

**Playful Pedagogy in an Under-Resourced Grade 1 Classroom:
A Teacher's Self-Study**

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DECLARATION

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

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Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

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ABSTRACT

I am a teacher in a primary school in a semi-urban area, serving an isiZulu-speaking community. My study aimed to explore playful pedagogy as a valuable teaching and learning approach in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom. A socio-cultural theoretical perspective helped me consider how social and cultural factors could influence teaching and learning. I adopted a self-study methodological approach. I was the primary research participant, and the other participants were the children 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 playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* This question helped me to look back on my childhood, playing inside and outside of school. Responding to this question helped me better understand why it is significant that children learn through play and how they might benefit from playful pedagogy. In answering this question, I used artefacts and drawings to prompt relevant memories of playing games we used to play when we were growing up. The second question was, *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* In responding to this question, I worked with my learners on various lessons whereby their classwork activities enabled me to observe and interpret the educational impact of playing. Audio recordings and photographs were used to record discussions and activities. I also used journal writing to reflect on each lesson. Engaging the learners assisted me in understanding how I could improve my teaching practice through playful pedagogy. I employed collage as an arts-based method to analyse and reflect deeply in searching for meaningful answers. The thesis presents four themes that reveal my understanding of playful pedagogy and the implications thereof for improving my practice: (1) Playful pedagogy can enhance child development; (2) Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life; (3) Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction; and (4) Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children. My study adds to the knowledge base of self-study research by demonstrating how schoolteachers can work with children as valued research participants who can also gain self-knowledge in the process.

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CHAPTER ONE: INCORPORATING PLAY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

1.1 Introduction

I am a Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3) teacher. I am currently teaching Grade 1 and I have taught this grade for four years. The school that I teach at is located on the outskirts of a town in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and is situated in a semi-urban area. It is a black African school and has 1350 learners and 31 staff members. All the staff and learners are black people and the majority of learners and teachers are Zulu speaking. The school is not more than 35 years old. For about 10 years the school was operating from mobile containers, as the Government was still looking for a suitable place to build the school. However, the site which the school was built on is not big enough; for example, there is a limited area for learners to play in and not enough classrooms. Hence, each of the intermediate (Grades 4, 5, and 6) and senior (Grade 7) classes have about 65 to 70 learners.

The purpose of this study was to explore playful pedagogy as a valuable approach in teaching and learning in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom, to instil learning engagement in children and stimulate cognitive development. I aimed to improve my practice as a teacher by exploring playful pedagogy. Playing is a vital part of children's lives; their daily routines involve play. Samuelsson (2008) proposed that playing forms part of a child's everyday life's natural components. However, with my school having limited space and no playground, children are standing in the corridors to eat and finish their lunch. I have noticed that learners do not do anything at break time that refreshes their bodies or frees their minds. I believe play can create calm, happiness, and a relaxed feeling, which I think is the break that all children need after a long period of working and cooperating with teachers' instruction. Play can give one a sense of being in control, and I have observed that children like to take control and feel responsible for being in charge.

I undertook this study because I anticipated that learning through play would encourage social interaction, making teaching and learning less stressful and fun for learners. Social interaction could motivate friendship among learners and build a positive relationship between my learners and me as their teacher. This could enable me to understand learners better in terms of who they are (background) and their thinking level. That would aid me to engage them in activities that could further their understanding and ability. Hence, knowing and understanding my learners

could allow me to become more aware of learners' talents and skills, and even their weaknesses. I anticipated that playful pedagogy would enable learners to work together in a friendly manner and allow learners with different capabilities to work as a team to learn from each other.

Play is for all children. It is in their nature. It is an important activity (Holt, Lee, Millar, & Spence, 2015). Therefore, I foresaw that besides children enjoying playing for its own qualities, the play could also be a tool that I as a Grade 1 teacher could implement to encourage learners' engagement and support their academic learning and help them improve social development. As Gray (2011, p. 454) states, "In the play, children learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules". Miller (2013, p. 1) agrees that "Play builds excellent social and emotional skills and helps create a culture where those skills are valued at school". This implies that children's play might be a source of multi-skills development. Integrating play in learning can allow learners to interact, help, and share ideas to build creativity, communication, and numeracy.

Learning through play (playful pedagogy) could allow the learners to learn to interact with each other and with me as their teacher. I supposed that playful pedagogy could set a free learning environment that could enable learners to engage well, feel accommodated, warm, and comfortable. If learners feel free this can facilitate sharing ideas, asking questions, and finding solutions. Miller (2013) acknowledges that children learn freely when they learn through play without fear or any limitations, as it allows them to make mistakes and keep on trying again and again until they get it right. Playful pedagogy can help build a child's positive development, such as self-esteem and creativity, and create social and emotional development (Miller, 2013). Likewise, Bennett, Wood, and Rogers (1997, p. 37) claimed that "Play allows children to take risks without fear of failure and to learn through trial and error". Playful pedagogy can encourage a safe space for children, and of course, when children feel safe and comfortable, this helps them be optimistic, which increases their learning ability.

My initial ideas for my research study were expressed in a lantern poem. Lantern poems originated in Japan and are short poems of five lines that describe a one-syllable noun, such as a feeling or an abstract idea. Pithouse-Morgan, Deer-Standup, and Ndalen (2019) shared that lantern poems illuminate multiple possibilities of communicating and responding to different and related human memories, knowledge, and understandings. I composed my lantern poem with the help of my supervisor, Prof. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, to consolidate my ideas on

how I believe playful pedagogy would have a positive effect on children's learning. I thought it would stimulate children's thinking and reasoning and social interaction and development.

Lantern poem

School

Playful

Encourage

Development

Mind

In this chapter I will explain the focus and purpose of my study, and give details of the study's rationale. I will also define my research questions and explain how I answered them. I will then clarify the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that inform the study.

1.2 Focus and purpose of the study

I have observed that young children are active beings; they learn better in an environment that allows them to perform actively, and so coming to school to sit and have to wait for the teacher to instruct them might bore learners. Bennett et al. (1997, p. 53) agreed, stating that "Children appear to have more energy when they are playing, and become bored or easily tired in formal, teacher-directed activities". In my experience, for young children having to follow the same routine every day is not exciting, challenging, or developmental, either socially or cognitively.

From my observations, I think play also makes learners feel comfortable and gives them a sense of belonging. Hendy (2003) maintained that playful pedagogy allows teachers to make learning more fascinating and to provide more opportunities for engaging learners in their learning. Bennett et al. (1997) emphasised that play gives children a sense of ownership; it also boosts their self-esteem and creates independence. Therefore, I anticipated that playful pedagogy would help learners explore and gain experience in constructing their knowledge. Playful pedagogy could enable me to guide and assist learners in reaching their full potential in their learning by maximising their thinking and reasoning capability and decision-making.

In my understanding, playful pedagogy encourages learners to participate in their learning. Weisberg et al. (2013, p. 18) asserted that “The hands-on, child-driven educational methods sometimes referred to as ‘playful learning’ are the most positive means yet known to help young children’s development”. For example, the learners can share ideas in class and small group discussions, use tangible resources to solve problems, and also construct new knowledge or new ideas through interaction or exploration. This also helps learners who are reserved, as some are too shy to ask questions for clarity in class discussions. Playful pedagogy could allow learners to feel comfortable enough to share problems with their classmates, so through playful pedagogy learners could help each other with class activities independently.

However, it might be a challenge in most under-resourced schools to employ playful pedagogy because of limited material. For instance, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of teaching and learning aids may result in teachers feeling that it might not be possible to apply playful pedagogy. This might result in teaching and learning mostly based on teachers instructing learners, with less interaction among learners or objects. As Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012, p. 135) claimed, “Poor children who are in the most overcrowded classroom receive the most drill-based instruction”. Consequently, this could mean that learners would contribute less to their learning. It could further deprive learners of opportunities for active learning. As Jensen (2016) stressed, children in poor communities and those that attend under-resourced schools deserve a good quality education. Therefore, I believe that even though my school has limited resources, playful pedagogy could still be employed if I am creative and do proper planning.

Since my learners are still young, they need to be provided with opportunities to gain mind, social and emotional development. Playful pedagogy could be an appropriate approach to apply, as it would encourage physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development. As Grindal, Hinton and Shonkoff (2012, p. 19) explained, “Teachers should ensure that young children have the experiences that are necessary to support a successful development process.” Furthermore, as Connery, John-Steiner and Marjanovic-Shane (2010) advised, teachers should introduce learners to a resourceful or fruitful environment that would stimulate their thinking and reasoning. Providing children with an inventive classroom could enable them to explore and experience, which could help them work or learn to gain understanding. I anticipated that with playful pedagogy, I would facilitate an innovative classroom to encourage interaction and independent learning.

In my understanding, regardless of the school conditions, playful pedagogy can be implemented with what is available. I think to implement it does not necessarily require a teacher to buy expensive playing materials. I believe teachers need to be creative in using available resources to deliver playful teaching and learning. For instance, Peterson (2016) advised that traditional games and toys can serve as resources that teachers can modify as learning resources. I believe that utilising familiar games would make learners feel comfortable and help them engage easily with activities developed from games that they usually play in their communities. Charlesworth (2004) maintained that playful pedagogy can provide children with materials that would encourage them to explore and further let the teacher assess children's level of thinking. Applying playful pedagogy in my classroom would mean manipulating resources and making my learners participate in some traditional games that I believe had helped stimulate my own development.

1.3 Rationale

I have noted in the Foundation Phase district meetings that most schools present the same concern about learners who are admitted to Grade 1 without having attended Grade R. Grade R is the preparatory year before learners in South Africa start formal schooling. It only became compulsory in 2019 for all children in South Africa to attend Grade R, which has still not been fully implemented. This seems to be a challenge for teachers, as they are most likely to fail to support underachieving learners who have not received an appropriate grounding before starting Grade 1. This intrigued me to understand how playful pedagogy could provide a platform for preparing Grade 1 learners for formal learning. In my school, there is no assessment policy for school readiness for Grades R and 1, which means that there are no interviews or tests carried out to assess the competence of a child for Grade 1; instead, only the learner's age is considered for their admission.

I feel that this is not only a challenge for teachers, but for our learners as well. Schooling could be overwhelming for the first-timer; thus, there might be a need to consider factors that could contribute to child underperformance. In this case, I think engaging in playful pedagogy could create a comfortable environment, and that this could allow the learners to be prepared for school readiness. Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule and Trew (2010) believe that playful pedagogy is essential in helping young children be ready for formal learning. This shows that playful

pedagogy can maintain a calm, safe space for learners to feel at ease and familiarise themselves with schooling.

I anticipated that employing playful pedagogy could help me develop and support learners' speech, written language, and numeracy. Peterson (2016) explained that playful pedagogy allows teachers to teach using learners' familiar contexts, resources, and games to incorporate play and creativity to develop learners' use of both written and oral languages. For example, using known objects can help learners develop what they already know into new knowledge or ideas. Teaching learners using resources that they are acquainted with can promote cooperation and play activities to increase interaction and encourage learners' oral language development.

In my understanding, learners must be actively engaged in their learning to enhance their creativity, skills and talents. Teachers should not only be feeding learners what is in the textbooks or teachers' knowledge, but must allow learners to use and reveal their abilities and aptitudes. Teachers must be just as concerned about how they teach (teaching pedagogy) as what they teach, to enhance children's social, academic and creative development (Reed, Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2012). Similarly, Han, Moore, Vukelich, and Buell (2010) maintained that the desk and chalkboard teaching approach reduces learners' potential. Charlesworth (2004, p. 73) further claimed that "Learning is a joint experience between an adult and child, not just transmission of knowledge from adult into the head of a child". In my view, this also implies that learning should not be about memorising what learners have been taught. Instead, teaching should equip learners to be independent and apply their ideas or methods to solve given problems rather than spoon-feeding them.

Employing playful pedagogy, therefore, can enable learners to reach their potential. It does not limit them, as it aids them to make discoveries beyond the teachers' control. According to Walsh et al. (2010), playful pedagogy permits teachers to provide children with opportunities to think critically and promote social development as they interact and assist each other. Furthermore, Weisberg, Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2013) argued that playful pedagogy requires learners to get involved in their learning and also enhances vocabulary through interaction. In addition, Grindal, Hinton, and Shonkoff (2012) maintained that playful pedagogy can enhance young children's development and provide them with skills to adapt to new circumstances or respond to different situations. Playful pedagogy offers children a chance to be part of their learning. This is supported by research that shows how educational

approaches that make learners passive suppresses children's thinking and reasoning capability, limiting children's cognitive development (Jensen, Pyle, Zosh, Ebrahim, Scherman, Reunamo, & Hamre 2019).

Even though as teachers we might feel the pressure to complete the syllabus and give written tests, we could always find ways to integrate play into our teaching. Play requires us as teachers to create, and therefore we can manipulate lesson activities and make them more playful and still fulfill the curriculum goal or lesson object. Jensen et al. (2019) understood that educators can create games or playful activities that could also be in line with a lesson's goals. In the same way, Sabean (2016, p. 3) pointed out that "Fortunately, it is possible to incorporate more play [to] meet academic standards". This calls for teachers to use creative skills to integrate play in learning by manipulating resources that could simulate active, enjoyable engagement. I believe applying playful pedagogy would enrich learners' knowledge. They could also find their own meaning as play encourages them to explore to improve their understanding.

My school district was nominated in 2015 as one of the pilot areas for implementing *Jika iMfundo*. This educational programme is in line with the prescribed national Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This programme focuses on curriculum coverage; it is based on the conviction that completion of the prescribed curriculum would contribute positive results in improving learning outcomes. According to Christie and Monyokolo (2018), "*Jika Imfundo* seeks to establish a common instructional culture of curriculum management; tracking, reflecting, reporting, monitoring, and collaborative problem-solving" (p. 25). However, this is a highly prescriptive programme that to me does not appear to be in favour of implementing play in teaching and learning. In planning for my study, I thought that I could adapt the prescribed curriculum by taking a playful approach.

According to Christie and Monyokolo (2018), *Jika iMfundo* has two types of accountability to fulfil: reciprocal accountability and internal accountability. They both aim to achieve the effectiveness of school improvement. Reciprocal accountability seeks to ensure that every unit that acquires the change in performance is guided and supported by the responsible bodies to ensure progress. Internal accountability works within the school to establish *Jika iMfundo* instructional culture. There are monitoring strategies such as curriculum management of

tracking, reflection, reporting, monitoring problem solving, and collaboration to ensure that curriculum coverage is achieved.

In our school, teaching and learning are informed by the prescribed Jika iMfundo curriculum, which applies to two learning areas: languages and Mathematics. The third learning area, Life Skills, still falls under the national CAPS, which, in my view, is in support of playful pedagogy.

I therefore also reviewed the Jika iMfundo policy document to see how it supports playful learning in the two other learning areas. Unfortunately, I found that the Jika iMfundo programme does not promote play-based learning. It mostly encourages social interaction learning, as it promotes group activities and class discussion, which inspires learners to share ideas and learn from each other. Even though these activities encourage communication and other skills among learners, I feel that they lack the element of play, as they are part of formal teaching and learning. Hence, there is no freedom as they are led and instructed by a teacher.

While I understood that it might not be easy for me to integrate play into the Jika iMfundo programme, I believed I could still try to create conditions for teaching and learning through play. As Bennett et al. (1997) explained, although play provides valuable contexts for learning, it might be difficult for teachers to incorporate play effectively into their teaching. This might be because the overload of content might constrain the teacher's ability to apply playful pedagogy. Furthermore, playful pedagogy might be seen as too much of an effort for some teachers, since it might be time-consuming as it requires more learners' engagement and considers more of what learners think or believe. Nevertheless, I believe adopting playful pedagogy aids teachers, as it allows them to measure learners' level of understanding about that particular lesson. Thus they could build up from what learners know.

I believed it would be necessary to find gaps to weave in playful pedagogy without compromising the Jika iMfundo programme's principles. Bennett et al. (1997) acknowledged that even though a national curriculum might not accommodate playful pedagogy, as teachers we still need to create the necessary conditions to improve the quality of and opportunities for play in schools. Likewise, Drake (2009, p. 10) stressed that "To encourage independent learning, resources in the area of provision should be readily available and accessible to children". For example, in teaching place value, addition, and subtraction in Mathematics, I could start the lesson by allowing learners to play marbles, where they play in groups; that

might help them understand the value of numbers, such as the concept of having more or less. In this instance this could be an introduction to assess learners' understanding or be used to extend learners' knowledge.

Therefore, I anticipated that beginning my lesson with games could enable learners to practically understand or make their meaning. That would also help them to apply their understanding of learning activities. Winning and losing could also allow learners to learn central lifelong capabilities, such as regulating their emotions, planning and social interaction. Concerning Life Skills, in my review, I found that the CAPS policy supports playful pedagogy, as several outlined activities promote indoors and outdoors free and teacher-guided playful pedagogy. For instance, the Life Skills curriculum endorses the use of indigenous games. These include hopscotch, marbles, and throwing and catching a ball, which promote free play and help create a free, calm and comfortable space.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions that guided my study are outlined below.

Question One: What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?

I respond to this question in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis. This question helped me to look back on my childhood, playing inside and outside of school. For example, I looked at the games I used to play at a younger age. I considered how playing managed to stimulate my creativity, helped me to learn to interact, focus, and maximize my imagination and thinking and reasoning capability. Thus, responding to this question helped me better understand why it is significant that children learn through play and how they might benefit from playful pedagogy. In answering this question, I used artefacts and drawings to prompt relevant memories of playing games we used to play when we were growing up.

Question Two: What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?

I address this question in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis. I show how I learnt that for young children, playing is part of their social, emotional, and cognitive development, which needs to be nurtured by providing a rich, resourceful environment. I explain how I worked out that I needed to improve in ways that would help me bring in play and incorporate it with the prescribed curriculum requirements. In responding to this question, I worked with my learners

on various lessons whereby their classwork activities enabled me to observe and interpret the educational impact of playing. Audio recordings and photographs were used to record discussions and activities. I also used reflective journal writing to reflect on each of the lessons. Engaging the learners assisted me in understanding how I could improve my teaching practice through playful pedagogy.

1.5 Key concepts and theoretical perspectives

1.5.1 Playful pedagogy

In this study, I explored playful pedagogy as a primary concept. Playful pedagogy allows teachers to support children's development by mainly using different playful activities that can involve working independently, teacher-guided activities, group activities, creativity, reasoning, and thinking capability (Hendy, 2003). I understand that playful pedagogy is a learning and teaching approach that allows learners to be more involved in their learning. It gives learners a chance to develop or improve their knowledge and not depend on teachers' understanding.

Playful pedagogy enhances learners' opportunity to interact with their environment in building up their knowledge and skills. Connery et al. (2010) suggest that play offers children a chance to discover the meaning of their situation and to construct ways of seeing the world. From my reading, I realised how through playing children can accumulate knowledge of different aspects of life in the world. As Neha and Rule (2018, p. 3) maintained, "Children learn by watching and imitating situations around them and it is learning through trial and error that enhances a child's cognitive abilities". For example, play may offer children a chance to safely practice home or school culture as they get to imitate some of the activities performed at home or school by playing games like houses and school. These kinds of games help children to gradually engage and fit in as they try out or perform different tasks or social norms. It could be said that pretence games allow children to role-play duties and cultural practices in a safe space, for them to understand the world around them.

Games are challenging by nature; they require children to engage deeply in their thinking to win the game or perform successfully. Preziosa (2017, p. 9) maintained that "Play paves the way for learning". Correspondingly, McFarland and Laird (2018) agreed that play allows children the opportunity to challenge themselves, test their abilities, and mostly to learn to make

risky decisions that might physically and emotionally hurt them. In that sense, I think playing can prepare children to become social and be able to deal with the challenging circumstances they come across in their daily experiences. For example, it enables them to deal with bullies and to resist the fear of facing challenges in life. I could say that playing also strengthens learners' self-confidence, and they easily get along with other children from their early grades. Connery et al. (2010) declared that play is one way of developing children to be critical, flexible thinkers capable of acting creatively in the face of a rapidly changing world. Thus, play can allow children to adjust to different settings, as play boosts their social skills and could enable them to easily fit into groups that they may be allocated to by a teacher.

Playing gives learners opportunities to solve problems, make their own decisions, and interact to share ideas. As Weisberg et al. (2013) explained, playful learning involves discovery as children learn through being active participants rather than being passive or directly instructed by the teacher. Reed et al. (2012) agreed that playful pedagogy allows learners to explore and interact with each other as well as with their environment. Consequently, learning through play enhances children's active engagement in their learning. I believe play grants them the opportunity to allow for the skills they have internalised to come into practice or be lived.

Playful pedagogy requires that learners get involved in their learning, and thus the role of the teacher's role is to guide and assist learners to find different meanings by scaffolding their learning. Han et al. (2010, p. 87) explained that "In scaffolding, the adult assists the child to perform at a higher level than would be possible without adult support. When the child can perform alone, the adult gradually withdraws and lets the child act independently". Likewise, Pyle and Danniels (2017) considered playing as an effective way of teaching. It allows children to engage with learning rather than the teacher directly instructing children, which they see as depriving children of their thinking and reasoning. For example, this means that in teaching through playful pedagogy a teacher could be seen as a co-player. For instance, when the child plays by sorting objects like shapes, balls, and boxes, as an adult, you could also help the child extend their understanding to learn that besides separating balls and boxes, they could sort them into colours. As a result, when the child plays under a teacher's guidance, this helps them develop reasoning and thinking ability.

Furthermore, playing could enable a child to reach beyond the potential developmental level they need to work together to assist each other or with an adult's help. Connery et al. (2010)

explained that playful pedagogy can be a joint activity that the child can engage in through an adult's aid or in a collective with peers. I view play as a tool that promotes sociability in learning, which leads to each individual delivering beyond her level of expectation.

With guided play, the teacher can help children with class activities to help them move to the next level or find other meanings for the given task. With playful learning the teacher can understand or find out learners' perceptions or understanding of a particular section. She would then know how and where she needs to focus on building learners' knowledge. As Reed et al. (2012, p. 27) stated, "Guided play fosters academic knowledge through play activities". Similarly, Danniels (2018) also maintained the essentiality of guided play-based learning, as she put forward that it extends learning opportunities within the play itself. I feel that play also helps children understand that there are many perspectives and angles by which to view things, and they need to explain how they came to their findings. In this respect, I consider playing as one of the major tools in strengthening children's reasoning and negotiation skills. For example, when they have to solve Mathematics problems, they can solve a sum using different approaches that have been applied by others, and would be able to justify how they arrived at an answer.

Moreover, playing could promote independence. The child learns from an early age to work and think independently. Britton (1992) proposed that play stimulates independence, as the child strives for freedom by attempting to do things for themselves. Britton (1992) further suggested that the best way for a child to perform well or achieve independence is to show them the skills they need to succeed. Similarly, Drake (2009) observed that playing scaffolds children's learning, as it allows them the freedom to experiment, investigate, and pursue personal interests. In my view, playful pedagogy urges teachers to provide learners with an opportunity to try and work on their own and make their meaning before the teacher could direct them.

Playful pedagogy could further promote socio-emotional interaction among learners and between teachers and learners. Weisberg et al. (2013, p. 16) explained that "playful pedagogy minimises stress in the classroom; cultivates joy, pride, and self-confidence; and fosters social bonding; all of which support efforts to improve academic achievement". Thus, playful interaction encourages friendly conversation between teachers and learners. This stimulates

warmth and joy, and most of all it allows the teacher to understand the level of socio-emotional development for every child in the classroom.

I believe playful pedagogy supports creative learning as it encourages learners to actively participate in their learning, hence promoting learners' skills and talents. Connery et al. (2010, p. 199) advised that "creative learning allows learners to use their imaginations intellectually, socially, artistically, and culturally". Through play, learners can take on different roles and use their imaginations to make meaning of the situation and build their knowledge. Likewise, Whitebread (2003) emphasised that children are active beings and are always curious. Thus the classroom environment should stimulate learners' engagement and enjoyment to inspire their learning and overall development.

We must value children's creativity and indigenous knowledge, regardless of the home and cultural background. Engel (2011) stressed that children's curiosity develops from their social influence, which means that what children love to do or even know and are curious about might be influenced by their social surroundings. I understand that playful pedagogy acknowledges what the child values and builds learning from what the child believes is valuable to him or her as a child (Peterson, 2016). In my opinion, utilising children's background knowledge to further their academic learning might help learners easily understand. Playful pedagogy enables the teacher to use familiar examples and aid in scaffolding learners' level of understanding.

Playful pedagogy could support children's multi-skill development and boost learners' academic progress. For example, Jensen (2019) posits that playing provides children with great learning opportunities that promote their school performance. I think playful pedagogy could enable the teacher to use various strategies that actively involve learners in their learning. For instance, engaging learners in dramatic play could improve their speech development; Hendy (2003) emphasised the value of story-making as a form of creativity that offers children opportunities to role-play. I trust that dramatic role-play encourages learners' oral language, speech, and social development. For instance, role-playing promotes working in teams, and consequently enhances learners' negotiation skills. This suggests that role-playing in games like playing school allows learners to plan together on how to go about taking on different roles; hence, such games increase their potential in improving skills that aid them to solve problems and make well thought out decisions.

In the Foundation Phase teachers are expected to develop learners' language levels, both in speaking and writing. Playful pedagogy could allow teachers to develop learners' language by using what children are comfortable with. For example, a learner could bring her favourite toy and present why the toy is so special. Play allows children to share ideas, read, and tell stories, which encourages oral and written communication and descriptive language (Bennett et al., 1997). Correspondingly, Whitebread (2003) explained that playful learning facilitates communication and listening. Playful pedagogy enhances vocabulary as the teacher promotes more open-ended questioning to assist learners in thinking creatively. For example, as Weisberg et al. (2013) recommended, instead of telling learners what a helmet is, the teacher could tell a story that would create questions and improve learners' thinking to find out what a helmet is and what it does. In the same way, Engel (2011) supports playful pedagogy as she suggested that it offers learners an opportunity to be active in their learning. Thus, instead of memorising what the teacher has taught them, they can discover for themselves and therefore make sense of what they learnt.

Foundation Phase teachers should provide a classroom environment that allows and encourages play to cater to learners' academic and social development needs. Connery et al. (2010) advised accommodating in terms of allowing learners to engage more in play. Similarly, Grindal et al. (2012) appealed to teachers to change their classroom environments to be more open and explained that teachers should provide children with safe, stimulating, child-friendly environments where they can explore the world through play. Likewise, Danniels (2018) posits that child developmental learning is related to a free play setting, which the educator needs to arrange but then step back as they observe learners in free-play. This means that the teacher has to ensure that the classroom environment supports being free to play. I think this implies that as an educator, I should facilitate children's learning by providing a resourceful classroom that appeals to learners' motives for exploring and experiencing.

Besides play encouraging both academic and social development, I believe it also brings joy to the players. In my view, engaging play in classroom teaching boosts academic success and encourages health-friendly relationships among learners and educators. Preziosa (2017) claims that play promotes social relationships. It bridges the age barrier and formal teacher-learner relationship and makes it easy for learners to approach their educator; also, the educators have great chances to learn and understand their learners' social and emotional needs. As Weisberg et al. (2013, p. 9) state: "Playful pedagogy can minimise stress in the classroom; cultivate joy,

pride, and self-confidence; and social bonding; all of which support efforts to improve academic achievement”. I view playful pedagogy as being able to help learners to engage and to feel that they are part of learning.

1.5.2 Teacher learning

In this study, I also focused on my professional learning as a teacher about exploring playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom. As a teacher, I feel it is necessary to continuously develop myself to meet my learners’ needs. As a teacher, I need to challenge my beliefs and assumptions to understand how they impact my teaching practice. For example, my teaching practice might be influenced by how I was taught during my own schooling.

I believe teacher learning is necessary to help me learn and review my teaching performance or find opportunities in my teaching practice to try to better myself. Pithouse-Morgan (2019) referred to a teacher’s learning as self-directed and self-initiated. To improve and develop myself, I need to understand my current professional standard and set goals to uplift my teaching profession. This means that I need to learn that my teacher identity should not remain the same or stable; my identity might be determined by various circumstances in my teaching career (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This implies that different challenges, situations, and conditions we encounter have a strong influence on our teacher identities. I need to continually review, adjust, or develop myself to adapt to new situations.

To make a valuable change in my teaching practice, I had to find and understand what needed to be changed and how I could implement it to improve teaching and learning. As Easton (2012, p. 50) attested, “Ideally, the learning community structure itself emerges from a need or purpose and passion”. Similarly, Kortjass (2019) believes that teachers should work together and learn from each other. This means that teachers can form groups to identify problems and questions that arise from their curiosity, concerns, and challenges. Thus, as a team they can discuss and share ideas, and together they try to find effective solutions. For instance, at weekly meetings with my colleagues at school, we review and reflect on that particular week’s work and then plan work for the following week. In some cases, we would find that we all have similar challenges, and we would work together as Grade 1 teachers to try to find solutions.

As a teacher, to bring change in my classroom I had to become conscious of my beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning, to develop an appropriate teaching approach that would

enhance children's learning. Kelly (2006, p. 507) explained that "Teacher learning involves teachers engaging in the process of knowing-in-practice to allow their full participation in classroom activity". Likewise, Korthagen (2016) argued that as educators we are confronted with the necessity of self-professional growth. This implies that I should actively engage myself in enriching my knowledge and continuously improve my teaching practice. Pithouse-Morgan (2019) agreed that teacher learning is self-developing. Kelly (2006) added that teacher learning moves teachers from a marginal level to the level of expertise, as they continuously develop their knowledge and consequently improve their teaching practice. Likewise, Day and Gu (2007, p. 425) maintained that "teachers' professional learning ... will enrich teachers' knowledge base [and] improve their teaching practices". To improve my knowledge, I explored how bringing playful pedagogy in my classroom could improve my teaching.

To learn constructively and make a productive change in my teaching practice, it was vital to work with others with whom I share the same vision and interest. That could help me learn from my mistakes and share my views and assumptions to better understand my teaching profession. Whitehead Delong, Huxtable, Campbell, Griffin, and Mounter (2020) witnessed that cooperative learning is a means of being responsive to improving teaching practice. I anticipated that involving fellow teachers would be an effective approach to bringing about a positive change in professional learning. Hence, as explained further in Chapter Two, in my study, I worked with three fellow primary school teachers and fellow doctoral students who served as my "critical friends team" (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 43).

As Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 43) explain, "critical friends encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to obtain alternative perspectives, and they work to help validate the quality and legitimacy of each other's claims." Consequently, I was aware that forming a relationship with fellow teachers would help me apply valuable changes to improve my knowledge and skills in my teaching practice. Easton (2012) also indicated that professional learning communities are groups of educators who share similar visions and goals to bring about positive transformations in teaching. Day and Gu (2007, p. 428) further stated that teacher professional learning and personal development can help teachers "Build character, maturity and other virtues in themselves and others, making their schools into moral communities". Correspondingly, Mackinnon and Moerman (2016) agreed that teacher learning involves a dialogical process that includes exchanging pedagogical knowledge and understanding in

constructing new ideas. I acknowledge the importance of teachers sharing ideas and challenging techniques to aid each other in professional growth.

I anticipated that further learning and dialogue with others would develop and help me discover new ideas and transform my thinking and reasoning structure in my teaching practice. Similarly, Whitehead et al. (2020) emphasised the significance of establishing and sustaining networking with other researchers who share the same interests for individual professional growth. This suggests that as a teacher, you always need to be prepared to learn from your colleagues and mentors to further develop your teaching practice (Mackinnon & Moerman, 2016). I understand that self-development in my teaching profession means allowing me to learn; regardless of the number of years of my teaching experience, I can always do better than yesterday. I needed to work with others to further improve and understand playful pedagogy's benefits in my teaching knowledge, skills, and approach.

I believed that uplifting my learning could help me enhance my knowledge and expand my understanding. Besides, it could also help me to teach better. As Kelly (2006) also maintained, teacher learning is a constructive movement whereby teachers partner with learners and colleagues to look for ways to expand their professionalism and enable learners to engage in classroom activities.

Thus, working in collaboration can help improve teaching and learning as colleagues would share ideas and help each other with challenges they encounter in their schools or classrooms. For instance, I expected that working with my Grade 1 learners would enable me to understand learners' needs in conjunction with my teaching. I anticipated that this would empower me to understand them better. Through reflections on my lessons, I could adopt teaching strategies to promote active participation to enhance teaching and learning in my classroom. Working with my learners could also give me an alternative, child-centred perspective on exploring playful pedagogy in my classroom. This means that teacher knowledge is built through engaging with others, to learn from each other, for example, regarding teaching skills, approaches, and understanding.

1.6 A socio-cultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning

In my study I adopted a socio-cultural theoretical perspective on teaching and learning. According to Kelly (2006), socio-cultural learning theories emphasise that teacher professional learning is constructed through sharing ideas. Mkhize (2004) agreed that the self cannot be conceived independently of social relationships. This could imply that knowledge is embedded in societal beliefs and norms. Therefore, our thinking and doing could be influenced by our socio-cultural backgrounds.

I understand that schools are communities and therefore school practices are informed or follow certain cultures of doing, which is influenced by our societal norms. Murphy and Iverson (2003) argued that common beliefs and our thinking cannot be understood apart from the contexts in which they appear. Likewise, Galman (2009, p. 130) understood that “Self-reflection forces critical consideration of the social and cultural dimension of personal experiences”. Our ideas and information on teaching practices are built on collective ideas. This suggests that for the school to function properly, it has to accommodate and respect everyone – including our learners.

Moreover, I feel that it is vital to always consider learners’ background knowledge. As an educator, I need to utilise tools that would aid in stimulating previous knowledge and helping them discover new information. I believe that integrating existing knowledge with other information could assist children in improving their understanding. As Björklund and Ahlström-Björkman (2017, p. 99) claimed:

Children need to be offered relevance structure for their exploration of different phenomena. This relevance structure supports meaning-making, in that earlier experiences and present resources are joined together, which offers an opportunity to experience the phenomena in ways not previously possible.

Hence, I was mindful that I should not enforce my understanding or knowledge of my teaching practice, but rather try to accommodate learners’ prior knowledge or even construct their meaning by exploring that particular topic.

Furthermore, I believed that I should try to bring in relevant resources for learners that would aid them to engage independently with their work and also allow them to easily relate and build

on new knowledge and skills. For example, Björklund and Ahlskög-Bjorkman (2017) maintain that children should be allowed to explore topics that would enable them to share ideas and bring in their knowledge for that particular topic for them to develop a new level of understanding. Similarly, Charlesworth (2004) affirmed teachers' significance in motivating learners to keep trying and to construct their knowledge instead of imposing one right answer. I anticipated that playful pedagogy would be capable of incorporating learners' background knowledge into academic learning. For example, playing grants children the opportunity to interact and bring in their previous experiences; this could help them integrate and associate what they know with the new information to improve their understanding.

I realised that I should not rely solely on my knowledge and understanding, but that learners should be part of their own learning to make meaning of their learning. Björklund and Ahlskög-Bjorkman (2017) proposed that primary learning for an individual is through meaning-making from interaction and communication, as one shares ideas with others that give rise to one's cognitive development. Kelly (2006, p. 510) further stressed that "Knowing-in-practice is a dynamic process resulting from the collaborative actions of teachers and students together in the context of their work". Classroom learning activities must not ignore learners' background knowledge or prior experiences. This could be made possible by engaging learners in group activities to share ideas and knowledge on certain subjects.

I was therefore aware that playful pedagogy can support children's discovery of new knowledge, and can help them to link new knowledge with existing knowledge, which can assist them in developing their thinking and reasoning. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory maintained that children learn better when they are provided with a rich environment to explore, make sense of, and build their knowledge (Connery et al., 2010). Similarly, Sluss (2005, p. 57) explained that "Children construct knowledge through interactions with society and culture and this is usually referred to as socio-cultural theory". Correspondingly, Bennett et al. (1997, p. 129) also agreed that "Knowledge is not just acquired; it changes existing ways of thinking and understanding". Therefore, as a teacher in the Foundation Phase I need to create a learning environment that promotes experimenting, and supports learners working individually or in groups to build their knowledge, explore, and solve problems.

I understood that the management of learners' participation in learning in classroom settings is influenced by their social environment. In this regard, Yahya and Wood (2017) highlight that

allowing children a chance to play may reveal community beliefs, practices, and values. Consequently, as a teacher I would be able to apply relevant teaching resources that learners could relate to. This suggests that as a teacher I should not impose or even oppose what learners bring into the classroom, but aid them in developing their thinking or improving their understanding. Bennett et al. (1997) further argued that it is not possible for children to automatically build new knowledge and skills without an adult's support. Sluss (2005, p. 57) explained that according to Vygotsky, "learning occurs in the zone of proximal development". This means adults must provide support and guidance to assist children in moving to higher thinking and reasoning levels. Murphy and Ivinson (2003) maintained that the social norms and values encountered by children in their communities (such as family, peer group, and friendship groups) are taken up by learners and influence their perceptions about the world. So, their opinions are built on their social and cultural beliefs.

From my reading, I understood that as a teacher I should only join in when needed to encourage my learners' thinking and reasoning. Bennett et al. (1997, p. 129) pointed out that "Play creates zones for proximal development, learning occurs in relevant, meaningful contexts, and that teachers can create ZPDs through the kinds of play environments, resources and opportunities they provide". This means that providing a creative, playful environment can allow children to construct knowledge and discover their skills and talents. Hill and Wood (2019) ascertained that children can express their desires and interest through play, and in that sense, by playing, children can show a sense of power as they act knowledgeable and skilful. Playful pedagogy allows children to share their knowledge and skills, and our responsibility as teachers is to help them fully develop and gain more experience and better understanding.

Moreover, children naturally imitate what they see adults practice; therefore, I think children feel safe to mimic their parents or others through play. In this way, children can interact with the world freely. Connery et al. (2010) submitted that Vygotsky understood a dialectical relationship between each individual and her world, as Vygotsky believed that every person's creativity can be enhanced by the opportunities they have been granted. Likewise, Murphy and Ivinson (2003) declared that a socio-cultural perspective on learning considers a link between the individual and the environment. As a result, I viewed playful pedagogy as an approach to develop children's sense of cultural identity, since playing could somehow transmit and develop language and cultural practices (Yahya & Wood, 2017). In my interpretation, playful pedagogy

should not undermine learners' social beliefs, but support and value individualism, allowing them to maintain their importance.

Playful pedagogy allows children to team up, as it usually involves children playing collectively. In my view this enables children at an early age to understand the values of social interacting. Hill and Wood (2019) sustained that play creates a peer culture whereby children bring their rituals and practices into play, which helps them to incorporate real-life situations to make their meaning of the world. Hence, a resourceful, playful environment can motivate children to become active beings and socialise with peers and interact with the environment. In this way they can share and learn from each other, while learning to appreciate and value each other's cultural differences. I understood that from a socio-cultural perspective, learning is enhanced if children are provided with opportunities to interact playfully with each other and with the environment to create their knowledge, which might be referred to as peer culture.

Hence, it was vital to consider various social and cultural factors that could influence teaching and learning to cultivate playful pedagogy in my study. As Peterson (2016) explained, taking a socio-cultural perspective means that it is vital to consider the school environment and learners' backgrounds when choosing teaching aids. For instance, it is recommended for teaching young children to use resources that learners are familiar with, such as indigenous games or playthings, since these could allow children to feel comfortable and able to engage easily or understand school activities developed from games they usually play. Similarly, McMurtry (2015, p. 1) advised that

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

For example, families, friends, traditions, and peers may influence children's learning and their cognitive and socio-emotional development.

1.7 Methodological approach

The study was qualitative in nature. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000, p. 37) asserted that a “Qualitative study uses qualifying words and descriptions to record aspects of the world”. Likewise, Collins and Cooper (2014) understand that qualitative study requires emotional maturity for the researcher to interact with participants to learn about their lifeworld. This implies that a qualitative scholar looks deep into people’s perspectives, as they intend to understand their social situations. I anticipated that using a qualitative approach would enable me to better understand the impact of playing, and assist me in further describing the effects of exploring playful pedagogy in my classroom.

Furthermore, qualitative research also offers rich information, since its methodologies require the researcher to be simultaneously involved in data collection and analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). Although the researcher offers information about the participants’ life situations, she also provides her self-discoveries and emotions to strengthen the study’s trustworthiness (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Consequently, qualitative study permits the researcher to employ several tools to gain more insight into the field of her research. Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2019) indicated that the researcher could apply numerous tools or methodologies to collect data. Qualitative research therefore grants the researcher an advantage to deeply engage with participants and self-awareness.

My study was located in an interpretive paradigm; it aimed to understand how people make sense of their world. As Henning (2004) claimed, the interpretive paradigm tries to present participants’ reality from their viewpoints. Similarly, Taylor and Medina (2013) affirmed that the interpretive paradigm wishes to establish a relationship with people being studied to learn and understand their beliefs or ways of living. This means the interpretive paradigm requires the researcher to understand the participants’ situations or circumstances. Hence, being a teacher-researcher would allow me to study and build an understanding of the nature of children’s perspectives in terms of their learning and mind development. In that sense, I would interpret my learners’ learning difficulties and how I could improve my teaching to enhance their learning experiences. When adopting an interpretive paradigm, the researcher needs to acquire knowledge about participants’ real life to make sense of their life circumstances.

For this study, I chose to use a self-study methodology; I offer an in-depth discussion of this in Chapter Two. Self-study methodology allows teachers to study themselves to improve their teaching practice (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Pithouse, Mitchell, and Weber (2009, p. 45)

emphasised that “Self-study is improvement-aimed and it looks for and requires evidence of, reframed thinking and transformed the practice of the researcher”. Correspondingly, Dhlula-Moruri, Kortjass, Ndaleneni and Pithouse-Morgan (2017) indicate that self-study focuses on a researcher’s individual professional learning. I anticipated that applying a self-study methodology in my study would allow me to study my memories and classroom experiences to improve my teaching practice. Likewise, Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 43) agreed that “self-study allows teachers to critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse”. I understood that self-study would help me examine playful learning, especially in the early years of childhood development, and explore playful pedagogy as a strategy for effective teaching and learning.

Self-study also requires teacher-researchers to develop team relationships to share their ideas and challenges and find alternative views rather than relying on individual opinions and beliefs (Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017). Austin and Senese (2004) also attested that self-study seeks to examine one’s teaching practice as a foundation for change and improvement. Therefore, I was aware that self-study would require me as a teacher to be open and vulnerable to learn and accept criticism and admit to my failures to learn from others and learn about myself as a teacher and person (Austin & Senese, 2004). Hence, applying self-study would assist me in learning more about myself to improve my teaching practice.

1.8 Conclusion and overview of the thesis

In Chapter One, I conveyed the focus and purpose of the study. I elucidated why I wanted to explore playful pedagogy in teaching my Grade 1 class. I introduced myself as a primary school teacher and provided relevant background information on my professional context. After that, I presented the two research questions that directed my research. I shared my initial insights into the concepts of playful pedagogy and teacher learning and explained why I adopted a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. I then gave a brief introduction to my methodological approach.

In subsequent chapters of this thesis, I continue to weave in my thinking and learning about my study’s critical concepts (Samaras, 2011). The thesis does not have a separate literature review chapter. Instead, throughout the thesis I support, contextualise, and extend my discussions with citations from relevant literature. This is in keeping with the personal narrative style of the thesis (Nash, 2019).

In Chapter Two, I offer an in-depth look at how my self-study research process unfolded. I explain my choice of a self-study research methodology. I also describe the study's location, as well as the research participants and my critical friends team (my three fellow doctoral students). Moreover, I clarify how data were generated using diverse research practices. I then discuss meaning-making. To follow, I address ethical issues and validity. I also explain how I addressed particular research challenges.

In Chapters Three and Four, I recount childhood and adolescent memories of play. In these chapters, I respond to the question: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* Chapter Three focuses on playful experiences in my early childhood, during my primary school life. In Chapter Four, I concentrate on playful activities during my teenage years when I was in high school.

In Chapters Five and Six, I respond to the second research question: *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* In these two chapters, I narrate how I designed and taught lessons to infuse playful pedagogy in all four learning areas: isiZulu; English; Life skills, and Mathematics. The chapters offer vivid portraits of what took place in my classroom.

Chapters Seven and Eight demonstrate how I reconsidered the data generated through evoking my childhood memories and teaching classroom lessons using play (as represented in Chapters Three to Six). For the interpretation and analysis of data, I show how creating and presenting a collage helped me form four main themes.

Chapter Nine is the concluding chapter. This chapter provides a review of all of the chapters, highlighting key messages. I also present a collage that I created to make sense of my learning about self-study through my research journey. Next, I delve into how engaging in self-study aided my professional learning. Then, I reflect on how my growing understanding of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective and critical concepts facilitated my research. Finally, I offer my study's contribution to the knowledge base of self-study research, and tender my conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: MY SELF-STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I defined my study's focus and purpose, which is to explore playful pedagogy as a valuable approach in teaching and learning in an under-resourced school. I also explained the rationale for my study, as I had described how I thought playful pedagogy would be useful for teaching and learning. I further elucidated my understanding of how learning through play could promote social, emotional, and cognitive development and positively impact learners' academic performance. I then discussed the research questions that guided this self-study research. The key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and research approach were also explained.

In this chapter (Chapter Two), I explicate the research methodology applied in my study. I go on to discuss the location of the research and describe the school environment. I give a description of the research participants (Grade 1 learners) and my critical friends team (three fellow teachers and doctoral students). I provide an account of how data were generated using different research practices, and then discuss meaning-making. I consider ethical issues and the validity of the study and, finally, address research challenges.

2.2 Research methodology

In this study I employed a self-study methodology. Self-study research is whereby a teacher engages in examining herself as a teacher in a learning process. As Austin and Senese (2004) noted, self-study motivates the teacher to systematically assess her primary teaching principles to bring valuable changes in her practice. Similarly, Whitehead et al. (2020) posit that teachers who engage in self-study perform continuous research on their teaching practice to improve their professional knowledge and learners' learning experiences. Self-study also requires a teacher to do self-introspection to understand how her teaching is influenced by her experiences, which would enable her to make a meaningful change in her teaching practice (Samaras, Hicks, & Berger, 2004).

To learn about yourself, you have to be honest with yourself and allow for others' opinions and criticism. Austin and Senese (2004) agree that self-study urges one to self-examine one's practice to bring change or to develop in one's teaching profession. Additionally, Samaras and Freese (2009 p. 5) maintain that "Self-study research requires openness and vulnerability since the focus is on the self." This could enable teachers to find weaknesses or gaps in their practice driven by their beliefs or values and, most importantly, to learn new teaching approaches.

In self-study research, teachers are encouraged to work collectively to form a community and practice an open-door policy in their classroom. This means a self-study researcher needs to become selfless and open-minded to learn from others – for example, for colleagues and critical friends to raise their opinions or point out problems or things that you may need to improve as a teacher. Similarly, Whitehead et al. (2020) declare that teachers can draw insight from collaborating with others. Correspondingly, Harris (2007) also believes that educators need to involve themselves in discussions where they exchange ideas with colleagues or critical friends who may have different views or share common ones. I expected that working collectively would allow me to reassess and reconsider my teaching practice.

Self-study is self-introspection; as a teacher, I aim to discover more about my principles of teaching. Self-study requires the researcher to step back and learn from her experiences and history to frame her practice (Harris, 2007). For example, I realised that to explore playful pedagogy with my Grade 1 learners, it would be significant that I critically examine my beliefs and values of playing through retracing my childhood memories of playing. This could then enable me to make coherent links with memories of how playing fulfilled a role in my learning and the skills I gained through play.

It could also be said that self-study enables one to develop room for improvement and not being fixed in one's beliefs as an educator. For self-study teacher-researchers, teaching is a process of learning where the teacher continuously critiques her teaching practice. I anticipated that self-study would enrich my teaching and learners' learning experiences.

Besides, for a researcher to understand how her beliefs and values inform her teaching practice, it is highly recommended that she go through a process of reflection. Reflection allows one to reflect on how values, ethics and thoughts influence one's teaching practice by engaging in a dialogue conversation with others with similar interests (Pithouse & Samaras, 2015). Similarly,

Samaras et al. (2004, p. 910) proposed that “Self-study is about self-knowing towards personal and professional growth that is necessarily enriched through conversation and critique within a self-study community of scholars.” I understood that in self-study research it is vital to know yourself better, through the process of self-knowing, and that it is advisable to interact with people who share the same interests.

Therefore, it is vital to work with others in sharing information and ideas to gain knowledge on how to improve in the teaching profession. For instance, Pithouse, Mitchell, and Weber (2009, p. 45) emphasised that self-study research capacitates the researcher to be actively involved in interaction with others, like colleagues or friends, to get their opinions rather than just to be solely based on your own beliefs or views. Whitehead et al. (2020) agree that it is fundamental for self-study researchers to connect or build communities with people who share similar values to encourage improved practice and create more educational knowledge. This implies that it would be crucial for me to get other people’s views about my teaching practice to get support and assistance. This would help me make suitable changes that would benefit not only myself as a teacher but also the learners.

Self-study allows us to make our past visible to our present. Galman (2009) claims that arts-based self-study enables us to focus on our personal meanings and experiences. We are therefore able to make judgements through what we read or as portrayed by the arts. In other words, we could use our imagination to learn what is represented by the arts of our past experiences. Arts reflect meaning in our past experiences, and in that way, one could read about and picture more clearly how one’s past influences one’s present. For example, Galman (2009) emphasises the importance of using visual arts in self-study. She claims that this allows teachers to learn about their values, attitudes and principles through what is reflected by their arts. It therefore offers us a chance to thoughtfully examine our past experiences.

To jog my memory in remembering my past playing experiences, I chose to use drawings, artefacts and journal reflections to learn about the effects of these experiences. Harris (2007) stressed that self-study is a self-representation; therefore, it is vital to use various data generation methods to validate our findings. Correspondingly, Pithouse, Mitchell and Weber (2009, p. 45) further declared that “Self-study employs multiple, primarily qualitative methods, these methods provide us with opportunities to gain different, and thus more comprehensive, perspectives on the educational processes under investigation”. This implies that I could cross-

examine my teaching practice by using several data generation tools, such as making drawings, keeping a journal, and reflecting on my teaching and gathering information. This could assist me in becoming more aware of my views or beliefs and personal experiences.

I believed self-study would enable me to engage with my professionalism as a teacher and question, review, reflect on my teaching, and try to change and improve to become a better teacher. Self-study is undertaken to promote change or improvement in one's professional identity and performance (Pinnegar, Hamilton & Fitzgerald, 2010). For example, as I have taught Grade 1 for several years, I could therefore possibly teach my learners using the same approach that I believe works better for me, and resist trying other methods. Thus, self-study helps one not overlook or be ignorant of one's mistakes, but to try to work out and find ways to address challenges or what one may not have been aware of to improve one's professionalism.

Self-study would therefore aid me to enter in self-searching of my practice as well as my past experiences. Pinnegar et al. (2010, p. 25) asserted that "Self-study is defined as the intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice". Likewise, Samaras et al. (2004, p. 909) also affirmed that "Reflection is a personal process of thinking, reframing and developing action". Therefore, I understood that self-study aids educators reflect on their teaching and be conscious of their beliefs and the impact they may have on their teaching practice and the learning of learners.

Moreover, I view self-study as a personal struggle where a teacher tries to maintain a balance between her sense of herself and the transformation to a new self. For example, Galman (2009) defined self-study as a reconstruction of the self. The teacher verifies who she is regarding her beliefs and values and tries to and finds out what to change or which aptitudes to add to make the necessary developments in her teaching practice. That would bring about improvement in her teaching as well as in the learning of learners. Austin and Senese (2004) held that for teachers to make a meaningful improvement, they need to identify the influence of their beliefs, attitudes and values in their teaching practice. Samaras and Freese (2006) assert that self-study begins with self-examining. This could mean that teachers need to study their teaching practice by questioning or raising issues of concern or what they find to be problems in their teaching.

Therefore, self-study could be said to be a process of learning in bringing about change in one's teaching practice to benefit learners. According to Samaras and Freese (2006, p. 82), "Self-study generates knowledge about teacher learning and contributes to the knowledge base of teaching and learning." Self-study could be described as an educator's inquiry, which ought to promote self-growth in her teaching practice (Mitchell, Moletsane, MacEntee, & De Lange, 2020). Samaras and Freese (2009) advise that with self-study, teacher educators and teachers reflect on their classroom teaching. This requires the teacher to explore her personal experience to understand her identity and identify how her personal experience influences her teaching practice.

I anticipated that the use of self-study research would promote my teaching practice. I intended to continuously explore and reflect on my teaching practice, which I supposed would help me learn in my teaching profession to be a better teacher to my learners. My research study is on playful pedagogy, where I explore the learning of learners using playful learning as a teaching approach. I believed that self-study would allow me to collect information on playing to learn from my early childhood years as to how play benefited my learning through experiencing and exploring.

I anticipated that understanding my personal history would enable me to develop an awareness of myself as a teacher and be conscious of learners' needs regarding their learning. Samaras et al. (2004) proposed that teachers who work with their learners using a personal history self-study approach can improve their teaching practice as they become self-conscious of their identity and professional growth. In this regard, I undertook this research as self-study research to understand myself and my personality, which could help me consider my influence on my teaching and accept others' opinions, such as those of my colleagues, and let myself grow professionally.

2.3 Research setting

I am a Foundation Phase teacher. I am currently teaching Grade 1, and I have taught this grade for four years in my current school. The research was conducted in my Grade 1 classroom during terms 1 and 2 of 2018. When I conducted my research, I had 32 learners in my class, 12 girls and 20 boys between the ages of 6 and 8 years. All these children speak isiZulu.

The school is located in a semi-urban area on the outskirts of a town in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The school medium of instruction is IsiZulu, and the school ratio is one teacher to 35 learners. It is not a well-resourced school, since it has limited furniture, and little learning and teaching support material. The school occasionally receives support or donations from local stakeholders, primarily to support learners with school uniforms. Recently the school received a grant from the National Lotto to build a playground (tennis court) since it usually uses the community playgrounds for sport and the community hall for specific functions such as school competitions (choir, cultural activities).

The school falls under quintile three, which means it is a no-fee school and learners' parents and guardians do not pay tuition fees. Learners are also provided with the minimum stationery by the government. Since the school receives only the minimum funding from the Department of Education to support teaching and learning, the school funds do not seem to be enough to buy additional materials to boost creative arts, physical learning or extracurricular activities.

The learners who attend come from the surrounding areas. Most parents are unemployed, with families relying on government social grants as a source of income, while some occupy low-paying or unskilled jobs. Hence, most parents cannot afford to buy their children school necessities like school uniforms and stationery.

Children that attend the school come from impoverished family backgrounds, and many learners come from family structures with a lack of support. Most learners walk to school and they arrive with empty stomachs. Fortunately, the school receives breakfast as a donation from a mission organisation; therefore, learners get to eat breakfast at school. The national government feeding programme also funds the school with food parcels prepared and served during school break times. Thus, the learners receive breakfast and lunch at school.

2.4 Research participants

I was the main participant in the study as I researched my childhood memories concerning playful learning and my current teaching experience to improve my teaching practice. I am a classroom-based teacher and worked with my Grade 1 class of 32 learners.

At the beginning of the term, the school holds a parents' meeting, and after the meeting, parents are granted the opportunity to visit their children's classroom. This was an excellent opportunity for me to explain my study to parents and ask their permission for the learners to take part in it. Parents seemed keen to have their learners participate in the study, as none of them objected to my request; instead, most of them asked when the study would start and were interested in how it would support their children's learning. I therefore had to further explain; I used practical examples and referred to what parents used to play as they were growing up, and tried to explain how playing those games may have improved their socio-emotional and cognitive development. After explaining my study to them, I felt that the parents and guardians were happy and willing to let their children participate in the study.

Nevertheless, there were seven parents and guardians who failed to attend the meeting. I gave learners consent letters to request permission to participate in the study from their parents and guardians (Appendix C). I therefore felt the need to allow those parents to come to me at school when they had a chance, so that I could respond to any queries or misunderstandings they may have had.

I explained my research study to the learners in simple language that they could understand, and I asked their permission to participate using child assent forms with pictures (Appendix D). As I explained my study to the learners, they looked happy; a few of them also mentioned the number of games they play at home with friends. It seemed that boys and girls do not like the same games, and this made me a bit anxious, as I was wondering if they would be willing to take part in some other games, as I felt that they have different beliefs regarding the types of games that boys and girls should play.

The games that learners participated in as part of my research formed part of their classwork for Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu. Therefore, all learners were required to participate in all class play activities, whether or not they agreed to participate in the study. However, in the

case of five learners whose parents or guardians did not give consent to participate in the study their classwork and practical games were not used as sources of research data.

At the end of the study, I had a class discussion with learners to discuss my research findings, using a picture I had drawn of a tree that illustrated the impact of playful pedagogy (see Figure 2.1). I believed that playful pedagogy had benefited both the learners' emotional and mental development, as it brought about positive changes that nurtured a calm and warm classroom environment.



Figure 2.1: A tree that explains playful pedagogy.

This picture was used to explain how I felt that playful pedagogy had helped the learners grow both in knowledge and skill. I explained to my learner why I associated playful pedagogy with the tree. For instance, I clarified what a tree provides to human beings and why trees are

essential in our environment. Using the tree picture helped learners easily understand how playing forms an important part of their growth.

I think it was easy for learners to understand the picture's message, as they engaged well in our discussion. For example, they also added their ideas on what trees offer and types of trees they know about; some shared the types of trees and what trees provide, stating that some trees give us fruit, herbs and shade. I then elaborated on what learners had shared, to explain how I relate playful pedagogy to trees. For example, trees provide shade – and also from playful pedagogy some learners were able to get comfort and joy; it also bears fruit, as playing allows them to grow in knowledge and proficiency.

2.5 Critical friends team

In my study, I worked with a team of three critical friends who were fellow doctoral students; they are also primary school teachers doing self-study research. We all worked with the same research supervisor, Professor Pithouse-Morgan. Ntokozo, one of my critical friends, is female. She is in her mid-20s and she teaches in a multiracial primary school situated in Durban. She is a Grade 4 teacher and with 8 years of teaching experience. Khulekani, my second critical friend, is male; he is in his late 40s. He teaches in a multiracial primary school situated in the centre of Durban. He has 27 years of teaching experience. S'phiwe, my third critical friend, is also a male and is in his mid-40s. He teaches in a primary school situated on the outskirt of Pinetown. He teaches Grades 6 and 7, and he has 17 years of teaching experience. Like me, all of my critical friends are African and speak isiZulu as their home language. I asked my critical friends for their permission to use our WhatsApp conversations and to have their names appear in my thesis and they gave their consent.

According to Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008, p. 21), “Self-study allows the researcher to focus on self, engage in reflection through interaction with a critical friend and self, and ultimately improve practice”. We helped each other share ideas and question each other's ideas, intending to improve our research and teaching practice (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) highlighted the importance of critical friends in building constructive self-study research. Hiralaal, Matebane and Pithouse-Morgan (2018) also indicate that critical friends in self-study research are crucial in developing a productive and well-informed research study that would enhance knowledge and enable the researchers to

transform themselves. This means self-study research values others' voices, especially those who share the same interest in improving professional practice.

Working with my critical friends helped me gain different opinions, as they brought in their beliefs, thoughts, and experiences and even questions that probed and challenged my understanding or thinking. Hiralaal et al. (2018) state that one of the most significant self-study factors is working in collaboration to hear other people's suggestions and learn from them, rather than relying solely on your own beliefs. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) posit that critical friends are useful in self-study research as a researcher might find it challenging to assess and address their practice. Working with critical friends helped me reconsider some of my ideas and restructure my ideas to improve my research and improve my teaching practice.

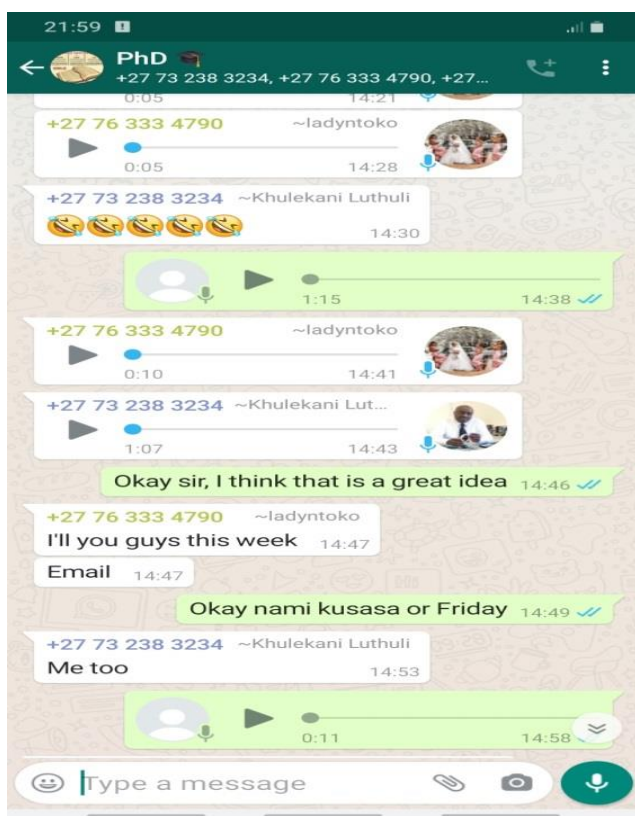


Figure 2.2: WhatsApp group chat with critical friends.

Figure 2.2 shows a WhatsApp text message conversation I held with my fellow PhD student critical friends. In our conversations, we switched easily between isiZulu and English. Apart from the regular meetings we also have a WhatsApp group, which is how we usually interact. It is an easy way to reach each other, especially when we need each other's assistance or share our ideas and get others' opinions.

I wanted to share my ideas on playful pedagogy with others, so I got a chance to exchange ideas and learn how I could improve my ideas on playful pedagogy with the help of critical friends. For example, early on in my study, I believed that games could only be played during the lesson times; my critical friends alerted me that I may even use gaps between the class periods to introduce free-play games. They suggested that otherwise I may not get enough time to let everyone have a chance to play. Thus, as I worked with critical friends I got an opportunity to share my ideas and in that way I was able to learn from them as they questioned my perceptions or beliefs. Hiralaal et al. (2018) state that critical friends allow self-study researchers to find a new perspective, enabling one to assume a new direction for one's research study. Having my ideas challenged helped me review and modify my thinking and try different alternatives to approaching my research.

Also, there were some practical ways in which my critical friends helped me in developing my proposal and the entire research study. Harris (2007) highlights that having a dialogue with a colleague helped her to build a bridge between her private interpretations or ideas and what others think. Likewise, I found it very useful to get my critical friends' opinions, especially concerning overcoming some of the challenges I may have encountered during data generation. For instance, in one of the meetings I had with critical friends I explained how I had a problem regarding how to develop an English lesson and make it more playful. Khulekani advised me to try and create songs. He pointed out that children like to sing as they act on the song; thus, it helps children not forget what they learnt, as they continue singing the song and learn to make meaning of it. I took Khulekani's advice and introduced my learners to morning and afternoon greeting songs, which I believe helped me assist learners in understanding the times of the day, which are morning and afternoon.

2.6 Data generation

In this study I generated data using five data generation practices, namely: a) artefact retrieval; b) reflective journal writing; c) drawing; d) audio recording of learners' discussions concerning their playful activities and Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu lessons over two terms; and e) taking photographs in class. The five data generation practices that I applied in my study were used to capture and prompt reflection on my childhood memories about playful pedagogy and my current teaching.

Artefact retrieval was used as a prompt for remembering my childhood memories concerning playful pedagogy. I kept a reflective journal reflecting on my past and how I integrated playful pedagogy in my teaching practice. Drawing helped me to make visible my memories of play as a child and youth. It was also used in my classroom as a form of visual communication. Audio recording was used in my classroom to record learners' discussions on their playful activities and how learners engage in play. I also audio recorded myself as I taught Life Skills, Mathematics, and isiZulu lessons during terms 1 and 2 of 2018. I used all five of the abovementioned data generation sources to create a narrative story to enhance the exploration of myself and practice as a teacher.

2.6.1 Artefact retrieval

I believed that using tangible material would bring me closer to my past, and reconnect me with the feelings and emotions of my past playing memories. Brogden (2008) maintained that artefacts can help one remember and understand experiences and the impact they may have on one and their role in one's life. Likewise, Kortjass (2019) affirmed that artefacts can bring back memories and, therefore, enrich the meaning and impact they have; for instance, at one stage in your life or relating to one's culture. Thus, I believed I would also be able to engage with my past regarding my childhood memories of play by collecting and reflecting on artefacts. Allender and Manke (2004, p. 21) explained that "Artefacts come from our past and are found in file drawers and dusty boxes, drawn on as we engage in analysis of our work". This implies that artefacts could be old in a sense that they may not be on the surface, as they may be things that have been neglected or long forgotten. As a result, careful searching may be required since it may not be easy to find them as they may be packed away in boxes or suitcases.

I understand that using real objects can bring the past to the surface, and that would enable me to work on my past and be able to understand it to change the present. As Allender and Manke (2004, p. 20) assert, "The variation among artefacts collected over the years evokes the ways [teachers] change and grow through their reflective practice". In my view, using artefacts enabled me to learn more about my teaching principles, as it helped me to review and assess my teaching practice. It further offered me an opportunity to apply necessary changes that helped me grow in my teaching field.

Therefore, using artefact retrieval as a data generation practice benefited my study, as it enabled me to engage with my childhood memories concerning playful pedagogy (see Chapters Three and Four). For example, Magubane agrees that the using a photograph as an artefact allowed him to get a deeper insight into his past high school memories, in learning the role played by family, friends, teachers, and community in his education (as cited in Mitchell, Magubane, Burkholder, & Saloojee, 2019). I suppose this means that in self-study research artefacts are studied in a meaningful way to aid in making sense of how they or the experiences associated with them played a part in one's life development. In that way, I also think artefacts helped me draw from my past the games that I felt were useful or would aid my learners' learning and development.

Discovering my past made me realise how much fun I had when I was growing up and brought pain as some of the people I had played with had passed on, and I am no longer in contact with others. Using objects or artefacts awakened my feelings, as I discovered that playing was something that we were eager for as children and youths. For example, in Chapter Four I present a book (Figure 2.3) as an artefact; this is the book that I used to read in high school for fun.

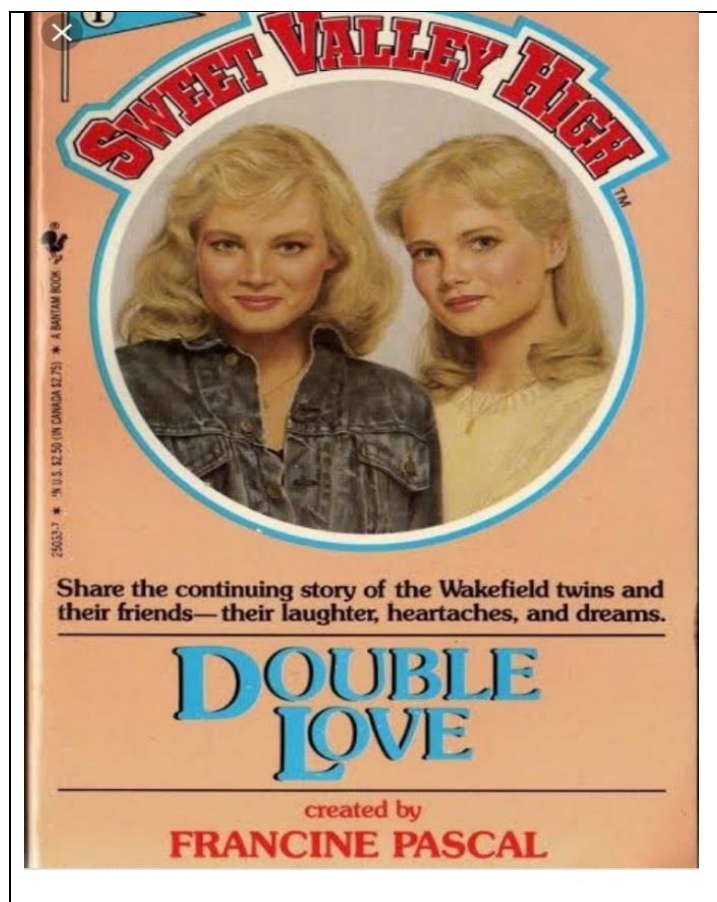


Figure 2.3: A popular book that I used to read for fun.

Figure 2.3 displays an artefact taken from Chapter Four, whereby I outline how this book series played a role in introducing me to my high school life. We formed a book club, so it became the norm for us learners to read at least one novel a month; this was how we kept ourselves entertained.

Using artefacts enables me to make sense of my past in terms of the significance it had in terms of my learning and development (Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017). I foresaw that playful pedagogy would enable children to learn in a happy way and without fear, improving children's capabilities.

2.6.2 Reflective journal writing

Reflective journal writing was used to reflect on my childhood memories. As Masinga (2012) highlighted, through journaling, she discovered herself as she reflected on the past through writing stories. Similarly, Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) determined that journal writing may be a useful self-discovery tool. It makes one reflect on emotions and feelings that might not have previously been explored. I also believe that capturing my childhood memories of playing games helped me learn more about the games that I think positively impacted academic learning. It helped me apply the games that would serve the intended purpose of educational improvement, rather than having my learners playing without a clear understanding of what I wanted them to achieve in each game.

In my journal, I also noted things that came up unexpectedly as I reflected on my daily observations in class. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) advise on the value of using a journal to record observations and experiences. I think it helps you to be responsive in your practice. For instance, I also recorded how each lesson proceeded, such as how learners interacted with each other and if games served their purpose, such as school and hopscotch games, which were intended to help the learner develop social and communication skills. Meyer and Willis (2019) also acknowledge that reflexive journaling can help develop intentional and carefully considered ways to address challenges in teaching techniques. Recording my research lessons aided me to rehearse and be informed on how each playful lesson was conducted. Consequently, I learnt not to repeat mistakes and to be conscious of each game's effect on learning. Therefore, it helped assess and reconsider, if necessary, other strategies to improve in meeting the desired

goal for each playful learning. Through journaling, I described the effects of using playful pedagogy in each lesson and think of ways to improve this in my other upcoming lessons.

Moreover, I used journal entries to record challenges and questions concerning my research study and shared them with my critical friends and in our supervision session with Prof. Pithouse-Morgan. I also used the journal to note down advice or ideas I received from them. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) further sustained that a journal entry is a safe tool to express your concerns and frustrations. They also suggested that the purpose of journaling could be to record interaction with colleagues. Journal writing was used for several purposes in assisting me in developing my study.

The example I present below (Figure 2.4) is a journal entry where I conveyed my thoughts as I was thinking of how and why playing was essential to childhood development and that the learners in my school are limited in terms of that opportunity to play. I wanted to find ways to intervene as a teacher to allow learners to play in my classroom for enjoyment and as a learning opportunity.

Journal entry: 23-04-18

At school as teachers, we take turns as each week two teachers are located on the ground duty, which means they spend their break or lunchtime outside the classroom and looking after children. Therefore, I noted during the week I was on ground duty that most children do not play, they either buy lunch or dish up in the kitchen and some have their lunch. After they finished their lunch they stand in groups and spend time talking to each other. I then questioned myself as I wondered if they were not playing because of limited space or because the period of playing, especially indigenous games, has passed. Thus, this helped me see the need to introduce playful pedagogy and how it could help me develop or improve in teaching and learning.

Figure 2.4: A reflective journal entry.

2.6.3 Drawing

To arouse memories of my playing in terms of how such activities developed my skills and helped me improve in my learning, I made memory drawings of games and play activities that we used to play when I was a child (see Chapters Three and Four). Pithouse (2011) maintained that illustrations make vivid memories visible, as they bring emotions alive. Drawing reminded

me of the joy and benefits of play concerning learning and social, emotional and cognitive development. As Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith and Campbell (2011) explained, drawings help remind yourself of memories. Pithouse-Morgan, Makhanya, Downing, and Phewa (2019) state that memory drawing provokes the researcher's questions that help her learn from drawings what the past and present means and determine meaning for her future life.

Making drawings aided in reminding me of games that could benefit my learners in improving their learning capability; for example, one of the games that I felt would be beneficial to them was playing school. When I drew the game 'playing school', I was reminded of how as children we learnt so much from each other through this game as we repeated what we had learnt at school. I believe playing school developed considerable skills, such as drama and speech skills and learning from others; also, it appealed to both boys and girls.

Furthermore, I created metaphor drawings to illustrate how childhood play made sense or meaning in my life. In their study, Hiralaal et al. (2018) used metaphor drawing to learn from their classes or students their influence as teachers on learners. For example, Hiralaal wanted to understand the role-modelling she had embedded in her students in becoming future accounting teachers. So she asked them to create metaphor drawings to express their thoughts, as this would depict their understanding in the form of visual representation. In the same way, I used metaphor drawing to show the impact of playing in my childhood.

I also involved my learners in drawing pictures during our playful pedagogy exploration. Wood and Hall (2011, p. 4) concluded that "Drawings are also seen as the child's own forms of expression and meaning-making, including their thoughts, feelings and interpretations of experiences and everyday events in their lives". Although I understood that learners aim to please adults in most cases, I assumed that their drawings would convey a message through which I could understand their thoughts about life and experiences in terms of what they like or are exposed to. As described in Chapter Five, the activity that I began with involved asking learners to make drawings of their name-tags, which I believe allowed them to express themselves (Figure 2.5). Luthuli, Phewa and Pithouse-Morgan (2020) discovered that using drawing builds communication with children and can be a resourceful source of information in expressing children's voices in self-study research. Similarly, Deacon (2000, p. 7) asserted that "Arts and drawing are expressive ways that children can provide information to researchers". I also felt that while my Grade 1 learners may not be able to express or give full meaning to what

they are saying in words, making drawings would enable them to convey the essence of what they like or enjoy playing.

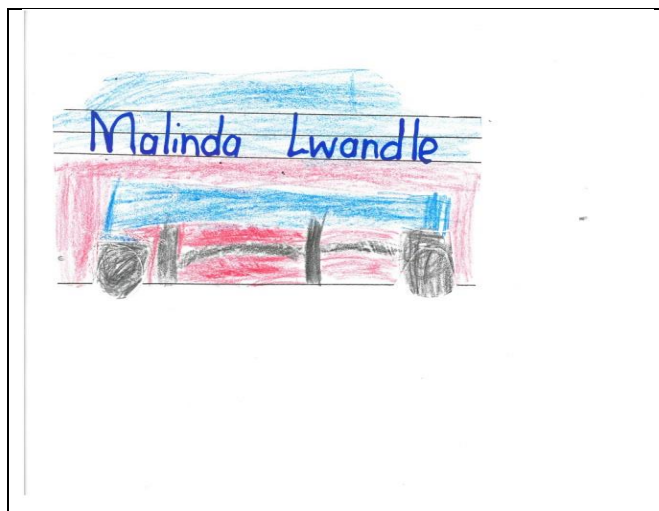


Figure 2.5: Learner's name-tag drawing activity.

The above drawing, Figure 2.5, displays a learner's drawing (learner's name-tag) activity that I used to learn about learners – for example, their favourite toys or other things they like or are exposed to. The activity was also an easy way to make learners feel calm and welcome by doing something they would enjoy and proud of, giving them ownership.

I believe offering learners a chance to make drawings created joy and allowed them to voice out their thoughts and share their ideas freely without fear. Deacon (2000, p. 6) discovered that “People's drawings, whether literal depictions or abstract symbolisms, can be data that provide quality information in a fun and creative manner”. I also anticipated that drawing would make them feel at ease, as most children enjoy drawing. It also allowed them the opportunity to freely engage with their inner being, as it required them to think visually and imaginatively. Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith and Campbell (2011, p. 20) advised that “Drawing and other visual methods, especially when are used with children, are a stimulus for communication”. Similarly, Green and Denov (2019) stressed the importance of using visual arts tools when studying children's experiences. They maintain that child-friendly tools like drawings in research with children strengthen the study by providing concrete information.

Therefore, I believe that applying drawing in my study encouraged learners to actively participate and interact with each other. Drawing also enabled me to interpret or find the meaning of the learners' pictures.

2.6.4 Audio recording

I recorded learners' discussions concerning their playful activities and my Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu lessons over two terms. The purpose of the recording was to listen to and fully engage with what happened during class and in discussions. Recording helped me take note of and pay attention to everything, as I might have missed some of the crucial things, such as tone of voice and emotions, as I interacted with learners. Similarly, Masinga (2012) highlighted that listening to audio recordings of research sessions helped her check on her role in group discussions. Therefore audio-recording also alerted me to how I was practising or not practising playful pedagogy in my teaching.

Audio recording playful activities allowed me to engage with what was happening during play; for instance, it helped me analyse how each game impacted learners' learning experiences. Therefore, it helped me understand how a game affected the children's learning or if it served the purpose that I thought it would. I was then able to continuously try to find new strategies to improve playful lessons or free games that would follow. Listening to the audio recording after some time helped me to reflect on what occurred in the classroom. In that way, I noticed and made sense of things that I might have missed at the time – for example, the emotional feelings, tone, and learners who were actively engaged. Below I give an example of how listening to my audio recording helped me make meaning of or interpret learners' engagement in play and understand my role in pursuing purposeful playing (Figure 2.7).

Reflection: 05/03/18

I wrote my reflection after listening to my audio recording of the lesson; I think this was because I was unsure whether this activity served the purpose of play or because during the activity learners were so serious and much concerned about finishing their activity. I felt that maybe I was the one who made my lesson a bit tense instead of learners having fun, as I kept on insisting that everyone should work and complete their name tags.

Listening to my audio recording, I realised that I was not as pushy as I thought I was, and the noise of laughter and talking witnessed a lot of engagement, interaction, and fun. I think the activity managed to build social bonds amongst learners, as we had in my primary school days where playing could bring children together. My aim was not to make learners complete

their task with this activity but rather to develop ownership, social interaction, communication, and creativity.

With this activity I was surprised to see the skills and talents some learners have; for example, I did not expect them to draw and colour so beautifully. I think learners gained ownership and social interaction skills as most of them felt proud of their name-tags. They could ask each other for help and they, therefore, showed a well-developed sense of communication and social interaction.

Figure 2.6: Reflecting on my playful pedagogy lesson.

2.6.5 Photographs

I took photographs of learners as they took part in different activities that were part of the research data generation (see Chapters Five and Six). I believed that taking photographs would project the learners' voices and display learning in the context of play and also enable me to understand and analyse how playful pedagogy can facilitate learners' engagement. As Mitchell, Weber and Pithouse (2009) maintained, photo-voice is often used to gain more understanding of what matters to people. Therefore, I thought that taking photographs would help me learn how playful pedagogy matters to learners in stimulating their cognitive development and cultivating positive relationships among learners and between a teacher and a learner. To protect learners' identity, I did not take any photographs that showed learners' faces.

I also took photographs of my class setup before I engaged in my research class activities and of my classroom as I started with research activities. Mitchell (2011, p. 37) highlighted that photographs "Possess and stay the moment when the thing was there and in the here-and-now". Pictures can provide additional evidence over and above oral telling; for instance, photographs display details of my classroom settings before and after I started with playful pedagogy. Tidwell and Jónsdóttir (2020) advised us that the use of photographs in examining practice is beneficial as they provide rich information about day-to-day engagement. I think photographs were useful, as I noticed what I might have missed during my observation in class. Photographs or images give more detail than one can ever try to explain, and enable one to understand some circumstances.

Therefore, I felt that photographs could be one way of communicating or passing on the message, as they could present a particular situation. I believe photographs give more detailed

information to the reader, as Mitchell, MacEntee, Cullinan, and Allison (2019) proclaimed that photographs give more insight than words. This means that with photographs, you can make your own meaning, understanding, or interpretations as they have the power to reveal real feelings and situations. Hence, I feel that photographs add value and evidence in explaining playful pedagogy in my teaching. Using photographs further allowed me to show what I might have not clearly described or explained in detail (for example, Figure 2.8).

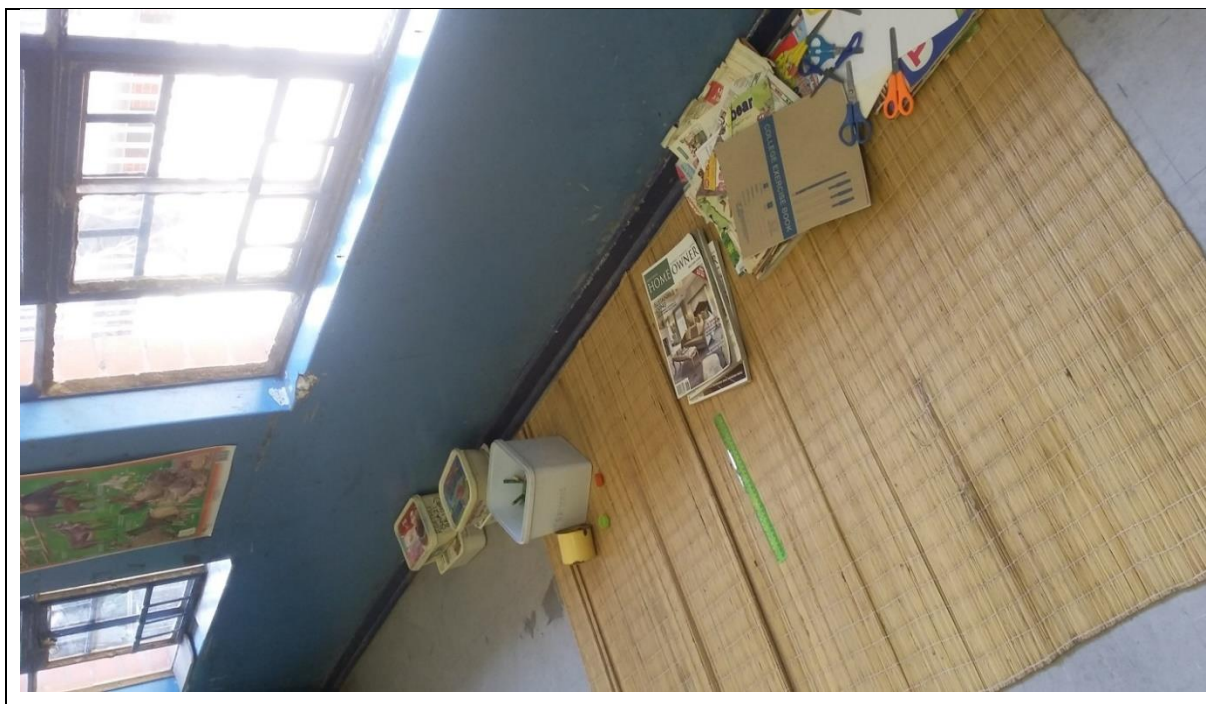


Figure 2.7: Photograph showing the playing corner.

Figure 2.7 displays a photo taken from Chapter Six of this thesis. I took this photograph to show the space I created for playing in my classroom. On this day, I had prepared the playing corner for my learners to play school.

Below I present a summary of the data generation methods used in this study (Table 2.1). The table indicates the two research questions and shows how data were generated, who was involved, and what data sources were produced.

Table 2.1: Data generation

Research question	Data generation activities	Participants	Data sources
<i>What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?</i>	I wrote about my childhood memories of playful learning I collected objects that triggered my memories. For example, I recalled games we played such as playing school, family, stones, and skipping rope I drew to illustrate my memories of play	Me Me Me	Reflective journal entries Artefacts, and my journal writing Memory drawings and metaphor drawings
<i>What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?</i>	I audio recorded and photographed playful activities and discussions in the classroom and Life Skills, Mathematics and IsiZulu lessons in my class over two terms I involved my learners in drawing pictures I reflected on my teaching in my journal	Learners and me Learners Me	Audio recording and photographs Learners' drawings Reflective journal entries

2.7 Making meaning: Data analysis and interpretation

The study was inductive; this means I had to read analytical data that I had generated to look for my data's relations and meaning. Braun and Clarke (2006) established that in inductive research the data are coded based on what is accumulated from the data and are not fitted in according to your pre-existing beliefs. In the same way, I examined data I had already generated (shown in Chapters Three to Six), and fashioned relations, patterns, and meaning.

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) state that with inductive analysis, the researcher repeatedly reads through data and creates headings to code and categorise them. Likewise, Nieuwenhuis (2010) advises that analysis codes are constructed from data generated in an inductive study. Thus, from reading my material, I found that the data for both of my research questions – on what I

have learnt from my past playful experiences and exploring playful pedagogy with my Grade 1 learners – seemed not to differ. In a sense, what I experienced when I was growing up and the exposure playing granted me in my upbringing, and what my learners experienced with playful pedagogy, proved to be alike. I then looked for patterns to make sense of how it relates or to join together information that makes similar meaning to form patterns.

To form patterns, I created a collage that is shown and discussed in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight. To make the collage, I selected and cut out magazine pictures and words that I felt represented my learning by exploring play in my childhood memories and classroom teaching. I pasted the images and words to form an arrangement on a large piece of coloured cardboard.

The collage was informed by the ideas I had drawn from the data. I began with reading my data and jotted down the main ideas. I then grouped similar ideas; with collage, I consolidated and organised the main concepts from the data I generated. Thus I used collage to display my evolving understanding of the data generated in response to my research questions. McKay (2019) acknowledges that collage in research facilitates a reflective conversation that allows the collage maker to re-examine the meaning of her data or experiences. As Van Schalkwyk (2010, p. 687) explained, “Collage as the non-linguistic mode of expression, image, and pictures represent embodied meanings”. This suggests that images used in a collage should be meaningful and could be used to make sense of the message you are trying to convey.

In responding to my first research question, I reflected on how I believed play enabled me to learn, explore and experience life through play. McKay (2019, p. 3) states that in research analysis, “collage helps unformed and fragmented thoughts to come to consciousness and develop a logical form”. Creating a collage helped me make sense of my memories and understand how and why my childhood playing experiences unfolded in certain ways (as narrated in Chapters Three and Four). I also anticipated that creating a collage would help me bring together pieces of my past playful learning memories to inform my knowledge of the benefits of playing. Similarly, Brunke (2018) proposed that art forms such as collage allow researchers to revisit their memories together with the emotions attached to particular experiences of specific life stages. Therefore, I used my collage to describe memories of playing in terms of the effects on me, such as emotional, social and physical development.

Moreover, I used the collage to make sense of the data generated in my classroom to understand my learning from exploring playful pedagogy. Collage making allowed me to express and give meaning to how I thought playful pedagogy helped my learners develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. It also enabled me to visually represent challenges encountered in integrating play into teaching and learning.



Figure 2.8: A picture from my collage.

Figure 2.8 is an image taken from the collage that appears in Chapter Seven. In my collage, I was representing my learning from exploring playful pedagogy. This picture shows a boy who has used his creative skills to create puppets using paper. Similarly, in discussing the image, I explained how playful pedagogy enabled my learners to be creative and learn about some of their skills and talents.

To make meaning of the data, I also worked with my supervisor and my three critical friends who helped me to gain alternative perspectives (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). As described in detail in Chapter Seven, presenting my collage helped me get useful input from my supervisor and fellow critical friends.

After presenting my collage for feedback, I then categorised the collage by grouping pictures that I felt made the same meaning. I followed the analysis process advised by Van Schalkwyk (2010) by numbering pictures on my collage and grouping together those I felt had a similar meaning to form a concept map (see Chapter Seven). In that way, I was able to produce themes and I related them to each category. Grouping data aimed to reduce the number of categories by collapsing similar or dissimilar categories into broader, higher-order categories. In the end, I produced four main themes, which are presented in Chapters Seven and Eight.

2.8 Ethical considerations

As a teacher researching in my classroom with my learners, it was vital for me to consider issues that might harm them; for instance, to protect the learners, I had to be sensitive in generating and handling data. As Lankshear and Knobel (2004, p. 101) maintained, “Ethics is concerned with ensuring that the interests and well-being of people are not harmed as a result of the research being done”. Graham, Powell, and Taylor (2015) cautioned that research studies involving children should honour every child’s dignity and well-being. As a researcher, I had to ensure that the children were respected and their human rights were not violated in any way. Graham et al. (2015) further advised that children must be protected from any emotional or social harm that might result from the research. I believed that my study would not bring any emotional, physical or social damage to my learners, as I aimed to apply playful pedagogy that facilitates children’s interests.

I believed that giving learners and parents detailed and clear descriptions of the research would allow them to make informed decisions about participating. Lankshear and Knobel (2004, p. 101) highlighted the importance of participants giving their informed consent; I needed to receive permission from my learners and from their parents or guardians to conduct research with the children. Hence, after having received permission from the school principal and ethical clearance from my university (Appendix A), I prepared consent letters for parents to sign on behalf of their children to use their classwork in the study (Appendix A). The consent forms (Appendix C) clearly stated the research purpose and explained the activities learners would take part in. For example, learners and parents needed to understand that my data generation included taking photographs of learners as they interacted and played in the classroom.

Working with children as research participants determined that I engaged their ideas, opinions, and beliefs of what they considered as playing. It was essential to me for learners to express their voices. The research activities were conducted in isiZulu as it is the learners’ home language and the school medium of instruction. In presenting learners’ spoken voices in the thesis, I have often quoted in IsiZulu and then translated the words into English. I felt that some of the children’s statements would lose their meaning and the tone of how they were said and understood by the speaker if they were only given in English.

I believed playing should allow learners freedom, and of course, play is often a child-initiated activity. As Lane (2019) maintained, children should be seen as actors whereby their views should be valued in a research process. As a teacher-researcher, I needed to allow learners to raise their opinions, instead of only instructing them. Therefore, it was crucial that although I introduced the games, I should not take over and impose my ideas of playing the game as that would have made them feel less capable. I needed to let them play as they wished and only add in if necessary to enhance academic learning.

In ethical research with children, it is vital to listen to them and respect their decisions. Although I had limited time to encourage free play in a fixed, predetermined curriculum, I needed to offer learners an opportunity to willingly play rather than compel them. As Yoon and Templeton (2019, p. 59) state:

Thus, in teaching and research with young children, neoliberal agendas constrain our ability to thoughtfully interpret children's declarations about the world, themselves, and others. Timetables related to productivity (for both children and adults) create classroom and research contexts where children's voices are dismissed in favor of both academic and publishable results.

As a result, sometimes, I felt that I was trailing behind my colleagues at school in terms of covering the prescribed curriculum. This was because some of my playful learning lessons would take longer than I expected. This was mainly because I accommodated learners' preferences and gave them enough chances to participate in the game.

It was important to me that I attended to learners' emotional well-being. I did not want learners to feel forced to play. I had to them a chance to feel ready to play. Even though I sometimes worked under pressure to ensure that I tried to meet the predetermined curriculum, I think accommodating learners' emotions made learners feel free to engage in play. Instead of rushing to complete lessons, I would sometimes allow play to continue even after lessons, such as during break times. I believe this enhanced my chances of learning more about how learners interpreted play and its impact on their learning.

Although I felt that using photographs would help me tell more than I would have been able to in words alone, I needed to consider a few factors when using photographs. For instance, no matter how interesting a photograph may have been, I needed to ensure that learners' faces were

not shown in the pictures included in the thesis. Some learners got excited when they saw that I was taking photographs, and they would want to smile for the camera. In that case, I had to be selective of photographs as I could not use those that showed their faces. This led me to compromise and eliminate some photographs that would have otherwise been appropriate, because I was obliged to adhere to ethical considerations.

To protect the children's identities, I did not use any learners' real names in the thesis. However, in some planned play activities in class, learners had to write their names – for example, in the name-tags game (Chapter Five). In this game, learners had to be creative in decorating their name-tags. Therefore, I decided to produce three name-tags with false names, and ask three learners to volunteer and decorate them to use in my thesis. I felt I would be compromising the ethics if I were to use the ones with their real names.

2.9 Validity

Self-study is based on researchers learning about themselves and their practices, and it is therefore easy to misinterpret information. Feldman (2003) maintained that validity is vital in self-study research, since we engage ourselves in a self-focused reflective process; thus, we may not be sure of accuracy. According to Feldman (2003, p. 27), “to achieve validity we must provide a clear and detailed description of how we collect data”. This thesis gives details of how I generated data using multiple data generation practices. These research practices helped me recall my childhood memories about playful pedagogy and explore and evaluate playful pedagogy with my Grade 1 learners.

The use of multiple data generation strategies helped me improve the study's validity, since each either complemented or challenged data generated using alternative methods (Feldman, 2003). Samaras and Freese (2006) likewise insist that using multiple data sources in self-study research strengthens the study's validity. Moreover, Feldman (2003) believed that a clear presentation of evidence can convince readers of the study's validity. Therefore, it was vital to provide various examples to show how data were gathered and how different data sources supported each other. For example, when working with learners in my class, I used various record-keeping methods, like photographs, audio recording, and journal writing; these sources serve as evidence.

Feldman (2003, p. 28) further attested that “Self-study [should] result in a change in the researcher’s way of being a teacher or teacher educator”. Therefore, evidence of how I have grown and changed through researching playful pedagogy was required. This is shown in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

As a final point, self-study researchers cannot make conclusions based solely on individual observations or assumptions. It requires working in collaboration with others to review your thinking or findings. As Samaras (2011) advised, “critical friends can prove useful in data collection and analysis as they provide alternative perspectives on interpretation to increase the validity of your research” (p. 179). This means that my critical friends and I enhanced our self-study research validity by continually sharing ideas and questioning each other’s perspectives and interpretations.

2.10 Research challenges

I encountered a few challenges that needed my attention to proceed with my research productively. One challenge I came across was that in group play activities, a few learners seemed to dominate. They wanted to be the ones who took control and to do everything in the group. The quiet, reserved learners contributed less to the activities. For example, in a maths game activity with playing cards, learners had to work in groups and one of them had to mix cards with the number of sums and give them to the team. I noted that dominant learners would not allow others to do this, so I had to intervene and address the importance of giving each other equal opportunities or taking turns.

Another challenge was that initially, not all learners had a chance to play the free-play games, as it was usually those who came to school early or left who had time to play. Hence, almost every day, the same children had an opportunity to play. So, I thought it would be better if I also allowed learners to come and play during the last 15 minutes of their lunch break, so that all of them would have an equal chance of playing (see Chapter Six).

Learners’ frequent absenteeism and late-coming caused challenges. My research project was delayed by a week because a few learners were absent for the whole week at the beginning of

the second term, because of heavy rain. I, therefore, had to start the following week. Late-coming also made it challenging to finish each planned class activity at the set time, as I had to allow learners who arrived in the middle of the lesson also to understand the play. Furthermore, when we had dramatic play some learners would choose roles to practice – but be absent on the performance day. Consequently, to avoid delays because of absenteeism, I noted days that learners typically were absent on and tried to shift the research play learning activities to days on which I noted they were rarely absent. Also, to allow learners who came late to have an equal chance to participate, I moved play activities to after the break time.

Teachers' absenteeism also resulted in delaying my playful lesson or games, because if a teacher is absent we had to divide and take learners into our classes. I would have to postpone my planned games or playful lessons as I had to squeeze in more desks to create space for other learners, and consequently, there was no space to move around.

2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained how applying a self-study research methodology enabled me to conduct self-introspection in terms of my teaching practice and the effect of using play during teaching and learning, especially with young children. Also, I have given a detailed description of my research process and data generation methods. I have discussed how my research participants and critical friends team contributed. I highlighted the importance of interacting with others, such as critical friends, to share ideas, and to accept criticism; this helps to enhance one's self-development in the teaching profession.

Doing self-study research helped me understand the significance of allowing myself to step aside and reflect on my past; this helped me learn more about myself as a teacher and find the kind of teacher I would like to be. Employing a self-study methodology also helped me learn more about my current teaching practice, especially about playful pedagogy's value and effects. It allowed me to understand that there is always room for improvement.

In the next chapter (Chapter Three), I respond to my first research question: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* I narrate early memories concerning play and learning at home and school. I reflect on the impact of these remembered experiences on my development as a child and consider implications for my teaching.

CHAPTER THREE: MEMORIES OF LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCING AND EXPLORING

3.1 Introduction

The focus of my study is on teaching and learning through play in an under-resourced primary school. In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I explained how I applied self-study methodology, which allowed me to study my teaching practice and look further into how I can improve, not only to benefit myself but also to benefit my learners. I noted the importance of critical friends and multiple data generation tools in strengthening my study. I also illustrated how I generated data and described the generation tools that I employed to gain insight into my past memories of play and playful pedagogy lessons that I conducted in class. I elaborated on the importance of protecting children as research participants to ensure that they are not physically or emotionally harmed. I also discussed the challenges I encountered and the solutions to these.

In this chapter, Chapter Three, I respond to my first research question: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* As Mitchell and Weber (1999, p. 12) asserted, “Working with what we remember and what we have forgotten speaks to the present as much as it does to the past”. This suggests that what I might have experienced in my early childhood can still impact my present and influence my teaching practice. For example, my study focuses on exploring play in teaching and learning, so remembering games I played and introducing some of those games I played would perhaps help my learners – as they were to me when I was growing up.

In what follows, I give a detailed account of my childhood memories concerning play and learning in primary school and at home. In this way, I am exploring how playing had an impact on my self-development. I believe that playing can stimulate positive development in young children and enhance their learning. I therefore look back on several games that I grew up playing, which I believe played a key role in shaping my cognitive, social, and emotional development. I then explore how playing enabled me to learn different coping strategies in different situations that I came across in my life. For example, learning to control my emotions and interact with others enhanced my thinking and reasoning skills and I made my own decisions independently.

As explained in Chapter Two, to elicit my childhood memories, I used artefacts to remember games that I played with my peers, friends and siblings. As Mitchell and Weber (1999, p. 17) maintained, “Using objects as prompts to remember is itself a strategy which can enhance memory work around childhood”. The purpose of using artefacts was to enable me to recollect my childhood memories of playing and the effect playing had on my growing up. I also hoped it would help me try and work out how and which games I could introduce to my learners to develop my teaching approach. I anticipated that collecting objects that reminded me of the games we used to play would help me remember much more about the emotions or feelings attached to play, relate to how playing games supported my socio-emotional and cognitive development, and how playing games reinforced my academic learning. Consequently, by bringing such memories into my teaching, I believed I could also more successfully apply play in my Grade 1 classroom.

Furthermore, I created memory and metaphor drawings (see Chapter Two) to illustrate games we played and how they made sense or meaning in my life. I believe illustrations help the researcher interpret her memories and allow the reader to understand or interpret the importance of the drawing. For instance, drawings helped me give details of how the games made me feel and understand how they influenced my present life.

In writing this chapter, I used letter writing as a narrative technique to thank my sister and express my emotions on how I felt about playing. Samaras and Sell (2013) affirmed that letter writing is a useful exercise to express feelings. Nyholm (2018, p. 160) declared that “A written text in a letter helps the letter writer to see different patterns, and the writer can go back to the way it was said”. This suggests that as a writer, you can re-read the letter to make meaning of it; hence, re-reading the letter I wrote to my sister helped me to understand the impact of playing in my childhood. For instance, letter writing helped me understand the importance of having someone I believe had a similar eagerness to play and who shared the joy and challenges I encountered. Letter writing helped me understand the meaning that playing contributed to my life and learn the benefits of employing playful pedagogy in my teaching.

In what follows, I narrate stories of my early childhood regarding play using drawing, letter writing, and artefacts to help me illustrate how play was valuable as part of my childhood. In my discussion, I reveal how I believe playing affected my childhood learning and development. In doing so, I refer to different kinds of games that were traditionally passed on from generation

to generation. These were the free games I played from an early age before I even started school; I played them with friends and siblings at home and school. I then consider the types of games I played in association with the emotions and feelings they evoked. I also consider how I think they enhanced my intellectual and socio-emotional development. I reflect on my childhood play stories concerning how I could learn from them to better my teaching. Lastly, I consolidate what I think playing meant to me and consider why my parents or educators perhaps never understood or acknowledged children's playtime as a significant part of our lives.

3.2 Playing in my primary school years

My primary school life was full of fun because of playing. I went to a rural school that was located in my community. At that time my community was still underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure. For instance, there were no appropriate roads, schools, or shops, and most families depended on farming and manual handwork to maintain their standard of living. Therefore, with no proper roads, walking barefoot was mostly how we travelled from one place to another. However, that never hindered people from seeing or visiting each other. For instance, if there was a function or a performance in my family, we would walk from one village to another to invite our relatives or just to pass on the message.



Figure 3.1: A memory drawing of playing while travelling to and from school.

Figure 3.1 shows various games we played on our way to and from school. It shows some children climbing on trees, some sitting on big rocks, and some sitting on the ground playing with stones while others are swimming on a small river.

Pathways were formed by our footsteps; they were narrow, and along each side of the path there were trees, grass, and plants. As children the plants and grass grew above our heads, and gave us a cool breeze on summer mornings. The new green nature appealed to our imaginations and attention. We would sincerely consider how nature was formed and even grab at a leaf or pull a strip of grass as we would freely walk. This was not done consciously or for any purpose, but I guess it was part of childhood curiosity to know or learn about the world around us. Engel (2011) emphasises that children are born curious, as she insists that children's development urges them to understand the unknown. I also think children are always eager to learn – even if it is something they know, they want to figure out or explore it to find out all possible ways of how something is used. For example, we would feel, smell, and sometimes taste whatever we pulled with our hands and even count the leaf's shreds.

I can still recall how, as I walked together with my siblings and friends to school, we would play on the way. Our playing revolved around nature. Our pathways were filled with nature. For example, we would play hide and seek, and we would hide behind rocks and trees. Hide and seek is a traditional oral game passed on to children; the game was played in a pair or in a group of up to any number of players. We played the game with one person seeking where others had hidden. The seeker would close her eyes and count up to any predetermined number; counting could be in ones, twos, and fives in a home-base area while others hid. After reaching that number, the seeker would notify the hiders that she was beginning the search by shouting, "Ready or not!" If she found someone she would call out loud the name of that person. The others would remain hidden; if the seeker failed to find them, they would run or race to touch the home-base area. Once they had touched it, they would have to shout "Home!" They were then free and could continue to play in the hiders' role. In the next round of the game, the seeker would be the person who had been found first.

It is surprising to me now that we enjoyed playing hide and seek and that we were never easily scared of any danger and challenges we came across. I remember that we used to hide behind big stones, and some even climbed up big trees. The thought of falling from a tree and getting hurt might have crossed our minds, but it never bothered us until one of us had fallen and got injured. When we got worried, we would try and help her get better by brushing off dust from her school uniform and wiping her tears. We would comfort and encourage her to stop crying and act normally so that we would not get into trouble, especially if we were on our way to school. We would not allow her to go back home since we knew if she did so, we would all get

into trouble and be punished because playing on our way to school was not permitted by parents and educators. Looking back, I think playing hide and seek pulled us together and we learnt to rely on each other for help and support; it also helped us endure pain and suffering with the support of each other.

Another game we played along the way to and from school was a ‘cow game’. We would dig holes in the ground to get ants out and play imaginary games where we pretended ants were cows and the ant holes were a cows’ kraal. A kraal is an enclosure where domestic animals such as sheep, cows, and goats are kept. We named and communicated with the ants, as our elder brothers or fathers did with cows. This was a privilege to understand and feel what it was like to take cows to the field. Girls were not allowed to herd cows; it was boys’ duty to look after cows. I very much appreciated this game on winter mornings as the sun rose to heat the rocks’ surface; we would sit on rocks and face the sun to warm our shivering and cold bare feet after we crossed the rivers.

On our way back home from school, we crossed two rivers, and so we would play our favourite summer games, which were swimming and fishing or playing with sand. The feeling of reaching the river after the long distance we had walked from school was tremendous. Getting into the cold water took away the heat in my body and refreshed me. Besides cooling ourselves in the water, I believe swimming and fishing were also a form of relaxation, alleviating my mind of any trouble I might have endured at school. Because we knew that playing in the river in the morning on our way to school was not ideal, as we would get to school wet, fishing and swimming or sand play were left for after school.

Another ‘famous’ summer game was usually played if one was walking alone; I think it helped us not feel the distance we had to walk. We played the “cat chair”. To make a cat chair, we would pull up a few green grass strips and make something that was sort of a chair that was light in weight and made with steps and a flat surface. That kind of chair was called “*isihlalo sekati*” in our home language of isiZulu. From my perspective, I think this chair was called *isihlalo sekati* because the cat was the only animal that we knew that was allowed to live indoors, and in most cases it sits on a chair. I remember how this game assisted me to distract my mind as I walked to or from school. It shifted my focus from fear and worry about anything that could have bothered me at school or home – for example, coming to school late or any kind of trouble I might get into, like not having a pen or homework not being completed. The game

gave me the strength to move forward, as it set my mind at peace, kept me calm and helped me enjoy my journey.

Playing along the pathways sometimes caused us to arrive at school late, sweating and dirty from the dust we had accumulated while playing. Nevertheless, punishment for arriving at school late never hindered us from playing on our way to and from school; I believe this was not because we cared less about school, but because we were driven by childhood desire. Jensen (2019) asserts that playing is intrinsic to humans from birth; perhaps this means that playing is not something we teach children, but is an instinct. This shows me how, as a child, playing is essential since it is at the centre of children's lives. I think that for children, playing is a need. I also believe that it is right that they should be granted.

3.3 A dusty playground

Playing was everything to us as young children. At primary school, we had a small, dusty playground that was big enough for everyone to have a space to play on. The playground had a small portion with grass, while the rest was bare with bits of stones. The stones regularly had to be raked towards the other end of the school to refine our playground, since some learners walked barefoot and would be hurt by the stones, especially if they accidentally kicked a stone when they were playing.

Harsh weather conditions sometimes made it impossible to enjoy playing. For instance, on rainy days we could not play as the playground would be wet and muddy; teachers would restrain us from playing as we would make ourselves and the classroom dirty. Our black and white school uniform would turn red from the mud we collected from playing on our small, dusty playground.

As I recall, games were usually gender-based, as girls had different games from boys; it was scarce to find boys and girls playing together at school. I cannot pinpoint the reasons behind the gender-based games, but I believe these were mainly encouraged by our socialisation and the stigma of playing with the opposite sex. If one associated himself or herself with the opposite sex, she or he was seen as not a "proper" boy or girl. Particular games were associated with being a boy or a girl. For example, a boy was not expected to play with dolls, and girls were forbidden to play soccer. I remember how we would also make fun of a boy who played

the games we believed were for girls, and the same applied to a girl who played with boys, who was also laughed at and seen as not usual.

As girls, we enjoyed playing *ushumpu*, which was a popular game. It was played with two equal teams. We used our hands to hit a plastic ball that was bowled by the player. If the player bowled the ball and it went far, the team accumulated more points, but the bowler was out of the game if the opposing team caught the ball. I can now see how playing *ushumpu* developed and strengthened friendships as it promoted socialisation; we got a chance to mingle as we joined different teams in every new match. I think it also taught us to count as we kept the score. The game brought mixed feelings, depending on the performance of the team. I remember that if my team was doing well, I would be rejoicing, and if the team was losing, I would get angry. However, I think that playing the game, regardless of whether my team was winning or losing, helped me deal with my emotions because losing the match did not mean giving up the game, as we carried on until the game was over.

The game that was most likely to be played by boys was soccer. I think boys liked to play soccer because it was a game that was well known and understood by many people and encouraged by society, as younger boys looked up to their elder male figures on how to play it. I remember how the soccer ball was any ball the boys could kick. In most cases, they made their balls, as they could not afford to buy soccer balls. If one of the boys had a ball bought by his parents, it usually did not last long as parents usually bought cheaper plastic balls that would get a slow puncture from the grass or be scratched by stones or broken bottles.

All in all, break time was seen as a valuable time for us as children. It was time for us to do things on our own, to do kinds of stuff that were of interest to us, that we enjoyed, and that made us feel happy. A happy mood was interrupted by the ringing of the bell to go back to the classroom. This meant that we had to keep quiet, listen, and be obedient, powerless, and bored. As I recall, being in the classroom was not exciting. It seems that the formal education practices of that time forbade us learners the chance to explore and experience in the classroom. I think that most of our teachers back then understood play as being naughty and not as part of learning through experiencing and exploring. I can see now that it was only break time that made sense to me as a child. I think this might have been the same for many others too, because it was what we were longing for: a dusty playground was where we would satisfy our childhood needs.

From writing about these memories, I have become mindful that our childhood needs were not fully catered for in the classroom. In my view, today's schooling could also be more fascinating for many children who currently find it boring because their preferred playful learning is limited or not provided for at all. If children were provided with a chance to learn through play in the classroom, teaching and learning might be more enjoyable, and it might also make learners feel more comfortable in the classroom. If a teacher could involve more practical activities that engage learners in playing, more learners might be able to make meaning of what is taught in their own way or with playmates' help.

From my memories, I understand that children do not want to play a game with someone incompatible, so they are usually willing to teach others the skill of how to play. Playing is often about winning the game. Children are commonly up for the challenge and eager to win. For instance, I remember how my brother was keen for me to learn to play spinning tops. He would teach me how to roll the rope on the top and carry it and spin it properly to become an expert in the game. I think to him teaching me all the techniques and skill of playing made the game more interesting, fun, and full of the challenge for both of us.

In my view, if teaching were joined with playing, learning could be like a game that everyone is willing to take as a challenge and win. In the same way, Pyle and Danniels (2017) discovered that "playing fosters independence and self-motivated learning" (p. 280). I believe playful teaching and learning could be far more motivating and create enthusiasm for schooling. Playing could bring happiness or a cheerful mood that your team played well, and if not, one would be full of eagerness for another chance to take on the opposing team and win the game. For example, I remember how I felt when my *ushumpu* team won. I would feel proud and wanted to share my happiness with everyone at home. As a team, we would sing songs (see Figure 3.2) that signified our victory and sometimes provoked the opposing team. I think everyone owned the success of winning the game.

Victory song	
<i>Sibatshelile</i>	– We told them
<i>Sathi sobahlula</i>	– that we would win the game
<i>Sebeyakhala</i>	– now they are crying
<i>Bathi sibarobhile</i>	– and complaining that we have robbed them

Figure 3.2: Victory song.

3.4 Unique encounter: Skipping rope

Skipping rope was one of the familiar games we used to play at primary school. I remember how we used to gather as girls during break time and after school to play this game. Playing skipping rope was not determined by friendship, but one could ask to join any group. For instance, if you found your peers playing, you would ask to join them and we would play all together. In that way, one was able to get along with many people, and it also allowed us to learn and understand people's differences, such as their personalities. Therefore, this helped us to be trained from an early stage to tolerate each other's differences. I believe that understanding and accommodating people's differences is a vital skill that needs to be nurtured at an early stage. It allows individuals later or when adults to maintain a good relationship with other people.

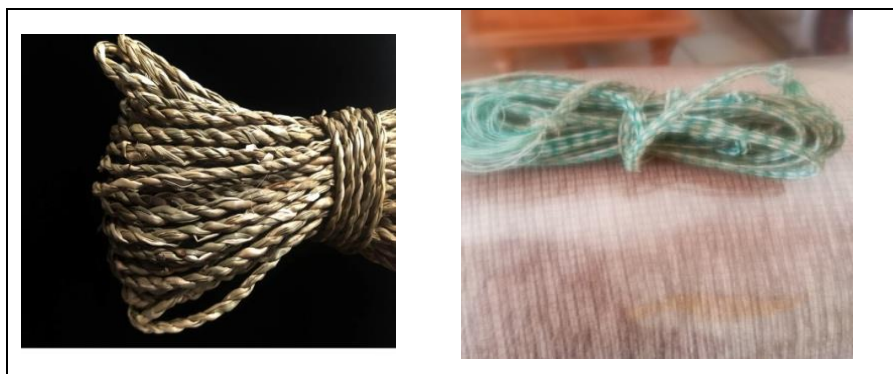


Figure 3.3: Photographs of skipping ropes.

The artefact photographs in Figure 3.3 show skipping ropes; these are the two types of skipping rope we used to play with. The one on the right is the rope bought from shops and was used to tether animals in summer; the one on the left, we made ourselves by weaving grass together.

Skipping rope is one of the memorable games for me because sometimes we had to make our own skipping ropes. This was because we usually played with the ropes that were used to tie domestic animals. In summer, these ropes were used to tether animals such as goats and cows to prevent them from damaging farmers' plants; we would then be left with no ropes to play with. To make substitute ropes, we would weave plastic or green grass. If we used grass, we would lay the rope in the sun for about a week to let it get dry. We left the grass to dry so that the rope would not be too heavy. A wet and heavy rope usually disturbed the flow of the game.

One of the remarkable things I remember about making a skipping rope is that not everybody could make an exceptional rope that would last longer, with no knots that did not break easily and made the game easy to play. Making a rope on its own was a competitive game, as we would all compete to create the perfect rope. One took pride in making the best rope, and would feel honoured by the acknowledgment from friends. Gray (2011) maintained that play promotes the development of valuable skills that the child would need later as an adult. I could say that making a skipping rope taught me lessons that add value to my life up to now. These include being passionate and cautious – as making the best rope required one to be extra careful to ensure that your rope was better than those of others – and not to fear a challenge.

In my view, playing was the best time for me to relax, and it was the only time I did not worry about anything, such as homework and home chores. I did not let anything compromise my time to play. This skipping rope artefact is suitable for my research because it shows me how play could be a valuable learning source. Apart from enjoying and learning new skills to help me play better to win the game, it also developed many opportunities for acquiring new skills. Moreover, I think the game cultivated social skills that moulded our beings, and academic skills that abetted us in doing better in our school work. The skipping rope helped me learn and develop some valuable aptitudes for both social life and academic development. Hill and Wood (2019) agree that playing can illuminate learning that ultimately leads to growth. For example, I learnt to interact socially, be creative, and control my emotions, as sometimes we experienced problems and learnt to solve them. To illustrate, we learnt about respecting the game's rules, such as taking turns. We also learnt about handling bullies or tolerating others' bad attitudes. Academically, for example, skipping rope play could also be applied in Mathematics and Life Skills to learn about patterns, sequence, flexibility, and develop motor skills such as hand-eye coordination. Skipping encouraged me to learn how to count and to develop the ability to think strategically.

I started to play this game early before I even started school, and I continued throughout my primary school years. I think it also developed healthy relationships among us as learners. The skipping rope game was played in a group, but it did not require us to team up. Everyone had a chance to play and one did not have to rely on others for winning the game, or to blame a teammate for losing the game. I believe that helped us to develop a sense of independence. Metaphorically, I think I can associate the skipping rope game with healthy food because I think I felt sick and hungry when I was forbidden the chance to go outside and play. For instance, we

were sometimes punished by not being allowed to go out for break time at school. Also, at home, we had to ask for permission to go out and play with friends, and my parents sometimes used to deny us the chance to go and play as a punishment, because they knew it would hurt us. Playing skipping rope felt like food with all the nutrients needed by our bodies to live a healthy and happy life.

From my perspective, playing taught us to be creative or to make alternative decisions to deal with different situations. I, therefore, foresee that children can make their own decisions. So, teaching through playful pedagogy could enable learners to find other techniques to work out various problems, rather than relying on my method of solving problems. As Sluss (2005) explained, Vygotsky viewed play as advantageous for developing a higher level of reasoning and thinking. Bennett et al. (1997) further attest that play provides children with a wonderful opportunity to become independent thinkers. I understand that playing could give learners a sense of freedom, allowing them to take control and make decisions about their activity.

3.5 Birds of a feather flock together: Playing stones (*amagenda*)

Stones (*amagenda*) was a game that was typically played by little girls; we used to play this game at school during break time. I also started playing this game in my early childhood and played it throughout my primary school level. We would collect small stones, usually not more than 20, and put them in a circle drawn on the ground. We played the game in pairs or small groups. Each person had to try to take all the stones out of the circle and take them all back and leave one or two stones out of the circle, while she threw up and caught the stone using one hand. This depended on the level of the game. For example, in the first round, everyone played, while the second round was played by those who had won the first round. As the game progressed, the number of players dropped as some failed to throw, catch and pull stones out of the circle at the same time.



Figure 3.4: A memory drawing of playing stones (*amagenda*).

Figure 3.4 shows girls playing stones while sitting on the ground. The stones are in a circle and one girl is playing; the others are watching and waiting for her to lose to get a chance to play. Each girl is carrying a stone to use when it is her turn to play.

Looking back, I believe this game taught me to be calm, concentrate, and improve my eye coordination. As an individual focus was essential in order to win. This game taught us many skills while we were not even aware of it, as we played just for fun. Looking back at it now, I think it enabled us to develop social skills, communication ability, numeracy and language skills, and developed our negotiating capability. Van Rooijen and Newstead (2017) shared that educators are responsible for providing a play-safe environment that could help stimulate children's development. Hence, I think these abilities might not only be gained by learners through academic learning, but may also be achieved through encouraging and providing them with the opportunity to participate in certain practical playful activities. This might allow learners to experience, explore, and work in collaboration.

Metaphorically, I can associate the stones or *amagenda* game with firewood, because pieces of wood have to be stacked together to make fire (Figure 3.5). This was a game played by almost all little girls while they were growing up, and I feel that the game kept us together as friends. To my mind, it made us value each other as little girls growing up together in one village and going to the same school. Being close to friends made me feel warm, loved, and happy as a child. Most of all, I think it gave me a sense of satisfaction. When we won the game we felt like champions, and we experienced eagerness to spend time with friends to play.



Figure 3.5: A metaphor drawing of a fire.

Figure 3.5 shows a metaphorical drawing of a fire made by pieces of wood. This symbolises the strength of how playing this game maintained togetherness and how the love we shared brought warmth to our hearts.

I think it is significant that I try out this kind of game with my learners, because this could be a valuable tool to learn to calculate and count. I think it would also encourage creativity, as I plan to use safe materials to replace the stones (see Chapter Six). Papier-mâché would be made by learners using paper torn into small pieces, and they could paint them to make them look attractive and colourful. I believe that papier-mâché or cool drink caps instead of stones would also benefit the learners' safety, since they could accidentally hurt themselves or each other as they throw up and try to catch the stones. Using papier-mâché would enable them to learn through this game in a calm, relaxed mode. It could also facilitate group work, which would allow learners to work together and learn from each other.

3.6 Something to ease our minds: Craftwork

Looking back, I recall that primary school was not an exciting place for me since we had to follow the teachers' predetermined instructions. School meant sitting at your desk, writing, reading, and listening, and the same routine was observed every day. However, while the other classes were busy reading and writing, the weekly craftwork period brought so much joy to me.

I remember how craftwork on Wednesday afternoons was appreciated by almost everyone, as we would get a break from reading and writing and, most of all, relief from being in the classroom.

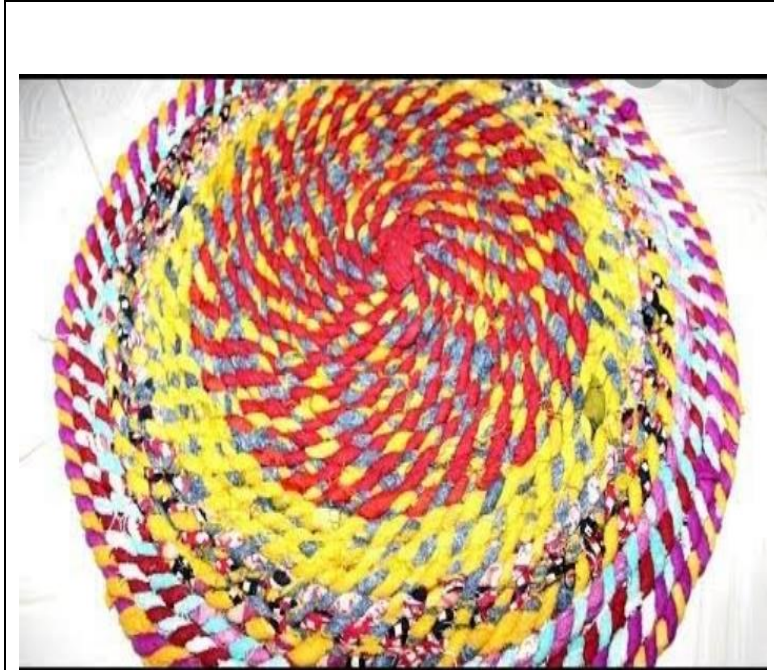


Figure 3.6: Photograph of a grass mat.

Figure 3.6 depicts a grass mat like the ones we weaved in craftwork lessons in my primary school. The mat shown is made of different coloured plastic bags; we believed that blending different colours of plastic when making our mats would make them look more attractive.

Craftwork was one of the activities that were part of the school work programme. In primary school craftwork was valued and handwork was promoted, so we had scheduled time allocated for it. Usually, we would make doormats and small baskets. Craftwork was gender-based, as while girls made doormats, the boys had to do woodwork.

The craftwork was assessed based on learners' creativity – for example, whether it was attractive in design and use of colour. We used to collect grass and plastics to make our crafts. During the craftwork period we would go to the field to cut grass, and we would find a spot around the school premises where we would sit in groups and work on our craft.

I recall going outside to the nearby field where we would cut grass to make mats. After we had collected enough grass, we would find shelter and sit under a tree to weave our mats until school ended. I think craftwork was the only thing that I did myself, as I created it from scratch and

finished it by myself. I believe I did my craftwork with confidence or without fear of being judged or feeling the fear of being labelled by my teacher and laughed at by classmates.

I think having this opportunity to do craftwork made us feel more positive about school. It was a time that most of us longed for, and if craftwork was cancelled we would be disappointed. Craftwork gave hope to most learners who were struggling academically, as we could trust ourselves to do something on our own. Thus, I believe it created independence and developed our creativity, focus, and concentration. It promoted confidence and cheerfulness about our efforts and achievements. It was not that craftwork was play per se, but it was the only classwork activity that allowed learners to be more involved and feel that our opinions were valued by the teachers.

Our teachers might not have been aware of all that we gained from craftwork or recognised the importance of that time. For example, I do not remember any teacher guiding us on how to weave a doormat, but traditional know-how was passed down to us by our older sisters. I remember that some teachers would use this craftwork time to work on those subjects that they believed were more important, such as languages and Mathematics. So it seems to me that craftwork was less valued by many teachers. Our teachers never seemed to emphasise making sure that we worked on craftwork independently or to see if we were getting help from others. They only appeared to concern themselves about the results – that is, whether the craftwork was completed or not.

I associate craftwork with play, because I feel that it was a time when we felt free and comfortable. We felt no pressure compared to other subjects, where we needed to follow the teachers' criteria and meet their expectations. With the craftwork, I believe we had a little opportunity to bring forward our ideas and creativity without the teachers' influence. I think this was because teachers were only supervising or guiding us to make sure that we were working or making progress, and it was only once in a while that the teacher would ask us to bring our craftwork in to view our progress. Hence, that gave us the freedom to initiate and create our crafts to our own satisfaction. I believe craftwork was of enormous value to us and helped us grow and develop emotionally, socially, and intellectually. It gave us the chance to work in teams, share ideas, be creative, negotiate, solve problems on our own and, most of all, to help and respect each other, as well as to tolerate each other where we had different opinions.

Craftwork helped us as we could relate to each other. It was nice to know that we were all there for each other. It developed a sense of caring, even though we had a competition among ourselves as sometimes we would look to see who made the most beautiful craftwork. Everyone wanted their own craftwork to be the best, so we made sure that we tried by all means to make ours look different from others, although we also taught and helped each other design the best craftwork.

I think I could associate this artefact of the craftwork mat with a blanket as a metaphor (Figure 3.7). A blanket makes one feel comfortable and safe and covers one on cold days. So the craftwork period gave me a sense of belonging as I felt comfortable, warm, relaxed, and happy. It also allowed me to express myself, as it enabled me to create and implement my ideas on making my craft look attractive. Likewise, I believe learners' talents and skills should be appreciated to make them feel motivated and willing to work hard towards their dreams. I think my teaching and learning should encourage learners' creativity.

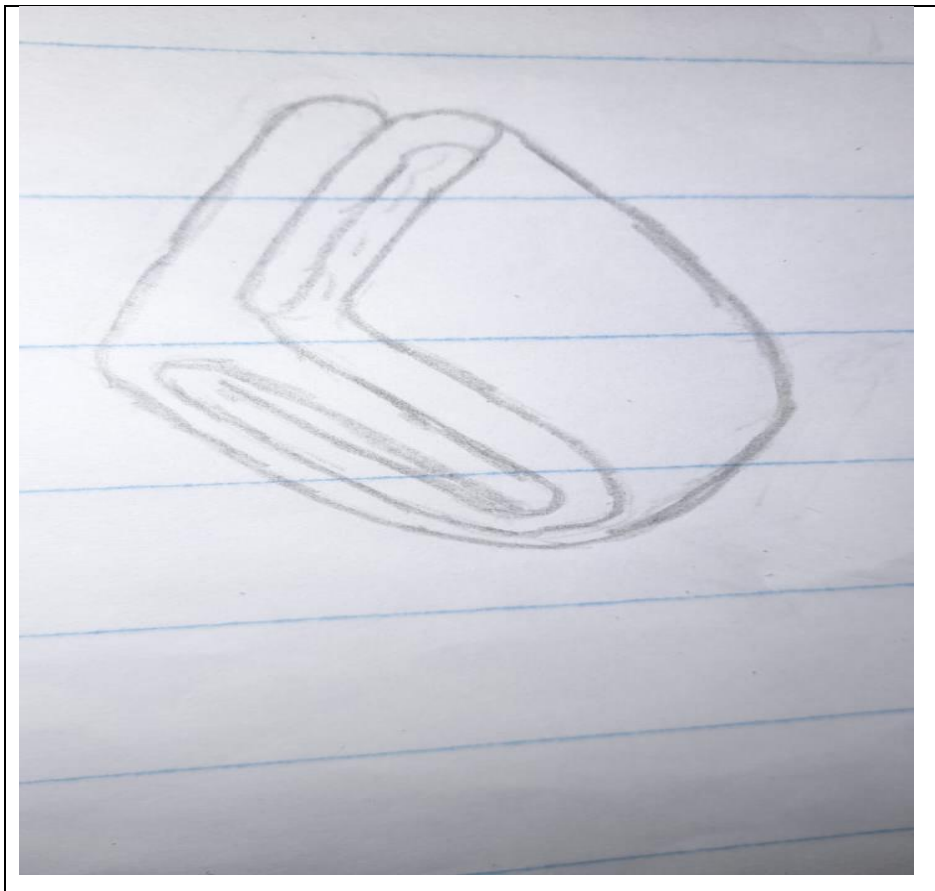


Figure 3.7: Metaphor drawing of a blanket

The above metaphor drawing (Figure 3.7) shows a neatly folded blanket with no colours. I made it plain and simple to show that no matter how it looks, one still finds warmth and comfort when covered with a blanket.

3.7 Fulfilling our hearts' desires for play – number search games

Every little opportunity for free time that we had as children was used for playing. I remember how in my primary school, when the teacher was absent or took early leave, the class would remain without a teacher for that day. I think this was because there were not so many teachers, and hence only one teacher was allocated for each class. For us, having no teacher in class meant free time – time to do things that were of interest to us, and generally, this meant playing games. One of the most popular indoor games was a number search. This game allowed us to play in class without getting into trouble with the other teachers who were busy teaching in their classrooms. It was a game that made less noise, as we would not move around or cause any disturbance. The game was played in pairs or groups, and suited both boys and girls, so we all played together.

The number search game was played on pieces of paper. There were two big pieces of paper that we all shared. One of the two pieces of paper was used to write down numbers from one up to the number that we all agreed upon – usually it was 50. The other piece of paper was used to record the names of the players. To maintain order, players' names were written in the order of their seating arrangement; this made it easy to know when it was your turn to play. Beneath each person's name, his or her score was recorded. Each player had his or her own piece of paper to play with, to make dots as others searched for the number she or he had called out.

To play this game, one of us would call out a number for the rest of the team to search for. As others would be busy looking for the number, the one player who had to call out the number would be making dots on their piece of paper. When the others had found the number that was called out, they would then count as a team the number of dots made by the player, and the number would be recorded under her name. The next person in the row on the sheet of paper would be the next to play. This game's trick was to make it hard for everyone to find the number and make as many dots as possible to win each round of the game.

I believe this game made us feel relaxed and even sometimes forget that we were actually in school where playing was forbidden in the classroom. Holt, Lee, Millar, and Spence (2015)

maintained that children have an unrestrained view of play, suggesting that children can play almost anywhere. Moreover, although we were having a good time, I think we learnt a lot from this game while not even aware of it. For instance, it taught us to count and identify numbers, and besides that, I think this game also managed to keep us together as learners. Therefore, I wish that my former teachers could have understood the value of playing and its impact on our childhood development and academic development. I believe the number search game confirms that playing can positively impact both academic learning and social interaction.

Metaphorically, I can associate this number search game with a chisel, a tool used to shape wood or metal (Figure 3.8). While I believe that the purpose of playing was to have fun as children, this type of game also shaped our minds as it trained us to have focus. It also taught us to value and accommodate each other, as we girls could play together with boys, and everyone had their own space to fit in, which created a comfort zone.

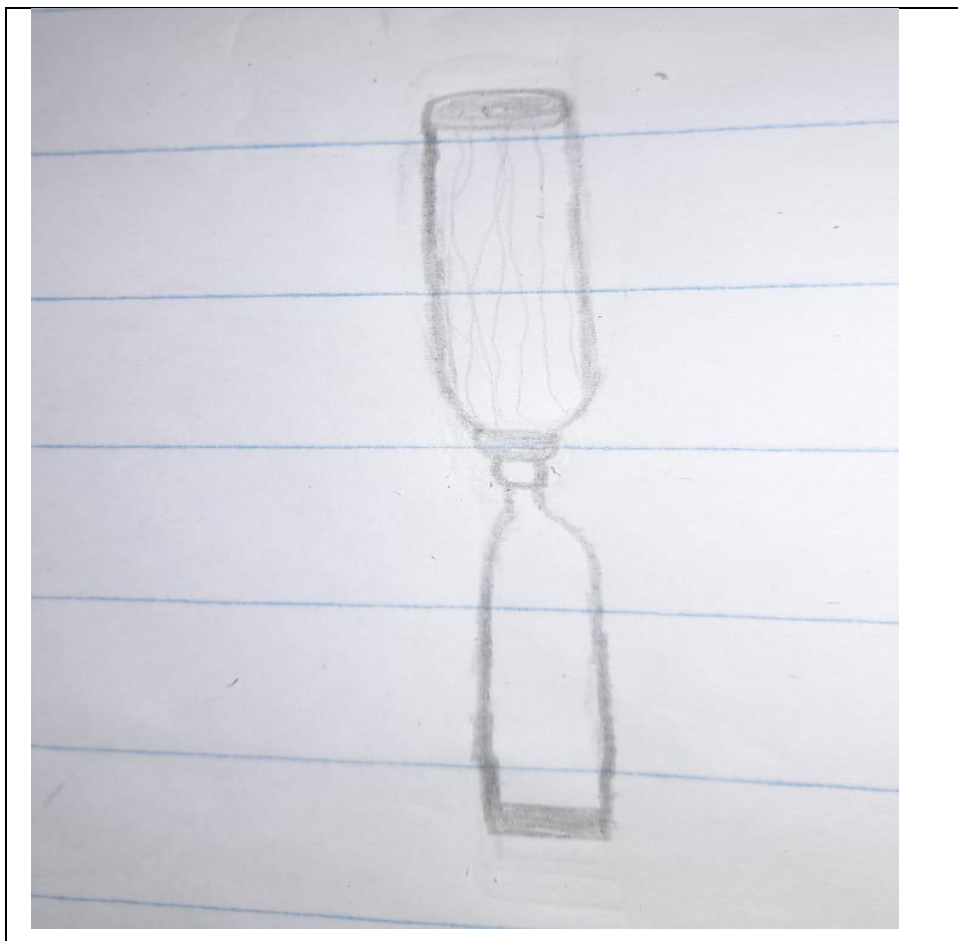


Figure 3.8: Metaphorical drawing of chisel

Figure 3.8 depicts a metaphor drawing of a chisel that is typically used to peel and sharpen wood to give it shape.

I think this number search game could go well with my Mathematics number recognition and identification lessons and help learners know numbers by learning from each other (Chapter Six). It could also establish or strengthen learners' relationships, and promote social interaction, communication, and thinking and reasoning skills.

3.8 Always game for play

I recall how cold mornings did not bother us much as children. The morning sun rays shining through the window curtains meant 'wake up time', especially during the school holidays. I remember how we would jump out of bed in the morning and rush to play. Before we even had breakfast, we would be outside looking for others (friends and peers) to play with. Sometimes I would meet others already playing, and I remember how that would make me cross because I would feel betrayed, as I would not have the opportunity to choose my team but would be forced to join the group they decided for me.

We had our favourite games that we were likely to play rather than other games, such as hide and seek, climbing trees, and swimming, but we had no prescribed routine that we followed. Games were sometimes determined by the weather conditions. For instance, on cold days, we played 'houses', and in our houses we would collect wood to make a fire to keep ourselves warm. Games were much enjoyed if they were played in a group, and that promoted friendship as we got to know each other; I think everyone was a friend to one another. This shows how playing was crucial to us as children, whether the days were cold, hot, sunny, or rainy. Nothing stopped us from playing. As I recall, playing was enjoyed by almost every child. Although home chores such as cleaning, fetching water, and collecting wood interrupted us from playing, these were mostly completed in a hurry because we did not want to miss a single game.

In the afternoon, especially during the week when we had to go to school in the morning, we would come back home from school to complete our chores before we went to play. We would play and hurt ourselves and cry out loud, but that did not mean that we would not play again the following day. Even our parents did not pay much attention to minor wounds unless there was a severe injury when they would intervene. They would try and find out how you got hurt, and if you were injured by another child, that child would be disciplined. But in the case of minor injuries, for instance, if you had fallen and hurt yourself, parents would brush it off and say "*uyakhula*", a Zulu saying which can be translated as "Being hurt is part of growing and

you need to be strong”. In my view, this meant parents were trying to tell us that as we were still young, we would encounter problems and challenges, but we would have to dust ourselves off and carry on with life.

I think we learnt to survive some harsh situations from playing. It was not always fun to play, as fights would sometimes break out due to misunderstandings, such as who had won the game. Some would refuse to accept that they had lost, or some would provoke others and take away some of their belongings. We had to learn how to cope in those situations. I can therefore say that playing helped us develop ‘thick skins’, as even in our adult life, we still face challenges that we somehow have to try to manage to carry on with life.

Looking back, I can see that I enjoyed playing when I did so out of my own free will. So, I think children should voluntarily engage in play. However, I am cautious about replicating that same belief that getting hurt means *uyakhula* – “Do not be discouraged, but be strong, you are growing up” – in my classroom during playful learning. I am concerned that this might have harmful effects on learners’ emotional development. Some children might feel that as a teacher, I have ignored their feelings, which might create anger or cause them to become withdrawn and fear engaging in any kind of game due to worry about getting hurt. They might also carry wrath and pain until their adult stage, which might lead them to be less caring and supportive of each other. I, therefore, want my learners to learn to accept and reveal their true feelings. For example, if they are hurt or angry, they can find something or another game that helps them heal instead of bottling up the pain.

3.9 Unlocking minds: Playing school

At an early age, before I even started school, I learnt the basic concepts of schooling, such as counting and scribbling through playing school. I remember that my older sister used to be ‘Mam’ (teacher), and she would try to dress formally like her teachers. A big tree next to my house used to be our school, and we used to line up stones to be used as our desks, as shown in Figure 3.7. This is where my school experience started, under the tree. Almost all school activities that my older sister and her friends learnt at school were practised in our ‘school’ under the tree. I think this game played a fundamental role in grooming or preparing me for formal schooling. As I remember, this was a typical game for most of the children in our community, and it accommodated both boys and girls. Being a teacher in the game was

recognised as a special role, and in most cases it was played by someone in the group who was seen as smart, and sometimes we competed for the position of teacher.

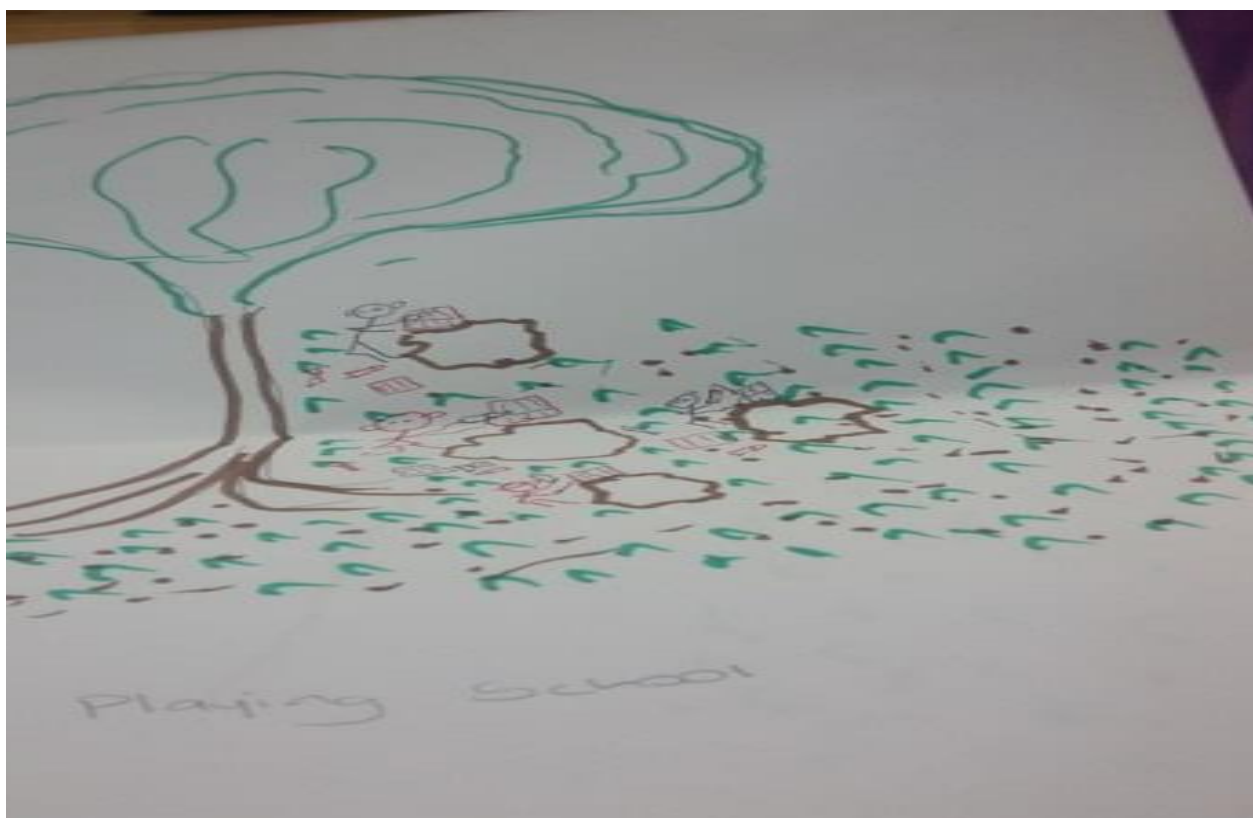


Figure 3.9: A memory drawing of playing school.

The drawing presented in Figure 3.9 shows boys and girls writing in exercise books under the tree. They are writing by leaning on top of stones; some are kneeling and others are standing. There are pens and papers and books all over, and the girl in the front is the teacher.

Although joy and laughter were highlights of this game, tears were also shed. I recall the freedom we had as we taught each other and learnt in free space and in our own way. For instance, I remember manipulating ‘proper school rules’ and applying only those that suited us; that was a joyful part of playing school. However, although the game had moments when we experienced fun, joy, and love in the company of friends, fighting and bullying frequently broke out due to power struggles. So we also constantly fought as everyone wanted to be a teacher and be in a powerful position and control. Thus, being denied a chance to take a role you wanted was likely to cause pain and anger. As a result, some would quit the game and join or form their own groups for playing school. Nonetheless, I believe this taught me and others to control our emotions and know our strengths and weaknesses in terms of our characters. Learning to control

our feelings helped me and others as children to manage to resolve our differences, as we would team back up and play the same game together the next day.

I believe playing school paved the way to begin formal schooling, as it taught us to envision the structure of the school and school setting. It also nurtured the creativity of our imaginations and encouraged dramatic play. I believe these capacities assisted us in using different approaches when solving problems and also revealed our talents. It also helped us develop social interactions, which I believe positively affected developing our oral language, numeracy, reasoning, and thinking capability.

I think playing school laid the foundation for preparing for what to expect at school. I therefore believe that playing school was a seed that was planted by peers or playmates, and this seed was to be cultivated and nurtured by teachers at school to grow. For example, in discussing my memories with my critical friends, one of them agreed that he learnt to write his name from playing school. He added that he believes playing school helped him develop his imagination as he learnt to use it to construct ideas and meaning from the stories told by his peers or playmates.

I think it could be helpful that learners engage in playing school to learn to develop different abilities to improve their learning (Chapter Six). Playing school with others could also build them socially and emotionally.

3.10 More than just friends: Playing house

Playing house was a popular game when I was growing up. We used to play it at home with friends or in our neighbourhood. This is one of the few games that I can remember playing together with boys. This game was a dramatic play, as we took different roles to resemble what we believed was a family. For us, a ‘normal’ family was one with both parents and children. In our ‘home game’, we had both parents and children. Sometimes, depending on the number of playmates, we would extend our family homes and have extended families, including grandparents, aunties, and uncles. We took roles according to our gender and one was supposed to act out the position that one was assigned to and try to imitate what (for instance) a grandmother or mother does for her children in a real family setting.

We all tried to bring something from our homes that would help make our play seem real. For example, we would bring old pots, dishes, dresses and toys and sometimes brought real food to cook and share. I still remember the joy we experienced when celebrating a birthday, as we would bake a cake with mud and use leaves and flowers to decorate it. It was a wonderful and loving way to celebrate birthdays because we knew that it was the only way to celebrate it, as most of our parents could not afford to organise birthday parties for us. Such celebrations made meaning in our lives; they fulfilled desires and made us feel complete.

Playing house enabled us to satisfy our wishes or desires, as I feel that it gave us a chance to get to experience what we wished we had. For example, it allowed us all the opportunity to play with toys that we did not have, as some of our friends who had toys such as dolls and toy cars would bring them along and we would all share them. I think playing through pretending developed or enhanced our imaginations, as we would act as if we were visiting different places that we wished to visit, like a zoo or a beach. This helped us understand what things one might expect to see in a zoo or what it looked like, even though we had never been there before.

The game also offered us a chance to experience the feeling of having a brother or sister relationship, especially for those who did not have siblings, since our game involved enacting our idea of what we thought a family was.

I think most of all, our play cultivated our talents. For instance, some of us discovered our abilities and skills by playing; for example, some learnt that they could sing or paint quite well. It also groomed us for our future careers and made us conscious of our gender roles in the family and society.

I believe from playing house we developed social interaction and communication and developing our emotions and imagination; this helped us make sense of and learn how to resolve some challenges that we still come across even now as adults. As a Grade 1 teacher, I firmly believe that for young children to grow and become independent and value themselves and their families, these areas could be nurtured with them while still young. One way of developing these values could be by teaching them through play, since playing could allow learners to interact with each other. Therefore they could learn communication skills and how to accept each other's differences. Introducing games such as playing house could benefit my learners, as they could utilise some of their skills such as communication and creativity (Chapter Six).

3.11 I will always be grateful to my sister

Special people make life exciting. Below is the letter I wrote to my sister, to express my gratefulness to her for making my childhood endearing. As a child you need someone who will understand your childhood instincts and interests and share your joys, pain and fears. Although I had other friends, my sister was my pillar of strength and protection; she made my life meaningful as she created a safe space for me to fulfill my childhood needs. I thought that writing to her would help me bring back to life some of the emotions and feelings of playing.

To my lovely sister

I am writing this letter to extend my gratitude to you; my sister, you planted a seed in my life and I want to tell you that it has never stopped growing. I now want to also nurture some emerging seeds with the skills and attitudes I gained from you as you were my playmate sister. We played together at home and at school. I was only happy that we had fun; running around on a sunny day or rainy day never bothered me, because what mattered is that we had fun. I value the times we shared playing together as children because I feel I had opportunities to experience and explore to know much more about the world around me, what is expected of me, and demands. I think playing games helped me to be socialised to girls' roles both at home and school. I learnt how a girl should behave, how I should dress up myself, and look smart, chores, and stages of woman development. Those were small skills I developed and gained through playing, especially playing homes and school. I think I grew into the woman I am today because of you.

As I am teaching now, I recall how I learnt so much more about life without someone instructing me, so I realise the value of learning through play. I learnt so much from you as we played together and I think learning through play helped me learn in a calm, relaxed environment, while I was not aware that I was learning. So I could say it was free learning. I think having a chance to play those (indigenous) games makes me realise how it positively influenced my development. For instance, I learnt to trust myself, value myself, and respect others. Therefore, I want my learners to appreciate each other because I believe there is so much they could learn from one another. Hence, I believe in encouraging my learners to develop friendships. Therefore, they need to have a sister-brother, brotherhood, and sisterhood relationships, which will be made possible by encouraging playing in my classroom.

My sister, I now want to share the values you equipped me with through playing games with my Grade 1 learners. I had fun through playing but I also learnt to share, listen, empathise, compromise, and negotiate. I think I learnt all of this while I was not aware, as I know that no one ever stood up and taught me these things. So giving my learners this opportunity of learning through play would enhance their social and cognitive development. This would help them in all stages of life development.

THANK YOU, SIS



Figure 3.10: A memory drawing of playing with my sister.

The above memory drawing (Figure 3.10) shows me and my sister collecting old books from my mother's box that contained old books, magazines, and exercise books. The picture shows my sister taking out a book and looking at it.

3.12 Moments to treasure

I remember how play made meaning in our lives as children. Our day was not complete without playing. We would not walk around looking for games to play; instead, the nature of children's curiosity for learning made us find everything to be part of playing. Similarly, Danniels (2018) maintained that children learn through play; I suppose this suggests that through playing, children feel free to interact, test, experience, and explore to make sense of something or the world around them. Children have ways of finding what and how something works as they play around with it without any intention of causing harm. However, I have noted that often we were denied – and even now, children are still denied – the chance of satisfying their curiosity for learning through play. Most of the adults around us did not seem to understand the value of play in children's learning. Most of them seemed to think of play as something done just for fun.

To illustrate, when either my brother or I was bought a toy, we would take apart every piece of it to find out all the mechanisms of how it worked. Sometimes we would try to fix it in our own way, but we would never throw it away because we thought it was broken. To illustrate, together with our friends we all enjoyed playing with my brother's toy, which was a yellow and black truck. However, my mom had stipulated conditions as to how we were supposed to play with it, and she never allowed us to put heavy objects such as stones in it because she thought that if we did, we would break my brother's truck. With every little chance we got, we would play with the truck in our own manner, just to satisfy ourselves and enjoy playing with it. We habitually played with it to copy what big trucks do, mainly to carry stuff and offload it somewhere else. We did not do this because we were disrespectful, but I think we were eager to feel the experience of driving a heavily loaded truck.

From recalling this, I can see that limiting children from playing is like denying them the chance to learn. Through playing, children are filled with knowledge and skills that they may not gain without interacting, experiencing, or exploring. My brother's yellow truck toy brought so much joy and the privilege of experiencing what it would feel like to drive the real truck that we usually saw carrying sand or stones from the local hardware store. We drove it with imagination and spirit. In this way, we understood how those trucks were driven.

In our community, it was very rare for our parents to buy us toys. Having a toy was a big deal, and it was appreciated by every child. I think it made me and many others feel proud, respected

and honoured, as your friends would come to your home to play with you. That gave us the power to control or take over and make decisions, like determining how and whose turn it was to play. Such power made one feel pleased and there was the slim chance of denying others from playing with your toy, as they would plead with you. It made us feel popular and respected among our peers, which brought us joy as we felt that we were loved by everyone.

3.13 It takes a village to raise a child

I was raised in a family and community that valued the church, so Sundays were assigned to go to church. This was a place where we would also get a chance to meet people from other areas as well as our relatives from neighbouring villages. The church was where people gathered for the service and many other activities to maintain unity. For example, my church also promoted Bible study, and had different solidarities groups such as St Anna, St Franciscans, Sacred Heart, and Sunday school. While the church had several solidarities groups, this did not mean that the church was divided; solidarities shared and worked together as church members to assist needy community members or support the sick.

I also joined the Sunday school when I was young; here we were taught mainly the prayers, hymns, and practices of our church, and the Bible. Every Sunday after the service, children that attended Sunday school remained behind and met for an hour to learn the scripture or songs (hymns) and prayers. This was the longest hour for most children, especially if we would only learn about the Bible. I remember that we would sit and listen to our teacher in most cases, and sometimes we would be asked to read verses from specific Bible chapters in turns. In my view, there was little engagement or interaction, which I believe led to the lack of interest of some children in attending Sunday school.

However, special celebrations at church made our Sunday school very interesting and mostly loved by all children. Easter and Christmas were made extraordinary. We all took part in making these celebrations memorable and enjoyable for children, as the story of the death and birth of Jesus was narrated through us acting in the drama. Acting out the story made it feel so real, and I think this helped us understand what happened when Jesus was born and crucified. Acting out the story of Jesus may not have been seen as play, since it was managed by the Sunday school teachers concerning who should play specific roles – but to us children it was a

joy to be part of the play. I still remember how we would make sure that we would practice our roles in front of the mirror or with friends every chance we got during the week.

By ensuring that we practised during the week, everyone was trying, by all means, to perform at their best level. This shows me how children take pride in and ownership of their tasks, and give it their all to make them faultless. For example, I remember how one boy got sick while we were preparing for the Christmas play. He was to play the role of a wise man, and he was so devastated that he would not be able to play it anymore. Sadly, the Sunday school teacher quickly replaced him and did not notice how he felt, since he wanted so badly to be part of the play.

This memory shows me that children have their ways of learning. For instance, taking part in a dramatic play about Jesus allowed us to learn more about who Jesus was. Therefore, I believe that if play were to be integrated with teaching and learning, children might take ownership of their learning from an early stage of schooling. I can see how young children in primary school need to feel that school is ‘part’ of them – meaning that they could more readily relate the activities carried out at school to their daily experiences. This could help learners to find school more relevant to their everyday life experiences.

3.14 Home sweet home

My memories have helped me see how play is always part of children’s lives when growing up; children find comfort and love in their games. There was a time when there was an outbreak of crime in our community, and rumours were spreading around our village that there was a black car going around stealing children; especially albino children were the primary target. We were therefore scared and were prohibited by our parents from playing outside in the field. This made me feel lonely, as I felt that everyday practices were not accomplished if we did not have time to go out and play in the field with our friends. However, we had to adjust to the new situation of remaining indoors, and hence outside games had to be replaced with new hobbies.

For many of us, watching television was an indoor hobby. We watched cartoons. I still remember that my favourite cartoon was called *Kideo*. For most children this was the typical cartoon show that we all watched, because other cartoons started in the early afternoon while we were still at school. We only watched this cartoon, which was on for about 30 minutes.

Surprisingly, we came to love watching other more fascinating television programmes. When we were together with our friends at school or church we would discuss what we had watched on television during the week or on the previous day.



Figure 3.11: Photograph of a television.

The above artefact photograph (Figure 3.11) shows the television which I, together with my brother and my nephew, would sit on a mat and watch. We were all seated close to the television as we wanted to hear and watch our favourite television programmes (cartoons) closely.

I now realise and understand that sometimes learners may not all be part of the game; however, one can still learn and enjoy the game even if you are not part of it. We learnt so much by watching television and we found it exciting. We were able to use our imaginations to experience how something felt or was done. In most cases, we would copy what we had watched and practise it in our play.

Not all families had a television set in their homes. Consequently, we would fill in our less fortunate friends who did not have television on what we were watching. They were also keen on listening to us, and would ask questions about the programmes that we had watched. I can see how telling our friends about television programmes helped develop our expressive language, and we also learnt to tell a story in a sequence.

Recalling this has helped me realise that not all children in my class may want to or enjoy involving themselves in some of the games I introduce. However, presenting them with a rich, resourceful environment could stimulate their minds and support their learning. According to

Jensen (2019), it is crucial to look for opportunities to incorporate play in teaching to encourage learners and give them a chance to experiment and discover for themselves. For instance, having a television at home was a resource that I had to entertain myself and also to learn. Even though I could not take part in television shows, watching them helped me to become exposed to things that I was not familiar with. For example, I learnt about places that I had never visited and things that fascinated my imagination, such as cars and fashion.

3.15 Together we stand

Work, school and home chores kept us separated as family members, as we all had different tasks and activities that kept us busy during the day. The time we came together as a family was in the evening after we all had finished our daily duties. I still remember that we would usually gather together in a small hut, our kitchen, after supper.

As my home was based in a rural community, most houses followed the same pattern and order, as farming was the primary practice for most families. Instead of building one big house for the whole family to stay in, building several rooms or huts for each home was considered much safer, in case the family was attacked. This was also done to protect the farming fields and livestock. Usually, the houses were built in a circular shape with a kraal in the centre and all doors facing the farm field and the kraal. The square rooms were usually used as bedrooms, while huts were used as kitchens and lounges. The lounge was traditionally kept for visitors, and the kitchen was generally used as the main room, where the family used to gather and share their daily experiences or plans for the day.

Although gas and paraffin stoves might have been available, these were not mainly used because of affordability. Therefore, fire and coal stoves were much preferred by most families as they were much cheaper. It was a family norm that a fire was made first thing in the morning, and it would be kept going until we parted for the night's sleep. We made it the family culture that we would gather in the evening and sit in a circle with the fire in the centre, keeping us warm. At the same time, the kettle would be getting warm to make tea for the adults in the family.

With my elders drinking tea, we children would enjoy ourselves by playing cards – the popular game of ' Crazy Eight'. This was a special time for us as children; nobody wanted to miss the

Crazy Eight match, especially if it was a Friday, since there would be no school the following day. This was a game that suited everyone at home, and so it was played by everyone. Playing together as a family created a bond; it built the bridges that enabled us as young children to reach out to our older siblings. Besides the fun and joy it brought us, the game maintained harmony; it created a comfortable space that made everyone feel a sense of belonging.

The Crazy Eight card game required a lot of thinking and strategising, as you could not make a move without thinking carefully about what the impact of your next move would be. Brussoni, Gibbons, Gray, Ishikawa, Sandseter, Bienenstock and Tremblay, (2015) believe that playing can equip children with different abilities, like assessing challenges and managing risk and even strengthen them to be able to make decisions or resolve conflict. The game also allowed me to think fast, as it required players to think and make a decision quickly, so they had to play with astounding speed. To win the game, you had to ensure that your opponent still had many cards while yours got fewer and fewer. So to make sure that you remained with fewer cards, you should aim at making your opponent pick up more cards in every step of the game. Winning the game was seen as a victory, and everyone wanted to win the game and be the champion.

This game taught me that one needs to be patient and understand that one needs to follow the rules in life. It also taught me that failing is not the end of life – one needs to patiently learn until one becomes better. Games such as Crazy Eight taught me to understand that I must keep trying until I become better at the game. This was important because failure was associated with not being clever during my schooling, and it destroyed some children's self-esteem. Sadly, failing in class meant being undermined during my schooling and made one feel incapable and less valued than one's peers. From remembering this game, I understand that playing might help my learners gain the confidence to work hard and not fear challenges.

In both my primary and high schools, classes were divided according to learners' academic capabilities. For example, each grade had classes A, B, and C; class A was the top achievers, B moderate, and C weak or academically poor. From as early as Grade 5, I believe that I started to be aware of the grading system. I remember that I was in class B in Grade 5, and most teachers never completed a lesson without reminding us that class A was better than us. I think as children, we also weighed each other on a class basis. I remember that my friend was in class A, and she usually considered herself better than me. Even if we were just going to the shop, she would be the one who carried the money, and she would be the one to buy whatever we

were asked to buy. She would also be the one to bring the change home. I assume she did this because she believed that I was less capable. Our parents also considered that children in the A and B classes were smart and could achieve anything, whether academically or socially.

3.16 Precious moments listening to folk tales

I grew up in a big family. We usually gathered in our little hut, which was the kitchen, and it accommodated everyone at home. In the evening, during supper, we all joined together in that hut. I think that was the only meal of the day that we ate together as a family. The supper was usually enjoyed with my parents telling us either family history background stories or entertaining us by telling folk tales. My older siblings loved to hear more about our family history background, while my younger siblings and I enjoyed the folk tales. We would ask my parents to tell us one story that we all enjoyed listening to repeatedly. I remember that the one story we all wanted was about a selfish rabbit that visited an old granny and asked her to play *umaphekaphekana* ('cooking each other') in a big black pot. The story went like this:

*The rabbit was ravenous that day and decided to visit the old granny who stayed with four grandchildren. The rabbit knew that during the day, her grandchildren went to school. So when the rabbit arrived at the granny's house, granny became happy because she spent the half-day by herself, so she welcomed visitors. The rabbit and granny talked and talked; after some time, the rabbit asked granny if they could play a friendly game together. The rabbit explained to granny that they would fill the big black pot with water and cook each other in turns. When one felt that she had been cooked enough, she would knock on the pot lid and shout **sengivuthiwe!** "I am well cooked". The one who is cooking the other would open the pot lid to let her out and the next one would then get into the pot. But when the water was hot, nobody would get inside, and it would be the end of the game. Granny agreed to play the game.*

They then filled granny's big black pot with water. Rabbit asked to start, and granny agreed, and they took turns as they had agreed. When the water began to get hot, the rabbit quickly knocked at the pot lid and asked granny to take her out and granny let her out. Then next, it was granny's turn to get into the pot, and because the water was much hotter, the granny also quickly knocked at the pot lid to ask the rabbit to take her out. But this time, the rabbit rejected granny's request but instead stoked the fire until granny was well cooked.

The rabbit ate granny, and when she was full, she left granny's feet for the grandchildren. Because the rabbit was a regular visitor, the grandchildren were not surprised to find a rabbit at their home, and he informed them that granny had gone to a nearby bush to collect wood. They were also happy when the rabbit quickly served them with excellent food as they liked meat but as they started to eat, one of the grandchildren suspected that the toes looked like his granny's, but the others denied it and told him to keep quiet and finish his food. They all continued to eat, and when they were about to finish, the rabbit jumped to the higher stone and shouted to the boys, telling them that they had eaten their granny. They got angry and took their sticks (canes). They wanted to beat the rabbit to death, but the rabbit had a lot of tricks. She managed to escape. But the boys went after her, and she got tired of running and turned herself into a stone near the big river. When the boys got to the river, they saw this big stone. One of the boys took the stone and said to the others that he would break her big head with that stone if he could find the rabbit. As he was saying that, he threw the stone across the river. The rabbit got excited and jumped cheerfully because she was out of danger, and the boys got angrier.

This was one of my favourite tales, probably because it was mainly about things that we were familiar with; I found it easy to follow and could also relate to what was said. I remember that my mother was best at telling tales. I think that every time this tale was told, I could envision and feel the joy that the granny felt when the rabbit visited her, not knowing that the rabbit came to trick her. I could imagine the pain that the boys endured when they found out that they had eaten their granny and how they lived with regret and suffering as they had no one to look after them anymore.

It was not that stories and folk tales were just told to us – they were used to teach us morals, respect, be caring, and maintain a healthy relationship with others. For instance, this folk tale was to teach us that we should not be selfish and only think about ourselves; we should not satisfy our needs at the expense of other people.

I think the most remarkable thing about folk tales is that they were told dramatically; the tone of voice and facial expression matched with the part of the story being told. That made it feel real: as someone telling the tale, you could see and feel since you could picture the situation with your imagination. I can still remember how we would sit quietly next to my mother on a grass mat. We would ask her not to start until we were done with anything that we were busy with, and you would be sad if my mother told the tale in your absence. For example, I remember

one particular day when I was not feeling well and went to sleep a bit early and missed supper. On the following day, in the morning, everyone was busy rehearsing the tale that my mother had told them. I was so angry that I demanded that my mom tell me alone the story that she had told the others on the previous night – even though I knew that she would not tell me, because of the traditional belief that if one tells tales in the morning or midday one would grow horns. Remembering our family storytelling allowed me to understand that play could be understood as people engaging in active interaction. Although stories and tales may not always involve dynamic interaction, they also form part of the play as your imagination plays along with what you are being told. They are also just as enjoyable as playing a game. So folk tales and stories allow children to enjoy themselves while they are learning, as these tales could teach children about social and cultural ways of living. I think they can also develop children's listening, speech, and language. I believe that storytelling can also develop children's creativity in telling and acting out their stories. I realise that in addition to my learners telling stories, I should also tell them more of the stories that I used to be told. I believe these traditional tales are relevant to the present to make them cautious and also enable them to understand how people lived in the past.

3.17 My view of playing versus my elders' opinions of it

Play was restricted by parents during my childhood; I grew up with an understanding that playing was being naughty and was not important. For example, at home, there was no time allocated for us children to play freely. We tried to make time to play between our daily activities; I think we played based on our parents' conditions. To me, playing was like a reward, which meant that I could only play because my parents were pleased about something I had done and felt proud of me. For example, to my parents completing home chores meant I was respectful and hard-working, and so in most cases, that is how I gained their approval to go and visit friends.

Not every game was regarded as play by my family or society, and they only approved of some games. For example, I remember that playing house (*umasigcozi*) was the kind of play that my peers mostly loved, as it was a kind of role-playing game where we took different family roles. Although this game was not forbidden, it was less popular with our community adults as they thought it would harm our physical and mental development. This was because adults believed that this game would teach participants inappropriate things, such as developing romantic love

relationships. Although it could have been the case that our families were trying to protect us, I doubt that they ever weighed up the pros and cons of the game. The game aided some of us to learn, in a calm environment, virtues and talents such as taking a leading role. I further believe such games were more a matter of learning than just having fun, as they allowed us to test our ideas about domestic chores, such as cooking. Also, pretending to be a father or mother allowed us to feel and experience what it was like going to work every day and be responsible for a family.

Furthermore, the school had its own stipulated time for play. When I began schooling in my primary years, I already had an idea of the school setup from playing school with my siblings and friends. Playing school, therefore, helped me to understand school expectations. I started school knowing that school was not a place to play, but a place to learn. When I got to school, my parents emphasised that if I played at school, I would fail, and teachers too always stressed that we would not progress to the next grade when we played at school. This was said to encourage us to work hard, keep focus in the classroom, and not distract us from doing our school work.

Consequently, the mentality we had was that school was not a place to play. In my view, there was a misunderstanding that school was not a place for playing. I assume that this created a tense atmosphere, in the sense that playing school and what parents or society instilled in us created a picture of how we should behave. Carrying such beliefs made me and many others feel restricted, as our behaviour and attitudes had to fit what was thought to be appropriate in school. We failed to explore beyond what teachers offered us at school. Therefore, the classroom was where I felt I needed to remain obedient and not play to achieve good academic results.

As I began school in my first grade, I was introduced to how the school operated by my teachers, who made it clear that the school was indeed not a place for play. For example, we learnt school rules and expectations from a poem recited every day in the morning assembly. Assembly is where we gathered as a school for morning and afternoon prayers and also for school announcements. This was the poem we recited:

Mhlangiqala ukufika esikole, Ngafundiswa umthetho kathisha, Hlala phansi uqonde, usonge izandla Fika ngesikhathi, ungalibali Okubalulekile ukwenza kahle umsebenzi wakho nokulalela uthisha.

Translation: On my first day of school, I was taught the teachers' rules; you sit down straight; arrive at school on time, and most importantly is to do your work correctly and listen to your teacher.

Looking at this poem now, I feel that it was recited to instil in us what the teachers believed the school's purpose was and how it should serve learners.

As far as I remember, all classes applied the same rules, which in most cases was to restrict learners from doing what teachers associated as being naughty or not part of classroom learning. For instance, when the teacher was busy with something else and we were doing nothing at that time, the teachers would usually ask the prefects to look after us. The prefects would submit the names of those who were misbehaving (for example, talking in class was considered misbehaviour). This means that what teachers believed was not part of schooling was not tolerated; hence, no game was part of learning in class in my school years. Being found to be playing in class, even if your work was done, was seen by teachers as misbehaving and thus we were punished for it.

We sometimes used the opportunity of punishment to our advantage. In some classes we knew that if we did not do our homework or misbehaved, our punishment would be to be sent out of the classroom to work in the garden. Such punishment made us happy, and we would joyfully water the garden and play with water and sand. I guess such behaviour shows that children needed to be involved in something that was of interest to them.

Revisiting my school life has made me conscious of how learning at school was tiring and boring; I do not remember anything that made me rush into my classroom, except being scared of getting a beating if I came to class late. With my self-study research, I want to create a lively, warm classroom where learning would not be driven solely by what I believe would be in learners' best interests but by learners' motives for learning. Craft, Cremin, Hay, and Clack (2014) explained the concept of the pedagogical environment; they maintain that the teacher needs to provide children with a resourceful classroom environment to encourage collaboration and also teamwork. They further elucidate that a resourceful classroom also motivates freedom and positive thinking, enabling learners to work on their own and modelling learners' creative attitudes. I also assume that a rich, resourceful classroom would attract learners' interest and create opportunities for learners' learning through interacting. Hence, remembering my schooling, I have realised that children's purpose or interest when growing up is to acquire more

information about life around them. They are always curious about finding out more, for instance, about how things are made.

Therefore, I feel that nothing is taken for granted by children – they are always eager to know. I hence believe that playful pedagogy would allow learners to experience and explore; it could allow them to interact and work on things for themselves. I anticipate that it would also make their learning more enjoyable and memorable, by creating opportunities for play and aligning lessons to playful pedagogy, and instilling the notion that you can learn through play.

I also firmly believe that playful pedagogy could make my learners feel motivated in school, and such attitudes could develop their level of thinking and imagination. It could also prevent my learners from being passive, as playful pedagogy could facilitate them being part of their learning. In exploring playful pedagogy, I wish to cultivate various class activities that most learners will enjoy and be willing to take part in.

3.18 Conclusion

Revisiting my childhood memories concerning play taught me that children make meaning in their lives by taking an active part. Similarly, Pyle and Danniels described children's play as freely chosen, dynamic, resourceful, enjoyable, imaginative, and focused more on the process than the outcomes. I came to understand that playing helps children to be part of what is happening around them. Looking back on my memories, I think it was only through playing that I could interact with the environment and engage with others (my peers and friends). I consider that playing made it possible for me to learn about the world and socialised me to societal ways of living. For instance, listening to my parents telling stories and folk tales helped us envision what was considered normal and abnormal. Knowing about our family background taught us the ways of our family and cultural practices.

Moreover, I think playing granted us some valuable expertise for social living and boosting our academic performance. For example, playing games like with the truck toy allowed us the privilege of socialising with others, and I think it was such games that taught us to learn to improvise, tolerate and support or care for each other. Hill and Wood (2009) maintained that play encourages children's learning and further highlighted that playing has enormous potential for child development. Likewise, Preziosa (2017, p. 9) argued, "Play paves the way for learning". Thus, children need to

be granted opportunities to explore and experience through play. Games such as playing house or school equipped us with skills that helped us perform better, since these games involved a lot of drama, exploring, and experiencing.

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I further discuss my memories of growing up as I progressed to high school level. The memories continue to articulate how I viewed playing both at home and at school. To show how playing made sense to me in my teenage and high school life, I used artefacts and drawing to portray my feelings and emotions as to how playing built my personality, character, and social living with others. In this way, I frame my thoughts as to the role of playing while I was growing up and how it made me feel part of my peers and friends and the community.

CHAPTER FOUR: PLAYING AFTER THE PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Three, I recounted early childhood memories of playing. I described some games that I grew up playing. I explained how each game was played and how I thought childhood play helped me develop aptitudes and gain knowledge and proficiencies. I reflected on how play helped me build capacities that helped me cope with different situations, not fear taking up challenges and be willing to keep on trying. I considered what I could learn from my childhood play stories to improve my teaching of young learners.

This chapter, Chapter Four, is an extension of the memory-work represented in Chapter Three. I further narrate memories of playing in my teenage years and at high school. As with the memory stories in Chapter Three, I used artefacts to elicit my recollections. Furthermore, I created a memory drawing to illustrate my high school setting. I look at playful activities that I was involved in and how playing seemed to differ in some ways from early childhood play. I consider how these playful activities could have supported my socio-emotional and cognitive development. I also reflect on what I can learn from my teenage and high school memory stories to inform my use of playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom.

4.2 Playing in my teenage years

I feel that free playing mostly fitted into my early-life stage or primary school life. When I got to high school, my life began to change as I physically and emotionally developed in the teenage stage. For instance, the eagerness I had previously felt for coming home from school to play suddenly vanished, and new interests developed, such as watching television and listening to music. Being a ‘grown-up’ at home meant that I had many home chores assigned to me, such as cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning.

Although I had some time to meet up with friends and do things that entertained us, I feel that playing was no longer as free as it had been in my early childhood and primary school stage. Looking back, I think that my teenage and high school life had boundaries. For example, I feel that playing was restricted; I remember that we would not play with anyone unless they were

our friend, and we had to stick with our friends. The games were also classified – we played games that we qualified to play, not just having fun.

In my early childhood and primary school stage of playing, I believe that playing had a different meaning from when I got to high school. During my high school years, the play was formalised, and we joined in to play certain games based on our perceived talents. For example, in my primary school years, outdoor games were any kind of games, as playing was unlimited and was determined by our interests. This play involved a range of playful activities. In contrast, in high school, playing was more restricted in terms of ability or achievement – you chose a particular sport or game because you were seen to be good at it.

Furthermore, in high school, playing took place in teams and was more formal than in primary school, since we had coaches who trained and guided us on how to play or assessed whether we qualified to play. For instance, when I started high school in Grade 8, there was a music period or lesson in the first term in which the whole class participated. Most of the learners liked singing, and it was a big shock when we learnt that the music teacher was assessing our singing performance. When we returned for the second term, the learners who met the music teacher's standard were chosen to be part of the junior school choir. The music period changed into a music and study period: all those selected for the school choir went for music class, while the rest remained in the class for a study period. In that sense, I think that the kind of play one was able to engage in had to match one's perceived capability. I feel that the free play I enjoyed in my primary school years was somehow wiped out for most of my secondary school life.

My high school mainly encouraged academic values. It was a Roman Catholic missionary school for girls and was widely recognised as a school of academic excellence. From my perspective, the school had sufficient resources to maintain a high standard of teaching and learning. It had classrooms that were in good condition. Teaching and learning aids were also available; for example, we had a science laboratory and a library. The school also had playgrounds for extracurricular activities. However, the school did not prioritise sport; I think we only had one special day a year dedicated to sport (Sports Day), when other schools visited our school for sports competitions. The school also held a few functions, which in most cases came about by chance, such as teachers' farewell and welcoming parties. Other functions were held once or twice a year to raise school funds to support events such as matric farewells or school trips.

In recalling this, I assume that our school placed more attention on academic learning. As a result, it apparently cared less about activities that developed learners' non-academic skills or involved learners' interests, such as entertainment. The only extracurricular activity that the school highly promoted was the school choir since my school was a religious day and boarding school that held morning and Sunday church services. Unfortunately, not everybody was considered to have singing talent, and if you could not sing, most of your time was to be spent on studying.

4.3 Overcoming challenges through a Book Club

At school, we had a library session that took about 45 minutes, during which a library teacher supervised us. She had to make sure that we (the whole class) were all in the library and all doing something that would keep us busy for the entire period. For quite some time, I spent the library sessions completing whatever project or homework needed to be done. I think this was because the school emphasised a culture of maintaining an excellent academic record, which meant that most of us put more effort into doing well academically. As a result, choosing library books or reading for enjoyment was seen as something that was not crucial; even the teachers were happy to see us doing schoolwork during the library period. It did not seem to matter to them that we were not eager to take out novels to read at home or inside the library.

My friends and I formed a Book Club when we were in Grade 9. The club was formed because my friends and I thought it would help us tackle the tremendous amount of reading we had to do for our English literature class. For English, we had to read a novel or a magazine and submit a reading report once a month, generally on Fridays. Sometimes we had to present to the class what we had read. My friends and I agreed that we would each borrow books from the library and then each one of us would read a book for two weeks. After that, we would discuss together what we found interesting in the book we read. Even though reading was done under pressure, the Book Club assisted us in preparing for a class presentation. Looking back, I assume that none of us thought we would actually reach a point where we would get used to reading and enjoying it.

Although this club was initiated to help each other complete our formal reading tasks, it ended up becoming an essential part of our social lives as other classmates joined us. I think the club

made us feel connected, as it was one main thing that we did together as a group without being coached by someone else, as was the case with school sports. The club kept us together as it created commonality with each other. For instance, through spending this time together, we learnt to understand each other. We could also relate what we read to our real lives.

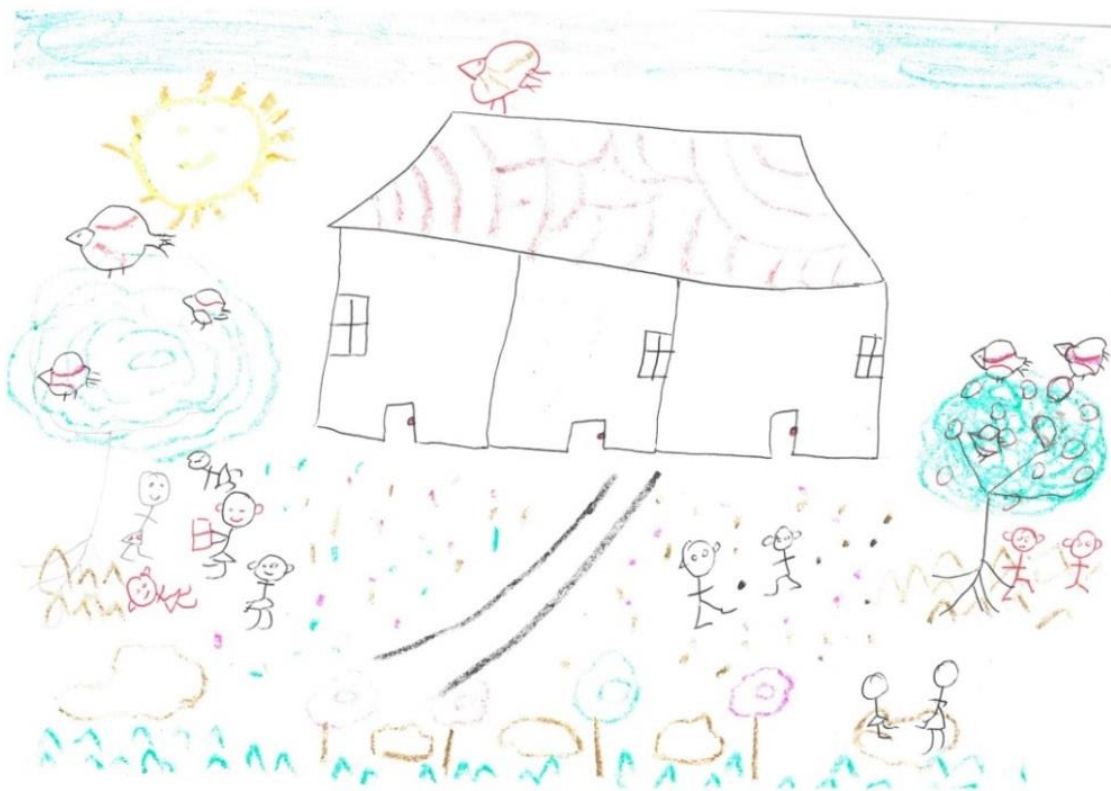


Figure 4.1: A memory drawing of my high school.

Figure 4.1 shows a memory drawing of my high school during lunch break time. Children are in small groups of friends enjoying each other's company. On the left can be seen a group of girls (the Book Club) carrying books and standing under a tree.

Therefore, reading became a big part of our daily social lives as we would not complete a conversation without discussing the books we were reading. Being part of the Book Club helped me and some of my peers create a space where we would fit in and feel a sense of belonging. We found joy and comfort in knowing that we had people who understood us, accepted us as we were, and shared a similar lifestyle. Nevertheless, I think not everybody read because they wanted to, but rather because of the pressure not to feel left out. Therefore, some read to fit in with the group. Even though they might not have found reading entertaining, they thought that they needed to keep up with the social life associated with Book Club.

The novels we read had commonalities, in the sense that we all read books that had similar scenarios or themes. For example, we read books that were about love and families. I remember the book series that was most loved – in fact, to not feel excluded, this was a must-read book series. The series was *Sweet Valley High* by the American author Francine Pascal, and it revolved around the Wakefield family (see Chapter Two, Figure 2.3). The series has three main characters: Steven, and the identical twins Jessica and Elizabeth, the children of Alice and Ned Wakefield. It was based on love relationships and complications that the main characters experienced in their relationships. We loved the book mainly because we were introduced to it when we reached the adolescent stage. It was mostly related to what interested us as teenagers, which was to be in a love relationship.

Furthermore, the Book Club promoted caring for each other. Although we were not all friends with each other, we came to know each other very well, and it was heart-warming to know that there were people you could rely on for help with any matter, especially when you needed emotional support. I believe it also helped us keep focus academically, as the Book Club turned into a study group, especially during mid-and year-end examinations. I found it very helpful because we knew each other's weaknesses and strengths. For instance, one knew who to go to if we needed assistance with a particular subject. Concerning the social aspect, I can see that we learnt a lot from each other on how to deal with certain aspects of life – since there was no subject like Life Orientation in my schooling that taught us about these aspects of life. Also, our parents did not talk much about things that pertained to sexuality and puberty. Hence, these were the things we talked about, read about, and learnt from each other.

From my perspective, I think the Book Club was useful not only to accumulate more knowledge but also for socialising. It created inner satisfaction and joy, especially when I successfully managed to complete and understand a book. I remember how we used to look forward to Friday lunchtime when we met to share the episodes from the books we were reading. We used to have a lot of fun as we discussed the characters and shared our hopes and dreams concerning the books we were discussing. We would also talk about how we wanted the story to end and what we thought might happen after the story ended.

Recalling our Book Club has helped me see how reading has so much power in developing children's imaginations, as I feel that from reading a novel one could visualise how and where the story could lead. In my view, reading novels helped us to understand different circumstances

that one might come across and how to handle different situations or resolve them. For example, I learnt more about love relationships from the *Sweet Valley High* book series; as a girl, I learnt how boys could manipulate us and what to do if you found yourself betrayed by a friend. It also helped me to develop emotional empathy. For instance, I think it aided me in learning to understand the consequences of hurting others emotionally. I consider it vital for young children to learn to take care and avoid harming each other physically or emotionally.

I feel that implanting the value of reading into my learners by regularly reading stories for them would enrich their knowledge and love for books. Reading for learners could also help them develop their vocabulary, as after reading we could always jot down new words found in the story and explain their meaning. Reading short stories might also support many other learning attributes, such as listening, reasoning, and thinking. For example, Peterson (2016) attested that playful activities that use child-friendly resources such as picture books can encourage a wide range of language use. I think the culture of reading in my class could develop to a stage where learners learn to read stories to each other for enjoyment.

4. 4 The role of popular culture

During my high school years, music was a way of life. Even though I did not think I was a good singer, it felt right and amusing just to sing. I made an effort to learn the tunes and rhythms of my favourite songs. I made sure that I did not slack behind with the popular music or artists that were a hit in that particular season. My friends and I mainly loved rhythm and blues (R&B), a type of music that combines several musical instruments such as piano and bass drums, generally with a background vocalist. The R&B music we mostly liked was by American artists such as R. Kelly and Celine Dion. We also listened to Kwaito music, which is South African township music with loud soundtracks. The famous kwaito artists in my high school years were Arthur Mofokate, Mdu Masilela and Trompies. To keep myself updated with popular music, I had to socialise with peers who had the same interest in the kind of music I loved. We would sing together to teach each other the tunes and rhythm of the songs. We would practice the songs until we sang them perfectly, even if we were alone at home.

Most of us had music books, which were precious to us. I think we all took good care of these, as I remember they were the most beautiful books. I think we followed certain trends as to how we made our books look; for instance, the cover of the music book had to have a poster of our favourite or most popular musician of the music genre we followed. This itself was something

desirable. It made us take pride and feel special, as everyone would want to see your music book; we would rejoice and be glad when taking compliments on the lovely music book one had. For example, when I was doing Grade 10, I had posters of American R&B musicians Brandy and Monica, who were the hits of that season, and I felt proud as everyone was admiring my music book.

To make our music books look lovely, we decorated them. On the first page, we wrote our names and made drawings or pasted pictures. It was amazing as I think of the effort we made to decorate and design our special music book to make it look beautiful. I recall how we would compromise and not buy lunch at school to save money to buy magazines, and coloured pens to work on our music books. Everyone made sure that their music book was kept safe and decent at all times. Each year we got a new music exercise book. We would make it look attractive by decorating it by drawing or using magazine pictures, like pasting photographs of our favourite celebrities and other things we liked, such as cars and houses, on the outer cover. This helped us to identify them quickly as we lent them to each other. It was easy for a music book to get stolen, so one had to be careful not to misplace it. I think we sometimes became too emotionally attached to our music books. While we did lend each other our music books, we became cautious and sensitive about who we lent them to, as some would not keep them clean or return them in the same condition as they received them.



Figure 4.2: A memory picture of a 2 Quire book and coloured pens.

Figure 4.2 shows two pictures: on the left is a 2 Quire book, of the type that we normally used for music, and on the right are coloured pens, which we used to decorate our music book and make it look attractive.

We represented and lived our music. We aimed to look like and live our favourite musicians' lifestyle by adopting their dress code and hairstyles to make our appearance similar to that of the most famous artists. Änggård (2016) acknowledged how post-humanist and non-representational theorists understood that the involvement of popular culture in children's everyday life has representational traits. This suggests that we followed trends as children and had symbolic representations that made us feel part of a group. I think music inspired us to follow specific fashions. Because some of our parents could not afford to buy us expensive clothes, we shared clothes with our friends. I remember that when we had functions at school, we would be honoured to get an opportunity to not have to wear our school uniforms and were

jubilant at the privilege of wearing ‘civvies’. Together with my friends, we would spend a few days planning the dress code. As our dress code would imitate famous artists, we would try to organise to get the whole outfit. We would borrow what we did not have or even help each other find the right items, so no one had to look or feel odd.

Besides those parents who could not afford to buy us what we asked them for, other parents did not seem to understand or did not want to entertain our adolescent dreams. For instance, some parents did not approve of buying us a music exercise book. Even if there was a spare exercise book available, my parents never allowed me to use it for music, as my mother would ask me to keep it for the following year’s schoolwork. I assume that they did not understand the importance of me having it, and the pain I endured at being left out of the group. This meant that we needed to take care of each other as peers and friends. This helped us know that we had friends that we could rely on, making us feel at peace. I believe it raised the spirit of unity amongst us, as the support that we had for each other was incredible.

Music created inner peace within my soul. Listening to music as a means of healing when I was emotionally hurt, and singing comforted me; music helped me relax. Music made us feel at ease and confident. I always thought that I was the best singer. It uplifted my ego and made me believe in myself and feel optimistic about life. Doing something that I loved satisfied me; it felt good because it freed my spirit.

Besides enjoying singing, we also learnt to listen to and understand the message carried by a song. We used to quote a few words from the songs when we were writing letters to our friends; for example, we did this if someone had a birthday or to wish each other good luck, especially during examinations. I think music played a significant role in aiding us to develop literacy, as writing songs in our music books and singing promoted the development of speech, communication, and writing. It also helped us to become emotionally empathetic towards each other. Not all of us had what we wished for, such as fashionable clothes or music books. Thus, to show our compassion to dear friends we had to lend each other clothes because we would feel sad if one of us did not have what the rest of the group had.

Music provided us the privilege of being cheerful and living out our dreams. When there were school celebrations or functions, we would be asked to take part and to do a special performance which was highly likely to involve singing or dancing. I remember that we usually sang as a

group. We would sing by imitating our favourite artists. It was gratifying and exciting to see everyone cheering for us and shouting our names. I think music allowed me an opportunity to live out my childhood dream of being a musician.

I also want my learners not to be demoralised and to allow them the chance to do what they think and feel they are good at. I guess all children have their icons, perhaps characters from cartoons they watch, such as Superman, Sofia, or musicians. Allowing them to talk about, sing, draw and cut out pictures of their favourite stars would increase their imagination and create pleasure.

I believe some children's dreams could evolve from their superheroes. I could allow learners the opportunity to cut out pictures of their favourite musicians, and together as a class we could create music books. It would also be more meaningful if they drew an expressional feeling next to each picture they have drawn or pasted; for example, they could draw a heart, smiling face, clapping hands. They could even perform music by their favourite artist. I believe this could develop some kind of closure for them and joy

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Furthermore, they might begin to learn to develop an interest in reading and telling stories, as they would talk about and read a story about what they have drawn or about a picture they pasted in their music book. Mills (2014) revealed that arts activities like dance, music, puppetry, and dramatic play help the child explore, experience, discover, and be creative. Consequently, creative arts could motivate active engagement in children's learning, fostering young children's imagination and cognitive development. This could help them develop literacy, such as writing and communication competencies, and enhance their thinking and reasoning capability.

4.5 Engaging in my roots: Traditional music and dance

I was introduced to traditional music and dance at a very early age, but it was just as a game in my primary school years. From watching and listening to my older siblings and others in my community performing, my peers and I would imitate them. At this stage, performing traditional dance and singing was a sort of amusement, as we did it together with friends or peers just for fun. I believe that was how we learnt and prepared ourselves for the stage when it was appropriate for us to join in with the community performing groups. Those who had a talent for singing or dancing were identified at an early age, and their love for performing cultural activities began to prosper through playing.

It was only in my early teens that I came to understand the value of this music and dance to my culture. We were socialised to our traditional beliefs and practices through attending traditional celebrations or gigs such as weddings and *umemulo*. *UMemulo* is a traditional celebration that is held to introduce a girl to adulthood. In my community, attending such festivals was the initiation to familiarise us to learn about and embrace our cultural heritage. I understood *ingoma* cultural music and dance as a kind of entertainment. I assume that the love and passion for joining the cultural group were implanted by my siblings, as they used to come from gigs and practices and perform for us at home. I enjoyed watching them performing; I could imagine myself also performing, and sometimes I would dance and sing along with the songs they sang.

Although traditional music and dance (*ingoma*) was introduced early in my childhood, I only took part in it when I was in Grade 10. This was because the performing group practices took place late in the afternoon. My parents felt that it was not safe for me as a young woman to travel late in the afternoon; my mother used to tell me that I could not go with my older siblings to attend the dance and music practices until I was grown up. McFarland and Laird (2018) explained that some parents may disapprove of their children going out to play with friends because of the fear that outdoor games might put their children at risk of injuring themselves. Hence, they caution parents that not allowing children to play outdoor games limits opportunities that might contribute to their psychological and social wellbeing. This implies that playing is a valuable element in healthy child development since it allows the child to take control, make a decision and gain a sense of independence. I think the performing group practices took place late in the evening to make allowances for everyone to finish off their home chores before embarking on the practice.

The practices for *ingoma* only took place when there was a function coming up that would require a traditional performance; the practice used to be held in the particular home which would be hosting the event. Each community had its group of *ingoma* dancers and singers. For instance, if the function was in my community, only the group from my village would perform to entertain the visitors. The visitors would not initiate the performance, as that was seen as an offence to the local people, which would typically cause a quarrel between villages.

I voluntarily joined the local group of performers during my high school years, with my parents' consent. Neha and Rule (2018) agree that play can be an impulsive, voluntary, cooperative activity, and I joined this play activity of my own free will. At that time, being part of the group was a privilege that allowed me to get a chance to hang out with my peers and friends. It felt right for me to do what other youngsters were doing, and it was exciting to be in the limelight, as everyone would applaud and cheer for the group or my performance. For example, particular songs were sung, which allowed either the group to dance all at once or one person to dance at a time. We all used to jump at the opportunity of dancing alone. I remember how I would outdo myself in my performance when I noticed that everyone was cheering or when I heard my family or friends shouting and praising me. I think those were exciting and glorious moments that I enjoyed through *ingoma*.

To be part of the performers' group meant that one had to stick to specific rules that our elders (ancestors) passed down. These were seen as traditional rules and were mainly enforced by our group leader (*igoso*). For example, girls were to abstain from sex, because they could not be part of the group if they had a child. The group leader was usually an older person in the village known to be the most outstanding performer and shown to have the best leadership qualities. The group leader had specific responsibilities to carry out, such as making sure that the group had traditional outfits or uniforms, which were bead skirts (*isigege*) for girls and *ibheshu* for boys; *ibheshu* looks like a skirt that covers the buttocks and is made of cow skin. The group leader would also ensure that the group had all the necessary instruments needed for the performance and that, for example, the drums and whistles were in good condition and available. The group leader would inform us members of *ingoma* if there was an upcoming gig in our village. He was also responsible for liaising with the family that would host the gig to make arrangements such as when we could start *ingoma* practice. We usually had practice for *ingoma* for about a week or two when there was any gig announced.

Being part of *ingoma*, the cultural music and dance group in my community, paved the way for me to participate in school cultural performances. We rarely performed cultural activities at school, but if there was an event that included this, the school would only use one grade to perform. Teachers typically asked for learners who were known to be involved in such activities in their community. I assume that this was because the school did not dedicate much time to extracurricular activities. As a result, selecting learners who were known to be good at a particular task was considered the best option by teachers, as they did not have to spend much time training the learners. Therefore, taking part in cultural activities at school granted me the opportunity to be recognised by the teachers, although this was rare. However, we enjoyed ourselves and it was an activity that was well-loved by teachers and learners. It made us shine and gain favour from our teachers at school.

When I joined the community cultural performers group I was not conscious of the values and principles conveyed to us as growing children. I only realised at a later stage that traditional music and dance had a particular influence on how I conducted myself as we worked in a team; for instance, the value of respect was cultivated. Although it was not always easy and enjoyable, as some would provoke, bully and be rude, it taught me to believe in myself and hold on to what I believe in, regardless of what others think of me. Therefore, it led me to be self-disciplined and respect others and value myself, communicate and interact with others, and be caring and kind to others.

I also believe that most of the cultural songs carried a powerful message about social life or things that were relevant to that particular period. For example, some songs were composed to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS-related dangers, and some were about children forsaken by their parents. Other songs were about children who embarked on a train to visit or look for their parents who had left them with a promise to come back home on Christmas day, but never came back. Some songs taught us, boys and girls, how we should conduct ourselves as we came of age. Sometimes, these songs would be composed as a cry to a local chief and/or men in the community about women's unfair treatment in their homesteads. As much as these songs and dance moves were enjoyable, they also sent stern messages to the community about various social injustices that women and children were afraid to talk about in the open. I trust such songs made me vigilant about life and things around me, which might not have affected me directly but affected people around me.

I hope engaging my learners in cultural music could create understanding and alert them about social circumstances and handle or solve problems. As some learners experience difficulties at home, they might be able to vent their worries and fears by singing and dancing. I firmly believe that cultural music and dance can form part of some kind of play in which children engage both by watching and taking part. That could free one's soul and help one find joy within, by letting go of sorrowful feelings or emotions in a calm situation. I assume that music and dance develop from children's interest and participate in groups, therefore allowing them to use their creativity, which develops their imagination and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength.

Consequently, I view the performing arts – in this case, cultural music and dance – as a kind of therapeutic experience that can allow one to release stress and make an individual feel relaxed and calm. It can enable one to remain focused and exercise the body and mind, which I believe is vital to maintaining one's physical and mental health. Hence, with my learners too, cultural music or dance could be part of entertainment to create joy and warmth amongst them and develop them into healthy beings.

Being part of *ingoma* provided me with an opportunity to understand and value myself and know my roots. Cultural music has a strong sense of language usage, and therefore can teach children to know about and make meaning of how and when to use certain words. Some songs use figures of speech like idioms or sayings. For example, the song '*Inkomo ingazala umuntu angeke sashawa kanjalo, sebethi induku zobuya*' is composed of a metaphor (*inkomo ingazala umuntu* – translation, a cow would bore a human being, which is said when one swears that something would never happen). There is also the saying '*induku zobuya*', which means a person who wronged another would face dire consequences one day. Teaching through the use of such songs could ensure that children would not easily forget what I may be teaching them.

4.6 Conclusion

Although I experienced playing in my teenage years differently from early childhood, I think play in both periods of my life offered me a chance to experience and explore. As Drake (2009, p. 8) declared, "children learn to make sense of the world around them through play—it is their work and as such should be afforded high status". I believe that I was able to make my meaning from my discoveries. Samuelsson (2008, p.623) further proposed that playing is not forced on

children; instead, it is a natural part of their growth. Thus play is a necessary element of a child's development. Even though I perceived playing as a more formal activity as a teenager, because I felt there was something at stake for me to learn from doing it, it seemed to me to be exciting and enjoyable. I also think that I learnt and developed valuable aptitudes for social, emotional and cognitive development. These elements are vital for my young learners to attain to build a concrete foundation for growth.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five, I represent data generated in the classroom as I conducted playful pedagogy lessons. I describe the games that I created, which were in line with the lessons; these were to further the learners' understanding and grant them an opportunity to explore and experience, have a chance to make sense of what they were learning and make their own discoveries. Also, I elaborate on how each game boosted learners' capabilities. I also reflect after each game by evaluating whether I needed to change anything and why.

CHAPTER FIVE: PLAYING IS SELF-LEARNING

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Four, I narrated my teenage memories of play. I described the playful activities I participated in when in high school, and how playing at this stage seemed to differ from primary school. I provided an account of how I thought playful activities had helped my peers and me develop valuable knowledge and traits. I believe that this had a positive impact on me, including my social development, discipline, independence and intellectual development.

In this chapter (Chapter Five), and the following chapter (Chapter Six), I address my second research question: *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* In these two chapters, I make evident how I built on the memory-work insights expressed in Chapters Three and Four to explore possibilities for playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom.

I gave this chapter, Chapter Five, the title of ‘Playing is self-learning’ as the lesson stories show how, when playing, children are enjoying themselves, and they also get a chance to construct knowledge since playing grants them an opportunity to explore and experience. The chapter shows my observations of how playing can develop new levels of understanding in learners as well as nurture their talents.

I begin by describing my school and classroom setting. After that, I provide an in-depth account of lessons I conducted in my Grade 1 class in three learning areas: isiZulu, English, and Mathematics. This chapter presents lessons I taught during the first, second and third term of 2018. The lessons covered the following subject areas and topics: a) IsiZulu lesson: Learners’ name-tags; b) Mathematics lesson: Matching cards – addition and subtraction; c) IsiZulu revision: Post office; d) English lesson: Learning through music; and e) English lesson: Drama play. For each lesson, I give details of the activities that I created for playful learning to promote further learning, knowledge, and understanding through experience and exploration.

I demonstrate how playful learning took place in terms of how and what we were doing in class. To convey this information, I describe how I introduced the games and explain learners’ responses to each game. I also provide my reflections to share my perspective in terms of

whether the games served their purpose or not – for instance, if the game achieved what I intended to teach or improved learners’ understanding by applying their thoughts and reasoning to make sense of what I was teaching. I also offer my reflections on how my learners responded to my playful learning lessons, what I picked up from the whole lesson, and what I thought I should add or change in future lessons.

5.2 My school and classroom setting

Our school has four blocks, and the Grade 1 block is in the middle of these blocks that face each other. This has always made learners conscious of their behaviour, as we usually warn them not to make noise so that they will not disturb the admin block or senior classes. Another factor is that our school surroundings are made from concrete and are not conducive to energetic play. This seems to make learners feel enclosed, as there is limited space for them to play around in. We teachers also fear that they may get injured on the hard concrete, and we restrict them from playing.

The photographs I took of my classroom at the start of my self-study research project (see Figure 5.1) show that my school needs maintenance; they show cracks in the floor, old furniture, and paint shedding off the wall. I was concerned that this had made my classroom lose the brightness, attractiveness, and warmth that inspires children to want to be at school and created a dull and boring environment.



Figure 5.1: My classroom setting (photographs that I took using my cellular telephone).

It is fundamental to attract children’s interest to facilitate their growing minds to develop their thinking and imagination capability. I assumed that having charts pasted around my classroom

wall would create a more lively and vibrant area to catch learners' attention and help them interact or engage with what they are learning. (The charts are shown in the left-hand-side photograph in Figure 5.1). I made some of the charts in my class while others were provided by the Department of Basic Education for teaching support. These posters cover all four subjects that I teach: Mathematics, isiZulu, English and Life Skills.

The photograph on the left in Figure 5.1 shows my classroom setup before I introduced playful pedagogy as a teaching strategy. Learners were in groups with desks leaning against the wall and much bigger spaces in between the rows. The photograph on the right shows how the classroom was reorganised to accommodate playful pedagogy, with the desks set up in a line to make more room for playful activities.

5.3 Learners' name-tags: IsiZulu lesson, 5 March 2018

My first research lesson was an isiZulu lesson. This lesson is prescribed in the curriculum document (Jika iMfundo lesson plan) as an introductory lesson. I was supposed to create learners' name-tags and help learners introduce themselves to their classmates. This lesson aims to assist learners in learning to write their names correctly and to know each other, so they could call each other by names to instil the value of respecting one another. The lesson requires learners to learn and recognise their names and get to know each other as they also have to introduce each other.

I chose this as one of my research lessons because I thought I could adapt this particular lesson and activity to ownership and creativeness. I modified the recommended task so that the learners would design their own name-tags to reflect their identities. I anticipated that this could make them feel part of the class. Since this lesson was in the first term of the school year, I assumed that learners might still be trying to find their feet or getting used to the idea of being in the classroom or formal learning environment. For some of the learners, this was their first year of schooling. With this lesson, I aimed to enable them to feel at ease, interact with each other, and, most of all, and begin to learn through playing.

I began the lesson by reminding my learners of the research I was doing that they were also part of. I felt that it was vital that I eased learners' minds by reminding them that joining in the games was voluntary and they would not be marked on their play. Phelan and Kinsella (2013) indicated that consent and assent from children are better approached as a process rather than a

single event. I also believe that children who are research participants, especially those as young as my learners, need to be continuously reminded of the research procedure. This could help in avoiding learners feeling that they are compelled to be part of the research. I felt that reminding learners would also assist me as a researcher to be sure that they joined in freely and understood the meaning of being part of the research. As I discussed the research procedure, they first looked puzzled and confused. As a visual reminder, I then took out a sample of the assent form (Appendix D) that they had all been given to assent to being part of the study.

After the learners had seen the consent letters, they all grinned as their faces lit up with smiles as they remembered what was said in the letters. Some even exclaimed, “*Ohoooo yeh! Okay!*” They started to flood me with questions one after the other as they shouted “*Maam*”, “*Are we starting to play today?*” “*Which games are we going to play today?*” “*Maam, ma’am, ma’am!*” shouted Kwazi¹ to seek my attention: “*I know nice games that we play at home*”. In responding to Kwazi and the whole class, as they seemed to be excited to start to play, I began by reassuring learners that they would all get a chance to play. I said: “*Okay, Grade 1, we will all get a chance to play, I will introduce you to games that may be new to you, or maybe some are familiar with those games. I want you to learn how to play my game. I hope everyone would enjoy playing it. My game will teach us how to write and to know each other’s names*”.

Seeing that there was so much excitement and the learners were getting out of control, I had to calm them down. I started a rhyme (*yakhala insimbi yesikole*), and they all joined in. The rhyme managed to draw their focus back to the classroom setting and our classroom rules on how and when we are supposed to talk; for example, raising your hands if you want to say something. Then I instructed them to sit, and after they were all seated, I recapped the procedure that I would follow in conducting my research lessons. I explained that I would be using an audio recorder and taking a few photos that would not show their faces but only their hands and classwork, and that I would also write in my book about things they said or did. As I finished explaining, Akhile’s hand was already up. She asked, “*Memu ngeke kubonakale ubuso bethu?*”² [“*Ma’am, you would not show our faces on the photos?*”] I replied, “*Ohooo yes, your*

¹ To protect the children’s identities, I did not use any learners’ real names in the thesis.

² The research activities were conducted in isiZulu as it is the learners’ home language and the school medium of instruction. In presenting learners’ spoken voices, I have often quoted in IsiZulu and then translated the words into English. I felt some of the children’s statements would lose their meaning and the tone of how they were said and understood by the speaker if they were only given in English.

faces would not be shown on the photos". "Ahaawu!" grumbled Kwazi, and the whole class looked disappointed.

I then started the lesson by explaining our first play activity lesson: 'the name-tags'. The task was to create name-tags for learners to see and get familiar with the spelling of their names and introduce themselves to their classmates so they could know each other's names. The name-tag lesson I planned was intended to make this process playful and to get learners more actively involved by designing their own name-tags. Miller (2013, p. 1) declared that "All kids want to play, and we can use play to motivate students toward being creative, toward collaborating and tinkering in our classrooms, toward creating high-quality work and assessments". This means that artistic play could be part of learning, as some activities could offer children the opportunity to reveal their abilities and shape their talents through the arts. I asked them to be inventive as I explained that they could colour, draw, or cut the name-tags in any shape of their choice. For example, this could be the shape of their favourite toy or pet. I assumed that this activity would encourage learners to develop a sense of creativity.

The children all looked happy with the activity they were about to start; some were whispering, telling each other what they would draw and how they would shape their name-tags. For example, Bahle whispered, *"I will make a dog"*. I handed them the papers I had written their names on, and as soon as I had finished handing out paper to make name-tags, a few hands were already up. Khanyo asked, *"Memu ngilisike noma krayone?"* [*"Ma'am should I cut my paper or colour it?"*]. I answered her as I explained that she could do whatever she wanted to make her name-tag look unique and beautiful. I then felt that I needed to explain that I wanted them to make their name-tags reflect their identities. Because I wanted them to make their name-tags look unique and not copy each other, I emphasised that there was no right or wrong way of creating the name-tags. I then allowed them to take scissors, pencils, and crayons from their pencil cases, and I provided them for those who did not have them. They all seemed excited and fascinated by the activity.

As the children started their task, I was unsure whether to supervise to ensure the activity was done appropriately or leave them to work independently. I decided to detach myself from them as I did not want to comment much on their work in progress because I felt that this might jeopardise the element of play and detract from the learners' sense of ownership. Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012, p. 134) state that "Play is a remarkably creative process that fosters

original thinking, problem-solving, learning, and imagination”; allowing learners to work on their own was to enable them to bring their original thinking and creativity to designing their name-tags. However, I welcomed questions and continuously insisted that they should not copy each other’s work but make what they each liked. I tried to keep myself busy with other things; I walked around sorting charts on the wall while peeking at their work and ensuring they were all working.

Some learners came to me with their half-done work to ask if they were on the right track. For instance, Lethu asked the question, “*Memu ngiwufake ured la?*” [“*Ma’am should I use red?*”]. “*Oooh yes, if you want to,*” I replied. Bahle, smiling and looking for my approval, asked, “*Memu buka, kuhle angithi?*” [“*Ma’am it looks beautiful right?*”]. Smiling back I replied, “*Oh yes Bahle, continue so that you can finish your activity*”.

Without me getting too involved, I noted that some learners were teasing each other. For instance, Akhile laughed and pointed at Londwa’s work, telling her that she needed to colour beautifully. I decided to intervene and told the class not to laugh at or tease each other. Immediately, Mdu came to me with his pair of scissors and stood next to me. With a sad voice, he said, “*I cannot cut*”. Mdu’s comment awakened me to realise that play is all about being interactive, and sharing ideas and strategies and learning from each other. Therefore, I asked my learners to help or share ideas on making creative and beautiful name-tags.

Then there were many interactions, as some asked others to draw for them or show them how to cut. For example, Mayenzi asked Phumla to draw a flower for her; then suddenly, Mbali screamed, “No! Do not colour your flower with black, roses are not black!” I pretended that I did not hear that statement, as I was trying not to get very involved. However, more learners felt that they needed my assurance on the colours they should use. I noted that most of the struggling learners were those who only started school in Grade 1 and had not attended Grade R (the Reception year). I insisted on others helping out the ones who needed help to complete their task, and also tried to work with those who were struggling with cutting and colouring. Finally, the activity was completed, and learners pasted their name-tags on their desks (see Figure 4.2).



Figure 5.2: Examples of learners' name-tags.

The top photograph in Figure 5.2 depicts learners' name-tags pasted on their desks. The other two pictures reveal learners' creativity in designing their name-tags. They tried their utmost to make them unique, colourful and beautiful. On the left is Lwandle's name-tag, designed as a truck, with Asanda's on the right, in the shape of a shark.

I was happy, as I felt that the learners took pride in their name-tags as they had become less self-conscious about what others were saying. Everyone was glowing with pride as they were showing each other what they had done. For instance, Mvelo exclaimed, "*Fish! Phiwe made a fish*"; the whole class turned to look at Phiwe's name-tag and they all wanted to show and tell what they had done. I asked them to be quiet so I could hear everyone's opinion, and asked if

they had enjoyed the activity or not. They all shouted “*Yees!*”, “*Kumnandi memu*” [“*It was nice*”]. There was so much excitement and everyone wanted to say something.

The learners enjoyed the activity and I noted that they were unwilling to pack up; even if I told them that it was time to go home, they wanted to finish up. They were not even bothered by the other classes marching out of their classrooms to go home. I had to insist that they pack up and put everything away; to calm them, I had to assure them that those who had not managed to paste their name-tag would do it the following day. I collected and kept the name-tags of those who had not yet been able to paste them.

The activity was to be continued the next day, whereby learners would introduce each other and the game that his or her partner like to play. I thought it would be amusing if learners would introduce the person sitting next to them. So I allocated the IsiZulu morning period for this, as I assumed that the learners would still be fresh and energetic in the morning, and the activity would be fun and brighten up their day.

5.3.1 Reflection, 5 March 2018

I wrote my reflection after listening to the audio recording of the lesson; I think this was because I was unsure whether this activity served the purpose of play. During the activity, learners were so serious and concerned about finishing their task. I felt that perhaps I was the one who made my lesson a bit tense instead of letting the learners have fun, as I kept insisting that everyone should work and complete their tags.

However, listening to my audio recording, I realised that I had not been as pushy as I thought I was. The noise of laughter and talking indicated a lot of engagement, interaction and fun. I observed how this activity managed to build social bonds among the learners, as we had in my primary school days where playing brought children together. My aim with this activity was not to make learners complete their task but rather to develop ownership, social interaction, communication, and creativity. I was surprised at seeing the skills and talents some learners have; for example, I did not expect them to draw and colour so well this early on in Grade 1. I think learners gained ownership and social interaction experiences, as most of them felt proud of their name-tags. They could ask each other for help and, therefore, showed a well-developed sense of communication and social interaction.

5.4 IsiZulu oral activity on learners' name-tags (continuation), 6 March 2018

As I had planned, the next morning, we had an isiZulu lesson, and started with an oral activity. I introduced the lesson by recapping the name-tag activity we had done the previous day and picked a few learners who volunteered to tell us what they had drawn or what shape they had cut their name-tag into. For example, Enzo joyfully announced that he had cut his name-tag into a truck shape; the whole class was amazed by Enzo's name-tag, as they all grinned and applauded him. Delighted, Phumla stated that she had drawn two flowers and stars, and Khaye interrupted as he said, "*Memu nami ngenze imbali nemoto*" [*"Ma'am, I have also drawn a flower and a car"*]. The mood in class was not like on any other day. The learners were so vibrant, excited and engaged; even the quiet learners were more willing to share what they had drawn.

I moved on to the core of the oral activity, 'Knowing each other'. I started by explaining how I wanted learners to introduce each other, as I explained that each one had to whisper into the ear of the person sitting next to him or her. Making sure that others did not hear, each learner had to tell their neighbour their name and surname and a game they liked to play at home. As I was explaining, I noticed that learners were smiling and eyeing each other to see who they would be whispering to.

I then picked one of my most outspoken learners and whispered in his ear. I told him my name and surname and the game I liked to play. As he stood up to introduce me, the whole class became quieter and they all paid attention to what he was going to say. Mzamo stuttered, "*Umemu, umemu, umemu,*" sighing, "*Umemu igama lakhe uMiss Phewa, uthanda ukudlala amakhadi*" [*"Ma'am's name is Miss Phewa and she likes to play cards"*]. I noticed that his stuttering was caused by the shock of having to call out my Christian name. He decided not to tell them my Christian name but instead told them my second name, 'Miss Phewa'. In Zulu culture, it is disrespectful for a child to call an adult by their first name. There was a lot of amusement, as Khaye shouted "*Nobaba uyawadlala*" [*"Dad also likes to play cards"*], and Sakhi whispered to others, "*I also know how to play cards*".

"*Okay, okay ... I also want to know about you, the games you like to play,*" I said, as I reminded the learners to draw them back to our game activity. I asked, "*Who wants to start?*" Hands went up quickly as most of them wanted to start. I thought I should not choose who should go

and present, which might have put pressure on some of them. Therefore, I allowed them to make a presentation, not in any order; anyone who felt ready was free to present.

Learners found the activity exciting. I observed that immediately after one had finished doing the presentation, others would be rushing to go forward to make their presentation. This caused a lot of chaos, and I thought it would disrupt other classes. I then decided that to control and maintain discipline, they would follow each other in a row. I also perceived that learners were cautious as they listened to each other carefully, as they wanted to introduce each other in the exact words of what the other had said to them. To illustrate, Kwazi screamed, "*Aibo! I said...*" as he was drawing his partner closer so he could speak in his ear so nobody else could hear. Then Slondwe once again had to tell the class what Kwazi told him in his exact words.

I believe that this activity uplifted learners' spirits. I noted that Bahle, who had come to school feeling very down, became more engaging, and I felt many learners gained self-confidence because most of them were much more willing to join in, even the quiet learners. I think I managed to bring in play with this activity, as learners freely participated and were ready to join in. I believe they also learnt and gained in many ways, such as creativity, interacting, communication, a positive attitude on their capability and also to respect each other and, most of all, to value themselves as individuals.

5.5 Mathematics lesson: Matching cards – addition and subtraction, 16 May 2018

For my next research lesson, I introduced a Mathematics game I had designed, intending to extend learners' understanding of how they could solve addition and subtraction sums. I presented this game to my learners to stress strategies they could apply when calculating and getting more (adding) or taking away (subtracting). I hoped that this game would help them integrate the new information I would introduce to them through play to help them understand more easily (Whitebread, 2003). This implies that playing could be a tool to teach a new concept or help learners engage practically with what they were taught to make personal meaning. I anticipated that this game would encourage thinking, interaction and communication, as learners had to work in pairs.

I had two tubs. One had addition and the other the subtraction sums; problems and solutions were both in the one tub. I made the number of sums equal to the number of pairs of learners. I

divided the learners into two groups; one group was working on addition, and the other on subtraction sums. I asked the learners to work in pairs, with the person sitting next to them. In each pair, learners had to take a problem sum and find its solution. For example, I had sums like two plus three ($2+3=$) as the problem sum and the solution was, for example, a picture with two apples on top and three apples below. I made addition and subtraction sums on different coloured paper so they could easily be differentiated. I also divided learners into two groups, the first doing addition and the other group subtraction. I made the groups sit apart to make it easy for learners to understand the difference between the two concepts regarding how to count. I alternated the groups during play, to make sure that they all got a chance to play. I then explained how the game was played.

They all looked excited about the game, even before they learnt how it was played. They could not wait to start the game, as they were showing each other what they had. For instance, Enzo whispered to those who were near him *"I have six apples"*, and they were all giggling as they also looked at what they had. This showed me that although they did not know what they would be playing, they were already excited because they were doing something different from writing and reading. Their minds seemed to be at ease, as I noticed that they all looked cheerful and comfortable and not concerned about what they would be doing.

I explained to the learners that the pair would read their problem sum out loud, and then look for a solution to the sum in the tub. If their answer was incorrect, they would get another two chances to try to get the correct answer; if they still were unsuccessful, we would ask volunteers to assist in the search. They were all quiet as I was explaining the game rules; some were passing comments such as *"Yoooh!"*, *"kumele sithole, sizowina thina"* [*"We have to find the correct answer, we will win"*].

After they had all picked up sums from one of the tubs, they settled down. We then started our game. As we began playing, learners were so fascinated that they could not wait for their turn to play. The game was played by alternating between addition and subtraction sums. I addressed children to read the sum as a scenario. I made an example on the chalkboard with sums similar to those that they had. This was to help them understand the sum problem so that it would be easy to find answers quickly.

Seeing that some learners struggled to get their sums correct, I noted that it would demotivate them to keep trying. I realised that they would not get enough time to finish their game. I then purposefully moved a few learners not to sit with the partners they had chosen, as I saw that some pairs were at the same level – either both struggling or doing well. I felt that those struggling academically would not enjoy playing if they kept getting it wrong. I hoped that the partners would help each other. I assumed that having mixed-ability pairs would create interest for learners, as they would not find the game as dull as it would have been if they were struggling and feeling exhausted if they could not get it correct. I recognised that having mixed-ability groups would be beneficial for struggling learners, as they would also learn how to count from the others.

I think children read their problem sums well, which enabled them to make sense of the problem sum. I noted most of them repeating the question to themselves and trying to make sense of it. For example, I heard Mzamo talking to himself as follows: “*Nginama marbles 4 ngathola amanye awu 3*” [“*I have four diamonds and I also get another three diamonds more*”]. Some learners were fast at counting, as they would quickly count and check if they were the ones with the correct solution to the sum. For example, Bahle raised his hand and said, “*They have the correct answer, $3+4 =$ and they have three diamonds and four diamonds*”. I felt that some quickly understood the game and nobody was left out from the game as they were all helping each other.

Those who were not sure if they had the correct answer would ask others, to be sure of the solution they had matched with the problem sum. For instance, Khanyo asked Lethu, “*Iright le answer?*” [“*Is this the correct answer?*”]. Although some learners experienced challenges in counting, I was happy with their effort as they kept on trying. The astute learners wanted to help others with counting, as they shared techniques of how to count easily. It showed me that learners were not feeling nervous but wanted to be happy that they got it right.

On the following day, during the IsiZulu lesson, I gave my learners who had finished early a chance to play. I thought it would keep them busy while others were still completing their isiZulu activities. To my surprise, when I mentioned that those who wanted to could play the addition and subtraction game, they jumped at the opportunity. They screamed and shouted, “*Yeah! I will do the addition*”. Even my shy and reserved learners were excited about the chance to play again. I divided those who were playing into two groups. Instead of reading the

question out loud as we had on the previous day, I asked them to paste the question on the wall and look for an answer together. I think they enjoyed this game more compared to when I was still teaching them. I also wished that I had introduced the game in the way that this group was playing. It looked easy and more fun, and I observed a lot of interaction as they exchanged ideas. For instance, Slondwe quickly stopped Kwazi from matching a sum with a wrong solution, as he said, “*Okwisithupha ngikuhlanganisa nokuhlanu kwenza seveni?*” [“*Does six plus five makes seven?*”]. They then started over again to look for the correct answer.

I think the game fulfilled its purpose, because, during the second time the game was played, learners were much more active as they helped each other with counting. Learners seemed to know how to make the game more fun, making them more willing to participate. What surprised me was that they did not seem scared to try and fail, as some would match with an incorrect answer and be corrected by others. Correspondingly, Bennett, Wood, and Rogers (1997) posit that playing frees children from fear of failing or taking chances; therefore, it allows learning through trial and error.

I believe that my not being involved much in the second round reduced learners’ pressure. I think some may have been intimidated by my presence in the first iteration of the game. Leaving them to play on their own promoted independence. I believe it allowed them some freedom – and being free gave them the courage to try and learn from their mistakes.

5.5.1 Reflection, 18 May 2018

On the first attempt of playing the game, I was a bit nervous as I wanted to make sure learners understood well how the game was played and that they would get the correct answers. For example, in the audio recording of the first day of play, I heard myself stressing that they should all try and not expect others to help. Therefore, some of my learners were a bit tense, as they also got worried about giving incorrect answers, and others were trying their best to help each other. In the second game, the tone changed for the better, as I think learners felt free and owned the game as they played independently. I anticipated that learners would learn how to count and find strategies to use when calculating or solving addition and subtraction sums. This was made possible by learners interacting; most were willing to ask others for help, so there was a lot of interaction. I also found this game very useful in facilitating a resourceful classroom, as learners could work or practice to improve their numeracy proficiency from time to time.

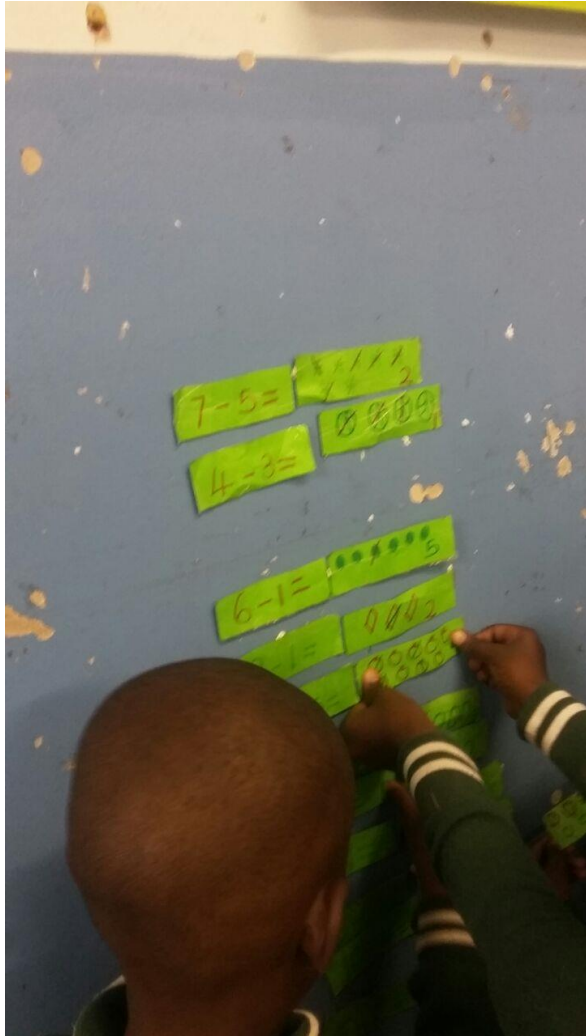


Figure 5.3: Learners looking for a solution or answer to a problem sum and pasting it next to the problem sum.

Figure 5.3 shows a few learners engaging in the playing activity where they took out problem sums and then looked for solutions for each sum to paste next to the problem sum on the wall. They all worked together, trying to figure out the solutions.

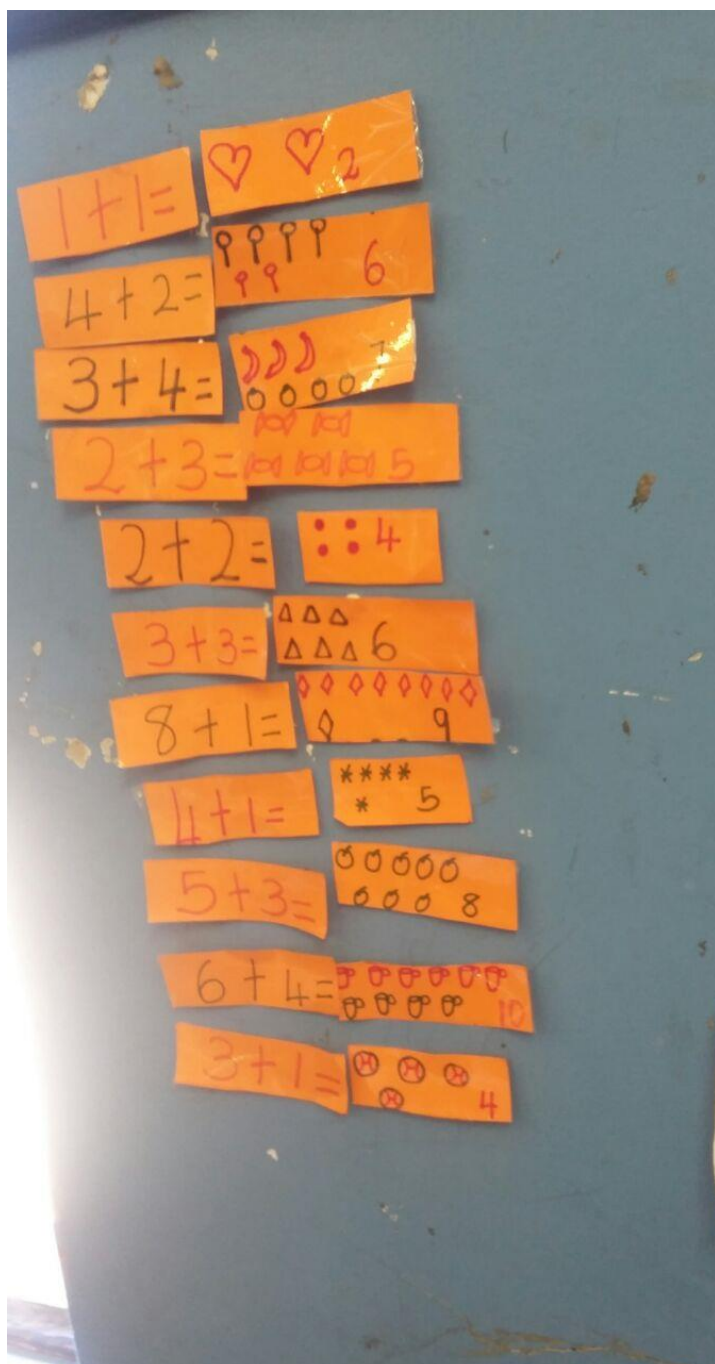


Figure 5.4: Learners' successfully completed matching sums.

Figure 5.4 displays the addition sums worked out by a group of learners. They had pasted the problem sums on the wall and matched them with the correct solutions.

5.6 IsiZulu revision: Post office, 19 July 2018

I initiated this game because I thought it would enable learners to assist each other, as I had planned to play in teams. In the first week of this new school term, we were supposed to revise the previous term's phonics – sounds like t, p, g, j – according to the stipulated Department of

Education curriculum (Week 1, Term 3, *Jika iMfundo* lesson plan and tracker). I assumed that since this was a revision lesson, playful pedagogy would encourage learners' involvement. I anticipated that it would assist them in learning as a group, and hence that it would be easy for them to grasp and remember what they were learning. Practical activities help learners to engage with what they are learning. For instance, Weisberg et al. (2013) proposed that guided play can be seen as part of learning, as it encourages a child to engage actively as a partner in the process of learning; hence as a teacher, you can manipulate the nature of play to achieve the goals that you intended. I assumed that playing post office would be a perfect game for learners to learn to recognise and pronounce words and remember words easily, even when they were writing them down.

I wrote a few words on flashcards and highlighted the phonic sounds that I wanted learners to match with the letter that appeared on the postbox. I had three ice cream tubs that were to be used as postboxes, and on the lid of each, I posted a picture that demonstrated the sound that corresponded with words that would be put in the tub. According to Danniels (2018), "Proponents of play-based learning for academic growth have argued that play-based strategies can be used to teach prescribed academic goals in an engaging and developmentally appropriate manner" (p. 2). I also understood that this game could help the learners recognise sounds and read words; for example, they had to recognise sounds and associate words with a similar sound, such as the words '*ugogo*' and '*igula*'.

Learners were divided into three teams. The first team was the 'senders': they had to take words out of a plastic bag and send them by posting them in the tubs (postboxes). This team had to put words in the correct tub (postbox) by ensuring that words corresponded with the sounds on the postbox. The second group was to take words out of the postbox and deliver them to the correct houses, as I had labelled the houses (desks) with phonics or sounds. The third team was subdivided into mini teams called houses that were to receive post at their homes. They had to accept correct words that corresponded with the phonic sound they were named after; they then had to read the words they had received aloud for the whole class.

To accommodate this game, I had to reorganise my classroom seating. Drake (2009) affirmed that playing affords children some time to learn and make sense of the world around them, and good classroom planning has to ensure that this is possible. This suggests that, as a teacher, I need to allow and prepare space for the learners to learn through playing, as this would grant

the children the opportunity to construct their knowledge. To enable my learners to learn by experience in this game, I had to rearrange the seating. I had to move the desks and placed them in groups of threes and fours, so each team had eleven members.

To ensure that there was interaction – for them to help each other and mostly so that there was learning in the play – I grouped the learners. I decided to mix learners according to capabilities to ensure that there would be progress in each group. For instance, if one group had only struggling learners, they would have got confused and failed to match words with the correct sound and picture. I assumed that this might demotivate and discourage struggling learners. I thought that if the game was not enjoyable, learners would feel pressured, and hence playing the game might lose the element of fun and lightheartedness. Although I considered that more successful learners would be at an advantage and lead the game, I also thought that struggling learners would also gain and learn about reading and word recognition. I, therefore, assumed that the most educative situation would be to have mixed-ability groups.

First, we discussed the post office; I wanted to know what learners knew about the post office so that I could add to what they knew. I asked them if they had ever seen a post office or postbox. There was a moment of silence and then one or two hands slowly went up. “*Yes, Kwazi,*” I said, “*Mmmh, eeeh,*” Kwazi said agitatedly, “*kusePinetown.*” I could see that he was not quite sure, and the rest of the class seemed to be blank as they all tried their best to avoid making eye contact with me. I decided to briefly explain to them what a post office is and its function so that they could have a little bit of understanding.

I used pictures that I had downloaded using my phone before the lesson; I then circulated my phone, showing them photos of the post office. As they saw the pictures, I could see some of them recognised the post office. Akhile exclaimed, “*Ohhoo! ilana, likhona lapha ngakubo kababa*” “*Ohhoo! This is a post office, it is in my father’s house.*”] Mzamo added, “*Mina memu ngalibona sihamba noMa*” [“I also saw it when I was going with my mother”]. With the excitement caused by seeing the pictures, I had to bring them back to our discussion. “*Okay, okay,*” I said as I clapped my hands to draw the learners’ attention back. I then asked them what the post office is used for. Although some of them had an idea that their parents received letters from the post office, they did not seem to understand the post office’s whole functionality, such as how the letters are sent via the post.

I believe that discussing with the learners how the post office functions helped them better understand the work of postal workers, to enable them to role-play the character. This included the importance of making sure letters are delivered to the correct postbox, so they can reach the right person. In our game, they delivered words that matched the correct sound on the postbox.



Figure 5.5: Resources that I used for the post office game.

Figure 5.5 shows resources that I used for the post office game. The photograph on the left shows ice cream tubs used as postboxes, and the picture on the right shows a learner postman about to deliver words to the postbox, as he is pointing at the sound that the word should be posted to.

After I had divided the learners into three groups, I explained how the game was played. I gave learners the option of choosing the roles or parts they wanted to play. Hands quickly went up and in every group, they called out, “*Memu, memu,*” seeking my attention. They all wanted to play the role of delivering. Teams A and B were excited about their roles, as team A had to carry the post and deliver it to postboxes and team B was to take it from the postboxes to deliver it to the third team’s houses; the third team seemed not to be so happy. I was not sure if this was because they only got to play the part of a recipient. I had to reassure them that they could also play this game during break or in their free time after or before school, and that excited them. For example, Sizwe, grinning, said, “*Memu ngiyazi mina ngizodlala nobani ngebreek*” [“*Ma’am, I know who I will play with during break time*”]. “*Who are you going to play with?*” I asked, and he started counting a few of his friends with his fingers. This showed me that my

learners were getting used to the idea of playing games and that there were no strings attached. It was just for them to have fun.

The game's main aim was to help learners learn from each other and be reminded of phonics covered in the previous term. I was quite happy during the play, as teams were assisting each other since they could correct each other. For instance, I would hear them negotiating as they corrected each other. For example, Fana was about to put a word into the postbox that did not correspond with a sound and a picture on a lid, and Akhile shouted sharply, "*Hhayibo! Buka leligama kumele silifake la.*" "*No! Look, this word supposed to get into this box.*" Akhile was pointing at the correct box. I saw a lot of interaction as learners were negotiating and arguing, as some were not sure if they were putting the correct word in the correct box, and some recipients were also not sure and required assistance from others. For example, I heard learners saying, "*Yeyi, oh no! Not that one. Oooh Yes, put it there,*" as they were directing each other as to which was the correct box to put a word into.

However, I noticed that learners who were struggling felt pressure, as those who were doing better academically would continuously dictate what they should and should not do. I felt that being ordered around did not give them a chance to try on their own. I decided that I needed to intervene and address learners who thought they could help each other since they still needed to let everyone try independently before they assisted them. This helped weak learners avoid giving up or feeling sorry for themselves if they did not get it correct. As they kept trying, I heard them cheerfully either ask for help or try to read and figure out where the next word should be placed. This revealed to me that with play, children can get to learn unconsciously. I noticed a bit of a competition in group C, as each house was dominated by learners who were performing well academically. They were the only ones who wanted to read words out. I assumed that they felt that if they allowed academically weak students a chance to read, they would fail to read words correctly and the team would lose. I intervened as I felt the others were being denied the opportunity to play and reminded them that they should give each other a chance to participate in the game.

Figure 5.6: The destination of the post at the various homes (desks with the name of their house).

The above three photographs show the destination of the words. Each house (third group) had received the words that matched the sound of the name of their houses, and they displayed them in front of them, so that they could be read out for the whole class. The house's name is written on the front of the desk, so the teams that were delivering the post had to read the names of houses to match the house's name and the words.

5.6.1 Reflection, 20 July 2018

The post office game was played well, as I wanted the children to learn through playing. I believe that this was achieved, as most learners were having fun and did not seem to be aware that the game's aim was to instil learning. I think that to them it felt like a general game with no "school" agenda. I knew that the game was to help them revise the sounds they learnt in the previous term. I think the struggling learners' willingness to participate showed that learners were starting to feel more comfortable and getting used to the idea of playing in class. I think they understood that playing meant that they could keep trying and just not accept losing. I also learnt from this game that playing develops eagerness to achieve better. Therefore, playing encourages children to make sure that, whatever they are doing, they should do it to their best capability.

5.7 English lesson: Learning through music, 30 July 2018

For this lesson, I composed a dramatic rhythm that the learners had to perform. In one performance, I had six or seven groups of learners I selected to perform a given instruction, while the rest of the class did rhythm and beat (clapping hands and beating desks). I requested a selected group to follow my instructions, for example, to either touch or point to a particular object. I thought this would be a playful and fun way of teaching learners and that it would be easy for them to get to know the English terms for items in the classroom. Sabean (2016, p. 7) advises that "Students love to be chosen to be actors and they will be fully engaged in learning!" I thought that introducing them to performing would allow everyone to engage in learning, rather than having only a few learners participate in a lesson.

Since most of our school learners live in the community around the school, they are likely to be exposed to cultural activities performed mainly by isiZulu-speaking people. For instance, in most cases, when there are functions at my school, educators and learners perform traditional

Zulu dance. Zulu dance is performed following the rhythm of a song and drums. Even the audience has to take part in the performance, as they also have to clap their hands and sing along with the performing group. In that way, everyone becomes a part of the performing group. Therefore, introducing learners to this type of performing activity was easy, as they understood that if someone fails to follow a rhythm, it disrupts the whole performance and makes it sound bad. However, following the rhythm was not my primary concern – I wanted them to learn to identify objects and follow instructions in English. However, I was not surprised when they paid close attention to the rhythm. As they were trying to master the beat, they made sure that when they beat the desks with their hands they also counted so as not to lose the beats. They beat the desks as they counted three numbers in chronological order; for example, they counted 1, 2, 3 as they beat the desks, and I would give the selected group instruction like “Walk to the door”. The beat would stop for a few minutes as I gave the instruction, and also to allow the group to do what they were instructed to do. They would then continue counting 4, 5, 6 and I would give another instruction like “Clap your hands”, then 7, 8, 9 and I would say “Touch the table”. Samuelsson (2008, p. 633) proposed that “Making meaning as a playing learning child is related to taking the child’s perspective, whether or not something is initiated by the child or the teacher. This implies that the child has to contribute by expressing him- or herself verbally or bodily to make meaning”. I assumed that the musical play learning would allow them to express themselves without having to discuss anything, just through bodily communication.

At the beginning of the game, learners were very concerned about following the rhythm correctly. For example, as Lethu reported, “*Ma’am, Sam is not doing it properly!*” and Kwazi shouted, “*NoSihle naye memu wenza wrong*” [“*Ma’am, Sihle is also doing it wrong*”]. Nevertheless, as we proceeded with the game, the learners felt a bit more comfortable as they started to laugh at their mistakes, and I also noticed that when they had made an error, they would stop and commence on the following step of the rhythm. I believe that this was because they were taking part in a game and felt no need to be threatened by their mistakes. It made them feel less pressure, and I wanted them to understand that playing is a free activity where errors are acceptable and a part of learning.

The learners showed a great understanding of the game and were all willing to taking part. Some were unsure what they were supposed to be doing when following instructions and they laughed about it. For example, when I instructed them to run and touch the window, they all hesitated; some ran towards the door and then would suddenly stop as they made sense of what

they were supposed to do. I also liked how they helped each other, as the group that was making the beats or rhythm would also shout to correct the team and direct them to what they were supposed to do. For instance, Sibahle screamed and waved his hand, “*Ehhee! Ebhodini!*” [“*No! Not there, chalkboard! Touch the chalkboard!*”], as he tried to show them what they were supposed to do. The rest of the class also sometimes stood up and attempted to go and join the team that had been instructed, to assist them if they were not sure what they were supposed to be doing. In cases where I felt learners did not know what they were supposed to be doing, I would repeat the same instruction and try to give signs, like looking towards the objects and nodding my head if they were doing the correct thing but did not seem sure if it was what I had asked them to do.

This game brought a lot of excitement into my classroom, as learners did not want the game to end. They kept asking for a last chance of playing it. This excited me, as I felt that learners saw the learning game as ordinary play. At the same time, I saw it as fruitful learning since most learners were making progress in understanding instructions and even vocabulary as they also repeated what I had said. For example, if I said “Wave your hand” they would again whisper to themselves, repeating my statement as they tried to figure out what they were supposed to be doing. Falk and Darling-Hammond, (2012, p. 27) witnessed that “Guided play fosters academic knowledge through play activities”. I believe this means that engaging in guided play activities could help enhance or support children’s learning. This game was enjoyed by most of the learners, and I believe it enabled children to grasp and easily remember what they were taught, to enforce learning.

5.7.1 Reflection, 1 August 2018

The best thing about the game was that it allowed learners to engage in learning and give it a try no matter whether they failed or succeeded. I noticed that most of the learners did quite well as they understood exactly what they had to do. In my view, the game helped them to get out of the constraints or to overcome the challenge of fear of trying or being judged. I noticed that learners I thought were not doing well in English surprised me, as they responded and performed well in this play activity. I assume that the game gave my learners a free space – both physically and mentally – as it accommodated mistakes, was free of judgement, and most of all offered them a chance to learn and correct their mistakes.

5.8 English lesson: Drama play, 29 August 2018

In this play activity where I intended learners to role-play an English language story I would read for them. I thought that the role-play was not only for learners to have fun, but also to strengthen certain attributes and talents. These could include communication and social competencies, as the child learns to empathise, listen and interact with others. Unfortunately, not all of the 32 learners were going to be able to participate in the play, so I had to select a few learners to role-play the characters of the story. Choosing the learners who would be part of the play was the most challenging process, as they all wanted to be part of it. Therefore, I had to be careful as I thought that I needed to select learners who had potential for acting, because it would demoralise and be frustrating for less capable learners. For example, if I were to choose shy and reserved learners to play a role, they might not do well, as they may become overwhelmed, emotionally depressed and uncomfortable with the idea of acting. This could eliminate the element of play from the role-playing. I believe that an essential part of dramatic play in the classroom is to get role-players who enjoy being players, and consequently, the viewers would also feel entertained and happy.

I chose outspoken and energetic learners to take part in the play, regardless of their academic performance. I chose learners with these types of characteristics because I thought they would perform well. As they had no idea about role-playing, I felt that I needed to prepare them for performing the story. Hence I kept reading the same story every day for three days, to enable learners to understand the story and get them ready to act it out. Han et al. (2010) discovered that reading storybooks to children enhances their speech development as they learn new words; she also maintained that answering questions about the story they read allows learners to learn to communicate. Likewise, reading the story to learners was not only for my learners to listen to it, but also to answer a few questions that I created about the story to check their understanding. They also performed some parts of the story as a class, such as whistling or acting as if pushing a wheelbarrow, to understand or make sense of the story.

The story was about a big rock on the road. A rabbit came along with a wheelbarrow and he wanted to pass across the road, but he could not pass because the big rock had blocked the road. The rabbit tried with all his power to move the rock but the rock was too big and bulky; it could not move. Several animals, such as a dog, horse, goat and cow, also came to the same path where the rabbit was stuck with his wheelbarrow. Although these animals had no problem with the rock blocking the road, as they could easily jump over the rock and go on to their intended

destination, each one felt sorry for the rabbit and they all wanted to try and move the rock to help the rabbit.

As the animals did not all arrive at the same time, each one that came along took over to relieve the other animals as each thought it was easy and that they were big and powerful enough to move the rock on their own. The last animal to arrive at the incident was a tiny mouse that all the animals looked down upon; they thought the mouse could not help with the problem they were facing. They mocked the mouse and said nasty words, but the mouse refused to be looked down upon. The mouse told the other animals on the scene that he had an excellent plan to help the rabbit move the big rock. They all laughed and asked the mouse to tell them the plan. The mouse asked them all to work together as a team to try to move the rock. His plan worked! All the other animals could not stop thanking the mouse. They were all rejoicing and shouted, “The big rock has been moved from the road!” They all shook hands with the mouse. They also apologised to the mouse for disrespecting him. The rabbit happily carried on with his journey. As I read and narrated the story, the learners I selected were to be the animals and act out the story. They mainly had to try to move the big heavy rock and show weary faces as they got tired from pushing it. I took 10 minutes of their break time before the day of role-playing to rehearse their roles. They all seemed happy to be part of the play and they were all willing; because I had read the story repeatedly, they knew what happened in the story and who the characters were.

I gave learners the option to choose the characters they wanted to play. They all seemed to be interested in being the rabbit. For example, Ayo said, “*Imina memu unogwaja*” [“Ma’am, I would be a rabbit”] and Lethu quickly cut in, as he was opposed to Ayo taking the rabbit character, as he said “*Irebhithi eyintombazane ayikho*” [“There is no female rabbit”]. I was surprised by Lethu’s statement, and Ayo also seemed puzzled, and others were laughing, Khaye shouted, “*Ya! Imina ozoba unogwaja*” [“Yes! I would be the rabbit”]. I immediately figured out that all of the learners would fight for certain characters, so I decided that I should give the rabbit’s role to the first person who had chosen it. I gave Ayo the role to avoid more quarreling. I was happy as they all abided by this decision, and there were no more clashes in choosing the characters.

After they had picked their characters, we then moved to our next step, which was acting. In the beginning, I explained that they would only do what I read and convey their actions through

facial expressions to make them look real. However, they all looked stunned by this. I then thought that it would be better if I demonstrated to them how to role-play. I picked the rabbit character for this and pretended to be pushing a wheelbarrow in a happy mood as I whistled; then I suddenly got a big shock and opened my eyes wide to express my surprise as I saw a big rock blocking the road. The learners were all quiet as they paid attention to my actions. Mills (2014 p. 2) declares that “Vygotsky believes that children’s learning depends on social interactions and supports called scaffolding”. This means that although children may have some understanding, as an adult or educator, I need to assist them in achieving the next level of understanding. They all seemed more comfortable after I had role-played and Sandi said, *“Okay, it is easy Ma’am, I can do it.”* They all smiled in agreement with Sandi. However, I noticed that Sizwe was a bit distracted as if he was not sure if he would manage. I quickly intervened and decided to calm them down, as I insisted that this was a game and we could play it in the way we wanted to.

In the middle of our rehearsal, I noticed that learners were more confident and enjoying themselves. There was much laughter and giggling as they were performing. For example, they laughed when Thandi kept on forgetting her character, as I had to repeat several times that her character was the goat, and when Lethu moved the desk, they were supposed to pretend to be failing to move it. During our rehearsal process, I noticed that learners felt a bit more comfortable; they became more natural, as they were no longer putting effort into making it look perfect. Instead, I felt that their performance was now mainly focused on fulfilling their inner beings or playing the role to their satisfaction. I was happy to see the learners feeling more comfortable and enthusiastic in making the play far more exciting and enjoyable.

On the following day, during the 15 minutes of shared reading English lesson, I prepared for this research lesson with learners’ help. We moved desks side by side to form a larger passage to make a road, and used one desk to be the rock in the middle of the road. The learners who were to perform had to stand outside the door in a line to follow each other in the story. I sat next to the door as I read aloud, so that the performers could also hear me from outside the classroom. Throughout the process of preparing, the rest of the class was quite excited about all the changes as we moved desks aside. They could not wait for the play to start and I overheard Slondwe whispering with a smile, *“UPinky uyihhash nangu eza”* [“Pinky is a horse, here she comes”].



Figure 5.7: Learners playing their roles.

Figure 5.7 shows two photographs of learners acting out their roles. Both show learners trying to move the rock (desk) on the path to help out the rabbit.

The class was very excited and was cheering and praising the actors. Ayo got a bit distracted as the class called out her name, screaming, “*Ayo the rabbit!*” I had to stop the role play and ask the children not to make noise as they were distracting the actors and also disturbing other classes. The children then remained quiet; occasionally they laughed out loud, but they would quickly return their focus to the play. I think the performance went well as the players had confidence. They were not easily disrupted by the rest of the class, even though some kept

shouting their names out as they entered the class, and some of the learners were applauding them.

Although this was the first time my learners participated in a school drama play, I think their interest in performing enabled them to perform well. Therefore, I believe all the learners enjoyed watching the play, as some could not stop imitating the actors' performance. Besides the learners having fun, I think it also developed vital elements that support their learning, such as listening and social abilities. Such dramatic play further stimulates the use of imagination to engage learners' emotions in a situation; therefore, it helps learners communicate, reason and think deeply about the consequences of their actions (Hendy, 2003). For example, they had to make it look real that they could not move the desk, which was supposed to represent a heavy rock.

5.8.1 Reflection, 31 August 2018

Learners were happy to be part of the play. The challenge I had with this game was to ensure that the dramatic play or role-play became playful for everyone, and that the players performed according to the storyline. Therefore, I tried too hard in the beginning, during our rehearsal, to stress that learners performed according to the story, which I regarded as "doing it perfectly". I think that put a bit of strain on my learners, as they also tried too hard to do it perfectly to impress me. However, as we proceeded with the performance, I felt that the play was no longer playful, as it lacked the element of playing and entertainment. To rectify my mistake, I accepted learners' mistakes as part of learning and to ensure that they had fun.

5.9 English lesson: Emotions, 27 September 2018

The basic activity was taken from the prescribed Jika iMfundo lesson plan. The lesson was on emotions; we had to discuss together as a class our current feelings in this particular moment of the lesson. In our discussion, we also had to give justifications for our feelings. For example, if one learner had said that she or he was feeling sad or happy, they would have to account for what made them feel that way.

I wanted to bring in some sort of amusement to make the recommended activity livelier and more enjoyable. In my teaching experience, I have noted that young children enjoy drawing and colouring, and for most, this is not seen as schoolwork but instead as something they do to have fun. I view drawing and colouring as an activity that allows children to relax while

enhancing their imagination and flair for art and developing their concentration. As children pay attention to colours to make whatever they are doing look beautiful, their imagination also develops as they create pictures in their minds of how they want their image to look.

Telling a folktale and colouring seemed suitable for bringing the element of play into this activity; I wanted to draw children's interest and trigger enjoyment. The exercise recommended in the curriculum document involved simply circling emotional faces describing their current mood. However, I felt that would not give any spark of play; I wanted this activity to be a playing and learning activity.

To facilitate an exciting and desirable activity that would incorporate play, I decided to tell a folk tale. I chose one that was commonly told in my village during my early years. I assumed that folk tales enable listeners to feel relaxed and are told to calm, teach, or warn – and most of all bring enjoyment to the listeners. I remember from my childhood how I enjoyed listening to and telling folk tales. I assumed that my learners would also like it and that it would create a calm classroom environment that would promote the mood for playing. I also hoped that a folk tale would draw the children's attention or concentration and develop their listening aptitude. I have observed that children usually listen attentively to stories, as they arouse their emotions and the children get to engage with them while also developing their imagination.

Folk tale

The tale was about animals living together in a jungle. The tiger was the king of all the animals. In one of the seasons, they experienced severe droughts and it was difficult for them all to get food. Some animals, especially the old ones, got weaker and died because of hunger. The king did not care much about other animals' death but showed selfishness as he made a plan to keep his family well-fed, healthy and good. One day, the king called a meeting and asked all the animals to bring food to his family every Friday. The animals were angry about the request that was made by the king, since they did not know where and how they would get the food to feed the king's family because they were also struggling to get their meal for each day. All of the animals had to walk or fly long distances to hunt for food, and the tricky part was to keep aside and store food for the king's family. The monkey's heart would bleed every Friday when he had to take food to the king's house, knowing very well that his family would go to sleep without food. The king's family was the only family that did not suffer from starvation.

The monkey did not rest, thinking of a strategy that could relieve them from the king's cruelty. One day the monkey came across a big, deep dam and was happy to get water, as he was very thirsty and tired from the long walk looking for bananas to submit to the king. The water was still and clear when the monkey got to it to drink. The monkey was fascinated when he saw his reflection in the water and thought that the dam could be the solution to their suffering.

He then went straight to the king's place and told the king that there was someone jealous of him and who went around calling himself a king amongst the kings and asked for the food he had prepared to be given to him. The king was furious and asked the monkey to show him that animal who called himself a king. The monkey took the king to the dam and asked the king to look into the water and see the other king. The tiger got very angry when he saw the other tiger that looked exactly like him, and worse, claimed to be the king among other kings. The tiger wanted to finish off the king he saw in the water and jumped into the deep dam to kill it. That was the end of all the animals' misery; the monkey joyfully announced the death of the king.

Before I told them the tale, we recited our saying, which we usually recited before telling a story or reading a book. We repeated it to prepare ourselves for listening and to not distract the teller.

Kuhle ukulalele

sekuyisikhathi sendaba

masizithokozise siyazithokozela izindaba

Thula, thula

Sesilalele

Ithini indaba

Listening is a vital skill

It's time for a story

Listening to stories makes us happy

Quiet, quiet

We're now listening

To what the story is about

As I was telling my tale, the learners sat quietly and listened. I told the story after we had discussed the emotions that I had drawn on the chalkboard. I drew faces showing different emotions, for instance, happy, sad and angry. I informed the learners beforehand that the tale I would be telling them would cause them to feel different emotions towards different characters in the story. I informed them that they would have to show how they felt about some characters' decisions. There could be a character they hated and felt angry about or others that they might feel proud of or sorry for.

Like any other children, my learners like to be told stories; they listened carefully and I could see that they engaged with the story. Their facial expressions showed that they were attentive and could imagine what the tale was about. I could even hear some moaning as they reacted to what was said in the story; for example, I overheard Mvelo complaining, "*Ha! Mina bengizobaleka*" ["*I would have run away*"] in reference to the impact of the drought situation. After telling the tale, I decided to ask learners about their general feelings towards the king (tiger) and the monkey's decision. I thought giving learners a chance to open up about their

feelings towards the two main characters would give me hints to understand whether or not they understood the tale and if they could relate the story to emotions.

I did not want the learners to feel that this activity was some kind of assessment, because generally, with formal assessments, the learners want to perfect their work. I assumed that this might restrain learners from revealing their true feelings, as they might have thought that I expected a particular response, which they might believe is the correct answer. To make the activity seem less formal, I decided not to give learners their English exercise books. Instead, I handed out papers for them to colour in both main characters of the story (the monkey and tiger) and draw an emotional face next to the two characters, to show how they felt about the decisions made by these two animals. The papers had both animals on them; the learners had to colour them in and draw emotional faces to express their feelings toward the monkey's and the tiger's decisions.

It was quite impressive to see my learners fascinated by this activity. Most of them kept asking each other about which emotional face they drew next to each animal. I noted a lot of interaction among the learners, as they were assisting each other in completing their tasks. For example, some helped each other choose appropriate colours for the animals, and they also lent each other crayons.

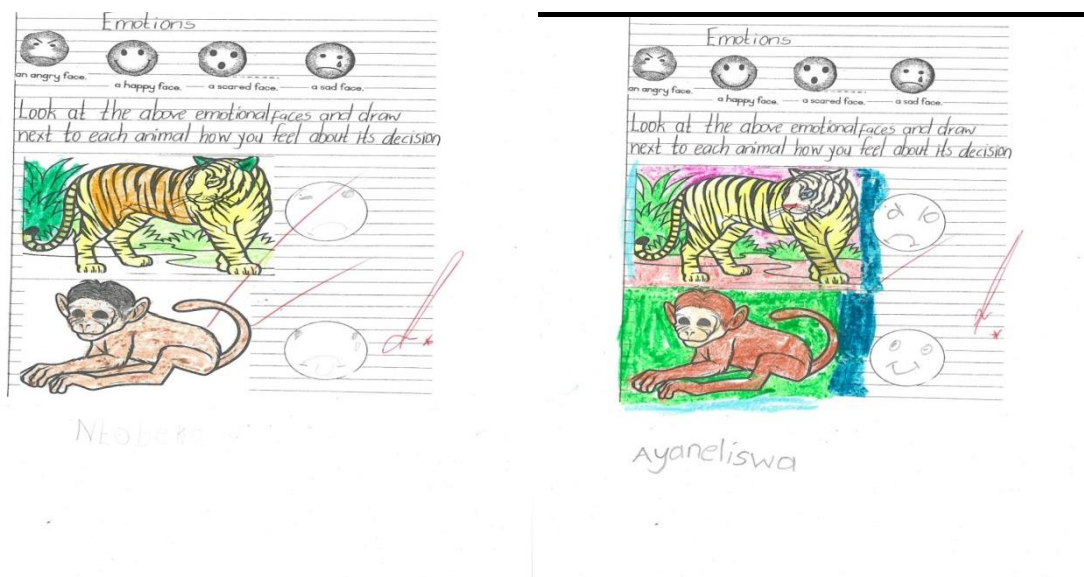


Figure 5.9: Examples of the learners' work.

The two pictures in Figure 5.8 portray examples of the learners' work. They had to colour in the two animals and draw faces that depicted how they felt about these animals, with reference to the folk tale I told them.

5.9.1 Reflection, 29 September 2018

I felt that the lesson was relaxed and that the learners felt free to express their emotions. I was happy, as I thought that I could maintain transparency and not influence the learners' feelings towards the two main characters in the tale. The lesson showed how the learners engaged with literacy competencies, such as listening, language development and creativity, as they had to draw the emotional face and colour in the animals (monkey and tiger).

5.10 Conclusion: My learning about playful pedagogy

In planning, facilitating, and reflecting on the lessons represented in this chapter, I have become even more confident that playing is a valuable way of fostering academic learning in young children. I have observed that it encourages children to participate in what they are learning, rather than just being fed information.

However, it was not easy to implement playful pedagogy. It required a lot of preparation since I had to adjust my classroom seating accordingly for every playful learning activity. I also came across a few other challenges, such as learners' competitiveness, as I was concerned that learners who were performing well academically would overpower those who were struggling. As a result, struggling learners would feel left out; in such instances, I thought that I should mediate and address this, even though I did not want to interfere and be too controlling. From reflecting on my own childhood experiences, I believe that playing should allow children to work out the challenges they encounter. Still, I compromised because I wanted everyone to feel accommodated.

As shown in the lesson stories, I observed how playful pedagogy can create a safe space for learners to learn and develop in numerous ways. Playful pedagogy aids children to gain practical experience, which I trust enables them to engage their thoughts, feelings, and reasoning. Therefore, I believe that it enriches their understanding, as playful pedagogy allows the learners to make sense of what they are learning from their perspective and construct their knowledge. Bringing playful pedagogy into my classroom has taught me that children can teach each other, as each one taught others until they all learnt and had better understanding.

In the next chapter, I describe other playful pedagogy activities; I demonstrate how I introduced some indigenous games I grew up playing. The chapter consists of two sections: First, I depict the games that involve free play, and second, I portray teacher-guided games. While I aimed to develop proficiencies that would help learners enhance their academic work, the free-play games were not played to reinforce a particular understanding of prescribed curriculum content. I consider these games as free playing because the learners got to choose their teammates and could play them anytime they had free, whether during a break or before or after school. On the other hand, I purposefully introduced the teacher-guided games to increase learners' understanding and knowledge in a specific learning area.

CHAPTER SIX: EXPLORING AND EXPERIENCING IS A WAY TO LEARN

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Five, I discussed how I engaged playful pedagogy in four learning areas: isiZulu, Mathematics (numeracy), Life Skills, and English. Games were designed in line with a particular subject and covered a specific topic. After outlining each game, I reflected on the progress of the play; I considered my observations throughout playful learning and assessed whether it had served its purpose and how I could improve on it in my other lessons. The reflections helped me learn that playful pedagogy could stimulate learners' thinking and promote active learning. I also discovered that children are willing to try something new or challenging when they believe they are playing. Therefore, I found playful pedagogy to be a vital teaching strategy to support and encourage children's learning.

In this chapter, Chapter Six, I relate how I introduced my learners to some indigenous games I used to play when growing up. I considered these games for my learners because I believed that they had helped me in different aspects of my life, such as social, emotional, and mental development. I trusted that these elements would also contribute to supporting learners' academic achievement. In my case, as shown in Chapters Three and Four, playing brought happiness and made me believe in myself and strengthened me to overcome my fear of failing.

I gave this chapter the title 'Exploring and experiencing is a way to learn' because I believed that these games could help learners learn from their own experiences. I also wanted my learners to feel and understand that playing is fun and brings happiness and helps them gain strength so that they can overcome various challenges.

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter Five's content, as it also responds to the first question of my research study: *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* The chapter consists of two sections: First, I describe the games that involve free play, and second, I describe teacher-guided games. The free-play games did not aim to achieve a specific objective for a subject – instead, I introduced them to develop and cultivate learning more generally. However, I purposefully initiated the teacher-guided games to improve learners' understanding and knowledge in a particular learning area.

6.2 Free-play games: Playing school, 23 April 2018

Playing school was a free-play game. I brought a grass woven mat and a few magazines and exercise books into my classroom and created a playing corner space (Figure 6.1). Learners were amazed at seeing them, as I heard “*Mmmh!*”, “*Wow!*”, “*Books*”, with Mzamo whispering, “*We will read these magazines*”. Since this was a free-play game, I wanted to use gaps between the lessons to introduce it to my learners. Although playing this game was for fun, I anticipated that it could develop social, emotional and intellectual aptitude. This could contribute to learners’ academic learning, and I also thought the game would offer them the chance to learn to develop and maintain a good relationship with others from an early age. Danniels (2018) states that we as educators need to engage our learners in free play to improve their social learning. Consequently, I assumed that free play would also benefit my learners in acquiring some social expertise, which might help them learn to tolerate each other’s differences and accommodate one another. I believed that this would benefit their essential lifelong skills and enhance their school work as they could learn to share, listen, and work with each other in group activities in class.

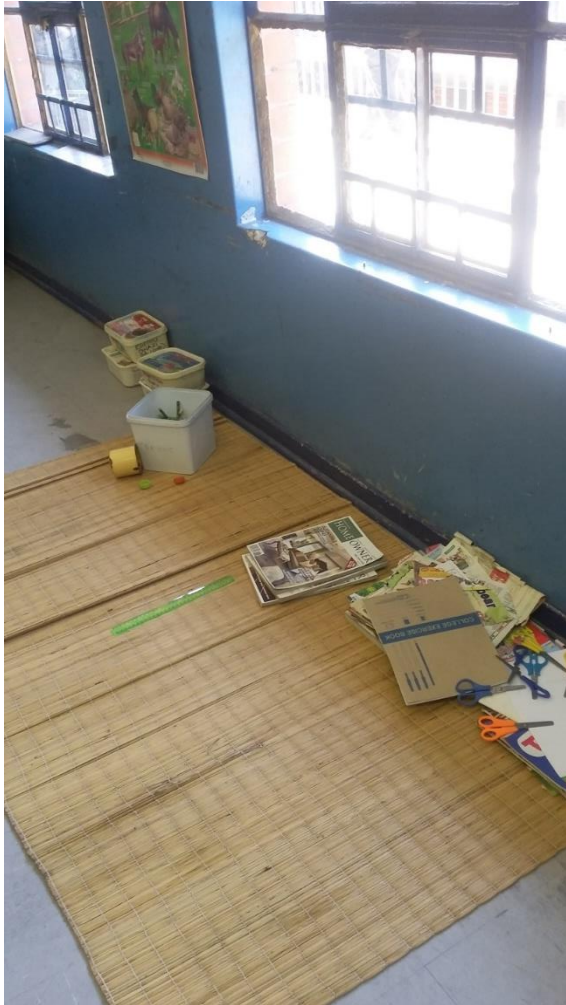


Figure 6.1: The playing corner, showing some of the resources that learners used when they were playing school.

I introduced this ‘playing school’ game in the last 15 minutes of the final period for the day on 23 April 2018. I informed the learners that we would play in groups, but that everyone would have a chance to play. On the first day, I only picked those who managed to finish their work early while others were still completing their class activity. To show my learners that this was a game and that there were no hidden expectations – just that it was to allow them free time to play – I played with the first group.

As I did not want to lead the game, I first asked learners if they ever played a ‘school game’ with their friends. A few learners responded that they knew the game but had not played it for a while. Londwa replied, *“Mina memu ngidlala nosisi wami kagogo”* [“I play this game with my sister at my granny’s place”]. I probed, *“Where is your granny’s house?”*, and she answered *“Ugogo uhlala emafamu”* [“My granny stays in a rural area”]. Bahle also shouted, *“I also*

played school with Spha when I visited my father at my granny's place". Grinning, I expected my learners to play. Still, they got a bit uncomfortable and I think this was because they understood playing school as an outdoor activity.

I felt the need to explain the game to assure the learners that this was a game and relieve the tension that I sensed as they looked unsure how they should play. I wanted all of them to play certain characters or take part in the game; I then explained to them that they would have to play a role in the game. I suggested that they decide who would take the teacher's position, with others to be children (learners), the principal and class monitor. They were still puzzled, so I quickly raised my hand first and requested to be a child, and they all laughed. Khaye said, "Ma'am, how come you will be a learner, you are old?", and once again they laughed. I replied, *"Even though I am old but I still want to be a child and learn from you and I think you are good teachers. You do not easily forget things like I do"*. They all looked surprised; Bahle, taking a deep breath, said, *"Mmmhaaa, kodwa umemu uzothola okhorethi yonkinto"* [*"But Ma'am you will get everything correct"*]. They all looked a bit stressed. I was not sure if it was because I was part of the game or because they were unsure which role to take.

I thought that I needed to help my learners feel at ease that this was not formal school work but that it was a game and would not be scored for marks. I cracked a joke, referring to one of my learners: *"If I get everything correct, sir Mdlalose, you would give me five stars, isn't it?"* They all lightened up with smiling faces, and Sphiwe asked, *"Ma'am, can I be the principal?"* Before I could even answer, the rest of the team all wanted to be teachers, shouting, *"I want to be ma'am Zakwe!"*, *"I'll be sir Hlela!"* and *"I want to be ma'am Khanyile!"*. I had to take control to calm them down so as not to disturb others. I pointed out that it was nice that we all wanted to be teachers, and I posed the question: *"Can we all teach at one time?"*. With a bit of disappointment, they answered, *"No ma'am"*. *"Okay,"* I said. *"Mmmm,"* clearing my throat, *"my friends, I'll join you just now. I need to check with others if they have completed their work"*. This was to allow them to play on their own following their own desires without me having an influence.

I then checked on the rest of the class – who seemed to be focusing on the group that was playing, which I believe distracted them a bit. The playing group was already busy looking at magazines and pointing at things they liked, showing each other pictures which were to their interest. I heard Silonde telling the others that she and her mom had visited the place she was

pointing at in the magazine. There was a lot of giggling and whispering. I then realised that my learners' idea of playing school might be different from what I knew, as I had expected them to create a similar version of the classroom and teach each other. The whole class focus had shifted to the group that was playing the school game. They could not contain their excitement and longing. Anele ran to notify me that she had also finished her work and to ask if she could join them. Unfortunately, the time was up, so I informed Anele and the rest of the class that they would all have another opportunity to play.

I had to ask the playing group to tidy up and go back in their places. After they were settled, I had to assure everyone that they were welcome to play every morning before school started and in the afternoon for those who remained behind to wait for their older siblings in the intermediate and senior phases. They all looked joyful. Mvelo quickly raised his hand to ask if he could remain behind. I knew that Mvelo walks home after school and so his parents would expect him to return at his usual time, so I saw the need to address my learners to avoid being in trouble with parents. I explained that those who usually walked home could ask their parents or guardians if they could come to school a bit early so that they could play, or if they could remain behind after school until the intermediate and senior phase lessons ended.

Most of my learners used their break times to play this game. I only allowed them to play in the last 15 minutes of their break, so that they had their lunch first and then came back to play. They came in pairs, groups, and some as individuals to play. I pretended not to take notice of them, and some of them took out pencils, coloured pencils, and a pair of scissors from their bags. Some were paging through magazines and others were drawing. As Whitebread (2003) explained, "During play, children are in control of their learning" (p. 11). No matter how each of them was playing the game, I was happy to see them all enjoying the game in their own way and felt that they were gaining social and language competence.

After I had asked them to pack up their stuff and put it in their bags in the afternoon, I announced to learners that they could play while they were still waiting for their siblings in the intermediate and senior phases. Most of my learners still wanted to continue and play, and those who had to go were disappointed because they were enjoying the game. For example, Sphiwe looked unhappy to leave his friend who continued to play, and he announced that he would come early to play before school started the next day. I replied, "*You are welcome, my boy*". I reminded the whole class that they were welcome to come early, before school started, to play.

In the afternoon, I noted that the game was still being played in separate small groups or pairs, and some children even played on their own. Seeing that there was not much interaction and communication among learners, as they just showed each other pictures that interested them, I felt that something was wrong. It was not how I imagined or expected them to play the game, as I wanted them to share ideas and build conversations to learn from each other. I decided to make a few suggestions about pictures that they were interested in to develop conversation, hoping that there would be more interaction. For example, as boys were showing each other cars, while girls were cutting out pictures of beautiful dresses and types of food they liked, I advised them to paste their images in categories, like having a page for food, clothes and toys. I also suggested that they use different shapes, for instance, a circle to indicate most liked and a square for the ones they least liked.

I think pitching this idea helped develop an engaging game, as they started to share ideas, for instance, asking which page they should paste clothes, food, toys, and cars. It was interesting to learn that children consider and reason around their actions; for example, Ntando questioned Sakhi for pasting only two of his pictures of cars and keeping the others. Sakhi replied *“I’m leaving space for Senzo to also paste”*. His response showed me that playing could develop children’s capability to think critically and deepen their reasoning.

Although there was an exchange of ideas and laughing, there was also a lot of arguing and some quarreling over scissors and Pritt (glue). However, this did not escalate to the point that I felt I needed to come in to resolve whatever issue. They also had to end their game before they were finished as the bell rang as the intermediate and senior phases ended. They all said their goodbyes and promised that they would arrive early the following day. Bahle even promised to bring in his magazines because he wanted to show others his fast cars.

On the next day, during the Life Skills lesson, I wanted to try to convince my learners to play the game in the way I used to when growing up. I was hoping that if they played the game in that way it could help them to teach each other or even improve their creativity or allow them to gain new skills as they shared or exchanged ideas. According to Weisberg, Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2013), guided play is a strategy that allows teachers to help learners make new sense of their exploration. I also hoped that guiding my learners in playing the game could facilitate a chance for them to learn from each other, which would help them improve academically or socially.

Hence, to show my learners how I used to play this game when I was their age, I began by narrating my experience of playing the game. I explained who I played the game with, and how we played it when we played it, and how I felt when I played it. I shared my experience of playing school with them because I hoped that they could help or teach each other either schoolwork or skills by playing this game. Learners found my story very interesting. They listened carefully as I shared it, and I received a few questions and comments from them. Thobeka asked, “*Memu usisi wakho uyena owaye uthisha wakho?*” [“*Ma’am, your sister, was she your teacher?*”]. I replied, “*Yes, everything she learnt at school she taught me*”. Akhile stated, “*I also teach my little brother*”, and I added, “*So we can also teach each other in our game*”.

On the next day, I decided to let my learners play the game ‘playing school’, and I only joined in when I felt I needed to bring in new thinking or ideas to improve knowledge. The early comers had an opportunity to play before school started; learners were also keen to play during lunch breaks. I noted that during break time, they jumped at the chance to play, and to my surprise, had already formed groups and picked their roles. I was pleased to learn that the learners played the game as I had shown them. I felt that this also helped me teach them things such as language (word pronunciation) and mathematics (counting), while they were unaware that the game helped them learn. It also revealed some learners’ talents and sharpened their skills, such as drawing and leadership adeptness. I suppose that the response I got from my learners upon playing this game shows that playing is in children’s best interest; the game made me recognise that play could be a source of teaching and developing skills, and is a strategy that involves children in their learning.

I spotted one girl (Thobeka) who usually shows self-confidence in class, especially in group and class discussions, telling others that she would be their teacher and would read them a story. According to Neha and Rule (2018), imaginary play performances may help children develop and connect different building blocks of a story; thus, children learn reading, thinking, and reasoning skills from an early age. Similarly, Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012) posit that fantasy is an active kind of game that promotes language usage; through pretend reading, children learn and develop language skills and develop their imagination. I trust that such attributes enhance their understanding, as they can picture or imagine a story’s meaning by looking at pictures. Thobeka ordered the group to sit quietly as she read them a story, and took a book and read them an imaginary tale.

She carefully ‘read’ her story, referring to the pictures I felt she could link in sequential order, making her story quite interesting to the listeners. Unfortunately, she could not finish reading her story because the bell rang, meaning the break was over and class lessons had to resume. I had to stop them and tidy up, but I assured them that they could continue after school or the next morning if they managed to get to school early. Even though I stopped them before they could finish, I could see that they were having fun as Thobeka read to them, and she showed leadership and creativity.

The game continued to be played for almost the whole week. Although not all learners initially showed enthusiasm, as the week continued, other learners also joined the game. I think they needed assurance that the game was just a game with no strings attached, meaning that it would not be seen as misbehaving as they played or if they only joined in play when they would be playing with their friends. I was happy when I saw other groups playing school, as I expected them to be doing the teacher and learner role-play. I noted that those who took the role of teacher tended to be the ones who do well academically, are competent and have self-confidence.

6.2.1 Reflection, 26 April 2018

I believe this was a perfect game for my learners, as it enabled them to build social bonds, as some of them did not know each other very well. It also helped to develop various skills that are important for social living. For example, I noted that even shy learners that other learners usually take for granted were able to stand up for themselves as they were playing. Nolwazi is known as a quiet, withdrawn girl, but she could talk and claim back what others took from her without her consent during play. The learners were also able to resolve issues that arose during play without running to me as they usually do to report each other for misbehaviour. I think this game also helped me to understand particular learners’ characters, talents, and skills. For instance, Bongzi does well academically but lacks social skills. I noticed that when she played school games, she never played for more than 10 minutes as she would get irritated and angry about minor things and then play by herself.

This was our first social interaction game. Even though I thought it went well, I learnt that not all children may be interested in playing. Some were not ready to play in the time I arranged for them to play. Some wanted to play other games or to play only when they felt comfortable.

For example, they might prefer to play with their friends or when they think they could fit into the group. I needed to be patient for everyone to feel free to join in play and have fun.

Besides building a friendly relationship with my learners, this game enabled me to learn where I could assist my learners, for instance, with creative arts (cutting and pasting) and literacy (storytelling).

6.3 Hopscotch (*ungxum' ngx*a), 7 August 2018

I presented the game of hopscotch (*ungxum' ngx*a) to my learners, anticipating that it would promote communication, negotiating, thinking, decision-making, and being independent. This is a game that I also played at a young age and that I enjoyed very much as I feel it accommodated my emotional state. For example, on the days when I felt I needed something relaxing or calming, or sometimes when I did not feel like playing with a group of people, I would also play this game alone. I would also enjoy it when I was in the mood for socialising, as I would play this game together with my friends and we would still have a lot of fun. I thought my learners would enjoy it as much as I did.

I introduced this game in the same way I used to play it when I was growing up. We used to play this game in small groups or even alone in our home's backyard. We drew squares and circle shapes with a stick on the ground. Each player had to have a marker; markers were stones and were used when it was an individual's turn to play. The player would throw a marker on a determined shape or scotch, as scotches were numbered chronologically. The first player would land her or his marker on the number 1 scotch and hop to the first scotch and then pick up their marker and carry on jumping to all scotches without touching the lines until they had finished. Once completed they would carry on and play, then landing the marker on the second scotch, unless an error was committed, for example, if the player failed to land their marker on the determined shape when they threw it. The next player would then play, while the player who made the mistake would be out for that particular round and play again in the following round. The winners would be those who played all scotches successfully.

I started by drawing the hopscotch grid on the floor using chalk. The learners were amazed by what I was doing, as I overheard arguing, whispering and giggling as they wondered what type of game I was drawing. I could sense the excitement of the learners. I think they were now used to the idea of playing in class; they no longer found it strange to play in the

classroom, as it had become the norm. Their excitement is witness to the fact that it is in their nature to play (Gray, 2011). I suppose this implies that for children playing is a normal and rightful thing for them to do, regardless of the physical constraints we as adults may see.

I drew hopscotch in different types of geometric shapes that the learners had learnt about, but without losing the format of how I used to play it. After I had finished drawing, I asked my learners what they thought I had drawn. I got similar responses as most of them concentrated on the shapes and particularly on the game type. For example, Slonde said it was a kind of game that he saw on Yo TV (a children's television programme), and Malusi and Khanyo stated "*Umdlalo wonxantathu*" [*"Game of triangles"*]. The learners' responses showed me that they had embraced playing as part of our classroom activities.

Most learners expressed that they had never played this game, and they were all curious to know how the game was played. Bahle asked, "*Memu, idlalwa kanjani le gemu?*" [*"Ma'am, how do you play this game?"*]. Before I could respond, I overheard Bongi whispering, "*Ngabona beyidla o-Anele.*" [*"I saw Anele and her friends playing it."*] I quickly cut in and asked Bongi how Anele and her friend played the game. She stood up and demonstrated how she saw them playing as she was hopping on one leg. Akhile interrupted and added to Bongi's explanation that players carry a marker they throw in one targeted shape. Although the learners had never played the game before, they were excited about the idea of playing it, which made it easy for me to teach them how to play the game.

I explained the game to my learners. As I showed them, they all stood up to see the drawn lines and how I was playing. With a lot of excitement, some of them were trying to practice how to play as they were watching, imitating hopping, and I heard Bongi shouting, "*Yes, that's how they played it!*". They all seemed happy and ready to play as they came forward and everyone asked to be the first player. I got the feeling that most of them understood the game. I decided to pick a few learners who had prior knowledge of the game to play first since I believed they would quickly master the game and teach others how to play.



Figure 6.2: Learners playing hopscotch.

The first picture of Figure 6.2 (top left) shows learners standing in a queue as the first learner is about to start playing; the others each show one learner playing hopscotch.

I played together with the first team that I had selected to show the class the techniques of the game and ensure that they understood how it was played. To my surprise, even the learners who were not taking part in the game were also paying attention, as they also commented on the game's process. For example, Khanyo commented on Sihle robbing Anele as she exclaimed, "*Memu! Buka unyathele ulayini.*" ["Ma'am! Look he steps on the line."] Others were giving support and suggestions to the players, such as Bahle trying to help Kwazi throw his marker on the destined shape, saying, "*Kwazi mfethu, ibambe kanjena wishwibe kancane uyezwa.*"

[*“Kwazi, hold your marker like this and throw it slowly.”*] Bahle was demonstrating to Kwazi what he was telling him. I sensed the learners’ spirit of eagerness as they cheered on the players, and they could not wait for their turn to play. The players took the game seriously and gave their all to stay in the game. They paid attention and played carefully to make sure that their marker landed on the correct scotch and that they did not step on the line as they hopped. Unfortunately, I had to stop the game because of time constraints, with the promise that the hopscotch grid would not be wiped off the floor, to allow everyone a chance to play in their free time, such as during break or before or after school.

6.3.1 Reflection, 8 August 2018

Although I doubted that the boys would love to play the game, since this game was known as a girl’s game in my primary school years, I felt that they also enjoyed it. I also had a bit of a challenge as learners were getting out of control, as they all wanted to play all at the same time. I quickly had to try to calm them down, bring them back to the classroom mood, or remind them that we were in school. I believe this somehow restrained the play element for them, as they had to change their actions to suit the school and classroom environment. However, once the rest of the class watched the one team that I chose to play first, this revived the spirit of play among the whole class. Even those who were watching also felt part of the game by commenting and giving players support and suggestions on how to play better.

6.4 Fantasy book, 27 January 2019

I decided on this form of play after a session with my supervisor and my critical friends, as we were reviewing and discussing my childhood play memories. They suggested that I also try finding out what learners like, so I decided that they could make a ‘music book’, since I also had one for writing down my favourite songs in high school (Chapter Four). My supervisor felt that it would be fun and an excellent opportunity to let my learners try out this play activity. She believed that music is usually loved and enjoyed by all children, as if it is inborn. I also felt it would be interesting to let learners share their preferred music and artists. When I was growing up, it was a fantastic experience for me to imitate my favourite musicians’ songs, and I cherished my precious music book.

I had invited my learners from the previous year (2018), who were my research participants and had progressed to Grade 2 in 2019, to make their music books. I asked them to bring in old magazines. At our meeting, I explained to them that I wanted them to work together in creating a music book. I thought it would make sense for them if I shared how I used to make and treasured my music books in my childhood. My learners looked keen on creating their music books as they started to share popular songs. Mayenzi started to sing one of the popular local hip hop songs (*Indoda endala kangaka*), and excitedly they all joined in the singing. I was happy to see that they were looking forward to making their music books, and I asked them to start collecting magazines that we could use. They all promised to bring in magazines, and Khanyo said, *“I will ask my mom and aunties to give me their old magazines”*.

We started with the music books the following week. Although most learners could not bring in magazines, we could amass a few magazines that a few learners and I brought in. I felt that break time was a convenient time since it was the only time they were all free, and I could manage to get all of those who were willing to participate in our play. This was better than using times before or after school because they did not all arrive at one time and also left at different times.

To begin the play, I prepared the space by laying the grass mat and magazines, pairs of scissors, Pritt (glue), and exercise books. I asked them to name a few artists and songs they liked, and hands quickly went up. *“Yes Sandi?”* I asked, and she happily announced, *“uDladla nomshumqisi ma’am”*. Phiwe whispered, *“NoMampintsha”*. *“Ohh Yes! UMampitsha no Babes, mmm.... [Thinking aloud] Oh yah no Sijava Memu!”* shouted Khule. They all joyfully nodded their heads in agreement. *“Great”*, I responded, *“Looks like you all like music and you know many songs. Let’s begin with our play”*. They all settled down on the grass mat to begin with the play.

I had a group of not more than 20 learners, but when they began to play, I noted that their focus shifted from music as they got excited by various things they saw in the magazines, like cars and cartoons. Their focus completely moved from music; while some noted a few musicians, this was no longer their interest. Khaye asked, *“Ma’am, can I take out this car?”* as he ran to me and showed me a picture from the magazine. I murmured, *“I thought you are making a music book”*. I moved closer to see if they were making any progress and was quite shocked to see that there was not even one picture pasted in an exercise book. I inquired, *“You have not*

yet cut or pasted any picture. What is wrong? You cannot find your favourite musicians?" There was no reply; suddenly Khaye shouted, *"Look Ma'am, I have found this car!"*. He insisted on cutting out the picture of the car he had shown me. Mayenzi showed me a kitchen cabinet as she reported, *"Ma'am, this is for my mom. She also has nice plates and cups like these"*. Seeing that my learners were not very interested in music, I decided to let them compile their exercise books using pictures that showed what they liked or signify their childhood interests.

Since their focus was not fixed on searching for their music stars, I felt that it was necessary to fill their books with whatever symbolised what they enjoyed and, most likely, felt important to them. They were so much relieved, and with excitement, all paged through the magazines as they rushed to cut out and paste their pictures.

The learners were happy with the playing activity; I noted a lot of interaction among them as they were trying to find pictures from all of the magazines. It felt like they were playing 'house', as one would be busy looking at a magazine but also eyeing someone else's magazine and pointing at pictures she would like to cut out when finished with the one at hand. There was also a lot of arguing over pictures, as one would claim to have picked a picture first, and others would quit and cry because they were angry. In such circumstances, I had to intervene to solve issues and maintain order.

This helped me learn more about how learners or children spend their time, especially at home, and learn more about things or people they value. It was interesting that even though children have commonalities in that playing is valuable for every child, they all enjoy having free time to do what they most love. I understood from the pictures they had pasted that children spend their free time playing with friends, watching television or playing cellular phone games. Most of the girls, like Thulile, pasted pictures of things they wished for, such as a bed and a box full of toys. I overheard her telling her friend that when her mother has a lot of money, she would buy her and her sister these two beds and build a big house to fit in all the furniture. Some girls were focused on themselves; as Khayo and Myenzi competed with each other for pictures of women and girls, all I heard was, *"This is me"* and *"This is my mom"*. I observed that the boys were much more interested in pictures related to playing, like motorbikes, cars and soccer, or else preferred playing games on cellular phones.



Figure 6.3: Two photographs showing fantasy books created by learners.

Figure 6.3 shows books created by learners to display their interests or what they wish for and like. Each photograph shows two different pages of the same book. They show what learners want to look like when they are grown up; some referred to pictures of adult men and women as their parents. They also display learners' favourite cars, television programmes, and what they would like to have in their homes.

This game took about a week. It was a bit challenging for me as the learners were now in Grade 2, and some came during break and before or after school. The game did not go according to my plan, as I initially thought learners would make music books, but I ended up suggesting that

they create a ‘fantasy book’. However, I was happy to learn about learners’ wishes, and I think children are usually honest about their feelings.

6.4.1 Reflection, 29 January 2019

This game allowed my learners to work together as they formed their fantasy books; they could accommodate their differences as they liked different things, but that did not lead them to insult each other. I liked that they could tolerate and respect each other as they had to share magazines to form their fantasy books using pictures of things that they liked. Although they argued over pictures at the beginning, they learnt to be patient with each other and were able to wait for one another to finish using the magazines. They even learnt to share or use one magazine simultaneously, as they would look for pictures in a group of two or three. They worked with each other very well as they could share space in a book to paste their pictures.

6.5 Life Skills: Playing marbles, 11 September 2018

Playing marbles was one of the popular games in my early childhood years; it was mostly played by boys in primary school. I do not remember myself taking part in this game, as in my early years most games were mainly gender-based. I became interested in this game from watching it, as it was one of my brother’s favourite games. I learnt a few rules of the game, such as asking your opponent to allow you to shift your marble to an equal distance, but to change positions and place it at an angle that would increase the player’s chances of beating the opponent’s marble. I also learnt that when your opponent had won your marble, you could ask him to substitute marbles and not take the marble that was originally at stake. In other words, you could ask to swap it with another one, especially if it was your ‘lucky’ marble that had been won.

I remember the most remarkable thing about this game was that the boys had such confidence; they saw themselves as winners and not losers. Before they even started to play the game, each one of them would already have counted how many marbles they would gain from each match. From my perspective, I would say it developed a positive attitude as they all played with the confidence that they would win the game. It also boosted their self-esteem, as the winner was highly respected and was given more respect if he had beaten a well-known player. Boys took pride in the game. I also think it mostly developed a sense of ownership, as it gave them the

power to be in control, since winning the game depended much on individual decision making and choices. It also required the player to think carefully before making any move, as they were aware that one wrong move might result in losing the game.

As I explained, the game was mainly dominated by boys in my childhood. My learners also revealed in a previous game that they believed some games are gender-based. For example, when they were making their name-tags, boys drew cars, which I referred to as masculinity, and girls drew flowers, which I think was showing the feminine.

Even though I doubted that girls would feel comfortable with the game, I thought it could be beneficial to encourage cooperation and boost learners' self-confidence, to help them not to disadvantage themselves because of other people's opinions. I anticipated that the game would also add some value to their academic work and equip them with social abilities. For instance, in mathematics, it could improve their counting, addition and subtraction, and even help them learn to socialise or tolerate each other as the game encourages teamwork.

Moreover, I hoped that the game of marbles would encourage learners to learn to trust themselves in every decision they make, and not be easily intimidated by others but stand firm for what they believe in. That could enable them to learn to control their emotions and deal with challenges. Whitebread (2003) states that playing teaches children to use different strategies or learn to look at a problem from different angles to try and come up with the best solution. I trusted that playing this game would teach children various skills and allow my learners to learn to tackle challenges they might come across and try to find possible solutions rather than giving up without making any attempt to work on them. I suspected that this game had the potential to develop positive attitudes towards life itself. Therefore, I assumed that it would encourage my learners to be positive, motivated, and willing to take on opportunities without fear of upcoming challenges.

In the morning, before school started, I took out the marbles I had brought and loaded them in a tub I placed in our classroom playing corner. The early-comers were over the moon as they saw the marbles. Akhile cheerfully asked, "*Memu singadlala imabhuli?*" [*"Ma'am, can we play with the marbles?"*] Smiling back, I asked, "*How do you play marbles?*" Thabiso joyfully explained, "*You have to beat your partner's marbles.*" Akhile added, "*Uma umshayile uyamudla kube eyakho.*" [*"If you have successfully beaten your opponent marble, you take it*

to be yours.”] Learners’ responses showed me that their ideas of playing the game were no different from mine. *“Okay, you may play the marbles, I also want to learn to know how to play the game,”* I said. They all rushed to get the tub with marbles.

However, I was not aware that they were rushing to get the tub because they wanted to choose what they believed to be a good marble for shooting. Then I noticed that there was already a quarrel, as Nkule forcefully pulled Sandi’s hand, asking her to bring back her marble. I intervened, asking them what the matter was. Akhile explained that they were fighting over the marbles. Probing, I asked, *“Why do you have to fight because there are enough marbles for all of you to play?”* A few other learners had now joined the class, and they were also amazed as they saw marbles and also came to participate in our conversation. Akhile further explained that a player must choose one marble that he would use to shoot with. *“Okay!”* I said. I remembered that my brother had also had special marbles.

I decided to ask the children to stand in a line, as I believed this would maintain order. It could also teach them to understand the importance of giving each other a chance. They all then stood in line and chose their shooting marbles. Some had their eyes closed and others looked carefully at the marbles before picking one. Some just picked without taking any consideration or giving too much thought to it. I assumed that it was important for learners to choose a ‘shooting marble’ because it was to be used as a weapon to win the game; players had to beat their playmates’ marbles to gain more marbles. I then chose not to ask any more questions because they might have felt a bit intimidated; I decided just to watch and learn how they played the game.

Although we had only a few minutes to play before the bell rang for school to start, I let them play just for the remaining time and then continued with the play in a Life Skills lesson by using the gaps in between or during their free time, such as in their breaks, and after and before school started. They somehow managed to sort themselves out, as they gathered in teams of their choice. Even though the teams were not equal in terms of the number of players, I was happy that they all felt that they belonged as they fitted themselves into groups. Even those who joined the class after others had already started playing requested to join one of the groups and some formed their own groups.

The game was played in different styles by different teams. For instance, in some teams each player had an equal number of marbles – a set of three or four. In some groups, the player would play until his marbles were finished, then he or she would be out of the game. In other teams, they drew a circle and kept their marbles in a circle; each player would take one marble from the circle to play with, and if his or her marble had been won they would take another one. The others played in pairs and won each other's marbles; they also counted the number of marbles they had gained by beating their partner. The common thing in all groups was that they were all competing against each other and there had to be a winner in every team and even for those who played in pairs. Those who had managed to beat their opponent's marbles more than the others or who gained the most marbles from the match were the winners.

The learners were excited about the game. Teams did not worry about how other teams were playing the game. I observed that the game brought mixed feelings as learners played; for instance, some would get angry about missing their opponent's marble. For example, I overheard Lethu talking to himself, whispering, "*Eish, ngageja kodwa ngizombamba*". [*"Eish, I will not miss it next time, I will make sure of it"*.] Others felt anxious as they were concerned about winning the game. For example, Mzamo put all his concentration on the game and did not want to miss any move; I heard him asking his group, "*Did Sphiwe move forward his marble?*". He suspected Sphiwe of cheating by moving his marble or bringing it too close to his opponent's marble to increase his chances of beating it. Other learners, especially those playing in pairs, were a bit more relaxed and less fussy about winning or losing the game and just enjoyed playing the game.

I felt that the game had drawn learners' interest, and both boys and girls had fun playing it. I was delighted to see some groups with both boys and girls in one team; this gave me the impression that girls felt comfortable with the game. It also showed me that they enjoyed the game as much as the boys did. This was important to me because I did not get a chance to play the game in my younger years as I was scared of the stigma that it was a 'boy's game' and that I would be regarded as not a normal girl. Seeing my learners freely playing meant their attitude and mentality were free from being judgemental or seeing each other as unequal in terms of gender.



Figure 6.4: Photographs of learners playing a game of marbles.

Figure 6.4 depicts learners playing marbles in my classroom. The top left photograph shows learners playing in pairs; they aim to knock out each other's marble. The other two photographs show learners playing in groups; all of their marbles are on the floor and they are all ready to play. The common thing in all of these photographs is that all of the players are focused, as each of them bends to be closer to their marble and, I assume, to observe all of the action.

6.5.1 Reflection, 14 September 2018

I believe that this game achieved what I think is considered by many researchers as free play. During the play time, I wanted to give learners free rein over the game, play it the way it suited them, and develop their own game rules. The fact that I did not instruct my learners on how to play the game, or group them in any way (as I usually did in most of the other games we had played) shows that they took over the game. I let them team up in accordance with their wishes. Therefore, I think that the game brought warmth, friendship, ownership and happiness to the learners. I do not remember any of the learners coming to me with any worries concerning the game. Problems that arose during play were solved or managed within the groups.

6.6 Mathematics: Cool drink lids (*amagenda*), 23 July 2018

Stones (*amagenda*) is a traditional game that I grew up playing from a young age. I introduced this game to my learners because I anticipated that it could help them count and understand number concepts. Since some learners at my school come from disadvantaged family backgrounds, they struggle financially. Consequently, some parents cannot buy the additional school resources to support their children's learning. Jensen (2016, p. 1) asserted that "Poverty, however, doesn't have to be an overwhelming obstacle to a child's success. Schools and teachers *can* make a difference". As a teacher, I have to make means to support children's learning. With that in mind, I usually ask learners to collect cool drink bottle caps for counting, especially for assisting them in solving addition and subtraction sums. Hence I decided to use the lids that learners had already collected instead of playing with stones, as I thought they were colourful and safer to use with my younger learners, to avoid them hurting each other.

I had never used cool drink caps for playing in my class before, as I strictly instilled that they were to be used for counting only. As we were preparing for the game, the learners seemed surprised that they would be playing with lids, and some were hesitant to join in. To introduce the game, I asked learners if they knew the game called '*amagenda*'. There was silence until I showed them how the game was played, and then their faces lit up. Most knew the game as '*amatshe*'. There was a lot of excitement among the learners. For example, Phiwo shouted, "*Yaay! I know how to play this game,*" and Sakhi whispered, "*Ngake ngayidla nami noAma*" [*"I also played this game with Ama"*]. As I felt most learners already knew the game, I asked them to group each other as friends. I wanted to grant learners the freedom to control their own game by allowing them to choose their groups to play with. I anticipated that being in control

would make the learners feel comfortable instead of being instructed on how the game should be played.

I expected that the game would allow learners to be practically involved in building their knowledge of earning more and losing (addition and subtraction). Besides what they would be learning from the game, I believed playing would put learners in a comfortable mood, encouraging more interaction. This could help them recall their experience of playing the lids game and how they tried to collect more lids (win), and how they might lose the game. This could be beneficial in teaching and learning, as learners could apply the skills and techniques they used when they were playing to solve addition and subtraction sums.

The game is played in pairs or small groups. To play the game, you have to sit on the floor and face each other in a circle, with an opening in the centre. A circle is drawn in the middle and lids are put inside the circle. Each player has to have one lid to use to throw up and catch while she or he takes all the lids out of the middle circle and brings them back inside the circle, leaving the agreed-upon number of lids outside of the circle. To protect her lids, each player needs to draw a small circle next to her within which to keep them safe. If you fail to catch the lids that you use to throw up, the next person gets a chance to play. At the end of the game each player counts the lids they have accumulated inside their small circle, and the one who has the most is the winner and will be the first to start playing in the following round. The one with the least lids is out of the game.

I believed that the game would grant learners an opportunity to learn to count and to understand the concepts of 'more' and 'less'. I also anticipated that since the game would allow them to count in ones, twos, and fives, it would also improve their understanding of the number concepts – for example, when you have five sweets, you have less than your friend who has eight or ten sweets (more or less) – and number value. I introduced the game before I started our Mathematics lesson on number values from 11 to 20. Learners were expected to understand the value of numbers from 11 to 20 to compare them in terms of 'more' or 'less'. Rothlein and Brett (1987) proclaimed that "Play is used to introduce and reinforce concepts; lessons are taught using play; play is part of all daily routine activities" (p. 47). Likewise, I felt that playing this game before my lesson would increase learners' understanding and easily grasp concepts and methods I would be using when teaching. In this way, teaching them about number values would add to what they were familiar with from the game they had played.

I introduced the game at the time of the Mathematic lesson. The game was to lay the foundation for what I intended to teach during Mathematics, as I felt that it would help learners apply their knowledge and the same technical solutions to solve the sums. I took 15 minutes from the Mathematics lesson to allow learners to play. In the beginning, I asked learners to form groups of five. I gave them the option to choose their groups, but I quickly noticed that some were left without a group. I was not sure if this was because they did not know which group to join, because they either felt that they did not fit into any group or had no friends in the classroom. Some wanted to jump from one group to another because they were so popular. I asked some of the learners that remained aside to form their own group, and fitted the rest into already formed groups to make up five members each per group.

Although forming groups took longer than I expected, I felt that it was worth it as I did not want to impose too many rules but instead wanted to allow learners to have some control over the game. I was quite happy to see that in the end, no one was left out. The few scared and reserved learners who felt that they did not belong to any of the groups were invited by other learners to join their groups. I was also thrilled to see learners sharing lids among each other to ensure that every group has some lids to play with.

Before they began playing, I wanted to be sure that there was someone who knew the game in each group, and not to make assumptions that everyone knew how to play it (stones). I asked them questions to understand if the game has changed from how I used to play it. I thought that if it had changed somehow I would need to redirect the play to serve the purpose of academic learning. All I heard was a happy refrain of “*Yes ma’am*”, and everyone wanted to come forward to explain with whom and where they had played the game. To illustrate, Khanyo shouted, “*Memu! Ngangidlala no Samke ekhaya*” [“*Ma’am! I have played the game with Samke at home*”]. Lethu screamed “*Nami ngake ngayidla*” [“*I also have played this game*”]. Seeing that most of them had some understanding of the game and all wanted to share their playing experience, I had to stop them before we lost too much time.

The learners seemed to be quite happy and well organised, as they seemed to understand the game. In most groups, I noticed that there were one or two learners who took control and determined how the game was to be played. For example, in one group, Sphe seemed to know the game better than the others and was the one who made decisions and explained the rules of

the game and how they should take turns to the others. Other groups also had team leaders and it seemed that they all cooperated and were happy with the decisions that were made.

Any arguments that occurred were mostly managed within the groups. I noticed that common complaints and disputes were about taking turns, with some wanting to get more lids to win the game. For example, Khule maintained order as he tried to solve and make a decision on Mvelo's issue, as his group accused Mvelo of taking more lids out. Khule was trying to make sense of the situation by analysing how Mvelo ended up with so many lids. I heard Khule ask Mvelo, *"If you took one out as you say, how come you have five lids now and not three, because I remember you had two before you play, you had one green and one blue lid?"*. This showed me that they had gained confidence and that playing also helped them learn one of the concepts I intended to teach ('more and less'), which was my main aim in initiating this game.

I only noticed two groups who were not entirely enjoying the game as they were continuously arguing. The first group felt that the lids were not easy to catch, and so their game was not continuing smoothly as they kept on failing to catch a lid. I then suggested they could perhaps use crumpled papers as a ball to throw up and catch, and that was supported by all groups as they also opted to use crumpled paper.

The other group, which was made up of boys, made me worried as they started their own, different game called a "car game". They complained that the stone game was a girls' game. I asked them what kind of a game they were playing and Kwazi explained, *"It is a car game."* Bahle cut in, *"Look, ma'am cars are in a garage"*, as he referred to the circles that were surrounding the lids and explained that each of them had his own garage and cars. *"How do you play your game?"* I asked. They all asked, *"Memu ufuna ukudlala nawe?"* [*"Ma'am do you also want to play?"*]. *"Ohh yes, but you will have to teach me first. Maybe during the break time"*, I replied. Kwazi then explained how the game is played: *"Uthatha ivalo phakathi bese ukhipha ivalo bese wifaka kwindilinga beseke wiqamba amagama"* [*"You take out lids from the tub and you put them in your circle and name your cars"*]. I was relieved to hear that their game was somehow relevant to my lesson, as they were also comparing and competing about the number of cars each had, so I decided not to interrupt them. They compared who had more or fewer cars in a garage and they were competing for colours that they thought were smart. When they referred to colours, they meant real cars that they thought had nice colours.

In this group, the boys thought that red lids looked nicer than blue and white, which was their least favourite. Sphiwe exclaimed, pointing at red lids, “*Yoh memu! Uyabona memu zinzima lezi eredi!*” [“*Mam, red cars are super cool!*”]. Judging from how they were interacting with objects and with each other, I could see that they were imagining that the lids were real cars. Some boys from other groups also joined the boys playing cars. This showed me that the learners were comfortable and had got used to the idea of playing.

Moreover, I believe that for the learners to decide on types of games and conditions for how the game was to be played, they were experiencing freedom, less pressure and less fear. This made me happy, especially as I could see that the learners were learning from the game. For instance, it enabled them to make decisions and to develop their communication skills as they shared ideas. I think it also served to teach them numbers, as I wanted them to learn to count and understand number concepts.



Figure 6.5: Photographs showing two groups playing with lids (*amagenda*).

The two photographs in Figure 6.5 show learners playing with lids. They played on the floor, with some kneeling and others sitting. Learners had to make circles on the floor, and in each circle there were lids. They are carrying white papers that they used to make a ball, because this was easier for them to catch than a lid.

6.6.1 Reflection, 25 July 2018

Although the stones game took more time than I expected, I enjoyed seeing learners playing happily. I was not only considering the game as playing but as learning for my learners; for instance, I observed the skills they were gaining. Learners were comfortable and relaxed as they were freely communicating and interacting. I felt that I was absent from or at the back of their minds as they got carried away with the game. They did not come to me for any concerns or worries but were solving any issues. I observed and assisted groups that I noticed had minor problems.

6.7 Mathematics: Number search, 2 May 2018

I anticipated that manipulating the nature of my teaching to make it more playful could work to the advantage of both myself and my learners. I recalled that as a child I was always ready to play and have fun, and the most exciting moments of playing were when enjoying the victory of overcoming challenges. I felt that introducing a number search game would be fun and challenging as some learners may not find it easy to identify or spot numbers. The game would require them to be fast as they had to search for numbers quickly to avoid the competitor earning a high score. I believed the game would be helpful for my learners as they would be much more involved, as it was going to help them playfully learn from each other with less pressure. Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule and Trew (2010) emphasised that “teaching methods [that] included a greater emphasis on play and activity-based learning rather than desk-work, [can] stimulate children’s curiosity, creativity, social development and engagement with learning” (p. 55). With the number search game, I aimed to help learners gain more understanding and more easily identify and know the value of numbers, and mainly to help each other identify numbers.

I started this play with an ice-breaker that I created to help me divide learners into teams and manage time. To avoid learners spending a lot of time forming groups, I had different shapes, triangles, squares, rectangles, and circles made of cardboard and coloured in different colours.

I had the shapes in a 2-litre tub and I asked learners to close their eyes when it was their turn to dig in and take out one shape. There was so much excitement among the learners, although they had no idea of the purpose of picking different shapes. I noticed some of them showing each other the shapes they had selected. They were smiling and whispering to each other: *“I picked the same as yours”*, and *“Can I see yours?”*. Some would peek before picking the shape, as they wanted to get the same shape as their friend. This ice-breaker made my learners feel jolly and comfortable; it was as if they were not even aware that they were in the classroom. The ice-breaker itself turned out to be another learning activity as they also learnt about two-dimensional shapes and colours.

I then asked learners with the same shapes to team up in one corner of the classroom. I explained to them that they would play together as a group and that, to not waste time, they were not allowed to swap their shapes or join other teams. I then explained how the game was played. As I was explaining, I perceived that most learners were listening carefully and some were observing their teammates. Mzamo shouted, *“Ngizokudla wena Mvelo”* [*“I will beat you Mvelo”*], and they all burst into laughter. Some were agreeing with Mzamo, as they were also telling their teammates that they would beat them.

As they were still standing in the four corners of the classroom, I attached four bigger shapes that were similar to the ones they had picked; the shapes were used to indicate where each group would sit when they were playing. Although I had emphasised that no one was allowed to swap teams, I still noted a few learners that were uncomfortable because they wanted to be in the same team as their friends. For instance, Bahle asked to join the circle group, and others were waving to their friends in other teams as they were smiling with them to release their eagerness to be in the same team as their friends. I told them that in the next game, they would get a choice to play with anyone of their choice.

I divided the learners into four groups: three groups with seven learners and two groups with six learners. Each learner had a clean piece of paper where they would make dots on their turn to play. One main piece of paper was to be shared among group members, with numbers from 0 to 20 on it. This main piece of paper was to be used by the rest of the team to look for a number that the learner (player) had called out. When the player had called out the number to be searched for by the rest of the group, she or he would make dots. The one with the most dots won the game. This game's trick is to make numbers tiny so that they are difficult for the team

to find easily, which enhances the chance of a player earning points by making more dots than the others.

In the first game, I wrote the numbers, and I did not make them tiny as I wanted the learners to easily see numbers because they were still learning the game. I assumed that if numbers were tiny and hard to find, the game would reduce learners' enthusiasm to play and bore them. I also made a scoring sheet with learners' names for each group. I then taught each group how the game was played and the rules of the game. I showed them how to count the dots as I used to in my primary school years – we used to count by joining the dots to avoid missing any. I believed that this was the only method they should use, as it seemed fair and showed that all of the dots had been counted.

I played with one group at a time, as I wanted to make sure they understood the game. As I was teaching and playing with one group, the other groups were given extra maths to work on individually. My name was first in every group, as I wanted to show each of them how the game was played. Most of the learners looked tense as they were trying to listen carefully and make sense of what I was explaining. However, as I started to play, calling out the number that they should look for, I noted that two or three learners in most groups understood the game. They became excited as they were smiling and passing on comments such as, *"We are looking for number 13"* and *"Move your hand, you are blocking"*, as others were trying to figure out how the game was played. Some of them grasped the game quickly and were eager to find the number I called out. They laughed as they were shouting all at the same time, *"Stop ma'am! Here is number 13"*. I counted the dots I had made by joining dots to make some kind of a pattern.

There was a spirit of excitement and eagerness among learners, as I noted that after I had played they would rush to the scoring sheet to find out who was next to play after me. To my surprise, they could read each other's names, as they would argue about whose turn it was; for example, I heard them saying *"Uwena Khanyo"* [*"It is you Khanyo"*], or *"Look, this is your name"*. I only moved on to the next group once the first learner in each group had played, as I wanted to make sure that they all understood and participated in a game. As Falk and Darling-Hammond, (2012, p. 27) explain, "Guided play fosters academic knowledge through play activities". So for all groups, I coached them in the first round of the game and then let them continue to play independently. After two or three learners had played they became sure of the game, and then

they stopped wanting my approval. In most groups, from the third player on, they gained confidence in the game and were coaching each other, and I felt that this was also when they enjoyed playing.

On the first day, not all learners had a chance to play, but I was happy with their progress in the game as they had gained confidence. I could see that they were becoming very involved emotionally. If one robbed others of dots, they would all get furious, and everyone wanted to be a winner. For example, I noticed the square group quarrel as Bahle wanted to break one rule of the game; he wanted to count his dots for himself, so I think others felt that he would rob them and were angry with his action. Lisa ran to me to report that Bahle did not want them to count together the dots he had made. Sphiwe also interrupted, announcing that Bahle was lying: *“Memu uBahle uthi yena wenze amachashaza awu 30 uqamba amanga akafuni thina sibale, uthi yena uwinile”* [“Ma’am Bahle is lying; he says that he won because he made 30 dots and he does not want us to count”]. I went to their group and reminded them of the game rules and that they all had to count together. Suddenly Bahle took out his paper and they counted together and wrote down his score. To avoid the same issue happening again, I reminded the whole class of the game rules.

The game was also played on the following day. I wrote numbers and provided each learner with one piece of paper to use when making dots. This time, with the scoring sheet, learners had to write their own names in the order they would follow when taking turns to play. The learners who played were those who had finished their work early. I asked them to sit on the mat in our playing corner. They were very excited that they would be playing the game, although they also got a bit confused as they were not playing with their former group mates. For example, Slonde asked, *“Memu izolo bengidlala no Zakithi, ngeke ngidlale nabo namhlanje?”* [“Ma’am yesterday I was playing with Zakithi so would I not be playing with them today?”]. Akhile also queried that on the previous day he was in the triangle group. I replied, *“Today you will be playing with others; we will have to form new groups today because others are not yet finished with their work”*. Those who were not yet finished with their work were keen to complete as they also wanted to play. Most of them frequently came to me to report that they were almost finished with their work. For example, Sabelo reported that he was left with two words to copy and would then be finished with his work and able to join others on the mat to play.

The second time playing, learners were a bit more relaxed and comfortable as they had mastered the skills and techniques of how the game was played. I felt that they were not much concerned that they were in the classroom space as they were playing. I considered the second game as more a type of free play because I was not involved much. Learners became so independent and did not rely much on my opinion. Play – a child-initiated activity – gives children a sense of ownership and control, so they value their play activity; it also boosts children's self-esteem and creates independence (Bennett et al., 1997). I noticed that they did not report so many of the challenges they confronted but dealt with them independently. For instance, I saw some learners quitting the game and joining other groups to play with, while others would ask for a recount of their teammates' score and correct each other. If one had skipped one dot as they counted, they would recount until they all agreed on the score.

I was only observing them as they were playing. I noted that most of the learners who did well academically somehow overpowered others, as they took control over the game. I was also surprised that girls did not separate themselves from playing with boys, as I thought girls would feel comfortable only if they played together as girls. They also showed themselves to be powerful, as they did not allow boys to take advantage of them. For instance, Khona cried out to one boy, *"Eeehee imina odlalayo buka wena udlala emva kwami"* [*"No, it is my turn to play, look you will play after me!"*]. This showed me that the girls could stand up for themselves, whereas I thought they would be intimidated by boys.

I think the game helped my learners to learn so much, both academically and socially. This game was teacher-directed and I anticipated that it could help my children learn how to count and identify numbers from each other. They acquired social skills as they learnt to interact, solving their problems or dealing with different situations. The game also required them to listen and understand what they were told, for example, the rules of the game and how it was played. Hence I believe it also developed them in listening skills.

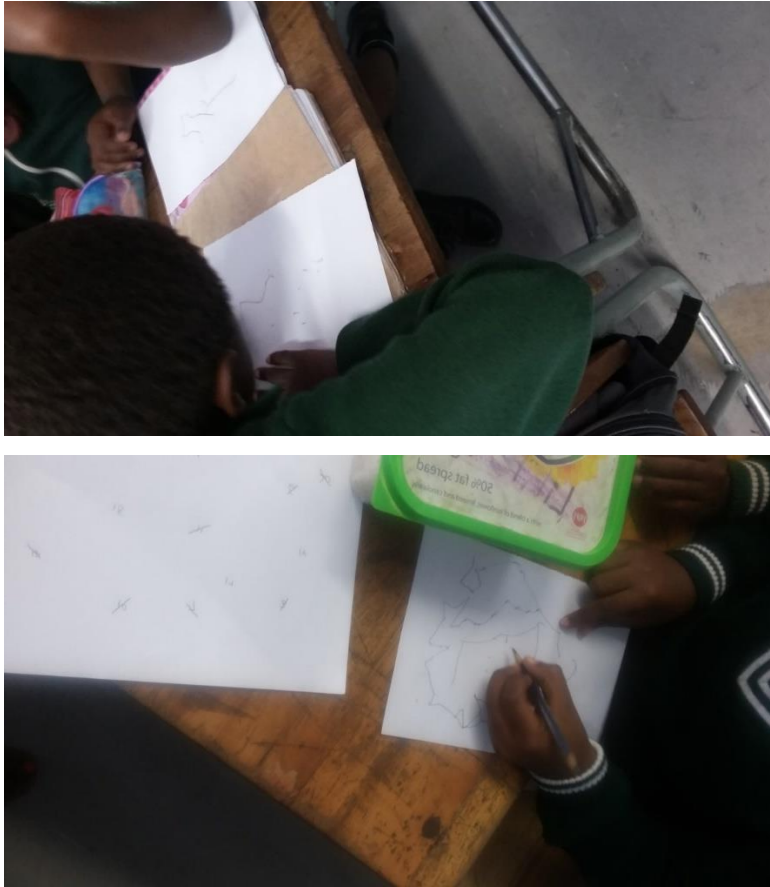


Figure 6.6: Learners playing the number search game.

Figure 6.6 shows two groups of learners playing number search. The top picture shows one learner making dots while others are looking for a number she has called out. The second picture shows a learner counting dots he has made.

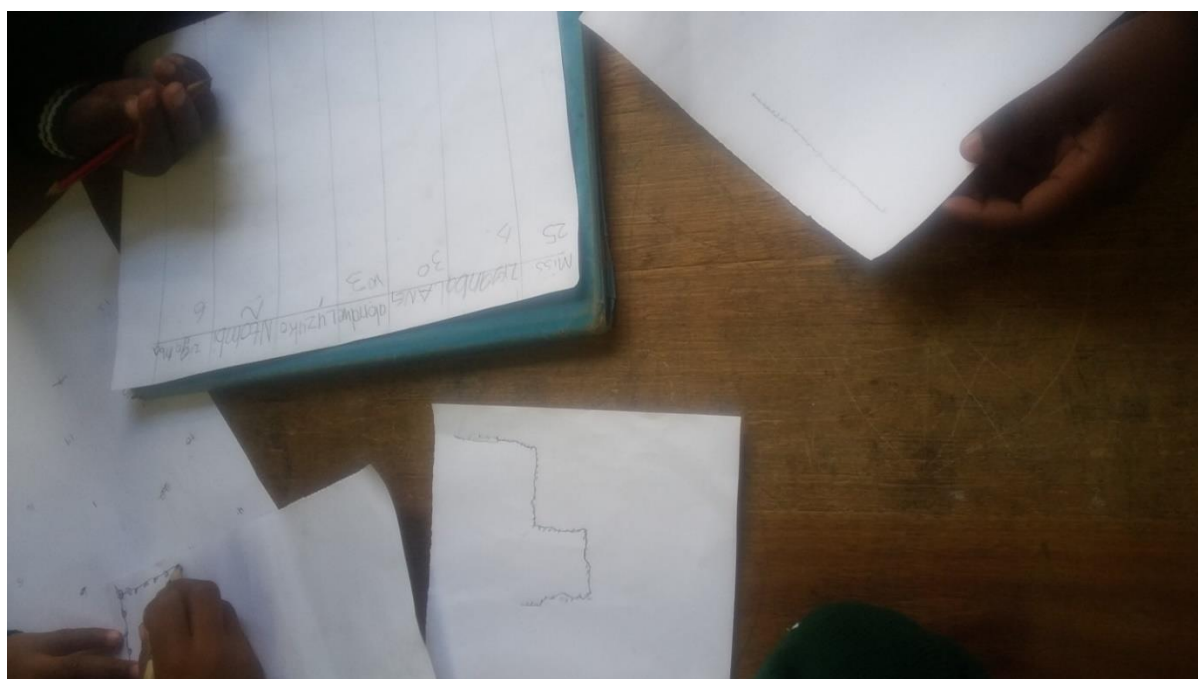


Figure 6.7: Three photographs showing the results of a number search game.

The photographs in Figure 6.7 display sheets used by learners when they were playing. The top left photograph shows a paper where some numbers have been crossed off and others not; the crossed-out numbers have already been called out by players, so they are no longer numbers that learners can choose from. This is to avoid learners repeating the same numbers several times; in this way, they would not be called out again. The picture on the top right shows joined dots, which means one of the players has made dots while the others were

looking for the number she or he had called out. To count the dots, they join them to make a pattern. The third photograph shows three papers used when playing: the paper for making dots on, a number sheet with a set of numbers, and a scoring sheet where each player's score is stipulated against their names.

6.7.1 Reflection, 4 May 2018

I think this game confirmed that children can learn more readily if they are taught playfully. I was surprised that most of them were interested in writing numbers correctly, as they would make an effort to go to the pasted classroom chart to count and find out how to write the number correctly. This game gave me a chance to assist learners with counting and writing numbers. Not all learners felt at ease during the first game, as they wanted to play the game correctly. As a result, I noted that they did not accept the game as a 'game' on the first attempt. They needed a chance to practice and feel confident that they knew the game before it became enjoyable. Even though learners wanted to play with their friends, I thought it achieved the purpose of teaching them numbers, and the game directly served academic learning. I was happy to see that the game also developed some social learning skills, such as solving problems, discipline and communication.

6.8 Conclusion

From reflecting on these free-play and teacher-guided lessons, I have personally learnt that I am an optimistic person; I do not allow circumstance to limit what I believe in achieving. I also became aware that I am caring and always want to consider learners' needs in my teaching. Hence, playful pedagogy allowed me to build a friendly relationship with learners. As a result, I gained trust from the learners and they gradually became more open about their issues and what and how to improve in my teaching practice.

As a teacher in practice, playful pedagogy taught me the essentiality of learning and developing what learners are interested in and good at. It is also vital to create a space to learn, either from my experiences or others, to gather information to improve my teaching profession and children's learning experiences. Lastly, I have learnt to acknowledge learners as individuals. This is important because it strengthens the teacher and learner relationship and thus learners feel accommodated.

In this chapter, I described how I granted learners the opportunity to play a few games which I played in my early childhood. I have found that these indigenous games were appropriate for my learners' development stage and were suitable for the classroom environment. They also helped build friendships among learners, and I think these games were able to support language use. Although I preferred to let them play by themselves in most cases, congratulating them on their performance during play made them proud and eager to keep up their good performance.

I discussed how I introduced each game, and learners' responses were highlighted in my reflections. The games allowed learners to explore and experience in anticipation of assisting their learning and empowering them with some skills that would aid them in their development. In every game, I observed and I have indicated the skills or understanding that was achieved through playing. I have therefore learnt that games can stimulate child development.

I also experienced a few challenges, which I believe taught me that while being prepared is good, it is vital to practice flexibility, as sometimes what I planned would not work. For instance, in some games, I had to intrude in the middle of the game because I was scared that learners would not get enough time to play; I would then rush learners to allow each a chance to play. I also discovered that children are always ready to learn something new and have a positive attitude. I established that in not one single game did learners tell me that they could not do it or that they were scared to try the game; they were always willing to try. Playful pedagogy also helped me understand that children are great thinkers – they just need to be given a chance to express themselves. For example, learners do not take things lightly: they question everything, expecting me to provide them with answers.

In the next chapter, Chapter Seven, I analyse the findings revealed by the data I generated regarding my two research questions: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* and *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* In making meaning of the data, I created a collage that displays what I have learnt about playful pedagogy by re-reading my four data generation chapters: Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six. I then grouped pictures that made the same meaning together and formed themes from each group of pictures. In Chapter Seven, I discuss two of the themes: *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development*, and *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*.

CHAPTER SEVEN: INTERPRETING MY LEARNING ON PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, Chapters Five and Six, I depicted my research lessons incorporating playful pedagogy. These games were meant to further children's learning through exploring and experiencing. I indicated how each game benefited learners in gaining some skills and knowledge related to each lesson. I also reflected on each game as to what I picked up, such as learners' responses to the game, what I felt went well, and how to improve in the future.

In this chapter, Chapter Seven, I make visible and express my response to this study's two research questions: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* and *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?*

I created a collage (Figure 7.1) to visualise and explain what I had learnt about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories and through exploring playful pedagogy in the classroom. The collage aimed to illustrate the benefits and challenges of implementing playful pedagogy in an under-resourced school.

I presented my collage to my critical friends and supervisor by explaining the meanings of the pictures and words I had pasted together. I then transcribed the audio recording of what I presented, including the discussion.



Figure 7.1: Collage representing my learning about playful pedagogy.

Gerstenblatt (2013) explains that collage can be used as a research tool that combines images and text to create a portrayal that allows one to discover meaning. This means that collages help reveal different aspects of a phenomenon to aid individuals to gain more understanding. Butler-Kisber (2008) views collaging as a qualitative research method, as it is a form of the reflective process that conceptualises ideas and evokes elicitation and interpretation.

To develop themes in response to my research questions, I drew from Van Schalkwyk (2010), who explored collage as a form of analysing life stories. She maintains that it brings to light one's memories and challenges and provides a visual medley of rich lived experiences. I

followed the analysis process advised by Van Schalkwyk (2010) by numbering pictures on my collage and grouping together those that I felt made the same meaning to form a concept map that enabled me to develop the following four themes that respond to both research questions simultaneously: (1) *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development*; (2) *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*; (3) *Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction*; and (4) *Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children*.

This chapter discusses the first two themes, with the other two themes being discussed in the next chapter. This chapter consists of three sections. The first section presents and discusses my playful pedagogy collage. In the second section, I discuss two themes, which are supported by sub-themes. I draw evidence to support each theme or sub-theme from Chapters Three to Six. In the third section, I reflect on my learning from the first two themes about implementing playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom.

7.2 Learning through presenting my collage

What follows is an edited transcription of my collage presentation and some contributions from my supervisor and critical friends.



Figure 7.2: Picture of a boy with paper puppets.

At the top of my collage on playful pedagogy, I pasted a picture of a boy (Figure 7.2) who has made puppets from paper. This was because I felt that play motivates creativity and enables learners to use various abilities and show off or reveal diverse talents. It, therefore, encourages teachers to be mindful of learners' gifts. Through self-study, I realised that I had mostly focused only on academic work and often ignored other child development aspects. Playful pedagogy allows learners to reveal their skills and aptitudes and this makes learners feel good about themselves and that they could do well in something else, even if it is not academic schoolwork. My supervisor, Prof. Pithouse-Morgan commented: "Also play creates different kinds of success, and not only in academic performance. It alerts us that there are many other ways of being a successful child". Her comment reminded me that as a teacher, I must create opportunities to support learners in all aspects of development.



Figure 7.3: The word ‘Success’.

I chose to add the word ‘Success’ (Figure 7.3) as I witnessed how playful pedagogy increased the learners’ eagerness for success, for instance, where everyone playing the game has a willingness to win the game. As a teacher, I discovered that children would aim to win or do well in their performance if they believed they were playing a game. Therefore, I learnt that my teaching should be creative and full of fun to stimulate learners’ interest and willingness to accomplish new tasks. It is also vital that I acknowledge learners’ progress and maintain their eagerness to achieve in different areas.



Figure 7.4: The words ‘Pots of healing’.

I also used the words, ‘Pots of healing’ (Figure 7.4). I saw the word ‘pot’ as a metaphor for my classroom. Through my self-study research, I observed how crucial it was for learners to have time for playing, which is something that is of interest to them as children. For them, having the opportunity to play could be a kind of medicine that heals them emotionally as it satisfies their physical and emotional needs. I believe playing can contribute to young children’s emotional, physical and spiritual development, especially as some come to school carrying burdens or problems that they may be experiencing at home.



Figure 7.5: The words ‘Making friends’ with a picture of birds.

I saw how play also allows children to make friends with each other; I, therefore, used a picture of birds showing love and words ‘making friends’ (Figure 7.5). Playful pedagogy offers my learners time to enjoy the company of each other.

My critical friend Ntokozo shared her thoughts on this by saying, “For me, what I picked up is that playful pedagogy has to do with social interaction. For example, children have to initiate a conversation to engage with each other”. Her comment reinforced how bringing play into the

classroom can enable children to be open to a certain extent and build friendships by nurturing socialisation and communication. As a teacher, playful pedagogy helped me incorporate social abilities essential in child development as they build respect and create great understanding among learners to bring unity and harmony.

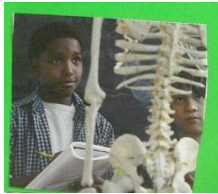


Figure 7.6: A picture of children analysing a skeleton

I perceived how play also can develop the thinking capacity of children. Looking at this picture (Figure 7.6), the two children look as if they are analysing the skeleton. I used this picture because engaging in playful pedagogy helped me learn that playing can enhance children's power of reasoning by assisting them to think critically. Playing allows children to trust their judgement and gives them the courage to raise opinions or share ideas.

Ntokozo also added to my understanding as she stated, "I also found it interesting that play helps children to think critically, because when you play, you need to think fast and be able to strategise. You need to think of your opponent's moves before you think of your move". This implies that I should encourage problem-solving in children's everyday learning to support their high-order thinking and reasoning capabilities.

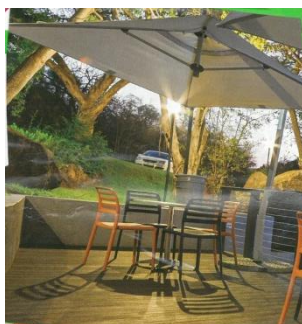


Figure 7.7: A picture of an umbrella.

From my study, I have seen how playful pedagogy is like a shelter to learners, so I used the picture of an umbrella (Figure 7.7). I understand that playing can make learners feel safe and secure from harsh or harmful thoughts. It can give them a sense of protection against the problem they may be experiencing. Through little moments of playing, I have witnessed

children get a space to forget about anything that might be going on around them and have a chance to enjoy playing and have fun.



Figure 7.8: The words ‘fun time’.

In added the words ‘fun time’ (Figure 7.8) because I felt that they explained the learners’ mood when they play. They tend to just have fun and forget all about their worries or anything that might be bothering them. Thus employing playful pedagogy was essential to create a welcoming tone and create a conducive environment for learners to feel comfortable and protected. This helped them learn to trust me with any challenges they faced in school or at home.



Figure 7.9: A picture of a boy who is cooking.

Figure 7.9 shows a picture of a boy cooking while his father is supervising him. I have observed how play allows learners to experience learning without the fear of failing, with me as a teacher being present to help them move on to the next level of their knowledge. Playing gives learners time to explore or to try out anything. Employing playful pedagogy in my teaching granted learners opportunities to try out and discover things for themselves.



Figure 7.10: The words ‘Sharing is caring’.

I used the words ‘Sharing is caring’ (Figure 7.10) because I witnessed how play can help learners slowly understand and practice some essential values of humanity; for example, when a child brought her or his toy to class, they would share it. I saw how play can enable learners

to learn from an early age how to care about one another and ultimately show empathy through sharing with others.

My critical friend Siphiwe added that playing seems relevant to our teaching practice since it allows learners to become emotionally attached to each other. For example, it promotes the principle of sharing and caring, enabling children to develop a spirit of unity and empathy. In that manner, playful pedagogy allowed me to instil an element of love, unity and friendship. My learners were able to understand that they need each other's support.



Figure 7.11. The word ‘Challenge’.

I put the word ‘Challenge’ (Figure 7.11) on my collage because although playing might be fun, it can be challenging for children. For example, as everyone taking part in a game aims to win, this could be a challenge as you have to think of how you could take advantage of the game and beat your opponents. Hence, I appreciate how playful pedagogy offered me an opportunity to teach learners how to deal with and resolve challenges. It encourages learners to think of strategies they could use to win the game.

I also experienced challenges when I began my research. In some cases, I was uncertain of how I was supposed to implement playful learning to correspond with the prescribed curriculum. In the beginning, I was not sure how to engage in play during teaching.

Prof. Pithouse-Morgan noted: “The fact that you are not running away from your challenges in what you were trying to do ... [pause] ... you did not let the challenges stop you”. She further commented:

In many cases, you find teachers having a negative attitude and failing without even trying. They may like the idea but feel that it is not doable in their school conditions, as most would complain of insufficient resources. I think Nontuthuko’s research shows that you can still initiate or allow learners a chance to play in any school context. You do not need a huge playground or more resources to facilitate this kind of experience for children ... [pause] ... it looks interesting to me.

It was not easy for me to employ playful pedagogy in my school – it required a lot of work, time, and thinking to prepare for it. Nevertheless, I did it because I believed and understood that my teaching profession should be about learning how I could better my teaching practice.



Figure 7.12: A picture of birds playing in a pond.

The birds in this picture are drinking water and some are swimming in a pond (Figure 7.12). These birds look free and happy. So, to me, these birds were the reflection of my learners when they were just playing and feeling free to be children. A necessary thing for them as young children to do is just to play. I observed how free play made them feel comfortable, as they were happy to do something they were interested in. Teaching through playful pedagogy allowed learners to discover and strengthen their individual personal abilities. Although adopting playful pedagogy was a bit challenging, because of limited resources (for example, in my classroom, I did not have enough space and teaching aids, and needed to move desks to one side to create space for play), it afforded a rich and resourceful classroom. In this way, I think playful pedagogy has managed to create a friendly environment, especially for first-time schooling learners, and enabled learners to be introduced to a new level of learning in a calm space. Some of these learners may have come from an impoverished family background with limited exposure to life experiences that other, more privileged children may have access to.



Figure 7.13: A picture of a woman nurturing a garden.

I believe incorporating playful learning in teaching was somehow nurturing holistic child development. This picture of a woman ‘nurturing her garden’ (Figure 7.13) represents me as a teacher who cultivates children’s social, emotional and intellectual development through playful pedagogy.

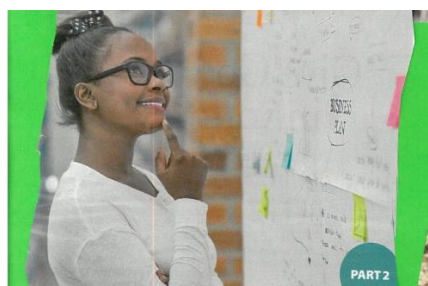


Figure 7.14: A picture of a lady doing a business plan.

Figure 7.14 shows a picture of the lady who looks as if she is thinking deeply about something; to me, she seems to be busy sketching her business plan. What I like is that although she is thinking of her business strategies, she still looks happy – as you can see, she is smiling, I felt that this lady resembles me when I was planning for playing. It took a lot of energy, but it was gratifying, as I knew the benefits in both academic and social terms of enabling my learners to play.



Figure 7.15: The words ‘The right recipe for success’.

The words ‘The recipe of success’ (Figure 7.13) remind me of the benefits of applying playful pedagogy in my teaching and children’s learning. It also cultivates learners’ holistic development. In other words, I understand that playful pedagogy is an approach that seeks to activate all aspects of the development of the child, such as emotional, physical, cognitive and social, for more effective and comprehensive learning.

After I had finished presenting my collage, Khulekani commented:

When I look at the whole collage, I am looking at caring, responsible, and loving attributes. So when you engage in playful pedagogy, children develop those attributes they will need in the future.... [taking a deep breath] Looking at this picture with an umbrella, I think an umbrella resembles a sense of protection. It also gives learners free

rein to understand that they are entitled to whatever is inside the umbrella. They also need to take care of these things to sustain their life.

Siphiwe suggested:

With this collage ... I think it allows children to have freedom because teaching and learning need to have that element of playing; learning has to be enjoyable for learners. Unfortunately, in my research, I could not allow children to bring in items of their popular culture to play with, as our school does not permit it.

He further noted that playful pedagogy would have worked well with his study to develop and motivate the value of sharing and caring among learners.

Prof. Pithouse-Morgan indicated that she liked the colour and sense of movement and open space in the collage. (Sadly, this does not represent the reality or the kind of school I teach at since my school is under-resourced in terms of infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms.)

She commented:

It is like you have created a space and opportunities where they can freely play within the limited space of your school, where there are no playgrounds, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources. However, you still find the time and create space where learners can play freely.

In supporting my supervisor, I think children should be granted the opportunity to play or have gaps between lessons to offer children a chance to play. I believe playing is natural to children and that as adults, we spend so much time trying to stop them from doing what is natural to them.

Ntokozo supported this:

As you have mentioned, I just think that playing is natural for kids, so I believe that is true, especially when you associate it with sharing. Like I would notice, for instance, when one child in my class has brought a toy to school, although they know it is not allowed, they would still want to show it to one another. They all become excited, and you will find them passing it to each other under the desks. They will all then go like, “*Ha, ha, ha*” as they are excited. So, I would say playing creates or strengthens friendships or relationships among children.

Agreeing with Ntokozo, I also saw how playing can build and maintain friendships among children.

7.3 Reflection on my collage presentation

Presenting my collage to my critical friends and supervisor assisted me in gaining different perspectives. Sharing my collage allowed me to critically review some of my understandings of how playful pedagogy benefited my learners. It helped me to perceive that we may view the same thing from different angles. For example, I focused on the capability of playful pedagogy in promoting social interaction and friendship. My critical friend Siphiwe understood playful pedagogy as an approach that assists in facilitating emotional learning whereby children value each other's feelings – as he pointed out that playful pedagogy raises the spirit of Ubuntu (caring and love).

Sharing my ideas helped me understand that my own opinion is not enough to validate my findings. It is essential from time to time to engage in conversation to share my thoughts and understanding and find out my supervisor and critical friends' suggestions to evaluate my views or findings. Their comments and the questions raised helped me find more meaning in how playful pedagogy developed me in catering to individual learners' needs. It promotes children's unique talents, which enables learners to feel comfortable. My supervisor and critical friends helped me realise that playful pedagogy bridges the gap (formal relationship) between teachers and learners. Learners found it easier to approach me during play than during formal learning.

My critical friends' and supervisor's comments helped me understand that as a teacher, it is important always to reflect on my teaching and learn from others – for example, to learn from my colleagues what I can do to improve my teaching practice. As Prof. Pithouse-Morgan mentioned, my collage shows that I tried my best to make space to accommodate playful pedagogy. Her recommendation showed me that no matter the school situation, I need not deprive learners of opportunities to play because of the school context.

7.4 Unpacking and making sense of playful pedagogy

Figure 7.16 shows the collage with numbers added to aid me to associate pictures with similar meanings. From these groups of images, I was able to develop themes to respond to my research questions.



Figure 7.16: Numbered collage.

Figure 7.17 displays the initial ideas for themes created by grouping together pictures from the collage with similar meanings. I fleshed out the themes in discussion with my supervisor and critical friends.

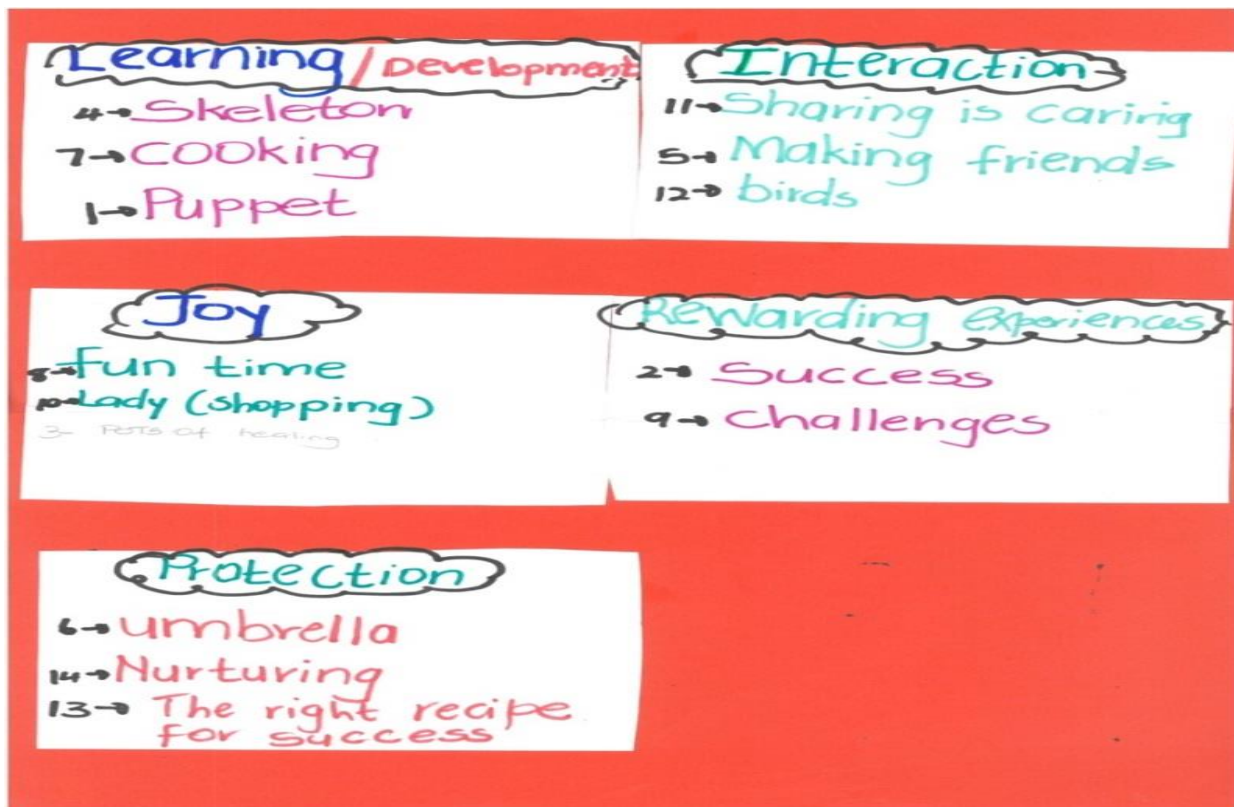


Figure 7.17: Initial ideas for themes developed from the collage.

In this chapter, I present two of the themes. The first theme, *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development*, is supported by three sub-themes: (a) *Playful pedagogy can aid in supporting children's academic achievement*; (b) *Playful pedagogy can develop children's independence*; and (c) *Playful pedagogy can stimulate children's creativity*. The second theme that will be discussed is *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*. The discussion of key points for each theme is illustrated by pertinent examples and excerpts from Chapters Three to Six.

7.4.1. Playful pedagogy can enhance child development

I understand child development as a growth of mind, emotional and physical development. Connery, John-Steiner and Marjanovic-Shane (2010) explain that Vygotsky proposed that child development depends on family members, teachers, and peers. This implies that for a child to develop, it is our responsibility as adult parents, teachers or guardians to prepare a rich, resourceful environment that offers children exposure to relevant experiences for them to gain more information on the world and learn to deal and cope with different social situations. Thus, children need to be afforded a chance to engage physically and be active within their

environment. This could help them accumulate knowledge and skills that would help them improve their holistic development, such as their language skills, thinking and reasoning, social skills, and imagination. I have learnt that playful pedagogy ensures that children actively engage with their social environment. I believe that this helps children to make a connection with the world around them. It has a good effect on a child's mind and physical development, since playing becomes a tool to develop a number of their skills. For example, below I give an account of how I observed the impact of playing in the game 'Playing school' on some learners. Playing school is an imaginary game that is played in a school set-up. Children may take different roles, like being a teacher, principal, or other learners, and in most cases they mimic their teachers or real school environment. In Chapter Six, I reflected on my observations on the playing school game:

It also helped to develop various skills that are important for social living. For example, I noted that as they were playing even shy learners that other learners usually take for granted were able to stand up for themselves. (Chapter Six, 6.2.1)

Of course, through playful pedagogy, children get a chance to interact with each other and with the environment, allowing them to learn and slowly build or improve their skills and knowledge. Although I learnt from the game mentioned above that free playing promotes children's freedom to initiate and design their own rules, I experienced difficulties in applying open free play due to limited time. I designed most of the games to fuse with the curriculum, and as a result most of them suited what I wanted to instil through my teaching. Hence games were aligned with the objectives of my lessons. For example, as described in Chapter Six, a few of the games I introduced were number search, addition and subtraction, and *amagenda* (the lids game), which were used to develop numeracy. This was a challenge to me, since most of the games were guided by me. I believe that if I had given learners more free-play games, perhaps they would have learnt or acquired more competencies.

As children grow up, they accumulate information through exploring and experiencing, which aids them discover, understand, or even know more about the world around them. Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012) suggested that the human mind starts development from birth, so appropriate experiences that children engage in can enhance their growth and help them adapt to new situations or respond to different situations. As a Grade 1 teacher in an under-resourced school, I also feel that applying playful pedagogy facilitated a resourceful classroom environment that encouraged exploring and experiencing. For example, in Chapter Six (6.6) I reflected on learners' arguments when playing *amagenda*, the cool drink lid game. This

example shows how the children experienced problem-solving and having to make critical decisions:

I noticed that common complaints and disputes were about taking turns, with some wanting to get more lids to win the game. For example, Khule maintained order as he tried to solve and make a decision on Mvelo's issue, as his group accused Mvelo of taking more lids out. Khule was trying to make sense of the situation by analysing how Mvelo ended up with so many lids. I heard Khule ask Mvelo, "If you took one out as you say, how come you have five lids now and not three, because I remember you had two before you play, you had one green and one blue lid?".

I, therefore, observed how playful pedagogy could allow children to explore and experience in order for them to enrich their cognitive, social, emotional and creative learning.

I have discovered that playful pedagogy enhances children's development in multiple ways and equips them with different skills. While playing is not intentionally initiated by children to learn or gain specific capabilities, it equips children for various aspects of their development, such as their intellectual, social and emotional growth. For example, in recalling my childhood experiences in Chapter Three, I expressed how playing 'house' unconsciously developed us in numerous ways:

I believe from playing house we developed social interaction and communication and developing our emotions and imagination; this helped us make sense of and learn how to resolve some challenges that we still come across even now as adults. (Chapter Three, 3.10)

It benefits learners to learn and understand their capabilities; with playing, new knowledge and skill is gained, building or developing new thinking or understanding. Daniel (2018, p. 2) maintained that "There is a growing body of evidence in favour of the use of play-based learning to support multiple areas of development and learning". Indeed, offering children time to play enriches their development in all different areas of their aptitude.

One of my critical friends, Khulekani, interpreted my collage as showing playful pedagogy as instilling important lifelong values and nurturing friendly relationships. I also had noted that although my school may not have the same privileges as some other schools in terms of material resources, bringing playful pedagogy into my teaching planted important seeds for learning. For example, it has allowed them to practice humane values such as sharing, compromise and being sympathetic.

Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012, p. 19) encouraged that “Teachers should ensure that young children have the experiences that are necessary to support a successful development process.” Correspondingly, Lehrer, Petrakos, and Venkatesh (2014) confirmed that playing contributes to various aspects of child development, such as healthy growth and learning. This suggests that playful pedagogy equips and enhances the child’s abilities in various ways, for instance, making responsive decisions or thinking carefully about the consequences of actions. Playful pedagogy provides children with experiences that allow them to discover new things and also teaches them how to handle and adapt to different situations.

7.4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Playful pedagogy can aid in supporting children’s academic achievement

By academic achievement, I mean how the child performs scholastically. I trust that learners’ academic performance could be influenced by several issues, besides factors that link to a child’s home background. For example, factors that could contribute to good academic achievement could range from the teachers’ teaching approach to the classroom environment or organisation; these all could lead to a child’s excellent academic performance.

Playful pedagogy can give learners a chance to be hands-on in their learning and construct their knowledge or build more understanding from what they were taught. Daniel (2018) stated that proponents of play-based learning for academic growth have argued that play-based strategies can be used to reach prescribed educational goals. I also felt that playful pedagogy helped me teach my learners to quickly grasp and make meaning of what they were learning. In that way, it has allowed me to develop aptitudes and knowledge that learners already own – it extended the learners’ knowledge.

Playful pedagogy allows children the potential to be creative and promotes the use of learners’ ideas. I embarked on playful pedagogy with an understanding that some of my learners may be used to playing creative games. Since my school is under-resourced and most learners come from disadvantaged family backgrounds, some parents may not have been able to afford to buy their children toys, and they may be forced to create their own games. Lehrer, Petrakos and Venkatesh (2014) confirmed that play or other social activities may significantly impact children’s academic learning opportunities. I observed how playful pedagogy could utilise or further learners’ knowledge and skills in improving their academic learning.

Besides that, I have learnt that playful pedagogy created pleasure during teaching and learning, as learners had a lot of fun. I noted that playing instils a positive attitude in children towards learning or schooling, and is more likely to stimulate an optimistic mindset and willingness to keep trying without fear of failing. According to Charlesworth (2004, p. 72), play should involve “encouraging children to keep trying and to construct their knowledge rather than imposing one ‘right’ answer.” For example, in Chapter Five I observed learners playing the game of addition and subtraction, which took two days. On the second day, I noted that most of the learners were willing to take part in the game and that even the learners who were struggling academically were eager to play. Seemingly, playful pedagogy gives learners the courage to give their input and share ideas in trying to make meaning of what they are learning.

Playful pedagogy promotes children’s learning by exploring and experiencing, and hence playful pedagogy helped me understand my learners’ level of knowledge. Björklund and Ahlskög-Bjorkman (2017) maintained that during play, teachers do not have to provide answers. Instead, it offers the children opportunities to discover phenomena that arise from their questions, practice necessary skills and process their new findings. Therefore, playful teaching and learning are more about adding to and developing what children already know. This is made possible by allowing learners to share or learn from each other. For instance, they could teach each other in games like ‘playing school’.

Playful pedagogy helped me understand that I need to accommodate learners’ knowledge and build on their understanding in my teaching. In other words, I should acknowledge their potentiality in making sense of their learning.

I have perceived that playing requires a player to pay a lot of attention to perform well. This helps children learn to keep focus from an early age, think carefully before taking action, and increase their concentration. For example, I facilitated a playful classroom activity where I told learners a folktale about animals who suffered from a greedy king tiger, where the monkey came up with an idea of how he could free himself and the other animals. The learners had to show emotions as to how they felt about the two animals' actions – the king tiger and the monkey. I asked learners to colour both animals in and draw a face that depicted emotions, as I felt that colouring in can be a playful kind of activity that learners enjoy doing:

I view drawing and colouring as an activity that allows children to relax while it enhances their I view drawing and colouring as an activity that allows children to relax

while enhancing their imagination and flair for art and developing their concentration. As children pay attention to colours to make whatever they are doing look beautiful, their imagination also develops as they create pictures in their minds of how they want their image to look. (Chapter Five, 5.9)

I would say playful pedagogy has enabled me to offer my learners experiences that might help them resolve real-life challenges or think critically of any challenge or problem presented to them. For instance, from play they learn to think of a problem from different angles to find a suitable solution. Below I offer an example from Chapter Six that shows how playful pedagogy draws learners' attention as they keep focus and track every move of the game so that they will not lose. This involves a game of marbles, typically played in pairs or groups. A player earns more marbles if she or he manages to directly hit their opponent's marble:

I observed that the game brought mixed feelings as learners played; for instance, some would get angry about missing their opponent's marble. For example, I overheard Lethu talking to himself, whispering, "*Eish, ngegeja kodwa ngizombamba*". [*"Eish, I would not miss it next time, I will make sure of it"*.] Others felt anxious as they were concerned about winning the game. For example, Mzamo put all his concentration on the game and did not want to miss any move; I heard him asking his group, "*Did Sphiwe move forward his marble?*". He suspected Sphiwe of cheating by moving his marble or bringing it too close to his opponent's marble, to increase his chances of beating it. Other learners, especially those playing in pairs, were a bit more relaxed and less fussy about winning or losing the game and just enjoyed playing the game. (Chapter Six, 6.5)

Below I provide an extract from the description of the game of marbles which shows how learners enjoy being in control and can manage or deal with situations. As the marble game is played in groups, learners managed to group themselves, and those who arrived in the middle of the game were able to request and join groups of their choice:

They somehow managed to sort themselves out, as they gathered in teams of their choice. Even though the teams were not equal in terms of the number of players, I was happy that they all felt that they belonged as they fitted themselves into groups. Even those who joined the class after others had already started playing requested to join one of the groups and some formed their own groups. (Chapter Six, 6.5)

Through playing, children attain fundamental academic qualities, such as managing, problem solving and listening, while they are not even aware that they are doing so. Likewise, Gray (2011, p. 454) asserted that "In the play, children learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules". Correspondingly, Preziosa, (2017, p. 13) maintained that "Playing broadens intelligence, stimulates the imagination, encourages creative problem solving, and helps to foster confidence, self-esteem and a positive attitude towards learning". Such attributes play a vital role in learning, as they allow children to think, focus or pay

attention, and be disciplined in their school work, which can enable them to do well scholastically.

7.4.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Playful pedagogy can develop children's independence

I discovered that with playful pedagogy children develop a sense of independence. Britton (1992) highlights the fundamental value of encouraging children's independence through play. Playful pedagogy teaches children to learn to make their own decisions and stand for what they believe in. I suppose this suggests that playful pedagogy cultivates self-trust, as children learn to trust their judgement – and, of course, this builds self-confidence.

As Yoon (2014) argues, children build knowledge by incorporating past and present situations; this means that for children to solve a problem or decide, they refer to their past experiences. Thus from playing they build their knowledge from their experiences, which help children make meaning of a situation by referring to the experience. Hence, playful pedagogy develops the child's capability and helps them move to the next level of knowledge.

Playful pedagogy has encouraged me not to always feed learners my knowledge and thoughts but involve them in constructing or accumulating their knowledge. Walsh et al. (2010) recommended that primary school teaching methods emphasise play and activity-based learning rather than desk-work to motivate children's interest, creativity, social development, and learning engagement. Similarly, Weisberg et al. (2013, p. 18) asserted that "Traditional teacher-centered instructional approaches that research has clearly shown are inferior for young children. The hands-on, child-driven educational methods sometimes referred to as 'playful learning' are the most positive means yet known to help young children's development". Playful pedagogy motivates independence, as it allows children to discover through exploring, so the child gains the first-hand experience. As a teacher you need to grant children an opportunity to explore their ideas on a topic, rather than giving them answers or instructing them on how to work out their activities.

However, although I have found playful pedagogy to be an approach that enables children to learn by building or constructing their knowledge instead of the traditional teaching approach that encourages learning from the educator – applying playful pedagogy was not easy. As Grade 1 teachers, we all discuss or plan lessons together for the week, and sometimes share methods to use when teaching particular lessons. Although I was willing to share my playful pedagogy

approach with my fellow teachers, I would continuously get negative comments, such as there being no space and time for playing and (mainly) complaints about the noise. Therefore, I had to somehow control the learners' noise to avoid my colleagues from coming into my class to ask us to lower our voices. I found this a bit intimidating and I think it made me always control the play and reduce the element of independent play among my learners.

I have noted that playful pedagogy slowly introduced or allowed my learners to build new knowledge and new understanding for themselves through interaction, or to build new information upon what they already know. Dyson (2003) avers that building on children's informal knowledge is vital in their learning. This implies that my teaching develops from what I have observed learners practising in class during play – for example, how they count – and adopt their system to develop new information. This means playful pedagogy values children's informal knowledge as a foundation for formal academic learning in school. This is illustrated in my description of using the lid game in Chapter Six. I anticipated that the game would assist me in my teaching by enabling learners to bring their knowledge and try out their ideas in solving sums:

I believed that the game would grant learners an opportunity to learn to count and to understand the concepts of 'more' and 'less'. I also anticipated that since the game would allow them to count in ones, twos, and fives, it would also improve their understanding of the number concepts – for example, when you have five sweets, you have less than your friend who has eight or ten sweets (more or less) – and number value. I introduced the game before I started our Mathematics lesson on number values from 11 to 20. Learners were expected to understand the value of numbers from 11 to 20 to compare them in terms of 'more' or 'less'.... Likewise, I felt that playing this game before my lesson would increase learners' understanding and easily grasp concepts and methods I would be using when teaching. In this way, teaching them about number values would add to what they were familiar with from the game they had played. (Chapter Six, 6.6)

I had ascertained that as children get used to the idea of classroom playing, they no longer find raising and trying out their ideas to be a problem. I noted that playful pedagogy made my learners willing to participate and created a free space to express themselves. For example, in the post office game (Chapter Five), which I created for term one phonic revision, I divided learners into three groups: the first to deliver words to the postbox (words had to match the phonic on the postbox), the second had to take the words out of the postbox and deliver them to houses (words also had to match the phonic of a house), and the third had to read out loud the words they received. This game allowed a lot of interaction as the learners were arguing

and negotiating whether the correct word had been dropped into the correct container, as they had to match the word with the correct sound:

I saw a lot of interaction as learners were negotiating and arguing, as some were not sure if they were putting the correct word in the correct box, and some recipients were also not sure and required assistance from others. For example, I heard learners saying, *“Yeyi, oh no! Not that one. Oooh Yes, put it there,”* as they were directing each other as to which was the correct box to put a word into. (Chapter Five, 5.6)

Whitebread (2003, p. 10) explained that “play is all about developing flexibility of thought. It provides opportunities to try out possibilities, to put different elements of a situation together in various ways, to look at problems from different viewpoints”. Likewise, I believe that play gives children the ability to rationalise and solve problems and use their reasoning to make quick decisions about the challenges they encounter.

There were times where I saw that I needed to get involved in facilitating independent play. For example, in Chapter Six, I describe a game where the learners play ‘school’, an imaginary game where children play different roles, such as teachers, principal and learners, to imitate the school culture. I observed that some learners played individually and noted that they were just paging through magazines. I decided to intervene to help those children find and cut out pictures they liked; I thought that would help them learn the skill of cutting out neatly and think and reason, as they would only cut out the images they wanted. Thus, playful pedagogy helped me understand which skills were needed to enable them to work independently.

Playful pedagogy kept my learners active, as it enabled them to take part in what I was teaching. Shabani (2016) asserted that Vygotsky maintained that social interaction contributes to development when it has a clear goal. This indicates that for children to take part in an initiated activity, it should have a clear purpose. Playful pedagogy gives children a goal, allowing them to cooperate and interact to find possible solutions and make sense of what is taught. As Danniels (2018, p. 2) emphasised, supporters of play-based learning for academic growth have argued that play-based procedures can be used to teach prescribed academic goals in an engaging and developmentally appropriate manner. Instead of me as a teacher giving learners techniques to answer questions, playful pedagogy created a platform for preparing my learners to apply their understanding of what I was going to teach. For example, employing drama play in one of my English lessons (Chapter Five) enabled the learners to understand emotional feelings attached to certain situations. They got a chance to experience being in that particular

situation. Those who were observing were able to use their imagination to relate to the players' feelings.

In Chapter Three I recalled how as children we learnt from our surroundings through exploring and experiencing. As children, we had no idea how much knowledge we were gaining from this independent play:

We would sincerely consider how nature was formed and even grab at a leaf or pull a strip of grass as we would freely walk. This was not done consciously or for any purpose, but I guess it was part of childhood curiosity to know or learn about the world around us. Engel (2011) emphasises that children are born curious, as she insists that children's development urges them to understand the unknown. I also think children are always eager to learn – even if it is something they know, they want to figure out or explore it to find out all possible ways of how something is used. For example, we would feel, smell, and sometimes taste whatever we pulled with our hands and even count the leaf's shreds. (Chapter Three, 3.2)

Consequently, if teaching and learning are built on playful pedagogy, they allow children a chance to explore and experience, as I view it as essential that every young child's learning develops from their understanding of how they make sense of their environment.

I have discovered that playing is part of children's culture; by this, I mean it comes naturally to them, as they are always ready and prepared for it. However, because my school is under-resourced, it has limited space and no playground for children to play freely. As a result, limited space could be one factor that restricts learners from fulfilling their need to play. Usually, our learners spend recess time running around in the corridors, or some just stand leaning against the walls. As teachers, we usually warn them to be careful and avoid running or jumping as they could easily hurt themselves. I believe permitting my learners to play in my classroom in their free time led my learners to experience freedom to a certain extent, as I think it allowed them to just be who they are, 'being kids'. They got to enjoy something that is part of their growing, and I think one cannot separate children from play.

7.4.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Playful pedagogy can stimulate children's creativity

My school is under-resourced, and I believe this has hindered learners from partaking in extramural activities such as sports, creativity, and arts (drama). In my opinion, it seems that the school focuses only on what teachers believe is doable, which is generally 'chalk and talk' academic teaching and learning – and I think this somehow suppresses learners' talents. Looking back at my playful memories and the playful pedagogy I undertook with my learners,

I have found that playful pedagogy not only promotes academic development but also creativity. Connery et al. (2010) affirmed that play supports children in being the creators and designers of their work and lives and not passive consumers of a scripted performance. For example, in Chapter Six, I described how in a lid game (*amagenda*), which is played in small groups, some boys felt the game was better suited to girls – and so created their own car game. Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012, p. 134) believe that “play is one of the remarkably creative processes that foster original thinking and imagination”. Likewise, Weisberg et al. (2013, p. 12) propose that “a playful learning approach can additionally boost creative thinking and problem-solving abilities”. Engaging learners in a playful pedagogy helped nurture and promote their creative thinking; it allowed them to use their imaginations to create what they like or had pictured. For instance, the playful pedagogy activity on name-tags described in Chapter Five allowed learners to design their own name-tags to express themselves through shape, colour and imagery. Adapting the name-tag activity to make it more playful allowed learners to be producers of their work. Since they had to display their name-tags on their desk, I believe this gave them motivation and boosted their self-esteem as they received praise from others:

For example, Enzo joyfully announced that he had cut his name-tag into a truck shape; the whole class was amazed by Enzo’s name-tag, as they all grinned and applauded him....The mood in class was not like on any other day. The learners were so vibrant, excited and engaged; even the quiet learners were more willing to share what they had drawn. (Chapter Five, 5.4)

However, even though playing was supposed to be fun, I experienced problems during some of the playful activities, as learners would rate each other; this made some feel a bit ashamed, as they would think that their performance was not as good as that of their classmates. In such cases, I felt that there was no play element, as they became more concerned about their failures rather than enjoying and assisting each other. For instance, in dramatic play (Chapter Five), when I nominated some learners to role-play the story I had read, some learners were initially fearful and hesitant about their capability or performance. They only felt at ease when they noted that I was not emphasising how they were doing, but instead encouraged and guided them. Then they gained confidence and enjoyed it.

I recalled from my childhood memories that it was only through play that, as children, we could develop, use and even enjoy our creative talents and skills – although nurturing or moulding these was not at the core of our play. Nonetheless, we somehow understood our creativity’s value, as we knew our capabilities among ourselves, like who was good at certain things, such

as drawing or drama. In Chapter Three (3.10) I recollected how playing brought our creative flair to light:

I think most of all, our play cultivated our talents. For instance, some of us discovered our abilities and skills by playing; for example, some learnt that they could sing or paint quite well.

Playful pedagogy encouraged me to always try by all possible means to facilitate learners' creative flair. Playful pedagogy taught me to carefully stimulate and nurture their little achievements, which perhaps motivated my learners not to be shy of letting us know what they were good at. It allowed learners to reveal their inventiveness, making them feel good that they could do well in something (even if it was not academic work) and be appreciated.

7.4.2 Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life

When children are happy, they feel ready to take on the world. They, therefore, develop a positive mindset to overcome any challenges that come their way. For instance, in Chapter Three (3.5), I recounted how, as a child, playing boosted our self-esteem and optimism:

Metaphorically, I can associate the stones or *amagenda* game with firewood, because pieces of wood have to be stacked together to make fire. This was a game played by almost all little girls while they were growing up, and I feel that the game kept us together as friends. To my mind, it made us value each other as little girls growing up together in one village and going to the same school. Being close to friends made me feel warm, loved, and happy as a child. Most of all, I think it gave me a sense of satisfaction. When we won the game we felt like champions, and we experienced eagerness to spend time with friends to play.

In my opinion, playing gives children the courage to give their best shot in trying to succeed in everything they do; in other words, playing creates faith in oneself. Reviewing my past experiences of playing, it appears that none of us thought less of our capabilities when we were playing. As all of us felt positive that we would win the game; if we somehow lost the game, we would be eager for a rematch to take on our opponents. In Chapter Three (3.3) I recalled how important winning the game was to us:

Playing could bring happiness or a cheerful mood that your team played well, and if not, one would be full of eagerness for another chance to take on the opposing team and win the game.

I also observed a similar attitude among my learners during playful learning. I saw how learners would be willing to try without fear of failing. For example, in Chapter Six, I reflected on the game of marbles, where learners were determined to try their best to perform well:

During the play time, I wanted to give learners free rein over the game, play it the way it suited them, and develop their own game rules. The fact that I did not instruct my learners on how to play the game, or group them in any way (as I usually did in most of the other games we had played) shows that they took over the game. I let them team up in accordance with their wishes. Therefore, I think that the game brought warmth, friendship, ownership and happiness to the learners. I do not remember any of the learners coming to me with any worries concerning the game. Problems that arose during play were solved or managed within the groups. (Chapter Six, 6.5.1)

I felt that gaining such an attitude from playing would also help them with their schoolwork and to understand the necessity of completing the task, and the need to work hard, keep trying and not give up if they failed on their first attempt, but to try by all possible means to achieve success. Bennett et al. (1997, p. 37) claimed that “Play allows children to take risks without fear of failure and to learn through trial and error.” This suggests that playing pedagogy offers learners the opportunity to understand setting a mission for oneself and taking it upon oneself to accomplish it.

In the ‘post office’ game too (Chapter Five), I noticed that learners who were struggling with matching the correct words with the box were not giving up or feeling sorry for themselves that they did not get it right. They kept on trying, and I would hear them cheerfully asking for help or trying to read and figure out where the next word should be placed. This revealed to me that through play, children can learn unconsciously and with optimism.

I believe that playing gives learners a sense of ownership, and they get to understand that their performance may have a positive or negative effect on their results. Consequently, they need to put in more effort, as they need to keep trying to achieve a good outcome. To show how I feel that playful pedagogy helped learners develop a constructive attitude and gain self-confidence, I draw on two of my reflections below. I believe that playful pedagogy helped them feel confident that they could manage to do well and eliminated the fear of failing.

Here I quote from my reflection on my lesson where learners had to design their own name-tags:

I believe that this activity uplifted learners’ spirits. I noted that Bahle, who had come to school feeling very down, became more engaging, and I felt many learners gained self-confidence because most of them were much more willing to join in, even the quiet learners. I think I managed to bring in play with this activity, as learners freely participated and were ready to join in. I believe they also learnt and gained in many ways, such as creativity, interacting, communication, a positive attitude on their

capability and also to respect each other and, most of all, to value themselves as individuals. (Chapter Five, 5.4.1)

The extract below refers to a game that I introduced to learners, where they had to make a rhythm by drumming and clapping their hands. A selected group followed what I had instructed them to do – for example, if I said to touch the door, they would touch the door – as the rest of the class created the rhythm:

The best thing about the game was that it allowed learners to engage in learning and give it a try no matter whether they failed or succeeded. I noticed that most of the learners did quite well as they understood exactly what they had to do. In my view, the game helped them to get out of the constraints or to overcome the challenge of fear of trying or being judged. I noticed that learners I thought were not doing well in English surprised me, as they responded and performed well in this play activity. I assume that the game gave my learners a free space – both physically and mentally – as it accommodated mistakes, was free of judgement, and most of all offered them a chance to learn and correct their mistakes. (Chapter Five, 5.7.1)

From my childhood experiences and watching my learners, I have learnt that playing a game is a challenge on its own, as players usually feel the pressure to win. Therefore, I had to overcome the complications that can arise when learners get emotionally involved or tense if they think they are being cheated. During my childhood, we used to resolve our issues as children, but, as a teacher, I intervened in some situations because of the classroom environment, as I could not let my learners get out of control. For example, I described in Chapter Six (6.7) how in the number search game one group got emotionally involved when they felt they were being cheated by Bahle:

I could see that they were becoming very involved emotionally. If one robbed others of dots, they would all get furious, and everyone wanted to be a winner. For example, I noticed the square group quarrel as Bahle wanted to break one rule of the game; he wanted to count his dots for himself, so I think others felt that he would rob them and were angry with his action. Lisa ran to me to report that Bahle did not want them to count together the dots he had made.... I went to their group and reminded them of the game rules and that they all had to count together. Suddenly Bahle took out his paper and they counted together and wrote down his score. To avoid the same issue happening again, I reminded the whole class of the game rules.

When children play, I have found that they take the game seriously and take it upon themselves to do well. Hence, I feel that playing develops children's strength and their optimistic attitude to tackle any problems or challenges that they face. Concerning their academic work, it assists them to understand that while school work might be challenging, a positive mindset will give them the courage to work hard to achieve good results

7.5 Reflecting on my learning from the first two themes

I have discovered that every child has capabilities; for them to reach their full capacity, they need support and proactive strategies that nurture them to reach their full potential. Playful pedagogy allows children to explore and gain exposure to various experiences. In this way, they maintain progressive development, as children continuously build on information and that enhances their knowledge and growth. This has helped me be conscious that children are not empty vessels waiting to be filled.

I saw that employing playful pedagogy granted my learners opportunities to bring in their ideas. As a teacher taking a socio-cultural approach to learning, I need to build on my learners' knowledge. Play enabled them to learn that they could raise their own opinions and share information or experiences even in the classroom. This has helped the learners to engage their imagination to understand or make meaning of what they are taught. Also, playful pedagogy has helped me learn and understand what learners know or lack and enable them to construct their knowledge and skills from what they are familiar with or what is relevant to them.

Playful pedagogy promotes a free, comfortable, and accommodative space for children. For instance, during play, children can attain or develop skills and knowledge that, as a teacher, I may not have been aware that they could gain from certain games. In that manner, they can develop abilities and accumulate new understanding that I may not have been able to teach them. For example, play can develop their concentration, motivation and reasoning. These are things that I could not easily teach these young children; however, with playful pedagogy they get to practise such powers that assist with or are prerequisites for their academic school performance.

Playful pedagogy has helped me understand that regardless of the school circumstances, I should be creative and think of ideas that would cultivate interactive and hands-on learning. I have learnt that a central part of my role as a teacher is to facilitate teaching and learning. This means that I have realised that I do not always need to be dictating what I expect children to come up with as solutions, but allow them to try their own methods. In that way, they can engage with their work, and I believe that this increases their chances of interacting and sharing ideas. Thus, playful pedagogy allowed some space for children to reveal gifts or knowledge they possess that enabled me to add on from what they already know, to develop a new level of understanding.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I considered what I learnt from exploring playful pedagogy in my teaching. I showed how I created and presented a collage to visualise, communicate, and reflect on my learning. My discussion was organised according to two themes and three sub-themes: *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development* (sub-themes: *Playful pedagogy can aid in supporting children's academic achievement*; *Playful pedagogy can develop children's independence*; and *Playful pedagogy can stimulate children's creativity*) and *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*.

Overall, I learnt that playful pedagogy creates opportunities for learners to employ their knowledge and ideas to learn. Teaching through playful pedagogy helped me motivate learners' involvement in my teaching, which also helped me find gaps in learners' knowledge and allowed me to add or bring in new knowledge. I further became mindful that education should not be just about me standing in front of learners delivering my knowledge. Playful pedagogy supports children's active learning: it allows children to experience and explore to make sense of real-life situations and, therefore, expands learners' understanding.

In the next chapter, Chapter Eight, I present the two remaining themes: *Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction*, and *Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children*. I will elaborate on how I interpreted these themes concerning what I discovered from my childhood memories and teaching using playful pedagogy.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONTINUING TO INTERPRET MY LEARNING ON PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Seven, I deliberated on my learning from exploring playful pedagogy through memory-work and teaching. The chapter describes how I produced and presented a collage to envisage, convey, and make sense of my learning. I shared some of the feedback from my research supervisor and critical friends on my collage presentation. Furthermore, I explained how I followed the collage analysis process advised by Van Schalkwyk (2010). I numbered pictures on my collage and grouped together those I felt had a similar meaning to form a concept map. I mapped out initial ideas for themes and gave them more substance in conversation with my supervisor and critical friends. In this way, I could shape and articulate my response to this study's two research questions: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* and *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?*

The thematic discussion in Chapter Seven was arranged according to two themes and three sub-themes: (1) *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development* (sub-themes: (a) *Playful pedagogy can aid in supporting children's academic achievement*; and (b) *Playful pedagogy can develop children's independence*; and *Playful pedagogy can stimulate children's creativity*) and (2) *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*.

In this chapter, Chapter Eight, I present the two remaining themes: (1) *Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction* (which is supported by two sub-themes: (a) *Playful pedagogy can enhance children's communication*, and (b) *Playful pedagogy can foster children's empathy*); and (2) *Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children*. I elaborate on how I construed these themes from what I discovered about my childhood memories and teaching using playful pedagogy. I draw on evidence from Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six to substantiate my discussion of each theme and sub-theme. I then offer a reflection in which I consider my key learning from deliberating on the themes.

8.2 Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction

Social interaction interlinks children with their environment. Charlesworth (2004) explains that Vygotsky's socio-cultural notions maintain that providing children with a rich environment allows them to explore and make sense or meaning of their world and construct new knowledge. Interacting with the environment through play grants children opportunities to explore and experience the social world. For example, as I described in Chapter Three, where I discussed my childhood play memories, we would play a game where we would act out our parents' and siblings' roles in the family. Peterson (2018) explains how playing creates opportunities for children to practise social roles that they see in their families or communities. She further adds that such games promote and maintain the continuity of cultural customs and values. In my childhood, playing helped us learn to understand how each family member in our rural community had essential roles and responsibilities to perform. This is illustrated in the letter to my sister (Chapter Three, 3.11), letter to my sister):

I value the times we shared playing together as children because I feel I had opportunities to experience and explore to know much more about the world around me, what is expected of me, and demands. I think playing games helped me to be socialised to girls' roles both at home and school.

Brock et al. (2009) affirmed that playing enables children to actively construct their understanding of gender identities. Similarly, Peterson, Eisazadeh, Rajendram, and Portier (2018) asserted that children understand gender through the social world; for instance, they make meaning of possible gender roles through building and maintain relationships. For example, with the name-tag play activity (Chapter Five), I noted that learners' drawings and picture choice had some links to gender socialisation. Many of the pictures and the learners' conversations about them portrayed gender-based identities with girls' drawings signifying traditional notions of femininity (love and beauty) and boys' masculinity (speed/power and recreation):

Some girls were focused on themselves; as Khayo and Myenzi competed with each other for pictures of women and girls, all I heard was, "*This is me*" and "*This is my mom*". I observed that the boys were much more interested in pictures related to playing, like motorbikes, cars and soccer, or else preferred playing games on cellular phones. (Chapter Six, 6.4)

This activity also enabled me to learn about and understand some gendered beliefs and practices of my learners, as they could easily portray them through visual images.

I tried to create playful social interaction opportunities to counteract some traditional gender divides I encountered in my childhood. For instance, I invited girls and boys to play marbles, which was mostly only played by boys in my primary school years. I was pleased to see girls and boys playing together with confidence and attentiveness (Chapter Six, 6.5):

I felt that the game had drawn learners' interest, and both boys and girls had fun playing it. I was delighted to see some groups with both boys and girls in one team; this gave me the impression that girls felt comfortable with the game. It also showed me that they enjoyed the game as much as the boys did. This was important to me because I did not get a chance to play the game in my younger years as I was scared of the stigma that it was a 'boy's game' and that I would be regarded as not a normal girl. Seeing my learners freely playing meant their attitude and mentality were free from being judgemental or seeing each other as unequal in terms of gender.

Furthermore, I was interested in how social interaction through play could foster children's relationships with others, especially their peers. As Preziosa (2017) highlights, play promotes social connections. In my classroom. I have observed how playful pedagogy can help build bonds among children. For example, with the post office game (Chapter Five), the fact that it was guided play meant that I could divide learners into mixed-ability groups, which enabled them to learn to work as a team and therefore encouraged cooperation. Learners who did not usually socialise got a chance to feel more comfortable with each other.

I believe that social interaction through play pedagogy can promote a calm and easygoing way of engaging children in learning. As I reflected in my letter to my sister (Chapter Three, 3.11):

I learnt so much from you as we played together and I think learning through play helped me learn in a calm, relaxed environment, while I was not aware that I was learning.

With these happy memories in mind, I aimed to use play to foster a safe and comfortable classroom atmosphere for learners to engage, express themselves, and understand each other through interrelating. Sabeen (2016, p. 7) confirms that playing together builds bonds among learners and between teacher and learners, and maintains that such relationships create a classroom community of sharing learning and fun. This implies that playful pedagogy could strengthen and develop a warm, calm and engaging classroom environment (Miller, 2013). Therefore, it allows children to feel at ease, free and comfortable to learn through connecting and enjoying each other's company.

I have found that playful pedagogy is a particularly appropriate approach to social interaction in the early grades of schooling, where learners are still young and adjusting to the school environment and new relationships. To illustrate, the excerpt below from Chapter Six shows

how playing could familiarise children with their environment, assisting them in improving their understanding of social life, building social relationships and strengthening their friendships. I introduced the ‘playing school’ game as a free-play game where they role-played different characters to imitate teaching and learning in the school or classroom:

I believe this was a perfect game for my learners, as it enabled them to build social bonds, as some of them did not know each other very well. It also helped to develop various skills that are important for social living. For example, I noted that even shy learners that other learners usually take for granted were able to stand up for themselves as they were playing. Nolwazi is known as a quiet, withdrawn girl, but she could talk and claim back what others took from her without her consent during play. The learners were also able to resolve issues that arose during play without running to me as they usually do to report each other for misbehaviour. (Chapter Six, 6.2.1)

Thus, playful pedagogy facilitated an atmosphere of companionship and joy and a spirit of love among my learners. Similarly, in the memory stories in Chapters Three and Four, I recalled how playing offered us much more as children than just enjoyment – it developed unity as we shared the common practice of ‘playing’. I believe that playing was one way in which we were able to satisfy our childhood dreams or desires.

Nevertheless, this was not always immediately the case with my playful pedagogy lessons, as some children would not feel like playing when I introduced the game. I had to learn to be patient with them and let them join in when they felt like it, which prolonged the length of a game. Consequently, sometimes I felt that I could not yet introduce a new game when I still wanted to observe and learn what they knew or understood about what I was teaching them.

As a final point, I was interested to observe how social interaction through play can allow children to feel in control, allowing them to collectively make decisions and arrangements. For instance, the children may have to determine how the game is played and who or even whether one can join the game or not. As Gray (2011, p. 454) maintained: “In the play, children learn to control their own lives and to manage the physical and social environment around them”. For example, in the case of the number search game (Chapter Six), I acknowledged that once my learners felt in control of the game they gained confidence, and in that way were able to own the play and, most of all, to enjoy it:

I noticed that they did not report so many of the challenges they confronted but dealt with them independently. For instance, I saw some learners quitting the game and joining other groups to play with, while others would ask for a recount of their teammates’ score and correct each other. If one had skipped one dot as they counted, they would recount until they all agreed on the score. (Chapter Six, 6.7)

8.2.1 Playful pedagogy can enhance children's communication

Communication can be both verbal and non-verbal. In the prescribed Grade 1 curriculum (Department of Education, 2011), communication development includes various ways of interacting to acquire, express and pass on messages, such as listening, writing, reading, performance and drawing.

My memory-work made me aware of the vital role of play in developing young children's communication. The games I recalled involved many forms of communication. A few examples are hide and seek, the 'cow game' and storytelling:

After reaching that number, the seeker would notify the hiders that she was beginning the search by shouting, "Ready or not!" If she found someone she would call out loud the name of that person. The others would remain hidden; if the seeker failed to find them, they would run or race to touch the home-base area. Once they had touched it, they would have to shout "Home!" (Chapter Three, 3.2)

Another game we played along the way to and from school was a 'cow game'. We would dig holes in the ground to get ants out and play imaginary games where we pretended ants were cows and the ant holes were a cows' kraal....We named and communicated with the ants, as our elder brothers or fathers did with cows. (Chapter Three, 3.2)

The supper was usually enjoyed with my parents telling us either family history background stories or entertaining us by telling folk tales. My older siblings loved to hear more about our family history background, while and my younger siblings and I enjoyed the folk tales. We would ask my parents to tell us one story that we all enjoyed listening to repeatedly. (Chapter Three, 3.16)

Recalling these communicative experiences made me aware of how playful pedagogy can allow children to communicate through either free play or guided play.

Peterson's (2016) research on learners' play reveals that children communicate in various ways for different purposes while playing. Han, Moore, Vukelich and Buell (2010) illustrate that guided play has excellent possibilities for developing children's communication learning. Similarly, Ramani and Eason (2015) propose that encouraging guided cooperative play activities in classrooms gives children opportunities to practice and expand their communicative capabilities. Below are examples from Chapters Five and Six that illustrate learners' engagement in communication as they listened and shared their ideas in guided play activities. The first example involves the number search game:

This game was teacher-directed and I anticipated that it could help my children learn how to count and identify numbers from each other. They acquired social skills as they learnt to interact, solving their problems or dealing with different situations. The game also required them to listen and understand what they were told, for example, the rules of the game and how it was played. Hence I believe it also developed them in listening skills. (Chapter Six, 6.7)

In an English lesson, learners had to discuss their feelings concerning a folktale. I told the learners the folktale and they had to draw a face showing their current emotions regarding how they felt about two of the characters. In this way, they were responding to the folktale through verbal and visual communication:

It was quite impressive to see my learners fascinated by this activity. Most of them kept asking each other about which emotional face they drew next to each animal. (Chapter Five, 5.9)

Another instance was an English lesson for which I composed a dramatic rhythm that the learners had to perform. I reflected on how the musical play learning allowed them to express themselves easily without having to discuss anything, just through bodily communication:

I noticed that learners I thought were not doing well in English surprised me, as they responded and performed well in this play activity. (Chapter Five, 5.7)

I also observed various kinds of child-directed communication during free-play activities. For example, in Chapter Six, I discussed how a group of learners came back from break time to ‘play school’ together. One girl (Thobeka), who is self-confident in class (especially in group and class discussions) told the others that she would be their teacher and would ‘read’ them a story. She ordered the group to sit quietly, took a book and ‘read’ them an imaginary story. This caused the group of learners with Thobeka to be more engaged and participate in listening to a made-up story.

Another occurrence I witnessed was during the hopscotch game (Chapter Six, 6.3):

To my surprise, even the learners who were not taking part in the game were also paying attention, as they also commented on the game’s process. Others were giving support and suggestions to the players... Bahle was demonstrating to Kwazi what he was telling him.

Yoon (2014) stresses that play and communication are interconnected. During play, children bring social and cultural communication resources that help them to assert identities, navigate relationships, and use appropriate language. My observations in the classroom showed how laying can nurture children’s communicative capabilities and confidence.

I generally find that some children in my class are quite reserved, and I hardly hear them during formal teaching and learning. With some such learners, such as Nolwazi (Chapter Six, 6.2.1.), it was only during playful activities that I heard their voices and learnt about their characters. I observed a change in behaviour and attitude when children play; some children feel that the environment is friendlier and they become more open.

While it was a good thing that learners felt free and became more open, sometimes it was difficult to control the learners' excitement; they would be noisy, and I was concerned that they would disturb other classes. I would occasionally ask my learners to lower their voices; however, I was concerned that disciplining learners not to make noise somehow limited the play element. I suspect that this could inhibit my learners' playfulness and make them constantly conscious of classroom rules; hence they could have thought that playing is guided by classroom terms and conditions, which was not my intention.

8.2.2 Playful pedagogy can foster children's empathy

Being empathetic means having emotional awareness. A child can respond to others' feelings, as they can understand another's pain and fears, and provide the necessary support to their classmates or peers. A relationship built on such attributes maintains joy and love as children take care of each other. Falk and Darling-Hammond (2012, p. 133) emphasised that children's play can promote "authentic relationships rooted in compassion and caring". The extract below from Chapter Three (3.4) serves as an example of how, during my childhood, playing equipped my peers and me with such authentic relationships:

Playing skipping rope was not determined by friendship, but one could ask to join any group. For instance, if you found your peers playing, you would ask to join them and we would play all together. In that way, one was able to get along with many people, and it also allowed us to learn and understand people's differences, such as their personalities. Therefore, this helped us to be trained from an early stage to tolerate each other's differences. I believe that understanding and accommodating people's differences is a vital skill that needs to be nurtured at an early stage. It allows individuals later or when adults to maintain a good relationship with other people.

Memories such as this persuaded me that playful pedagogy could help children to maintain healthy relationships and create a culture of love, caring, and happiness at school.

Playful pedagogy gives children time to spend together and teaches them important life values such as respecting and tolerating each other's differences. Such values could develop other

qualities, like empathising with others and caring for one another. Miller (2013) states that playing awakens vital elements of social living, as children learn to understand other peers' situations while playing. Below I offer an example from Chapter Six to show how playing can cultivate friendship and promote the value of caring for one another. It refers to the lid game (*amagenda*), which is played in groups. During this game, I observed how the learners did not want anyone to feel left out:

I was quite happy to see that in the end, no one was left out. The few scared and reserved learners who felt that they did not belong to any of the groups were invited by other learners to join their groups. I was also thrilled to see learners sharing lids among each other to ensure that every group has some lids to play with. (Chapter Six, 6.6)

Also, I noted how, through playful pedagogy, my learners, as young as they are, chose to share the little that they had (such as school materials like pencils and erasers) with other children. They were also able to help each other with their school work; for example, if I put my learners in small groups, they could work together and help each other complete the given task. The following extract from Chapter Five shows how playful pedagogy can promote the value of helpfulness. I developed this playful activity in an English lesson, where learners had to discuss their current state of emotional feeling:

I noted a lot of interaction among the learners, as they were assisting each other in completing their tasks. For example, some helped each other choose appropriate colours for the animals, and they also lent each other crayons. (Chapter Five, 5.9)

Therefore, playful pedagogy nurtured a culture of love, sharing, and caring as my learners learnt to look after each other. Sabean (2016) understood that playing fosters empathetic relationships and thus creates a classroom community. This implies that learners become one family, as they get along with each other even if they are not friends, show sympathy and care for one another. I witnessed that most of the time learners chose to come in pairs or groups to play, which showed that playful pedagogy has the power to build and strengthen relations.

I think that employing playful pedagogy in an under-resourced school aided some of my learners who come from disadvantaged home backgrounds because during the play they did not feel more disadvantaged than others in any way. I noticed how sharing became a culture of our classroom practice. Learners understood that there were not enough classroom resources for everyone to use or play with. Therefore, they would give each other a chance to play, which allowed especially those who are less fortunate to enjoy and feel the exposure and experience of (for example) playing with toys. The below extract from Chapter Six (6.4.1) reflects one of

the playful pedagogy free-play activities, where learners had to make a fantasy book using pictures from magazines to display things that they liked or valued:

This game allowed my learners to work together as they formed their fantasy books; they could accommodate their differences as they liked different things, but that did not lead them to insult each other. I liked that they could tolerate and respect each other as they had to share magazines to form their fantasy books using pictures of things that they liked. Although they argued over pictures at the beginning, they learnt to be patient with each other and were able to wait for one another to finish using the magazines. They even learnt to share or use one magazine simultaneously, as they would look for pictures in a group of two or three. They worked with each other very well as they could share space in a book to paste their pictures.

I think that playful pedagogy gives children time to enjoy each other's company, to be open to a certain extent and to build friendships among themselves. Playful pedagogy strengthens relationships among children; it built unity and a sense of belonging. It, therefore, assists children to learn to cope or deal with and understand their differences. However, while I found that applying playful pedagogy has useful effects on a child's upbringing, I must say that engaging this approach in my teaching was a bit challenging. This is because I felt that there was not enough time to engage free play in my teaching. I therefore opted for guided play in most of my lessons, where I introduced a game to link it with my lesson; thereafter learners could use gaps between lessons or their free time to play the games as they wished. I suspect that this might have limited opportunities for children to enjoy each other's company and develop bonds, especially as I began by guiding or determining how the game should be played.

8.3 Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children

In Chapter Six, I described how I introduced the stones game (*amagenda*) to my learners, but instead of using stones, we used cool drink lids; however, some boys felt that it was a girls' game and they created their own car game using the cool drink lids. The following example shows how a boy in my class manipulated the stones game into a car game that he and other boys enjoyed:

Judging from how they were interacting with objects and with each other, I could see that they were imagining that the lids were real cars. Some boys from other groups also joined the boys playing cars. This showed me that the learners were comfortable and had got used to the idea of playing. Moreover, I believe that for the learners to decide on types of games and conditions for how the game was to be played, they were experiencing freedom, less pressure and less fear. (Chapter Six, 6.6.)

Bennett et al. (1997) declared that play as a child-initiated activity gives children a sense of ownership. Hence, they value and delight in their play activity. I found a similar example in my own childhood. I recalled how we would play with my brother's truck to our satisfaction, even though it was against my mother's rule. This implies that playing offers children freedom of mood, enabling them to experience pleasure in taking trying out new ideas and experiments:

My mom had stipulated conditions as to how we were supposed to play with it, and she never allowed us to put heavy objects such as stones in it because she thought that if we did, we would break my brother's truck. With every little chance we got, we would play with the truck in our own manner, just to satisfy ourselves and enjoy playing with it. We habitually played with it to copy what big trucks do, mainly to carry stuff and offload it somewhere else. We did not do this because we were disrespectful, but I think we were eager to feel the experience of driving a heavily loaded truck. (Chapter Three, 3.12)

To me, this demonstrated that playing is natural for children, and has the potential to set a 'free mode' in a classroom, as when my learners felt free to initiate their own cars game.

Although the play in my classroom was most often enjoyable, it occasionally created conflict among the players when it was a competitive game. Additionally, sometimes, there would be inequality as some learners would overpower the others. I also experienced cases where learners would not play the game fairly, which created tension. This would put me in a difficult position, as I would be tempted to take part in the play to settle some matters, especially when I could see that a game was not being fairly played. I had to remind myself not to interfere in the game to allow my learners to develop or strengthen their talents and learn the effects of playful pedagogy in teaching and learning.

I also noticed that playing heals children emotionally; it allows them time to forget about their worries and enjoy others' good company. Even if a child was emotionally down, they would slowly forget their worries and enjoy playing when they joined in to play. I believe playful pedagogy is especially helpful in assisting the child in surviving or keeping them away from hurting to make their day less stressful and more pleasurable. In this way, the child can also get their work done, as playing would distract their mind so that they would not focus on the pain they were going through.

For example, in Chapter Five (5.4.1), with the name-tag game, I described how playful learning made it easy for a learner who was unhappy to feel comfortable enough to join in a learning activity:

I believe that this activity uplifted learners' spirits. I noted that Bahle, who had come to school feeling very down, became more engaging, and I felt many learners gained self-confidence because most of them were much more willing to join in, even the quiet learners.

A similar example is shown in Chapter Three (3.4), giving a brief account of how during my childhood playing helped us to forget our worries:

In my view, playing was the best time for me to relax, and it was the only time I did not worry about anything, such as homework and home chores. I did not let anything compromise my time to play.

I have found that playing creates a comfortable and agreeable space for learners – and they become fond of their classroom. They gain interest and become optimistic about life and learning. My school is under-resourced, which meant that I had to plan appropriately to not jeopardise my research. For instance, although there was a lack of space and resources (such as costumes for the dramatic play described in Chapter Five), I could make do and utilise reusable resources that were of interest to the children.

Because the school does not have a playing field, I could not conduct any playful pedagogy lessons outside as I would have liked to. This could have limited learners' enjoyment, as all games had to be suitable for the indoors. Nevertheless, learners were quite happy and enjoyed a chance to play, and some would come to school early to get time to play in class. In Chapter Six, I explained how my learners were blissful when they arrived at school to find that there was a new game:

I took out the marbles I had brought and loaded them in a tub and placed them in our classroom playing corner. The early-comers were over the moon as they saw marbles. (Chapter Six, 6.5)

In addition to the fact that the learners enjoyed playing and that playful pedagogy promoted a secure and comfortable space for them, I strongly feel it strengthened my relationship with them. For example, some would approach me with ease, for instance, to ask if they could play during break time or during gaps, such as before school started or after school.

8.4 Reflection

I understand that young children such as the Grade 1 learners are energetic and need to be kept active. Exploring playful pedagogy as a teaching approach has encouraged me as a teacher to enable my learners to be active participants rather than passive and dependent. With playful pedagogy, children become cooperative and engaged in their learning. Playful pedagogy allows children to create a problem and also encourages them to find solutions. Thus, I have found that playful pedagogy enables children to learn to set a goal or purpose and to make a way to achieve their set goals. Playful pedagogy accommodates and motivates children's thinking, imagination, creativity, and ideas in their learning; thus, it does not use only the teacher's beliefs and thoughts as the core of education.

In contrast, I have observed how learners become withdrawn with more formal, teacher-directed 'chalk and talk' learning because they do not have any input. As a teacher, I have realised that I need to provide a favourable, rich and resourceful environment encourage children to be hands-on in their learning. In this way, I believe that they can make sense and meaning of their environment, discover or accumulate new knowledge, and build new understanding.

Taking a socio-cultural perspective helped me understand that children can bring ideas and knowledge that they have learnt from home or their community to share in the classroom through playful pedagogy. For example, children's thinking and communication are culturally situated. As a teacher, I observed and learnt about their values and practices from their interaction through playful pedagogy.

I also learnt that even though my school lacks a playground or playing field, I needed to develop a space for children to play. The fact that my school is under-resourced was one of the challenges I had to deal with. Lack of material resources led me to learn that you do not require expensive materials to provide play for children; as a teacher, I need to be creative and improvise.

I also experienced a challenge in terms of time constraints. Although I was aware that playful pedagogy aims to allow learners to construct and enhance their knowledge, I felt that sometimes this was a long process. I was concerned that it would delay me from starting my next planned lesson on time, since I introduced some games hoping that they would lay the foundation for teaching some of the prescribed content. However, sometimes, I would find that some learners

were not participating fully or had been deprived of opportunity by others. In these cases, not all learners would get a chance to play, so I would have to extend the game to allow everyone a chance.

As a Grade 1 teacher in an under-resourced school, I need to be creative to develop a healthy learning climate. This implies that children's learning does not have to be hindered because of their school or home circumstances. I believe that my teaching is more fun and far more interesting when I adopt an appropriate pedagogy to aid and encourage my learners to take an active role in their exploration of learning. It is essential that my classroom environment stimulates learners and offers various learning opportunities. My school is under-resourced and most learners come from impoverished homes. Playful pedagogy can allow them to experience things they may not have ever seen before, through using their imagination and sharing ideas.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the remaining two themes construed from exploring my childhood memories and teaching using playful pedagogy: (1) *Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction* (which is supported by two sub-themes: (a) *Playful pedagogy can enhance children's communication*, and (b) *Playful pedagogy can foster children's empathy*); and (2) *Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children*.

Overall, playful pedagogy promotes a social classroom where learners can enjoy interacting, communicating and building compassionate relationships. As a Grade 1 teacher in an under-resourced school, I have learnt how to inspire the learners and create a welcoming, comfortable and resourceful classroom environment.

The next chapter, Chapter Nine, is the concluding chapter of my thesis. This chapter gives a review of all of the chapters, highlighting key messages. I then look at how engaging in self-study aided my professional learning. Next, I present a collage that I created to make sense of my learning about self-study through my research journey. After that, I deliberate on how my evolving understanding of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective and critical concepts helped my research. Finally, I consider my study's contributions to the knowledge base of self-study research, and offer my conclusions.

CHAPTER NINE: LEARNING THROUGH DISCOVERY

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of my self-study research was to improve my practice as a teacher by exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom. In my view, children are active beings and always eager to know how things are made and what they are made of, meaning that they are ever-curious about life. This led me to understand that just sitting and listening to what I am teaching might be tedious or unstimulating for them. I anticipated that adopting an approach like playful pedagogy would promote learners' engagement, interaction and development.

9.2 Purpose and structure of this chapter

I gave this chapter the title 'Learning through discovery', as I intend to show what I learnt in conducting my research. I also aim to provide an overall picture of my research thesis in terms of what it entails; the title is an informing statement that captures keywords that sum up the findings and emphasises the impact of playing on a child's development.

This chapter provides a review of the thesis, with a synopsis of the previous chapters. I further elaborate on the critical conclusions of these chapters. Next, I look at how engaging in self-study aided my professional learning and reflect on how my discoveries have been useful to me. I then present a collage that I created to look back on and express my learning about self-study through my research journey. To follow, I consider my conceptual and theoretical learning, where I discuss how my understanding of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective and critical concepts supported my research. Lastly, I consider my study's contribution to the knowledge base of self-study research, and put forward my conclusions.

9.3 Review of the thesis

9.3.1 Chapter One

In this introductory chapter, I communicated the focus and purpose of the study. I clarified why I wanted to explore playful pedagogy in teaching my Grade 1 class. I introduced myself as a primary school teacher and supplied pertinent background information on my professional context. After that, I presented the research questions that guided my research: Question 1: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* Question 2: *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* I shared my preliminary insights into the concepts of playful pedagogy and teacher learning and discussed how I adopted a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. I then gave a brief introduction to my methodological approach.

This chapter shows how I anticipated that playful pedagogy would be of value in the Grade 1 classroom, in that it could be a useful means for teaching and learning. I saw that a socio-cultural theoretical perspective on playful pedagogy and learning could help me develop my practice to promote a child-friendly, interactive approach. The chapter emphasises that I aimed to actively enrich my professional understanding and continuously improve my teaching practice.

9.3.2 Chapter Two

Chapter Two offered a detailed account of my self-study research approach and methodology. I explained that in self-study research, a teacher engages in examining herself in a professional learning process. I also emphasised my understanding that self-study requires a teacher to do self-introspection to understand how her teaching is influenced by her experiences, which would enable her to make meaningful changes in her teaching practice. I described the research setting: a semi-urban, under-resourced primary school serving isiZulu-speaking learners. Next, I acknowledged my roles as a teacher participant and researcher in the study. I described my research participants (32 Grade 1 learners) and critical friends team (three fellow teachers and doctoral students). I stressed the significance of my critical friends' contributions. Next, I explained my use of five data generation practices, namely: a) artefact retrieval; b) reflective journal writing; c) drawing; d) audio recording of learners' discussions concerning their playful activities and Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu lessons over two terms; and e) taking

photographs in class. I explained my inductive, arts-based approach to data analysis and interpretation, using collage as an interpretive medium. I reflected on ethical issues, highlighting the special ethical obligations towards child research participants. I explained how I sought to establish a strong foundation for my self-study's validity. Finally, I discussed some of the difficulties I experienced in the research journey and how I dealt with these.

This chapter draws attention to my learning that, in self-study research, it is vital to work in collaboration with others as it is easy to misinterpret or omit critical information. I certainly believe my critical friends team played a huge role in helping me overcome some challenges. Also, playful pedagogy allowed my learners to bring their knowledge and understanding into the classroom. In that way, I was able to learn from them.

9.3.3 Chapters Three and Four

Chapters Three and Four focus on my childhood memories. In both chapters, I responded to my first question: *What can I learn about playful pedagogy from my childhood memories?* In Chapter Three, I recalled the games I used to play as a young child, describing how I played at school and home. I used artefacts and memory drawings and metaphor drawings to stimulate my reminiscences and understand the feelings and emotions attached to the playful experiences.

In Chapter Four, I gave details of the games and playful activities I participated in when I was in high school. In this chapter, I showed that playing at this stage had a different meaning – some games were played because you were good at them, and there was supervision. Others were more like play activities, such as traditional dancing and the book reading club, which I joyfully joined with school friends, peers or neighbourhood friends. I also used artefacts and memory drawings to illustrate the stories told in this chapter.

These two chapters draw attention to how remembering my past experiences allowed me to understand the privilege I had enjoyed through being able to explore and experience the world around me through play. Playing developed my imagination and I was able to understand things I had never seen before. Playing helped me gain insight and values that my schoolteachers might not have taught, for instance, to be social and creative. Understanding my memories of play helped me comprehend that exploring playful pedagogy in my class could be advantageous to my learners.

9.3.4 Chapters Five and Six

Chapters Five and Six gave an account of lessons I conducted in the classroom to explore playful pedagogy, and address my second question: *What can I learn through exploring playful pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom?* I adopted playful pedagogy in all four learning areas: isiZulu, Numeracy, Life Skills, and English.

In Chapter Five, I described how I intentionally created games according to the lesson goals, hoping to make it easier and more fun for learners to grasp certain concepts. Some games were aligned to what I was going to teach, and others were to help learners make sense or meaning of what I had already taught them. This chapter demonstrates how, in these games, learners were able to help each other, make their own decisions, and try out different methods of finding solutions. By observing the learners at play and reflecting on my teaching, I was also able to figure out where and how I could assist them or bring in and build new ideas from what they already knew.

In Chapter Six, I described other playful pedagogy activities. This chapter demonstrates how I bring in some indigenous games from my childhood. The chapter comprises two parts. The first part depicted games that involve free play, and the second portrayed some teacher-guided games. The chapter demonstrated how I found that these indigenous games were appropriate for my learners' development stage and were suitable for the classroom environment.

Both chapters draw attention to how playful pedagogy served to create a free and comfortable classroom environment, as learners joined in and took part in most of the games that I introduced. This created a lot of interaction; it also boosted communication and strengthened relationships. Playful pedagogy allowed me to make learning fascinating and fun, and enabled me to help learners to learn from each other. Bringing play into the classroom allowed me to learn about myself and my learners and to gather valuable information to improve my teaching and children's learning experiences.

9.3.5 Chapters Seven and Eight

Chapters Seven and Eight demonstrated how I reconsidered the data generated through recalling my childhood memories and teaching classroom lessons using play (as represented in Chapters Three to Six). I clarified how, for the interpretation and analysis of data, creating and presenting a collage helped me form four main themes.

In Chapter Seven, I presented and discusses my playful pedagogy collage. I then discussed the first two themes: *Playful pedagogy can enhance child development*; and *Playful pedagogy can promote a positive attitude towards life*. I also reflected on my learning from these themes about implementing playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom. In Chapter Eight, I presented the two remaining themes: *Playful pedagogy can encourage social interaction*; and *Playful pedagogy can bring joy to children*.

These chapters highlight how playful pedagogy helped me motivate learners' involvement in my teaching, creating opportunities for children to bring in their knowledge and ideas and share their thoughts and feelings. The chapters show how I observed that playful pedagogy allows children to experience and explore and promotes a social classroom where learners can enjoy interacting, communicating and building human relationships. Moreover, the chapters draw attention to my learning and growth as a teacher.

9.4 My professional learning

An important insight from this study is how both free play and guided play can bring enjoyment and add value to teaching and learning. I can see how guided play is particularly beneficial to academic learning, since it allows the teacher to guide children towards a learning goal. As for free play, such as the indigenous games, I learnt that such games can encourage cooperation, build good relationships, and help young children adapt to the school environment. I have noted that when learners play such games, they feel free, are willing to participate and take pride, and appear to be confident to take up challenges.

I have also discovered that I need to be observant and not limit my expectations of a playful activity to achieve one specific academic purpose. Instead, I should be prepared for learners to gain multifaceted development. I noted that one game may benefit learners in terms of more aptitudes than I expected. With playful pedagogy, I should not limit expectations regarding

what learners could achieve. Therefore, I need to be prepared, vigilant, and accommodative to find meaning in how a playful activity can assist children in terms of development.

Moreover, playful pedagogy offered me a chance to learn about learners' needs without questioning them. For example, I could identify whether something was bothering them or had disturbed them from observing their interactions. I understood that a learner was experiencing some problems at home or even at school when I noticed them taking out their frustrations or anger on their classmates or withdrawing and wanting to play alone.

Carrying out this research has been an eye-opener for me, as I have learnt that the prescribed curriculum does not have to limit my teaching capability. I have to determine what is best for my learners and try to find age- and context-appropriate strategies to use for their benefit while meeting curriculum goals. As I teach young children, it is essential that my teaching approach caters to learners' needs and draws on their interests.

Through my self-study research, I have become more aware of how learners look up to me for many things. For instance, the learners expect me to support them socially and emotionally. Children want to feel special or cared for. To achieve that, I need to give each learner a chance and not undermine their capabilities. By this, I mean that no learner should feel left out. As my learners are young, I must create space or time for each of them and allow them a chance to feel that they are part of their learning. Education that does not serve children's needs or interests might fail to accommodate all learners, resulting in those who feel left out or not catered for lacking enthusiasm in their schoolwork.

Moreover, as a teacher, I have learnt that I am the influencer; I have so much power to create change. For instance, besides offering learners academic knowledge and I could also build positive attitudes to learning. Creating an encouraging classroom environment and fostering a supportive teacher-learner relationship could encourage learners to be optimistic about schooling and beyond that, even about their life challenges.

Undertaking this research has enabled me to understand that playful pedagogy is an accommodative teaching approach. Some learners in my school come from impoverished or insecure home backgrounds. Playful pedagogy stimulates a resourceful and welcoming classroom environment for all children. It does not undermine children's experiences and knowledge but instead promotes their unique proficiencies and creativity. I have learnt that

every day in education brings a chance to do better, especially in bringing about change in children's lives.

One of my fundamental discoveries is that when teaching through play, games can be adapted to use available resources. Being in an under-resourced school should not limit me as a teacher. Play materials can be collected and made from what is on hand. Space can be made by rearranging the classroom – even with a large class. I have learnt how essential it is to improvise, be creative and be optimistic in order to offer the best education to learners. Playful pedagogy can promote the use of local and reusable resources to enhance children's learning experiences. I have become determined to learn more about how I could do better for my learners, and not be held back because of my school situation. I must frequently review my teaching plan and approach to ensure that they feel part of their learning. To continue to promote learning through the play after my self-study research project, I have already started exposing my current learners to numerous playful activities and games, with the intention that they get to learn through experiencing and exploring.

Working in collaboration with my colleagues stands as a core factor that would help me do well and contribute to others' professional understanding. And this is something I hope to work towards in the future with my colleagues at school. I have already become more active in my school phase meetings. Phase meetings are workshops to assist teachers in that particular phase to share their practices or acquire new knowledge and be informed of what is expected in each learning area. For instance, with the insights gained from my self-study research, I shared the challenges that I encountered and also what I think has worked well in my teaching. I hope that other teachers might follow suit and share their views and engage more in group discussions. In this way, we could share or teach each other useful teaching strategies.

9.5 Making meaning of self-study in relation to my research thesis journey

I created another collage (Figure 9.1) to help me find meaning and understanding of self-study as it played out in my research journey. To make the collage, I used magazine pictures and words that I felt represented how self-study helped me learn to better my teaching practice. I presented and discussed my collage in a session that included my critical friends team and my supervisor, Prof. Pithouse-Morgan. Discussing my collage helped me make sense of and discover how self-study has positively influenced my attitude and improved my teaching practice.



Figure 9.1: Self-study collage.

9.5.1 Presenting and discussing my self-study collage

My collage reveals my learning about self-study as a teacher-researcher. Engaging in self-study means that it is about me as a teacher trying to improve my teaching practice. The words in my collage ‘In the classroom’ (Figure 9.2) mean that my focus is on my classroom. Self-study research helped me to study my teaching practice and find ways to improve my teaching approaches.

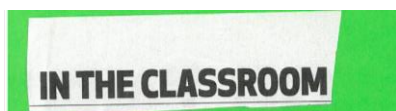


Figure 9.2: The words ‘In the classroom’.

This picture in Figure 9.3 shows a man who is doing art, and shows how he focuses on his drawing to make sure it portrays what he means. The artist is wearing his glasses, which shows that he wants to get the fine details of his art right. This means that self-study compelled me to look closely and not overlook some teaching practices as irrelevant; for example, I became aware of how my beliefs could influence my teaching. I thought the glasses may also mean that I needed to look at things from different angles; I could not depend solely on my own thinking and understanding. I also needed to work with others.



Figure 9.3: Picture of a man doing a drawing.

Figure 9.4 shows a mirror and a ceiling light; in choosing this picture I wanted to emphasise the light reflected on the mirror, which to me symbolises that self-study research brings everything to light – I got to understand myself. Self-study allowed me to learn to know myself by making connections or joining the dots of development. For instance, it enabled me to discover my past experiences to understand my present teaching practices.



Figure 9.4: A picture of a mirror with ceiling light.

The words in Figure 9.5, ‘Discover your story’, interlink with the picture of a mirror, show that self-study research was like a journey where I could pick up from here and there the pieces that constructed my true self.



Figure 9.5. The words ‘Discover your story’ overlaid on a mirror.

In my collage, I included the words ‘Think outside the box’ and ‘Alert’ (Figure 9.6) to express how I have learnt to reason and be considerate before taking any action and how self-study taught me how to always be careful. Self-study has made me critical about my teaching practice; it has taught me to engage with my professionalism and self-values. I have learnt to be conscious in terms of not neglecting things that I think are minor, but to try to address them and understand how my actions are being influenced by my principles and the impact they have on my teaching practice.



Figure 9.6. The words ‘Alert’ and ‘Think out of the box’.

Working in a group with my critical friends to verify my observations and share ideas was a key component of my self-study. Therefore, I included a few pictures and words to express how much I valued communication and sharing ideas with others. For example, Figure 9.7 displays pictures of a mother and two ladies and stokvel (savings society) women; these emphasise that I had to listen, share, and learn to review my professionalism.



Figure 9.7. From left to right, a picture of two ladies; mother and daughter; and women in a *stokvel* (savings society).

The words in Figure 9.8, 'The goodness of fellowship', refer to how, through self-study, I shared my concerns, challenges and other information concerning my study with my critical friends. I got so much support from them as they guided me in developing myself and my teaching practice.



Figure 9.8: The words 'The goodness of fellowship'.

The words in Figure 9.9 say, 'Sometimes sharing some of your own school memories can reassure them'. This means that collecting and reflecting on my own stories was vital for understanding my past and background. This assisted me in understanding children's interests and encouraged me to meet my learners' needs.



Figure 9.9: The words 'Sometimes sharing some of your school memories can reassure them'.

I also learnt about the contributory factors that influenced my thinking, practices or my profession. I used the words 'Your own identity' (Figure 9.10) to show how I learnt that my identity as a teacher might be influenced by certain factors that positively or negatively impact teaching practice.



Figure 9.10: the words 'Your own identity'.

The words in Figure 9.11, 'Human memory stick', meant that self-study research required me to learn about myself (identity) using numerous tools to jog my memory about my experiences.

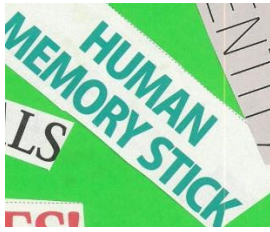


Figure 9.11: The words ‘Human memory stick’.

I used the word ‘Journals’ (Figure 9.12) as journal writing helped me record my observations and the information that I shared with colleagues and critical friends.



Figure 9.12: The word ‘Journals’.

I learnt that doing self-study means I am in a self-development process, which brings about a positive change in my teaching and the learning of learners. I believe that undertaking self-study changed me into a new person with a different mindset, attitude, and energy towards my teaching practice. The picture in Figure 9.13 of a young girl painting represents the new vision and changes that self-study has brought about in my teaching.



Figure 9.13: A girl painting a picture.

9.6 Reflection on my collage

From discussion on the collage, I learnt from critical friends and my supervisor that self-study promotes the significance of not being fixed, but always critical and looking for strategies to better myself. One of my critical friends said that the words ‘Your own identity’ meant to him that as teachers, we need to keep changing as we need to educate ourselves to develop. Referring to the picture of a child painting, Prof. Pithouse-Morgan noted as follows:

This picture could also change in a process; it is like you painting a picture of yourself as a teacher and your teacher identity keeps changing all the time; for instance, at the beginning of a self-study you might have been somebody else in terms of teaching approach, but as you progress with your study you learn new things and that builds to a new person. I, therefore, understood that self-study allows you the potential of changing and keeps you self-motivated.

The discussion also taught me that self-study has enabled me to be careful and open-minded and look for opportunities in developing my learners' learning experiences. A critical friend suggested that the collage artist is attending to the fine little details of the drawing. As a teacher, I learnt to understand that everything should matter to improve my professional practice.

To grow and prosper in my profession, I need not box myself in but need to be flexible, allow change, and learn from others. One of my critical friends noted that a child and mother picture symbolised the value of learning from children as a self-study teacher-researcher. This implies that a teacher may not be able to enhance children's learning experiences if they do not have every learner's full background. Therefore, as a teacher, I need to draw closer to them and value my learners' voices. This means I should even listen to their 'silent voices'. As one of my critical friends stated, as teachers we are all about changing learners' lives, which might be impossible if I am not available to them.

For my self-study research, it meant that I needed to attend to all of the little things and put everything together, for instance, to use different data generation tools to bring evidence or enrich my study. Self-study has taught me to think positively and take my time to study my professional practice and myself, to enhance my knowledge of my professionalism. Prof. Pithouse-Morgan indicated that we might not always notice how our teaching practice is developing because of the self-study research: "You might not notice the small changes that build up all the time, but as self-study researchers, we are changing lives". She further noted that my use of bright green cardboard as the collage background symbolised growth, and the picture of a light could mean that we shine through from doing self-study research.

Self-study is a process; I understood that I could never say that I have learnt enough to provide me with sufficient knowledge and skills and continuously push myself to develop myself and learners. Self-study does not take anything for granted, no matter if we might think something is small or not valuable. Self-study considers everything as a rich piece of information that

might significantly impact an individual's personality and positively or negatively affect her teaching practice.

Self-study allowed me to look at or review things differently from how I had always done them before. With self-study, one manages to find one's inner self without being ashamed and to work on it in a manner that would bring change within and to others.

9.7 My conceptual and theoretical learning

In my study, I explored two key concepts: playful pedagogy and teacher learning. I saw how playful pedagogy can be a building block for child development. Playful pedagogy allowed me to ascertain I offered children opportunities to construct their knowledge. Playful pedagogy helped me teach learners to grow from what they know or are familiar with – this attracts their interest and enables them to quickly grasp what they are taught. I learnt to recognise the knowledge that learners start off with and encourage them to share their knowledge and skills. Regarding teacher learning, I discovered that as a teacher, I must regularly improve my teaching. This self-study has taught me that to develop in my teaching profession; I need to take the initiative in enhancing my knowledge and proficiencies. Thus, I feel that I have learnt to understand how my beliefs and culture shape my practice; this implies that my teaching is related to my creeds or previous experiences and circumstances. Hence, teacher learning offered me a chance to make sense of how my principles and values influence my practice, and how I can draw on these to further improve my teaching practice. It has allowed me to consider various strategies, for instance, to learn and respect or value other opinions, such as those of my colleagues or others who share the same interest, to assist me in advancing my practice.

Exploring playful pedagogy and teacher learning helped me to learn that I am a social person. I like doing challenging things, and I am an adventurous person who does not enjoy following the same routine every year. I get bored by knowing that I have to follow a prescribed teaching plan; I want to explore and bring new concepts into my teaching to make learning exciting, in the sense that learners should always be willing or eager to find or learn something new. Playful pedagogy gave my learners a sense of freedom. It has granted them a chance to interact freely as it increased their participation, which encouraged communication and led to social relationships. It has also strengthened my relationship with learners, as I feel it has enabled me to maintain a comfortable and calm classroom environment. I have become more approachable,

which aids learners to share their problems or joyful moments. In that way, I learnt from my learners – for instance, what they enjoy and how they perceive other things – as they also learnt from me.

My study was informed by a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. I became aware of how knowledge is socially constructed; thus, an individual's thinking and reasoning are situated in a specific context. In that sense, socio-cultural ideas helped me understand that children's learning begins at home, meaning that learners come to school already knowing something – so they do not come to school 'empty-minded'. I, therefore, learnt not to disregard learners' home background knowledge. Hence, taking a socio-cultural stance helped me be aware that education should be child-centred to allow the learners to share or apply their knowledge.

By taking a socio-cultural stance, I could revisit my childhood memories of play to understand how playing could be associated with learning and child development. In that way, I learnt that there are plenty of play opportunities in children's lives, as children do not see time or place as constraints to playing. I understood that playing could take place anywhere and take any form; in that sense, school situations such as lack of resources should not be a stumbling block to exploring playful pedagogy.

9.8 Contribution of this study to the knowledge base of self-study research

Kitchen (2020) recently argued that more needs to be done to promote self-study among school teachers so that self-study of teaching will become influential in changing the status quo in schools. I believe that my self-study offers a distinctive and inspirational exemplar of a teacher employing a self-study approach. Furthermore, in exploring playful pedagogy in a Grade 1 classroom in an under-resourced school, my study adds to the knowledge base of self-study research by demonstrating how schoolteachers can work with children as valued research participants who can also gain self-knowledge in the process (Whitehead et al., 2020). This thesis provides a detailed account of how a teacher-researcher can encourage young children to participate and bring their awareness into the research. My study shows that self-study research was not only about me benefiting in my professional learning. The way I conducted my research encouraged my learners to engage and voice their thoughts and understanding. Luthuli et al. (2020) shared that interactive self-study research methods can provide marginalised populations such as children the power to speak in ways that respect the children's dignity and

perspectives and acknowledge them as key research contributors. Through my playful research and teaching strategies, learners could communicate freely and I was able to portray their unique voices and give prominence to them in this thesis.

9.9 Conclusion

Exploring playful pedagogy in my Grade 1 classroom in an under-resourced school was a marvellous learning experience for me. I have learnt that I am a valuable tool in my teaching, and for me to teach well, I need to know who I am first. I can bring about the desired change. This does not mean that self-study has taught me to disregard others or other elements of education, but it has led me to understand that for me to improve on my work, I need to know that my being has a lot of influence on my teaching practice. Hence, with self-study, I have learnt to be self-critical by not being defensive about what others might think of my teaching practice, but to be willing to let others share their perspective for me to develop in my teaching profession. I feel I have acquired that through self-study and am responsible for my personal growth and professional development, which means I have the power to bring about the change that I want to see in my teaching profession or classroom environment. The best thing about self-study is the visible progress I have made in my professionalism: I own it because I made it happen!

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



6 February 2018

Ms Nontuthuko Queeneth Phewa 205508572
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Phewa

Protocol reference number: HSS/0055/018D

Project Title: Playful Pedagogy in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom: A teacher's self-study

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 23 January 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.

Yours faithfully

.....
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 / snymann@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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APPENDIX B: TURNITIN COVER PAGE

1/28/2021

Turnitin Originality Report



PhD thesis 28 January 2021 by
Nontutuhuko Phewa

From Chapter drafts (Phd)

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Class: MEd self-study
Assignment: Coursework and dissertation
Paper ID: [746259944](#)

paper text:

CHAPTER ONE: INCORPORATING PLAY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING 1.1 Introduction I am a Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3) teacher. I am currently teaching Grade 1 and I have taught this grade for four years. The school that I teach at is located on the outskirts of a town in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and is situated in a semi-urban area. It is a black African school and has 1350 learners and 31 staff members. All the staff and learners are black people and the majority of learners and teachers are Zulu speaking. The school is not more than 35 years old. For about 10 years the school was operating from mobile containers, as the Government was still looking for a suitable place to build the school. However, the site which the school was built on is not big enough; for example, there is a limited area for learners to play in and not enough classrooms. Hence, each of the intermediate (Grades 4, 5, and 6) and senior (Grade 7) classes have about 65 to 70 learners. The purpose of this study was to explore playful pedagogy as a valuable approach in teaching and learning in an under-resourced Grade 1 classroom, to instil learning engagement in children and stimulate cognitive development. I aimed to improve my practice as a teacher by exploring playful pedagogy. Playing is a vital part of children's lives; their daily routines involve play. Samuelsson (2008) proposed that playing forms part of a child's everyday life's natural components. However, with my school having limited space and no playground, children are standing in the corridors to eat and finish their lunch. I have noticed that learners do not do anything at break time that refreshes their bodies or frees their minds. I believe play can create calm, happiness, and a relaxed feeling, which I think is the break that all children need after a long period of working and cooperating with teachers' instruction. Play can give one a sense of being in control, and I have observed that children like to take control and feel responsible for being in charge. I undertook this study because I anticipated that learning through play would encourage social interaction, making teaching and learning less stressful and fun for learners. Social

**APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR LEARNERS' PARENTS/
GUARDIANS**

250380 Mangangeni
Mariannhill
Dylom Road
3624

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Nontuthuko Queeneth Phewa. I am currently studying for a PhD in Education at University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. I am conducting a research on exploring playful pedagogy with my grade 1 learners. The research objectives of my study are to learn from my childhood memories about playful learning and to explore playful pedagogy with my grade 1 learners.

To collect information for my research study, I would like to work with my Grade 1 learners. I have selected my learners because the study requires me to explore playful pedagogy as a teaching strategy that stimulates all aspect of child development such as socio-emotional development, cognitive development and enhance speech development. To gather data I will use the following data collection methods which will include Grade 1 learners in providing contribution to my study.

Data generation activities are:

Drawing

I will ask learners to draw a picture of themselves, animals and toys.

Fantasy book

I will ask learners to make a fantasy book.

Audio recording

I will record learners as they participate in their drawing and compiling fantasy book activity and as well as they will be discussing what they have drawn.

I will audio record Life skills, English and isiZulu lessons and Mathematics lessons

Taking photographs

I will take photographs of learners as they participate in their drawing and making fantasy book activity.

I will also take photographs of my learners during teaching and learning of Life skills, isiZulu, English and Mathematics. No faces will be shown in the photographs.

Please note that:

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

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

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

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

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours faithfully

Miss Phewa Q.N

DECLARATION

I (Full names of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to my child or ward participating in the research project: *Playful Pedagogy in an Under-resourced Grade 1 Classroom*, and their contributions being used in the thesis and any other publication based on the thesis.

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

I hereby provide consent to:

Use of my child /ward's drawing and fantasy book

YES/NO

Audio-recording of my child discussions on a drawing and fantasy book activity

YES/NO

Audio-recording of my child's contributions to Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu lessons

YES/NO

Taking photographs of my child' during teaching and learning in all four: Life Skills, Mathematics and isiZulu and English lessons

YES/NO

Signature of parent/ guardian.....

Date:.....

**APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR LEARNERS' PARENTS/
GUARDIANS (ISIZULU VERSION)**

Incwadi yokucela imvume ukuba umntwana abe ingxenywe yalolucwaningo

250380 Mangangeni
Mariannhill
Dylom Road
3624

Mzali/ umbhekeleli womntwana

Igama lami ngingu Nontuthuko Queeneth Phewa. Ngingumfundi waseNyunivesithi yakwaZulu Natali kwikundla yase Edgewood eSouth Africa ngenza iPhD yezemfundo. Ngenza ucwaningo maqondana nokufunda kwabantwana besenzisa indlela yokudlala.

Ucwaningo engilwenzayo lumayelana nokufunda ngomlando wami ngisakhula, ukuze ngikwazi ukubheka imidlalo esasiyidlala isithokozisa kodwa futhi sifunde kuyona. Ngoba uncwaningo oselwenziwe luyaveza ukuthi ukufunda ngokudlala lusiza umntwana akhule kahle futhi athuthukise ulimi, akwazi ukwakha ubudlelwane nabanye, akwazi ukwenza izinto ngokuzimela okubalulekile luthuthukisa nomqondo womntwana.

Ukuqoqa ulwazi engiludingayo ukwenza uncwaningo, ngizosebenzisa lamathuluzi alandelayo:

Ukudweba/Drawing

Abafundi ngizobacela ukuba badwebwe isithombe sakhe, esomndeni kanye nesethoyizi alithandayo analo noma afisa ukuba nalo.

Ibhuku lezifiso/Fantasy book

Abafundi ngizobacela benze ibhuku lezinto abazithandayo, bazosika izithombe kumaphepha bhuku bexoxa ukuthi bafisa ukuba nakho noma banakho vele.

Ukubaqopha/ Audio recording

Abafundi ngizobaqopha bechaza ngabakudwebile, nabakwenzile kwi bhuku lezifiso labo. Ngizophinda ngiziqophe kanye nabo abafundi ngibafundisa kumalesini ayisikhombisa kwisifundo samaKhono Empilo, Izibalo Kanye nesiZulu.

Ukushutha/ Taking photographs

Abafundi ngizobashutha bezibandakanya ekwenzeni imidwebo kanye ibhuku lezifiso. Ngizophinda ngibashutha abafundi ngibafundisa kumalesini ezifundo ezahlukene njenge: sifundo samaKhono Empilo, Izibalo Kanye nesiZulu nesiNgisi (ubuso babafundi ngeke buvele.

Nakhu okubalulekile okumele ukwazi:

- Nginyaqinekisa ngithi amagama abafundi azogcinwa eyimfihlo kuloluncwaningo.
- Imininingwane yomntwana izogcinwa iminyaka emihlanu endaweni ephephile, bese iyashabalaliswa.
- Kuyilungelo lakho mzali ukuba umntwana wakho ahlanganyela noma angahlanganyeli kuloluncwaningo.
- Ukusebenzisana ukuqoqa ulwazi kuloluncwaningo angeke lukwakhele inzuzo, lumayelana nokuthuthukisa ulwazi.
- Imiphumela yaloluncwaningo izoxwa nabafundi ngokusebenzisa izithombe ezidwentshiwe ukutshengisa buhle nokuxhumana kokufunda ngokudlala.

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

Umpathi wami u Phrofesa Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan otholakala esikhungweni sezemfundo ephakeme i-Univesithi yaKwaZulu-Natali, enkundleni yase-Edgewood. i-imeyili yakhe ithi-Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za noma 031-260 3460

Umpathi wase-ofisi locwaningo umnumzane Premlall Mohun utholakala kwi imeyili ethi-mohunp@ukzn.ac.za noma enambeni yocingo ethi-031-260 4557

Ngiyabonga ukuthi uzibandakanye kuloluncwaningo

Yimina ozithobayo

Miss Phewa Q.N

Amazwi afungelwe

Mina (amagama aphelele omzali noma umbheki womntwana) ngiyavuma futhi ngiyaqonda ngakho konke okushicilelwe kulomqulu kanye nezinhlalo zocwaningo, ngiyanikela ukuba umntwan wami azibandakanye kulolucwaningo kanye nokuletha izethulo zakhe ocwaningweni olumayelana nesihloko esithi: *Indlela yokufunda ngokudlala eklasini lebanga lokuqala*. Imibono yabafundi izosetshenziswa kwi thesizi kanye nakwezinye incwadi ezihambelana nethesizi.

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngivumelekile ukuhoxisa umntwana wami kulolucwaningo noma inini uma ngifisa.

Ngiyavuma:

Ukuba kusetshenziswa imidwebo kanye ibhuku lezifiso yomntwana wami
YEBO/CHA

Ukuba umntwana wami aqoshwe lapho echaza ngomsebenzi wakhe awudwebile kanye noma exoxa ngebhuku lezifiso alenzile
YEBO/CHA

Ukuba umntwana wami angaqoshwa lapho efaka imibono yakhe kumalesini ezifundo: Amakhono Empilo, iZibalo, isiNgisi Kanye nesiZulu
YEBO/CHA

Ukuba umntwana wami angashuthwa lapho efaka imibono yakhe kumalesini kwizifundo: Amakhono Empilo, iZibalo, isiNgisi Kanye nesiZulu noma enzibakanya ekwenzeni imidwebo kanye nebhuku lezifiso.
YEBO/CHA

Ukusayina komzali noma umbheki womntwana
.....
Usuku.....

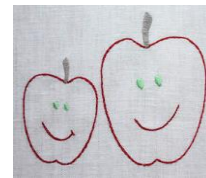
APPENDIX D: LEARNER ASSENT FORM



Hello grade 1, I am doing a research on how I can cultivate playful learning with you grade 1



and I want you to be part of my study



In my study I want you to draw pictures like your favourite animal or toy and I would like you to present to us your drawing like



What is special about your favourite animal or toy? I will also want you to work in groups to make a fantasy book where you will cut and



paste pictures from magazines or newspapers to show things that you like or wish for. It could be place you want to visits, toys, games or even programs you enjoy watching.



My study will also engage you in different play activities like drama play such as singing and acting.



I will take photos and audio record both drawing and collage presentation; I will also audio

record my research teaching lesson with you



Are you happy or unhappy to be part of my study?

APPENDIX D: LEARNER ASSENT FORM (ISIZULU VERSION)

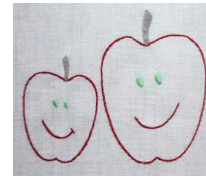
Incwadi yokucela umntwana abe ingxenye yoncwaningo



Sanibona grade 1, mina ngenza uncwaningo olumayelana nokuthi ngingagqugquzela kanjani



ukufunda ngokudlala lapha eklasini lethu. Ngakho grade 1 ngizonicela ukuba nibe ingxenye yoncwaningo engilwenzayo.



Kuloluncwaningo nizodweba ithombe zamathoyizi, izilwane noma ingabe ikuphi okutshengisa into ekujabulisayo. Uma senidwebile nizobe senethula nichazela iklasi ukuthi udwebeni.



Nizolindeleka uthuthi nichaze ukuthi kungani ithoyizi noma isilwane osithandayo siyigugu kuwena?



Ngizobuye nginicele ukuthi nisebenze ngokuhlanganyelana ukwaka ibhuku lezifiso lapho nizosika izithombe kumaphephandaba nakuma phepha bhuku.



Nizozinamathisele izithombe sakhe ibhuku elitshengiusa esikuthandayo kungaba izindawo esifisa ukuzivakashela noma abalingisi, abaculi, opopayi enikuthandayo.



Nizophinda nizibandakanye kwimidlalo ehlukene, njengemidlalo yokulingisa kanye nokucula.



Ngizonishutha izithombe ngibuye ngiqophe into enizidwebile nengxoxo ngebhuku esilenzile,



ngizobuye ngiqophe izifundo engizozenza zoncwaningo engizozenza nani la eklasini.



Ngabe uyakujabulela noma awukujabuleli ukuba yingxenye yoncwaningo engilwenzayo?

APPENDIX E: PROFESSIONAL EDITING CERTIFICATE

L. Gething, M.Phil. (cum laude)

WHIZZ@WORDS

PO Box 1155, Milnerton 7441, South Africa; cell 072 212 5417

26 January 2021

Declaration of editing of PhD dissertation:

Playful Pedagogy in an Under-Resourced Grade 1

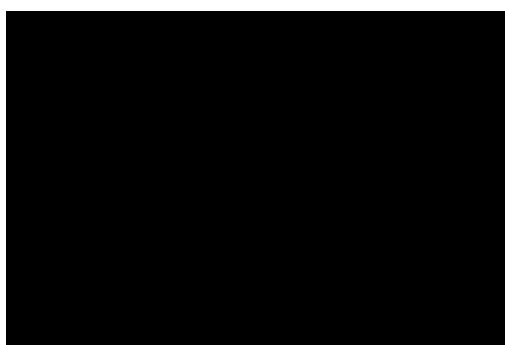
Classroom: A Teacher's Self-Study

I hereby declare that I carried out language editing of the above PhD thesis on behalf of the author, Nontuthuko Phewa.

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

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

Yours sincerely



LEVERNE GETHING

leverne@eject.co.za