

# **AN EXPLORATION OF MY TEACHING PRACTICES WHEN TEACHING WRITING TO HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS: A NOVICE TEACHERS' SELF-STUDY**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Education of the University of  
KwaZulu-Natal in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education.**

**Specialization: Language & Media Studies**

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**Date: November 2021**

## DECLARATION

I, Seshen Brijmohun declare that

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Dr Bridget Campbell

## DEDICATION

Matha, Pitha, Guru, Daivam - Translated word for word, is: “Mother, Father, Teacher, God”.

The meaning of this adage is the greatest truth and is the order in which one should offer reverence.

I dedicate this thesis to my amazing parents, Mr & Mrs H. Brijmohun, in recognition of their utmost contribution and dedication to my life. It is because of you – I am.

I would also like to dedicate my project to every individual who served as a “teacher” in my life, and taught me many lessons – you have added flavour to my existence and make life worth living.

Last, but definitely not least, I devote my thesis to God Almighty, who has made this, and every other occurrence, in my life possible. Aum Sri Sai Ram - I dedicate my life to serving in your will and pray... *Samastah Lokah Sukhino Bhavantu*, meaning - may all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that freedom for all.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A journey is never straightforward nor smooth. Along the road, we must surpass challenges, in the form of bends, potholes, gravel and so forth. Many individuals may jump on the vehicle of your journey at the start, but along the way they may jump-off, and only a select few will stay at your side and complete the journey with you. Through the ups and downs, lefts and rights, this journey has been an enthralling one, and it is therefore absolutely apt for me to acknowledge the individuals who fuelled this journey and continue riding along with me.

Dearest Dr Bridget Campbell, thank you for being the chief chauffeur of my study. As cliché as it may sound – this project would have not been possible without your undivided supervision and splendid support.

My sincerest gratitude goes to Adhiti Maharaj, Prabashnie Danariah, and once again, Bridget Campbell – for critically riding along this journey with me.

To my Mum & Dad – Harry & Roshila, Brother & Sister – Ashin & Jyothi, you people are not just my family, you are my life. I appreciate everything you do for me and will forever be grateful to you.

To my brother from another mother, Avikaar Rajkumar, cheers to you for keeping me sane, and allowing me to create a balance between work and play. I appreciate you, brother. It's friends like you – Avii, Selene & Prabz who understood and encouraged me.

A special thanks to Professor Kiveshni Naidoo for proofreading my study, your editing and constructive feedback is much appreciated.

To the many other individuals who extended their support to me during this long ride, both knowingly and unknowingly, I thank you. These include my extended family, dearest cousins, colleagues, neighbours, learners, and amazing friends – God bless you all.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, as a novice teacher. My research questions were: *What are my learning experiences of writing? What are my teaching experiences of writing?* and *How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?* My study was guided by three key concepts, which are Socioculturalism, Pedagogy, and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Pertinent literature which underpinned this study, included the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing. Taking a self-study approach enabled me to compose and analyse my experiences of teaching and learning of writing to become cognisant of the constructive and undesirable influences on my Pedagogy, with the hope of building a more effective, and meaningful Pedagogy. This methodology was apt for my study as I delved into my own experiences of learning, how I was taught writing and my own teaching of writing. In doing so was critical of how I was taught writing as well as my past and current teaching practices. I acknowledged that there is room for improvement and worked with critical friends to alter my practices. Data generation strategies stemmed from reflective practice and were inclusive of narrative journaling, lesson reflections, source document retrieval and critical friend conversations and peer reviews. As the study progressed, I explored various ways in which to improve my teaching of writing from what I had learned through revisiting and adjusting my teaching practices. Learning from my past and present experiences, enabled me to adapt my current teaching practices and to explore ways of being more responsive to my learners. The themes that emerged, through thematic analysis, are parental involvement, a supportive teaching and learning environment, pedagogic practices, and the use of teaching resources when teaching writing. This self-study journey has not just made me an improved teacher of writing, but more culturally relevant teacher overall. Being a meaningful teacher denotes that I need to be au fait with my learners, their lived experiences and the environments with which they are familiar, as well as how to communicate with them within a setting of supportiveness. New challenges mean fresh possibilities will continually arise and I will never stop questioning and trying to improve upon my Pedagogy.

Key words: teaching and learning of writing; self-study; culturally relevant pedagogies; life-long learning; novice teacher

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## **Chapter One - Beginning My Writing Odyssey**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study is an exploration of my teaching practices when teaching writing to high school learners. It was driven by a self-study approach, wherein I explored the influences on how I learnt, and now teach writing, in order to improve upon my practice. This thesis was a journey that has allowed me to reconnoitre my experiences of learning and teaching writing. In this chapter, I begin by introducing myself, and my current professional context, wherein I briefly define and discuss the phenomenon being studied as well as my positionality. I then move on to stating my research questions, and their respective objectives. Thereafter, I briefly mention my methodological approach, concepts that guided my study, and in the conclusion, outline the structure of my thesis.

As a novice teacher, I began my teaching career with information, abilities, and attitudes gained through my initial teacher education as well as previous educational experiences as a learner (Allender & Allender, 2006). However, Vilakazi (2013) asserts that this is insufficient for classroom competency in an ever-changing environment and that we must constantly increase our understanding and expertise in order to strengthen and advance our teaching practice and Pedagogy. Similarly, Nieto (2003) stated that in order to advance in their jobs, teachers must continue to study. In the exploration of my teaching practices, I also saw the need to reflect upon my learning experiences, as teaching and learning do not happen in isolation, but rather in a matrimonial process. Therefore, I chose to explore my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, in order to become a more competent, culturally responsive teacher of writing, as I believe that writing is a crucial aspect for our lives at large.

Writing is a fundamental skill. In school, learners write about the materials read or presented in class to enhance their understanding (Graham & Hebert, 2011). At home, writing provides a means for initiating and maintaining personal connections, as we text, email, and befriend each other using a variety of social media networks (Freedman, Hull, Higgs, & Booten, 2016). The importance, flexibility, and ubiquitousness of writing exacts a toll on those who do not learn to write well, as this can limit academic, occupational, and personal attainments (Graham, 2019), hence the need for me as a novice teacher of writing to improve on my teaching practices,

so as to deliver operative writing instruction to develop my learners wholistically. I am an English first language speaker and hail from a sociocultural background of literate parents and siblings which is important to note as there are many learners whom I teach who are English second language speakers. I need to be cognizant of the fact that they encounter challenges that are foreign to my experiences.

Classroom writing practices are predisposed by teachers' beliefs and knowledge (Graham & Harris, 2018). I have therefore chosen to study my experiences of learning and teaching writing, as writing is an important skill and my teaching of it must be effective. According to Rietdijk et al. (2018), teachers devote more time and attention to teaching writing if they are better prepared to teach it, feel more confident in their capabilities to teach it, derive greater pleasure from teaching it, and consider it an important skill (Troia & Graham, 2016).

## **1.2. My current professional context**

I hold a Bachelor of Education degree specialising in English, as well as an Honours degree in Language & Media studies. I am currently in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching, and am teaching grades 9, 11, and 12 English Home Language at a high school in a residential suburb of Tongaat, KwaZulu-Natal. I have also taught English as a First Additional Language. Teaching English is something I am very passionate about, as it is a language that is universal.

According to the Auckland English Academy (2020), English is currently the global Lingua Franca. The importance of writing is something that I emphasize with my learners through my pedagogical practices, as I believe that it is one of the most important skills to acquire and it is an important skill in language production. Its importance increases when it comes to writing in English which is commonly utilized for global mediation of knowledge (Mahboob, 2014; Mansoor, 2005; Marlina & Giri, 2014). Hyland (2003) advocates that performance in language development is subject to improvement in writing skills and teachers of writing thus have a responsibility to assist their learners to develop the necessary skills. I decided to undertake this study, so as to understand my writing journey better and to use what I learnt about my teaching and learning of writing to enhance my current teaching thereof.

The school at which I teach is a quintile 4, public high school in Tongaat in KwaZulu-Natal. All South African ordinary public schools are categorised into five groups (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019), called quintiles, largely for purposes of the allocation of financial resources ranging from quintile one which is the 'poorest' quintile, while quintile five is classified as the 'least poor'. These poverty rankings are determined nationally according to the poverty of the immediate community around the school, as well as certain infrastructural factors.

The school falls under the Pinetown district (Mafukuzela-Gandhi circuit) and caters for Grade 8 – 12 learners ranging from 13 – 21 years old. The school comprises of approximately 820 learners of which 75% are Indian, 20% are African and 5% are Coloured. Learners come from medium to low-income households and live in close proximity to the school, and some live in the nearby settlements. English is studied as Home Language; however, some learners are not English home language speakers and lack proficiency.

The school is fairly financially stable, as learners pay an annual fee of R2 250 (schools in quintile 1, 2 and 3 have been declared no-fee schools, while schools in quintiles 4 and 5 are fee-paying schools). However, some learners do not pay school fees and sign a fee-exemption form. This could be due to the concern raised with the quintile system that the improper classification of learners based on the area of the school which does not take into consideration the diverse areas where the learners come from (Longueira, 2017). In other words, there could be a learner coming from a township with socio-economic problems and attending a quintile 4 or 5 school and I have thus noted that some of my learners' hail from informal settlements yet attend school in a residential suburb. Our teachers ran a sponsored feeding scheme program, until recently, when the school was considered for the school nutrition program.

The school comprises of 28 teachers, of which 5 are school governing body teachers and the balance are state paid (including the principal, deputy principal, an acting departmental head and 2 appointed departmental heads). All standard classrooms comprise of furniture including approximately 45 desks and chairs respectively, a chalkboard, as well as a teacher's cupboard and table. Learners receive both notebooks and textbooks.

### **1.3. Research questions**

This research is guided by three questions:

1. What are my learning experiences of writing?
2. What are my teaching experiences of writing?
3. How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?

### **1.4. Methodological Approach**

A self-study methodology guided this research because I reflected upon my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, and reflection is a key component to self-study, which will further be elaborated upon in chapter three. I could not only reflect upon my teaching, without knowing the ways in which I was taught, as it is this that enabled me to learn how to write and thus built the bridge to becoming a teacher of writing. Bergh et al. (2019) state that self-study researchers have the knack to inquire into their own practice, question it, seek to see things from numerous perspectives in order to see and re-see what they do, why they do it, and how it could be done differently. Researchers who conduct self-study strive to learn from their own and others' instructive experiences.

Self-study research is self-initiated, aimed at improvement, interactive and collaborative at various points, employs various, typically qualitative, methodologies, and is validated through a process based on trustworthiness (Hawley & Hostetler, 2017). As a novice teacher of English, I view myself as being in the process of becoming a teacher of writing. I wish to understand the experiences of my own writing journey by engaging in self-study. I used my reflective diary, and experiences which influenced my own initial learning to examine my writing journey, through writing about and reflecting on my memories and experiences of what influenced my own initial learning and then teaching of writing. In addition to my reflective diary wherein I reflected on my school and university years, I kept a lesson reflective journal wherein I reflected on my classroom practices. Zierer (2015) states that teachers should have a critical-reflective attitude to know how and why they do what they do, and the

systemic competence to adapt to changing circumstances, in order to be considered a successful effective teacher.

Validation of my memories sufficed through source documents and artefacts as evidence. My lesson reflections were strengthened through conversations with my critical friends.

I have thus used my learning to enhance my current teaching. Knowing what my experiences of teaching and learning of writing were, resulted in improving my practice as a teacher of writing and the English language at large.

### **1.5. Concepts that guided my study**

The concepts underpinning this study, are Socioculturalism as coined by Vygotsky, Pedagogy, and Culturally Responsive Teaching. These concepts will be elaborated upon in chapter 2.

#### **1.5.1. Socioculturalism**

Hodges (2017) mention that the sociocultural view theorizes that children learn about the world around them from people who have more intelligibility about content matter, known as more knowledgeable others (MKOs) (Vygotsky, 1980). From this basis of the more knowledgeable other (MKO), language researchers (Gee, 2000) additionally advanced sociocultural theory to highlight the vitality of language to social and cultural interactions (Perry, 2012). This prominence on language permitted for future researchers to relate sociocultural theory to writing instruction and development.

I, therefore, have chosen to allow the concept of Socioculturalism to guide my study. In doing so, I discuss the concepts of MKO's, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding, as well as internalization, all of which are tenets of Sociocultural theory, in order to better understand the context in which I teach, and how this concept influences my Pedagogy. Scaffolding is when teachers give guidance to learners. Another precept of Socioculturalism utilized in this study is that of internalisation, which is a notion that proposes an individual is able to observe and internalise the ideas and processes of their surroundings as they partake in social interaction. It is therefore apt

to make use of these principles in the exploration of my writing journey, so as to better understand it and issues that affect it.

There are many issues that teachers are faced with, and thus need to adjust their teaching methodology, in order to respond favourably to these issues. In essence, one of the biggest hindrances in education currently is the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a worldwide issue, yet the response needs to be local (Tashiro & Shaw, 2020), and the adjustment process depends largely on the sociocultural context (Schwartz et al., 2020, Van Bavel et al., 2020), inclusive of our interactions with others and the systems that bind us (Kitayama & Park, 2020). Ando (2021), however mentions that this sociocultural aspect of understanding, is often missing in the teaching of writing, which reiterates the usage and contribution of it in this study.

### **1.5.2. Pedagogy**

According to Ngcongo (2012), pedagogic practices make reference to encounters in formal education through which teaching, and learning take place. Thus, a simple definition of Pedagogy is that it is the method and practice of teaching. This definition will guide my study, as I wished to reflect and understand the influences on my writing journey, in the hopes of subsequently improving my English Pedagogy. I believe that in doing so and continuing to grow, I will keep learning and encourage my learners to grow.

Teachers from all grades and contexts experienced the necessity of rethinking their roles and finding ways of supporting learners' academic tasks (Rodríguez-Triana et al. 2020) in recent times. The rethinking of these roles and finding better practices in supporting learners, is associated with pedagogic practices, hence the need to hone in on Pedagogy in my study.

### **1.5.3. Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Cruz et. al (2020) states Culturally Responsive Teaching is a set of practices designed to build on learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as teaching and learning occur. Larson et al. (2018) concur that the understanding and amalgamation of a learner's culture into the classroom is denoted as culturally responsive teaching or culturally responsive Pedagogy. Studies thus show that learners make academic progress when their teachers are prepared to incorporate Culturally Responsive



Teaching into classroom Pedagogy (Cabrera et. al., 2012), and that when teachers identify and acknowledge learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and integrate them into learning, learners experience greater academic success (Dee & Penner, 2017). Thus, Culturally Responsive Teaching has the potential to enhance learning outcomes for learners.

## **1.6. Outline of the structure of my thesis**

In Chapter one I introduce my study and myself before providing insight into my current professional context. I then move on to state my research objectives and the questions related to these. Thereafter, I briefly mention my methodological approach, concepts that guided my study, and in conclusion outline the structure of my thesis.

Chapter two is a discussion of my theoretical framework and review of literature within the scope of the phenomenon being studied. I chose to work with three concepts to guide my research, which are those of Socioculturalism, Pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. I will then provide a review of literature pertinent to this study, wherein I discuss the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing. These concepts are apt to my study and are elaborated upon in chapter two.

Chapter three commences by explaining my research design approach and paradigm. I have used a self-study methodology for my study and elaborate on this research approach in this chapter. My data generation strategies are discussed next and these include narrative journaling, lesson reflections, source document retrieval and critical friend conversations, experiences and observations. The data analysis process follows and finally, I present matters on ethical considerations, as well as validity, and then go on to conclude the methodology chapter.

Chapter four responds to my first two research questions: *What are my learning experiences of writing?* and *What are my teaching experiences of writing?* In the chapter, I reflect on my learning, and thereafter my teaching experiences of writing, in stages. I begin by recalling and discussing my first experiences of writing. The discussion then moves on to my memories and deliberations about my progression of my writing journey. What follows are my university years as a student, and pre-service

teacher. I then reflect on my teaching practices as a student teacher which is followed by a discussion about my experiences as a current novice English teacher.

The purpose of chapter five is to address my third research question: “*How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*”. In this chapter, I present the findings, in the form of themes, that were extrapolated when I analysed the data generated by means of the field texts. The themes induced are: parental involvement; a supportive teaching & learning environment; pedagogic practices; and teaching resources. These themes are discussed whilst also highlighting my learning.

Chapter six will review and conclude the thesis, as a whole. It will highlight my learning, and thus briefly conclude my study, by subsequently making recommendations as to what I can do to improve my practice as a novice teacher of writing.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

This chapter began with a brief introduction of myself, and my current professional context. I then moved on to stating my research questions, and their respective objectives. Thereafter, I briefly mentioned my methodological approach, concepts that guided my study, and conclusively, outlined the structure of my thesis. The chapter to follow will discuss my methodological process.

## Chapter Two - Fuelling My Writing Odyssey

### 2.1. Introduction

My opening chapter, Chapter one, outlined and discussed the background of the study, introduced the phenomenon being studied, and offered a brief outline of all the chapters that were to follow.

I begin Chapter two by briefly explaining my chosen methodology, I then mention and discuss my theoretical framework, which is inclusive of Socioculturalism, Pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. The chapter will then go on to conduct a review of literature within the scope of the phenomenon being studied – discussing the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing.

#### 2.1.1. Methodology

As a teacher of English, who is interested in understanding my experiences and what has influenced my academic life, I felt it is vital to reflect on my experiences of teaching and learning of writing in order to improve my Pedagogy. Fareed & Ashraf (2016) advocate that writing is a significant skill for the production of language. They further state that learning how to write has gained substantial importance over the last two decades. One of the factors contributing to this, is its use as a tool for effective communication of ideas (Graham & Perin, 2007; Haider, 2012). Language is used to teach written communication, and language is culturally formed and reconstructed (Kajee, 2011). The way in which I explored this was through self-study. I wanted to explore my writing experiences, in response to my first two research questions: *What are my learning experiences of writing?*, and *What are my teaching experiences of writing?* so as to better understand myself, with the hope of being more aware about my Pedagogy by getting to know what influences my teaching of writing, how I teach it, why I teach in that way and where I can improve, in response to my third research question: *How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*. In this chapter I first discuss my theoretical framework and go on to review the literature underpinning this study

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework.**

I chose to work with three concepts to guide my research, as I intended to work with and consummate complementary concepts. The concepts underpinning this study, as a life-long learner interested in being responsive to my students, are those of socio Culturalism, Pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. These concepts are apt and relevant to my study, and shall be elaborated upon further.

### **2.2.1. *Social Culturalism***

The theory of Social Constructivism was devised by Vygotsky (1978). This theory provides a significant framework for learning about human behaviour in conjunction to the social environment. The core idea of Vygotsky's framework is that social contact is critical in the development of cognition. Learning is impacted by social, cultural, and historical aspects, and it occurs through social interactions between experts and novices (Wertsch, 1991). Luria (1979) stated that "Vygotsky proposed that we should not look for the explanation of human behaviour in the depths of the brain or the soul but in the external living conditions of persons and most of all, in the external conditions of their sociocultural contexts" (p. 23). The lens of sociocultural theory is broad as a sociocultural theorist, when interpreting a learning situation, might attend to the broader social system in which the learning is happening before interpreting ways of thinking and development. The explanation of learning and development offered by constructivist theorists is only concerned with the individual and the manner in which sense making occurs through the individual's accommodation of experience (Cobb, 1994).

Hatano (1994) was particularly adept at combining sociocultural perspectives on learning with constructivist theories of learning, resulting in a "mixed" theory of conceptual knowledge that successfully accommodated both perspectives (Cole & Miyake, 2006). Thus, Vygotsky's theory aids us to comprehend how a person cognitively develops through their interaction with their social environment. It is for this reason that social culturalism is a key concept to my study, as I explored my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, in relation to my sociocultural context. In exploring my own teaching, I moved beyond my immediate surroundings and considered the sociocultural contexts of my learners in relation to my own. In examining the sociocultural theory, in respect of my study, I now discuss the concepts

of MKO's, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding all of which are tenets of Sociocultural theory.

#### **2.2.1.1. Sociocultural theory**

Sociocultural theory impacts on the way teachers teach and learners learn and emerged from the work of Vygotsky (1980) who posited that children learn about the world around them, from MKO's or those who have a greater mastery of the subject matter (Vygotsky, 1980). As teachers, we do not function in isolation, hence we are impacted by Socioculturalism, which also impacts on our learning and teaching. Vygotsky noticed that children are active learners, and a sociocultural theoretical perspective highlights the fundamental role of working together in making sense collectively of personal experience (Taylor, 2014).

According to Hodges (2017), sociocultural theory stresses motivation, and social effects as components of writing, implying the importance of considering Socioculturalism when teaching writing. From the sociocultural view, writing is thus a collaborative activity. Sociocultural theory is important to my study, as throughout my writing journey I was certainly influenced by my sociocultural background which has shaped the ways in which I learned and now teach, writing. The inclusion of sociocultural theory thus allows me to understand not only my experiences better but has conceivably enabled me to improve on my Pedagogy, as I consider the sociocultural contexts of my learners in relation to my own and take this into consideration in my teaching.

#### **2.2.1.2 More Knowledgeable Others**

According to Vygotsky's (1980) view, children learn from the world around them and from MKO's. Sivnarian (2013) stated that MKO's can be teachers, peers, or adults. I now realise, as a pre-school child and throughout my schooling I considered adults, such as my teachers and parents as the MKO's. Desmond (2010) advocated that "the child's first and longest-standing [teachers]" are the parents (p. 8). Desmond (2010) notes in her study of the Family Literacy Project that parents or guardians can play a significant role as the "first teachers" of their own children and assist children's literacy acquisition through the use of ordinary informal activities. She goes on to suggest that the best opportunities for learning occur when parents and children work together at home (Desmond, 2010). From the time I was a toddler, I was exposed to everyday

informal activities such as my father reading newspapers whilst I browsed through them. My parents would also take me to the library quite often and I was thus exposed to written materials throughout my childhood.

In relation to my study, individuals who were instrumental in my teaching and writing journey would have shaped my attitudes and views towards writing. Some of these individuals, like my parents, will be elaborated upon further in this thesis.

Teachers learn about teaching from their training in educational institutions and also from other teachers in their schools. They accomplish this through observing other teachers in and out of the classroom, conversing with them, and learning about the school's ethos, traditions, and customs (Sivnarian, 2013), hence relating to scholarship of observation. Thus, when collecting data for my research, it was important that I reflect on my experiences to find out the influences on how I learnt to write, and it was also important to reflect on how I was taught to teach writing so as to ascertain the influences on my learning to write and how I was taught to teach writing.

#### **2.2.1.3. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding**

The MKO concept is related with Vygotsky's second significant principle, known as the ZPD. These complementary principles are important in the scaffolding aspect of a child's cognitive development. According to Tudge & Scrimsher (2003), Vygotsky was not only interested in what MKOs brought to interactions, but also in what the child himself or herself brought to the interaction, as well as how the wider cultural and historical setting shaped the interaction, thus the concept of ZPD and scaffolding.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that to understand the connection between development and learning, two developmental levels must be eminent. These are the *actual* and the *potential* levels of development. The actual suggests that the accomplishments of a child can be demonstrated or performed independently. This is in contrast to potential levels of development as suggested by the ZPD - what children can do with assistance - the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Thus, ZPD is the limit to which someone can learn new information without the assistance of someone else. It describes the difference between what someone can achieve on their own and what can be achieved with expert guidance.

When teachers give guidance to learners, it is known as scaffolding. Scaffolding is a teaching method that encourages learners to achieve learning goals in collaboration with teachers or peers. When adapted to my experiences with teaching, I viewed the efforts of my lecturers and mentor teachers during teaching practices as scaffolding. According to this teaching method, teachers model how to solve a problem, and then step back to offer support whenever required. Through our teaching curriculum at university, we were taught about ways to solve problems, and our mentor teachers would equip us on how to deal with learners, however, we would then be left to conduct lessons by ourselves and were offered assistance when required.

Carlile and Jordan (2005) stated that a learner can study a certain amount on his or her own. However, with a teachers' guidance, more can be learnt. Teachers can recognise the stage the student is presently at, and offer suitable material, encouragement and prompts to move him or her on to the next level of learning. As the learning mentor, teachers provide scaffolding or support to assist learners to a higher level, while steadily withdrawing this support so that the student becomes more independent. In this way, teachers help their learners to internalise external knowledge and make it their own.

#### **2.2.1.4. Internalization**

Internalization is attributed to the process of learning where social interaction, mediated by language, is internalized to a new level of behaving and thinking. Internalization denotes the final stage of learning in which a person applies new ideas to unique situations and is no longer dependent on external support from the social environment. Narrative journal writing, which is my data generation tool, can mediate the internalization of new learning and help teachers make sense of themselves and their world (Bruner, 1994).

This concept of internalisation put forward by Vygotsky (1978) is an idea that proposes an individual is able to observe and internalise the ideas and processes of their surroundings as they partake in social interaction defined as, "new ways of thinking" (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016, p.103). During social interaction one's thinking is continually transformed by interaction with others. Zittoun & Gillespie (2015) advocate that internalization is the process by which culture becomes mind. Thus, internalization is vital to this study, as it enabled me to better understand how the social culture

around my experiences shaped who I am today as an individual, and as a teacher of English.

According to Vygotsky (1986), the concept of internalization recognizes unique human minds that owe their existence to and are inextricably linked with social, historical, cultural, and material processes (including brain activities). Internalization may be understood in one respect as "knowing how". Internalization is conceived of as a representational activity, a process that occurs simultaneously in social practice and in the human mind. From a sociocultural standpoint, human development is viewed as a gradual internalization of those processes that are initially shared between learners and later are viewed as independent problem-solving skills. A further aspect of internalization is when learners take tools and adapt them to personal use, perhaps using them in unique ways. Thus, Vygotsky's theory on Socioculturalism was valuable when exploring my experiences of having been taught writing, learning to write and becoming a teacher of writing.

### **2.2.2 Pedagogy**

Ngcongco (2012) states that Pedagogic practices can be defined as encounters in formal education through which teaching, and learning take place. Thus, a simple definition of Pedagogy is that it is the method and practice of teaching. This definition will guide my study.

There are different pedagogical approaches, which could be put into various categories: behaviourism, constructivism, and social constructivism. A behaviourist Pedagogy uses the theory of behaviourism to inform its approach. The theory of behaviourism in a classroom setting came from pedagogical research by Thorndike (1911), Pavlov (1927) and Skinner (1957). According to behaviourist Pedagogy, the teacher should be the sole authority figure leading the lesson, resulting in a teacher-centred lesson. A lesson using a behaviourist pedagogical approach might include a mix of lecturing, modelling and demonstration, rote learning, and choral repetition, all of which can be considered archaic. All of these activities are usually led by the teacher. However, during the course of the lesson, the shift may come where the learner is the centre of the activity and demonstrates learning that has occurred. In an everchanging society, this theory's approach can be considered



outdated, as it does not encourage learner participation, which is much needed for meaningful teaching and learning to take place.

Constructivism is a theory where people learn through experiences and reflection. A constructivist Pedagogy puts the child at the centre of the learning. Constructivism is based on the pedagogical research of Piaget (1976). Piaget authored comprehensively about 'schemas', a notion that learners come ready to learn, and the teacher must build activities to enable learning. Younger children work things through physically, whereas older children confront symbolic and abstract ideas.

A Social Constructivism Pedagogy is deemed to be a blend of two priorities: teacher-guided, and learner-centred. Lev Vygotsky, a cognitive psychologist, developed social constructivism, building on Piaget's work, but argued against Piaget's ideas that learning only occurs in its social context, and believed that learning was a collaborative process between learner and teacher.

The teacher should guide the process, by providing space and opportunity for the learners to showcase their learning. In my practice, I am interested in having a blend of a teacher-guided and learner-centred Pedagogy and suspect that a lot of my experiences of having been taught were more behaviourist. In knowing my writing journey, I will be in a better position to unlearn certain teaching practices and become more aware that learning and teaching are interdependent.

In her discussions on learning to teach, Britzman (1991) stated that practice replicates practices that are frequently founded on unarticulated and unexamined conceptions of learning and teaching. Such inquiry (into our practices) does not occur as a result of the command 'to reflect.' Rather, it aids in situating specific moments within a historical temporality - narrative recitation (in the present tense) has been beneficial in my experience (Vins, 1997, p.140).

Vins (1997) further mentioned that in such reflections of our school lives, future teachers can discover a performative way to challenge a particular moment or condition, something that resonates to our ways of believing or acting in the present. The respective reflections bring back the experiences, and provides an opportunity to "un-know the known" (Vins, 1997, p.140). Engaging in reflective practice has assisted me to understand the influences on my writing journey and how it has predisposed my Pedagogy.

There are immense advantages associated with engaging in reflective practice. To reflect can assist individuals to understand the self and others better. Furthermore, it can aid one to think in a creative manner, something that I believe is vital as a teacher of English. A practice for reflection often encourages creative thinking, this is due to questioning aspects such as: how often something is working, how much can it be changed and why do we reflect?

As a novice teacher, I am learning to reflect on numerous aspects within the teaching and learning process by writing about, reflecting on, and considering whether my Pedagogy is effective. Interactions with others also allows for a form of reflective practice. This happens unconsciously after my classes and in conversations with colleagues. Thus, engaging in this self-study provided me with an opportunity to engage in deeper reflection and exploration of myself as a novice teacher of writing. Through this self-study, I wished to reflect and understand the influences on my writing journey, in the hopes of subsequently improving my Pedagogy. I believe that in doing so and continuing to grow, I will keep learning and encourage my learners to grow.

### **2.2.3 Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In her book, Bassey (2016) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using ethnically diverse learners’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for learners” (p. 31). According to Ladson-Billings (2014), culturally responsive teaching is a Pedagogy that inspires learners intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers who use a culturally responsive technique in their teaching see culture as a strength which can be used effectively to enhance academic and social achievement.

Edwards & Edick (2013) mention that classrooms today appear very different from those of just a decade ago, hence as the learner populace becomes progressively diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status, teachers are challenged to meet the academic, cultural and community needs of tomorrow’s citizen. Hence, one of the contributing factors towards me conducting this study, is for me to be a more responsive teacher towards my learners and meet the needs of tomorrow’s citizen, therefore being guided by culturally responsive teaching was apt and relevant to my research.

Edwards & Edick (2013) further state that culturally responsive teaching offers a pathway for teachers to connect with all learners for success in academics. This is something that I wished to do, in order to have become a more conscious and effective teacher of writing. Culturally responsive teaching warrants that teachers engage learners by teaching subject matter in evocative ways, connecting it to learners' lives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). I would thus like to do this, as I believe that learners write better when they are able to connect to texts and overall subject matter.

Learners "experience academic success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness" through culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.160). Hence, these three aspects are imperative for writing, as being consciously critical whilst writing will enable you to produce relevant writing pieces and ultimately lead to academic success, which will equip learners to participate in this ever-changing world. Thus, to do so, learners must be critical thinkers who can engage with others to integrate multiple perspectives in an evolving world.

Edwards & Edick (2013) advocate that culturally responsive teaching depends on a solid pattern of interaction, accommodation, and ownership so that learners feel comfortable working together, knowing that their opinions will be valued, and expressing themselves in various ways is very important. This is something that I wished to do in my classroom, as each learner must feel valued and comfortable to express their thoughts and opinions in writing. Therefore, it can be said that culturally responsive teaching is effective teaching, especially here in our South African classrooms, as a novice teacher of writing. Thus, effective teaching addresses the academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness of learners and is hence apt to my study.

According to Larson et al. (2018), engaging in culturally responsive teaching typically begins with a broad understanding of culture, teachers' clear understanding of their own and others' cultures, and the ability to connect with their learners through this understanding (Gay, 2002 ; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To foster this connection, strategies such as incorporating artefacts that reflect a learner's interests and using real-world examples and problems to solve during instruction to connect learners to

their community, national, and global identities can be used (Bouillion & Gomez, 2001).

The above section established the theoretical framework and concepts underpinning this study, which are Socioculturalism as coined by Vygotsky, Pedagogy, and Culturally responsive teaching. The next section will review the literature underpinning this study.

## **2.3. Literature Review**

This section provides a review of literature pertinent to this study and discusses the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing.

### **2.3.1. Life-long Learner**

The South African Department of Higher Education and Training's Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (DHET, 2011) requires that every teacher is expected to be "a scholar, researcher and a life-long learner" (p. 49). The policy implies that lifelong learning means that practicing teachers should engage in on-going learning. My decision to continue with post-graduate studies thus supports policy, as well as enables enrichment of my knowledge, which is beneficial to my learners.

A lifelong-learner teacher has an awareness of the relationship between learning and real life, sees the need for lifelong learning, is exceedingly determined to take part in the process, and possesses the required confidence and learning skills (Dhaliwal, 2015). According to Fraser et al. (2007, p.156), teacher learning is a method of self-development that leads to personal growth as well as the development of skills and knowledge that aids in the education of young people.

Fischer (2018) states that lifelong learning is an essential encounter for the purpose of inventing and allowing for the emergence of future societies. Reflecting on my experiences of teaching and learning of writing has assisted with evaluating the past and present, and life-long learning can thus complement my future pedagogic practices. Being a life-long learner prompts a teacher to further enhance in fields

pertaining to social inclusion, active citizenship in all areas of life, as well as, in personal development which is one of my aims with this study.

As per Kelly (2006), the term "teacher learning" is introduced as the process by which novice teachers progress toward expertise. As a result, self-sufficiency, competitiveness, and employability should emerge. Life-long learning ensures teachers are constantly developing and improving. They can be known to be conquerors of challenges, irrespective of the level of difficulty. They see challenges as part of the life-long learning process and strive to overcome the challenges with which they are confronted as they learn, adapt, and change/add to ideas and perspectives about teaching.

A teacher has to attempt obtaining knowledge in life enabling them to disseminate it in the best possible way/s to their learners. Albert Einstein advocates that intellectual development should commence at birth and cease only at death (Dhaliwal, 2015), hence, the importance for any person and more importantly a teacher to be lifelong learner. I aimed to be a better, more effective teacher and therefore through self-study, I believe I can be a life-long learner.

As a novice teacher, I believe that I am setting a good example for my learners because I am still learning. The mere fact that I am still studying intrigues my learners as they view me as a qualified teacher who has the knowledge. The education arena is ever-changing and never more so than during this COVID-19 lock-down period. Teachers as well as learners have been forced to adapt to these rapid changes and I see the new skills that I am developing as part of being a life-long learner as I reflect on my experiences and my classroom practice. Vilakazi (2013) makes the point that with the support of life-long teacher learning, we should be well able to adjust to these changes.

Demirel (2005) makes us aware that, beside the most usual familiarities associated with life-long learning as both a teacher and a member of society, the concept of life-long learning also assists with aspects pertaining to an improvement in learners' lives and society at large. Lee (2014) argued that the sociocultural dimension is an important part of teaching and learning, since "education systems, classroom teaching

and learning are neither culture- nor context free” (p. 1039). Therefore, as teachers we need to be wilfully thinking of the means we can employ to ensure that our learners get sufficient opportunities for making sense of everyday experiences.

As teachers, it is inevitable that we will encounter socio-economic disparities and the effects thereof in our classrooms. Issues such as unfavourable economic backgrounds, language gaps, and inequality, especially in our South African context will impact on our teaching and learning. As mentioned by Spaull (2015), the effects of apartheid and the resultant correlation between education and wealth have meant that, generally speaking, poorer learners in South Africa perform worse than privileged learners, academically. Cappy (2016) mentioned that due to costly school fees, former white schools have employed extra and better-trained teachers, while most former black schools remain racially segregated and continue to face high learner to teacher ratios with under-qualified staff.

This state of affairs is intensified in rural areas, where employment in local schools is viewed as a last resort for newly trained teachers (Bantwini 2010). This can be attributed to travelling and security concerns. I have experienced this when, due to initially not finding any employment, I attended the interview at a school situated more than one-hour away from my home, in a rural context, in order to seek a salary and experience. This is further elaborated upon in my reflective journal. As a life-long learner, one is always developing and broadening knowledge on societal influences on your life, as well as on the lives of learners.

Teacher learning can be influenced by generative learning which is a method in which teachers endure to progress in their teaching by building on previous knowledge, experiences, and learners' needs (Ball, 2009). A generative learning process is best supported when teachers engage in a long-term professional development model that encourages inquiry, writing, dialogue, questioning, collaboration, and teacher mentoring (Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010; Luneta, 2012).

I wished to understand my development of writing through reflecting on my writing experiences at home, school, and university, as how I practice the teaching of writing and how I can improve thereon. Life-long learning can also instil creativity, initiative

and responsiveness in people thus allowing them to show adaptability in society – a much needed skill for writing enhancement and therefore I saw it apt to position myself as a life-long learner.

Timperley et. al. (2008) ascertained that a variability of conditions is necessary to advance teacher learning. These conditions include: a) more time for teachers to develop, absorb, discuss, and practice new knowledge; b) safe spaces to explore new materials and challenge previous beliefs and practices; and c) collaboratively engaging in Pedagogy that requires teachers to learn in ways that reflect how to teach their learners. Such professional development strategies recognize the significance of teachers' identities, caring connections, and communities of practice in their learning. These conditions ascertained by Timperley et. al. (2008) is fitting to my study.

### **2.3.2. Preparedness of novice teachers**

According to Assaf et al. (2016), the current literature on writing instruction in South Africa reveals that many teachers feel unprepared to teach writing and rarely receive professional development focused on effective writing instruction (Taylor et al., 2013), similar to teachers in the United States and abroad (Gaitas & Martins, 2015; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). However, even after receiving professional development in effective writing, teachers struggle to implement new techniques in their classrooms, reinforcing the status quo (e.g., Hendricks, 2013; Mendelowitz & Davis, 2011). Teachers play an essential role in a learners' life and it is therefore vital that they receive the required training to enhance their pedagogical skills.

Smith and Sela (2005) make it known that novice teachers are unfortunately expected to portray professionalism and educate learners, in the same manner as experienced teachers. This generally negatively impacts these novice teachers, as a feeling of immense pressure can overpower them. Therefore, one should note that, constant motivation and empowerment of novice teachers by other more experienced teachers is an essential factor. This guidance can prepare novice teachers in many ways. In addition to guidance from the more experienced teachers such as critical friends, teachers can empower themselves.

I started my teaching career in 2019, the only professional development I received were two departmental English workshops of a day each and consisted mainly of receiving and reading through booklets and policy documents. Steyn (2008) confirms that professional development workshops in South Africa are typically one-time sessions offered by the Department of Education (DoE), teacher unions, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved in education. Sponsored workshops as such comprise of reading through policy documents, assessing standards, and asking teachers to evaluate learners' writing exams rather than the application of effective Pedagogy (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). These methods provide no evaluation of teacher learning or classroom impact (Hendricks, 2013; Mendelowitz & Davis, 2011).

A professional development network, the National Writing Project (NWP), based in the United States of America, with international sites in Malta and Norway, has spent the past forty years providing sustained professional development on writing instruction to teachers, in primary school through to high school, and has served as a research hub for studying teachers' learning and learners' writing performance (Assaf et. al., 2016). Professional development modelled after the NWP allows instructors to spend more time writing, reading, discussing, reflecting, and analysing the ideas that underpin effective writing instruction with other teachers in a supportive learning community.

Teachers participate in demonstration lessons provided by scholars and fellow teachers and are encouraged to continue their learning by attending follow-up workshops and writing retreats. Much of the research on NWP modelled professional development focuses on teachers' identity shifts, instructional transformations, the importance of professional networks, and teacher leadership development (Assaf et. al., 2016).

Assaf et. al (2016) noted that the NWP has collaborated with South African educators since 2005 and has only recently documented the impact of NWP modelled professional development on South African teachers' learning and writing instruction. According to the findings, teachers not only learned new ways to teach writing, but they also implemented additive writing instruction that reflected their students' literacy and language abilities and needs. Assaf et. al. (2016) additionally stated a vital point that generative change is a process that takes place within a teacher's zone of



proximal development (Ball, 2009) where teachers are scaffolded to use writing as a pedagogical tool to become more meta-cognitively conscious of their own learning and to identify shifts in how they view themselves as writers and writing teachers. Additionally, Pineteh (2014) is concerned that not enough attention is afforded to the development of writing in South Africa. Correspondingly, Bharuthram (2012) pronounces that the lack of literature that focuses on writing in the South African learning contexts indicates that concerns of writing and ways of improving writing in our educational settings are not yet given the importance they deserve.

According to Brannan and Bleisten's (2012) research, novice entry teachers should in fact be given support, as this support tends to deal with material regarding the psychology of new teachers, resources, and the logistical knowledge, which should be provided by their teaching colleagues. Therefore, one should identify that the support of workplace colleagues is in fact vital, to the well-being and intellectual state of novice teachers, entering the profession.

Essentially, a supportive induction process or program should be implemented to assist newly appointed teachers in motivating and guiding them in all aspects of a successful teaching career. My experience of induction is that senior teachers just explained what was required and mentioned that they will assist me as we go along. The reality is that I did not receive much assistance.

Professional development is ultimately about teachers learning how to learn and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of improving learners' learning (Avalos, 2011). Avalos (2011) is of the opinion that professional development approaches that are collaborative and provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice are more meaningful to teachers. Thus, the need for continued professional development.

### **2.3.3. How writing affects confidence**

Writing anxiety can be defined as an individual's display of tension sensations, concerned thoughts, and physical changes like augmented blood pressure (American Psychological Association, n.d.) when confronted with a writing task. This is something that sometimes affected me in my undergraduate years, as well as in my current

writing as a post-graduate student. This subsequently lowers my self-efficacy, which is vital for academic writing because the activity is mainly self-scheduled and performed alone. Self-efficacy is correlated with achievement in writing within school settings, according to several studies done with secondary and university students in the United States, learners reporting higher self-efficacy had higher writing achievement (Prat-Sala & Redford, 2012) and produced writing of higher quality (White & Bruning, 2005) than learners who reported lower self-efficacy. Mascle (2013) claimed that building self-efficacy is important for lowering learners' writing anxiety and increasing their writing progress, which is something I intend to do.

I aimed to become a better teacher of writing by improving my Pedagogy and being more creative in my teaching, with the hope of encouraging and boosting my learners' confidence. Creativity is apt in any teachers' life and is also vital in any learners' life to face the 21st-century's incessant adversities especially in their future careers (Olusegun, 2015). Rababah & Melhem (2015) further mentioned that linguistic creativity is one of the language skills closely related to writing among the components of language Pedagogy. Once thinking is enhanced, the writing capabilities fall into place, promoting learners' needs in several real-life events and further permit them to express their views and thoughts confidently (Jaelani, 2017), thus increasing their confidence.

Teachers who are also recognized as active agents, meaning-makers, and knowledge builders should design activities in which learners take on the responsibility of doing, organizing, explaining, and arguing at every stage of the learning developmental process (Coyle et al., 2018) – which is something that I wished to enact in my classroom.

In a study conducted in Pakistan, it was stated that “our examination system does not encourage our learners to be analytical or critical. We give them twenty minutes for writing 200-word essays, so we encourage them to memorize rather than be creative” (Fareed & Ashraf, 2016, p. 86). You (2004) correspondingly noted that the focus of writing Pedagogy in China, was on the memorisation of model essays so that learners perform well in the examinations. Similarly, in South Africa, this was the practice whilst I was at school and currently happens in the way we test learners – hence writing is

mostly seen as an assessment task. When I could not recall parts of my essay in school, it would get 'worked-up' in the exam and I would not be very confident about my work. Thus, creating writing anxiety, which is also considered to be an interference in learners' production of well-organized text.

According to Yunus et al. (2019), learners do not engage much by simply sitting and listening to teachers, memorizing essays, phrases, and sentences, and then compulsorily ejecting the processed material without conversing, relating, or implementing what they have generated in their everyday routine. Research by Mansoor (2005) and Siddiqui (2007) critiques inept teachers who instead of promoting creative skills urge learners to rote learn for exam-oriented language production. This method is frowned upon and can cause learners to remain in the 'memorisation' coup – something that I do not want to promote.

Learners' lack of confidence is also caused by a teaching strategy which does not conform to learners' learning styles and cultural backgrounds (Ahmad et al., 2013). Lee (2014) conveyed that the learning of difficult subjects cannot be avoided and that they are affected at varying levels "by the sociocultural backgrounds of learners and teachers, the political and sociocultural and the broader global education environment" (p. 1039).

Fareed & Ashraf (2016) mentioned that it is contended that inadequate writing skills originate from two factors: the teacher (which can be attributed in some cases to the unpreparedness of novice teachers), and the learner. Performance in English writing across the curriculum is thus reliant on many factors, including the social background of the learner, learner attitude and the language policy. Hence the social background of the learner influences their attitude, thus the reason to include Socioculturalism and culturally responsive teaching in my research. It is therefore incumbent on teachers to prepare and to teach in a meaningful way so as to inspire the learners to use their prior knowledge to comprehend the content of what is learnt in the classroom (Dong, 2017).

As a high school teacher, I need to consider the sociocultural context of my learners to make English, as well as the learning and teaching of writing a socially relatable

experience. Similarly, Stevenson (2015) maintained that it is required that teaching be regarded as involvement by a collective in the creation of knowledge, with teachers as part of the process instead of them being seen as supervising the knowledge that has been created. In order to be eloquent, writing should include real-life situations.

High school teachers therefore need to be conversant about the different sociocultural factors which might have an effect in the way in which they teach and respond to learners, and the way in which learners learn in the classroom (Naude & Meier, 2019). This will, in-turn, allow them to better prepare for their school contexts.

#### **2.3.4. The teaching of writing**

Teachers in South Africa are guided by the Department of Basic Education's, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2012) for public schools. The CAPS document for English focuses on four key skills to be achieved and well understood by learners. These skills are reading and viewing, writing, and presenting, listening, and speaking, and language structures and conventions. One of the key skills is writing, which is allocated approximately three hours per two weeks' cycle.

Written assessments which include creative writing (including essays and transactional texts) are a requirement of the CAPS in high schools. These assessments are assessed in the General Education & Training phase (Grade 7-9), as well as the Further Education & Training (FET) phase (Grade 10-12). CAPS gives South African teachers detailed guidelines of what is to be taught and assessed in the respective grades and subjects and is a significant factor to this study as it gives guidelines of the types of writing high school learners engage in. Thus, one of the main aims of CAPS is to ensure consistency and guidance for teachers when teaching.

The teaching and learning of the subjects have specific aims, skills, focus of content areas and weighting of content areas which ascertains which areas of writing are more prominent in the schooling syllabus, which then guides the importance of promoting effective writing. What were previously known as Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards in the National Curriculum Statement are now known as Content and Skills

in CAPS; as a result, CAPS provides clear guidance in terms of pacing and progression to which teachers must adhere and is thus relevant to this study.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is defined as a change to what is taught (a curriculum) and not how it is taught (teaching methods) (Department of Education (DoE), 2011). This showed that there is a need to explore the influences on my writing journey, to better understand them and effect positive advances in my Pedagogy, as the curriculum has changed, but not the teaching methods.

The entirety of curriculum changes however, since the new democratic era has been disastrous in South Africa (Maphalala, 2006), this could be due to teachers not reflecting and having enough insight into innovative teaching methods. Indeed, while new changes emphasise a learner-centred approach, the teachers are often ill-equipped to carry out the tasks. This is due to factors which include teacher unpreparedness, the lack of training in implementing a new curriculum policy, hence not having knowledge of the various approaches to enhance their teaching, the lack of resources like modern technology such as over-head projectors which majority of our South African schooling classrooms do not have, as well as, the lack of parent involvement – as parents believe that it is not their role to assist children with their school work (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005).

Parents' lack of knowledge about curriculum implementation is a deterrent in assisting their children in academia. As a consequence, they are unable to help their children. Magano (2009:2) argues that changes in curriculum policy may lead to greater changes from the teachers, in the way they teach learners, and the way learners learn in the classroom and therefore exploring and understanding the influences on my learning and teaching of writing is a vital component to this study and my professional development as a whole.

#### **2.3.4.1. How we learn and are motivated to write.**

Several factors that affect learners' writing skills have been identified in literature (Fareed & Ashraf, 2016). These factors are associated with the motivation of learners who are generally uncertain about the purpose and significance of the text that is to

be written. This can be obviated by explaining the purpose and significance of a text and how it can be used beyond the classroom - in reality. For example, when I teach learners how to write *minutes of a meeting*, many learners wonder what the point of this is, hence I explain to them that when we (teachers) have staff meetings, there is a secretary of the meeting who records what is being discussed in that meeting. The minutes of the meeting are considered a legal document and the items discussed are vital, especially if a grievance arises.

Similarly, social media, inconsistency in teacher feedback, learners' lack of analytical and critical attitude, and large and unmanageable class sizes all have a negative impact on the structural and communicative accuracy of learners' texts (Pineteh, 2013). According to Cappy (2016), in our South African context, the factor of overcrowded classrooms serves to constrain teachers' agency in former black schools to proclaim their professional goals. Although contemporary pro-poor policies direct more state funds to schools in poor typically all-black neighbourhoods, learners in former white schools continue to outperform their peers in former non-white schools (Sayed & Motala 2012).

As a result, youngsters who go through South Africa's education system will experience radically different life trajectories, raising important questions about how teachers and young people understand the role of education (Cappy, 2016). It was, thus important to take Socioculturalism into account, in order to become an effective culturally responsive teacher.

Another area that affects learners writing is social media. Presently, social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are very popular amongst our youth, especially high school learners, and they are easily influenced by it, due to their constant use of it. Roelofse (2013) alludes to this and states that we find ourselves in a technological era where it has become inconceivable to live without the World Wide Web. However, Bronowicki (2014), states that, although technology and the social networking sites that have advanced from it are vast and helpful, numerous learners and other persons see these advancements as a must have and this leads to an abundance of harmful consequences that negatively influence learners in the classroom.

Chepkemai et al. (2018) resonates with the above and state that the common features of writing considered inappropriate in a writing class are widely used on online chats or social network sites. These include phonetic spelling use for transcription of standard pronunciations such as “nite” for “night”, “wanna” for want to (Danet & Herring, 2007). The use of *emoticons* or *smileys* for conveying a feeling, such as being happy :) or :-), and being sad :( or :-(. Multiple punctuation marks or use of letters for a prosodic affect are such as; no more!!!!, Yes!!!!, aaaaahhhhh, soooo (Crystal, 2001). Special abbreviations or acronyms used for saving time and making it convenient, such as b4/B4 (before), lol/LOL (laughing out loud), oic/OIC (Oh I see). Common shortenings used for easy use and convenience are ‘u’ (you), ‘i’ (I), ‘r’ (re), ‘thx’ (thanks), ‘pls’ (please), ‘tmr’ (tomorrow).

The above, in turn lowers the learners overall mark, as according to their creative writing marking guideline rubrics, as per the CAPS document, they are awarded marks for their content, language used and the structure of their writing. Although teachers in South Africa are required to utilize digital technology for teaching subjects such as English, as proposed by the syllabus rolled out in 2011 (National Department of Basic Education [CAPS] 2011), social media in the South African education system is still not widely used officially because of disciplinary challenges and financial constraints (Rwodzi et al., 2020).

## **2.4. Conclusion**

The above section reviewed relevant literature underpinning this study and these concepts from the literature review has thus guided the exploration of understanding my experiences with teaching and the learning of writing in my self-study. At the start, the chapter established and discussed the theoretical concepts guiding this self-study. These included Socioculturalism as devised by Vygotsky, Culturally responsive teaching, and Pedagogy. The next section reviewed literature in which the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing were discussed.

Chapter three which follows, elaborates upon and discusses the methodological process utilised for this self-study research project.

## **Chapter Three – Driving My Writing Odyssey**

### **3.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I elucidated the theoretical framework and went on to conduct a review of literature pertaining to the exploration of my teaching practices when teaching writing to high school learners. This chapter explains my research design approach and paradigm. I have utilized a self-study methodology for my study and will therefore go on to elaborate on self-study research. My data generation strategies, which include narrative journaling, source document retrieval and critical friend conversations and observations will then be discussed. What follows is a discussion of the data analysis process. Finally, I present matters on ethical considerations, as well as validity, and then go on to conclude the chapter.

The research design for this study is a qualitative approach which is about understanding how individuals construct meaning (Guest et al., 2013). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) explained that qualitative research is a task that places or situates the researcher in the world. In this study, I have explored my teaching and learning of writing so as to gain understanding of how I was taught writing, learned it and the ways in which I teach it in my classroom. I aim to improve my teaching of writing, hence situating myself in the world as a learner and teacher of English. Guest et. al. (2013) further explains that there is a close relationship between the researcher and the participants – who in my case are my critical friends – as well as the phenomena being researched resulting in a socially constructed understanding of the experience.

For this study, the phenomenon being explored were my teaching and learning experiences of writing. Cohen et. al. (2011) argue that qualitative research studies are essentially interpretive in nature and therefore an interpretive paradigm was adopted in this study. It was also mentioned in Cohen et al. (2011), that the interpretivist paradigm focuses on the individual, in order to understand the phenomenon being studied. Thus, I have found the interpretive paradigm suitable to my study, as I have reflected on and interpreted the influences on my learning and ultimately my teaching of writing as a novice teacher so as to better understand myself and my learning and teaching of writing, with the aim of becoming a more responsive teacher to my learners.



According to Phakisi (2008), within the interpretive paradigm, qualitative researchers believe that individuals intentionally develop their own knowledge of the world through experience. A self-study methodology guided this research because I went back and reflected upon my experiences of teaching and learning of writing with critical friend feedback, which is a key component to self-study.

## **3.2 Methodology**

### **3.2.1. *Self-study***

Pinnegar (1998) emphasized the notion that self-study is a methodology for studying professional practice and that there is no one way, or correct way, of conducting a self-study. Rather, how a self-study is carried out depends on what is being sought to be better understood. For my study, I aimed to explore and better understand my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, whilst seeing how knowing about my experiences of writing can assist me to enhance my teaching of writing and thus a self-study methodology was adopted.

Pithouse et al. (2009) state that a self-study methodology is often used by teacher educators, and teachers who are exploring their own practice, assisted by critical friends who are colleagues or learners. According to Anderson-Patton and Bass (2002), “self-study is a collaborative methodology for examining one’s own teaching with the goal of possibly transforming one’s practice” (p. 101). I opted for the self-study methodology because I imagined that it would allow me, as a novice teacher to reflect upon, learn from and improve my teaching of writing. Through utilizing a self-study methodology, I aimed to know what to retain, what to change, and to learn how to become an effective, more culturally responsive teacher of writing. To do this is to heed Pithouse’s (2011) notion that self-study pays attention to the researcher’s personal and professional experiences.

Ritter (2017) notes that interest in self-study methodology continues to grow as scores of teachers find it useful as a systematic approach for examining and improving their practice, so as to transform through professional development. Professional development not only involves changes in professional practice or actions, but also in

practitioners' thinking about the how and why of that practice (Day & Sachs 2005, Kelchtermans 2009) which is what I hoped to achieve through this study. According to Allen et al. (2016), self-study methodology provides a process of reflection that allows one to deeply analyse parts of personal practice as well as the factors that may influence various aspects of one's teaching practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).).

I therefore reflected on my experiences of writing and how they have influenced my current teaching. I then commenced by looking at my first experiences of writing before I went to school. The next step was to interrogate my school and university experiences of writing before exploring my own teaching thereof as a novice teacher of English.

What Dinkelman (2003) contends is that learning to teach means learning to inquire and I hoped to use self-study as a tool to learning to inquire. Samaras (2011) concurs by stating that self-study research reveals that teaching requires continuous reflection, not to mention introspection. In this study, I wished to explore the influences on my learning and ultimately my teaching of writing. I went about this by firstly, reflecting on my own experiences so as to understand the influences on my writing journey in my formative years. In doing so, I hoped to gain more insight about my writing journey, its influences and how I could improve on a professional level. In this study, I purposefully reflected on my writing journey systematically.

I started off by recalling my first experiences within the home of writing, and then reflected on my primary schooling years. My reflections then progressed to my secondary schooling years. After that, I reflected on my university years as a pre-service teacher of English and thereafter critically reflected on my teaching of writing practices as a novice teacher. These reflections were done in collaboration with critical friends, with the ultimate goal of understanding the influences on my writing teaching and learning.

The term "self-study" may imply a one-sided personal study; however, this is not the case, and my research was done collaboratively with critical friends. Russel (2006) stated that a self-study is not the private and personal affair that the label might suggest, as it relies on interaction with colleagues who can listen actively and

constructively. “Self-study also relies on ideas and perspectives presented by others and then taken into one’s personal teaching and research contexts for exploration of their meanings and consequences” (Russell, 2006, p.5). As per Samaras (2011), “critical friend(s) could be from a grade level or discipline-based school, or a group of teachers from diverse disciplines in your own school or even across schools” (p. 117). She went on to explain that it is a learning community of reliable and trusted colleagues who ask questions for clarification of the research and propose different points of view in a productive manner.

According to Loughran (2007), the phrase self-study may imply a unique or individual approach to researching practice. However, he went on to say that in reality, self-studies are greatly aided by drawing on other views and reframing of events, resulting in ideas, facts, and information that need stepping beyond the self. “Moving beyond the self also matters because a central purpose in self-study is uncovering deeper understandings of the relationship between teaching about teaching and learning about teaching” (Loughran, 2007).

Thus, self-study is justified as not a one-sided approach, but rather an approach that adopts aspects that pushes researchers to move beyond themselves. I have done this through taking into consideration critical friends’ input and applying it to my knowledge and experiences in order to move beyond and enhance my own teaching of writing practices as a novice teacher. Ball (2012) advocated that academics participate in a self-reflexive process of reflection, introspection, critique, and building a personal voice in order to move beyond oneself. Madondo et. al. (2019) mentions that others interested in self-study research must be prepared to be criticised— and to criticise yourself, to search beyond your own perspective, and to know that there is always room for improvement.

This improvement will be personal and professional as Samaras & Freese (2009) assert that self-study improves both personal and professional selves, which was my intention in this study. According to Samaras et al. (2019), the goal of self-study is for teachers to be active agents in exploring their beliefs about their teaching practices and educational problems for improvement-focused purposes beyond themselves, as they contribute to an educational knowledge base (Loughran & Northfield, 1998).

Correspondingly, Crowe & Dinkelman (2010) mentioned that in self-study you become better at what you do by learning from your own practice. Dlamini (2013) further mentioned that taking a self-study approach enables one to look at how you can use a new awareness of your past to enhance your teaching in the future. According to Samaras et al. (2004), this approach to self-study can be beneficial in thoroughly thinking about the personal and professional selves and to engage in reflection to better understand our role as teachers.

Thus, this methodology was apt for my study as I studied and inquired into my own experiences of learning and teaching of writing, and in doing so was critical of how I was taught writing as well as my past and current teaching practices. I acknowledged that there is room for improvement and worked with critical friends to alter my practices as I explored and experimented with effective ways to improve my teaching of writing from what I learned through revisiting and adjusting my teaching practices. In conclusion, self-study enabled me to also explore what I can learn from my past, to adapt my current teaching practices and to explore ways of being more responsive to my learners.

### **3.2.2. Data generation**

Hamilton et al. (2008) state that self-study researchers employ a number of methods for data generation. LaBoskey (2004) agrees, stating that self-study participants use a variety of methods to generate useful information for a better understanding of their practice. I have thus adopted reflection in the form of narrative journaling, source document retrieval, and critical friend observations and conversations as data generation strategies.

#### **3.2.2.1 Reflection**

The origins of reflective practice come from Dewey's (1910/1933) work. The goal of reflective thinking, according to Dewey (1910), is to acquire warranted beliefs, which are critically examined and supported by evidence. Reflective thinking is a well-known process of establishing "belief upon a firm basis of reasons" (Dewey, 1910, p.6).

Dewey (1910/1933) further stated that to think reflectively is an active attempt to resolve the doubt and settle the hesitation and mental difficulty that occurs when we think.

Dorfler et al. (2017) proposed reflective diaries or journals as data collection methods because they provide opportunities and access to our ongoing everyday behaviours in becoming more self-aware. It must be noted that I am the main researcher participant (Dlamini, 2013), hence I acted the researcher and the researched. Since I am the main participant in this study, memory-work in the form of reflective journal writing was the first and major data generation method which I utilised, in order to write about and reflect on my experiences of how I was taught writing and what I learned through the process.

Reflection has been identified as a learning strategy that can result in adjustments in teaching (Brookfield, 1995; van Manen, 1990). The major data generation tool for this study was my reflective narrative journal. In an attempt to fulfil my first research objective: “To explore my experiences of teaching and learning of writing”, I engaged in reflective diary writing, wherein I initially reflected on the way in which I was taught and learned writing.

In this diary I reflected upon my exposure to writing from an early age, my experiences of how I was taught initial writing as well as the different genres. These reflections, elaborated upon in chapters four and five, included what I learned through the teaching process. Thereafter, I engaged in lesson reflections in which I reflected on lessons that I had taught, some of which were also observed by one of my critical friends. These reflections are accompanied by source documents and artefacts which I retrieved, that assisted me to reminisce and delve deeper into my writing journey. In addition to the reflective journal about my initial experiences of writing I kept a reflective diary of my teaching of writing as a novice teacher.

Whilst reflecting on my experiences, in my attempts to address my second research objective which is: “*To explore how my experiences of teaching and learning writing may enhance my teaching of writing*” – I examined them, in order to explain their significance and reflect on the experiences that they represent. The reflections

enabled me to explore my own lived experiences of how I teach writing, in order to better comprehend and adjust my teaching (Samaras, 2011).

According to Samaras et al. (2004), “personal history, the formative, contextualized experiences of our lives that influence how we think about and practice our teaching, provides a powerful mechanism for teachers interested in discerning how their lived lives impact their ability to teach or learn” (p. 905). Pithouse et al. (2009) concurs by emphasizing that reflective journal writing “requires teachers to insert themselves directly into texts they are creating and to write about happenings, contexts, and issues that are meaningful to them” (Pithouse et al., 2009, p. 49). This is something that I aimed to do, with the assistance of my critical friends to confirm and refresh my memory about my experiences, in order to meaningfully reflect on my teaching of writing.

Dörfler et. al. (2017) established a systemic method framework for reflecting on becoming. Through this framework, students can reflect on who they are becoming and how this will influence their understanding of past experiences (i.e. reflection-on-action), their actions in the present (i.e. reflection-in-action), and their future activities/engagements (i.e. reflection-(be)for(e)-action), suggesting that the mixture of theoretical knowledge (savoir), knowing how to do tasks (savoir-faire), and knowing how to be (savoir-être) is the idyllic mixture for learners to reflect on their becoming (Stierand & Zizka, 2015). Through reflection, I hoped to see what worked well for me during my formative years, and what did not, hence allowing me to understand the enabling and disabling experiences, thus allowing me to perhaps become a more responsive teacher of writing.

### **3.2.2.2. Source Documents & Artefact Retrieval**

Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren (2012) state that although there are an endless variety of source documents that can be used by self-study researchers, the object is generally chosen by the researcher and acts as a reflective tool that is relevant to the researcher's lived experiences and has connected meanings. Typically, the things are not recently acquired, but rather already present in the researcher's living environment and are associated with an emotional bond. In this case, I have used

existing documents, objects, photographs, old school reports, and certificates which enabled me to reflect and delve deeper into my reflection of my experiences with teaching and learning of writing. These also served as verification for my analysis recollections in my reflections of writing found in chapter four.

Teaching practice module documents were re-visited to refresh my memory about the experiences I had as a pre-service teacher. These documents included lecturer and mentor-teacher observation reports which encompassed remarks about my Pedagogy. Certificates reminded me about the many achievements that I have accomplished, as a school learner and university student, all of which included writing. I also sourced and utilised photographs, as they brought back many recollections of my writing journey and the influences upon this journey. These photographs prompted me to reminisce and delve deeper into my experiences of teaching and learning of writing. Additionally, old school reports were used to evoke my memoirs about my writing journey as a learner. I made use of learners' scripts that I have marked so as to interrogate how I provide feedback to learners. This also provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon my teaching practices of writing.

Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren (2012) make the point that in numerous academic disciplines, the importance of commencing with manipulation of objects is considered vital. In these disciplines', objects such as documents become the primary sources for manipulation that facilitate learning. Additional source documents that I looked at included scripts that I have marked, writing exercises that I had set and lesson plans. These source documents can be considered objects, as opined by Mitchell (2011) who contends that objects can carry personal memories and can evoke reflective writing journals when scrutinised to answer certain questions about their significance to the possessor. The possessor in this case being myself – the researcher.

Allender & Manke (2004) mention that the observations and opinions of others can have an influence on the researcher's own reflections, observations and hypotheses to supplement and extend ideas for reflection as well as reflexivity and therefore, suggest working in small groups to discuss and explain the chosen source documents. They go on to say that engaging and sustained involvement in self-study research

often occurs when artifacts like source documents are discussed with critical friends. This collaborative effort with others allows for a deeper intellectual, emotional, and physical extension of the goals of each individual self-study researcher.

### **3.2.2.3 Critical friends**

Another source of data generation were critical friend observation reports and conversations. Pithouse et al. (2009) mention that “the support of caring, sensitive, and interested critical friends to help us through the study can make it easier to remain open to further learning and professional development” (p. 47). Samaras et. al. (2019) mention that self-study is intertwined with the location of inquiry in the self and with the capability to change facets of that self because of the association with others (LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras & Freese, 2006). Self-study methodology paradoxically establishes the power of the “we” to develop the “I” for improving teaching practice (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015b, p. 6), and this work occurs within a learning community.

Thus, self-study research entails working with others known as critical friends. For this study, I interacted with a fellow novice teacher who was a peer in my undergraduate years and through to my honour’s degree. We studied together and attended three teaching practice module practical periods together, and therefore interacting with this fellow novice teacher allowed us to compare notes and for him to comment on what I was doing in classroom and to offer guidance and advice. This critical friend also served to validate my experiences. My former lecturer, who is a pre-service teacher educator, also acted as a critical friend in my study, by supervising, critiquing, and questioning my reflections on how I was taught to teach writing during the course of my undergraduate degree, enabling me to delve deeper into exploring my teaching of writing. This critical friend also questioned what I said I was doing in my classroom. Another critical friend was my school’s languages departmental head, who is a senior teacher, has over two decades of teaching experience, and over the years, has furnished me with rich knowledge in the context of my school. According to Grant and Butler (2018), the individuals who serve as critical friends during the study will “ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through another lens, and offer critique... as a friend” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50).



Laboskey (2004) is in agreement with earlier observations that self-study is not about the 'I' and states "the word self-study does not sound like it is collaborative, but actually this research necessitates collaboration" (LaBoskey, 2004), hence collaboration between researcher and critical friends. LaBoskey (2004), further stated that the use of critical friends affords interaction, which is a valued characteristic of self-study methodology. Gathering various perspectives, through interaction, on our professional practice helps to challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconsistencies, develop our possible understandings, and triangulate our findings (LaBoskey, 2004). This collaboration between myself and critical friends was not completely hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, as we were able to engage remotely. I have thus chosen collaboration with the fellow novice teacher, an experienced pre-service teacher educator and a senior schoolteacher, in order to gather different perspectives and explore the influences on my teaching and learning of writing thoroughly. My critical friends challenged me in our conversations as they sought to uncover and understand what changes I had made in my teaching of writing practice.

### **3.2.3. Analysis**

Loughran (2007) mentioned that when the researcher and the practitioner are one and the same - which is the case with my study - careful exploration of what is being done, how and why, becomes all the more significant if the outcomes are to genuinely affect understandings of practice beyond the individual self. In order to achieve this, data needs to be analysed in an appropriate manner.

In the process of making sense of data, Christiansen et al. (2010) state that data analysis is categorised by two approaches namely: inductive and deductive reasoning. They mention that in inductive reasoning, we use the raw data generated from participants, arrange it, and draw conclusions. Christiansen et al. (2010) further state that inductive reasoning is the process through which researchers in qualitative approach synthesise and make meaning of that data, while Hyde (2000) explains that deductive reasoning is the process of testing theory which begins with generalisation and seeks to see if the theory applies to specific cases.

The main distinction between these two approaches is that in inductive reasoning, categories emerge from the data, whereas in deductive reasoning, the researcher starts with a set of categories that are then used to organize the data. I found inductive reasoning to be appropriate for the analysis of my data. This means that I did not develop categories to code my data beforehand, but rather that patterns and issues arose as I engaged with the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a). I used raw data that was generated from participants and organized it into themes which had arisen by looking for similarities and differences in order to draw conclusions.

Thematic analysis is typically utilized for single texts, compilations of parallel texts, or a collection of texts about a similar phenomenon (Allen, 2017). In this case, my experiences learning and teaching writing. The key step in making sense of reoccurring observations is discovering themes within the data. According to Allen (2017), themes provide a comprehensive picture of the communication experiences under examination and provide depth of understanding of an interaction.

This study thus implemented the analysis of data through the process of inductive reasoning. In using an inductive approach, I searched “for emerging patterns, associations, concepts and explanations” which equate to themes, in my reflective journal memory-work (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a, p. 107). I also worked with my critical friends to get different viewpoints during this process, enabling me to delve deeper into the emerging themes.

Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase analysis was used as a guide, as I employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within my work. In analysing my reflective journal, I looked for noteworthy patterns and matters within my writing experiences so as to extrapolate and develop themes in relation to my research topic. Hence, thematic analysis is a technique for detecting, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. Ndlovu (2019) reinforces that thematic analysis is a simple beneficial method of understanding people’s experiences, which is apt to my study.

In phase one, I familiarized myself with the data. It was vital to submerge myself in the data to the extent that I was acquainted with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion entailed reading the data repeatedly and actively - searching for meanings,

patterns, and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did this by going/reading through the data/field texts (reflections, source documents and critical friend observations).

Phase two commenced after I read and familiarized myself with the data and had generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what was interesting about it. This phase then involved the production of initial codes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Maguire & Delahunt (2017) mentioned that thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within data.

Thus, in phase three, I started to analyze the codes identified in the previous phase and considered how the different codes might consolidate to form a predominant theme. Braun & Clarke (2006) proposed that using visual representations, such as tables, to aid in sorting the various codes into tentatively extrapolated themes, is beneficial during this phase. During this phase, I presented the data (from field texts) and notable aspects as a table, thus lumping data into codes/themes along with supporting evidence from *words*, *where* and *who*.

During phase four, which involved refining those tentatively extrapolated themes, I identified notable aspects by digitally highlighting and commenting on them. While refining themes, I went on to highlight aspects of each theme in a different colour. I had used yellow for a *Supportive Teaching and Learning Environment*. Green for *Parental Involvement*. Red for *Pedagogic Practices* and Turquoise Blue for *Resources*.

Amidst phase four, I had to check what my learning was and to collapse the sub-codes into main codes. during this phase, I consulted with my critical friends so as to ascertain different perspectives.

Phase five entailed determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. It also included identifying the narrative that each theme tells, as it was critical to consider how it fits into the larger overall story that I am telling about my data in relation to my research questions. Therefore, for each respective theme, I conducted and wrote a comprehensive analysis, which formed the basis for Chapter 4.

Phase six was the final analysis and write-up of the report for Chapter 4. It was vital that the analysis provided a concise, coherent, logical, and thought-provoking account of the story the data tells – within and throughout themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest provision of adequate evidence of the themes within the data to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme – which can be found in Chapter 4.

During all the afore-mentioned phases of analysis, data was sent back and forth between myself and my supervisor who encouraged a deeper level of reflection. Analysis, as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), is not a linear process in which you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is a recursive process in which you move back and forth as needed between the phases.

Thus, these themes had first arisen from my reflective journal, whilst source documents and critical friend observations revealed additional themes and authenticated themes that had already been identified.

In conclusion, cyclical thematic analysis allowed for inductive reasoning, wherein the themes emerged from the data and were supported by literature. Once the initial themes had been identified from my reflective journal, source documents revealed and authenticated the themes which had responded to my first two research question - *What are my learning experiences of writing? & What are my teaching experiences of writing?* Thereafter, I consulted and reviewed relevant literature in order to explore and have a better understanding of these themes and how they influence and continue to influence my teaching of writing – in response to my third research question - *How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*

#### **3.2.4. Ethical Considerations**

According to Nkosi (2014), ethical considerations are critical in all research investigations and must be addressed by researchers. Educational research involves people as participants, ethical and legal considerations are very important. Samaras (2011) contends that when performing self-study research, we should strive to never harm people in any way, whether it is emotional, physical, or psychological. Ethical considerations therefore included asking permission from critical friends for collaboration. This was done by asking them to sign a letter of consent. The letters of

consent were clearly explained both verbally and in writing in the language that the participants fully understand, which is English for this particular study.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary and this was stated in the ethical form. Participants were also advised about their rights of participation and that they were allowed to withdraw at any stage should they wish to. In addition, the purpose of the study was elucidated to the participants prior to their participation. To maintain confidentiality, their full names were not disclosed. As stated by Maree (2007), the code of confidentiality in presenting the findings of a study is essential. Graham et al. (2015) further elucidated the importance of privacy and confidentiality, stating that this is a basic human right and I thus respected the rights of my participants who served as my critical friends.

In writing my narrative journal, I included some memories of lived experiences that involve my family and made reference to my parents. I also know my critical friends well and thus needed to heed the advice of Ellis (2008) who signalled that in writing about family members, we need to be cognizant of issues of “relational ethics”. She went on to say that relational ethics requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, recognize our interpersonal bonds with others, and accept responsibility for our actions and their consequences (Ellis, 2008).

Therefore, my research was discussed with my immediate family, as some of my personal experiences are influenced by them and memories we share together. Their exact names will not be used in my study, and I have their undivided support. I also constantly checked with my critical friends that I did not misrepresent our discussions through my interpretations thereof.

### **3.2.5. Validity & Trustworthiness**

Madondo (2014) notes that critical friends in self-study research can fortify the credibility of the data analysis and interpretation process by allowing different people to think deeply and propose possible solutions. My critical friends thus played a vital role in my study, as I worked with my them to “obtain alternative perspectives” when analysing my data (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 43). I then referred to applicable

literature to deepen and extend my understanding of the emergent themes (Nash, 2004). Self-study is a methodology that is also about learning with critical friends who are from different contexts but within the same fraternity, and my critical friends fell within this, as all are within the education fraternity - in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, teaching writing.

The questions and input critical friends offered for clarification of the research simultaneously served towards the trustworthiness of the study, as they queried, confirmed, and critiqued events. I also attempted to consider different angles, through comments and questions from my critical friends that ought to authenticate my study as trustworthy and valid. As Stewart (2015) mentions, as part of my verification process, themes, and source documents, as well as findings, were shared with participants, and participants were invited to provide input, clarification, and critique to contribute to the validity and trustworthiness of my study.

The idea of Nieuwenhuis (2007) of using more than one data source to check findings is seen as a beneficial exercise in improving the validity and dependability of findings. Thus, in enhancing validity, and therefore reliability of findings, this study relied on different techniques, like reflective journal writing memory-work, source document retrieval and critical friend observation conversations.

The source documents relating to my reflective journal will serve as validation to my lived experiences of writing by assisting in my memory-work and confirming particular events. Furthermore, the different techniques, like reflective journal writing and source document retrieval were used to gain a variety of perspectives on what I am studying (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), as my reflective journaling involved memory-work, as well as lesson reflections in which I reflected before, during, and after lessons, in conjunction with critical friend feedback.

Feldman (2003) provided recommendations for legitimacy in self-study, which I also utilised. By engaging in memory-work to write my reflective journal and retrieve source documents, I also intended to give clear and apt explanations of what data sources have been used and how data was generated, represented, and interpreted (Feldman, 2003) to add to the validity of my study. Accordingly, the comments, input and

questioning by my critical friends served to strengthen the credibility of my study, as noted by (Mlambo, 2012).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed my self-study research methodological process. Madondo et al. (2019) mentioned that it is understood that the most significant aspects of self-study include questioning one's own practice based on observations and personal experience, working with others who can provide beneficial guidance and feedback, and, finally, experimenting with novel teaching methods to increase learning (Samaras, 2011). Through my methodological process I wished to achieve this, hence I have given an account of the nature of self-study and why it is a suitable research methodology for my study. The chapter included an explanation of my data generation strategies, which originated from reflective practice and source document retrieval, as well as from critical friend feedback. Thereafter I described how I will make meaning of, and analyse the data generated. What followed was a discussion about validity.

What is perceived as a limitation to this study is that it is set in place a particular social and educational context. So as to allow others to conduct similar studies in other contexts, I thus took care to describe the process in detail. I aimed to explain my study rigorously, so that others will be able to use and adapt it to their own settings and teaching. Generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research and therefore the focus is on transferability for this study, as the findings of this research can be applied to similar settings/contexts.

## Chapter 4

### A Reflective Odyssey:

### What Are My Experiences of Learning and Teaching of Writing?

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, my methodological process in the exploration of my writing journey through self-study was discussed. This chapter responds to my first two research question: *What are my learning experiences of writing?* and *What are my teaching experiences of writing?* In the chapter, I reflect on my learning, and thereafter my teaching experiences of writing, in stages. I ponder what these memory accounts can tell me about the influence of my experiences of schooling, on my development as a learner and teacher (Mitchell & Weber, 1998, p.45).

I begin by recalling and discussing my first experiences of writing, mainly in my primary schooling years. The discussion then moves on to my memories and deliberations about my progression of my writing journey, particularly focusing on my secondary schooling years. What follows are my university years as a student, and pre-service teacher. I then reflect on my teaching practices as a student teacher which is followed by a discussion about my experiences as a novice English teacher.

#### **4.2. My first experiences of writing... and exposure to print.**

I was fortunate that my literate parents exposed me to print material and reading in my formative years and in my narrative journal I recalled that *my father used to always purchase the Post newspaper and bring home a copy of the North Coast Courier on a weekly basis and still does until this day*. As a result, I was exposed to different genres of writing. This exposed me to the different styles and purposes of writing. The newspaper was thus one of my first experiences of viewing what writing is.

This awareness makes me realise that every individual would have been introduced to writing in their formative years in different ways as even those who were not exposed to print at home would have probably seen writing in town, on billboards and



so on. I realise that this exposure to print in the home as well as outside of it privileged me when I went to school. What also privileged me is that my parents were supportive and literate as well as readers themselves.

My reflections on my exposure to print made me realise that it is important for teachers to be cognisant of ways in which individuals are introduced to literacy, and should thus take this into consideration when teaching. As a teacher of English, I question how many of my learners are privileged in the same way as me and what type of sociocultural and economic backgrounds they hail from.

My first experience of actually viewing writing was when I used to look through books that my parents read to me as a toddler. At the time I was more interested in viewing the illustrations that these books contained. I recall noticing the simple sentences written under those illustrations and I had an understanding that it was those words that my parents read out to me.

#### **4.2.1. Pre-School Years**

I only recall attempting to write when I entered Grade R at the age of 5 years old. The first primary school that I attended is situated in the area in which I live. I recall viewing many more words on the charts that were in the classroom. When we started to learn numbers, we would learn by viewing the number, the picture (quantity) and the word, hence the teacher would point to the respective part and we would repeat after her “number 1, picture 1, word one”. When we would learn the letters of the alphabet, it used to always be accompanied by a picture starting with the corresponding letter. The letter ‘A’ would be accompanied by a picture of an apple with the word apple written underneath it, the letter ‘B’ with a banana and so on, right until ‘Z’ for zebra. I also recall when it came to the letter ‘X’, we would say “X as in boX” and only until I got into grade 2 or 3, we started using xylophone for X. Thus, this is where I was introduced to more words.

At first, learning to write was more creative work, like colouring inside the lines and cutting out shapes. My teacher used to draw a big circle on a blank sheet, I would then colour it in and thereafter cut it out. If the work was good, which meant it was neat and

I had coloured inside the lines, it would be pasted up on the wall with my name written inside the circle by the teacher. This used to make me happy and motivate me to always produce neat work and the positive reinforcement and affirmation of my work kept me motivated.

After initially learning the above, we were then introduced to writing numbers and letters. The teacher used to draw dots that outlined the numbers and letters and we used to join the dots to create the letters and words. This used to be an enjoyable task, as I would feel happy to see that the dots which I joined resembling the letters and numbers. I remember even asking my parents to buy me “dot-to-dot” colouring books, where I would join the dots of pictures and colour them in. Hence, my first experiences of writing were mostly made up of just writing letters (capital and small) and sometimes just copying down the date and heading from the chalkboard. As a teacher I now realise the importance of the scaffolding that was taking place in the home and at school as I was supported through every step of learning to write.



*Figure 4.1: Beginning of my academic journey - parents at my Grade R graduation.*

In looking at the above photograph, I notice an enabling grade R environment and evidence of a united family unit. This shows me the positive effect that my parents had on me from my early schooling years, right into my post-graduate academic journey. The smiles in the photo exude positivity and indicate how my parents' support scaffolded me from early in life, into the academically inclined individual I am now. It is also evident, in the photo, that my father attended my Grade R graduation in his work uniform (firefighter), indicating that he always made time for me, even though he had work commitments. This now, makes me think of my learners and whether their parents do the same for them.

I note the involvement of my parents in introducing me to literacy in my formative years, as my father always brought home newspapers. My learning thus includes ways in which my literate background privileged me, and I therefore need to be aware of the learning. After reading this section of my memories, a critical friend stated: *this is important to your study. Ask yourself how many of your current learners had this privilege*. From what I have observed, many of the learners come from home circumstances different to mine and not all come from literate homes or live with their parents, but with guardians.

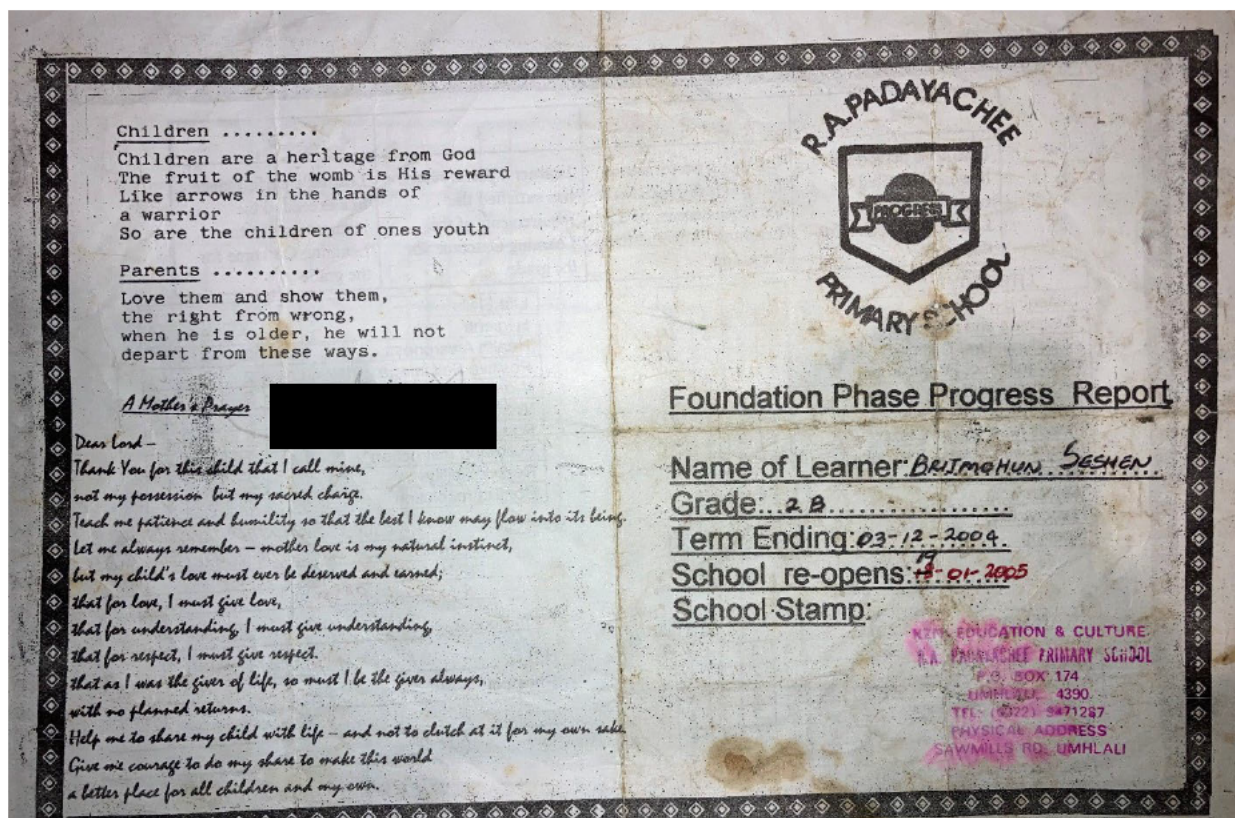


Figure 4.2: A primary school report of mine reflecting (on the left) the importance of parental involvement.

My learning from this phase of my life is the importance of exposure to print in acquiring early literacy as well as support from the home environment.

#### 4.2.2. Foundational Years

As I moved on into the foundation phase (grades one-three), writing still meant copying things that the teacher would write on the chalkboard. This writing would normally consist of writing down the weather for the day and drawing a corresponding picture. If it was a hot day, we would usually draw a sun and write "Today is a sunny day". If it was a rainy day, we would draw a cloud with water droplets falling from it and write "Today is a rainy day" and so on. Other sentences I had learnt to write was based on topics like 'My family' and the sentences would usually go like this – "I love my mum.", "I love my dad". My teacher was patient with us, although it was a class of over 30. She used to walk around the class and supervise our writing. If we were doing it wrong, she would take the pencil and guide us on how to write those respective letters and numbers. I do not recall her shouting at me if I did something wrong, however she



would encourage me and ask me to work neater or I would not get a sticker. These stickers used to be golden or silver stars and also happy or sad faces. A critical friend commented that I was fortunate because I was in an enabling school and environment and I needed to realise that many of my learners would not have had this privilege.

By grade 3, the teacher used to write down sentences, but leave blanks for us to fill in. For example – “Today is a \_\_\_\_\_ day” and we had to fill in the missing weather condition, usually copying these words from charts. We used to also be given pictures and asked to label them, like dogs, cats, cars, and sometimes asked to write simple sentences on them. The teacher used to walk around the class and check our work, if it was good, she would say so and ask us to read it aloud to the class, sometimes even show our work by walking around the class with your open book. This used to make us feel so accomplished. If your work was untidily done, she would say so and ask us to neaten or re-do it. When I was asked to re-do work, I used to feel a bit disappointed, however when she would view it again, she would say “much better” or “good” and that used to then make me feel good about my work again. Giving ‘feedback’ in a supportive teaching and learning environment seems to come into play here.

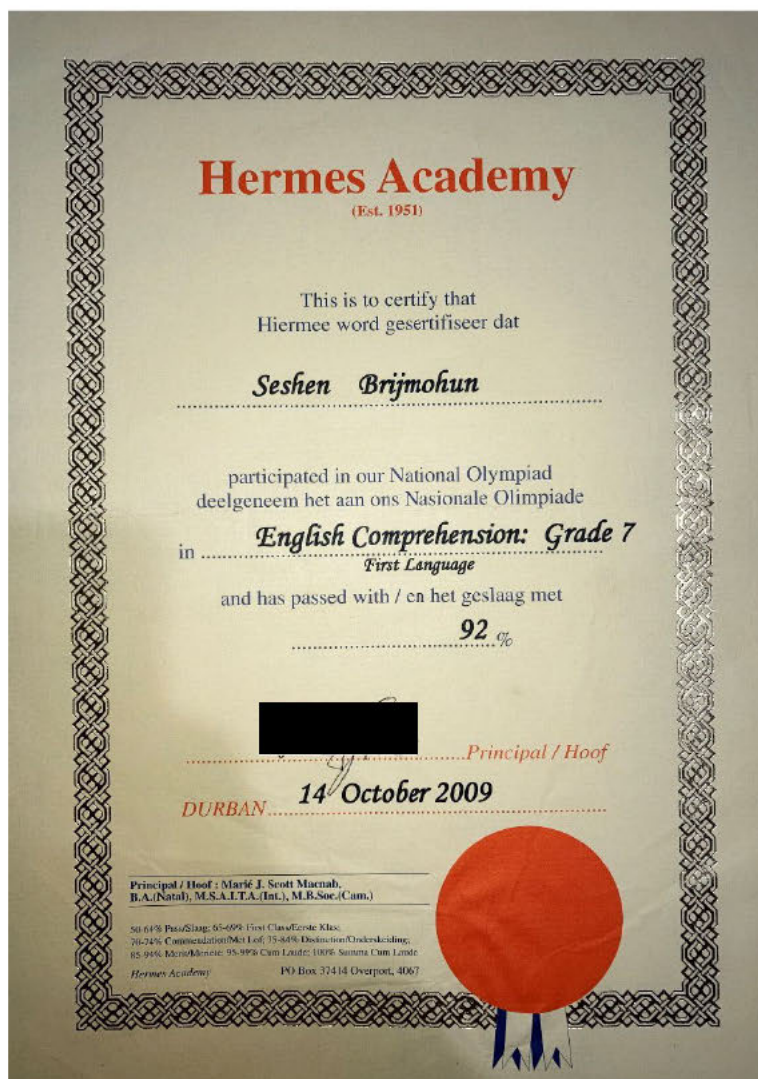
What I learnt about my exposure to the teaching and learning of writing in this phase is the importance of scaffolding as well as positive reinforcement in a supportive environment.

#### **4.2.3. Intermediate Years**

When I moved into the intermediate phase (grade 4-6) I was introduced to writing complete sentences without assistance. This was introduced by writing “daily news” which was an exciting task to complete. Our teacher used to ask us to watch the news at 7pm and then write down a few lines based on a headline. I enjoyed this approach, as we could ask our family members to assist us at home. I recall my parents checking spelling and grammar for me, as well as my older brother reading over the work for me. I attended this primary school until grade four, where every year I would receive the award for first place. Thereafter I had moved to a primary school about 10km away from home, where I used to travel to school by bus. I had felt the need to go to this

other primary school, as I wanted to have more academic competition. My parents were reluctant at first, however my grade 4 teacher supported the idea and mentioned to my parents that it could be a beneficial move in terms of competition and academics.

In this new school, work seemed to a bit more fast-paced. I was introduced to essay writing and orals. My handwriting was not very neat, but I used to write good pieces of work. I still do not consider my handwriting very neat. I remember my teacher asking me to enter literacy and numeracy Olympiads (refer to figure 4.3), essay writing competitions, as well as inter-class and inter-school speech contests. I may have not won any of these competitions, however I always bagged a spot in the top 10 at least. This may have not been the best for my self-esteem, but it definitely encouraged me to work harder.



*Figure 4.3: A certificate I have attained from participating in an English national Olympiad.*

During my senior primary years, my father used to take me to the library almost every alternate Saturday. I used to borrow story books, as well as movies. Something that interested me was finding movies based on books. I seemed to have been interested in visuals from an early age which could explain why, as a teacher, I use the overhead projector often, I always got excited seeing how a piece of writing was turned into “reality”. Besides just borrowing story books, I also borrowed books for assignment purposes. I remember selecting books based on natural disasters and diseases because my assignments were based on them. I also used the photocopying facility at the library to photocopy pictures that I would stick next to my writing as part of my assignments. A critical friend comment to the library visit was to think about how many public libraries are within the precinct of the school. The comment was to yet again, remind me of who my learners are and that to document my story is not enough to assist them.

I actually recall wanting to be a journalist back then. Reading newspapers like the *Post* and *Courier*, as well as watching the news and travel television shows like *Eastern Mosaic* and *Top Billing*, I got interested in that field of work. These are also aspects that got me interested in writing. When the topic of “what do I want to be when I grow up” was discussed in class, I recall saying I want to be a journalist and my teacher just looked at me and asked, “what type of journalist?” and I had no idea what to say, because I did not realise there were different types. So, I went that afternoon and asked my parents. I also looked at the newspaper. I then came across the title “leisure” in the *Post* and decided I wanted to be a leisure journalist. The next day I went to school and told my teacher this. Her reaction of “are you sure? A bright learner like you, have you not thought about engineering or something...”.

I also recall watching television shows like *Thabang Thabong* on television and writing letters to be submitted to the show, which makes me realise that I engaged in a little bit of transactional writing from a young age. I would ask my father to post the letters, as those received would be read out on air. None of my letters were ever read out on the programme and when I got older, I realised that my father never sent them, as 2

weeks after giving him a letter to post, I found it in his car cubby-holder. I did however win a Christmas competition that was hosted by the *Courier* local newspaper. I had to write a letter to Santa telling him what I wanted for Christmas. This letter was scanned and published in their newspaper. Which made me feel very excited at the time. I recall asking Santa for a book.

In the three years that I spent in this new school, I got more involved in writing and orals. I used to be very nervous when it came to presenting my orals, such as my “show-and-tells”, but this definitely boosted my self-esteem and presentation skills. In my previous school we hardly ever engaged in orals or inter-class competitions and here there was one almost every term. I now notice a small discrepancy between the two primary schools and the activities that they offered and a critical friend alerted me to the fact that my learners hail from very different backgrounds and schools.

My show-and-tell item used to be making a book-mark, most probably because I was engrossed in reading at the time, and I remember the librarian and the local library discouraged folding the page edges as a book-mark. My favourite author at the time was Enid Blyton. I enjoyed the adventurous stories that she wrote. I recall watching a movie titled *Enid* and only towards the end of the movie I realised it was actually based on Enid Blyton. I was so mesmerised by this that I remember telling one of my friends about it and how there is actually a movie about my favourite author and her life.

As a primary school learner, much of the teaching associated with writing in primary school, was very general. In English we had a general focus on vowels, understanding sentences, and using them to form own sentences, and spelling, amidst other components like nouns.

What I learned about my exposure to the teaching and learning of writing in this phase of my life is that writing within the school environment was taught in a scaffolded manner – we started with basic writing pieces, like writing “daily news”, and gradually extended those pieces into essays. The importance of a supportive home environment was reinforced as my parents were still actively involved in my education, as they guided and proof-read my writing pieces, and my father took me to the library regularly.



### **4.3. Progression of my writing journey**

#### **4.3.1. My High School Years**

The vast progression of writing came about when I moved on to secondary school, which was just up the road from my primary school. In this phase, writing was emphasized. We had writing pieces to do for English almost every term in the form of essays, dialogues, and letters. These were the topics/pieces we would mostly receive. It was in high school that I was introduced to and learnt more about the different purposes of writing.

My English teachers from grade 8-12 used to teach us topics based on the aforementioned writing pieces, thereafter they used to show us the formats and give us guiding sentences for our work. This paragraph reveals that writing was definitely emphasized more in high school, it also shows that essay and letter writing were the most common genres. The formats of these pieces were also taught, along with guiding sentences. Thus, this is how I was taught, and it seems to have influenced how I currently teach. Creative writing was mostly done for assessment purposes, and this is still the case in schools.

The teacher would scaffold the format for a particular genre of writing and I found these guidelines fairly useful. The teacher also highlighted the importance of drafts when writing as every successful writing piece, needs to be planned, before submission. However, I remember sometimes just writing a draft and then a final copy afterwards just because my teacher wanted to see it. Also, sometimes I would not feel confident enough to start of my letter differently or end it in a different way from the guidelines given, as I would feel that it may be wrong, as it is not how the teacher had guided us to write it out. I get the sense that I wanted more autonomy when writing but was scared to try anything new.

When it came to literature essays in the FET phase, based on Shakespearean plays for instance, we would be given model essays to look at. In an examination I would then try to remember the main points of the model essays and use them for the current topic. I used to get anxious when I could not recall all my essay points. I now realise

that a lot of my learning at this stage was very instrumental. One of the most beneficial excursions I have been on is to the Playhouse Theatre to watch *Othello* in my matric year. This excursion really made me understand Shakespeare better and assisted me whilst writing assessments based on it. I felt empowered whilst writing these assessments, as I could recall the play and how it unfolded.

I recall, in matric, my friends would be preparing essays on a general topic like “The best time of my life” and learning it off by-heart to adapt it to the topics in the creative writing paper (paper 3). However, me on the other hand would not, as I felt that I would not be creative enough or I would restrict my ideas by doing that.

After writing these essays I remember getting feedback from our teacher in the form of marked scripts. These scripts would be marked with a red pen, misspelt words would be circled, and grammatically incorrect sentences would be underlined. I used to feel a bit annoyed seeing the teacher’s corrections and remarks, especially after putting so much of effort into producing the writing piece. I seem to give feedback in a similar manner presently and need to work on alternative ways of marking.

I was fairly good at writing pieces, usually attaining an A aggregate mark (75+%). I was in the grade 12 ‘B’ class, which used to be quite a noisy class. We had a coy, soft-spoken, senior English teacher, however after the first few lessons with our noisy class she adopted an attitude of teaching those who wanted to be taught.

I was quite a responsible learner who was a class representative and I remember her telling me to let the class know that she is willing to assist if needed. I think this was due to the fact that she could give us her all and somewhat felt guilty about it, as my class was too playful. She did form an ‘English club’ wherein we were encouraged to engage in creative writing (refer to figure 4.4) below.

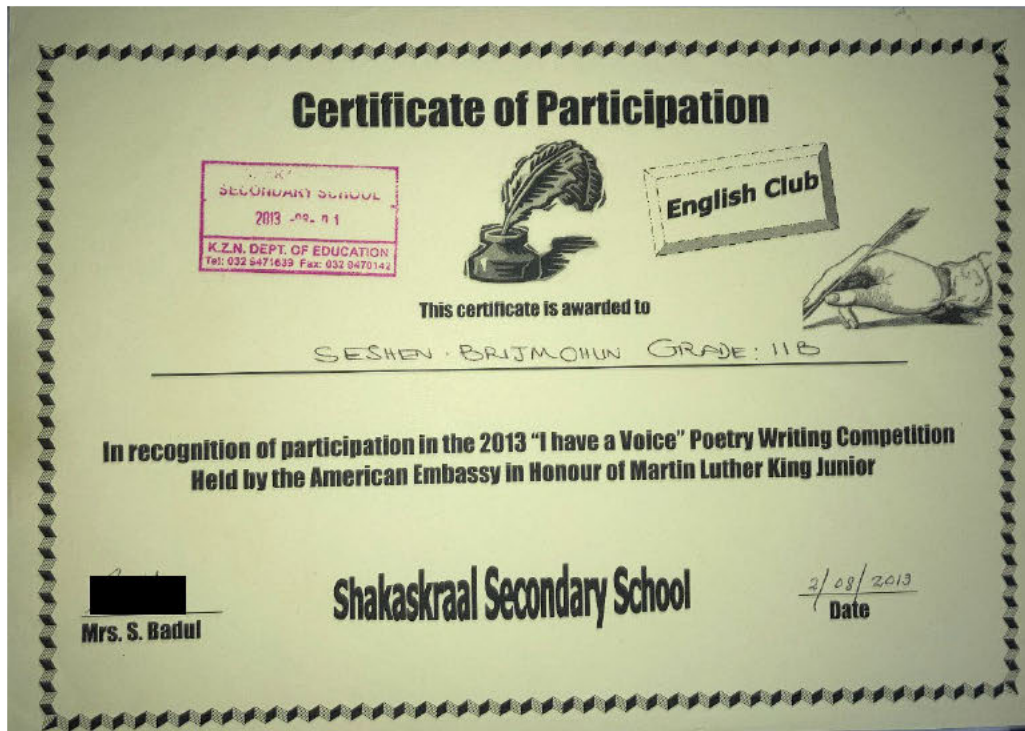


Figure 4.4: A certificate I have acquired from participating in a poetry writing competition.

What I have come to realise and learned in the reflections on my experiences of writing in high school is that I often model my teaching and assessment of writing on how I was taught at school. Our teacher treated us as if we were an homogenous group (which we were in the main), and I tend to do the same with my learners. I came to this realisation only after a critical friend asked what I do differently from the way in which I was taught. I now realise that to teach in this way is not necessarily to meet the needs of every learner in the class. I have also realised that the teaching moments that I recall vividly are those that were not teacher-centred. An example of such is the visit to the playhouse. Another important learning was those certain activities in which I had to model my own writing on what I had been exposed to caused anxiety.

#### 4.4. My University Years

##### 4.4.1. Being A Tertiary Student

I then proceeded to further my studies in the field of education, making me a pre-service teacher. When I got to university, I was not fully equipped for academic writing

and it took me some time to grasp the writing concepts and conventions. What I have realised is that high school does not equip students for academic writing and is more for creative writing. This made me feel somewhat lost and incompetent. However, I had the guidance of my older brother and cousin who were also students on the same campus but in different phase specialisations.

One of the first modules I attended was Academic Literacy for Undergraduate Students and we were asked to find and read an article on a specific topic. My newfound friends and I did not really know what an 'article' was, and we decided to search for an article online and in newspapers, until a second-year friend of ours told us what was meant by finding an "academic article". When I read my first few academic articles, I could not fully fathom them and the way in which they were written, as I was never exposed to them before. I could not fully understand the language and the sections which they were divided into. This was the first time in my life that writing made me feel inadequate.

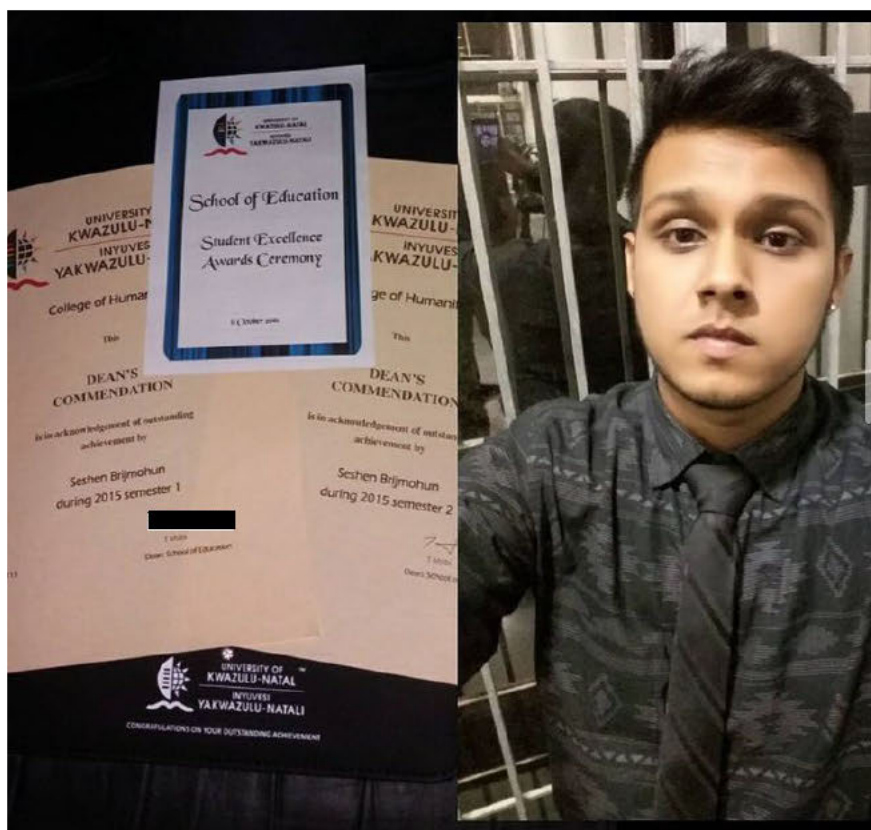
For my first couple of assessments, which were mainly academic essays, I would not write academically. For example, I would put down famous Nelson Mandela quotations without referencing them, in my essay introductions I would not really outline what would be discussed throughout the essay. This was because I had not been taught these conventions during my schooling years. In school, we would normally do a bibliography at the end of our work and just put down titles and authors. Here in university, it was different as we had to reference in-text as well. This felt as a lot of work initially and still does at times, as I feel sometimes more time is spent on referencing rather than focusing on the actual content. I do, however, realise the need to acknowledge somebody else's work.

After a whole semester I had a better idea of academic writing. This was due to guidance from other students and module lecturers which I now view as learning from others. It was through my English Major and Methodology modules that I became familiar with academic writing. I recall starting one of my English module essays with a long quotation and not really outlining what my essay was going to be about. Upon receiving feedback from my marked script, I realised that academic writing requires us to introduce our topic in a certain way and outline what and how we are going to be

discussing the topic throughout the essay. I notice that feedback has definitely assisted me in my academic journey and therefore see its importance in scaffolding my learners. This feedback gave me a better understanding of academic writing conventions.

As a pre-service teacher, I was taught about the significance of being able to write appropriately. At first, I was not aware of the manner in which a well-structured academic essay should be structured, and the conventions which it should entail. I was just familiar with the basics, which I had understood from school. However, with the aid of my lecturers and marked assignments, I was able to get into grips and understand how to write successfully in an academic context.

Through their guidance and continuous assessment of my writing, I was able to write appropriately, as an undergraduate academic and achieved accordingly (refer to figure 4.5). Upon reflection now, I see that although we had big classes of students in our modules, a supportive teaching and learning environment was still somewhat maintained. At the time I believed that my lecturer marked all my assignments, however I now know that markers are actually employed by the university as a major aid to lecturers and marking. Perhaps teachers deserve assistants as well, therefore the Department of Basic Education have currently employed teacher assistants, although only for a few months.



*Figure 4.5: A collage of one of the highlights of my university years – Student Excellence Awards Ceremony.*

## **4.5. Becoming a teacher of writing.**

### **4.5.1. Pre-Service Teaching**

A very useful module which influenced my teaching in my Bachelor of Education degree was the Teaching Practice module. We went into schools to observe classes being taught and to teach under supervision and it was in these teaching blocks that I gleaned ideas about how to teach. Through the actual teaching practice, for the four weeks every consecutive year, I got a taste of being on the reverse side of school and being a teacher. This was also a profitable time for me to observe my mentor teachers in their classrooms and how they taught.



8. Time allocation of lesson

Activities	Minutes
Linking with previous work	—
Introduction to the learning content	10
Teaching of new learning content	10
Application (examples, assignments)	20
Evaluation/Assessment	15

9. What did you learn from this lesson and what would you do differently if you were teaching this lesson? Why

I learnt to take the learners ideas into consideration as different learners had different ways of describing obituaries they have seen.

2

Figure 4.6: A snippet from my teaching practice module' observation of (mentor) teacher lesson.

All of my mentor teachers, throughout my exposure to the practice of teaching, followed a teacher-centred approach. Their lessons mainly meant standing at the front of the classroom and teaching, whilst providing limited opportunities for learners to give their input.

Thereafter, written activities were given to learners from their English textbook or worksheets (which generally came from other additional textbooks which the teachers were in possession of). Learners would then attempt the activities and start to chat to each other – not necessarily about their classwork. The teachers would normally sit at their desk and randomly ask learners if they needed assistance. The pieces of written work would then be 'marked' the following day.

Marking meant the teachers would dictate or write the answers on the chalkboard and learners would mark their work with a pencil. I have realised that I engage in such activities as it is impossible to physically mark every learner's book and activities on a daily basis. Giving learners feedback on activities and allowing them to mark their work in pencil is something I will probably continue doing. I feel this is beneficial, as learners can see where they went wrong and can be aware not to repeat those mistakes again. Through the observations above (with reference to figure 4.6), I had thus noted that "I learnt to take the learners ideas into consideration...".

I engaged in teaching practice at a combined school in my second and fourth years and at a high school in my third year. My mentor teachers were mainly grade 9 and 10

English teachers but did have other subjects like Life Orientation to teach. Both these schools were considered quintile four schools. The combined school seemed to have better resources, such as a portable over-head projector while the secondary school did not. However, according to the learners of the combined school, their teacher hardly used the projector. When I asked the teacher why, she explained that it was a bit of a hassle to walk around and set up this device in her classes. This reason was justified as it does take some time to set up a projector. What made it more understandable was that the teacher taught a range of grades and it seemed difficult to be walking around with a projector, as well as your own bag. My critical friend made the comment *welcome to the 'other world' upon reading this*.

In addition, classrooms did not have a projector screen, however a white sheet could have been used, but in the teacher's defence, the classrooms did not have curtains, and this would affect the projection. An over-head projector is a great resource to have when teaching writing but not all schools have that privilege. There are numerous videos and pictures to show learners on how to become an effective and more creative writer.

During my teaching practices, I taught lessons on poetry whereby I spoke about how and why poets wrote in the way that they did. I also did lessons on the introduction to Shakespeare wherein I briefly spoke about how we get different styles of writing and how unique pieces of writing – like Shakespeare is remembered for centuries (currently – I tell my learners that they must aim to write just as well, so that their work will be remembered too), reading comprehensions in which I told learners to read questions properly and write their answers in a precise manner.

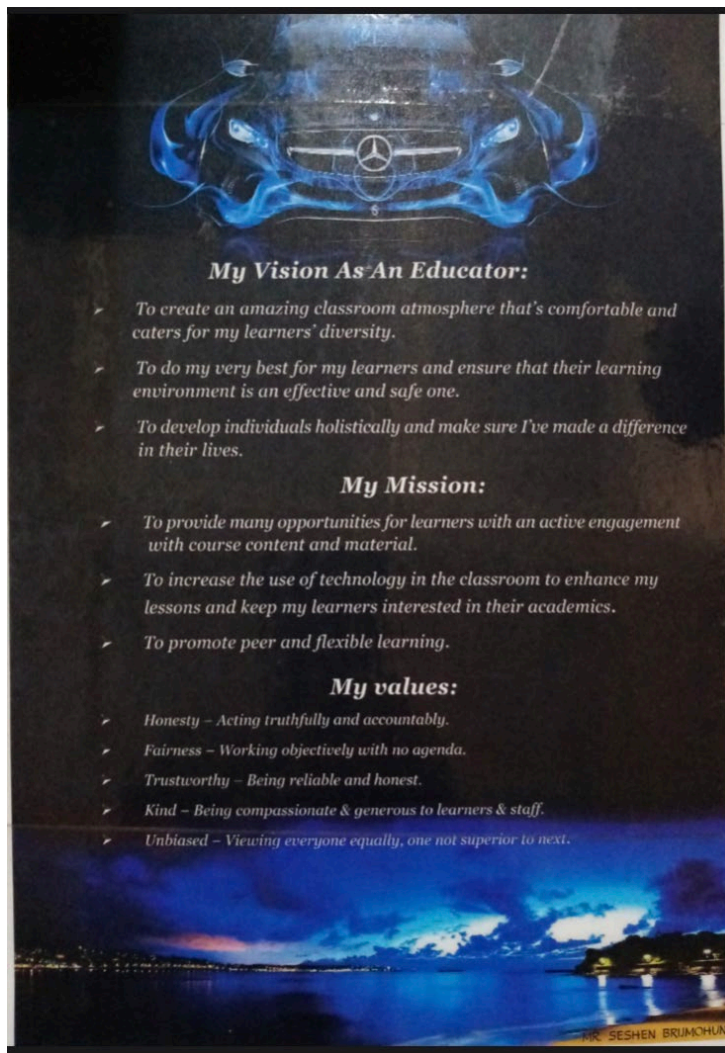
I still engage in this practice and tell learners to pay attention to the 'mark scheme' so that their written answers are sufficient, with regard to language and essay writing. I remember when teaching essay writing, I first discussed the different types with the learners so that they understood the features associated with narrative and argumentative essays for instance. Whilst doing this, I could not really recall being taught about these different types in my schooling years. Perhaps, my teachers very briefly touched on these. Learners seemed to be quite interested when I had given them some practice topics. Some learners produced very good pieces of work, whilst others seemed to have just written to get the work done. I noted that I gave them the



writing piece as an informal assessment. Upon deeper reflection now, I remember that I did not initially tell them it was not for formal grading and when this was revealed to them at a later stage, they seemed disappointed and some made remarks like “I should not have put in so much effort if I knew it was not for marks...”. Thus, creative writing is viewed by these learners as a task (for formal assessment) and they are not very keen on doing it for practice purposes, hence the need to try and shift their views away from this and make them view writing in an exciting way. I will try to do this by letting them know that writing is a way of expressing their thoughts and letting others (the world, perhaps) read and hear their voice.

I realized during teaching practice, that learners enjoyed being included, and they paid more attention during these lessons. Since I only taught a couple of lessons, I made use of the school’s over-head projectors and learners seemed to be very interested as it was something out of the ordinary lessons that they were normally given. I remember teaching a lesson on using punctuation marks. I emphasized the importance of using punctuation marks to make their writing better and easily understood. I printed A4-size punctuation marks and at the back of the same page I wrote out small dialogues to remember these marks by. I called 10 learners to the front of the class (as I focused on 10 punctuation marks for the lesson), these learners then had to hold their respective punctuation mark up and read the short dialogue to the class. For a *full stop* – “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a full stop. You will find me at the end of a sentence”. For the *question mark* – “Hello? Can you hear me?... No, I’m not the singer Adel, but I just wanted to ask you a question to get your response” and so on. I also recall reiterating how important punctuation is in their writing – as it “saves lives” – I used the example “Lets eat grandma” which is meant to be punctuated as “Let’s eat, grandma” and learners found this funny.

I engaged in this activity with my grade 8 and 9 learners this year as well and this method seems to work quite well. I plan to continue using it; thus I notice that coming up with my own creative ways of teaching content is actually a good thing and I must not be afraid to move-away from the methods in which I was taught.



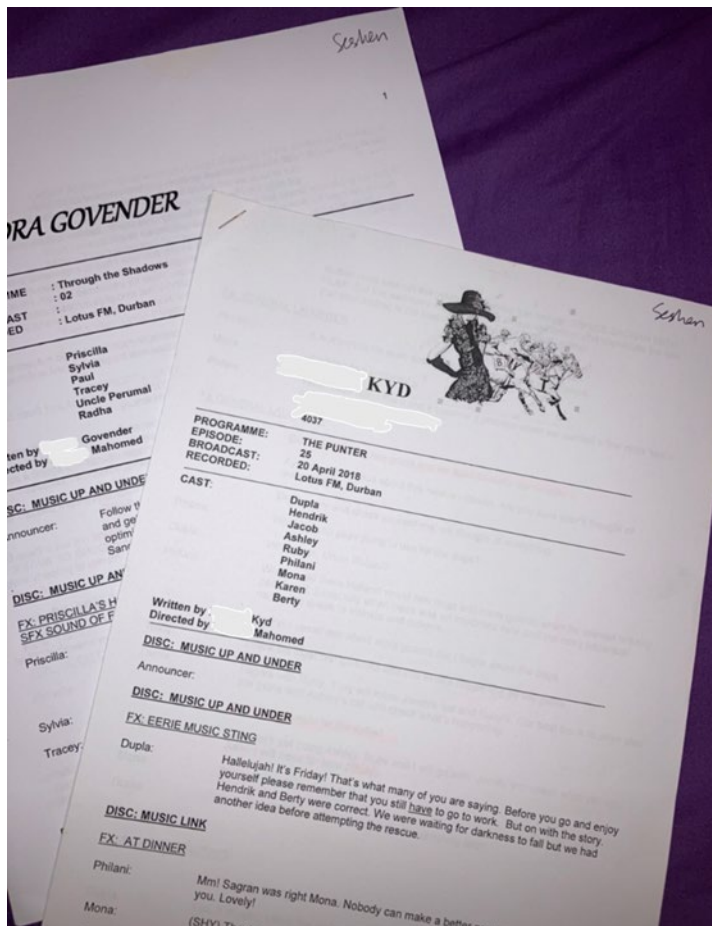
*Figure 4.7 : Inside the front cover of my teaching practice portfolio file – which has now become my Grade 12, Teacher Portfolio File.*

Teaching practices meant having a portfolio file (refer to figure 4.7). In these portfolio files there were many pieces of writing required. I remember preparing lengthy lesson plans containing 5-8 pages just for one lesson. These lesson plans would include details like the grade, subject, and topic and a detailed step-by-step on how the lesson was to unfold. We would also include aims and objectives of the lessons. I recall also writing daily reflections, as well as lesson reflections on my lesson plans. This had become a tedious task at the time and sometimes I used to write really short lesson reflections, just so that it gets done.

Overall, my teaching practices were great learning experiences and really made me feel more equipped to be in a working environment. I currently use the majority of my teaching practice lesson plans as guides whilst writing out lesson plans now, however

my current lesson plans are much shorter. I still view filing and lesson plans as a tedious task and I prefer, to rather look at study guides and internet resources for lesson preparation – instead of having lengthy plans written out, which I hardly refer to while the lesson is being taught.

As a student teacher I observed that English as an overall subject, and writing in particular is a challenge, to many learners. A critical friend asked me to elaborate on this and I replied that when I browsed through learners' work, I noticed that not all were able to write efficiently, nor follow the correct grammatical discourse and structures. Essay writing was (and still is) an issue, as many learners were not able to use punctuation marks appropriately, and they were not able to construct sentences deductively. According to all my mentor teachers, they said they were doing their best, but many learners still struggled with writing effectively. I also observed that, many learners had experienced much fear, when it came to speaking out and answering questions. Class participation was minimal, and teaching was mainly teacher-centered.



*Figure 4.8 : Examples of radio drama scripts which I performed, and was exposed to.*

Additionally, during my years as a pre-service teacher, I ventured into the world of entertainment. Here I became exposed to more writing, in the form of dialogues for radio dramas, television series, feature films and stage plays. I have been featured on all four of these platforms as an actor and stage manager. By being exposed to these dialogues, I have gained more experience of these different entertainment genres and noticed how the style of writing for each one differs. In radio drama scripts, the writer includes adding the sounds of objects (like cutlery) as a side note on the script, whereas the side notes in film scripts just included direction of the scene (refer to figure 4.8)

During my pre-service teacher years, my learning included that teaching seemed to be teacher-centered. Henceforth, I will definitely try to include my learners in lessons. This gives them a sense of belonging and encourages them to express themselves – this could also help in writing. The more confident they are in speaking and reading,

the more effective they can become in writing. I also learned that technological devices are in short supply in many South African classrooms.

#### **4.6. Being A Novice Teacher**

##### **4.6.1. The student becomes the teacher.**

Having just qualified, not securing a job, feeling disappointed, and feeling slightly hopeless after studying for 4 years, I decided to pursue my post-graduate studies. Just before my honours academic year could begin, I was called for an interview at a semi-rural high school on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. After the interview, I was not too sure whether I would get that substitute post for a teacher who was on accouchement leave. However, before leaving the school carpark, I was called back (on my cellphone) and asked if I would be happy to remain at the school for the day to speak to the languages departmental head and English educators. I immediately agreed, as this was what I hoped for.

Upon speaking to the languages departmental head who presented me with my timetable and duty load, I noticed that I was going to be teaching majority English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners. As a novice teacher, I was nervous to do this as I was not sure about the methods for EFAL classes. The next day I returned to the school to start my first official teaching job. It was not the ideal school which I had in mind. I did not have my own classroom and the majority of the classes that I taught were overcrowded. I had a minimum of approximately 48 learners per class and I remember a grade 11 class having over 60, with some of the learners being my age. The good part was that they were manageable and listened most of the time. I would say that they seemed to value education. However, giving them individual attention was almost impossible.

A problem that I encountered with the EFAL classes was that some of the learners did not even know very simple English terminology, like nouns and verbs. It was quite difficult to converse with them due to the language barrier, as the majority of them were IsiZulu speakers. I asked learners who understood to kindly assist their classmates and they agreed. I dictated answers to them, until I realised that they were not using the correct spelling and I then started writing answers on the chalkboard. Hence, when it came to writing - spelling and grammar was poor and I would tell them they need to improve on their writing, but never really had a chance to give them many

writing activities, as I was concerned about completing the syllabus. I also did not want to create too much marking for myself as I was still ‘finding my feet’.

Many learners could not even understand essay topics. A topic like “My holiday” was not something they easily understood, as some of them had never been on a holiday. When the matric learners were going to the Playhouse theatre in Durban to watch *Othello*, their teacher told me that they are very excited, as it is the first time for some of them to be going to a city, let alone to a live production. It was definitely an eye-opener for me, as I got a better understanding of what teaching English, specifically writing, meant in the different contexts of South Africa. I realised that I was not fully prepared to go into an EFAL classroom and needed to be really patient with the learners – which I was. I recall always repeating points and also including learners by making them read paragraphs out aloud when we did comprehensions and I guided them on how to write answers. I still continue with this practice in my home language classes, as I feel that it guides learners better.

I tried to encourage reading and even asked them to go watch predominantly IsiZulu soapies like *Imbewu* and *Uzalo* on SABC 1 and E-Tv where they would be able to listen to the dialogues in IsiZulu and read the English subtitles. I thought that this would expose them to more reading, which in turn might improve the way they constructed their sentences and overall writing. Thinking back, some of the learners also ‘joked’ and said they do not have electricity nor television sets and others would just giggle, but maybe those were not ‘jokes’ after all.

However, an amusing discovery for them was spotting me on *Imbewu* (refer to figure 4.9), when they approached me about it – I denied it was me, but one student found a newspaper article confirming that it was actually me.



*Figure 4.9: A scene from my feature on Imbewu.*

Nevertheless, whether my methods mentioned above actually helped them - I cannot really say, because two months into that teaching post, I got a call from a secondary school in Tongaat where I was to serve as a substitute teacher as well, however there was another English teacher who was scheduled to retire and I could possibly fill in that post. This was more convenient for me, as instead of travelling to Honours lectures almost 90 minutes every second day after school, I would now be travelling for just under an hour and this was closer to home. Hence, I accepted the post and moved to the new school.

My experience there made me realise that teaching writing to EFAL learners was not something I was fully ready for. I knew content relating to writing fairly well, but simplifying it to make those learners understand well, was definitely not my super-power. If I ever had to go back, I would be even more patient and really scaffold these learners' writing skills, considering their cultural backgrounds. For example, I would not just give them an essay based on "My Holiday/vacation" – but rather adapt it to their setting – making it "My school holidays on the farm" or "Christmas time at Ugogos house". I would also attempt to code-switch at times to make explanations a little bit clearer, as I feel this would help them. It will also show them that I am making an effort to communicate in a better manner with them and so should they – with me.

The above period has shown me the importance of preparation in teaching, which ultimately influences Pedagogy and creating a conducive teaching and learning

environment. Once again, I learnt that resources in the classroom mainly comprise of textbooks and printed worksheets, hence the lack of technological resources. I also learned that peer-learning/ assistance can also contribute to be positive teaching and learning environment.

Another learning was the importance of creating more writing opportunities as practice for learners and have them peer-reviewed by their classmates. I consider the most valuable learning to have been that I must consider Socioculturalism and being a culturally responsive teacher. Learners will respond much better to writing they can relate to. To become this teacher requires that I get to know my students.

#### **4.6.2. My current teaching context**

Having accepted the teaching post in Tongaat, I moved schools and am in my third year as an educator at this secondary school. I teach mainly English Home Language (EHL) and a few classes for Life Orientation. In 2019 I taught grade 9, 10 and 11 and last year (2020) I taught grade 8, 9 and 10. My B.Ed. qualification specialisation is however FET (grade 10-12). I am finally teaching a grade 12 class this year (2021) and I am quite happy and ready for the task ahead. My allocation for the 2021 academic year is EHL – grade 9, 11 & 12 respectively.

Teaching English is something I am very passionate about, as it is a language that you can communicate with in most parts of this world. The importance of writing is something that I emphasize with my learners, as I believe that it is one of the most important skills to acquire and will take you to great heights personally, professionally, and academically. I even joke and say that you write from a very early age, throughout your education process and even beyond that. Before you die you will be required to write your last will and testament and even when you die, someone will have to write a report on how you have passed on.

When teaching creative writing to all my grade classes, I generally explain to my learners what the writing piece is going to be about, whether it is a certain type of essay or transactional piece, like friendly or formal letters. I do this by dictation whilst referring to the formats from their textbooks. I then ask them for feedback about what can be written. For instance, what do they think they should write about in a formal letter of complaint, and they would give me responses like “complaining about food at a restaurant”. I also encourage my learners to not only complain or state problems,



but rather offer solutions as well, hence if your complaint is about receiving cold food, offer a solution like having more food warmers or waiters to serve it faster. Upon reading this a critical friend asked is I ever introduce a genre of writing in a different, more exciting manner.

I realised that I teach writing in almost the same manner throughout all my grade classes. I even tend to use the same examples and if I write the format, of a friendly letter for instance, on the chalkboard, I ask all my classes, regardless of grade to take down the same format in their books. Sometimes I even talk to my grade 8 & 9 learners about how matric examinations work and how they need to write effectively to achieve good marks. I tell them that when their examination scripts get marked by external markers when they get to matric – “those markers are marking hundreds of scripts for the day and they are not going to take extra time on your script to try and understand what you are writing, just because you forgot to use the correct punctuation marks and grammatical conventions”. Learners get so surprised by this, especially when I tell them that their name does not even go on their answer booklet. I do this to let them know what they must prepare themselves for – thus reiterating the importance of effective writing in English and across all other subjects as well. This is a practice I will continue with, as it gives learners a better idea of how examinations works.

Even if it is a narrative essay and the narrative contains a problem, I always encourage them to offer a solution. Thus, I remind them that stories normally contain conflicts in its rising action and resolutions in its falling action (something that I do not recall being taught to me in school). I do this so that they learn to be critical thinkers and engage in life skills where they need to learn problem solving. I also situate their pieces of writing in reality and where it is actually used.

An important aspect that I always draw my learner’s attention to, is that of using social media lingo in their academic work. I have found, through the marking of assessments, that learners tend to sometimes write in the same way that they use to chat on social media. Common themes that I find in many learners writing are: Shortened/incorrect spelling of words (“dat” instead of ‘that’, ‘lotz’ instead of lots); No/Misuse of punctuation (“OMG!!!!!!” instead of ‘Oh my gosh!’; Phrases being incorrectly shortened (‘wanna’ instead of ‘want to’ and ‘gonna’ instead of ‘going to’); No/Misuse of capital letters (‘i’ instead of ‘I’, ‘durban/durbz’ instead of ‘Durban’). When learners are generally

questioned about the above themes found in their writing, majority reply by stating that – that is how they communicate on a daily basis via social media networking sites and that they understand what is being said and I always try to reiterate that those are not academically acceptable. Therefore, I want to encourage assertive peer-reviewing, whereby their classmates check and proofread their work for common social media lingo.

One way of combatting the above is conducting spelling tests on a weekly basis for my grade 8 and 9 learners, as suggested by my languages departmental head, which is something that was not done last year. Learners sometimes complain about this, but I always explain to them that this will greatly benefit them in their writing. Besides just spelling these words, I ask them what they think the words mean and offer them an understanding of the word, as well as in what type of contexts it can be used. Hence, when they write – they must use appropriate vocabulary. The practice of conducting spelling tests is something I would like to continue with, I believe that this helps learners to improve on their spelling and vocabulary.

I encourage peer reviewing in class. I mainly started doing this, not only to encourage assisting and helping each other, but also to save myself the time to mark their work twice (i.e., their drafts and then their final copies), as this would sometimes make learners lazy – knowing that they can write anyhow and I would correct it for them, before they rewrite it as their final copy. Thus, this places more responsibility on them, and I always remind them that they are accountable for their marks. I do not support the notion that teachers are entirely responsible for a learners' work. I, therefore, always have and will remind that they are responsible for their own marks and there is no such thing as “the teacher failed me – but you failed yourself” – because as a teacher, I know I teach to the best of my ability and equip you with the necessary aspects to pass assessments, the rest is up to you. I always tell them, that I can tell and even show you how to start a car and change gears, but if you do not go and practice yourself, you will unfortunately not be able to drive by yourself.

At the end of the draft, I ask them to write “Peer reviewed by *their name*” on their classmate's draft. I normally guide this process by checking if this is being done and I assist with spelling and grammar should they not be sure of it. However, most learners view this as a tedious task and some show very little interest in it. I wish to try and shift

learners' attitudes away from this – writing must be something that they enjoy and like to do on their own accord. There are a few who produce really good pieces of work and it is evident they follow my guidelines. I always encourage them to be very creative and always write pieces of work that they can relate to.

When we received news at school, that due to the Covid-19 pandemic we will be closing. I immediately decided to give all classes a writing piece to do, hence all classes received essay topics that they were required to work with in this 'break/lockdown'. I decided to do this as I knew that when we returned, they would have an essay as an assessment. Thus, essays and writing pieces at large are mainly used for assessment purposes and therefore I want to try and move away from this perspective and make it an enjoyable task. Remembering what my critical friend had asked about teaching in a different manner. One of the grade 8 topics was "The power is in your hands". When I gave the topic to the classes, I encouraged them to think creatively. I asked them to consider our current circumstances, hence I wanted them to think about our hand sanitation and its importance at this time. I, however, did not let them know that, as I want them to think about the topic and assess how creative they can be on their own.

Creativity encompasses doing things in a unique and exciting way (Simplicio, 2000). Piirto (2011) contends that creativity cuts across all disciplines, not only the arts, visual art, music or dance, and that creativity is also developed by divergent thinking. Thus, thinking creatively is something I always encourage.



*Figure 4.10. : A bunch of keys which I randomly used whilst teaching creative writing.*

I showed learners a bunch of classroom keys (refer to figure 4.10) and I told them that this could appear in your creative writing examination as a visual stimulus topic and there are so many topics you can come up with – the KEY to education, the KEYS to your future, KEYS open locks and therefore it reminds you of how we were locked down for months, the KEYS to the holiday house that you will never forget, your grandmothers stories were the KEYS to your heart... and so on. Learners were so amused by this, and I reminded them that they should never just look at things from one angle, but critically examine it through different angles – that is creative thinking.

Learning from the above section, primarily focuses on my Pedagogy. This section also honed-in on how I attempt to create a supportive teaching and learning environment, inclusive of trying to be a responsive teacher.

#### **4.6.3. Looking back...some months ago**

Learners were scheduled to write their creative writing paper (paper 3) on Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2020. In the lessons building up to the paper I decided to hone in on creative writing – essay and transactional writing. This is because I believe that revision and refreshing of learners' memories are vital before examinations.

Due to having limited lessons with them, I focused more on transactional writing, focusing their attention to formats, register and tone when writing. I took for granted that learners remembered the different types of essays (i.e., descriptive, argumentative or narrative). I did however remind them that all essays must follow the format of having an introduction, followed by a body and then conclusion.

I emphasized the importance of an interesting “catchy” introduction and a well-rounded conclusion. I always tell learners to put themselves in the marker's shoes and think about whether they would be interested in reading something that has a boring introduction. I also ask them “If someone is delivering a speech at an event and the person starts off with a boring introduction, would you want to continue listening to them?” – majority of learners will reply “No” or shake their heads in disagreement. I then reinforce the importance of an interesting introduction and how the marker will want to read till the end. This also reiterates the importance of being creative and writing in a way that will keep your ‘audience’ interested. I noticed that this shows learners that they are not just writing for assessment purposes, but also for preparing for real-life situations. This is something that I wish to continue with, I want learners to have a realistic and holistic view of writing and education at large.

Another aspect that I encourage for the creative writing paper 3 is preparation. Learners tend not to prepare for this paper, as they feel that without having the topics, they cannot prepare. I remind learners that preparation is key, and I give them tips on how to prepare. These tips include reading, familiarising themselves with famous quotations and also thinking and planning on a generalised essay topic that they can adapt to one of the ‘picture topics’ - if it does not match any of the given topics. This shows learners that it is actually good to prepare for what they will be writing, because many learners feel that they should not study for English, as they do not know what comprehension or essay topics will be there.

Familiarising themselves with famous quotations from icons like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi can enhance their writing and boost their overall mark. These quotations relating to 'being the change you want to see in the world' and 'education being the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world', enables them to link their writing to well-known people, as well as encourage them to think in a way that is mature and can develop further creative ideas from them. These are ways in which I enriched my writing and therefore share it with my learners, in hope of them improving their writing.

The first thing I do when teaching how to write any genre, is to show them the format of the respective text. I then briefly tell learners what could be included in the introduction, body, and conclusion of the respective texts.

When writing the body of the text, I encourage learners to 'answer the question' by referring to and addressing aspects from the question. I also encourage them to take time to write their conclusions. I do not recall being specifically taught/lectured on how to teach creative writing to high school learners and hence, I teach it in a way I was taught in school. Upon review, I do wish to move away from this and come up with my own ideas.



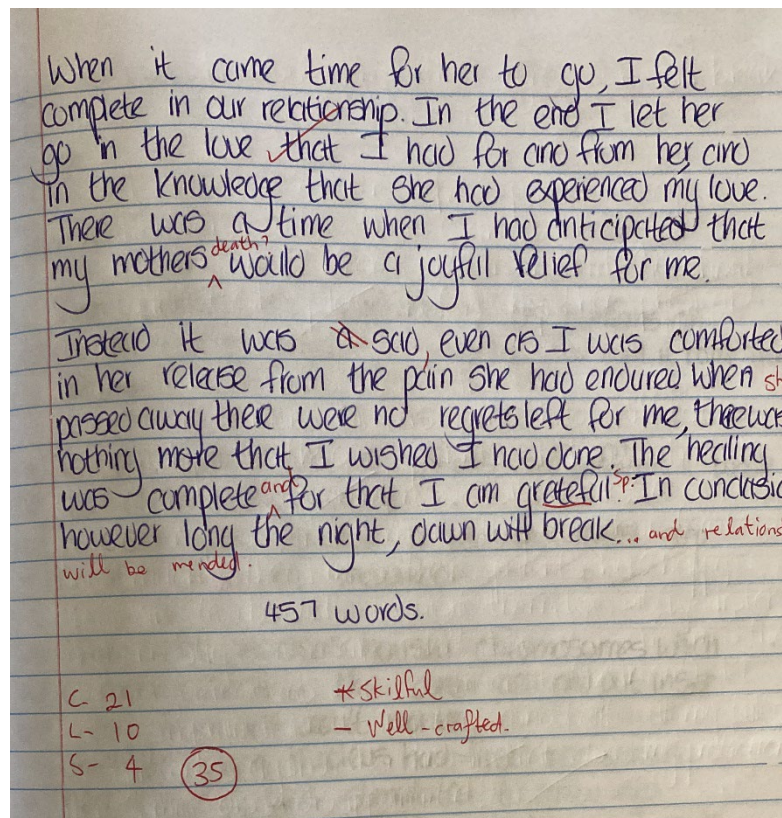


Figure 4.11. : A snippet of my marking of an essay.

Learners generally get their marked English examination scripts back a few weeks after writing (i.e., when they return after their term break). Marked test scripts are generally given back to them after a week. These marked scripts generally contain feedback in the form of red markings (refer to figure 4.11) – misspelt words are underlined and corrected, unnecessary words are deleted and general comments are given to “watch grammar” or “write neatly”.

This is how my scripts were marked in high school, as well as, at university and therefore I followed suit. From the inception of being a novice teacher, I was never workshopped or shown how to mark English scripts, however, when my scripts were moderated by my departmental head – she then gave me a few pointers, otherwise I interpreted the essay and transactional writing by myself and awarded marks, as I saw fit. The marks I award learners seem to be on par with more experienced teachers of English, as my marks never drastically lowered or increased during the moderation process. Thus, I see myself as a competent marker of writing. Marking writing is quite subjective, my departmental head would concur. I, however, use the rubrics (as per

the CAPS document) as a guide, in conjunction with my discretion and seem to be quite a competent marker of writing.

The marking is similar to examination or test marking and contain feedback in the form of red markings where misspelt words are underlined and corrected, unnecessary words are struck-out and general comments are given to “watch grammar and spelling” or to “write neatly and legibly”. I mark in this way, with the intention for learners to see their shortfall and improve on their writing and perhaps never make those mistakes again, however, when learners get their scripts back, they briefly discuss their marks with their peers, sometimes even giggling upon their mistakes and then not worry much about it. This shows me that they regard writing as an assessment task and once it’s over, they do not bother too much about it. I hope to change this behaviour in terms of response to feedback and perhaps ask a few learners (henceforth) to share their feedback aloud in class. I can get learners from the higher, middle- and lower-mark categories to share their feedback and perhaps this could be briefly discussed, so that other learners can relate as well.

Learning from the above section, once again exposes my Pedagogy, and my teaching practices when teaching writing. Erudition also included the importance of collaborative learning, inclusive of peer-reviewing and assistance, which makes me realise that peers could serve as MKO’s and scaffold fellow classmates. Through scholarship of observation, I have learnt that having a teacher-centred classroom is not ideal, and that I should move away from that, and promote a learner-centred classroom. It is also important to shift learners’ views of writing as a ‘task’ to something that is enjoyable, and a ‘life-skill’. This will assist in ensuring they prepare for writing, and its process.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

In reviewing my experiences of writing, I began with my exposure to written print and ended with my current teaching writing practices. I reflected on the different methods that I encountered throughout my writing journey, from being a very young learner to now, a teacher of English and master’s candidate.



Through my reflections on my teaching and learning I realised how these different experiences have scaffolded my writing journey and I have also realised the importance of being a lifelong learner as a teacher. Through reflecting on what my experiences of learning, and especially the teaching of writing is, I have also seen how these experiences influenced my learning and teaching of writing currently and have thus addressed my first two research questions: *“What are my learning experiences of writing?”* in which I discussed how I learnt, and was taught writing, and *“What are my teaching experiences of writing?”* in which I discussed how I teach writing.

In concluding, LaBoskey (2004) noted that the assumption is that the correctness of our memories is unimportant: whatever shape they take, they influence the creation of our identities, current thinking, and future action. As a result, by beginning to access and question those memories, we can gain greater control over them and their impact on our teaching (p. 843), hence the importance of looking back at what my writing experiences were. I have thus looked at my writing journey analytically, which assisted to develop themes to help me to respond to my second research question. The chapter to follow will hence primarily address my second research question: *“How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?”*.

## **Chapter 5 – A Reflexive Odyssey**

### **How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter explored my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, so as to extrapolate themes that will assist in my Pedagogy. In this chapter, I present the findings, in the form of themes, that emerged when I analysed data generated by means of the narrative journal and my other field texts, such as my lesson reflections and critical friend classroom observation sheets, which were also used as data generation strategies.

The purpose of this chapter is to address my second research question: “*How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*”. The themes extrapolated are: parental involvement; a supportive teaching and learning environment; pedagogic practices; and teaching resources. The learning that emerged from these themes and how what I now know can improve my Pedagogy, will subsequently be discussed in this chapter.

#### **5.2. Parental Involvement**

The term ‘parental involvement in education’ emphasizes the shared responsibility that families and schools share in fostering successful learner achievement (Bailey, 2017). Kennedy (2010) states that parental involvement has a constructive effect in developing written expression if parents support their children at home with class or homework activities and application of the knowledge gained at school. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) views resonate with the above, by stating that parental involvement is an important aspect in education and can be accomplished through home-based parental involvement like listening to the child as they read or write, helping them in completing their homework as well as school-based activities. This is something that my parents did for me, as they always proofread and guided my writing by correcting spelling errors and making sure sentences were constructed correctly.

My reflections indicate that my parents have always played a major role in my education and much of this was through what was modelled rather than explicit assistance. Through this, I have grasped the value of parental involvement in my writing journey. My parents were actively involved in introducing and exposing me to texts from an early age as seen from the following extract from my narrative journal - *my first experience of viewing writing was when I used to look through books that my parents used to read to me as a toddler*. This early exposure to literacy led to my interest in reading and later on writing, resulting in always being enthusiastic to engage with books in my primary schooling years, right into high school

Lessing and Mahabeer (2007) wrote that literacy learning begins at a young age, thus parents should expose their children to literacy-related activities, like reading, as my parents did. I recalled in my narrative journal that *my father used to always purchase the Post newspaper and bring home a copy of the North Coast Courier on a weekly basis and still does until this day*<sup>1</sup>. As a result, I was exposed to different genres of writing. After reading my reflections, one of my critical friends stated: *did you not realise the link between this privilege and your academic success?*

In response I stated: *well, it exposed me to the different styles and purposes of writing*. Mellom et al. (2018) stated that teacher views have been shown to have an effect on their expectations, and also impacts on learner behaviour and learning. In reflecting on my critical friend's question, I came to the realisation that I was now aware of my early literacy experiences, but had to consider the sociocultural circumstances of my learners. The critical friend's question encouraged me that to take into consideration my learners' backgrounds, may assist me to understand them better and not just impose my views on them.

This will assist me in becoming an effective culturally responsive teacher, thus enhancing my teaching of writing as well as my learners' writing competence. After a chat about my home circumstances, a critical friend stated: *from what I know and have observed, many of my learners' home circumstances are different to what you experienced. Some learners do not live with their parents, but guardians such as their grandparents, aunties, and uncles. It can also be noted that many of these caregivers are not academically inclined, and some even illiterate, due to their backgrounds*. This

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<sup>1</sup> The *North Coast Courier* and *Post* are local newspapers available in KwaZulu-Natal.

comment alerted me to so much about my learners. Ntekane (2018) writes that some parents are unable to read and write, as they can only communicate in their mother tongue, which makes it challenging for them to help their children with homework and it was only after the comment that I realised that Ntekane was writing about learners such as mine.

Nondabula (2020) makes the point that, as children acquire language skills in their social environment, the home environment plays an important part in how language acquisition occurs. It is therefore worthy to note that some of my learners are FAL speakers of English and are not exposed to much English in their communities. It is also noteworthy that my learners who come from English-speaking homes, may not be exposed to standardised academic English, as their dialect and styles differ.

As a novice teacher, I have become cognisant that all parents are not active in their children's education for a range of reasons. I did not come to all of these conclusions alone but it was in critical friend conversations that some of the issues were raised. These include but are not exclusive to low literacy levels, work and domestic problems. I am wary about how I approach a learner regarding their parents and do not just ask them to show their parents their work or get their work signed as I am not sure about their unique situations or backgrounds. I generally make reference to their 'parent or guardian' and sometimes just ask learners to seek assistance from family members or those with whom they live so as to avoid making them feel peculiar if they do not have actively involved parents in their lives.



*Figure 5.1 : My parents at my undergraduate university graduation in 2019.*

This photograph (Figure 5.1) reminds me of my parents' active and supportive involvement in my academic life. This reiterates my theme of parental involvement and its importance in my writing journey, as my parents have been actively involved in my education, from its early stages, right into my post-graduate studies. On seeing this photograph a critical friend stated that *support is a privilege*.

It has been ascertained that parental involvement in the initial phases of a child's educational development will have a substantial impact on the child's cognitive and literacy abilities (Dor, 2012; Sheng, 2012). This impact could be negative or positive. Lessing and Mahabeer (2007) note that low socioeconomic environments and literacy levels of parents tend to afford learners with marginal chances of exposure to the English language thereby effectively reducing their ability to speak and write effectively in English.

My privilege was three-fold as my parents were prepared to assist me, they are educated and have the means to purchase educational books. In my narrative journal I wrote:

*The teacher used to draw dots that outlined the numbers and letters and we used to join the dots to create the letters and words... I remember even asking my parents to buy me "dot-to-dot" colouring books...*



*Figure 5.2 : Me engaging with one of my "dot-to-dot" books.*



Through reflection, I realise that I was fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity to be exposed to print material through these books, and newspapers as many of my current learners are not afforded this privilege. According to Singh et al. (2004), one of the challenges hindering effective parental involvement in education is the poor socioeconomic status and income which leads to parents working more jobs and not spending enough time at home helping their children with their writing skills and school-work in general. In addition, Madondo (2014) states that rationales given by many parents for not being actively involved in their child's academics, are their low levels of education or their illiteracy, whilst some cite financial reasons.

If parents do not give one of these reasons, then say they are busy with household responsibilities or that they come home tired from work (Madondo, 2014). Learners' academic lives are impacted due to this lack of parental involvement and therefore I will further look into strategies of gaining active parental and family involvement, which may serve to enhance my learners' writing journeys and contribute to the way in which I teach.

I resolved to offer support to learners in this regard and to step in as the more knowledgeable other, by proofreading their work, encouraging peer-reviewing, and also asking them to make use of free resources. Through school WhatsApp groups, I am able to keep in contact with learners. On this platform, I share free resources and study guides. In this way, they receive additional supplementary support from me, which assists in remedying the issue, of parents not being able to be actively involved in their child's education, due to career commitments and their socioeconomic backgrounds at large.

My realisation that my middle-class background privileged my education is supported by Juan & Visser (2017) who mention that factors determining educational achievement in our South African context, expand beyond the school environment to include the home environment, wherein family is involved. Juan and Visser (2017) add that home resources include both material and intangible advantages such as parental education levels, parental involvement with homework, and home language. All of these are resources that a learner can access and constitute the learner's support system or social capital (Visser et al., 2015).

Knowing this, highlights the need to consider the sociocultural backgrounds of my learners in my research, as both environments provide tangible and intangible resources to learners that can influence academic achievement. This awareness of my privileged background, comprising of my social capital, directs me into considering the several backgrounds from which my learners hail and how I can be a culturally responsive teacher of writing.

Garcia and Thornton (2014) mention that research indicates the involvement of family in learning helps to improve learner performance, reduce absenteeism, and restore parents' confidence in their children's education. These factors are vital in producing good writers of English, as reduced absenteeism will result in learners being exposed to and engaging more with writing, subsequently improving their writing proficiency and performance. It is, however, noteworthy that not all learners have the full support of their families, and therefore, as a teacher, I enquire about absent learners and also ask them to furnish me with a note and contact number when they are absent. This practice reduces absenteeism, as learners know that they cannot just stay away from school without a valid reason.

As Lemmer (1996, p.335) states: "Children from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds also face general linguistic deprivation". These underprivileged backgrounds result from low-household income, as one of the challenges mentioned by Ntekane (2018), that hampers effective parental involvement is low income. Due to this, there is often a scarcity of books, magazines and newspapers, educational radio, and television in the home environment, as well as verbal communicative styles that are not compatible with those in the school environment. In contrast, I had the privilege of having newspapers, as well as borrowed library books at home, which enhanced my interest in reading and exposed me to different genres of writing. It can be noted that story books or novels were not bought for me, but my parents made the effort to take me to visit the library every month, as mentioned in my narrative journal - *my father used to take me to the library almost every alternate Saturday*. This shows that parents do not need to spend exorbitant amounts of money on attaining reading and writing resources for their children, but rather utilise resources from public libraries that can assist in improving language acquisition and writing proficiency.



Schools can assist by having reading programmes at school, whereby learners collect articles that they are interested in and create their own 'reading bank'. Prior to COVID-19 regulations and time constraints, my school used to have a designated reading period, wherein learners were meant to be engaging with reading material for 30 minutes on a Tuesday morning. This was a good practice, as learners actually engaged with reading resources, printed out for them.

In addition to the above, parents can also become involved in their children's writing journey in other ways, as mentioned by Ntekane (2018), for example, parents can be involved in their children's learning by becoming members of school boards, being actively involved and concerned about their child's academic performance and demonstrating commitment to their children's learning by attending parent meetings in order to gain a better understanding of their children's performance. These strategies do not cost parents a lot of money, but rather just asks for a little time and dedication to their child's education. A critical friend read my suggestion to parents and commented: *Huh, how do you KNOW that parents have the time to attend such meetings? You seem to talk about being a responsive teacher but now have to walk that talk and a starting point is to stop making assumptions.*

SESHEN BRIJMOHUN

RESULT		
LEARNING AREAS	RESULTS	LEVELS
LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION	%	
PRIMARY LANGUAGE		
ENGLISH	86	4
ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE		
ZULU	97	4
ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE		
AFRIKAANS	95	4
MATHEMATICAL LITERACY		
MATHEMATICS AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES	94	4
NATURAL SCIENCES	96	4
SOCIAL SCIENCES	82	4
ARTS & CULTURE	92	4
LIFE ORIENTATION	89	4
ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES	99	4
TECHNOLOGY	93	4

COMMENT :

*Seshen has produced excellent results.  
Serves as a role model to other learners.  
Congratulations. Keep it up!*

Figure 5.3: A snippet from a primary school report of mine.

As a learner, especially in the foundation phase, I always achieved excellent results and *every year I would always receive the award for first place*, as reflected in my narrative journal. Among the many support systems available to learners, parental involvement is an element that is profoundly linked to learner achievement (Cheung and Pomerantz, 2012).

Lessing and Mahabeer (2007) stated that teachers see parental involvement as an essential contributing factor to acquiring writing skills. Parental involvement in learners' education improves their ability to learn English writing skills and learn by means of English. This is something I can relate to, attesting to my good results, due to having supportive parents who exposed me to, and guided my writing in my home and sociocultural setting.

Nondabula (2020) reported that learners who have inadequate exposure to English in their sociocultural environments, face insoluble encounters in processing English demands in the classroom environment. In my journal I wrote:

*Writing daily news which used to be an exciting task to complete...as we could ask our family members to assist us with it at home. I recall my parents checking spelling and grammar for me...*, which shows parental and family involvement in my writing journey during my primary schooling years. In contrast to many of my learners' lack of parental involvement I now realise my privilege. Blackledge (1999) and Han & Ernst (1999) mentioned that teachers and parents generally play major roles in assisting learners in overcoming their reading and writing difficulties.

Parental involvement can thus take the form of offering pedagogical care (Dlamini, 2013). Pedagogical care, in my case, meant that my parents supervised and worked with me to nurture and develop my writing capacity with their knowledge. Which reveals that, not all of my learners receive this type of care, and thus rely on the support they receive from the teacher. It shows that teachers are required to also offer this type of support to learners, in the form of scaffolding writing tasks or merely advising learners on what they can do to improve upon their writing skills. Additionally, teachers can also advise parents on pedagogical care strategies that may use to improve their child's education.

Parents can offer pedagogical care by supplying children with essential educational needs such as uniforms, stationery, and school fees. This is something that my parents did for me – from primary until tertiary education. The same critical friend who had challenged me on other occasions read this and said: *you don't get it do you? Where will the money come from?* Dlamini (2013) highlights the immense contribution of families giving financial support for children's learning. Correspondingly, I would have not accomplished this much academically, if it was not for my parents who provided the necessary resources, such as clothing and financial support.

South African studies have revealed that parental involvement in the education of their children still appears to be limited (Mncube, 2010; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013). Whilst there is an immense need for support, parents are faced with increasing demands of maintaining work and home life responsibilities (Bailey, 2017), consequently contributing to the limited support which is what my critical friend was alerting me to. In addition to not knowing much about my learners' parental support, what I had not realised before embarking on my self-reflective journey is the extent to which my parents contributed to my academic journey.

As Ntekane (2018) elaborated, parental involvement does not only refer to parents probing about a learner's performance in school, but also to them taking a role in communicating with their children with the intention of having a healthy relationship with them, so that the process of encouraging, mentoring, leading, and inspiring them in their writing journey is genuine (Clinton & Hattie, 2013).

According to Mncube (2010) the “concept of parental involvement entails awareness of, and achievement in, schoolwork, an understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and learner success in schooling, and a commitment to consistent communication with educators about learner progress” (p.234). Makgopa & Mokhele (2013) further perceive parental involvement as “a combination of supporting student academic achievement and participating in school-initiated functions” (p.220).

However, not all learners are afforded this privilege. As noted by Nondabula (2020), teachers and parents must collaborate to become more holistically involved in their children's learning by overcoming or even harnessing the social pressures and socioeconomic problems that children, their families, and schools may encounter. As a teacher, I thus try different strategies to overcome these hindrances, as discussed throughout this theme. Through trying these different strategies and reflecting upon them, I gain more insight on what is being done and also what can be done better. Through this reflective-journey, I have become assertive to what needs to be done, in order to be a culturally responsive teacher of writing. It was not enough to simply write my story and to reflect as my critical friends challenged me to be more honest with myself.

School policies make sure that parents enrol their child in a schooling institution, likewise if parents are formally involved in curriculum matters – it can make sure of their parental involvement. Okeke (2014) suggests that to warrant parents are stimulated to partake in curriculum matters, schools should invite parents at the opening of each academic year or term to take an interest. This is generally done for grade 9 learners, when they have to choose subject courses for the FET. phase and for grade 12 learners at my school. I also recall my parents attending these meetings when I was in school. What I have noted in my practice is that these types of parental involvement strategies, may not be present in all high schools. This may not be fully feasible, due to parent's work commitments; however, it is an attempt to engage with

parents. This does seem to work quite well, however, other parents are only invited to collect report cards and limited interaction time is given with them.

In my reflections, I noted *that I remember my teacher asking me to enter essay writing competitions, as well as inter-class and inter-school debate and speech contests. I may have not won any of these competitions...This may have not been the best for my self-esteem, but it definitely encouraged me to work harder.* This resonates with Okeke (2014) who states that school debates and speech days can aid in establishing an effective home–school relationship.

These debates and speech preparations are largely derived from effective writing. Through writing speeches and debates, learners are exposed to different styles of writing and learn how to communicate effectively, when given a certain topic or scenario. If parents are informed and invited for such events, they will be encouraged to play a more active role in their child's writing.

I concur with Okeke's (2014) statement in the paragraph above, as through my narrative journal which stated that *my parents always assisted with writing speeches and were prepared to listen to my points for debates...* which reinforces that my parents were indeed involved in my academics and writing when it came to speech contests and debates.



Figure 5.4. : A certificate I acquired from participating in a debate contest.

These events seem to be absent from my current school activities as a teacher, as learners present speeches as part of oral assessments, but debating is not practiced at all. My critical friend, however, suggested that we pursue the possibility of debates which I will pursue as I am now more aware of the effective implications of having such contests. A starting point would be to have debates as an inter-class activity and then perhaps pursue it as a contest between different grades. This will assist in ensuring that learners from different grades are getting involved in these activities, thus engaging with writing, and presentation of the written activities.

Debates and speeches seem to be mainly used for assessment purposes and I therefore want to create an environment where these speeches and debates can be utilised for active parental involvement, as well as extra-curricular activities, as these aspects assist in developing learners' writing and communication skills at large. Through these events, I could perhaps be able to engage with neighbouring schools, teachers, and parents, and get more insight into the sociocultural backgrounds of my learners thus enabling me to be a culturally responsive teacher. These aspects could also assist in creating a favourable learning and teaching environment.



### **5.3. A Supportive Teaching & Learning Environment**

In the analysis of my reflections, the second theme that came to light was toward the importance of having a supportive teaching and learning school environment when teaching writing. Freire and Macedo (2005) mention that supportive writing environments that inspire learners to advance as critical writers, who are able to write creatively, are inadequate. Therefore, I will explore this theme further, as a supportive teaching and learning environment can enhance the teaching of writing and address this inadequacy.

According to Nondabula (2020), there is a need for meaningful change in the way creative writing is taught and assessed. My reflections reveal that I believe we need to enhance and change our teaching methods, just as the world is everchanging. Conventional methods should be changed and improved upon when teaching and assessing writing, especially in our fast-changing world, in order for it to be meaningful and relevant to the lives of the learners. Writing is dependent on the linguistic resources of a language and notwithstanding the difficulties experienced by learners at high school level (Graham and Harris, 2005, p.17). Writing is a challenging skill and needs a supportive environment for teaching and learning to occur (Donsa, 2017) and it is up to me, as the teacher of writing to provide such.

My reflections have made me realise that my teaching of writing may not be as meaningful as I would like or as I thought it was. Finding ways to teach writing creatively that is in response to the learners' experiences which is in line with being responsive to the lives of the learners, should contribute to a meaningfully supportive teaching and learning environment. Writing is an intricate and complex task and is said to be the most difficult of all the language abilities to acquire. This reinforces the need to teach writing effectively in a supportive classroom environment. To write effectively will be beneficial to my learners as to attain effective writing skills improves the learners' communication abilities and learning magnitude at large (Mirzaee & Marzvan, 2016).

In my primary schooling years, I was exposed to a supportive classroom teaching and learning environment, as stated in my narrative journal.

*My teacher was patient with us, although it was a class of over 30. She used to walk around the class and supervise our writing. If we were doing it wrong, she would take the pencil and guide us on how to write... I do not recall her shouting at me if I did something wrong, however she would encourage me and ask me to work neater or I would not get a sticker.*

The guidance and patience that the teacher offered whilst class peers were writing, contributed to a positive environment, thus making the learning of writing less overwhelming. What I do not recall, is that writing was taught creatively. My reflections reveal that I viewed her as *good* but what I had not realised is that her methods were very traditional and general, with no creativity and it is only after my reflections that I realise this. I do not want to just be a 'good' teacher, but rather a meaningful one, who contributes holistically to my learner's writing skills and who take their circumstances into account when teaching.

In my reflections, I also noted that *teachings associated with writing in primary school, included an ample amount of generalness*. I do not recall much emphasis being placed upon writing skills and the methods associated with it. I also noticed *a small discrepancy between my two primary schools and the activities that they offered*. I wrote: *my previous school hardly ever did orals nor inter-class competitions...* whilst the other school did and about that I wrote: *I remember my teacher asking me to enter essay writing competitions*. This shows that there was a discrepancy between the schools, and the emphasis placed on writing and the improvement thereof, and I envisage that this is still the case.

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit's (NEEDU) 2012 report revealed that one of the most underserved areas of language acquisition in South African primary schools is the teaching of writing abilities (Taylor et al., 2013, p.75). This is noteworthy, as when learners enter my grade 8 English classes, many of them do not know how to write effectively which is one of the reasons for why I wish to be an effective teacher of writing. I noted that many of my learners lack the appropriate writing conventions in my reflections, as when commenting on their written tasks I noted that they are *using social media lingo in their academic work* and *it does not follow even the simplest of writing rules, such as starting a sentence with a capital letter and making sure that the letter "i" is always written in capital when used*



*singularly*. This is a cause for concern, as a high school teacher of writing, I must now go back and brush-up on primary school content and with time constraints there is not much time to achieve this and to complete the curriculum. I will thus use my discretion whilst marking and draw their attention to inappropriate ways of expression.

Adas and Bakir (2013) note that a good teacher teaches, a better teacher explains, and the best teacher inspires. If a teacher keeps on teaching following the traditional method, the classroom activities become passive and repetitive. Therefore, the teacher should try new methods other than the traditional methods of teaching and make the learners better achievers, and I want to be this teacher who scaffolds the learners through the process. Being this teacher will enable me to teach writing in a more encouraging manner, thus ensuring a supportive environment. What I discovered from my reflection below, is that I am not the teacher who fully inspires my learners: *They will read through each other's work and offer feedback. At the end of the draft, I would ask them to write "Peer reviewed by their name" on their classmate's draft. I normally guide this process by checking if this is being done and I assist with spelling and grammar should they not be sure of it. However, most learners view this as a tedious task and some show very little interest in it.* This reveals that writing may be regarded as a feared activity by learners since it entails the process of transferring thoughts onto paper while also attempting to conform to writing rules such as syntax and spelling (Defazio et al., 2010). They are then expected to comment on peers' lack of appropriate language and grammar.

This practice, however, may have a limited positive effect on the learner's work, as their peers may not be able to correct these discrepancies, as classmates correct each other's writing pieces to the best of their abilities. Their writing abilities may be just as poor or worse than their peers as noted by one of my critical friends. This practice has its advantages as it encourages learners to work together and actually discuss their writing pieces. In response to a suggestion by a critical friend, I have started encouraging them to ask me for clarity about spelling errors, as well as grammatical errors. In this way, I am able to scaffold the writing process, as well as become more aware of the areas of weakness and difficulty.

What makes writing difficult is that it is an artificial reproductive occurrence as compared to the other language skills such as spoken language (Graham & Harris,

2005). Spoken language is learnt spontaneously, whereas writing entails learning not just the language but also the grammatical structures that make up that language. Therefore, Donsa (2017) mentioned that writing persists to be regarded as a mechanical skill in the upper grades. It is important that the learners are taught the format of the different genres of writing and at times some of what they are taught must be mechanical. I hope to find more meaningful and responsive ways of teaching writing so as to address the difficulties that learners encounter with their writing.

I want to try and shift my learner's views about writing, away from dread and toward eagerness. I believe that one of the ways in which this can be done through creating a supportive teaching environment. Butcher and Kintsch (2001) ascertain that the writing assistance supplied to learners is very dependent on the timing and nature of the assistance, thus I am to support my learners in a holistic way. It can be noted that many learners require this support, as they may not be able to acquire it elsewhere, such as in their homes and communities. As discussed in the previous section, learners may not receive full support from their parents or families and therefore require this support from their teachers. I must thus look at methods that support my learners in a wholesome way, such as offering constructive positive criticism on their writing, as I scaffold them into improving their writing.

In becoming a holistic teacher of writing, it is imperative for me to explore the different approaches as well as to find my own way when teaching writing so as to respond to my learner's needs. The product and process-based approaches appear to be the leaders in the teaching and acquisition of writing abilities, according to People & Michael (2006). The product-based approach focuses on the finished result, which is the text, as well as the structural components of an academic essay. The process-based approach, on the other hand, is the discipline of effective writing by reviewing and rewriting, and it entails returning to written work, thinking, and moving ahead (Pople & Michael, 2006).

As a novice teacher of writing, I tend to use a combination of these two approaches. My reflections state, *when learners do written assessment tasks like essay and transactional writing, they are asked for a draft containing planning (in the form of a mind-map, flow chart.). Learners bring these drafts to class; I ask them to swop with*

*their peer (sitting next to them) and they are all required to check each other's work and make corrections in pencil.*

*Whilst learners are doing this, I ask them to clarify anything that they are not sure about with me. They will thereafter get a chance to revise their writing and then write-down a final copy for me, which will be marked and allocated a mark.* This showed that when I teach, I am not just concerned with the final product, but I also place emphasise on the revising and editing of written work.

In consensus with the above, Sakoda (2007) contends that the two approaches cannot be separated but used integrally and neither one of the approaches should be exaggerated. From the reflection excerpt above, it is evident that I integrate these two approaches in teaching and assessing writing, without placing emphasise on either one, however this may be considered too traditional and perhaps this is one of the areas in which I can improve. Nondabula (2020), maintains that the actions that the learner takes before participating in writing are just as informative as the end product. This is critical since the planning process has a significant impact on the final result.

The following excerpt from my narrative journal reveals that I believed that learner encouragement and motivation are also good ways of creating a supportive environment. I wrote:

*I have unplanned motivational talks with my classes on a weekly basis about the importance of writing and reading... These talks seem to encourage them for that day or two, as they sit quietly and attempt their work....*

A critical friend read this and stated that perhaps they were quiet because they were tired or distracted. I now realise that perhaps my strategies were not necessarily encouraging and perhaps the silence was for other reasons – they could have been bored which the critical friend stopped short of saying! I need to ask my learners what encourages them. This, in turn, will allow me to take their feedback about what encourages them and to utilise it in my teaching of writing as I think of topics in order for me to be a more responsive teacher of writing. As a novice teacher of writing, I should not just presume that my encouragement methods work, but rather assess my Pedagogy with feedback from learners.

My field texts additionally revealed that I make use of multiple methods when teaching writing. Newfield (2011) demonstrates how multiple communicative modes can enhance learners' writing development. Feedback seems to be a good way to communicate support to learners. Through reflecting on my writing journey, I noticed what I found positive, supportive, and encouraging as a learner, such as positive comments from teachers. I too, now use positive comments as a form of support toward my learners. In reflecting on my comments, when marking learners' work, I wrote: *I noticed that this shows learners that I am an assertive teacher of writing and that I actually read through their entire writing pieces.*

Julius (2013) noted that the way in which teachers themselves were taught and given feedback in school, seemed to have been influential in their practices and as an example says: "the ways they taught a friendly letter and provided feedback on this genre in some way reflected those that they had been subjected to as learners" (p.137). This reverberates with Borg's (2009) assertion that teachers' cognitions can be powerfully informed by their own experiences as learners, as was in my case.

Once the final writing product is handed in to me, I offer feedback through marked scripts, classroom discussions and review of writing pieces. Through reflection, I have realised that, although I offer feedback in the ways listed above – I did not really follow up with learners who were battling and this is where I need to improve. I just presumed that giving whole-class feedback would assist. My feedback mirrored that of my teachers when I was at school and I now see the need to actually follow-up with individual learners, in order to scaffold them correctly.

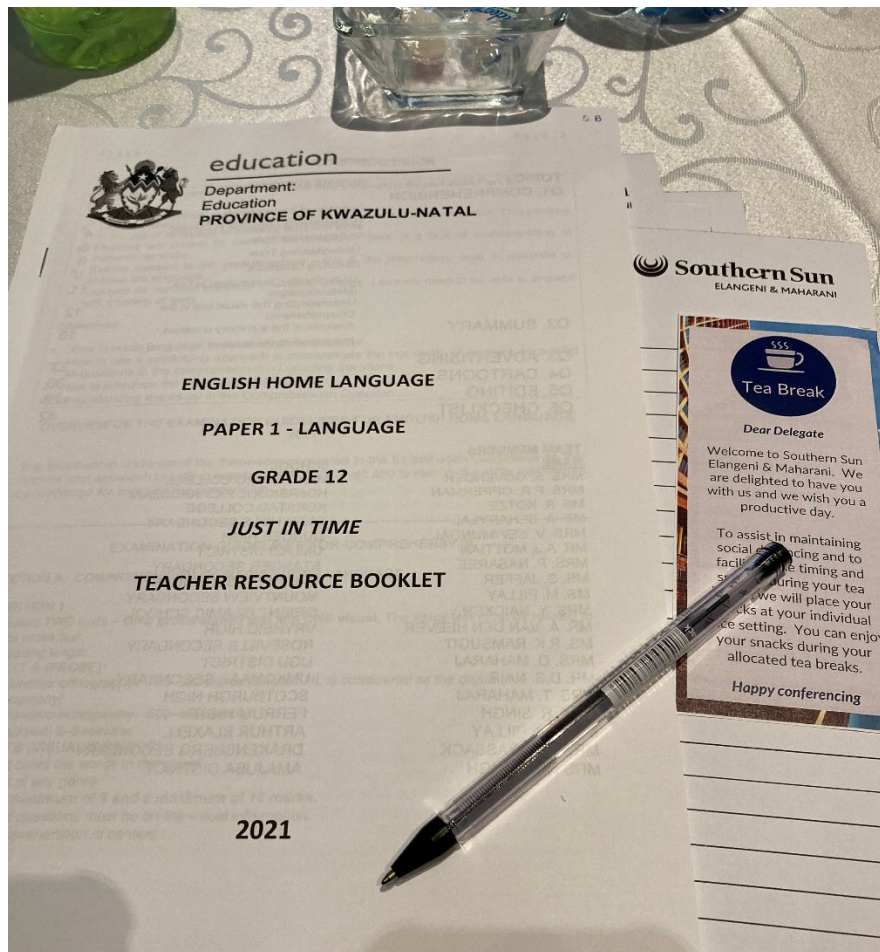


Figure 5.5: A picture from the **Just In Time** workshop held at the beginning of September 2021.

I also noted that I was *never workshoped or shown how to mark English scripts (only at the beginning of 2021, after 2 years of teaching, one of the teachers who attended “matric marking” gave us a short workshop on how to mark Paper 3)*. Recently, I have finally attended a full 3-day workshop which was very insightful and much needed for me, especially as a novice, and first-time matric teacher. The workshop reinforced the need for professional development for teachers. Before attending the workshop, it was not clear to me exactly how I should mark learners’ scripts and I used my limited knowledge of how teachers and lecturers used to my mark my scripts and worked in conjunction with the marking guidelines and rubrics. Another concern about feedback is mentioned by Taylor et al. (2013) who state that South African teachers have poor language skills, which can affect assessment and feedback, and this could be the fundamental problem in learners’ low literacy performance in many South African schools. It is therefore vital that professional development workshops happen

continuously, in order to maintain standardised marking of writing and developing teachers holistically.

Hattie and Timperly (2007) add that feedback is one of the most essential mechanisms in the teaching and learning process and that “feedback is more effective when it produces information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous trials” (p. 85). This statement made me conscious about not only providing feedback that outline the learners’ mistakes, but to also offer feedback that praise the learners’ strong points in their writing, as I realised that it had become a force of habit to always point out the inaccuracies, rather than praising accuracies. After writing and analysing my writing journey, I effected small changes to the way in which I teach writing and respond to learners.

Overall impression

Mr Bryndhun takes pride in his work and ability to convey information to learners/colleagues. He is confident and responds professionally to challenging learners. He listens and provides a mature, respectful response.

Any comments on teaching material developed/used

Introduce samples of emails - compare to samples of formal letters. The content is very similar, just a different format in terms of addresses etc. It is noted that F.E.T syllabus needs to include emails on a significant scale compared to be formal letters.

Signed (observer):

[Redacted Signature]

Figure 5.6.: An excerpt from my critical friend observation sheet.

My critical friend noted that - “He (I) listens and provides a mature respectful response.” This makes me aware of my responsive demeanor when offering feedback to learners and will ensure a supportive environment that will scaffold learners’ writing abilities and not jolt them. As Madondo (2014) mentioned, the teaching and learning

of written communication should not be a scary and a frightening process for learners. Thus, through offering respectful responses to learners, it boosts their morale and encourages them to improve upon their work, helping to ensure remediation.

Some learners have become more comfortable with approaching me, to ask questions about their work and how they can improve upon their writing more, increasing their interest in the writing process.

After initial classroom observations and reflection, I decided to implement some of my critical friend's, as well as my own suggestions for improvement. Some aspects that may have contributed to the changes in my lessons include that I incorporated additional teaching strategies in my lesson, as stated in my reflections: *I have listed 2 teaching strategies in this lesson plan: Whole Class Discussion & Questioning. I still prefer using these strategies, however, going forth – I would like to incorporate more strategies – such as group/peer discussions, as this will enable learners to engage with individual's they are more comfortable with in a more meaningful way. Class discussions may be a bit too "open" or broad and it may hinder the quieter learners getting involved.* Looking back, I realise that I took my learners' needs and feelings into account, in order to foster a supportive environment. When learners needs and wants, such as including them more in lessons became more pertinent, a more positive classroom environment ensued.



Note any factors affecting delivery e.g. appropriateness or otherwise of the venue

*Mr Brijmohun articulates procedures and expectations clearly, providing a positive learning environment.*

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What were the teacher's major strengths?

*Mr Brijmohun demonstrates passion and enthusiasm for training /teaching of learners. He stays current with the latest trends and innovations in secondary school education.*

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Figure 5.7.: Some comments from my critical friend's observation of my lesson.

Upon observation, the second time around, improvement was also noted as follows: *Mr Brijmohun articulates procedures and expectations clearly, providing a positive learning environment... & demonstrates passion and enthusiasm for the training and teaching of learners, he stays current with the latest trends in secondary school education.* This indicates that using current topics, based on music and television series that learners were interested in, made them engage in the lesson more, as they were more comfortable speaking about things they are constantly exposed to.

Upon further reflection of the lessons from which the preceding comments were taken, I distinguished that my critical friend noted, *in a previous observation, that Mr Brijmohun's movement around the classroom is limited* and I thus aimed at being more active. I also wanted to include learners more. Therefore, throughout the lesson I kept moving from side-to-side of the class, however restricting my movement mainly to the front of the classroom – due to social distancing. This seemed to work well, as I was making eye-contact with almost all the learners, thus making them feel included in the lesson.

Through the above, I realised that making eye-contact with and including all learners throughout the lesson, makes them feel valued and promotes inclusivity, as more of



them gave their input and responded. This also made me aware of the fact that I used to only look at a selected group of learners while teaching and unknowingly used to bypass the ones who would keep their heads down or not pay attention. Through walking around, I noticed that learners have become more attentive and try to participate more in lessons.

Further reflections revealed that *I told learners, that when answering a comprehension, especially during tests, they should not read the entire comprehension first, without looking at the questions. As this would be as good as “going to the mall without a shopping list, and just entering all the shops, because you do not know what you came for” – my critical friend noted that this analogy was quite effective, and she would also adapt it to her lessons as “it gives learners a clear view of what is expected of them, in a way they can understand”*.

I try to use current trends and relatable examples in my teaching. Hence, I know that learners are familiar with visiting the mall and therefore decided to use an analogy that would be easily understood by them – in terms of approaching a comprehension and answering it effectively within the given time frame. This was never done by my teachers.

Learners enjoy examples and explanations like this, as they agree with me and laugh with their peers stating, “how true it is” and they also chat about how they sometimes go to the mall and waste time not knowing what they went for. I then intervene and tell them that time-management is important with any activity, and they should therefore manage their written tasks timeously.

Creating a supportive teaching and learning environment is a vital component when teaching writing. I realised that what I thought was a supportive teaching and learning environment could actually be improved upon by making positive changes to enhance the writing classroom. These changes have influenced my pedagogic practices, which will be discussed in the next theme.

#### **5.4. My Pedagogic Practices**

During the exploration of my field texts which include my narrative journal, lesson reflections, critical friend observation sheets and critical friend comments, I noted that pedagogic practices, which I was exposed to as a learner and now a teacher, were

constantly emergent, and evolving. By looking at the theme of pedagogic practices, I will be able to address my research question of *how can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing*, as my pedagogic practices are directly linked to my teaching of writing.

In exploring the theme of pedagogic practices, it is apt to note the definition, as Ngcongo (2012) stated that Pedagogy is the development through which knowledge sought for in the English education, in this instance, mainly writing skills, are transmitted to learners. He further mentioned that pedagogic practices can easily be defined as encounters in formal education through which teaching, and learning take place.

The curriculum in South Africa has been modified several times, and teachers are then faced with the task of adapting to those changes (Manning, 2017), these changes are thus not well-adapted by teachers and this is a concern. Morgan and Bourke (2005) consider the teacher as an individual who develops his or her own understanding of policy documents pertaining to the instruction of writing. This individualistic way of interpreting documents and the curriculum at large can create vast differences in Pedagogy. In this section, I discuss aspects relating to Pedagogy from my pre-teaching years to current years as a novice teacher.

In my reflective journal, I wrote that feedback was an important aspect during my writing journey in the comment *feedback has definitely assisted me in my academic journey and I therefore see its importance in scaffolding my learners*. From my primary schooling years, it was evident from my narrative journal that *feedback made me happy and motivated me to always produce neat work*. I therefore see its importance, as it equipped me with constructive writing criticism, and realise the impact it has on learners' writing skills.

I have now noted that I need to use *exciting forms of feedback* for my learners *because I realised that I do not even draw a star or happy face for them as a teacher*. The way in which I reacted to this, was to begin placing a golden star sticker for all learners who received a good mark, in my matric class. I wanted to view their reactions on receiving this - normally considered a primary school incentive, in high school. Their reactions were favourable and some even smiled and conversed with their friends about receiving a sticker. This shows the importance of giving feedback and motivation to

learners through your Pedagogy, even in simple ways like placing stickers onto their writing pieces.

I journaled that as a pre-service teacher, my teaching practice mentors' classrooms mainly *followed a teacher-centred approach. Their lessons mainly meant standing at the front of the classroom and teaching, whilst providing limited opportunities for learners to give their input* wherein teachers would dictate or write the answers on the chalkboard. I also noted that I used to do the same thing, as this is what I was exposed to and it seemed to work.

I am learning and making attempts to move toward a learner-centred classroom which seems to work better, as I try to elicit learners' input, by asking them for their views or opinions more. It can therefore be said, that as novice teachers, we are not only influenced by the ways in which we were taught as learners, but also influenced by our scholarship of observation during our teacher training or teaching practice years. This has made me aware of my pedagogic practices and enables me to look for ways and make small changes, to improve and become a more effective teacher of writing.

A small change was to include learners by asking them for their input and ideas regarding writing pieces and including them by calling them to the front of the class to role-play punctuation marks, I noticed that they *enjoyed being included*, as I noticed they embraced the role-play and classmates enjoyed it by laughing and being more relaxed, indicating a conducive learning environment.

Another aspect that is critical to my pedagogic practice is preparation. I noticed that I am not always fully prepared to approach my classes as a novice teacher of writing. When entering the classroom, I was not fully aware of the different methods to utilise when teaching writing, and when certain learners questioned me about certain writing practices – like the purpose of the 'drafting' or planning by using a mind-map, I was unable to give solid responses – but rather generalised and responded by saying it just helps your creativity to flow better and gives your writing pieces direction. This made me realise the importance of being properly prepared, which contributes to the successful execution of my pedagogic practices. The observation by Barends & Nel (2017) that research demonstrates that the quality of pedagogical teaching learners experience on a daily basis counts more for learner achievement than any other school-based element truly struck a chord with me. Nonetheless, new teachers in a

variety of circumstances frequently claim that they are unprepared to deliver high-quality education on day one.

My unpreparedness was also evident in my narrative journal which stated that when I formally entered the teaching fraternity on day one, *I got a better understanding of what teaching English, specifically writing, meant in the different contexts of South Africa. I realised that I was not fully prepared to go into EFAL classroom.* My narrative journal further states that *Teaching writing to EFAL learners was not something I was fully ready for as I was not fully sure about the methods for EFAL classes* as my home language is English and the majority of learners seemed to be IsiZulu speakers, among other languages like IsiXhosa. I found it a challenge to adapt to their level, coming from an English Home Language background. Probyn (2009) noted that there is a gap between language policy and language practice due to many teachers and learners not sharing a common home language in many South African schools. This fact makes it even more important to prepare lessons with care and to be responsive to my learners.

As a result, I began spending more time preparing for lessons, and am working on improving in this sphere. My critical friend remarked on my preparation after she had peer reviewed a lesson on visual literacy, she stated that *Mr Brijmohun has prepared well and understands his content well and therefore is confident in his communication.* The way in which I prepared myself better for lessons was by researching content and reading up in study guides regarding the subject matter. Observations additionally stated that; *educator displays extensive content knowledge... (and) demonstrated confidence and was clear in his communication with learners.* These comments reiterate the importance of preparation and shows how preparation can enhance and develop you as a novice teacher, hence receiving developmental remarks like - *educator was able to explain content clearly, in a way that was easily understood by learners.* This further supports the need for lesson preparation, which is a vital component in being an effective teacher.

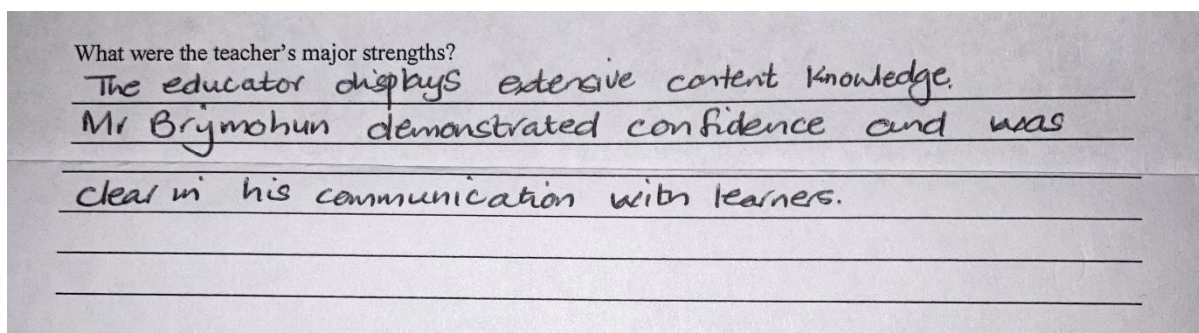


Figure 5.8: A Comment from my Critical Friend Observation Sheet.

Preparation is not only vital for teaching, but also in learning. *I remind learners that preparation is key, and I give them tips on how to prepare* to write efficiently. The following extracts from my narrative journal further elaborate upon how I encourage learner preparation:

Familiarising themselves with famous quotations from icons like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi can enhance their writing and boost their overall mark. These quotations enable them to link their writing to well-known people, as well as encourage them to think in a way that is mature and can develop further creative ideas from them. These are ways in which I enriched my writing and therefore share it with my learners, in hope of them improving their writing.

Having predetermined generalised topics and ideas in preparation for their creative writing paper decreases stress when writing the actual paper, as they already have some ideas in mind and can expand on them according to the question. For example, preparing on a topic like “A day I will never forget” can be adapted to one of the given topics in the paper or can be used for the visual stimuli/picture topics. I tell learners to link their topic to the picture in the introduction, so that we immediately see the connection.

I further give them an idea on how to do this. I tell them that if there is a person or are people in the picture – link the peoples’ facial expressions to how you felt on that “day you will never forget”. Likewise, if there are objects or words in the picture, link it to some event that happened on that “day you will never forget”. This tip works relatively well, and I notice learners doing this in their creative writing paper and will thus continue with enlightening them with these tips.

Through my reflections, I also noticed that *it was quite difficult to converse with them due to the language barrier*, as learners would sometimes try to express their understanding of a certain question, both verbally and in writing, and it would take me a few seconds to process meaning. This is in line with Probyn (2009) who states that some learners sometimes understand what is being asked but cannot express themselves effectively in English.

Additionally, Grussendorff and Booyse (2014) states that English is usually a third or fourth language for many South African learners. The majority of these learners did not use English in their social setting and thus struggled to understand basic concepts, creating a language barrier. Therefore, this limited proficiency in English may affect their writing proficiency.

As a novice high school teacher of writing, my reflections further revealed that *learners still struggled with writing effectively*. One of the factors contributing to this is the *language barrier*, as Taylor and Fintel (2016) state that the primary language that is not spoken in a learner's home environment is consequently underdeveloped for academic purposes. According to research, African home language speakers do not perform much better than English home language speakers (Taylor and Fintel, 2016). This is due to them having to adapt to another language. I realised that this adaptation is vital, as English is a global language and will assist learners in many facets of their lives.

My narrative journal also revealed that we were given texts, in the form of *model essays to look at...* and my teachers used to also use *formats of these (writing) pieces...*, *along with guiding sentences* when teaching us. This shows, when teaching creative writing, many teachers rely on texts to facilitate teaching and learning. These texts are habitually used as discussion points in the classroom (Pople & Michael, 2006).

Upon reflection, I realise that I also rely on text-based examples in my lessons when teaching writing, as I always have text examples of the formats to show learners, as it is stated in my narrative journal *that I also give them the formats for their writing pieces, on the chalkboard and ideas on how they can start off their work* – sometimes in a worksheet form or I look for page references in their respective textbooks. Whilst

teaching writing, I also utilise texts *focusing their attention to formats, register and tone when writing*. These reveal how I utilise text-based examples in my current teaching, just as my teachers taught me in school. I now realise that this may not be the most favourable of ways to teach writing and my pedagogic practices need to be improved upon.

I have observed how my pedagogic practices, through a scholarship of observation, were influenced to teach in a similar way to how I was taught, as a learner. I realised that *I show them the format first – as this was done by my English teachers at school and I tend to do the same thing.*, which reiterates the notion that *I teach in a way I was taught in school*. On the contrary, my critical friend stated *I do not want to be the teacher, who taught me, as I found his methods boring*.

This, in-turn encourages her to improve upon her Pedagogy by teaching in a way that is responsive to her learners and not as she was taught at school. When she shared this with me, I became aware that I am definitely influenced by the way in which I was taught and this makes me work towards being more relevant in my practice so as to respond directly to learners' needs. I have therefore attempted, to now, always ask learners for their contribution to lessons. Where relevant, I ask them what they think about a certain topic or view. This shows them that their input is valued, and it boosts their confidence knowing that they are getting to share a little bit of their authentic ideas with the class. I, encourage them to interpret topics creatively and write in a way that is different from others – as that is the way in which they personalise their work .

In my narrative journal I noted that my current Pedagogy entails having *unplanned motivational talks with my classes on a weekly basis about the importance of writing* which constantly reminds learners about the importance of writing and how it will be used throughout their lives. On reading this I realise that, as part of my Pedagogy I try to create an environment in which I attempt to enable my learners through such talks which is in line with what Nondabula (2020) mentions about writing being an intricate task and that the teacher has to expedite learner's writing skills by incessantly accentuating the importance of writing to learners. This is something I do not recall my teachers doing, as I was exposed to very traditional teaching Pedagogy, as a learner. I now see the need for these motivational talks, and will pursue it further, as learners need a lot of encouragement with writing, in order to cope with its demands.

My narrative journal revealed that writing was mostly done for assessment purposes. At present, creative writing is still done mostly for assessment purposes - I therefore try to situate their pieces of writing in reality, in order for them to grasp the idea that writing is not just meant for assessment purposes but is an important skill that is much needed for the many facets of life. As a novice teacher of writing, I noticed the need for learners to realise that writing is a skill that will be utilised throughout life and not just for assessment purposes, as I want learners to have a realistic and holistic view of writing and education at large.

Thus, incorporating the need for writing as a life skill, is an imperative component that needs to be intertwined in my Pedagogy, so that learners realise the importance of this life skill and how it will benefit them beyond the classroom, which could assist in alleviating challenges with writing proficiency.

My reflections further revealed - *Writing is a challenge, to many learners... I noticed that they were unable to write, nor follow the correct grammatical discourse and structures.* This is a major hindrance in their written work, as they are unable to articulate written responses effectively. The 2014 Annual National Assessment (ANA) found that Grade 9 learners were unable to use active and passive voice while writing and demonstrated deficiency in textual editing, syntax, spelling, and punctuation in English FAL (Department of Basic Education, 2014, p.11).

However, Grade 9 learners appeared to have had knowledge on the appropriate format of a letter and demonstrated a strong point in letter writing (Department of Basic Education, 2014, p.11). This is also noteworthy to my study because letter writing forms part of creative writing and I have thus reflected on a lesson whereby I taught *writing formal and informal letters.* The reflection shows that *I placed emphasis on knowing the letter formats and also gave learners guidelines on what to include in each paragraph.* I now realise, that more imaginative methods need to be developed and used in the teaching of writing and that teachers should not only place emphasis on knowing formats, but rather teach in a creative way that keeps learners encouraged to pursue writing.

Another aspect to note, which was pointed out by my critical friend (as per figure 5.6.), is to *introduce samples of emails*, whereby learners can then *compare it to samples of formal letters.* This will make them realise that *the content is very similar, just in a*



*different format, in terms of address.* This is noteworthy, as emails seem to be used more often than written formal letters currently. It is therefore apt to include more currently used forms of written communication in my Pedagogy, in order to produce learners who are *au fait*<sup>2</sup> with current trends of communication. My critical friend further mentioned *that the FET syllabus needs to include emails on a significant scale, as compared to the formal letter*, reiterating the importance of teaching current, more widely used forms of written communication.

My teaching Pedagogy now tries to employ more strategies like asking learners what they think about certain topics and also by allowing them to give examples from their current daily lives. This pedagogic practice of moving toward a learner-centered classroom was also noted by my critical friend who stated that I *involved learners in the lesson*. This was done by including learners' inputs more often and allowing them to discuss their interpretation of topics, rather than only giving them my ideas and points to consider. By doing this, I was also exposed to learners' sociocultural backgrounds and how they interpret texts from their perspectives.

In terms of reading, what I wrote in my narrative journal is that *learners do not see the importance of reading, especially the role it plays in assisting with writing, as when I give them texts to read, they would rather chat with their friends or perhaps pretend to read and wait me to read the text aloud*. One should be aware of the notion that reading is the construction of meaning from a text, whereas writing is the creation of text to produce meaning (Harl, 2013).

Thus, both reading and writing are interconnected and are essential for the overall development of literacy skills. I am now aware of the importance of encouraging the learners to read so as to improve their writing. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2012) argue that writing and reading share cognitive processes

such as building textual meaning and how these texts are interconnected (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It can therefore be said that poor reading skills contribute to meagre writing skills.

My reflections and critical friend comments have made me realise that the way in which to be more relevant in my classroom is to source suitable resources that learners

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<sup>2</sup> *au fait* (French) adjective - having a good or detailed knowledge of.

will identify with. The only way that I can do this successfully is to know my student's backgrounds.

A critical friend noted:

*Encourage reading widely because it exposes them to the different types of texts and this will help them in writing appropriate responses to the questions and scenarios given. For example, if they read a review of someone's holiday, they may be able to write about a holiday they have been on. Also, if they read interesting short stories and novels, they will be able to adapt ideas and write interesting narratives.*

This reiterates the notion that reading will enhance writing skills. By being exposed to more reading pieces, one will be able to pay attention to correct grammar and writing conventions, thus enhancing one's own writing skills.

This theme also indicated ways in which my lecture reflections alerted to changes that I was making in my practice and also highlighted what else can be changed in my practice.

The above theme discussed my pedagogic practices in relation to how encouragement and motivation of writing influence my Pedagogy. It then went on to highlight the importance of utilising feedback within pedagogic practices. It further discussed the utilisation of texts when teaching writing. My attempts to create a more learner-centred classroom were then examined, whilst highlighting scholarship of observation. Finally, the aspect of preparation, for both teaching and learning, within pedagogic practices were discussed. Another pivotal aspect that affects pedagogic practices and my teaching of writing at large, are my teaching resources, which will be discussed next.

## **5.5. Teaching Resources**

Another theme that became evident, upon evaluation of my field texts, inclusive of my narrative journal, lesson reflections and critical friend observation sheets, is the theme of teaching resources. In exploring this theme, one could be cognisant of Mgwashu (2008), who advocates English as an influential subject for academic and

communication purposes that has been welcomed and is recognized globally. More significantly, Wang and Odell (2003) stated that learning to write is a vital part of literacy education and therefore the resources utilised to enhance the teaching of writing skills is imperative. Rammapudi (2010) concurs by explaining that the concept of teaching 'resources' is the teaching materials a teacher uses for developing a lesson which brings the content of the subject to 'life'. He added that teaching resources make the process of teaching and learning an exciting one and affords learners the opportunity to be hands-on with activities and interact with real objects. This alludes to the importance of teaching resources in teaching writing.

STUDENT'S TEACHING SKILLS	3	Was communication between learners promoted?		✓	
	4	Attitude towards learners.		✓	
	5	Was self-directed learning motivated in learners?		✓	
	6	Were suitable learning and teaching aids used effectively?	✓		
	7	Quality of student's classroom management?	✓		
ADMIN	1	Does the student show clear evidence of all necessary documentation? (Daily forecast, timetables, class lists, lesson plans, school information, etc.)	✓		

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Remarks: A well planned lesson. Visual aids enhanced the lessons.  
Learners were encouraged to participate in the lesson.

EXCEEDS STANDARD ☐ MEETS STANDARD ☒ DOES NOT MEET STANDARD - THE LESSON MUST BE REPEATED ☐

Univ. Tutor/School Mentor: Name (in full): MRS V. MAYART Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 5.9: A remark from my mentor teacher on my teaching practice formative assessment of lesson report sheet.

As a student-teacher, I utilised resources whilst delivering lessons. I did not, however, fully comprehend how they enhanced my teaching. My awareness of teaching resources were sparked by my reflections, as whilst teaching writing as a novice teacher, I became conscious of the importance of appropriate teaching resources needed to be an efficient teacher of writing.

Teaching English writing skills has been identified as one of the most difficult challenges for both English HL and FAL speakers worldwide (Almubark, 2016). I am of the opinion that this is more challenging in South African classrooms where we have HL and FAL learners in the same HL classes. Almubark (2016) further specified some of the aspects that aggravate the challenge in teaching writing skills, which include the lack of access to appropriate teaching resource tools, as well as time constrictions, as

there are other facets of language that need to be taught in the language classroom. I will elaborate further upon this, in the exploration of this theme.

In my reflective narrative, I journaled that *I seemed to have been interested in visuals from an early age, hence the reason I would prefer to use overhead projectors (as resources) in my classroom*. I further shared my experiences of being interested in and using technology like an overhead projector in my teaching practice lessons, as I noted how *learners seemed to be more interested in the lesson when modern technology was utilised*. It can be said that the use of technology as teaching resources, in teaching writing creates a more effective environment, especially enabling learners to learn with the use of visuals – rather than only looking at aspects from a limited view, offered by worksheets or textbooks.

This is evident from my teaching practice reflection where *I made use of the school's over-head projectors and learners seemed to be very interested as it was something out of the ordinary lessons that they were normally given*. Learners sat diligently and eagerly awaited to see what was to be projected upon the screen. I, however, *only taught a couple of lessons* and therefore utilized the overhead projector, as it was not something frequently utilized by my mentor teachers, due to the logistics of carrying the equipment to the classroom and setting it up.

However, Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) mention that teachers must include information and technologies (ICT) as resources to facilitate creative writing teaching. This suggests that the teaching of writing can get better and more interesting if teachers adjust to new ways of teaching including the use of technology. I want my teaching of writing to be better and more interesting and thus need to consider using technology more in my lessons.

My mentor teachers, during my teaching practice modules, did not utilise overhead projectors often, and when I asked the teacher why, she explained that it was a bit of a hassle to walk around and set up this device in her classes. This reason was justified as it does take some time to set up a projector. What made it more understandable was that the teacher taught a range of grades and it did seem difficult to be walking around with a projector, as well as your own bag. In addition, classrooms did not have a projector screen, however a white sheet could have been used, but in the teacher's defence, the classrooms did not have curtains, and this would affect the projection.

My reflective journal highlighted that *an over-head projector is a great resource to have when teaching writing. There are numerous videos and pictures to show learners on how to become an effective and more creative writer... I know it will be difficult to use often, but I will use it for a couple of lessons at least. This visual aid seems like a 'breath of fresh air' to me, and the learners and it assists in making the lesson more interesting and unique*, as learners appreciate the visual aid and audio— *as compared to the same-old conventional method of looking at black & white worksheets and the chalkboard.*

Through exploration of this theme, I noticed that the use of technology in teaching and learning of writing adds to the efficiency of a writing lesson and therefore Makeleni (2013) is of the view that schools need electronic resources like computers and libraries to enrich the quality of teaching in writing. Donsa (2017) hence mentions that teachers should use an array of resources in order to support learning, particularly in writing.

However, as a novice teacher who wants to use modern more innovative methods, I am somewhat limited to the resources available in my school. My school has a projector, but the logistics of using it places a strain on my time-management. Due to the pandemic, my learners remain in their form allocated classes for the day and teachers go to the learners in their form classes, hence it is not feasible to walk around and set up a projector in each classroom, and this dims my enthusiasm for the use of it. This also somewhat justifies why my teaching practice mentor teachers did not utilise projectors that often, as they moved around to different classes.

As a result of my reflections, I have also realised that the teaching of creative writing involves the preparation of resources, as well as critical thinking and learners generally produce their ideas through lived experiences, thinking and personal cognition (Wang et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) advocate that teachers can help learners develop their creative writing skills by using a variety of tools that complement their pedagogical skills. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2018, p.3) stated that employing web-based learning could help teachers with creative writing teaching and learning. This is something that I concur with, as I believe that we need to use modern resources in this everchanging world, however most of our school settings are not fully equipped for this, which calls for creativity to alleviate this issue.

Woottipong (2016) states that learning to write using web-based learning is said to be helpful since it provides learners with techniques such as sounds and graphics, which is quite useful in this day and age. However, looking at South Africa's present dispensation and the deficiency of resources in many classrooms, web-based learning could take time to happen as compared to technologically driven countries (Nondabula, 2020) and this is a cause for concern. One can, however, be creative and work around this, by coming up with resources for the teaching of writing, such as utilising mass media resources, like newspapers, and making lessons interactive, even with the absence of modern technology or web-based learning. I am going to make an effort to use real-life resources in my future teaching practice.

The CAPS document proposes the use of textbooks as resources to be used in teaching writing. This was and is my most frequently used resource whilst teaching writing as I am always referring the formats from their textbooks. Also, during my teaching practices, written activities were given to learners from their English textbook or worksheets (which generally came from other additional textbooks which the teachers were in possession of) – reiterating the frequent use of textbooks.

Upon reflection, I realise that this is not the best use of a resource and more innovative and 'real life' resources can be utilised – such as newspapers and magazines, which have sufficient text-based examples for the teaching of writing. This could also alleviate the challenge of the shortage of textbooks, as many learners have to share this resource (which is not conducive during this pandemic) and some learners may not receive textbooks at all.

In relation to the above, Donsa (2017) mentions that findings show there was a lack of resources that support the teaching of writing and there "were 50 learners who shared 30 textbooks. Sharing textbooks was found to compromise the teaching of writing" (Donsa, 2019, p.67). At present, in my grade 9 classes, there are approximately 40 learners per class with an average of 30-32 textbooks to use. This is not a major shortage, but definitely impacts on my lesson deliverance, as certain learners need to share, and cannot do so efficiently due to social distancing. This also makes me aware of the fact that I need to be more creative with the invention of resources.

To address this issue, I use worksheets, dictate notes, and sometimes write on the chalkboard, to avoid any learner making contact with another nor being denied the text-based resource. As stated by my critical friend, *the educator is aware of curriculum and school resources*. I now realise that, due to the shortage of technological resources, I have to be more creative and innovative in the coming up with resources when teaching writing, in order for all my learners to benefit, as Bojuwoye et al. (2014) agree that each learner should have his or her own learning textbooks that support learning, in order to work according to his or her own capability and pace, as a deficiency of resources can lead to poor performance in the teaching of writing and hampers effective curriculum implementation (DoE, 2009).

I am able to make worksheets, as my school has the necessary resources to do so, although there is a shortage of paper at times, however some schools do not have photocopying machines at all because the schools may not even have electricity (Donsa, 2017). She further stated that common resources that teachers utilised were note-taking from the board, worksheets, posters, textbooks, and newspapers and that using these resources did not efficiently produce nor help to develop learners writing skills effectively.

It is therefore important for teachers to understand all resources that can be used before they start a lesson so that when they teach writing, they choose relevant resource for particular topics (Donsa, 2017). This is something that I take note of and try to utilise these available resources in the best way possible.

My critical friend noted that I need to make *use of* (the) *chalkboard* more. This is something that I may engage in when necessary, however I believe that the usage of modern resources will be more effective, in this globalising world. My critical friend is in agreement with my view, however, she mentioned that we need to make good use of the limited resources that we do possess, such as the chalkboard. Donsa (2017), however elaborated that writing down notes from the chalkboard means that a learner duplicates and is not given a chance to think creatively during writing. Conversely, worksheets were a sheer completion of questions and little was achieved to promote creative writing. Additionally, teachers spent too much time writing on the chalkboard hence this was found to cause a hindrance to learners in terms of receiving quality teaching of writing.

The importance of teaching resources is stressed upon in my exploration of this theme, as Hoadley and Jansen (2013) states that teaching and learning resources can be called the carriers of the curriculum because they serve as the best vehicle that we use for teaching and therefore it was vital to explore this emergent theme in relation to using technological teaching and learning resources and discussing the conventional resources such as the usage of textbooks and the chalkboard.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the emergent themes from my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, which were: parental involvement; a supportive teaching & learning environment; pedagogic practices; and teaching resources. In discussing the themes, I alluded to my first two research question of “*What are my learning experiences of writing?*” and “*What are my teaching experiences of writing?*”. Through what I learned, addressed my third research question of “*How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*”.



## **Chapter Six – Denouement of my Writing Odyssey**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This study was an exploration of my teaching practices when teaching writing to high school learners. It was driven by a self-study approach, wherein I explored the influences on how I learnt, and now teach writing, in order to improve upon my practice. The previous chapter addressed my third research question: “*How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?*” by presenting the findings, in the form of themes. These themes were discussed whilst also highlighting my learning. This chapter will review my thesis and offer my personal and professional learning. It will then go on to conclude the thesis, as a whole.

### **6.2. Review of the thesis**

In Chapter one I introduced my study and myself, and provided insight into my current professional context. I then moved on to state my research objectives and the related question. Thereafter, I briefly mentioned my methodological approach, concepts that guided my study, and conclusively outlined the structure of my thesis.

Chapter two is the chapter in which I presented a discussion of my theoretical framework and reviewed literature within the scope of the phenomenon being studied. I chose to work with three concepts that guided my research, which are those of Socioculturalism, Pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. A review of literature pertinent to this study was provided, wherein I discussed the nature of being a life-long learner, the preparedness of novice teachers, how writing affects confidence and the teaching of writing.

Chapter three commenced by explaining my research design approach and paradigm. I have used a self-study methodology for my study and hence elaborated on self-study research in this chapter. My data generation strategies are discussed next and these included narrative journaling, lesson reflections, source document retrieval and critical friend conversations and observations. The data analysis process followed and finally, I presented matters on ethical considerations, as well as validity, and then went on to conclude the methodology chapter.

Chapter four is my response to the first two research questions: *What were my learning experiences of writing?* and *What were my teaching experiences of writing?* In the chapter, I reflected on my learning, and thereafter my teaching experiences of writing, in stages. I began by recalling and discussing my first experiences of writing. The discussion then transitioned to my memories and deliberations about my progression of my writing journey. What followed were my university years as a student, and pre-service teacher. I then reflected on my teaching practices as a student teacher which was followed by a discussion about my experiences as a current novice teacher of English.

Penultimately, chapter five addressed my third research question: *“How can knowing my experiences of writing enhance my teaching of writing?”*. In the chapter, I presented the findings, in the form of themes, that were extrapolated when I analysed the data generated by means of the field texts. The themes generated were: parental involvement; a supportive teaching and learning environment; pedagogic practices; and teaching resources. These themes were discussed whilst also highlighting my learning.

Chapter six serves as my final chapter in which I review and conclude the thesis. It highlights my learning, and thus briefly conclude my study, by subsequently making recommendations as to what I can do to improve my practice as a novice teacher of writing.

### **6.3. My Personal and Professional Learning**

This self-study journey of exploration into my learning and teaching of writing, has taught me many things. These things learnt emerged from my reflections, wherein themes materialised, and made me cognisant of the many aspects of my learning and teaching of writing journey.

My first learning that is both personal and professional is that parental involvement is an important aspect in a child’s education. On a personal level, I understand my privilege in this regard as my parents had the time and resources to devote to my literacy development.

On a professional level I learned that teachers must also be cognisant of the fact that not all learners have actively involved parents in their lives and I thus need to step-in to assist, by scaffolding learners in the classroom. I also learned the value of working with others as critical things.

The teaching of writing primarily takes place in the classroom, which reiterates the absolute need for a supportive teaching and learning environment. Teachers must offer guidance to learners throughout the writing process, in order to ensure a constructive writing classroom. Guidance should be inclusive of feedback, which does not only highlight the learners' weak points, but also focuses on their strong points so as to create a meaningful classroom with constructive criticism.

Teaching writing should be more learner-centred, thus providing opportunities for learners' voices to be heard and valued. I learned that the focus of my teaching of writing must be innovative rather than using outdated methods. I need to reflect on my teaching of writing regularly with my critical friends so as to identify weak points and improve upon them. My improvement of teaching writing must be supported through professional development, personal engagement with literature so as to stay ahead of trends. I must strive toward becoming a culturally relevant pedagogue, and can only do this by getting to know my learners well.

Pedagogic practices lay the foundation of teaching and I must stay abreast of innovative teaching methods which was noted by my critical friends. I must be cognisant of my Pedagogy and practice reflection in order to be an effective teacher. Teachers are guided by curriculum policies, and it is important to use these guidelines in the implementation of their Pedagogy, yet they must also be able to understand their own context and decipher how to correctly implement these policies in their Pedagogy.

Pedagogic practices should be flexible, in order to adapt to any hindrance in the education arena, hence I must be able to swop an authoritarian teacher-centred Pedagogy to one that focuses more on the learner. Preparation is thus key for a favourable Pedagogy and efficient use of resources, so as to allow one to become an effective teacher of writing.

The utilisation of teaching resources enhances the entire teaching and learning process. One must make use of appropriate teaching resources, in order to be an

efficient teacher of writing. Technology in the classroom adds many benefits to the teaching of writing, as it enhances lessons by providing audio-visually, thus allowing different learners, like visual learners, to benefit.

Teachers must, however, be aware of the resources available to them, in their specific context. Textbooks are one of the most widely used resources in the classroom, teachers should, however, not solely rely on them, especially in cases where there is a shortage. If technology and modernised resources are not available, creative, and inexpensive resources can be utilised. These inexpensive resources can be inclusive of free print media, such as newspapers, which will expose learners to, and supplement their learning of writing processes.

#### **6.4. Onwards & Upwards.**

This study was a thoroughly enlightening journey of reflection. It has enabled me, as a novice teacher of writing, to reflect upon my learning experiences of writing, my experiences of teaching writing, as well as how knowing my experiences can enhance my teaching of writing. Through this self-study journey wherein I explored my experiences of teaching and learning of writing, I have become cognisant of my past Pedagogy and have learnt, through reflection and from the honest feedback from my my critical friends, how to improve upon my teaching. These improvements have emerged from knowledge about parental involvement, creating a supportive teaching and learning environment, pedagogic practices, and the usage of teaching resources when teaching writing.

This self-study journey has not just made me an improved teacher of writing, but a meaningful teacher overall. I recognise that this journey will never end. Because of my study, I learned that as a novice teacher I should aim to enact meaningful pedagogies that can be altered to respond to various contexts. I should endeavour to make my Pedagogy relevant and responsive to the lives of diverse learners, and to be unequivocal and self-reflexive about my Pedagogy. I need to keep working to recognize my learners, their lived experiences and the backgrounds with which they are familiar, as well as how to connect with them within an environment of positive scaffolding. New challenges will continuously arise in this ever-changing world and should be seen as possibilities for personal and professional development. Thus, I will

never stop questioning my Pedagogy and being a lifelong-learner. What is important in this journey is to have critical friends who will advise me as I continue on my journey as a teacher of English.

### **6.5. Conclusion**

This concluding chapter has reviewed and reinforced my learning from each respective theme, summarised my self-study journey, and consolidated what I now know about my teaching of writing.

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## ANNEXURES

### Annexure 1 – Ethical clearance letter



10 November 2020

Mr Seshen Brijmohun (215039715)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Brijmohun,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00002086/2020

**Project title:** An Exploration of My Teaching Practices When Teaching Writing to High School Learners: A Novice Teacher's Self-Study

**Degree:** Masters

#### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 21 October 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 12 November 2021.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Annexure 2 – Gatekeeper’s letter



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

COLLEGE OF  
HUMANITIES

### **RESEARCHER**

Full Name: Seshen Brijmohun

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### **HSSREC RESEARCH OFFICE**

Full Name: Prem Mohun

HSS Research Office

Govan Bheki Building

Westville Campus

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### **GATEKEEPERS LETTER**

Dear Gatekeeper

I, Seshen Brijmohun, am writing this letter to request permission to undertake research at your secondary schooling institution in Belvedere – Tongaat. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education (M.Ed.) programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and am in the process of conducting my Masters research.

The following is a brief description of my intended study:

Title: *An Exploration of My Teaching Practices When Teaching Writing to High School Learners: A Novice Teacher's Self-Study.*

Individuals who wish to participate, will be given a letter of consent to sign. Should the individual wish to withdraw from the study at any given point, he/she is free to do so with no repercussions.

All data will be kept in a locked cupboard and after analysis will be stored in my supervisor's office for a period of 5 years, after which it will be shredded and disposed of. Please note that the names of participants' and the school will be protected by the use of pseudonyms. I will practice participant confidentiality at all times.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact me or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee as mentioned above.

For further information/clarity, kindly contact my supervisor, Dr. B. Campbell on +27 31 2603468 or e-mail [Campbell@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Campbell@ukzn.ac.za). The higher degrees offices can be contacted on +27 31 2603895 or e-mail [RhEdgewood@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:RhEdgewood@ukzn.ac.za).

If you AGREE, kindly sign below:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name & surname of Gatekeeper)  
hereby confirm that I fully understand the contents of this document and the nature of  
the research project, and I consent to grant Mr. Seshen Brijmohun permission to  
undertake research at this institution.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Principal/Gatekeeper)

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Witness : \_\_\_\_\_ (Deputy Principal)

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure 3 – Critical Friend Classroom Observation Sheet

### Critical Friend Classroom Observation Sheet

Teacher's name: Mr. Seshen Brijmohun

Critical Friend/Observer's name:

When observation took place: Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Time & Duration : \_\_\_\_\_

Number of learner's present:

	<i>Not present</i>	<i>Requires more Emphasis</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Accomplished very well</i>
1. Teacher was well prepared	1	2	3	4
2. Learning objectives for lesson clearly outlined	1	2	3	4
3. Links the teaching lesson to the previous lesson/s	1	2	3	4
4. Provides an introduction to the lesson	1	2	3	4
5. Demonstrates enthusiasm for the subject matter	1	2	3	4
6. Uses teaching methods that facilitate accomplishment of learning objectives	1	2	3	4
7. Communicates material appropriate for the level of the learners	1	2	3	4
8. Explains concepts and ideas clearly	1	2	3	4
9. Defines unfamiliar terms	1	2	3	4
10. Presents examples to explain/clarify points	1	2	3	4
11. Demonstrates command of the subject matter	1	2	3	4

12. Highlights major points (e.g. voice, reemphasis)	1	2	3	4
13. Listens to student's comments and questions	1	2	3	4
14. Encourages student interaction/questions	1	2	3	4
15. Responds appropriately to student questions in the lesson	1	2	3	4
16. Voice volume appropriate	1	2	3	4
17. Rate of speech appropriate and clear	1	2	3	4
18. Maintained student interest	1	2	3	4
19. Exhibits distracting mannerisms	1	2	3	4
20. Lesson paced and pitched to allow learners to make notes	1	2	3	4
21. Visuals (Posters, charts...) well prepared and easily read from the back of the classroom	1	2	3	4
22. Summarised major points/concluded the session	1	2	3	4
23. Related the lesson to future lessons	1	2	3	4
24. Demonstrates equitable concern for all learners	1	2	3	4

Note any factors affecting delivery e.g. appropriateness or otherwise of the venue

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What were the teacher's major strengths?

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What suggestions do you have for improvement?

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Overall impression

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Any comments on teaching material developed/used

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Signed (observer):

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## Annexure 4 – Example of informed consent letter for participants



**COLLEGE OF  
HUMANITIES**

**RESEARCHER**

Full Name: Seshen Brijmohun

Contact: [REDACTED]

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Westville Campus

Contact: 0312604557

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Dear .....

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education (M.Ed.) programme at the University of Kwazulu-Natal and am in the process of conducting my Masters research. I wish to have you as a 'critical friend' for my proposed study entitled: *An Exploration of My Teaching Practices When Teaching Writing to High School Learners: A Novice Teacher's Self-Study*. The objective is to explore and understand my experiences with teaching and learning writing and your input will be greatly appreciated.

Your role would be to observe some of my lessons and to give feedback to me via conversations.

Kindly note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your input will not be credited to you in person but conveyed only as a population member opinion.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the gathered data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored safely in appropriate storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be reprimanded for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

In the event of any problems, concerns or questions, you may contact me or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee as mentioned on the top of this letter.

My supervisor is Dr. Bridget Campbell who is located on Edgewood campus of the University of Kwazulu-Natal. For further information/clarity, kindly contact her on +27 31 2603468 or e-mail [Campbell@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Campbell@ukzn.ac.za).

The Edgewood higher degrees offices can be contacted on +27 31 2603895 or e-mail [RhdEdgewood@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:RhdEdgewood@ukzn.ac.za).

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

If you agree and are willing to be a participant, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the conversations to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

I ..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study and have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I may have had regarding the study and my participation.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

.....

## **Annexure 5 – Turn-It-In Report**

## Annexure 6 – Proof-reader’s Letter

12 November 2021

To Whom it May Concern

This is to confirm that I have proof-read and provided feedback on changes for the dissertation: **Exploring My Experiences Of Teaching And Learning Of Writing: A Novice Teachers’ Self-Study** by Seshen Brijmohun.

I have made corrections to grammar, spelling, references as well as suggestions on sentence construction. This candidate has produced a real-life journey experience which is well-constructed and makes for a really enlightening, and interesting read.

Yours sincerely



.....  
Professor Kiveshni Naidoo

Academic Director : MANCOSA

ORCID ID : 0000-0002-7336-867X