowledge of the sport by consulting different media sources. They enjoy having dialogues about sports in their circles of friends. That is why learners have a vocabulary about sport and I believe I should harness this in creative writing.

(d) Children's popular culture can be expressed through music

As a result of this study, I plan to use music as popular culture to teach creative writing in my class. Learners come to school with some kind of music knowledge from home. Children often are introduced to music at the early stages of development by their parents. Many children enjoy listening to music and become fascinated by particular music genres that they are exposed to outside school. These music genres can influence children's dress codes as they identify strongly with them. Because they are obsessed with music, they are knowledgeable about it. That means that if I integrate music content and musical forms into writing activities, that could enhance learners' motivation and creativity because they will be familiar with the content and

form. Learners could even write about their favourite musicians. And singing and performing music could stimulate learners to be innovative and artistic.

(e) Children's popular culture can be revealed through fashionable clothing

I plan to teach differently by using fashionable clothing as content to develop creative writing. I have discovered that fashion is one of the children's interests and sometimes expresses who they aspire to be. By fashion, I refer to clothing items that are in style for children, such as tee-shirts, pants, shoes and other accessories. Celebrities are often the people that set the trends in fashion and then young people become obsessed with them. Children also get knowledge of fashion from friends, television and social media platforms such as Instagram. Therefore, using fashion as content for writing topics could enable learners to write about what is in their minds and hearts. The writing could improve if the topic content is from the heart and they are passionate about it.

(f) Children's popular culture can be seen in movies and television

Lastly, I plan to use popular culture content seen in movies and on television to teach creative writing as a consequence of this study. Many learners grasp this knowledge at home when they watch movies and on television. This is because many learners spend most of their time watching television as it gives them joy and entertainment. This audio-visual content knowledge can increase learners' vocabulary and skill for narrating stories. Spending most of their time in front of screens makes them experts in movie stories. Movies and television have content knowledge that is useful to prompt learners' creative thinking for writing activities. This means that primary school teachers can use the knowledge that learners have gained from entertainment sources such as movies and television.

Conclusion

As an English language teacher working with isiZulu-speaking learners, I felt that it was my responsibility to seek understanding and strategies for improving my creative writing teaching. The first research question that guided the study was: *What can I learn about children's popular culture and creative writing from my childhood memories?* To find answers to this question, I recollected childhood memories pertaining to popular culture experiences. I discovered that my childhood was dominated by children's popular culture experiences that included educative and fun elements. However, my childhood experiences that involved popular culture did not appear

to be considered by my language teachers in creative writing teaching. We were given dull topics to write on and often drilled to reproduce a model essay the teacher gave us to memorise. I have realised that I need to draw on children's real-life experiences and passions for my creative writing teaching to improve. It is important not to just teach how I was taught, because I might repeat the same mistakes my past teachers made. This means that memory-work can be a catalyst to bring positive change to develop professional competencies and improve the teaching context.

The second research question was: *What can I learn through exploring children's popular culture as a resource for teaching and learning English creative writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class?* Through studying classroom-based activities, I discovered that children are experts on modern popular culture. This means that this study offered me a platform to learn from my learners as they taught me about what was in their hearts. This study made me realise how much knowledge of popular culture I lack and the need to keep updated. I have learnt that popular culture content can be used to elicit inspiration and creative thoughts for writing. When planning writing lessons, I should consider topics and activities that incorporate children's interests.

This self-study research was necessary to re-invent and revive my teaching. Self-study has made a difference in my personal development as it has helped me believe in myself as a teacher. It uplifts my morals and spirit to have positive professional self-esteem. Furthermore, the study has recognised the significance of children's perspectives and expertise and considered them as valued partners in educational research and practice.

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LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS

P.O. Box 2011

Hillcrest

3650

06 December 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM YOUR CHILD'S CONTRIBUTION IN (POPULAR CULTURE) ENGLISH WRITTEN COMMUNICATION LESSONS.

- Title of study: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study

The purpose of my research is to explore children's popular culture as a resource for my teaching of English creative writing in a Grade 6 class. This topic is very important to me as a teacher because I seek to make an improvement in the way I support, instruct and impart knowledge to my learners. I also need to have most of my learners achieving more and developing their creative writing capacity.

This study is supervised by Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is an associate professor at the School of Education, UKZN. She can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2603460 for further information.

The information will be generated through daily lesson activities. I will use hardcopies of learners' written work and journal entries they will keep during research period. I will also audio record and photograph lesson activities (no learners' faces will be shown in the photos). I therefore request your permission to refer to child's contribution in lessons.

I will only use your child's work if you give me your consent. It will be used in way that respects your child dignity and privacy. Hard copies and journal entries of learners work will be safely stored and discarded if no longer required for research purposes. Your child's name or any information that might identify him or her will not be used in any presentation or publication that might come out of the study.

There are no direct benefits to your child from participating from this research. I hope this study will make valuable contribution to the teaching of written communication in primary schools. I also wish to inform you that you do not have any obligation to have your child participating in the study. You may withdraw your child at any point and that will not affect or put your child at a disadvantage.

For further information on research participants' rights you can contact Mr Premlall Mohun at UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 4557. Email: mohunpeukzn.ac.za

I hope my request will be considered positively.

Thank you.

Yours truly,
S.B. Madondo
0827551646 (Contact number)

DECLARATION

- TITLE OF THE STUDY: Title of study: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study

I, ………………………………………… hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the research that will be conducted during English lessons.

I also understand that my child can withdraw from the study and there won't be any negative or undesirable consequences to him/her. I understand that my child's contributions will be used in the thesis and other publications based on the research.

I consent to the data collection activities of:

Copies being made of my child's class work	YES/NO
Photographs being taken of my child during class (no faces will be shown)	YES/NO
Audio recorded discussions	YES/NO
Journal entries	YES/NO

………………………………………   ………………………

Signature of parent/Guardian   Date

LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS (ISIZULU VERSION)

INCWADI YESIVUMELWANO NOMZALI

> P.O. Box 2011
>
> Hillcrest
>
> 3650
>
> 06 December 2017

Mzali

ISICELO SEMVUMO YOKUSEBENZISA IMIPHUMELA YOCWANINGO OLUZOVELA KUMSEBENZI WOMNTWANA WAKHO WOKUBHALA ISINGISI

- Isihloko socwaningo: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A teacher's self-study

Inhloso yocwaningo ukubheka usikompilo lwezingane njengendlela yokufundisa ukubhala ngesiNgisi kwibanga lesi 6. Sibaluleke kakhulu lesihloko kumina njengoba nginguthisha ofuna ukuphucula indlela engifundisa ngayo. Ngifisa nokubona abafundi bami abaningi benza kangcono ekubhaleni izindaba ngesiNgisi.

Lolucwaningo lwengamelwe u Proffesor K. Pithouse-Morgan onguSolwazi eNyuvesi yaKwa-Zulu Natali. Ngizosebenzisa ulwazi oluzovela emsebenzini womntwana wakho uma ngabe uvuma. Ngizowusebenzisa ngendlela ehlonipha amalungelo omntwana wakho kanye nesithunzi sakhe. Igama lomntwana noma ulwazi olungamveza umntwana angeke lusetshenziswe kushicilelo oluphathelene nalolucwaningo.

Akukho umntwana azokuhlomula ngokuba yingxenye yalolucwaningo. Ngethemba ukuthi lolucwaningo luzoba nomthelela omuhle ekufundisweni kokubhala ezikoleni. Ngifisa ukukwazisa ukuthi akukho ukubophezeleka komntwana wakho ukuba aqhubeke nokuba yingxenye yalolucwaningo uma engasathandi.

Ukuthola kabanzi ngamalungelo abantu abayingxenye yalolucwaningo ungaxhumana no Mr Premlall Mohun e UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office ku 031-260 4557 noma Email : mohunpeukzn.ac.za

Ngiyathemba isicelo sami sizokwamukeleka.

Ngiyabonga.

Yimi obhalile

S. B. Madondo

082 7551646 (inombolo yocingo)

INCWADI YESIQINISESO SOLWAZI OLUPHATHELENE NOCWANINGO OLUZOKWENZIWA

- Isihloko socwaningo: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A teacher's self-study

Mina, …………………………………. Ngiyagcizelela ukuthi ngiyezwa konke okuqukethwe yilombhalo kanye nohlobo locwaningo oluzokwenziwa ngezikhathi zesifundo sesiNgisi.

Ngiyazi ukuthi umntwana wami angashiya ukuba yingxenye yocwaningo futhi angeke kube khona okubi noma okungamlandela ngenxa yokushiya kwakhe.

Khetha ngokubhala u YEBO noma CHA esikhaleni ohambisana naso:

Ngiyavuma ukuthi ulwazi luqoqwe emsebenzini womntwana wami, okungaba olubhalwe emaphepheni, izithombe, ingxoxo eqophiwe okanye idayali ukuze kusetshenziswe ekubhaleni kwe thesis noma okunye okungabhalwa kususelwa kucwaningo _____.

NOMA

Angivumi ukuthi ulwazi luqoqwe emsebenzini womntwana wami kungaba olubhalwe emaphepheni, izithombe, ingxoxo eqophiwe okanye idayali ukuthi kungasetshenziswa ekubhalweni kwe thesis noma okunye okungabhalwa kususelwa kucwaningo _____.

_____
   _____
Sayina mzali   **Usuku**

APPENDIX B: LEARNER ASSENT LETTER

Dear Grade Six Learner

You are invited to participate in my research project which aims to improve the way I teach and support English creative writing to Grade 6 class.

We will be using children's popular culture to inform my teaching and your learning of English creative writing. I also need to see most of you achieving more and developing your creative writing capacity. I believe that this study will be of great benefit as it will equip me and other teachers with new ways of utilising what children regard as very important and meaningful in their lives in approaching teaching and learning of creative writing. I also hope to share my findings and learning with you, your parents/guardians, other teachers and educational researchers.

Your participation will be your activities of English lessons on creative writing which is part of your school work. You are not forced to take part and are free to leave at any time without any negative effect to your academic progress.
Thank you.

Yours truly,
Mr Madondo

DECLARATION

- TITLE OF THE STUDY: Title of study: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study

I, …………………………………………… hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the research that will be conducted during English lessons.

I also understand that I can withdraw from the study and there won't be any negative or undesirable consequences to me. I understand that my contributions will be used in the thesis and other publications based on the research.

I consent to the data collection activities of:

Copies being made of my class work	YES/NO
Photographs being taken of me during class (no faces will be shown)	YES/NO
Audio recorded discussions	YES/NO
Journal entries	YES/NO

………………………………………   ………………………

        Learner   Signature   Date

APPENDIX B
LEARNER ASSENT LETTER (ISIZULU VERSION)

P.O. Box 2011

Hillcrest

3650

06 December 2017

Mfundi

Uyacelwa ube yingxenye yocwaningo oluhlose ukwenza ngcono indlela engifundisa ngayo ukubhala ngolimu lwesiNgisi eklasini lakwa Grade 6.

Kulolucwaningo ngizobe ngisebenzisa usikompilo lwezingane njengendlela yokufundisa ukubhala. Ngifisa ukubona abanye babafundi sebenza kangcono ekubhaleni izindaba. Ngikholwa ukuthi lolucwaningo luzoba nemiphumela emihle ezokwazi ukungisiza ekwenzeni indlela yokufundisa ukuthi ibe ngcono. Imiphumela yocwaningo ngizoyithumela kunina bafundi, abazali benu, abanye othisha kan nabanye abacwaningi.

Umsebenzi we siNgisi uzoba yingxenye yaloiucwaningo kodwa awuphoqekile ukuthi ube yingxenye yocwaningo ungakwazi ukuphuma ushiye noma nini. Akukho okubi okuzokwenzeka kuwena kanjalo nasekufundeni kwakho uma ushiya kulolucwaningo.

Ozithobayo

S. B. Madondo

INCWADI YESIVUMELWANO ESIPHATHELENE NOCWANINGO

Igama nesibongo: _____   _____

Khetha ngokufaka X ebhokisini elilodwa lokuvuma noma lokuphika

Ngiyavuma ukuba yingxenye yocwaningo	

Noma

Angivumi ukuba yingxenye yocwaningo	

Sayina lapha : _____

CRITICAL FRIEND CONSENT LETTER

<div align="center">

P.O. Box 2011

Hillcrest

3650

06 December 2017

</div>

Dear Critical friend

<u>REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM DISCUSSIONS IN CRITICAL FRIENDS MEETINGS.</u>

- Title of study: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study

The purpose of my research is to explore children's popular culture as a resource for my teaching of English creative writing in a Grade 6 class. This topic is very important to me as a teacher because I seek to make an improvement in the way I support, instruct and impart knowledge to my learners. I also need to have most of my learners achieving more and developing their creative writing capacity.

This study is supervised by Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is an associate professor at the School of Education, UKZN. She can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2603460 for further information.

In this study it will be useful to record our group supervision discussions as a method for data collection. I will request your additional time for us to meet to discuss our childhood popular culture memories. Other contributions will be from our meetings during our group supervision meetings.

I hereby request your permission to use your valuable contributions during our critical friends meetings and to avail yourself for further meeting discussions. You will be notified in advance with the date and time for our meetings.

If I receive your consent I will use your contribution in a manner that respects your dignity and privacy. Your voice recordings and my notes of our discussions will be securely stored and discarded if no longer in use for my research purposes. You will not be identified even the name of your school will not be used in any presentation or publications that might result out of this study.

There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study and that there are no legal obligation to the study, meaning you may withdraw at any time. There won't be any negative consequences or be prejudiced as a result of a consent withdrawal.

For further information on research participants' rights you can contact Mr Premlall Mohun at UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 4557. Email: mohunpeukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely
S.B. Madondo

DECLARATION

- <u>TITLE OF THE STUDY</u>: Title of study: Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study

I, …………………………………… hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time from the study without any negative consequences to myself. I understand that my contributions will be used in the thesis and other publications based on the research.

I consent to the data collection activities of:

Audio recorded discussions   YES/NO

…………………………………………   ……………………
 SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

APPENDIX D

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF ™
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

12 February 2018

Mr Siphiwe Madondo 207523550
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Madondo

Protocol reference number: HSS/0096/018D
Project title: Exploring children's popular culture as a resource for English Creative Writing in an isiZulu-speaking Grade 6 class: A teacher's self-study

Full Approval – Expedited Application
In response to your application received 5 February 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Y

.. ..
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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PROFESSING EDITING CERTIFICATE

THE WRITING STUDIO
Writing and Editing Practice

Certificate 2021/1/1
2 January 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This dissertation, entitled **Exploring Children's Popular Culture as a Resource for English Creative Writing in an IsiZulu-speaking Grade 6 Class: A Teacher's Self-Study**, by Siphiwe Madondo has been edited and reviewed to ensure technically accurate and contextually appropriate use of language for research at this level of study.

Yours sincerely
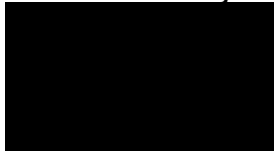
CM ISRAEL, BA Hons (UDW) MA (UND) MA (US) PhD (UNH)
LANGUAGE EDITOR AND WRITING CONSULTANT
Connieisrael90@gmail.com **Mobile 082 4988166**

APPENDIX F

TURNITIN COVER PAGE

turnitin Turnitin Originality Report

<u>Thesis 28 January 2021</u> by Siphiwe Madondo

From Chapter drafts (Phd)

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paper text:

CHAPTER ONE: ENTERING THE UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY OF CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE AT SCHOOL Introduction I am an African male teacher with 18 years' experience in the teaching profession. My initial teacher qualification was a Secondary Teachers Diploma. However, I got my first teaching post at a rural primary school as there were no higher posts available at that time. From then, I gradually developed a