

**PREPARING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FOUNDATIONS FOR  
LEARNING: A SELF-STUDY OF A SUBJECT ADVISOR**

BY

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I, Makhanya Hlengiwe Delicia Bawinile declare that

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This dissertation is submitted with / without my approval.

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Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation reports on a self-study in which I aim to better understand and improve my own practice as a Department of Education subject advisor, specifically in relation to preparing for the implementation of the Foundations for Learning (FFL) programme in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3). FFL is a National response to persistent unacceptable low levels of literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase in South African schools. The programme is designed to focus attention on key activities that lead to effective literacy and numeracy development. Through memory work and critical reflection, I re-examine my lived experiences of learning and teaching in order to understand what impact these experiences have had on my practice as a teacher and a subject advisor. In addition, I work with a focus group of teacher participants to examine their experiences of learning and teaching as well as their current needs as Foundation Phase teachers in relation to the implementation of the Foundations for Learning programme. Through the self-study, I distinguish areas where I need to improve on my practice and also set out key strategies for change. Areas for improvement include closing the gap between policy and practice, conducting effective workshops, encouraging networking, enhancing communication and addressing specific barriers in rural schools.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ANA	- Annual National Assessment
2D	- Two dimensional shapes
3D	- Three dimensional shapes
C 2005	- Curriculum 2005
CD	- Compact Disk
CES	- Chief Education Specialist
FFL	- Foundations for Learning
FP	- Foundation Phase
Grade R	- Reception year
GET	- General Education and Training
HOD	- Head of Department
NCS	- National Curriculum Statement
NGO	- Non Government Organization
NPDE	- National Professional Diploma in Education
OBE	- Outcomes-Based Education
PTD	- Primary Teachers Diploma
S	- School leaving certificate symbol
SMT	- School Management Team
STD	- Secondary Teachers Diploma

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

In this self-study dissertation, I look at my practice as a Department of Education subject advisor in terms of preparing for the implementation of the Foundations for Learning policy, which seeks to improve literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase in South African schools. Research indicates that primary school children in South Africa are underachieving in literacy and numeracy (Fleisch, 2008). As a subject advisor, I always notice that a considerable number of teachers are reluctant to accept curriculum change because of an ‘avalanche’ of new policies, which keep on reshaping the scope of teaching. The new South African curriculum (see Department of Education, 2002) is an example of change of policy, which has changed the role of the teacher and his/her relationship with the learners (Goldman and Kearns, 1992). In my experience, the focus of interventions to facilitate the effective implementation of policy has been on teachers and learners. The importance of looking at whether Departmental officials, especially subject advisors, are doing their jobs according to the Department’s set standards has not been an issue. Not much introspection has been done to check whether we as subject advisors are actually helping teachers and supporting them in the process of dealing with policy change. Nor do we question ourselves as to whether we have the expertise to ‘unpack’ the curriculum in a user-friendly way for the teachers.

This chapter introduces my self-study research and elaborates on why I developed an interest in doing this research. In the chapter, I state and explain the research questions that I am exploring through the study. I also introduce the research approach I have chosen and give relevant background to the study. Furthermore, the chapter gives the outline of how this dissertation is structured.

### **Who am I and Why am I Undertaking this Self-Study?**

I am a subject advisor in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3). My decision to undertake a self-study of my practice as a Department of Education subject advisor was prompted by the autobiography I wrote for my studies while doing my first year Master’s coursework. I was given a space to look back at things that have shaped my thinking as a teacher and as a subject advisor,

the choices I have made and what informed those choices. Through that experience, I came to see that it is important that teachers and teacher educators “discover a better understanding of the foundations of [their] own teaching” (Allender & Allender, 2006, p.15). This study is important to me to better understand and reflect on my own practice as well as to improve on my practice as a subject advisor. When systemic evaluation results of recent national literacy and numeracy tests were analysed, the findings showed that learners are not performing at the expected standard in numeracy and literacy (Department of Education, 2007). In my experience, teachers often tend to blame learners for not being willing to learn and, in turn, Departmental officials blame teachers for poor teaching and learning. However, in general, we subject advisors, who are responsible for the curriculum policy training, do not look critically at our own practice to see whether we are effectively helping teachers to understand the new curriculum so that they can implement and own the policy. That is the reason why I decided to engage in this self-study.

### **Focus and Purpose of Study**

In this study I aim to better understand and improve my own practice as a Department of Education subject advisor, specifically in relation to preparing for the implementation of the Foundations for Learning programme in the Foundation Phase. According to a systemic evaluation of the Foundation Phase conducted in 2007, the literacy and numeracy performance of South African children is significantly worse than children in other parts of the world, even children whose conditions for learning are far worse than ours (Department of Education, 2007). This has resulted in the government launching a campaign called Foundations for Learning (FFL) to provide quality education for all. FFL was launched in 2008 by the National Minister of Education as a call to schools and community to focus on reading, writing and calculating. FFL is primarily a National response to persistent unacceptable low levels of literacy and numeracy at GET (Grade R-3) level. The campaign is designed to focus attention on key activities that lead to effective literacy and numeracy development.

This study is also important to me as a subject advisor because I have seen the gaps of policy implementation in schools. It is important for me to get an understanding of how I, as a subject advisor, can better prepare for implementation of policies. As Jansen (2002), highlights, policy implementation is a complex and challenging task. Through this research, I aim to learn

more about and put into perspective my responsibility as a curriculum subject advisor in relation to the implementation of policies such as the FFL.

### **Research Questions**

The key question that underpins this research is: *How can I, as a subject advisor, improve my practice in preparing for the implementation of Foundations for Learning?* From this initial research question, I developed the following three sub questions to guide my research:

1. *How can I better understand my own experiences and practices as a subject advisor in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase?*

I developed this question in order to be able to review my experiences of learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy so as to better understand and explain who I am as an educational practitioner and how my past learning and teaching experiences might have influenced what I am doing with the teachers. I also hoped that engaging with this question would help me to think critically about why I do things the way I do them.

2. *How can I better understand the experiences, practices and needs of the teachers in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase?*

The aim of asking this question was to gain an understanding of what shaped the teachers' lives and practices to be what they are today. I also wanted to gain a better understanding of how I could meet the needs of teachers in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase.

3. *How can I use this enhanced understanding to think about and plan for the implementation of Foundations for Learning?*

This purpose of this question was for me to look critically at my implementation of the FFL policy in relation to the actual experiences and needs of the teachers. My intention was that this would be done from an informed background of where these teachers are coming from and what their experiences are. I would therefore be able to plan for the implementation of FFL in a more effective way.

### **Methodological and Theoretical Approach**

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation, this is a self-study of my self as a subject advisor in preparing for the implementation of FFL. The methodology of self-study

involves studying one's self as a practitioner in order to improve one's practice (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Grossi (2006, p. 9) highlights that self-study research is "valuable to the teaching profession because it ensures professional growth for teachers and can result in new practices which can be invigorating." It is thus my aim that this study will improve my practice as a subject advisor.

This study is a form of qualitative research, which Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2) defines as being "multi-method in focus and involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter". Denzin and Lincoln (1994) states that qualitative researchers attempt to understand thoughts, feelings and emotions by getting to know people's values, beliefs, and symbols. In this study, I use a range of qualitative methods (as explained in Chapter Two) to gain insight into my own thoughts, feelings and emotions and those of the teachers with whom I work. As is demonstrated in this dissertation, using this qualitative approach helped me to define my researcher role as that of a dynamic learner who can understand and tell the research stories from the participants' viewpoints rather than as a 'specialist' who passes judgment on participants (Creswell, 1994)..

In designing and conducting my self-study research, I have drawn on the interpretive theory of knowledge. The interpretative theory of knowledge highlights that "knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning and self-understanding" (Henning, 2004, p. 56). Thus, in reflecting on my own experiences and practice in order to deepen my self-understanding as a subject advisor, I am drawing on the interpretive theory of knowledge. In addition, as I explain in more detail in Chapter Two, my research has also involved facilitating a focus group of Foundation Phase teachers who have reflected on their feelings and thoughts about their own experiences of learning and teaching and about the implementation of Foundations for Learning. The interpretive theory of knowledge thus assists me in constructing new knowledge in relation to the teachers' experiences of and views and beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

As Grossi (2006, p.10) explains, "the epistemological underpinning [of self-study is] that knowledge is constructed by meaning-making and understanding." Thus, in my self-study, I am also drawing on social constructivist ideas of 'self' that highlight that people are continually constructing and reconstructing themselves in relation to their social world (Bruner, 1990, 1996).

Social constructivism argues that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas based upon current or past knowledge (Bruner, 1996). This idea of social constructivism helps me as a researcher because I am continually building upon what I have already learned and learning new things from this study.

### **Putting the Study into Context**

#### **Who are Subject Advisors?**

Subject advisors are employed by the Department of Education. They are people who are specialists in their chosen field of expertise, including the didactics of the subject. Subject advisors monitor and provide support and service to schools (Clarke, 2007, p. 198). Subject advisors are responsible for ‘unpacking’ the curriculum policy to teachers, and then making a follow up through school visits to support and guide the curriculum policy implementation process. They are also responsible for running workshops as part of professional development for teachers. Subject advisors must coach and mentor teachers on classroom organisation and curriculum policy implementation, including assessment of learners.

#### **What is Expected by the Current Curriculum Policy?**

After we had our first democratic elections in 1994, our South African school curriculum policy changed. We adopted a new curriculum policy called Curriculum 2005 (C2005), which is underpinned by an approach of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). OBE involves the use of continuous assessment to check on learners’ progress. In streamlining and strengthening C2005, the Department of Education introduced the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (Department of Education, 2002). This curriculum has changed the role of the teacher and his/her relationship with the learners. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grade R-9 (schools) adopts an inclusive approach by specifying the minimum requirements for all learners. The curriculum seeks “to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen” (Department of Education, 2002, p.19). Thus, Foundation Phase teachers are expected to be highly qualified with relevant skills and knowledge of how to prepare these learners for lifelong learning.

### **Understanding Foundation Phase (FP)**

This is the first phase of the General Education and Training Band: Grade R, 1, 2, and 3. Foundation Phase (FP) provides the basis for learners to acquire their early learning skills. This phase is responsible for laying solid foundations for learning. Foundation Phase education is a critical component of education in South Africa as it enhances early learning, which underpins the fundamental skills and competencies that children acquire during this period (Department of Education, 2002). During the Foundation Phase Teacher Conference in 2008, then National Education Minister Pandor emphasised that “Literacy, Numeracy and Life skills are building blocks upon which the solid foundation for learning are built, and as such are the key determinants of child’s success” (Pandor, 2008, p.4). When a systemic evaluation was conducted in 2007 it showed that many of our Foundation Phase learners cannot read nor do simple mathematical calculations (Department of Education, 2007).

### **Systemic Evaluation**

Systemic evaluation is an integral part of ensuring that all learners derive maximum benefit from the education system. To determine the level of achievement of learners within the Foundation Phase system, a systemic evaluation was conducted in 2007. Learners were assessed through standardised written exercises to measure their levels of achievement in respect of the grade appropriate curriculum outcomes for literacy and numeracy (Department of Education, 2007). The findings indicated that literacy and numeracy are already a problem in the Foundation Phase.

### **What is Foundations for Learning?**

Foundations for Learning (FFL) is a campaign that was launched in 2008. This was because the systematic evaluation report (Department of Education, 2007) showed that most Grade 3 learners could not read or write at a Grade 3 level. FFL is a call for commitment to teaching and learning the art and skills of reading, writing and calculating to ensure a better life for all (Department of Education, 2007). Former Education Minister Pandor (2008) highlights that the outcomes from the study conducted contextualised the challenges that are currently being faced in the Department’s pursuit to build solid foundations for learning. The results of the study also



emphasise the importance of teacher quantity, quality, and ability in the classroom. As Pandor (2008, p.5) explains:

one cannot overlook at the fact that good education relies on the availability of good teachers who are well versed in the knowledge areas that learners must be taught, and also who have thorough knowledge of the various ways in which knowledge can be learnt.

The FFL programme focuses on Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics for Grades R to 6. The programme is aimed at helping teachers to know what to teach and when to teach it as well as helping them access the resources they need (Department of Education, 2008). It specifies teaching time as well as how long to spend on teaching the different component parts of a lesson.

The FFL programme begins with the Assessment Framework. This document ‘unpacks’ the knowledge and skills contained in the Assessment Standards of the National Curriculum Statement. The aim is to give teachers a guide as to what to teach (knowledge and skills), when to teach it (pacing) and what to assess. The Assessment Framework also specifies Milestones. These Milestones are broken down into the different assessment tasks that are to be covered during each school term. In order to maintain a standard across the country, the last assessment task of each term is accompanied by a standardised assessment tool containing the criteria for assessment, for example, a holistic rubric, checklist or rating scale. The FFL also includes an Assessment Booklet, which gives teachers some help with actual assessment tasks and activities. Additionally, the FFL includes Annual National Assessments (ANA), which is a standardised assessment across the country for all grades. Teachers are supposed to use the results when planning to improve learner performance.

The last part of the FFL programme provides Lesson Plans, which are in line with the Milestones as well as the National Curriculum Statement. There are 40 weeks of Lesson Plans (10 per term) with five lessons per week. These contain ideas and activities which are designed to be developmentally appropriate as well as being conceptually correct. Continuous assessment is built into the Lesson Plans. Teachers are expected to take the lessons and adapt them to their own circumstances and contexts. However, teachers who are battling with teaching of Numeracy and Literacy or new teachers are advised to use the lesson plans as they are. Not everything in

the lessons has to be taught every day, but they do indicate the amount of work learners should be doing.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have given a foundation for and explained the focus of my study. I have also given the reasons why I was so interested in undertaking this self-study research. I have highlighted the research questions that underpin this study and further explained them clearly. I have introduced the methodological and theoretical approach used in this study and offered relevant background information to put the study into context. As is common practice in self-study research texts (see, for example, Masinga, 2007; Pithouse, 2007), I have taken a naturalistic approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) in writing this dissertation. Hence I have tried to explain my research journey as simply and clearly as possible and I have also integrated references to relevant literature into the storyline of this dissertation rather than providing a separate literature review chapter.

In Chapter Two, I offer an explanation of the research design and the methodology used in the study. Furthermore, I clarify the research context and choice of participants. I present a table that clearly shows my data collection and production process. I also discuss issues of trustworthiness and validity, as well as the limitations of this study and how I dealt with ethical issues.

In Chapter Three, I take the reader through my early experiences of schooling and on to my training and my practices of being a teacher, a lecturer at the teacher college and a subject advisor within the Department of Education. I go on to re-examine my lived experiences to identify significant themes that emerge from the journey of my educational life.

In Chapter Four, I present data from my teacher participants' early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy, as well as their experiences of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as student teachers. I further look at their current needs as Foundation Phase teachers in relation to the Foundations for Learning programme. I then go on to identify and discuss themes to make sense of the teachers' lived experiences.

Chapter Five is the concluding chapter where I review the findings of the study, highlighting what will help me to improve my practice as a subject advisor. Because I have

discussed my study with other subject advisors, in this chapter I also present their views. To end, I offer recommendations based on the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: MY SELF-STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **Introduction**

In this study, I aim to improve my practice as a teacher and a subject advisor. In the previous chapter, I give the rationale for this study and present the research questions that I am exploring through the study. I also briefly discuss the methodological and theoretical framework in which my study is located. It is important for me as researcher to communicate what I went through in the process of arriving at my findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I want to take the reader through my journey of this research process. Hence, in this chapter, I give an account of my self-study research process. I begin by elaborating on why I have chosen self-study as the methodology to guide my study. I then give a description of the research context and my selection of and interaction with the research participants. Next, is the discussion of how data was generated and collected. This is followed by discussion of the analysis and representation of my data. Finally, I address the limitations and challenges of the study, as well as issues of trustworthiness and ethics.

### **Choice of Research Methodology**

The methodological approach for this research is self-study. According to Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008), self-study involves studying one's self as a practitioner in order to improve one's practice. LaBoskey (2004, pp. 842-849) highlights the principal characteristics of self-study as "self-initiated", "self-focused", "interactive" and "improvement-aimed". My own understanding of self-study is about positive change. I chose to undertake self-study so that I would be able to look at and learn about things that I need to change within my practice as a subject advisor and change them for the better. I hoped that self-study would help in revealing my weaknesses which I will change into my strengths. I wanted to do the introspection on whether I am doing my work efficiently before I blame the next person. In order to make my self-study interactive, I also wanted to obtain the perspectives of some of the teachers with whom I work. Hence, it was my aim that self-study would enable me to grow in my profession and bring about new practices. By adopting a self-study methodology, I also hoped that my colleagues might learn and be inspired to improve their practice from my findings.

### **Research Context**

I am a subject advisor who is responsible to monitor and provide curriculum support to primary schools in my district. My work involves office based activities, such as planning and report writing after each visit and after conducting a curriculum workshop. I also work with teachers, based in the schools that I regularly visit. I visit a range of primary schools in both rural and urban contexts. Some of these schools are located in disadvantaged communities while others are from more advantaged communities. For this study, my data collection has included working with a focus group of teachers from both urban and rural areas. A central venue for meeting with these teachers was chosen in order to help cut the cost of travelling expenses. I provided the teachers with transport costs as well as refreshments during our focus group discussions.

### **Research Participants**

My initial planning for selecting my focus group participants was to have two teachers from different rural schools, one teacher from a township school (which were the schools for Black African and Coloured learners in semi-urban areas during apartheid times), one teacher from an ex-model C school (these are the better resourced schools that were for whites only during apartheid times) and one teacher from an informal settlement school. I was of the opinion that teachers from these different schools would provide a variety of perspectives. In my initial planning, I had wanted to have five members in my focus group in case some might drop out and, indeed, two of the five teachers withdrew at the last hour. I decided to continue with my focus group discussions with the three remaining teachers. The teacher from the ex-model C school and the teacher from a township school made apologies at the last hour as they were unable to attend the focus group meetings. The remaining teachers that participated in the focus group are all female. They are teaching in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) and each teacher has more than ten years of teaching experience. Their ages range from 38 to 47. They are all Black Africans and speak Zulu as their mother tongue (see Chapter Four for further discussion of the school contexts of these teachers).

It was not in my original plan to include my fellow subject advisors as participants in my study. However, after the focus group discussions where the teachers highlighted their needs, I then felt that it was important to share my new understanding of the teachers' needs with my colleagues. I wanted them to understand why teaching and learning is not happening according

to the prescribed curriculum in some schools. I wanted to share my study with my colleagues and also hear their views. I had a slot during our Unit meeting where I explained about my self-study research, including the focus group meetings with the teachers. I explained that I had developed a questionnaire that I would like my colleagues to fill in (see Appendix F). I also explained and gave them consent letters to sign, assuring them that their supervisors were aware of this study as I had asked permission to share my study and obtain their views. I gave the questionnaires to all five subject advisors that I work with. Out of five subject advisors, only four responded. Of the subject advisors who responded, one has 10 years' experience as a Foundation Phase curriculum specialist, the other two subject advisors have more than five years experience, and the other one has less than two years of experience as a curriculum specialist.

### **Data Collection and Production**

According to Hamilton et al. (2008, p. 20), self-study is “a research methodology in which researchers and practitioners use whatever method that will provide the needed evidence and context for understanding their practice.” LaBoskey (2004) explains that self-study is based upon data gathered from a variety of sources. Thus, in this self-study, I have used a range of methods and data sources to gain a better understanding of how to improve my preparation for the implementation of FFL. The following table summarises my data production and collection plan. I then go on to explain my methods in more detail.

**Table 2.1. Data Production and Collection Plan**

Research sub- question	Method /Tool	Data source	What data/ information will I be looking for?
1. How can I better understand my own experiences and practices as a subject advisor in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the	Memory work	Memory narratives and drawings	My early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy. My

Foundation Phase?			<p>experiences of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as a student teacher.</p> <p>My experiences of teaching literacy and numeracy as a schoolteacher.</p>
	Reflective journal writing	Journal	My observations, thoughts and feelings throughout my study.
	Note-taking and report writing	Notes and reports of school visits	My observations of and reflections on my interaction with teachers during school visits - in

			relation to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning
2. How can I better understand the experiences, practices and needs of the teachers in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase?	<p>Memory work and focus group discussion</p> <p>Focus group discussion</p> <p>Focus group discussion</p>	<p>Memory drawings and audio recordings of discussion</p> <p>Audio recordings of discussion.</p> <p>Audio recordings of discussion</p>	<p>Teachers' early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy.</p> <p>Teachers' experiences of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as student teachers.</p> <p>Current challenges and needs as expressed by teachers.</p>
3. How can I use this enhanced understanding of my self and the teachers to think about and plan for the implementation of FFL?	Critical review of my scheme of work for implementation of FFL.	My scheme of work for implementation of FFL.	Correlation / disparity between my scheme of work and my reflections and observations as well as the experiences, challenges and needs of the teachers (as expressed in memory



			work and focus group).
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## Methods of Producing and Collecting Data

### Reflective journal writing.

As a researcher, I have kept a reflective journal to record all my thoughts and feelings since I embarked on this journey. I have also recorded my daily activities or involvement that has an impact on Foundations for Learning. In this way, I have been reflecting on my own practice. Keeping a journal has not been not easy because I am not used to documenting my thoughts and feelings and, in my experience, it is not common within our Black African culture. Masinga also highlights that, “keeping of journal was an unfamiliar process for [her] and[ her] learners as [she] came from a background that did not encourage the expression of thoughts on paper” (2009, p. 18). However, I have found that the keeping of the journal to record my thoughts, feelings and observations of my participants has helped me to think more deeply about my practice and the journey of my research.

I ended up with three different journals. Initially I started using a 48 page exercise book which was left in my bookcase. However, I found that I would wake up at night and have ideas about my study and so I started jotting them down in a small notebook that I kept next to my bed. Most often I thought about my study when I was driving to do school visits. I then decided to keep another diary in my bag. The next time I undertake a research project I will know to keep journals where I spend most of my time, at the office, in the car and at home. I will then collate all the information at the end into one journal according the sequence of the dates.

As Khau (2009) indicates, keeping a journal can trigger memories that are very sensitive. I realised how sensitive it was when I thought about my time of teaching of students at a teacher training college. This is an example of the reflection from my journal: *“I just wonder how my past students are doing in their schools with the concepts of mathematics that I didn’t bother to teach”* (Journal entry, 28 July, 2010).

### Note-taking and report writing.

I made notes of my observations of and reflections on my interaction with teachers during school visits in relation to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. I also wrote reports of my school visits and used these as a data source. As my study progressed, I realised how I had changed in my approach when visited schools. I was not demanding to see files, assessment, portfolios as I used to. My approach changed as I offered teachers my suggestions, starting from classroom arrangement, and at times offered to co-teach reading lessons. Similarly, Kunene (2009), also a Departmental subject advisor, explains how when she embarked on her self-study research her approach to site visits changed from that of just completing a checklist and she became involved in the process of teaching. Looking back at my notes and reports, I am amazed to see how self-study has changed my way of thinking about teachers and my approach to them.

### **Memory work.**

In undertaking a self-study, it is important to reflect back and recall memories of the things that contributed in shaping you as the person you are today (Allender & Allender, 2006). Hence my study has also focused on memory work. Memory work helps the individual to tap into and better understand his/her past and how it might affect the present (Onyx & Small, 2001). Crawford et al. (as cited in Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 774) explain that “significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self”. Thus, experienced teachers can get to know and understand themselves better in relation to their work through reflecting on their past experiences as learners, student teachers and novice teachers (Allender & Allender, 2006; Samaras, Hicks & Berger, 2004). Kuhn (as cited in Mitchell & Weber, 1998, p. 55) points out that “memory work requires the most minimal resources and the very simplest procedures.” In this study, I have used memory writing and memory drawing as methods for memory work.

### *Memory writing.*

I have used memory writing to generate data on: a) my early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy; b) my experiences of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as a student teacher; and c) my experiences of teaching literacy and numeracy as a schoolteacher (see Chapter Three). As per Onyx and Small’s recommendations for memory writing (2001, p. 776), I have written about particular episodes from my past, such as early

schooling and how difficult and frustrating it was to be taught by English-speaking people. I have used pseudonyms. I have described each experience in much detail as possible, including what might seem unimportant. The writing of these memory stories has been like a healing process for me as I realised that I had deep-seated issues that were unresolved. I found the writing of my memories very exciting and rewarding as I was able to understand who am I and the reasons why I do things the way I do. According to Pithouse, Mitchell and Weber (2009, p. 50), “writing descriptions of remembered educational experiences can help teachers (and teacher educators) to review their experiences from diverse perspectives and to think about them in new ways”. Memory writing has helped me to think and do things differently. When doing school visits I no longer go there to ‘inspect’, but rather I give support and guidance. I understand fully who these Foundation Phase teachers are and where they are coming from.

#### *Memory drawing.*

According to Weber (2008, p. 44), visual images such as drawings can “help us to access those elusive, hard-to-put into words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or ignored.” Thus, I have drawn a picture to complement and extend my memory writing (see Chapter Four). I have also used memory drawing with the focus group of teachers to generate data on their early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy. Each member of the focus group was asked to think and draw on their past experiences that might have helped or hindered their learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy. As per Onyx and Small’s recommendations for memory writing (2001, p. 776), I asked the teachers to draw particular episodes their past, in as much detail as possible.

The teachers were not comfortable about drawing, as they indicated that they were not good at art. These teachers, who are all Black African, were schooled during the apartheid era where there was racial segregation and whites were given better education than Black Africans and Art was not considered an important subject for Black African schools (Christie, 2006). After a long silence, I showed them what my drawing looked like. As a researcher, I was also not confident in drawing. My drawing was not perfect but it represented my early experiences well. (My drawing can be seen in Chapter Four.) Derry (2005, p. 35) explains that drawings help to us to access memories and can give others a “multi-layered intellectual/emotional connection to [a

researcher's] experience." After showing the teachers my drawing, they seemed to feel more confident and they started to draw. (For more discussion of this issue see Chapter Four.)

As the teachers were drawing, they were discussing things such as, "How do you draw learners squashed on one bench?" I then realised that the use of drawings had triggered their memories (Khau, 2009). The use of memory drawing gave the teachers an opportunity to think about their past experiences and to identify significant experiences that might have shaped them to be the teachers they are today. Drawn memories produced by the focus group were discussed and analysed in the group. (The drawings can be seen in Chapter Four.) I used memory work as "a group method that involves the collective analysis of individual [drawn] memories" (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 773). I think that memory drawing was less time-consuming and possibly less intimidating for the teachers than memory writing would have been. Once the initial discomfort was overcome, the drawing process was creative and fun and I believe that it encouraged teachers to be more actively involved in the research (Punch, 2002).

### **Open-ended group discussions.**

According to Morgan (as cited by Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), in a focus group members interact with the others and discuss a particular topic or theme, yielding a collective rather than an individual view. Hamilton et al. (2008) explain that sharing and reflecting with colleagues presents an opportunity for others to provide feedback and integrate the ideas into their own practice. Data emerges from that interaction.

I had two data collection sessions with the teacher focus group, excluding the first meeting of explaining the whole research process and setting the scene of working together. Open-ended group discussions were conducted with the focus group in each of our meetings. All sessions were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed. As explained below, the teachers were quite reserved at the start of the first meeting, but as we established a working relationship they became more confident and were able to share their ideas, experiences and views with the group.

At the first session, I started the first group discussion by explaining in full about my studies and the importance of doing this research. I asked the focus group to keep all our discussions confidential. However, the atmosphere was quite tense. The issue of power relations, as I was from the Department of Education, was evident. I quickly decided to change the topic

and we debated about the national strike (it was during a time when teachers and all public servants were involved in the salary strike action). Everybody was free and had something to say about the strike. They were very vocal and angry about our government whom they felt was not listening to public servants' demands. Before I even changed the topic into what we had met for, Toto<sup>1</sup> (one of the teachers) reminded all of us of the task we had to do, and asked me to carry on with the task.

The discussion about the strike helped to establish a working relationship with the teachers. Although our discussions were held in English, from time to time the participants, who were all Zulu-speaking, used some Zulu words to express their feelings (see Chapter Four). This did not bother me as I understand that the language was a troubling issue for all of us. The reason why the research was conducted in English and not in isiZulu was because I was dealing with teachers who are professionals and I assumed they could express themselves well in English, as they did. English is our second language, and after listening to the early learning experiences of the focus group, I realised that we were all experiencing the same problems in terms of a lack of confidence because of English as our second language (see Chapter Three). However, If I do such research again, I will definitely conduct it in English again as, in my view, it helps to build self-confidence.

In the first discussion session, the focus group (including me) were sharing their past experiences and memories through their memory drawings. I probed the teachers with questions during our discussion of the drawings so as to learn more about their experiences, thought and feelings. Through the group discussion prompted by these drawings, I was able to understand the type of education that the group members had experienced and the kinds of schools they had attended. I was able to relate their educational background to mine.

During the second session, everybody was looking forward to what we were going to do. The members of the focus group discussed their needs as Foundation Phase teachers. This was a very sensitive issue, as the discussion was pointing at us as subject advisors and the things that we do and do not do. I did not take it personally as my role was listen to the teachers' challenges and needs.

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<sup>1</sup> For confidentiality, the names of the teachers have been changed.

### **A critical review of my scheme of work.**

In this study, I have looked very critically at my core responsibilities as a subject advisor. These include my daily activities and interaction with schools. This study helped me to look at the gaps in terms of policy implementation and I gained insight into what I need to change (as explained in the following chapters). This has helped me to redesign my scheme of work to address the real needs and priorities of teachers.

As a subject advisor, it is within my area of responsibility to ‘unpack’ policy matters with teachers. This is done by looking at the key areas in the policy and also finding simpler ways to explain terminology used in the policy. It also includes giving teachers examples of learning activities that they can use in the classroom. In my critical review of my scheme of work, I considered how the numeracy and literacy activities I was using in curriculum workshops corresponded to the actual experiences, challenges and needs of the teachers so that I could better assist them to help learners to improve in literacy and numeracy (see Chapter Five).

This critical review will be an ongoing process as it helps me to improve my practice. As a result of this study, I developed numeracy and literacy activities that further helped teachers to implement the policy as expected by the Department of Education. Sayed and Jansen (as cited in Samuel, 2009, p. 3) argue that, “the failure of educational policies suggests that policies could also be understood as merely “symbolic” and that they are never really intended to be implemented in practice”. That is the reason why I developed more user-friendly activities to simplify policy issues.

In addition, after the interviews with the focus group, I decided that, when I visited schools, I would no longer use the school visit report form that we are using as a district. I designed my own form to capture the information I wanted to see that showed what to look for on follow up school visits (see Appendix G). The original school visit forms that we were using checked whether teachers had developed the learning programme and the work schedule, as well as the daily lesson plans according to the stipulated curriculum. It also checked whether assessment had been done according to the assessment tasks per term. Recording of these assessment tasks are very important irrespective whether teachers struggle in doing assessment or not (see appendix H). The new school visit form that I developed is not demanding anything from the teacher. This form assures the teacher that there is a working relationship between her and the subject advisor. Teachers are given an opportunity to highlight the curriculum challenges

they have in their classrooms. The teacher and the subject advisor work together to find solutions to the problem. A follow up visit is then planned together. This time the teacher knows what to do and on the next visit, she also understands what to expect.

### **Questionnaires and discussion with the other subject advisors.**

As explained above, it was not in my original research plan to hold a discussion with my fellow subject advisors, but after the group discussions with the teachers I felt that it would be important to share what I had learnt. I gave questionnaires to four subject advisors after sharing with them the issues that had emerged from the focus group discussions with the teachers. The reason for giving out questionnaires was that I felt that the subject advisors might not feel free to talk about these issues in front of others. The issues that came up in my study are very sensitive, especially if you know that you are not doing your work well as an advisor. My self-study research had helped me to better understand Foundation Phase teachers and I knew that my colleagues might not have the same understanding that I had. I gave the subject advisors questionnaires during our meeting, and ask them to fill it during their leisure time. I did not record their responses at the discussion meeting, as I felt that they are not going to be free to speak from their heart in front of others.

### **Data Analysis and Representation**

In analysing the data produced by myself and my participants, I have looked for the similarities as well as the differences in our experiences, views, and observations in order to determine key themes and issues in relation to my research questions. I have also used some participatory analysis, in which the focus group participants have given each other space where everyone has shared her story, viewpoints and responses with the members and all voices were listened to.

After the discussions with the focus group, the first step was for me to manage the data by categorising it, thus naming issues that were coming up. I organised issues into themes, then broke these into manageable units in relation into those issues. I then look for the patterns in the story of each participant. I looked at what was important in terms of teacher A, teacher B and teacher C. I looked at what could be learnt from my participants' early experiences and then analysed them by comparing and contrasting the focus groups' stories in order to find common

themes and issues. Although with the focus group we shared different experiences and needs, there were similarities between our stories.

In analysing the subject advisors' responses to the questionnaire I looked at the similarities as well as the differences. I also looked at the positive as well as the negative responses. This happened after I analysed the content of our discussion during our meeting.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

According to Feldman (2003, p. 27), it is important to “[provide] clear and detailed descriptions of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work” if we want to enhance trustworthiness or validity in self-study research. Feldman (2003) also highlights the importance of being explicit about how data is analysed. In my dissertation, I have therefore given a clear and detailed account of how I have gone about producing, collecting and analysing the data for my study. In addition, following Feldman's guidelines for establishing trustworthiness in self-study research, I have also given evidence to show how the study has deepened my self-understanding and my understanding of how I have improved my practice as a subject advisor (see Chapter Five).

The data represented in this study has given evidence of my experiences as well as the experiences of the focus group (teachers). To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, I have therefore shared my data analysis (see Chapter Four) with the teachers to check whether ‘this’ was what they meant during our focus group discussions. I organised another meeting at the central venue with my focus group to discuss what transpired from the discussions we had. I even shared my recommendations of the study with them and they expressed their concern that they so wished somebody out there would read and act on the recommendations. I explained to the group how I had arrived at themes from our discussions. At that moment I felt like I was an ‘expert’ in conducting research. That was just the feeling I had. I explained to them how I chose the themes by grouping and counting the number of issues from each issue that came up from the discussion. I then explained to them how important it is in my research to look for the work other authors that will support my argument.



### **Limitations and Challenges**

The study is a small scale qualitative study. The findings cannot be generalised across all South African schools. However, I believe that the study does give useful insights and highlight some key issues that other subject advisors and also policy developers can draw on in their own work.

The biggest challenge in conducting the research was my position as a departmental official, which initially made teachers feel uncomfortable in talking about their needs as Foundation Phase teachers. I started by sharing my experiences and what I see as a problem from my experience when visiting schools. After that, they felt free and comfortable to discuss and share their experiences as well.

### **Ethical Issues**

Each member of the focus group was given a letter explaining the research and stating that I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (See Appendix C). I even showed them my student card as a proof that I am a part-time student. They were given a promise in writing that the group discussions that were audio recorded will remain confidential. These audio recordings were strictly for my study, nothing else. Each member of the group was told and assured in writing that although I intended using their responses in my research, their names and the names of their schools would not be mentioned. The stories that we shared together will also remain confidential. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the study. Participants were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at anytime if they felt uncomfortable. I asked them to sign the consent forms, and those have been kept in my file throughout the study. Focus group members were also asked to respect each other's privacy and to keep others' stories confidential.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have given a detailed account of my self-study research process. Choosing self-study methodology to drive this study helped me to be focused and improved in my work. The methods of collecting data has added value to my self-study as I have become aware of what is happening around me, thus becoming visionary. I have given an account of the research setting, and also discussed the importance of choosing the participants for this study. The issues of validity and trustworthiness are also important for self-study.

In the next chapter, I look at the experiences that have shaped me as teacher and as a teacher educator and subject advisor with the intention of gaining deeper insight into who am I as an educational practitioner and how I can improve my practice.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE JOURNEY OF MY EDUCATIONAL LIFE**

### **Introduction**

In this study, I aim to better comprehend and enhance my own practice as a Department of Education subject advisor, specifically in relation to preparing for the implementation of the Foundations for Learning programme in the Foundation Phase. In the previous chapter, I discuss my self-study research methodology. In this chapter, I address the first of the three sub questions that underpins my study: *How can I better understand my own experiences and practices as a subject advisor in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase?* To respond to this question, I remember the journey of my educational life (with particular emphasis on my experiences of learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy) from the time I started schooling up to my present job as a subject advisor. I take the reader through my early experiences of schooling and on to my training and my practices of being a teacher, a lecturer at the teacher college and a subject advisor within the Department of Education. These memory journey experiences are important for this study as they form part of my practice and thus form the data for the self-study research I am engaged in. This data was collected through memory work (in the form of memory drawings and memory narratives), as well as reflective journal writing. (I discuss my data collection process in more detail in Chapter Two.) In the second section of this chapter, I re-examine my lived experiences to identify key themes that emerge from the journey of my educational life. My intention was that my engagement with and analysis of my memories would help me to better understand and explain who am I as an educational practitioner and how my past learning and teaching experiences might have shaped my practice today.

### **My Lived Experiences of Learning and Teaching**

#### **Primary Schooling**

My primary school years began in 1968 when, at the age of four, I attended a very old missionary school in a deep rural, disadvantaged area in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (which at that time was known as Natal). The missionaries taught basic reading and writing, along with Christian doctrine (Christie, 2006). These missionaries had the idea that when Black Africans attended school, the only thing important for them was to be taught “to work” (Christie, 2006, p.

70). Thus Black Africans were to be prepared only for doing manual labour. According to Porteus, Vally, and Ruth (2001), young black Africans were not considered capable of becoming critical and responsible citizens. The authors further explain that blacks were 'educated' to become obedient low-wage workers within the racial capitalist system. The curriculum prescribed for Black Africans during apartheid times (known as Bantu Education) differed from that of the Whites. As cited in Christie (2006, p.12), this is evident in what the then Minister of Native Affairs, H.F. Verwoed, said in 1953, at the time when Bantu Education was being introduced: "When I have control over native education, I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them".

My primary school was one of the poorest of the poor schools. Our class did not have furniture, except for a few benches, which we used for sitting and for writing on. Teaching aids never made an appearance; there were no resources. In 1982, Robert McNamara, past president of the World Bank (as cited in Christie, 2006, p. 13), on his visit to South Africa also commented about poor schools in rural areas:

"I have seen very few countries in the world that have such inadequate educational conditions. I was shocked at what I saw in some of the rural areas and homelands. Education is of fundamental importance. There is no social, political, or economic problem you can solve without adequate education".

I still remember my first teacher who used to carry a bamboo stick when teaching us using the traditional rote method. According to Dewey (1934), traditional education is when a teacher funnels the knowledge into learners through books and instruction without learners acquiring any knowledge through their own active inquiry. The only way of learning concepts at the missionary school was through memorisation and drill work; active learning or learner-centred pedagogy was not practised in this school. Kunene (2009) highlights that, in learner-centred pedagogy, learners actively construct their own knowledge, thus making a teacher a mediator and a facilitator of learning.

My primary school teacher used to give us sums orally and we were then expected to write answers on our own without using any concrete objects to assist us, or any explanation. If you did not get the sum correct, you would be punished with the bamboo stick. The teacher was the only important 'all knowing' figure and nobody dared to question her. If you showed that you needed a little more explanation if you did not understand certain concepts, you were punished

and the teacher would shout at you. This created a passive culture in the classroom where no one dared ask or question anything. Corporal punishment was practised during the apartheid era as it was believed to be technically proven to help educate children (Porteus, Vally & Ruth, 2001). According to Morrell and Moletsane (2002, p. 234), Black African schools during apartheid “shared with their Christian National white counterparts a ferocious commitment to corporal punishment.” It was believed that for learners to listen and learn they must be punished. As Harley, Barasa, Betram, Mattson and Pillay (2000, p. 10), explain, “corporal punishment has been a pervasive feature of life in South African schools”. From the first day I was at school, I realised that school was not a nice place to be but strangely enough, after school, my friends and I would play “schools” and I would always choose to be the teacher. What I loved teaching my class was spelling and basic numeracy. If they did not answer my questions correctly, I really enjoyed beating them with a stick until they answered correctly. Now I see that I was practising what my teacher was doing to me. And I believed that the only way for them to learn was to be given a beating, and I did just that.

Christie (2006) states that, for Black African children, learning to read and write was not considered very relevant to their lives. During my primary school years, I never experienced reading, nor did I ever see a teacher carrying a book. I still remember our English lessons. The teacher used to write a few sentences on the shiny blackboard and we had to copy them. If you got three wrong, you were given three strokes with a stick. Our teacher also used to show us all the answers to questions, then wipe them off the blackboard and ask us to re-write them on our slates. Thus, learning for me was meaningless.

As I remember it, the teacher’s main job was to control the class. She demanded that we pay attention and listen to her. What our teacher expected from us was to be cognitively receptive but physically inactive, except when taking notes. Harley et al. (2000) indicate that teachers often fear to move away from teacher-centred pedagogy as they think that it undermines their power in the classroom. I now understand that my teacher probably felt that she had to take control of everything in the class to maintain her authority as a teacher. Later on, when I had to do my teaching practice in this same school, I discovered that this teacher was a volunteer sent by the church and had no teaching qualifications. Fleisch (2008) highlights the fact that even today many teachers who teach in poor schools in South Africa are not fluent readers themselves, nor are they fully qualified.

I now see that I never received any effective teaching in my primary school years. Everything was about drill work and memory, which, in my view, is not a bad method if done intentionally as one of a number of pedagogic methods, but is not sufficient on its own. In my opinion, this way of teaching goes against what teachers should be doing in schools. Their job should be to nurture learners and help them develop holistically. According to Dewey (1934), education is a holistic process of helping learners grow morally and physically, as well as intellectually. He further says that any experience that hinders the future development of learning is “mis-educative” (1963, p. 25). As I look back at my primary schooling, I would say that my learning experiences were largely mis-educative.

### **Secondary Schooling**

These were the most frustrating years of my schooling. I was sent to a public boarding school far from home in another deep rural area of KwaZulu-Natal province. This time I found the teachers to be different from those of my primary schooling experience. The teachers at my high school were all either Afrikaans- or English-speaking, except for the Zulu teacher. In my primary school years, everything had been taught using isiZulu as the medium of instruction. When I went to high school, everything was in English and Afrikaans. This was a disadvantage for my learning, as I did not understand the language of teaching and learning. Language was a great obstacle for me, as I did not understand what was being taught at this school.

When I was in Grade 10, I experienced being taught by a White, English-speaking person for the first time in my life. At the beginning I did not understand even a simple sentence he was saying. All the instructions he gave us were very vague for me. As a result, I was amongst those who were not doing their class work and homework well, as I did not understand what I was supposed to do. I started to hate being at school as it was of no benefit to me. The reason why I felt that I could not give up was my parents. My father used to share with us that he started working at the age of thirteen because his parents did not have money to take him to school. He told himself that once he had his own children, he would make sure that they received a good education irrespective whether he had money or not.

As in my primary schooling, teacher-centeredness was evident in my high school and teachers were very authoritarian. Similarly, Kunene (2009, p. 143), who also attended school under the Bantu Education system, highlights that her secondary school teachers used traditional,

teacher-centred methods of teaching in which “facilitation of critical thinking and self-discovery was ignored”. I used to sit quietly in class and dared not question anything or raise an argument. Even during study time at the hostel, I used to study alone while others studied in groups because I felt that I had nothing to contribute. I knew that my problem was in understanding the language that was used in teaching and learning.

During exam time, I used to memorise and recall everything. This was what Freire (1972) calls the “banking” concept of education. What Freire means by this is that as teachers we teach in a way that we give our learners all the information without scrutinising it. We do not step back and check whether that information is internalised or whether it makes sense to our learners. What we expect at the end of the year through tests and examination is for learners to reproduce that information as it is. Although I passed the exams, I was not proud of my results. I also remember that, although I was beginning to like Mathematics, I was not chosen to be in a Mathematics class because of the low marks I had received. I did not finish my second year at the boarding school. The work was difficult and I thought it was too hard for me. I just could not manage and so I ran away.

I went back to the “Black African” secondary school, where I completed my matriculation year without having teachers in two examination subjects, one being English. I remember that the Mathematics teacher was an ‘untouchable person’. Every learner feared him. Nobody wanted to be in his class. Maybe that was the way for him to have fewer learners in his class. He knew his work and was always in class teaching, but he did not open up enough to us as learners. There was no communication about our mathematics work. If we had difficulty in some concepts, we were afraid to ask him to help us. Severe punishment was always the result when we got our mathematics sums wrong. This teacher never helped us by explaining where we went wrong and how to correct our misunderstanding. He used to teach by giving one simple example on the board and then expected us to do difficult sums on our own. Learning was so difficult in his class. I recall that we used to mark our own sums, but because we were afraid of being punished we would mark our incorrect answers as correct. This did not help either, as we then never understood what the correct answer was.

## **Teachers' Training College**

I was so unfortunate because I repeated Grade 12 twice and on both occasions got results of the school leaving certificate (S-symbol). This was not a good symbol for a university entrance. Teaching was not my dream career. I wanted to be a social worker, but I do not know for what reasons. I also would have liked to be a nurse because I loved the white uniform that nurses were wearing at that time. I started at a teachers' training college when I was seventeen years of age. I spent three years training and obtained my primary teachers diploma with distinction in practice teaching and in mathematics.

It felt as if the years at the teachers' training college were the beginning of my life of real learning. I really enjoyed being a student teacher. For the first time, I was in a place of learning where there was no corporal punishment. When I looked back in my years of schooling I felt like my teachers were 'restricting' me; now I was free and felt like I was being extended in my learning (Harley et.al, 2000; Evans, 2007). I felt that I was regarded as a critical thinker and a self-disciplined member of the learning community. This was in line with what hooks (1994, p.15) argues for, "a progressive, holistic education":

To educate as the practise of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred, who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (hooks, 1994, p.15)

This was a teacher training college with 98% White lecturers. All were loving and caring people. However, the fear of the unknown took hold of me as I started to think of my language problem. How was I going to understand these lecturers who lectured in English as well as in Afrikaans during Afrikaans lessons? Although I had difficulty in understanding the language of instruction, I learnt so many things. However, some did not make any sense to me, such as the teaching of phonics (letter recognition), as I had never experienced being taught this way. I learnt interesting and different methods for teaching, including problem solving and the self-discovery method. I also learnt about reading methods. I then realised that drill work and memorisation were not the only way of teaching. The fact that teaching aids could be made was an 'eye



opener' to me. I had thought that resources could only be bought, not made. Learning about the use of concrete aids in the teaching of Mathematics was exciting and challenging. I learnt a lot about the teaching of Mathematics, resulting in me being chosen as the best Mathematics teacher in primary education. However, although I was chosen as the best student teacher and obtained a distinction in practical teaching, I was not confident that I would be the best teacher in the field.

### **My Teaching Career**

What excitement I experienced at gaining a teaching post in a deep rural school in the middle of nowhere surrounded by sugarcane fields! However, I did not realise that the worst time had just begun. Realities now surfaced. Now was the time to prove who I was as a teacher and the changes I would be bringing to these poor learners. The school was in a poverty-stricken area of KwaZulu-Natal province, with a high unemployment rate. According to Fleisch (2008, p. 51), "poverty is a good predictor of poor educational achievement" and this is what I found. Parents who were employed were working as labourers in the sugar cane fields. Fleisch (2008) highlights that parents who are illiterate and have not achieved a high standard of living convey low expectations to their children. He further explains that the language spoken at home, as well as a lack of availability of books at home, can contribute to the underperformance of learners. This was the case with the learners I was teaching. Schooling for them was not that important as they were happy if during weekends or school holidays they would have part time jobs at sugar cane fields and get paid.

As a novice teacher, I had to share 118 Grade Two learners with a teacher who had taught for more than 17 years. This teacher was opposed to all the methods I had learnt at college (see also Kunene, 2009). I felt that I was not given a chance to excel in my teaching. Everything I did was discouraged by this older, experienced teacher with whom I had to share a classroom. The participatory methods I was trying to use were discouraged and I was categorically told that they would not work in this type of school with the type of learners it had.

I was so frustrated. I felt that the training college had not prepared me enough to deal with the dilemmas I was facing, nor had it prepared me for rural education. Most children were in Grade Two at the age of 10 because they had started school late. I found that at the Grade Two level the learners could not even write their names. There were so many things that were not dealt with according to my training as a teacher. The issues of overcrowding and of how to

manage discipline in a more positive manner were not dealt with in any depth. I wanted to be comfortable in my new situation and for me to be accepted in this school I had to teach the way my colleagues were teaching. This meant that I had to forget about all the new methods I had learnt at the college.

When teaching Mathematics, I went back into the way my primary school teacher had taught me. I felt that that was the only option as I was not creative enough to think of better ways. Reading was not done in this school. There were no resources in this school. There was not even a single book for me to read a story to those poor learners. As a teacher, I was not creative enough to make my own storybooks and so I did not practice any reading with the learners. Learners recited the same poems that I had recited twenty years previously. I now see that those poems did not benefit the children's learning experiences and in fact, most did not make any sense. Every Friday was a test day irrespective of whether there was anything new learnt. It did not matter whether the same test was written three times, as nobody was responsible for checking our work as teachers. The poor learners used to fail these tests and no positive feedback was given to them.

I wanted to leave teaching as I was so frustrated by the manner in which things were happening. Only about 30% of the 118 learners I had seemed to be making any progress. I was worried about those who were not achieving well and wanted to know the reasons why, but I did not know how to ascertain this as the training college had not prepared me in this area.

However, a two-day workshop on how to deal with learners with learning difficulties, given by a person from overseas, changed my mind. I was then motivated to be a 'proper' teacher in a challenging environment. I knew from then on that I had to know my learners' strengths and weakness and that I should also be able to pay individual learners the attention they needed (Nel, 2007). This gave me the answer to a problem with which I had been struggling. I began to understand my learners better than before. This also encouraged me to undertake studies on remedial education at university.

When I moved to a school in an urban area, there was a difference. This school had resources, including books, but teachers were not using them. I was then asked by the principal to open a remedial class as many learners were failing to meet the required standard set by the Department of Education. It was the first time I found joy in dealing with learners who have barriers in learning. It was amazing to see how these learners performed after my intervention.

After conducting informal assessments with the learners, I would then draw up an individual programme for each learner. This programme addressed the difficulties learners were experiencing in learning. For example, if the learner was not doing well in numeracy I would find out which aspects needed to be addressed. For example, if it was a spelling or reading difficulty, I needed to concentrate on how to teach spelling or reading to that particular learner.

I still remember taking a street child into my remedial class whom all the other teachers did not want as they claimed that he was rude and bossy to young learners. This sixteen year boy did not trust anyone including the teachers. I offered to have him in my class on a full time basis. The first thing I wanted to do was for us to have a relationship of trust. I used to play different games with him during break times, including chess and cards. After noticing that he felt more free to talk I then asked him to tell me about his life and where his home was as he was staying at a place of safety for street children. To cut his long story short, this boy ran away from home at the age of ten because his step father was ill treating him. He told me that he could not stand looking at his frequently drunk step father beating his mother every day for no apparent reason. I was also able to connect this street child with his mother after seven years of his disappearance. The difference I made in the life of these children was so rewarding. This was evident by their improved performance in other grades, even in the Intermediate Phase (Grades Four to Six).

### **My Lecturing Career**

After I had taught for 10 years, and because I was able to further my studies, I was appointed as a mathematics lecturer in the junior primary section at a teachers' training college. This was in 1995, and I was there for a period of six years before the colleges were closed by the government. There were aspects and concepts of mathematics that I did not know and did not understand and therefore I did not even bother to teach them. Now I realise that my student teachers were disadvantaged through my neglect. Fleisch (2008) highlights that what teachers know is a key factor in learner performance and this was certainly so in my case. I was hesitant to use my experience of remediation to my student teachers as I felt that they are adults and they needed more than what I can offer. It is only now after being involved with teachers that I realise that teachers themselves are like children, whatever help if it is going to transform them is fine.

### **My Work as Part-Time University Tutor**

In 2002, I was appointed as a part time tutor at a university for the National Programme for Developing Teachers (NPDE) and I am still tutoring on this programme. The programme deals with under qualified and unqualified teachers who want to upgrade their qualifications. Among the modules that I tutor is Mathematics Literacy. This self-study has helped me to better understand the needs of these teachers, consequently I have become involved in helping them realise their dreams even after tutorial sessions. I find this very time consuming, but I realise that it is also rewarding and fulfilling especially when I see their progress.

### **My Department of Education Career**

After the closure of the teachers' training colleges in 2001, I was absorbed into the Department of Education as a subject advisor in the Foundation Phase. It really transformed me as a person. At the college, I had been in my 'comfort zone' as I had never applied for any post advertised. Towards the end of 2001, I was promoted within the same unit into a better position. In 2003, I gained another position that gave me the responsibility to also manage human resources within the unit. With this position, I was expected to give direction to teachers in relation to curriculum policy.

This was during the crucial time when there were changes in our education system as the post-apartheid Curriculum 2005 curriculum policy had been revised, streamlined and strengthened, which resulted in the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2002). Workshops conducted by the National Department of Education to assist us as provincial subject advisors in "cascading" information about this revised curriculum policy to teachers were not beneficial to us. Some National officials did not have Foundation Phase expertise. They did not have any idea what was expected in the Foundation Phase. Their workshop was much too theoretical, without any practical examples given to us to share with the teachers. After that workshop we were all confused as to what we were going to say to the teachers about the changes in the curriculum. However, professional development workshops conducted by Non Government Organisations (NGOs) assisted me to undertake this task. Concepts that had been unclear to me during the past years were explained using concrete objects, for example, the tessellation, 3 dimensional (3D) and 2 dimensional shapes (2D) were explained. That made a

great difference in my learning and teaching. I was able to reach out to the teachers with more confidence.

I knew that I had to emphasise the importance of reading to the teachers and how it would benefit the learners. On the other hand, I understood the frustrations of the teachers who lacked appropriate skills and materials to carry out this task. Apart from the fact that teachers were functioning at different levels, time was really against us. We would conduct workshops for three days but found it very hard to visit all the schools and to give further support because of the other initiatives we are involved in as Departmental officials.

### **Making Sense of my Lived Experiences**

In this section of the chapter, I reconsider my lived experiences of learning and teaching (as related above) to identify key themes to assist me in better understanding my own experiences and practices as a subject advisor in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase.

### **Carrying the Past into the Present**

It is clear to me that I am amongst those who are lucky to have experienced all levels of schooling and teaching throughout my life. I have taught learners at a school level, and I have been a remedial teacher dealing with learners who have barriers in learning at a school level as well. I have also taught student teachers at a teacher training college. In addition, I have had the experience of tutoring under qualified and unqualified teachers at a tertiary/university level, doing National Programme for Developing Educators (NPDE). Furthermore, I now work with practicing teachers as their mentor.

Through drawing (see Chapter Four) and writing about my memories of my diverse experiences of learning and teaching, I have realised that my teaching of both literacy and numeracy, as well as the way in which I deal with the teachers with whom I now work, are influenced by how I was taught and learnt from primary school level to tertiary level. I now realise that, as Nieto (2003, p. 24) argues, “teachers bring their experiences, their identities, values, beliefs, attitudes, hang-ups, biases, wishes, dreams and hopes” with them into their classrooms, I have also done that. The way I teach is influenced by the way I was taught. I have come to see that “the past is a means of understanding the present” (Dewey, 1963, p. 78) and that

teacher and teacher educators' experiences and biographies influence their professional practice (Beljaard, Verloop & Vermunt 2007). Now I understand myself and why I do things the way I do them. Goodson and Walker (1991) highlight that teachers' personal life experiences in the past interact with their current professional lives and shape their work. Consequently, who we are as individuals affects who we are as teachers and thus affects our students' learning (Samaras, Hicks, & Berger, 2006).

Nieto (2003,p.24) advises that [one] way to find out who we are, what meanings are and the sources of meanings that we adopt to make sense of our lives and our responsibilities, is to acknowledge how our values may either get in the way of, or enhance our work with [learners]. By revisiting my memories of learning and teaching through writing and drawing, I have come to realise that the way in which I have dealt with individuals in different settings during my educational career has often been the same way as the way in which I was taught as a learner. This further affects my current practice as a subject advisor when I conduct workshops for teachers. I now see that when I explain curriculum policy on numeracy and literacy to the teachers, I expect teachers to listen and accept the policy as it is. I do not expect them to question anything. I always remind them that "this is policy" and is gazetted and we cannot change anything. In my past experience, teachers imparted knowledge to me and I find myself doing the same thing to these teachers. In practice, there has been no sharing of views and ideas during my workshops.

Reflecting on my personal history as a learner and teacher has helped me to understand why I do things a certain way (Allender & Allender, 2006). I hope that this deeper understanding can help me to change and improve my practice as a subject advisor (Allender & Allender, 2006). This study of my own educational journey has helped me to understand that the background of where learners come from does not matter much if teachers are prepared and committed to teach the learners effectively. I have always looked at teachers teaching in deep rural areas as those who do not have the capacity to excel in their teaching. This study has helped me to ask myself questions such as, "How can I contribute to helping the rural schools perform like ex-model C (formerly White) schools?" This memory work has also helped me to understand that ordinary teachers teaching in the class really need our support. These teachers have needs as well as aspirations as human beings. I need to open lines of communication for them to talk about classroom challenges and also to help the teachers to perform better. Through

my study, I have realised how important it is to praise teachers for the hard work they are doing. This will help boost their morale and they will realise that someone has a concern about their work with learners.

### **The Language Barrier**

I now see that throughout my learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy, language has been a barrier for me; it hindered my excellence in my performance. No matter how much I wanted to raise issues or come up with an argument, communicating in a foreign language was a problem. I would first start thinking in my mother tongue and then translate the thoughts into English. The main idea or argument would be lost in the process. Now I understand why teachers are so quiet during workshops; it is often because of a language barrier. If you do not understand the language of what you are being taught, it is difficult to master and have knowledge of all the concepts in numeracy and literacy. My memory work has shown me the soundness of Fleisch's (2008, p.105) argument that although "children begin schooling with an adequate knowledge of the language of their home and community, the shift to the second language means that they never master the knowledge and skills required by the school".

In South Africa, educational policies are written in English. I have to explain them to teachers who are expected to communicate these policies to learners and parents in their mother tongue. It is very difficult for me to deal with the policies in a holistic way as some of the language aspects are not clear to me and I end up explaining what is familiar and comfortable to me. I find that teachers whose mother tongue is not English will not question anything from the policy because of the language barrier. They are afraid to speak out in front of other teachers of a different race who are English mother-tongue speakers and so they will pretend to know and understand everything. I realise that because of a language barrier, I am not equipped or assertive enough to deal with the ever-changing world of curriculum policy. When people from other racial groups raise issues, I sometimes feel inferior and might be inclined to think that they want to show others how much they know.

My school visit experience as part of my job description as a subject advisor has shown me that many teachers do not fully understand most aspects of the prescribed curriculum irrespective of the numerous workshops they have attended. They have what we call a "culture of compliance" during workshops, but when they go back to their schools, they do what they are

able to do. I now see that the reason for this might be that what the language of was discussed during workshop was not made accessible to them When I was a student teacher, because my lecturers were White and English speaking, language was once again a barrier for me. At times, at the end of the lessons I would have no understanding of the lesson content. However, remembering my own educational experiences has helped me today to understand and empathise with teachers who have no understanding of certain aspects of numeracy and literacy. I know how they feel. I sometimes try to convince myself that they will understand the concepts in time to come. However, at other times I ask myself, “Who is going to teach them if I think that way?” As a result of my self-study, I have begun to offer teachers more help even on a one to one basis. This helps them as I explain some concepts in their mother tongue and use practical examples. I have found that this works very well and helps teachers to understand what they are teaching in a broader sense. I have tried it with five different schools so far and will continue to work in this way.

### **Lack of Confidence and Self-Esteem as a Learner and Teacher**

During my primary and secondary schooling, I relied heavily on my teachers as I thought that they were the only ones who had knowledge. I do not recall doing any studies on my own. This belief hindered my independence and confidence. I also do not recall giving teachers work to do on their own when I was lecturing or conducting workshops. Just as my teachers had done with me, I now constructed a barrier to them being independent and confident as learners. I was just repeating my own experiences.

During my schooling, teachers used to punish us verbally as well as physically. This was demotivating, as it encouraged me not to explore and do things on my own. I do not remember being active in class and trying to answer questions asked as I was afraid of being humiliated in front of the class. Even if I knew the answer, I was scared to voice it as, if I was wrong, I would be punished. I now see that this has been a barrier to me as I have lacked confidence and self-esteem in my learning and teaching.

At secondary school, I was not chosen to be in a Mathematics class. During that time, it was believed that learners who studied Mathematics and Physical Science were exceptional learners. Because of that, I lacked confidence in my ability to do Mathematics; hence, there are aspects of numeracy that I am still not comfortable to deal with. I wondered why my



Mathematics teacher at the teachers 'training college praised me so much because I was not confident in Mathematics.

As stated previously, 98% of the lecturers at the training college were English speaking and only 2% were Zulu speaking lecturers. Because of a language barrier, I lacked confidence to communicate with my lecturers. I realise that even now, as a subject advisor, because of a lack of confidence I do not debate much with teachers of different racial groups.

When I was newly appointed as a subject advisor, a lack of self-confidence affected my delivery. I lacked facilitation skills and no induction was done by the Department. I had no knowledge of conducting successful workshops. I felt that I was lacking in expertise and kept asking myself how teachers would gain knowledge and expertise if I did not have it. During literacy workshops with teachers, I have never stressed the importance of reading books, as I did not experience this when I was a learner. I now see that this results in a lack of confidence and low self-esteem when it comes to reading with understanding.

As a subject advisor, I have colleagues that I supervise and mentor on curriculum issues. I now realise that I do not give these colleagues a platform to do things on their own. I do not even delegate work to them because I perceive that they lack confidence, and I, too, lack confidence in them. I then find myself extremely stressed because of all the work I have to do.

My lack of confidence as a learner has even affected my experience as a researcher. As I explain further in Chapter Two, my self-study data collection methods for this research have included drawing and keeping a journal of my everyday activities. Both these methods were unfamiliar to me at the start of my study. I was particularly sceptical about drawing, as I did not have confidence that I could do it. I was even afraid to write in my journal, thinking that what I was writing about was not important. As I have travelled through this self-study journey, it has been surprising to realise how much I can do with the help of my supervisor who has always praised and encouraged me to think critically about my study. I gained confidence in whatever I was doing and it actually helped me as personally as well as in my practice. Now I am able to contribute in our Departmental meetings how when we are discussing about poor performance of learners and what needs to be done. My suggestions come from an informed background of being involved in this research.

### **The Legacy of Bantu Education**

Education in apartheid South Africa was not equal, with different education systems for different racial groups (Christie, 2006). This created inequalities within our education and learning. Whites had better education and better opportunities as opposed to Black Africans. As I explain in the first section of this chapter, the Bantu Education curriculum for Black Africans was designed in such a way that it prepared learners for menial jobs. In addition, as Christie (2006) highlights, Black African schools had inferior facilities and resources and fewer qualified teachers.

As I re-examine my learning and teaching experiences, I can see how Bantu Education has affected my learning and teaching of numeracy and literacy. As a result of inadequate resources and authoritarian and teacher-centred teaching methods, I did not get good foundation during my primary schooling. As is illustrated in the above discussion, I have carried a resultant low self-esteem as a learner and a lack of confidence in my abilities throughout my educational life. My memory work has enabled me to see that I do not want to perpetuate this legacy with the teachers with whom I now work.

### **Rurality and Rural Education**

I am now aware of how my primary schooling in a rural area hindered my learning and teaching. That was where I was supposed to receive a solid foundation for my learning. However, the school I attended did not have resources, including textbooks, and I was not exposed to modern technology; we had no electricity or libraries. In addition, my teacher was unqualified and had very limited pedagogic skills.

Even now, nothing much seems to have changed with rural schools, which remain disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in urban areas (HSRC, 2005). People in rural areas are still experiencing extreme poverty and high levels of unemployment and many are still illiterate (HSRC, 2005). The Ministerial report on Rural Education (2005) also highlights that one of the challenges facing rural education in South Africa is the quality of education, lack of qualified teachers, irrelevance of curriculum, large classes and lack of teaching aids. The socio-economic conditions of rurality determine that schools do not have adequate resources including competent teachers. Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008), who have done research on rural and community development, mention that there is a slow progress in education in rural areas.

They further mention that the initiatives that were set for rural areas to bring about social change including teacher education and curriculum implementation, have not addressed issues such as poverty.

My self-study has helped me to realise that I need spend more time with rural schools. I have also become aware that I need to work with the teachers and school management teams at these schools to look at and discuss possibilities that might help transform them into self-reliant schools. As a subject advisor it is important to develop the school management team, especially the principal. The principal must have a vision and passion to lead the school. More professional development workshops have been planned for rural teachers. I have discussed with my colleagues how we might spend more time with and give more support to rural schools. I have also begun to encourage the issue of ‘partnership’ among schools, where I will ask an ex-model C school, which is doing well, to collaborate with the most disadvantaged rural school. The purpose of this partnership is for ex-model C to help and boost our disadvantaged rural schools. Ex-model C schools have enough resources, they also know how to use the resources effectively. In my experience, teachers in these schools are very creative and are ever willing to share their knowledge and expertise to disadvantaged schools. I also believe that encouraging partnerships among these schools will also help teachers in ex-model C schools to better understand the Black African learners in their schools, I have also conducted several workshops with teachers from rural schools on making resources using waste materials. In addition, what has proven to work well was to take a group of rural teachers for a week to observe in ex-model C schools. The teachers shared ideas and they learnt a lot from each other.

### **Importance of Understanding Learners’ Background and Context**

As I look back at my learning and teaching experiences, I can see that teachers need to teach a child in a holistic way and with understanding and, to do so, the teacher needs to understand the child’s background and the context of the child’s environment. I remember that when I was at the teachers’ training college our White lectures did not have a full understanding of our learning backgrounds and so they did not know how to assist me to overcome the language barrier that I was experiencing. When I had a remedial class, it became one of my priorities to know and understand about learners’ backgrounds. I have learnt that this helps you as a teacher when

learners experience difficulties as you are in a better position to understand and deal with the situation in advance to eliminate more problems.

Similarly, I have now realised that it is important for me as a subject advisor to understand teachers' contexts in order to be able to better meet their needs. This includes understanding what they know in terms of subject matter, the schools they are coming from and their personal backgrounds. The issue of teachers' identity, including their cultural identity, also cannot be overlooked. Teachers have received their training from different institutions offering different qualifications. Some teachers are teaching without any qualifications and some are upgrading themselves through distance education. In working with teachers, I need to take all these diverse factors into account.

### **Relationships and Communication**

During my primary and secondary schooling, there was no relationship or communication with my teachers. However, at the teachers' training college I felt recognised as a person. I was able to express myself freely without fearing that I would be reprimanded. I now realise the importance of me as a subject advisor having a good relationship and open communication with the teachers I work with. This will assist teachers to be relaxed and to be confident to ask questions and discuss matters of which they are not sure. Teachers need to view subject advisors as people who are there to mentor and support them. This will help teachers not to think of power and authority when we visit schools, but to be able to think of mentoring and receiving guidance and support from us. I agree with Kunene (2009) that it does not help either the teacher or the subject advisor for the subject advisor to visit the school and only concentrate on filling in the school visit form and checking on what teachers do not have. Shulman (as cited in Hargreaves, 2003, p.186) argues that "teacher collegiality and collaboration are not merely important for the improvement of morale and teacher satisfaction....but are absolutely necessary if we wish teaching to be of the highest order...Collegiality and collaboration are also needed to ensure that teachers benefit from their experiences and continue to grow during their careers." hooks (2003, p.xv) maintains that the classroom must be "a place that is life sustaining and mind expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teachers and learners work together in partnership." It is, therefore, important to nurture the relationship I have with the teachers in order to create a space where all of us can engage with issues and learn from each other.

Additionally, through my work as a subject advisor, I hope to encourage teachers to form communities of practice (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). This is where they will be free to share ideas together, ask questions for clarity and talk about their classrooms challenges without any pressure.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have remembered and re-examined my educational life to consider how my lived experiences have shaped me to be a certain kind of a teacher and teacher educator. I have discussed my experiences and the type of education I had which has had an impact on the way I do things in my educational practice. I have also highlighted and discussed the themes that emerged from my recollection of my experiences. Identifying these themes has given me the reasons why I do things the way I do them and has also helped me to realise where I need to improve my practice. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I discuss the experiences, practises and needs of teachers in relation to their learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: LEARNING FROM TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this study is for me to gain insight and improve my own practice as a Department of Education subject advisor, particularly in relation to preparing for the implementation of the Foundations for Learning programme in the Foundation Phase. In the previous chapter, I recount the journey of my educational life from my early experiences of schooling to my current work as a subject advisor. Furthermore, I highlight what impact my lived educational experiences have had on my practice as a teacher and a subject advisor. In this chapter, I engage with the second sub-question that underpins my study: *How can I better understand the experiences, practices and needs of the teachers in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase?* To address this question, I consider my teacher participants' early childhood experiences of learning numeracy and literacy, as well as their experiences of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as student teachers, to see what impact these experiences might have had on their teaching. I further look at their current needs as Foundation Phase teachers in relation to the Foundations for Learning programme. As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, the data that informs this chapter was generated through memory work (in the form of memory drawings) and open-ended group discussions with the teachers, as well as my reflective journal writing and note taking. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss how I generated and collected data with the teachers in my focus group through drawing and open-ended group discussions. I discuss the current challenges and needs as expressed by the teachers. I then go on to analyse the teachers' lived experiences through identifying and discussing significant themes.

### **The Focus Group Meetings**

As explained in Chapter Two, I met three times with the teachers' focus group (excluding the first meeting of explaining the whole research process and setting the scene of working together). The first and the second meeting were for data generation. The third meeting was important for checking validity with the participants. When I met with the focus group, my intention was for the teachers to reflect back on their experiences related to the learning and teaching of numeracy and literacy and to share these with me and each other. These meetings were important to me

because I hoped to understand what shaped the teachers' lives and practices to be what they are today. I also wanted to gain a better understanding of how I could meet the needs of teachers in relation to the learning and teaching of literacy and numeracy at the Foundation Phase. Additionally, I was interested in better understanding their experiences in the light of possible connections with my past experiences (as presented in Chapter Three). Allender and Allender (2006) explain:

In the bigger picture, it is not so much about how these connections take place as it is about how others can undertake this kind of inquiry for themselves in productive ways that can benefit the continued growth of the teacher self. (p. 14)

Thus, I not only wanted to look for connections among my participants' experiences and with my experiences, but also to encourage the group to discuss these experiences in an open-ended way that would allow each member to learn and grow as a teacher.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the focus group consisted of three teachers from three different schools, in different circuits in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. (Circuits are part of the district and each district has four circuits. Each circuit further has four wards. Each ward has approximately 23 schools). Two of the teachers are teaching in a rural area circuit and their schools are under-resourced. The other teacher is teaching in a semi-urban area that is surrounded by informal settlement houses. These teachers, Mhlobo<sup>2</sup>, Mali and Toto, did not know each other beforehand but all of them are teaching in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3). Krueger (1994) explains that if members of a focus group do not know each other but have similar associations, they are likely to share their experiences freely. All participants in the focus group, including myself, are Black African women, ranging between 38-47 years of age and are all Zulu speaking.

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<sup>2</sup> For confidentiality, the names of the participants have been changed.

At the first focus group meeting, I gave the group the following guidelines:

**Table 4.1. Drawings and Discussions**

<b>Drawings and Discussions</b>
1. Think about your early experiences as a child at school. Think about your classroom, your first teacher and her experiences and try to recall how you have learnt numeracy and literacy. I want you to draw these experiences and we will take turns to discuss our experiences.
2. Think about your experiences and share with me, of learning about the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy as student teachers.
3. What are your needs as Foundation Phase teachers in terms of the policy Foundations for Learning?

### **The Teachers' Early Childhood Experiences of Learning Numeracy and Literacy**

At the beginning, it was so tense when I explained to the focus group members that I would like them to draw their early experiences of learning numeracy and literacy. I first gave the instructions in English, but there was quietness after I asked my participants to draw. I thought that maybe the instructions were not clear or that the teachers did not understand me because of the language barrier (see Chapter Three). Thus, I went on to explain in more detail in isiZulu. However, when we were discussing using our mother tongue, I discovered that the reason for their hesitation was that they were afraid to draw. They looked at each other and confessed that they were not comfortable with drawing as it had not been part of their schooling. (I discuss this discomfort with drawing in more detail in Chapter Two.) I assured them that I was not expecting a perfect drawing but something from which they could tell their story. I also kept on assuring them that I needed the information for my studies and that it had nothing to do with the Department of Education. I wanted them to be free to speak their minds and not to see me as an official on duty. I also assured them about confidentiality in whatever they would say.

I decided to draw first and share my experiences as a starting point for our discussion so that the teachers could use my experiences as memory triggers for their own experiences (Khau, 2009). After I had done my drawing (see Figure 4.1), I reminded the teachers that I was not expecting a perfect drawing.



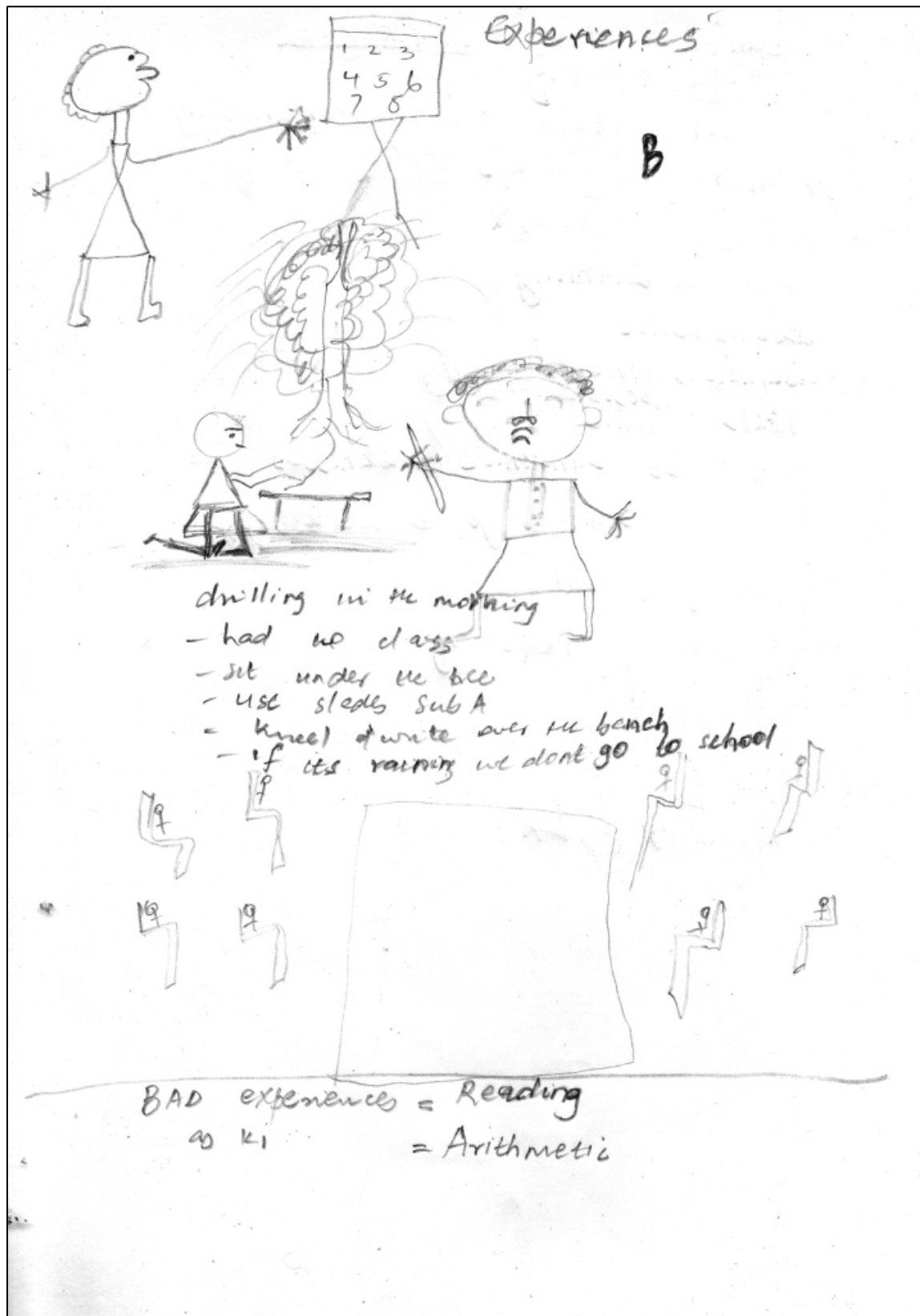


The focus group then felt more relaxed and started to draw. Eisner (as cited in LaBoskey, 2004, p. 836) explains that “art and aesthetic education capture and reveal those aspects of our experience and understanding that cannot be expressed in words.” Through this memory drawing activity with the teachers, I saw how drawing activates the mind and thus helped them in the process of remembering. This was an exciting moment for them as it helped them to remember what their former classrooms looked like and how their teachers taught them. The teachers’ drawings helped me to understand their perceptions of their experiences (Derry, 2005).

### **The Teachers’ Memory Drawings**

Figure 4.2 shows Toto’s drawing of her early experience of schooling. She remembered that they did not have a formal class, but they were learning under the tree. When they had to write using their slates, they kneeled down over the bench. Toto mentioned that the days that she enjoyed most were in summer when it was raining and there was no school. Figure 4.3 is Mhlobo’s drawing, depicting her first school in a deep rural area. In her school, they were using a local church as a classroom. Both grade one and grade two shared the same church with one teacher who was responsible for teaching this multigrade classroom. Mhlobo remembers that they did not have reading materials and had no desks but were using benches to sit and write on. She explained, “When I was doing Grade 1, we use to sit on the bench, when it’s time for writing, we had to kneel down and write using a pencil. If you don’t have a pencil, you get punished, or you are chased out of the classroom. Figure 4.4, Mali’s drawing, shows memories of how they learnt and were tested spelling. They would be scattered outside the school yard. The teacher would loudly shout out the words and all of them would spell the words aloud together without writing. Thereafter they were allowed to write the spelling word. If you got three words wrong, you were punished with three strokes.

Figure 4.2. Toto's memory drawing



[illegible]

[illegible]

### **The Discussion Prompted by the Memory Drawings**

Derry (2005, p. 37, citing McNiff, 1992) explains, “artistic images can expand communication and offer insight outside the scope of the reasoning mind”. I wanted the participants, including me, to feel free to discuss about how our drawings had helped us to “elicit” our memories (Derry, 2005, p. 37). After the teachers had shared their memory drawings with the group, we discussed issues that were raised by the drawings, including mine. All our early experiences were similar; our experiences only slightly differed when we were at training as teachers.

The first issue the focus group discussion highlighted was the type of classrooms and the conditions of those classrooms during their early schooling. All members of the focus group attended their early schooling during the apartheid era in under-resourced schools. Mhlobo and Toto’s schools were in a rural area and, although Mali’s school was in an urban township, it was also under-resourced. I then realised from their discussions that township schools during apartheid were not necessarily better resourced than rural schools as I had thought. From the discussions, it was clear that there was a shortage of classrooms in most schools and the principals would give the available classrooms to the higher grade classes as they seemed to feel that the lower grade classes were not as important. This was happening when these teachers were still learners themselves and from my experience of visiting schools, it is still happening even now in some of the schools. It was clear from Mhlobo’s discussion that her multigrade class was accommodated at a church where there was only one teacher responsible for teaching all the learners. Mhlobo explained, “We use to sit on the bench, the church benches, and what I remember is that, the teacher always focused on the bigger grade, which was grade two, and really I don’t remember what I learnt except a,e,i,o,u which was written on the board.” Toto highlighted that during her early schooling they were using a tree as their classroom. If it was raining or very cold, they were asked to stay at home.

Another key issue that came out of our discussion was the way in which we were taught phonics (letter recognition). In my experience as a Foundation Phase teacher, the learning of phonics is important, as it is the cornerstone of mastering language acquisition. It is important for learners to know and understand what they are learning and why they are learning that. Our former teachers were all using the same method of teaching, which was the traditional, teacher-centred method (see Chapter Three). It came from the sharing of our memories that our teachers would write a, e, i, o, u, on the chalkboard and let the learners recite this all over repeatedly. The

teachers would then wipe this off and ask learners to re-write it on their slates. This must have been believed to be the best method of teaching phonics as all of us had experienced it.

Teaching of reading was not evident in the early experiences of two members of the group. One participant said that her former teacher had had only one book called “*Umasihambisane*” (in English meaning “Let us go together”) and that this teacher used to ask them to read without giving them the skills of reading. Learners were also punished for failing to read and that created a culture within them to hate reading. In my experience, it is crucial that children are stimulated to read at an early age. It is also evident that the current poor matriculation results are in part due to the continuing low level of learners’ reading skills in our schools (Department of Education, 2008).

The teacher-centred approach was also used for teaching numeracy; counting was done without using concrete objects, except for one participant who remembered using stones for counting, which shows that her teacher was creative enough to think of using stones for counting. The group members shared that what we remembered was our teachers punishing us for failing to count. We were asked to count repeatedly from one up to hundred everyday without using any concrete objects. The teacher would not be in the classroom to check whether we were counting correctly. The group highlighted that older learners would cheat and not count at all. This shared experience suggests that drill work, memorisation and repetition were the common ‘methods’ of teaching numeracy and literacy practised amongst Black African schools during the apartheid era.

## **The Teachers’ Experiences of Learning about the Pedagogy of Literacy and Numeracy as Student Teachers**

### **The Stories of the Focus Group Members**

At our second focus group meeting, I was interested to find out where the teachers had done their training, what their training colleges were like, and what they felt they had gained from their colleges. I anticipated that this would help me understand these teachers better and to understand their needs. As I had done with the drawings, I started by sharing my own story of where I had done my training and what I had learnt from my lecturers, which was different from my early schooling (see Chapter Three). Similarly, Khau (2009) indicates that she used her experience as

the starting point for the discussion of remembered experiences with her group of participants. Like Khau, I found this technique very useful, as the group felt free and more relaxed once I had shared my story. It was also helpful for the group members to realise that I had had similar experiences to them. After I had shared my story (see Chapter Three), the three teachers shared their stories and I recorded them and later transcribed and analysed them.

### **Toto's story.**

Toto attended a training college in the early 1980's, during the apartheid era. This teacher training college was in an urban area with about 98% white lecturers, and all students were Black Africans. The following is her story<sup>3</sup>:

*"I was fortunate to do my training in an institution that had a fully fledged Junior Primary (Foundation Phase) Department with lecturers that had taught Foundation Phase classes. Their passion and expertise was instrumental in laying a solid foundation in terms of pedagogy of literacy. Lecturers who taught us used to demonstrate how to teach Literacy skills using a child-centred approach employing their senses and learning through play when acquiring basic skills of literacy, that is Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Learners need to be actively involved in listening activities using various resources to promote listening. Speaking resources could be radio, chanting of rhymes, talking on a phone and in the fantasy area. Reading activities would include reading a story to learners, incidental reading and picture reading. Writing methodology would be based on pre-writing skills, patterns of writing, creative writing and language development skills. Learners were expected to acquire all basic skills of literacy in the Foundation Phase. As a student teacher, I was taught to always know and remember that the Foundation Phase learner learns through play, using senses and must be always active. Concrete objects and pictures must be used when teaching Foundation Phase learners. Group teaching as a method of teaching is very important in the Foundation Phase when introducing basic skills of literacy in phonics, language skills, that is; grammar individualisation is very important in Foundation Phase and the identification of problems so as to assist learners.*

*I was taught that Foundation Phase learners need to manipulate objects so as to understand number concept, number operations and relationships of numbers with operations. I*

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<sup>3</sup> In presenting these oral accounts, I have corrected any grammatical errors that might impede the reader's understanding.



*was also taught good Foundation Phase practice in teaching capacity, measurement, Time, Mass and Length. Learners need to experiment with the above-mentioned concepts, their environment, daily activities and measuring outside, indoors and at home. I was taught to use real objects, counters, number chart counting activities before each lesson and to assist learners with gaps in terms of Numeracy basic skills like counting, number concept development and basic operations.”*

### **Mali’s story.**

Mali did not attend any training college, but gained her teaching qualification through correspondence in early 1990’s, towards the end of the apartheid era. What I realised about Mali was that she had taught for more than 10 years before gaining a qualification. Here is her story:

*“There is not much I am going to say about my experiences at the teacher college. I was so unfortunate that I did not have an experience of college life. I started teaching as a private teacher after completing my Matric [Grade 12]. I have done my teaching qualification through correspondence. There is not much that I can share with the group of how I learnt numeracy and literacy as I did not understand even myself what I was learning and why. I concentrated on doing my assignments and then memorised important facts for my examinations. The way in which I teach now is the way in which I was taught while I was a learner.”*

### **Mhlobo’s story.**

During the apartheid era in the late 1980’s, Mhlobo attended a college where 99 % of staff was Black African and all students were Black African. This college was in the middle of the township. This is her story:

*“I did not do a Primary Teachers Diploma (PTD) but I have done the Secondary Teachers Diploma (STD). My specialisations were isiZulu and History. I have never been exposed in learning subjects like Mathematic and Languages. At college, we were taught different methods of teaching reading. This did not make sense to us as our lecturer was only doing theory, nothing practical that we were involved in. I would have loved to see our lecturer demonstrating practically on different reading methods. When I finished my tertiary education, I got a post at a lower primary school. At the beginning, it was so difficult to deal with young learners, but*

*professional development workshops helped me to cope. Ever since then, I have never looked back.”*

### **The Discussion Prompted by the Stories**

In our discussion, it became clear that the teacher training colleges that the group members attended were offering the same qualifications, but practising different pedagogies of teaching literacy and numeracy. Consequently, the participants had different experiences of learning how to teach numeracy and literacy. Toto's experiences were similar to mine because when I listened to her story and then asked her to give more details on her learning as a student teacher, I realised that we went to the same teachers' training college, but at different times. Mali highlighted that she did not go to the college for her training, but completed it through correspondence studies. Mali was frank enough to share with the group that she does not understand about different methodologies of teaching, even now. She only uses her experience that she has gained while teaching for more than 20 years. She explained that she knows how to teach but cannot explain to other teachers what methods she is using. I really appreciate her honesty; in my experience, very few teachers are prepared to acknowledge that they do not know what methods of teaching they are using. Mhlobo recalls that at her college, the teaching of reading was done through theorising, but nothing was represented practically.

What also emerged through our discussion was that when we were teachers ourselves we did not use the methods that we were taught at the college, but we taught in the way in which we were taught while in primary schools. We agreed that the training we received at the colleges did not prepare us for realities of classroom life. None of us was trained and adequately prepared to teach more than hundred learners in a class. For example, as I explain in Chapter Three, although I began my career team teaching with an elder teacher with experience, the situation of dealing with such a large class was new to me as a novice teacher. In our discussion, we acknowledged that when things get tough in the classroom, you forget about different methods that you have learnt and instead, you go back to the way in which you were taught as a learner. Another reason for not using the new methods we had learnt was the scarcity of resources such as reading books. We also agreed that when the national curriculum changed after the advent of democracy in 1994, it made things even worse as the new curriculum had so many demands that we did not feel equipped to respond to. This discussion helped me to realise what support these teachers

need. I found myself moving away from being a researcher and I discussed about how to teach reading, referring the teachers to another new policy, the National Reading Strategy (Department of Education, 2008), which the teachers claimed that they had never seen.

### **Current Challenges and Needs as Expressed by the Teachers**

The above discussion led us into more discussions about what the participants' needs really are as Foundation Phase teachers. I wanted to find what they would like to see happening that would promote teaching and learning of numeracy and literacy in schools. I started the discussion by highlighting how much I had learnt from their experiences and how this would help me to make changes in my practice. I told them that the next time I visited their schools I would leave my school visit report form behind (also see Kunene, 2009). I explained that when I visited I would ask them to highlight their challenges and weaknesses and that we would then sit down and discuss how we could solve those challenges and change those weaknesses into strengths.

I recorded and transcribed our discussion of the teachers' challenges and their needs. I must confess that I found some of the things they highlighted to be very true and very sensitive. That is the reason why I told myself that if I want to contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning, I must share these issues with other subject advisors so that they can learn from my study (see Chapter Five).

There were a number of issues that emerged from this discussion. One issue that the teachers highlighted was the need to have access to all curriculum documents sent to schools by the National Department of Education. For example, Mhlobo said, "My school does not have electricity, the principal made two files, one for literacy and one for numeracy per grade. We have four grade twos, which we find it difficult to share these files." This emanated from the problem where the National Department has sent electronic copies (CD's) of curriculum documents to schools and principals have only made one printed copy available for the whole phase (with three grades per phase). It must be noted that to bring about equity in schools in the post apartheid-era, the "Norms and Standards for School Funding" was introduced (South African School's Act of 1996). This means that each school is allocated a budget and is expected to use that budget to purchase resources. Consequently, schools have limited funds for printing curriculum documents, which can be very lengthy.

The teachers further explained that it would be helpful if curriculum documents could be ‘unpacked’ by subject advisors who have expertise in their field of work. Additionally, they recommended that subject advisors should give practical demonstration lessons rather than just telling teachers the theory. The teachers also mentioned that their relationship with some of the subject advisors is not good. They said that some subject advisors, because they are not specialists in the Foundation Phase, fail to demonstrate curriculum issues that require practical examples. Instead, they read the curriculum documents to the teachers and, when teachers ask questions for clarity, they become angry and harsh. For example, Toto said, “We need proper workshops from the proper advisors, our advisors are not well trained, and they are not specialists in dealing with Foundation Phase”. The teachers said that the very same problem is experienced when the subject advisors do school visits, as they will ask for documents that they themselves do not know how to complete, for instance assessment records. Hence, there is a communication breakdown and the working relationship is spoiled. The teachers highlighted the great need to improve communication so that teachers and subject advisors can relate well.

The teachers also complained about the overcrowded classrooms that they manage, as these do not tally with the nationally approved teacher-pupil ratio of 1: 40. Teachers highlighted that the new curriculum policy emphasises group work. They are unable to do this group work as they have more than 70 learners in each class. The issue of being overcrowded and issues of lack of space and lack of proper furniture were all things that the teachers complained about. As Lewin and Stuart (2003) argue, the Millennium Development Goals (2005) relating to education cannot be realistic if we do not have enough teachers to sustain the required pupil-teacher ratio. The teachers also mentioned that the current policy of the Department of Education to rank principals’ salary levels according to the number of children in a school is problematic. In their experience, some principals want to enrol more learners in order to earn a higher salary at the expense of the quality of work in the classroom.

Lewin and Stuart (2003) explain that if the quality of teacher training is not up to expected levels, it results in learners’ poor performance. The teachers said that they need training on new policies that is clear and straightforward. They need continuous and appropriate professional development workshops from subject advisors who have the relevant experience and skills. They also highlighted the need for ongoing support and guidance after each workshop.

Additionally, the teachers felt that they are not creative enough, as this was not encouraged in their early schooling. The memory work activity helped them to remember that creativity was not encouraged when they were learners themselves. Therefore, they felt that they would benefit from training on creative materials development. They also highlighted the shortage of resources, including mother tongue medium books. They expressed their failure to deliver the new Foundations for Learning programme, as it requires teachers to use concrete apparatus such as the abacus, which they do not have. The teachers said they even skip those lessons that require concrete objects that they cannot improvise and rather teach the next lesson.

The teachers also said that, in their view, school management teams look down on them because they are teaching lower grades and that the Department of Education is only concerned about Grade 12 results, forgetting that those learners in Grade 12 cannot perform well if they do not have a solid foundation. They felt that nobody listens to their requirements as Foundation Phase teachers and that people think that their intelligence is the same as that of the learners they are teaching. They emphasised that as Foundation Phase teachers, their suggestions are not taken seriously. Even if the school budget is discussed, they are the last people to be consulted and to be asked what resources they need for their classrooms. The teachers said that principals do not understand Foundation Phase teachers' and learners' needs and that the principals believe that there is too much playing rather than teaching and learning. According to the teachers, the principals fail to understand that learners learn through play in lower classes. The teachers also drew attention to the importance of the School Management Team being well versed in curriculum issues, so that they can fully support the teachers.

Finally, the teachers felt that the heavy workload that they have does not equate with the salaries they receive at the end of the month. This point of salary increase was debated at length as it came at the time when teachers across the country were on strike. I had to sympathise with the teachers. I reminded them that I am also a teacher and that they must not think that I am being paid better than teachers are. I motivated the teachers that what is fulfilling about teaching is not what you get at the end of the month, but when you see your learners progressing.

### **Making Sense of the Teachers' Lived Experiences**

In this section of the chapter, I reconsider the teachers' lived experiences of learning and teaching (as related above) to identify key themes to help me in better understanding the experiences, practices and needs of the teachers and thus my core functions as a subject advisor.

#### **Impact of the Past**

The focus group discussions showed that, as Allender and Allender (2006, p. 15) maintain:

Unless we are conscientiously aware of what is driving our choices of behaviour in the classroom, we are all too likely to revert to the ways of the teachers who taught us maybe for the good, but usually for the not so good.

The discussions revealed that the teachers have not parted with their past. When the curriculum changes, they resort to teaching the same way in which they were taught while they were still learners themselves. They always look for anything to fall back on. They find themselves teaching the same way they were taught, whether it was a good method or not. Having done my own memory work (see Chapter Three) and having come to understand why I still do things in the way in which I was taught at school, I fully understand why teachers are still teaching the same way they were taught. This study has helped me to accept and comprehend with the teachers why, if curriculum policy changes, they resort to going back and teaching the way they were taught. As I explain further in Chapter Five, after gaining this new understanding, I sat down as a subject advisor and looked into ways to help teachers realise their goals of teaching effectively. This was done through systematic preparation for unpacking the numeracy and literacy (Foundations for Learning) policy with the teachers and giving more examples that are practical.

#### **Poor Teaching Methods, Poor Initial Teacher Training and Lack of Ongoing Support**

It was evident from the discussions that the group members' early learning involved traditional methods of memorising, drilling and rote learning. Their teachers did not use any concrete apparatus to enhance teaching and learning. Learners were not challenged to engage dynamically with the activities that they were doing and therefore these activities were too abstract for them. As discussed in Chapter Three, I also experienced these methods in my schooling. I do believe that these methods have a place in Foundation Phase teaching, but they must be used with a

purpose and in conjunction with a range of other methods. The group discussions showed that the effects of this early schooling were often compounded by the type of training that the teachers went on to receive. For example, Mali, who did her training through correspondence, did not grasp all the dynamics and the pedagogy of teaching numeracy and literacy. The Foundation Phase needs to have specialised people who have been trained in Foundation Phase methods. Mhlobo is unfortunate in that she is teaching in the foundation phase but was trained in the senior secondary methods. Toto and myself are lucky because we were trained as Foundation Phase teachers.

Nkonyane (2009) argues that one of the reasons for South African learners' poor performance in numeracy and literacy is because of the training of our teachers. For instance, many Foundation Phase teachers have not been exposed to the pedagogic skills of teaching reading (Department of Education, 2008). Nkonyane (2009, p.7) further states, "some of our teachers with lower qualifications are reading at a frustrating level." This shows us that these teachers are not regular or fluent readers. Teachers are expected to be role models to their learners. You cannot expect a teacher who is not fluent in reading to produce learners who are fluent as readers. In addition, there has been a misunderstanding about the role of the teacher in teaching reading in the post-apartheid curriculum policies of Curriculum 2005 and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). For years, many teachers have believed that they do not have to 'teach' reading, but simply have to 'facilitate' the process; they have believed that learners will teach themselves to read (Department of Education, 2008). From my observations when I do school visits, some teachers do not know how to teach reading and do not understand the importance of reading. In addition, if it happens that a teacher does know how to teach reading, then it is often only one method that is known. However, the teaching of reading cannot be 'one size fits all'. Teachers need to use a variety of strategies to cater for individual differences. Teachers themselves need to acquire the knowledge and skills in terms of content and pedagogy. They must be experts in their field of teaching.

The discussions also revealed that the teachers felt that curriculum workshops conducted by Departmental officials have no value to teachers. They said that most of the challenges relating to curriculum issues and assessment are "left hanging" without any clarification or direction. Workshops are so short and not informative and, as a result, after attending workshops, they become more confused and frustrated. From this, I realised that it is important for subject

advisors to motivate teachers to form cluster groups, so that can they meet and share ideas together on an ongoing basis. These cluster meetings will then have to be supported by subject advisors.

The teachers highlighted the importance of ongoing support from subject advisors. They mentioned that it really worries them when advisors come to inspect rather than to guide and give support. Research on teaching and teacher development in South Africa (for example, Kanjee, 2009, Robinson, 2009) highlights that many teachers find the new curriculum policy very challenging to implement and that this is compounded by the lack of clarity in terms of its interpretation and guidelines as well as lack of support from Departmental officials.

It is through this self-study that I came to an understanding that proper training is important for teachers to be competent and have confidence in their work. If the teacher is not confident in what she/he is teaching, that will result in a negative impact in dealing with the learners. Teachers will be afraid to move from their ‘comfort zone’ and try something new. Those teachers will always have fear of changes of curriculum in the education system. My self-study has helped me to understand the needs of teachers in receiving appropriate and effective curriculum training as well as supporting them during the implementation period. Through my own self-study and my discussions with my teacher participants, I have realised that teachers’ pedagogic proficiency is linked to their professional identity and what shaped them to become the teachers they are today. That is why it is important for teachers and teacher educators to discover a better understanding of the experiences that form “the foundations of [their] own teaching” (Allender & Allender, 2006, p. 15). I have realised that, as a subject advisor, it is important for me to work with teachers to reflect on their work as teachers and how to improve on their practice (Kunene, 2009). I have become aware that “[teachers] can look more deeply into their own teaching practices through professional development approaches such as self-study” (Pithouse, Mitchell & Masinga, 2009, p. 240). It is then important for me to work with teachers to do such ongoing professional development. I also realised that it was important for me to share all these concerns with the other subject advisors (see Chapter Five).



## **Policy Versus Practice**

Teachers are the implementers of educational policies. They know and understand very well what will work in the classroom, but in my experience, they are not often given a voice to be heard. In my experience as a teacher and a subject advisor, teachers are not encouraged “to view policy documents with a critical eye” (Masinga, 2009, p. 249). I now understand that this is probably because we have learnt from the past not to question things.

Jansen (2002) highlights an unclear process of curriculum policy implementation in South Africa. Carl (2005, p. 223) refers to the “top down” approach that used when curriculum is developed and states that teachers are often merely the “recipients” of curriculum policy developed by the specialist somewhere else. From these statements, one can understand why teachers and subject advisors are experiencing problems in implementing and helping others to implement policies. My study has assisted me in realising the practices and needs of foundation phase teachers in implementing numeracy and literacy policy. I have become aware that teachers’ voices are not heard on curriculum policy issues. This study has taught me the importance of listening to teachers and not judging them as people who are resisting policy change.

## **Lack of Resources**

Robinson (2009, p. 123) highlights that “teachers are dissatisfied because they say that the curriculum is the ideal, but on the ground there is a lot of frustration because of a lack of fit between the resources available to enable the curriculum to be achieved, and the standards and outcomes set.” This dissatisfaction was evident in our focus group discussions. The discussions highlighted that overcrowding is really a problem in the teachers’ schools. In addition, lack of infrastructure results in the teachers being unable to do group work and to teach effectively. One focus group member also mentioned that they have multigrade classes because of the lack of space, which impacts on the delivery of the prescribed curriculum. The issue of furniture also plays an important role. If schools do not have proper furniture for learners to sit and work, it is difficult for effective teaching and learning to take place. Poor funding also results in the schools not having enough resources. The discussions also revealed that some teachers lack the creativity to make their own resources and that even if resources are there, there is often poor usage of these resources as lessons become teacher-centred, keeping the learners passive throughout the

lesson. On visiting schools, I still experience some of these problems where a school without enough classrooms will sacrifice the lower grades into a shaky building. Instead of the teacher concentrating on teaching learners, she is also worried about learners' safety.

Teachers need relevant resources that will help to enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms. Fleisch (2008, p. 139) argues that "inadequate access to and use of classroom resources, and various aspects of poor teaching all contribute to the patterns of educational underachievement among our nation's disadvantaged schoolchildren." Ngidi and Qwabe (2009) agree that lack of facilities for studying results in failing to master the foundations of knowledge such as numeracy and literacy skills by learners. Fleisch (2008, p. 132) further states, "while resources cannot guarantee success, without a basic minimum it is unrealistic to expect schools to achieve."

These discussions have helped me to realise my role in advising principals to buy relevant resources for the Foundation Phase where possible. They have also helped me to see that I should encourage teachers to make their own resources using waste materials. I have shared my expertise of making resources with a group of forty teachers from disadvantaged rural schools. I will carry on sharing my expertise even on weekends or holidays as teachers are appreciating the sharing of skills. This will help in improving teachers' practices.

### **Poor Discipline Methods and Harsh Punishment**

From our memory work discussions, it was clear to all of us that corporal punishment was used in our early learning. None of us appreciated being punished for failing to do class work. When learners were failing to do tasks, instead of teachers giving individual attention or using remedial strategies, they used corporal punishment. My early experience of poor discipline methods and harsh punishment (see Chapter Three) was not different from my focus group.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (section 1) states clearly that no person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner. It further says that any person, who contravenes section 1, is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a sentence, which could be imposed for assault. Although corporal punishment was banned in South Africa in 1996, it emerged from our discussions that teachers are still using it. My self-study, through memory work, has helped me to better understand why teachers still use corporal punishment. I have realised that corporal punishment is exercised with a belief that learners will learn better and that

that the use of corporal punishment will help teachers maintain order and keep the environment safe. From my memory work, I have come to see that corporal punishment discourages learners from trying their best in their learning, as they know that if they give wrong answers they will be punished. This has negative consequences as learners then lack confidence and self-esteem in everything they do. This study has given me a platform to advise Foundation Phase teachers not to use corporal punishment in their classrooms. Teachers need to be assisted to use appropriate child friendly methods of disciplining learners, such as ‘time out’ or detention. These methods must only be used under teachers’ supervision.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shared what I have learnt about the lived past and current experiences of teachers and the impact that these experiences have on teaching and learning in schools. I have highlighted how this deeper understanding of teachers’ experiences has helped me to better understand my responsibilities and roles as a subject advisor. This research process has made me realise the importance of subject advisors in supporting teachers in the classroom. It is clear to me how important it is for ‘us’ as subject advisors to have thorough knowledge of Foundation Phase content and pedagogic methods and to reflect critically on our own knowledge and practices. This will help in giving effective support and guidance to our teachers. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I draw on the data analysis that I present in Chapters Three and Four to identify strategies for improving my practice and to offer some recommendations to show how what I have learnt through this small-scale study can contribute to educational practice and research in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION: TAKING MY SELF-STUDY JOURNEY FORWARD**

### **Introduction**

The key question that underpins the self-study research presented in this dissertation is: *How can I, as a subject advisor, improve my practice in preparing for the implementation of Foundations for Learning?* In the previous chapter, I explain how learning about my teacher participants' past educational experiences as well as their current needs and challenges has helped me to better understand my role as a subject advisor.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by addressing the third sub question that guides this self-study: *How can I use this enhanced understanding to think about and plan for the implementation of Foundations for Learning.* The enhanced understanding referred to in this question involves an understanding of my own experiences and practices as a subject advisor (as discussed in Chapter Three) as well as an understanding of the experiences, practices and needs of my teacher participants (as discussed in Chapter Four). My intention is that this deeper understanding will contribute to the improvement of my practice as a subject advisor. Thus, I draw on the data analysis that I present in Chapters Three and Four to identify areas where I need to improve on my practice and key strategies for improving my practice.

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how I shared what I have learnt from this research with some of my fellow subject advisors and also asked for their views in return. I then go on to consider how this study has deepened my self-understanding and changed my way of being as a subject advisor. To conclude this chapter, I offer some recommendations to show how what I have learnt through this small-scale study can contribute to educational practice and research in South Africa.

### **Improving my Practice as a Subject Advisor**

In this section of the chapter, I use the data analysis that I present in Chapters Three and Four to distinguish areas where I need to improve on my practice and to set out key strategies for change that I have already begun to put into practice.

## **Putting Policy into Practice**

Through discussion with my teacher participants, I have realised that there is a problem in the distribution of policy documents (see Chapter Four). Some schools will get policy documents, while other schools are not even aware that policies are available. There is a problem within the system of the supplying of Departmental policy documents to schools. The National Education Department sent National Curriculum policy documents to District offices in various provinces. After some time had lapsed, it was realised that there were some schools which did not receive all documents in time, while others did not receive any documents at all. The documents were eventually discovered collecting dust in different district offices. The National Department of Education then changed their strategy of distributing policy documents and posted the Foundations for Learning Policy documents directly to the schools. However, some of the school addresses were not in use anymore. This created many problems. Schools that did not receive documents telephoned district offices requesting documents. Even now there are schools that do not have these important documents. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these documents will be evaluated next year through systemic evaluation and the results will not be a true reflection of what is really happening in our schools and if there has been an improvement or not. Through this self-study I have realised the need to make copies of policy documents for teachers. For schools that do not have electricity, I now make it a point that I photocopy lesson plans as well as policy documents from our offices.

It is the duty of the subject advisors to explain key information or changes in the new policy. A problem we face is that of policies that are written in English, yet Foundation Phase teachers are expected to teach the content in isiZulu (also see Chapter Three). This further creates problems during workshops when we interact with the teachers as some teachers cannot ask for clarity because of a language barrier (see Chapter Three) as workshops are conducted in English. Through this study, I have realised that policy documents should not be distributed without an accessible explanation of their contents as these will just collect dust in teachers' cupboards.

As a Subject Advisor, I often notice that a considerable number of teachers are reluctant to accept change because of an 'avalanche' of policies. Not much introspection has been done to check whether we as subject advisors help teachers and support them in the process of understanding and accepting change, nor do we question ourselves whether we have the

expertise of ‘unpacking’ the curriculum in a more user-friendly manner to the teachers. This is one of the reasons why I undertook this self-study. Teachers need to understand the importance of engaging with policy changes. They cannot do so if subject advisors do not assist them. As a result of my research, I now make it a point to ensure that teachers understand why we have a change of policies. I have explained policy issues to the teachers and also empowered them on what to do in their classrooms. Where possible, I have made copies of policies for teachers. It will be of benefit for everyone if teachers are involved in policy development (see Chapter Four). Maybe the National Department can think of how to pilot draft policies and gain substantial input from teachers before they are gazetted.

When I do school visits, my approach has changed. I no longer fill in report checklist form, but I give guidance and support. It is through my self-study research that I was able to understand what teachers really need when a subject advisor visits the school. I have tried my best to explain the policy practically, using relevant examples. During my school visits, I have asked teachers to identify concepts within the policy that they do not understand. I have demonstrated, using their learners in their classrooms, how those concepts must be addressed. I must indicate that this is a long process, but very rewarding. If you teach one teacher, you are reaching out to more than 45 learners.

### **Improved Workshops**

In our group discussions, the teachers highlighted poor workshops conducted by subject advisors (see Chapter Four). It was clear to me that teachers were not much ‘developed’ by attending professional development workshops. Professional development activities and processes are supposed to develop “the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they are able to improve students’ learning” (Moletsane, 2004, p. 203). Professional development is important for an educational effort to improve teaching and learning (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). My memory work reminded me of how professional development workshops also helped me as an advisor to have expertise and gain self-esteem in my practice and thus to conduct curriculum workshops with more confidence (see Chapter Three).

The National Curriculum policy envisages the kind of teacher who is qualified, competent, dedicated and caring (Department of Education, 2002). Among the norms and standards that are expected from the teacher is the fact that she/he must be a learning area or

phase specialist (Department of Education, 2002). This shows that teachers must have competency and expertise in their field of teaching, as their performance is critical to quality education and learner achievement. This ideal will not be realised if teachers do not attend effective professional development workshops that actually benefit the teachers. Therefore it is important to know the needs of the teachers before one conducts a workshop. If advisors are well prepared and present with confidence, they will impart self-confidence. This will rub off onto the teachers and in turn will improve teacher and learner performance.

I have realised that teachers have a right to receive information firsthand from subject advisors and not to have to wait to be taught by their colleagues through the 'cascading' model. It is my responsibility as an advisor to demonstrate new policies and methods of teaching and to show how new policies differ from the old policies. Teachers also need to understand the background of a new policy in order to own it. Thus, we as advisors need to explain and demonstrate clearly the reasons for the paradigm shift. This will help teachers to understand the reasons for and to adapt to new changes. Nieto (2003) argues that good teachers think deeply and frequently about their work as teachers and the process of learning. From this study, I have learnt that workshops also need to engage teachers in considering the question of *why* are they doing things and not only ask about *what* to do and *how* to do things. This will help them think critically about their practice and about policy.

My self-study has helped me in understanding that teachers are not all on the same level in their qualifications and that this has an impact on their understanding. This insight has helped me while preparing as well as when conducting workshops. I have used concrete resources when demonstrating some of the concepts to teachers during workshop. I have invited learners from the nearby primary schools and used them for my demonstration of reading lessons during workshop. Subject advisors need to understand that teachers function at different levels. They also need to be acquainted with what teachers know and can do better and what they do not know. The early experiences of these teachers, where they are coming from and their backgrounds must not be forgotten when facilitating workshops.

As a result of my self-study research, I have also begun to give teachers a chance to voice out their challenges during workshops. I have made it a point that we discuss a few challenges and put others 'on a parking bay'. During the break, we get a chance to go over our parking bay issues. I have also identified teachers in ex-model C schools that I am using as

facilitators. We meet before workshop days and we allocate each other 'slots' according to our strengths and expertise. This has encouraged teachers to work on policy matters with a positive attitude. Some teachers have approached me and indicated that they would like to be facilitators. All that I have done to improve my workshops is because of understanding I gained through my self-study research.

### **Support of Cluster Meetings and Partnerships Among Schools**

It was through what I learnt from the focus group discussions that I decided to support teachers' cluster meetings (see Chapter Four). Clustering schools has always been advocated by subject advisors but, in my experience, they were not active. In cluster meetings, teachers come together once or twice a month to share experiences and communal problems. This is a place where teachers need to feel free to ask for clarity on any issues they are faced with. Cluster meetings provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to be supported, guided and developed. Aside from the curriculum, topics such as classroom management and classroom activities can be discussed. This will play a part in improved teaching and learning.

Networking encourages teachers to learn from each other as they share and develop expertise together. Collegiality and collaboration promotes professional growth (Hargreaves, 2003). Re-establishment of clusters has promoted networking amongst schools. Teachers had a chance during cluster meetings to discuss their needs, and they were able to share and help each other. This time it was not only myself as a subject advisor to tell them what to do, but they were sharing amongst each other.

It is important for teachers to be supported in these cluster meetings where teachers from five or six neighbouring schools meet. Thus, it is wise for advisors to participate in cluster meetings as when linked with school visits, the advisors will be able to identify gaps and plan for future workshops to introduce and reinforce any new concepts.

In addition, the idea that I gained through this study to form 'partnerships' among schools has helped in improving service delivery (see Chapter Three). The ex-model C schools have shown much enthusiasm in sharing resources with the disadvantaged rural schools. I invited teachers from ex-model C schools who have expertise in the teaching of numeracy and literacy to support and guide other teachers. I found out that within our own Black African schools there are teachers who dedicated in their work and they were willing to share ideas with the other



teachers (see also Kunene, 2009). Through this I saw an opportunity to build ‘communities of practice’ within and across schools, where teachers will come and share their teachings (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). I have identified teachers whom I have trained, developed, empowered, and I will continue mentoring them as facilitators.

### **Improving Communication**

My study has highlighted the significance of open and supportive communication between subject advisors and teachers (see Chapters Three and Four). It is important that advisors give support and guidance when doing school visits. Teachers must be given an opportunity to voice out their classroom challenges. Subject advisors must not undertake school visits with the aim of inspecting, but rather they need to open up lines of communication. During the visit, it is important to start with positive things to acknowledge and to give praise where it is due. Robinson (2009) further insists that teachers need to feel that they are appreciated for the work they are doing and that they must feel invaluable. It is therefore important that we motivate teachers to stay positive and motivated to ‘go an extra mile’ in their work. This will boost their morale. Thereafter, one can identify the gaps and areas for improvement. As a result of this self-study research, I have shown teachers how to improve in their practice and also modelled good practice by co-teaching. I have listened to the teachers’ challenges and tried to address them, but I do understand that it needs time and a lot of patience on my side (see Chapter Three). Teachers need support, guidance and mentoring to improve on their practice. I have discussed with the teachers that they need to communicate with facilitators in their clusters about curriculum policy matters. With my support and guidance, I hope that these facilitators will help them solve their problems.

### **Lesson Demonstrations and Co-Teaching**

The group discussions with the teachers drew my attention to the importance of doing practical teaching demonstrations with teachers rather than just imparting theory (see Chapter Four). I have realised that when doing school visits, it is important that the subject advisor should demonstrate things to the teacher if the need arises. If it means co-teaching, then the advisor needs to get involved. The sharing of ideas and skills promotes teamwork among colleagues. The National Department has provided teachers with lesson plans. It is the duty of subject advisors to

clarify difficult concepts in the provided lessons. Teachers need to be encouraged to work together in a school as a team and also do co-teaching. I have done co-teaching in a few schools I have visited, and it proved to be a success. It was not only learners who gained but teachers themselves indicated that they have gained a great deal from my teaching. Teachers grow by observing their colleagues teaching aspects that they do not fully understand. Therefore, co-teaching promotes quality teaching and in turn, effective learning. In cluster meetings I have asked teachers to identify all areas of difficulty, then decide within the cluster on a person who will do a demonstration lesson each time when they meet. I have observed one lesson done within a particular cluster, and it went very well. What I appreciated was that teachers had asked learners the host school to attend, and the teacher (from another school) who was demonstrating had to teach those learners.

### **Curriculum Workshops for the School Management Team (SMT)**

The focus group discussions highlighted for me that the school management team (SMT) must know what each teacher is expected to do in class so that they can fully support them (see Chapter Four). They are the immediate supervisors who are expected to mentor and coach teachers. According to Hargreaves (2003, p. 188) collaboration and collegiality can be achieved through “team teaching, collaborative planning, peer coaching, mentor relationships and through professional dialogue”. It is also important that school management team members are knowledgeable and informed. Therefore, the school management team needs to be workshopped on curriculum issues; it must not be taken for granted that as managers they are well-informed. From experience, I have found that the school management team does not usually attend workshops. If they do, they do not participate if you have invited them to the same workshops as the teachers. It is therefore important that a separate workshop be held for the school management team before teachers are workshopped on new curriculum issues. Protocol must be observed at all times. I have therefore planned to do curriculum workshops for the school management next year. I have informed Principals, Deputy Principals and Head of Departments (HOD) for Foundation Phase, and they show appreciation. They also mention that when coming to curriculum issues, it is difficult to support Foundation Phase teachers as they know things that SMT’s have not heard about .

### **Addressing Specific Barriers in Rural Schools**

According to the Ministry of Education Report (2005), our education policies and programmes seek to address imbalances of the past as well as to improve the lives of all people. The socio-economic contexts schools determine the kind of learners they have. My self-study research (see Chapters Three and Four) has shown me that advisors need to realise this and identify and cater for the specific needs of teachers in rural schools.

It is important for us to do a need analysis and motivate teachers to upgrade their qualifications as unqualified or under qualified teachers hinder the delivery of quality education. Rural schools also lack basic resources; if they happen to have resources, teachers often do not know how to use them effectively. This is one of the biggest challenges for teachers in rural schools. Teachers need to be empowered to gain knowledge about relevant resources that will help to enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms. With the help of my colleagues, I have conducted workshops with few rural schools on how to make resources using waste materials. We are also now conducting workshops in more accessible venues where teachers from rural schools need not travel long distances.

### **Sharing what I have Learnt with Other Subject Advisors**

As I explain in Chapter Two, it was not part of my original research design to bring my fellow subject advisors into my research process. However, through the self-study research process, I came to realise how important my practice is and to understand the reasons why most of the teachers rely so much on a subject advisor's support and guidance. I also realised through interacting with the focus group (see Chapter Four) how important it is for us as subject advisors to take a step back and really listen to teachers. Hence, I saw a need to share with the other subject advisors what I had learnt about teachers' needs in the Foundation Phase, highlighting why some teachers are finding it difficult to implement policies in the classroom. During our sub-directorate meeting I had an opportunity to introduce my self-study research to my colleagues. I took them through from the memory drawings of our early experiences up until teachers discussed their needs as Foundation Phase teachers in implementing the Foundations for Learning policy. I shared with them the needs of Foundation Phase teachers, emanating from data in my study (see Chapter Four).

I found it interesting to share my study with the other subject advisors. I wanted them to understand teachers' backgrounds and also to think critically about how they can better support schools. Therefore, I gave out a questionnaire with three questions that I wanted other subject advisors to respond to (see Appendix F). I managed to get four questionnaires back, out of five questionnaires I had given out. I also shared with them the new school visit report form (see Appendix G) that I have developed as a result of my study. Using this new report form, I work together with teachers to identify challenges they are facing and to find possible solutions. We agree on a plan of action and I conduct a follow-up visit to check on the progress. I have tested the report form in few schools and found that teachers are improving in their teaching. I suggested to my colleagues that we all use this report form and then share the results together. We have agreed that after using the new report form when visiting schools, we need to capacitate and develop each other before we go out and run district workshops. I will also be sharing this form with the rest of the subject advisors in the Province.

In response to the first question of the questionnaire, Mrs. Hayes<sup>4</sup> who has 15 years experience in the Foundation Phase as an advisor agrees with Mrs. Hana (eight years experience as an advisor) and Miss Sonja (two years experience as an advisor) that teachers lack confidence because of lack of understanding of the jargon in the policy. The subject advisors further states that too many changes of policies confuse teachers. Mrs. Druze, who has four years experience in the Foundation Phase as an advisor, indicated that it is because of 'non-comprehending' of information by Foundation Phase teachers. She further states that this is because of the 'cascading' model used when policies are introduced. In response to question two, all subject advisors saw a need for Foundation Phase teachers to be reskilled so that they can be confident in dealing with curriculum policies. Mrs Hana and Mrs Hayes highlighted the fact that subject advisors must be the people who are 'experts' in their field. They must possess pedagogical as well as content knowledge. This is in line with what Shulman (1986) advocates, that teachers must be well versed with content as well as pedagogical knowledge. All subject advisors highlighted as a major problem the issue of our Education Department employing people who are not competent and not even subject specialists. They all agree that the Foundation Phase is a crucial phase where a solid foundation must be laid so that our learners become critical responsible citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> For confidentiality, the names of the subject advisors have been changed.

I have taken upon myself that I will continue to do research so as to find out more information and share it with my colleagues.

### **The Personal-Professional Impact of this Study**

As Grossi (2006, p. 206) explains, “[it] is indeed worthwhile engaging in teacher self-study to remind one of one’s initial purpose and goal when entering the field”. Through revisiting the memories of my early childhood and reflecting on my experiences which have brought me to where I am today, I have come to realise that I have conquered many avenues, against all odds and I survived as a teacher. Writing this dissertation has been a healing process for me. I came to realise that I had deep-seated issues concerning my early years of schooling that were unresolved.

I also had a chance to appreciate and think deeply about my position as a subject advisor and to become aware of how important it is to help teachers realise their dreams of making a difference in the lives of their learners. I had an opportunity to discuss their needs with the teachers and realise how greatly teachers rely on subject advisors for information and development. This made me think that if we ignore the call for help from one teacher we also ignoring the call of many children that this teacher is responsible for. It is important for subject advisors to be competent and committed in our work. Subject advisors are duty bound to be involved in research so that we keep up abreast of the latest developments in education. We are the people who must have the expertise; hence we must have the skills and knowledge to do our job.

### **Recommendations Based on this Study**

#### **Utilisation of Adequate Human Resources**

The Education Department needs to revisit the problem of human capacity. Many more subject advisors with expertise should be employed. It will be of benefit to both teachers and learners if one subject advisor monitors and supports not more than about 15 schools within the ward. It is not possible to do justice to teachers if four subject advisors are responsible for all the primary schools in the district, as is now the case. The district has about 345 primary schools. It is humanly impossible to visit, monitor and support schools regularly, let alone discuss curriculum issues with the teachers. It is also the responsibility of the Human Resource Unit within the

Department to employ people who are skilled and competent to do the job. Therefore, further research could answer the question, ***“How does the number of subject advisors affect the implementation of curriculum policy?”***

### **Efficient Supply of Policy Documents and Curriculum Materials**

The issue of policy implementation must be critically reviewed. In my experience, the cascading model has never worked. Teachers need to be given more time and training to understand policies before implementation starts. It is impossible to see growth and development within our country if policies are not well implemented, especially curriculum policies. I strongly believe that *“Progressive countries usually invest in education for the future generation”* (my journal, 6 August, 2010). As I highlight earlier in this chapter in the section, “Putting Policy into Practice”, training in new policies can never be efficient while there are schools and teachers without policy documents and adequate curriculum materials. Therefore, further research could answer the question, ***“What impact does the supply of policy documents and curriculum materials have on the successful implementation of curriculum policy?”***

### **Involving Teachers in Policy Development**

When new policies are developed, the Department should not only rely on academics and Departmental officials for comments. What about people on the ground who are the engines of reform? On the other hand, teachers from poor schools do not even have the kind of technology that will allow them to access the policy documents in time, let alone comment on them. I recommend that hard copy policies must be given in time to all teachers. Officials should take draft policies to teachers and discuss them. Teachers will recognise the gaps in the policy and what will and will not work in the classroom. It is also important for the teachers to be given a voice in the development of policies. This will also allow them to claim ownership of the policy. Therefore, further research could answer the question, ***“How effective will the implementation of policies be if all teachers are involved or have a say in the development of policies?”***

### **‘Be Assertive, Committed and be a Hard Worker’**

Another important issue is that the Department of Education needs people who are experienced and have the expertise and knowledge for their respective posts. As highlighted above, subject advisors need to be specialists within their particular fields. It should not be taken for granted that subject advisors ‘know it all’ as, like teachers, they function at different levels and have been trained in different institutions. Therefore, subject advisors also need intensive training so that they are able to effectively support and mentor teachers. Therefore, further research could answer the question, *“What kinds of training and support are needed for subject advisors to effectively support teachers?”*

### **Conclusion**

Through my self-study research, I have grown and developed as a researcher, a teacher, and a subject advisor. This self-study has taught me the important skill of listening to others and not to judge people before looking at their backgrounds and circumstances. This study has changed my mindset by helping me to realise how important it is to support and give proper guidance to teachers. The study gave me an opportunity to critically ‘think’ about the responsibilities of a subject advisor. I had a chance to relook at the importance of curriculum policies, and realised that policies are not necessary failing because they are not good policies. My self-study helped me to look at policy issues and think again about how the policies can reach out to teachers and the teachers can become involved in policy development.

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## APPENDIX A

18 Kite Place  
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4004  
24 May 2010

The Department

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### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### **M.Ed. Research: Implementation of Foundations for Learning**

The aim of this research is to examine teachers' perceptions on their teaching and learning of the new policy of Foundations for Learning. The research is supervised by Dr. Kathleen Pithouse (Telephone office number 031 2603460), lecture at the School of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

I am a M.Ed. student at UKZN, and this research is part of my studies.

I would like to conduct a drawing group discussion, after school hours with four teachers within the Department which should last approximately 1-2 hours on four consecutive days. I will record their views in writing and may also tape record the discussion. The data will be anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for it to be linked to any school. The data will be used in writing my research theses. The teachers will not be disadvantaged if they choose not to participate or if they choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage.

Yours faithfully  
Makhanya HDB

## APPENDIX B

18 Kite Place  
Woodhaven  
4004  
11 July 2010

The Principal

.....  
.....  
.....

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### **M.Ed. Research: Implementation of Foundations for Learning**

The aim of this research is to examine teachers' perceptions on their teaching and learning of the new policy of Foundations for Learning. The research is supervised by Dr. Kathleen Pithouse (Telephone office number 031 260 3460), lecture at the School of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

I am a M.Ed. student at UKZN, and this research is part of my studies.

I would like to conduct a drawing group discussion, after school hours with one of your teachers which should last approximately 1-2 hours on four consecutive days. I will record her views in writing and may also tape record the discussion. The data will be anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for it to be linked to your school. The data will be used in writing my research theses. Your teacher will not be disadvantaged if she chooses not to participate or if she choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage.

Yours faithfully  
Makhanya HDB



## APPENDIX C

18 Kite Place  
Woodhaven  
4004  
13 July 2010

The Teacher

.....  
.....  
.....

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### **M.Ed. Research: Implementation of Foundations for Learning**

The aim of this research is to examine teachers' perceptions on the new policy of Foundations for Learning. The research is supervised by Dr. Kathleen Pithouse (Telephone office number 031 2603460), lecture at the School of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

I am a M.Ed. student at UKZN, and this research is part of my studies.

I would like to conduct a drawing group discussion, after school hours with you and other teachers which should last approximately 1-2 hours on four consecutive days. I will record your views in writing and may also tape record the discussion. The data will be anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for it to be linked to you. The data will be used in writing my research theses.

You will not be disadvantaged if you choose not to participate or if you choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage.

Yours faithfully  
Makhanya HDB

## APPENDIX D

18 Kite Place  
Woodhaven  
4004  
24 October 2010

Chief Education Specialist

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.....  
.....

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### **M.Ed. Research: Implementation of Foundations for Learning**

The aim of this research is to examine teachers' perceptions on their teaching and learning of the new policy of Foundations for Learning. The research is supervised by Dr. Kathleen Pithouse (Telephone office number 031 2603460), lecture at the School of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

I am a M.Ed. student at UKZN, and this research is part of my studies.

I would like to share the findings of my study with other subject advisors and get their views on what teachers highlighted as their needs in the Foundation Phase. I will give them questionnaires that they can fill in during their spare time. Their names will remain anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for them to be linked to any person. Pseudonyms will be used when writing the data.

The data will be used in writing my research theses. The subject advisors will not be disadvantaged if they choose not to participate or if they choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage.

Yours faithfully  
Makhanya HDB

## APPENDIX E

Date: 30 October

The Foundation Phase Subject Advisor (R-3)

Dear Madam

### **RESEARCH PROJECT: Preparing for implementation of Foundations for Learning**

This letter serves to request your participation in this research project. A brief description of how the study will be conducted is outlined.

I am a student at the University of KwaZulu Natal studying towards a Masters degree in Education. The aim of my research is to prepare for the 'implementation of Foundations for learning'. I will share with you the issues that came from my focus group(Foundation Phase teachers) that I have interviewed. I would like to get your views on those issues.

I would like to give you a questionnaire to fill in which should last approximately 30 minutes. I will record and interpret your views. The data will only be used in my research report nothing has to do with the Department. It is important that you as a participant for this study understand that:

1. Your identity will remain anonymous by using pseudonyms when reporting on the results.
2. If at any time during the period of the research you wish to withdraw, you can do so.

My supervisor for this research is Dr Kathleen Pithouse and can be contacted at anytime on this number 031 2603460

Yours faith fully

Makhanya HDB

Persal number: 11471921

Cell: 082 5973 3734

E-mail Address: [Hlengiwe.makhanya@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:Hlengiwe.makhanya@kzndoe.gov.za)

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Questionnaire for subject advisors**

1. What do you think is the problem for most teachers not implementing the curriculum policies in the classroom after attending a workshop?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Some teachers highlighted that attending curriculum workshops is ‘a waste of time’. They do not benefit anything from workshops. Subject advisors do not explain important concepts and procedures clearly. They normally read line by line from the policy documents. What can you say about that as an advisor?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Teachers mentioned that some advisors do not have Foundation Phase expertise; it is difficult for them to give guidance and support. When they do school visits they come to inspect rather than giving guidance. They will ask to see all documents that they themselves do not understand. When you ask for clarity they become defensive. What is your opinion on this?

**APPENDIX G**  
**Umlazi District**

**School Visit Report Form**

**Name of official:**

**Date of Visit:**

**Name of School .....**

**Emis Number.....**

**Circuit .....**

**Rural/Urban/Semi-urban.....**

**Name of Teacher .....**

**Grade .....**

**State Paid/Grant- in-aid/ SGB Paid** (circle the correct one)

**Number of years teaching**

**No of Learners.....**

**Time Arrived.....**

**Time Left.....**

<b>List of challenges that the teacher highlighted</b>	<b>Possible solutions including action plan</b>	<b>Tasks to be done on follow up visit</b>

**Next Date of Visit: .....**

**Report on Improvement (including evidence):**

**1.....**

**2.....**

**Areas of further development**

.....

**Signature of district official .....**

**Date.....**

Signature of teacher .....

Date.....

School Stamp
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## APPENDIX H



### KwaZulu–Natal Department of Education (KZNDoE)

#### Monitoring Instrument

Name of Official: \_\_\_\_\_

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

#### 1. SITE DETAILS

CLUSTER	DISTRICT	CIRCUIT	WARD

SCHOOL NAME / SITE NAME	EMIS	QUINTILE
School Postal Address		
School Telephone Number		
School Physical Address		
School Fax Number		
E mail Address		

**Type of the institution:** Please mark with a tick the appropriate block

Public School	<input type="checkbox"/>	Independent School	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Pre Primary School	<input type="checkbox"/>
---------------	--------------------------	--------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------	--------------------------

GRADE	1 <sup>ST</sup> CLASS	2 <sup>ND</sup> CLASS	3 <sup>RD</sup> CLASS	4 <sup>TH</sup> CLASS
No. of learners present				
No. of learners absent				
Total No. of Learners				
Total No. of Underage learners				

*(Breakdown of the teachers' nature of appointment)*

State paid	UTE/Substitute	SGB paid only	Other

Does each class have its teacher present today? (Yes/ No)  
If not what arrangements were made to teach learners today?

.....  
...

#### 2. PRACTITIONER DETAILS

Teacher's Surname & Initials	Persal No. (Or ID no.)	Teacher's cell number	Qualification
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

--	--	--	--

**3. HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT**

Is food provided at the site? (Yes / No)

If yes, who provides it?

.....

....

Is there a first aid kit/system at the site? (Yes / No) .....

.....

**4. TEACHER TRAINING**

Have the teacher/s been trained on NCS programme?

.....

.....

.....

.....

**5. SPECIAL NEEDS**

Do the teacher(s)/ have a referral strategy for dealing with Learners experiencing Barriers to learning and development, e.g. OVCs, Child abuse, Social Development Grants, Emergencies (fire brigade, ambulance, houses of safety, accidents)? (Yes / No) and are records kept?

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.....

**6. MANAGEMENT OF ACTIVE LEARNING**

Has the site received the Resource kit/Disk provided by the National DoE? (Yes /No)

Are the following documents available and up to date?

- Phase plan:

.....

- Work schedule:

.....

- Lesson plan:

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- Class register:

.....

- Assessment records:

.....

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.....

**Classroom layout:**

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.....

.....



**Outdoor area (space, equipment and security)**

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.....  
.....  
.....

**7. GENERAL COMMENTS:-**

.....  
.....

Teacher's signature: .....

Date.....

Principal's signature:.....

Date:.....

Official's signature: .....

Date: .....

