

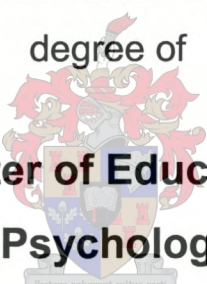
**A TEACHER'S STORY OF PERSONAL AND
PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH THE USE OF REFLECTION**

**LYNNE CELESTE APRIL
B.A.; H.E.D.; B.ED.**

Assignment presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

**Master of Education
in Educational Psychology (M Ed Psych)**

The crest of the University of Stellenbosch is centered behind the text. It features a shield with various symbols, topped by a crown and flanked by two figures. Below the shield is a motto scroll with the Latin text "Festera roburant cultus recti".

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

SUPERVISOR: DR R NEWMARK

December 2003

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this study project is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university to obtain a degree.

Signature:

Date:

A teacher's story of personal and professional growth and development through the use of reflection.

Abstract

The research question I wondered about was whether becoming a reflective practitioner/teacher could contribute to a sense of empowerment and greater effectiveness in practice. I am telling my own story in this study and have chosen to do this through the use of a variant of Life History Research called Narrative Inquiry. This is a qualitative approach to research and makes use of narratives. Field texts (journal entries, family stories, teacher stories) were produced through conversations, observation and journal writing. These field texts were then presented in narrative form. Analysis of the field texts, as well as the story was done throughout the research process. I used conceptual tools developed within Narrative Inquiry to analyse the narrated data in order to foreground the two main areas namely personal and professional growth. Based on this study of my personal experience of the use of reflection, it would seem that becoming a reflective practitioner could indeed contribute to a sense of empowerment and more effective classroom practice by supporting personal and professional growth and development.

“n Opvoeder se storie oor die gebruik van refleksie vir die bevordering van persoonlike en professionele groei.

Opsomming

Die navorsingsprobleem waaroor ek wonder is of die gebruik van refleksie as reflektiewe praktisyn kan bydra tot 'n gevoel van bemagtiging en groter effektiwiteit binne die klaskamer. Aangesien ek my eie storie in hierdie studie wou vertel het ek besluit om gebruik te maak van 'n variant van lewensgeskiedenisnavorsing naamlik 'Narrative Inquiry'. 'Narrative Inquiry' is 'n kwalitatiewe benadering tot navorsing en maak gebruik van stories. Narratiewe data (dagboekinskrywings, familie- en onderwyserstories) is geproduseer uit gesprekke, waarneming en die skryf van 'n dagboek en is in die vorm van 'n storie vertel. Analise van narratiewe data vind plaas regdeur die navorsingsproses. In die analise van die narratiewe data is gebruik gemaak van konseptuele terme wat binne 'Narrative Inquiry' ontwikkel is om die professionele en persoonlike ontwikkeling uit te lig. Uit hierdie studie van persoonlike ervaring van die gebruik van refleksie as 'n reflektiewe praktisyn wil dit blyk dat die gebruik van refleksie wel kan bydra tot gevoelens van bemagtiging en groter effektiwiteit binne die praktyk, aangesien dit professionele en persoonlike groei en ontwikkeling ondersteun.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction to the study

The WHO (1993:1) defines a health-promoting school as one which: aims at achieving healthy lifestyle for the total school population by developing supportive environments for the total school population conducive to the promotion of health. The concept *health* is used here to refer to physical, social, environmental, economic and spiritual *well-being* and not merely the absence of disease. The well-being or health is created by 'caring for oneself and others

Lazarus, Davidoff and Daniels, 2000:2

In this chapter the reader will be orientated with regard to the objectives, research puzzle, research design and methodology used in this study. The motivation and relevance of the study, as well as the definition of terms will also be explained.

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to the creation of health-promoting schools and classrooms as defined in the above quotation. These schools are places where children's diverse needs are met in a holistic way. In my opinion teachers are pivotal in the creation of these learning environments. In this study I want to suggest that one way of supporting teachers to create more learner-centred classrooms is by encouraging them to become reflective practitioners.

By becoming a reflective practitioner the following objectives could also be attained:

- Teachers could gain greater **awareness** of the beliefs and assumptions upon which their practice is based and reasons for the resistance to change.
- Using reflection could also help to generate solutions which fit teachers' particular circumstances and enable them to **become lifelong learners**.
- By coming up with their own solutions a greater sense of control and **self-empowerment** could be engendered.
- In the process teachers could then also become more **receptive to change** and be more willing to take the risk of **adapting or changing their practice** so that it becomes more child-centred and constructivist.
- Reflection can be done individually or as a group. Reflecting together as a group could lead to greater **staff co-operation** and less isolation and may help in the creation of a learning environment where teachers can also harness the expertise and creativity of their colleagues and feel bold enough to be innovative.

The question I wonder about in this assignment then revolves around whether being a reflective practitioner contributes to a greater feeling of empowerment and greater effectiveness in practice. The way I have chosen to explore this question is by telling the story of how I started my personal journey of becoming a reflective practitioner. Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:17), a qualitative research approach, seemed most appropriate since I want to describe and make sense of my experiences in this process and disclose how the use of reflection has nurtured both my professional and personal growth.

The focus of narrative inquiry is on trying to capture the richness of human experience. This is done through the use of narratives. Narrative Inquiry and the use of narratives will be explored further in chapter 2. In Narrative Inquiry narratives are situated within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:50). These dimensions comprise the following: a temporal dimension (past, present and future), the personal and social dimension and a notion of place. These dimensions are all incorporated in the telling of my story.

I undertook this study of my experience of becoming a reflective practitioner for a variety of reasons. The main reason is that I hope to make a contribution towards the creation of schools which promote the holistic development of children (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 1997:18).

I do not, however, want to downplay the enormous task faced by teachers in the process of creating these learning environments, and nor do I wish to set myself up as an example to other teachers. Rather, by telling my story, I want teachers to realize that they are not alone in this difficult process. Through my story I want to invite my readers into my world. I want them to understand the experiences and emotions that I describe. In this process I hope that they will be stimulated to use what they have come across in my story to reflect on, understand and cope with their own professional lives (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:742). In essence, what I am hoping to offer through the telling of my story is a vicarious experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:7) for the reader which could help to open up the possibility of an alternative to the current story many teachers are living. The alternative story I want to help build is one through which teachers can experience greater joy and a sense of purpose in their teaching, and in addition, can get back into contact with their

hopes and dreams for teaching. I also want to encourage other teachers to be actively involved in their own development (personally and professionally) and to explore their biography. This is not an attempt to prescribe to teachers, but rather an attempt to encourage teachers to wrestle with making sense of their experience of teaching within their unique circumstances.

Apart from the great number of changes and challenges they have had to cope with in the last couple of years, teachers are also the ones who are mainly responsible for nurturing and caring for the children who have been entrusted to them. Many factors can contribute to or get in the way of their ability to meet children's diverse needs. In my experience as a teacher many personal factors affected my willingness and ability to meet children's emotional, psychological and educational needs. These included the level of my sense of self-efficacy, my own personal support and stresses, my values, hopes and dreams for teaching and my own experience as a learner at school. Other factors that could play a role include the availability of emotional and professional support within and outside the school, the teacher's beliefs about herself as a teacher and her role, her personal theory of teaching and learning and her beliefs about children. Through describing my journey as a teacher over the past ten years this assignment is also my attempt to gain greater understanding of what motivated me to want to continue to grow and develop both personally and professionally within these circumstances.

Another reason for embarking on this journey has to do with the whole issue of 'voice'. Goodson (2000:16) cites Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992:57) who made the following comments with regard to the teacher's voice:

The notion of the teacher's voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes. In a political sense the notion of the teacher's voice addresses the right to speak and be represented. It can represent both the unique individual and the collective voice: one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups.

In the past, research was done and papers were published that were about teachers, but which did not include the teachers' perspectives in their own words (Goodson, 2000:16). The voices of ordinary teachers were not heard. Casey (1992:188) as cited by Goodson (2000:18) states that "(b)y systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature of educators' careers actually silences them". If

conditions for encouraging teachers to be reflective practitioners and lifelong learners are to be created, the most important people involved in this process, namely teachers themselves, must be heard (Goodson, 2000:17). This thesis is also then my attempt as a teacher to express my 'voice'.

As a teacher in the process of becoming an educational psychologist I also feel that telling my story could have social relevance. Firstly, because I believe that the promotion of healthy development as defined by the Lazarus, Davidoff and Daniels (2000:2) is part of what an educational psychologist must do. Secondly, because many schools presently are not places where children are assisted to develop holistically. Often, in my experience, so much emphasis is placed on academic achievement that children's emotional and psychological needs are not met. In this pursuit of academic excellence and the achievement of certain grades, provision is also not always made for different educational needs and schools become places where certain children will always fail or not measure up to established standards (Eraut, 1999:ix). I have experienced that when this happens schools are not health-promoting (Lazarus et al, 2000:2) but can become institutions which initiate, maintain or exacerbate negativity to self, others and education.

In my own experience as a learner at school I often felt that I was only acknowledged and valued if I performed well academically. It seemed that one was only noticed if one achieved academically or seemed to exhibit problem behaviour. I experienced teachers as friendly, but distant. They were definitely not the kind of people I felt comfortable confiding in. One of my most vivid memories of school was the feeling of being invisible and insignificant in my Mathematics class where all the "clever" children sat in front of the class and were given all the attention and praise and the "strugglers" like myself were left to struggle on by themselves. I have seen this pattern repeating itself in both the schools where I have taught. The result is children who have a negative view of themselves and their abilities, as well as, a negative attitude to learning. The school is then not a positive place where they are nurtured and affirmed, but a place where their value is determined by their grades.

If, as I firmly believe, there is a connection between learners' emotional state and their learning, this negativity towards school and self could become a barrier to learning and eventually even lead children to doubt their own ability. Day (1999:19)

supports this belief when he explains that “[s]tudents’ feelings about the environments in which they study, their teachers and their experiences of teaching affect their interest, motivation and ultimately, their levels of achievement”.

By becoming reflective practitioners, teachers may develop greater understanding about their own practice and may be more able to evaluate its effectiveness. The use of reflection could then also contribute to greater commitment on their part towards caring for children holistically and as individuals due to their greater awareness of the different needs of children. These needs which can become barriers to effective learning can include educational, social, emotional and psychological needs (Green, 1999:129). There is usually an interaction between these needs and they therefore have to be understood and addressed in a holistic way. By becoming reflective practitioners teachers and schools could then not only work to remediate problems, but also to prevent them.

Thirdly, my story of growth and development through the use of reflection could contribute to an approach to professional development where teachers’ knowledge is respected and acknowledged and which has teachers’ needs as a starting point. Currently teachers are often treated like technicians who must just put into action what has been decided higher up in the education system hierarchy (Dadds, 2001:50). The knowledge teachers have is not often taken into consideration and as a result teachers are not included in the decision-making process regarding educational issues which affect them directly (Dadds, 2001:50). In my experience this could contribute to a resistance to change that is imposed in a top-down manner, and a refusal to take ownership of educational changes. The telling of my story could help to highlight the need to respect teachers’ knowledge and experience and to include us in the vision to provide quality education.

A fourth reason is that the use of reflection could contribute towards maintaining and encouraging the desire of teachers to want to make a difference in learners’ lives. Through the use of reflection teachers could gain greater understanding and awareness of how their biography, beliefs and assumptions influence what they do in the classroom (Thomas, 1995:11). By becoming aware of this, teachers could be more empowered to make decisions regarding their current practices and whether they want to continue in that way (Gough, 1998:121). The use of reflection could also

help teachers to reconnect to their hopes and dreams for teaching and in that way renew their commitment to making a difference in children's lives through providing quality education for all (Day, 1999:18).

A final reason for my belief that my story could have social value has to do with the feelings of disempowerment and being overwhelmed which ex-colleagues and other teachers seem to be experiencing. Apart from the more personal factors mentioned above teachers are also facing enormous social challenges and have to deal with a variety of changes not just in schools, but also in society as a whole. This has resulted in new expectations of teachers and has required that teachers assume new roles and responsibilities.

South Africa is in the process of transformation and there is a great emphasis on a move to democracy and the importance of human rights for all. Unfortunately we are still struggling with the legacy of our past especially where poverty is concerned. Many households in our country for example earn less than the 'poverty line' of R300 per month (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 1997:144). This situation has contributed to a number of socio-economic problems including an increase in crime and violence (Donald et al, 1997:204). Unemployment, which can contribute to this cycle of poverty, is also rife in most of the communities in which our teachers work. Teachers also have to contend with other social ills such as sexual and other forms of abuse (Donald et al, 1997:206).

These socio-economic problems also affect families. The huge problem of poverty may affect parenting directly or indirectly (Donald et al, 1997:144). Directly, poverty is associated with inadequate facilities and resources which can make it difficult for parents to maintain healthy children (Donald et al, 1997:144). Within the communities that I served as a teacher the traditional family was changing with many households being headed by single parents or a grandparent. Many of these households have minimal support (Donald et al, 1997:146). Indirectly, poverty can contribute to parents not being able to support and protect their children adequately. Many parents are often also illiterate and cannot help their children with school work or do not necessarily place value on education (Donald et al, 1997:21).

All these circumstances affect the children in schools. Teachers therefore cannot just concentrate on academics, but have to be aware of and try to counter all these barriers to learning experienced by learners if effective learning is to take place (Donald et al, 1997:24). This is an enormous task and one which teachers cannot face on their own.

In the past teachers have seen their work mostly as confined to the learners in their classes. At many schools parental involvement is minimal. With the greater demands made on teachers it is going to become more and more important for teachers to actively form closer partnerships with and access all the role players involved in the education of learners. These include parents, the rest of the communities of which the school is a part and other support services outside the school (Engelbrecht, 1999:55).

Lazarus, Davidoff and Daniels (2000:13) describe the situation in which teachers find themselves as follows:

In response to the need for support to the *transformational* processes occurring in schools in South Africa at present - relating to massive policy changes and demands in the last five years - *and* in response to the need for ongoing additional support that some schools, and educators, parents and learners will always require in order for learners to access the curriculum successfully, various forms of educational support services have been identified as necessary (Department of Education, 1997).

According to Lazarus et al. (2000:13) these support services can to a large extent be provided by the school community - that is educators, support staff and learners themselves, within the context of the local school, but additional support is often needed. It seems clear, however, that although other support services must be put into place and partnerships must be formed, a great deal of the responsibility to coordinate these services and to provide support in all areas in the school will rest on teachers. At present teachers seem largely responsible for the creation of conditions conducive to learning since these other support structures are still in the process of being put into place. This lack of adequate support can have a negative impact on teachers' ability to take care of children holistically (Day, 1999:8).

Apart from these societal challenges and the resultant demands that have been made on them, teachers also had to cope with major changes in the education system. Outcomes based education has been implemented in both primary and high

schools as the new curriculum to facilitate the transformation of the education system in South Africa (Engelbrecht, 1999:2) A great deal of uncertainty, however, still exists around the its implementation, since this form of Outcomes based education is unique to the South African situation. Changes have also been made to the original way of planning and implementation and this also adds to the confusion and uncertainty teachers are experiencing regarding its implementation in the classroom.

Outcomes based education has required a change of role for teachers which also has implications for classroom practice. Whereas in the past the teacher's role was to convey knowledge, she must now become a facilitator who helps learners to construct their own knowledge (Engelbrecht, 1999:76). This has implications not only for how teachers go about creating learning opportunities through their teaching, but also for how teachers view themselves in this new role.

The new curriculum also expects teachers to accommodate learner diversity (Green, 1999:128). Teachers are faced with bigger class sizes and a greater variability in ability, ages and culture of learners. As a result of a new human rights culture taking hold, the needs of all learners including the so-called learners with special educational needs also have to be addressed and accommodated by teachers within the mainstream classroom (Donald et al, 1997:22). With the acceptance of the policy of inclusion of all learners in the mainstream, teachers will therefore have to re-examine their assumptions and personal theory of teaching and learning, as well as how this is embodied in their practice (Donald et al, 1997:22) if they are to create learning environments where all learners can work at their own pace and level (Engelbrecht, 1999:76).

In order to help learners to construct their own knowledge and to accommodate diversity, changes will have to be made in the ways lessons are organised and taught and also in the ways learners are assessed (Donald et al, 1997:23). In order to make practical changes teachers need more time to plan and prepare. All these new demands can contribute to the further intensification of the teacher's working life (Day, 1999:8).

Teachers in South African schools are currently being expected to make major changes in the way they understand teaching and learning in the process of adapting

to an entirely new curriculum. New demands are being made and this experience can be stressful. These changes have also been implemented in a top-down fashion with teachers having very little say in this process. According to Day (1999:8) it seems that externally imposed changes and innovations in education, especially if these are poorly implemented without consultation with teachers, often can result in periods of destabilization, increased workloads and crises over professional identity for many teachers. Teachers could be left feeling that they have no control over what happens in their professional lives and this in turn could lead to feelings of anxiety, stress and frustration (Day, Fernandez, Hauge and Møller, 2000:4). Energies could be so focused on coping with demands and consequences of change that in this process there is no room for creativity or coming to a new understanding of what teachers are trying to achieve in their classrooms (Day et al, 2000:4). In order to survive, teachers could then become resistant to innovation and be unwilling to change their practice in the classroom. The teacher also may not necessarily have the experience of taking ownership and being accountable and may feel threatened and burdened with yet another responsibility (Donald et al, 1997:17). On the other hand, teachers may also be unwilling to take ownership of and responsibility for educational changes in which they have had minimal input or little faith.

Within schools themselves teachers also experience various other pressures which do not support them in their efforts to cope with all the demands made on them. In my experience, lack of collegial support and support from the top structures of the school, as well as a lack of time or the inefficient use of time places great constraints on the teachers' ability to be emotionally available and supportive of children and to reflect on whether their practice is effective in promoting healthy development for all children.

Teaching and learning does not occur in a vacuum. Many factors, some of which have been mentioned above, influence both these processes and can have a positive or negative influence on them. According to Day (1999:6) teaching is taking place in a world dominated by change, uncertainty and increasing complexity. Teachers are being confronted by a number of changes which lead to different demands. The challenge to teachers is then to continue to learn and adapt as teaching contexts, pupil behaviour and the expectations of teachers change (Eraut: 1999:ix).

All these challenges and changes can contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and disempowered. Many solutions can be offered to assist teachers, but if generally imposed these may not be the answer to each teacher's unique and continually changing situation. Teachers need to be empowered to become more pro-active and creative in searching for solutions which fit their own unique circumstances. In this way they can then see themselves as agents of change rather than pawns.

I want to suggest that a way in which this can happen is through encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners. Reagan, Case and Brubacher (2000:25) cite Irwin's definition (1987:6) of a reflective teacher / practitioner. Irwin (1987:6) defines a reflective teacher / practitioner in the following way:

A reflective teacher / practitioner is one who makes teaching decisions on the basis of a conscious awareness and careful consideration of (1) the assumptions on which the decisions are based (2) the technical, educational, and ethical consequences of those decisions. These decisions are made before, during and after teaching actions. In order to make these decisions, the reflective teacher must have extensive knowledge of the content to be taught, pedagogical and theoretical options, characteristics of individual students, and the situational constraints in the classroom, school and society in which they work.

Hart (1990:167) as cited by Garbutcheon Singh (1996:349) gave the following definition:

A reflective practitioner is a teacher in whose mind multiple sources of knowledge and multiple ways of knowing are made to interact, shaping action congruent with what the [teacher] knows and seeks to accomplish ... Reflective practitioners explore their own [understandings, actions and conditions of work], and reflect, often in a setting hostile to reflection, on ways they frame their actions.

According to Garbutcheon Singh (1996:349) reflective practitioners combine the 'objective and subjective, using themselves as a source of knowledge, and integrating their own knowledge with the knowledge they have learned of others'.

All these definitions imply respect for teachers' knowledge and an active participation on the part of teachers. When teachers become reflective practitioners change starts from the inside out. Teachers can start to identify their own areas of need and barriers to learning and in this process can become pro-active in their own development.

Reflection is central to this process of becoming a reflective practitioner. There are many definitions of reflection. Dewey (1993) as cited by Hatton and Smith (1995:34) described reflection “as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge and the further consequences to which it leads”.

According to Swart (1994:50) reflection is the following:

Reflection is a generic concept for the conscious, intellectual and affective action which takes place in unique situations, that is, situations that give rise to uncertainty, confusion and conflict. In these situations individuals have to reconstruct experiences as problems by a making connections between different parts of the experiences that in turn, will lead to new insight and action. The implemented solution is then evaluated according to the consequences that follow and this leads to new understanding and further reflection. The reflective process is cyclical in that practice is monitored, evaluated and reappraised on a continuous basis. Reflection takes place on different levels.

Jay and Johnson (2002: 76) see reflection in a similar way, but add that reflection can be both an individual and a collaborative process: Insights gained from this process can be evaluated with reference to: additional perspectives: own values, experiences and beliefs, and the larger context within which the questions are raised.

The use of the term reflection in this assignment will be based on Swart’s definition (1994:50), with the inclusion of Jay and Johnson’s notion (2002: 76) that reflection can be an individual and a collaborative process. The levels of reflection which Swart mentions fits in with Dewey and Jay and Johnson’ s notion of reflection on issues beyond practical problems.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the vehicle I chose to describe and make sense of my experience of becoming a reflective practitioner and to show how the use of reflection has nurtured both my professional and personal growth is Narrative Inquiry. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1990:2) “the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world”. Narrative Inquiry then seemed appropriate, because I feel that it is through narrative that my readers will be able to get a real sense of my struggles in the process of making meaning of my experience of teaching.

In Narrative Inquiry, data or field texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:97) can be produced in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources. My sources of field text data are journal writings, family stories and teacher stories. These field texts were created through journal writing, conversation and observation. A narrative is then written based on these field texts. Analysis of both the field texts and the narrative takes place throughout the whole process. Analysis is done by looking for patterns and themes within the individual's experience and by situating the individual's experience within the social setting which contributes towards shaping it.

My assignment will be structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction to the study

This chapter will include the statement of problem and the objective of this study, a brief introduction and description of the research approach and methodology which will be used, as well as the motivation and relevance of the study. Important terms will be defined and the structure of the presentation will be indicated.

- Chapter 2 – The Research Process

The chosen research design and methodology used in this study will be more fully discussed in this chapter. The use of my chosen research design and method will also be explained.

- Chapter 3 – Literature study

A literature study exploring the term 'reflection' will be presented.

- Chapter 4 – My story

In this chapter my story will be presented.

- Chapter 5 – Summary of findings, interpretations and recommendations.

This chapter will include a summary of findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations.

In this introductory chapter I have orientated my reader regarding the objective/s of this study and my research question. Further, I have explained my motivation in the choice of my particular theme and argued the social relevance and value of the research. Relevant terms used in the study were defined and a brief description of the research design and methodology which will be used in this study was given. An indication of the structure of the study was also presented. In the next chapter I will describe the research design and methodology used in this study in greater detail.

Chapter 2- The Research Process

Schooling is long in prescription, short in description. That is nowhere more evident than in the two million persons who teach in the public schools. It is widely conceded that the core transactions of formal education take place where teachers and students meet But although books and articles instructing teachers on how they should behave are legion, empirical studies of teaching work - and the outlook of those who staff the schools - remain rare.'

Lortie, 1975 cited by Goodson, 2000:15

In the previous chapter brief mention was made of the research design and methodology which will be used in this study. This chapter will address the following issues in greater detail:

- Choice of research design
- Research methodology
- Criteria for research

In this assignment I wonder about whether being a reflective practitioner could contribute to a sense of empowerment and more effective classroom practice. Through my personal story I want to describe how the use of reflection, both on my own and with others, has nurtured both my personal and professional growth and development as a language and guidance teacher in the secondary school.

I do not consider myself a master teacher who can offer ready-made solutions to the problems of other teachers. The purpose of this assignment is, therefore, not 'to prescribe general applications and uses, but to offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In my own experience I have often found that knowing that others have had similar struggles to mine and witnessing their efforts to make sense of these struggles and to find creative solutions, has provided me with new possibilities of being as a teacher and new ways of doing in the classroom.

The first step in the process of telling my story was choosing a research design that would best suit my purposes. Mouton (1996:107) defines a research design as "a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem". He further states that "the aim of a research design is to plan and structure a given research project in such a manner that the eventual validity of the research findings is maximized". According to Durheim (1999:29) a research design is "a strategic

framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research ". Durheim (1999:32) states that these strategic frameworks of action should specify a series of activities which will ensure that valid conclusions can be drawn from the research. Research designs can vary along a continuum, from inflexible and technical blueprints to flexible and pragmatic guides for action depending on the purpose of the research and the orientation of the researcher (Durheim, 1999:32).

In this study my personal experience forms the central focus of the research. The following considerations were kept in mind in deciding on a research design:

- I wanted to capture the richness and complexity of my experience within a specific context in narrative form.
- The study would be written in the first person since I am describing and trying to make sense of my own experience.
- The many stories / voices which contributed to the construction of my story of experience would have to be accommodated.

Keeping these considerations in mind and mindful, too, of the fact that I was trying to present my subjective experience of making sense of teaching, I decided to make use of a variant of life history research called Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry is an approach where experiential stories are told in an attempt to give voice to tacitly held personal knowledge without abandoning the particular, the contextual, and the complex (Conle, 2000:51). Within Narrative Inquiry humans are described as "storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990:2). Through narrative inquiry individuals' lives can then be understood as stories; thus the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990:2). According to these authors education can then be viewed as the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, and teachers and learners as storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990:2).

Gough (1998:121) supports this view when he states that:

much of what we claim to 'know' in education comes from telling each other stories of educational experience. So narrative inquiry is concerned with analysis and criticising the stories we tell and hear and read in the course of our work, as well as, the myths that surround and are embedded in our social interactions. We tell stories informally in our anecdotes and gossip, and we tell them more formally in policy documents etcetera.

The approach to teachers and teaching which uses forms of narrative as a device for obtaining a perspective on life, work and career, can be located within an interpretive or qualitative turn in social science research (Thomas, 1995:2). This interpretive turn was linked to a rediscovery of meaning and interpretation in human processes (Thomas, 1995:2). Mousley and Kortman (1998:43) use the terms 'interpretive', 'qualitative', and 'naturalistic' research interchangeably since these terms can all be used to describe research which has its focus on seeking meaning from natural phenomena. Qualitative or interpretive researchers, then, are involved in the study of things in their natural settings and attempt to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:2). I locate my research within an interpretive research paradigm as it is my intention to make meaning of my story of professional and personal growth and development through processes of reflection.

According to Kelly (1999:398) the interpretive turn in social sciences included a turn towards 'contextual' research. This approach assumes as starting point that people exist in contexts (Thomas, 1995:2) and that human experience can therefore not be understood without understanding the social, linguistic and historical features which give it shape (Kelly 1999:398). Consistent with this view is also the notion that 'people in context' are engaged in attempts at relating and communicating; that is, they are making efforts to understand and interpret their own behaviour and that of others in their community, context or milieu (Thomas, 1995:2). The individual's attempt at constructing meaning is then embedded in and interacts with social, historical and cultural contexts and cannot be fully understood outside of these contexts. In my story the personal and professional contexts in which I lived and worked represented influential factors in the construction and interpretation of my narrative.

I concur with Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) when they state that within the qualitative or interpretive approach to the study of human experience:

researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

In the process of trying to understand and to make sense of the meaning people bring to experience in their contexts, there is a reclaiming of the subjective as a legitimate zone of inquiry (Thomas, 1995:2) and less immediate concern with discovering universal, law-like patterns of human behaviour.

According to Thomas (1995:2) the use of narrative was crucial to this process of trying to understand how people make meaning of their experience, since people seem to be predisposed to frame experience into a narrative form (Lyle, 2000:53). Lyle (2000:54) further states that it is through narrative that people render actions and events meaningful. Narratives can then be viewed as devices for communicating, interpreting and giving meaning to our experiences.

Bochner and Ellis (2000:744) refer to the stories written under the rubric of narrative inquiry as evocative narratives. The characteristics of these stories are the following:

- They are usually written in the first person since the authors of these stories make themselves an object of research.
- The stories are focused on single cases.
- The reader is engaged as a co-participant in dialogue, that is, they are invited to enter the author's world.
- The text activates subjectivity and compels emotional response. It encourages dialogue and the telling and retelling of stories (Bochner and Ellis, 2000:744).

These stories are not constructed in a vacuum. In order to understand and capture the complexity and richness of experience within a specific context, Clandinin and Connelly (2000:50) suggest that inquiries into experience be within what they term the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. The dimensions of this space are the following:

- Personal (internal conditions such as feelings, hopes) and social (the environment).
- Temporality (past, present and future).
- Place (specific physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes).

Any inquiry into experience must then have temporal dimensions, it must focus on the personal and the social and must occur in specific places (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:50).

In the writing of my own story the characteristics of evocative narratives were kept in mind and I also tried to situate my story within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000:50).

The research text or narrative is constructed from collected data. In narrative inquiry data can be collected from a variety of data sources or records. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:92) call these records field texts, because these records are “created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience”. These need to be positioned within in the three-dimensional inquiry space, that is keeping in mind temporality, the personal and social dimension and the notion of place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:50&95). Field texts can include field notes, interviews, conversations, teacher stories, family stories and stories of families, as well as autobiographical writing and life experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:98-115).

The field texts I am making use of are journal entries which centre around my personal and professional experiences. Using my journal writing as a source of field texts seemed appropriate since it was kept over many years and since it provided information of both a personal and professional nature. My journal entries were also written close to the time events occurred and are quite detailed. In these journal entries I described and recorded the following:

- incidents in my classes and my reaction to them both in terms of thoughts and feelings. I also recorded my interpretation of what had occurred. Most of these entries are reflections with a personal or problematic interest (Louden, 1991:151).

- notes on informal chats with colleagues about teaching.
- notes on my therapy sessions and what I had learnt from them, especially regarding new insight into myself and my needs regarding teaching.
- notes about my observation of learners in order to gauge the effect of changes I made both in my way of interacting with learners and in my practice.

As in other forms of qualitative research field texts can be collected through many ways including observation and interview. I collected my field texts through observation, conversations and journal writing.

The way in which data is analyzed differs according to whether the study is quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analyst would first look at the particular elements in isolation and then in various combinations with other elements, whereas the qualitative analyst would use methods of data analysis that are more holistic and interpretative (Mouton 2001:169). The aim of qualitative analysis is to find out and report the sense that individuals make of their social world, as well as what lies behind the ways they act in it (Mousely and Kortman, 1998:45). Analysis and interpretation of constructed field texts and narrative takes place throughout the process of research.

In the narrative inquiry approach “the inquirer looks for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions and the themes either within or across an individual’s experience and in the social setting” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:132). When narrated data is analyzed an account is not just given of the patterns, themes and tensions within an individual’s story. The individual’s story is also analyzed within the contexts and narratives which shaped it. Some of the conceptual terms considered and used are: image, rules, practical principles, personal philosophy, metaphor, cycles, rhythms and narrative unities, that is, threads in people’s lives that help account for the way in which they construct the stories that live both in their personal lives and in their teaching (Connelly, Clandinin and He, 1997:667).

According to Carter (1993:10) “generalizations, that is the careful framing of patterns with respect to certain themes”, can be made. However, these generalizations are not seen as “laws to which we must somehow conform to be effective but explanatory

propositions with which we can make sense of dilemmas and problematics of teaching." (Carter, 1993:10) Questions of meaning and social significance are also kept in mind when analyzing field texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:132).

I will analyse my story by looking at themes and patterns of personal and professional growth and development and the role of reflection in nurturing both. Within the analysis of these themes I will then look for factors which contributed to or framed this professional and personal growth and development through reflection. These factors include rules, image, personal philosophy, cycles. By looking at themes and patterns in my story in terms of these factors a deeper and more layered understanding can be gained about the meaning I make of teaching.

Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalization. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:7) have emphasized the importance of not trying "to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research". The following were identified as possible criteria (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:7):

- **verisimilitude** that is evoking in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:751).
- **transferability** that is when readers feel that the story speaks to them about their experience or the experience of others they know and tells about unfamiliar people or lives (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:751).
- **resonance** that is reacting to a story with a narrative of one's own.

The above are some of the criteria being used in qualitative research. I mention verisimilitude, transferability and resonance since I would like my story to ring true so that my readers can identify with it and use it in the reconstruction of their own narratives.

The use of narrative in educational research has many benefits, some of which are listed below:

1. Telling teaching stories offers teachers the **challenge of seeing themselves** and the **opportunity to reflect on their goals and practices** (Gomez and Tabachnick, 1992:137 cited by Gerardo and Contreras, 2000).

2. Thomas (1995:11) stated that under certain conditions, biographical work by teachers, either autonomously or collectively with researchers, helps with their **professional development**. This in turn may have **positive advantages for the pupils** and where the work becomes professionally and politically transforming it may have the potential to help towards more **systemic change**.
3. The use of narratives could make some teachers **more knowing** (Thomas, 1995:11). This would entail “a sense of expanded and deepened awareness of the roots of professional practice: beliefs, behaviours and values” (Thomas, 1995:11). According to Thomas (1995:11) there is strong evidence that what teachers know’ about teaching derives from the links between personal life-history and professional career.
4. “Teachers’ narratives are vehicles for **bringing out aspects of their accumulated experiential knowledge**. Among the distinctive features of this knowledge is its anchoring in the concrete and the specific” (Thomas, 1995:13).
5. Narrative allows us to see the events which led to **reflective transformation and allows us to generate questions for ourselves**. The account offers us the possibility of comparing and contrasting our experiences with that of the narrator (Thomas, 1995: 6-8).
6. Biographical work almost inevitably obliges the writer to reflect, and in that sense the teacher-writer is addressing the self as well as a readership. We can think of the present self communicating through writing with earlier versions of the self, consulting on editorial matters such as selection, censorship and discourse conventions. It hardly seems possible to engage in any substantial biographical work without the writer **coming up against the universal questions of personal identity and the meaning and purpose of life** (Thomas, 1995:11-12).
7. The idea of finding ways to enable us **to hear the voice of teachers** has been a central value of a great deal of narrative work. It has taken the form of trying to understand the frames of reference, or perspective, teachers use in describing their role and more deliberately in relation to notions of empowerment (Puckett in Thomas, 1995:15). Implicit in this narrative view is the valuing of teachers as experts in their own teaching lives (Gerardo and Contreras, 2000:24).

8. James (1996:89) argues that 'the hearing of stories of action embedded in concrete experience' **could open up spaces for learning**. She explains that concepts need to be embedded within contexts and practice which make them meaningful.
9. Stories can be seen as a 'loan of consciousness' (Bruner in James, 1996:92). According to Harré (1984:20) as cited by James (1996:92) such a loan is one in which the student may borrow the knowledge and consciousness of another **to understand new aspects of language, meanings, practices and relationships** and as these are transformed and shared with others, **to create a new identity and a new culture**.
10. The process of storytelling attempts **to grasp and convey something of the totality and wholeness of the teacher's life and work** (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:37).
11. Narrative inquiry can then be **emancipatory**. The way we give meaning to ourselves and others and the world at large sometimes happens through stories which we are largely unaware of or which are taken for granted. Reflecting critically on the stories we read, hear, live and tell, may help us to understand how we can use them more responsibly and creatively and free us from their constraints (Gough, 1998:121).
12. Studying the teacher's life and work through the use narratives could provide a valuable range of insights into the new moves to restructure and reform schooling and into new policy concerns and directives (Goodson, 2000:17).
13. Narratives can contribute to greater awareness of the socializing influences relevant to the formation of the teacher over the full life experience (Goodson, 2000:19).
14. Work on teachers' lives provides vital and generative insights into teaching as a gendered profession (Goodman, 2000:19)

In this chapter an explanation was given of my choice of research design and methodology, as well as criteria used to evaluate my research. In the next chapter I will explore the term 'reflection' in greater detail.

Chapter 3 – Literature study

I cannot teach clearly unless I recognize my own ignorance, unless I identify what I do not know, what I have not mastered.

Freire, 1996:2 cited by Day, 1999:22

In the broadest sense, teachers who reflect in, on and about the action are engaging in inquiry which is aimed not only at understanding themselves better as teachers, but also at improving their teaching.

Day, 1999:22

The research puzzle I am considering in this thesis is whether being a reflective practitioner leads to a greater feeling of empowerment and effectiveness in practice. The terms reflective practitioner and reflection were defined in chapter one. In this chapter I will explore what it means to be a reflective practitioner, as well as examining the term reflection in greater detail. The following aspects of reflection will be explored:

- The benefits of the use of reflection
- Goals of reflection
- Ways of reflecting
- Elements of the reflective process
- Factors that impede reflection
- Reflection-enabling factors

My interest in the use of reflection for personal and professional growth and the start of my journey in the process of becoming a reflective practitioner came about through the need for congruence between my image of the ideal teacher and the teacher I was and also my own dissatisfaction with my practice. I wanted the children in my class to feel safe emotionally and to be excited about and participate in their own learning and it was not happening to the extent that I would have liked. I did not realize that I was actually reflecting on my practice. It was only later during my studies when I was introduced to the idea of the educational psychologist being a reflective practitioner, that this mulling over my practice and around the kind of teacher I wanted to be was actually identified as reflection.

Encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners seems to have become quite an issue in educational circles. Teachers are encouraged and required to become reflective practitioners from within government and education circles more and more.

In the Policy Document of the Committee of Teacher Education reflection was accentuated to such an extent that it was almost laid down as a condition that every teacher should be a reflective professional (Lombard, 1996:186).

I believe that teachers should become reflective practitioners, because making use of reflection could help them to provide a caring, nurturing learning environment where all learners would be accommodated. The requirement that teachers should become more reflective, however, is not something that can be imposed on them. Day (1999:47) stresses that “reflection on teaching is not simply a cognitive process. Like teaching, it demands emotional commitment”. The decision to become a reflective practitioner is a personal one that fits in with a teacher’s view of teaching and learning, her personal biography and her hopes and dreams of teaching.

What does it mean to be a reflective practitioner? Louden (1991:xi) argues that

teaching is a struggle to discover and maintain a settled practice, a set of routines and patterns of action which resolve the problems posed by particular subjects and groups of children. These patterns, contents and resolutions to familiar classroom problems are shaped by each teacher's biography and professional experience. The meaning of these patterns of action only becomes clear when they are set in the context of a teachers' personal and professional history, her hopes and dreams of teaching, and the school in which she works. A teacher's response to new problems is shaped by these historically sedimented patterns of action.

He calls this predisposition a *horizon* of understanding, which is not static, but constantly in the process of formulation. According to Louden new horizons of understanding are reached when a teacher is confronted by new problems and challenges and struggles to resolve them in ways that are consistent with the understanding he / she brings to the problem.

A reflective practitioner / teacher is one who uses reflection to explore these horizons of understanding and who is willing ‘to go beyond these routine behaviours and patterns of day-to-day functioning’ (Reagan, Case and Brubacher, 2000:146) in order to improve his / her practice. Zeicher and Liston (1996:6) as cited by Reagan et al. (2000:150) have listed some key features of a reflective educator / teacher. According to these authors the reflective teacher:

- Examines, frames and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice.
- Is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he / she brings to teaching.
- Is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which she or he teaches.
- Takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts.
- Takes responsibility for her or his own professional development.

Central to the process of becoming a reflective practitioner / teacher is the use of reflection. The use of reflection within teaching has many benefits. Some of them are the following:

- “to make explicit the hidden questions about schooling, to promote a critical and reflective attitude about teaching and learning, to nurture a probing sense of inquiry, and to stimulate commitment to and caring for children among preservice teachers” (Dinkelman, 2000:198). I would also include teachers already in service.
- “... to reveal the wisdom embedded in our experience. Through reflection we develop context-specific theories that further our understanding of our work and generate knowledge that informs our future practice” (Killiam and Todnem, 1991: 14).
- “to guide future action” (Killiam and Todnem, 1991:15).
- “(to be) led to construct their own perspectives by drawing on their past and present personal and professional experiences in school; theoretical knowledge base; self-image and efficacy ; and interaction with peers, mentors, supervisors, and children in school” (Sparks-Langer and Colton, 1991:41).
- Personal and professional transformation (Wellington, 1991:5).

As can be seen from the above benefits, reflection can be undertaken in order to reach a variety of goals. These goals have been organized into various typologies by different authors. Examples of these typologies are as follows:

Van Manen (1977) as cited by Hatton and Smith (1995:35) proposes 3 levels of reflection:

- technical reflection that is reflection concerned with efficiency and effectiveness of means to achieve certain ends.

- practical reflection that is reflection that involves the examination of not only means but also goals, the assumptions upon which these are based and the actual outcomes.
- critical reflection that is reflection which includes emphases from the previous two, as well as considerations involving moral and ethical criteria. In addition any analysis of personal action is located within wider socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts.

Louden (1991:149) distinguishes between 2 dimensions of reflection, namely, the *interests* and the *forms* of reflection. According to Louden (1991:149) a particular act of reflection has both interest and form, and a reflective act can then be described in terms of both dimensions. The term *interests* refers to the goal or end in view of the act of reflection. Louden (1991:151-163) mentions four interests namely:

- technical interest
This interest involves fidelity of teachers' practices to theoretically or empirically derived standards, as well as the development of technical skills of teaching.
- personal interest
This interest is concerned with a deeper and clearer personal understanding. Here there is an emphasis on connecting biography with experience and actions.
- problematic interest
Problematic interest involves professional problem-solving. There is then a concern with the resolution of problems within practice. This problem-solving can occur during or after the event that is seen as problematic.
- critical interest
Critical interest involves the questioning of taken-for-granted thoughts, feelings and actions in order to confront and go beyond that which is perceived as the norm. For teachers this would involve considering who benefits from current practices, how these practices may be changed, and the action to be taken to ensure that these changes are made in the classroom.

Jay and Johnson (2002:77-79) suggest the following types of reflection:

- descriptive reflection that is the intellectual process of determining what it is that will become the matter for reflection. In this process the matter for reflection is described.
- comparative reflection which is thinking about the matter for reflection from a number of different frames or perspectives.
- critical reflection which is the making of a judgement or a choice among actions, or integrating what has been discovered into a new and better understanding of the problem after having viewed the matter for reflection in several different ways. The broader historical, socio-political and moral context of schooling is also taken into consideration.

Zeicher and Tabachnick's typology (1991:3-9) as cited by Lombard (1996:187):

- subject-related reflection
- teaching-related reflection
- learner-related reflection
- socially-transformative reflection

Bullough and Gitlin's typology of goals (1991:38-39) as cited by Lombard (1996:187):

- technical reflection
- interpretive reflection that is self examining / therapeutic reflection
- critical reflection that is rational challenging of existing and sometimes established frameworks within which teacher training takes place

There are many aims of reflection, but I want to agree with Jay and Johnson (2002:76) who suggest that teachers should not only reflect on how to solve a problem, but also on the frames they bring to bear on it. These authors (2002:76) cite Zeichner and Liston (1996) who believe that reflective teachers should therefore move beyond simple questions about whether or not their practice is working, to an understanding of how it is working and for whom. Zeichner and Liston (1996) also advocate that teachers critically examine the inherent values in their practice as well as how their practice lead to change. (Jay and Johnson, 2002:76). In other words, reflection should take into consideration the social, moral, and political aspects of teaching. The advantage of taking in the broader context of schooling is that reflective practitioners / teachers come to see themselves as agents of change,

capable of understanding not only what is, but also working to create what should be (Jay and Johnson 2002:79). This view of themselves could help teachers to feel more empowered and motivated.

Apart from the fact that the goals of reflection can vary, reflection itself also seems to take place in different ways. Louden (1991:149) refers to this dimension of reflection as the *forms* of reflection. The forms of reflection, then, refer to the characteristics of the act of reflection (Louden, 1991:149). He (1991:164-180) suggests the following forms of reflection:

- **introspection**, which involves looking inwards and reconsidering one's thoughts and feelings about some issue
- **replay and rehearsal**, which involve teachers' discussions and conversations about events that have occurred or the possibility of future action
- **enquiry**, which involves a process of deliberate movement between action and discourse. Enquiry is a form of action research, where there is a 'self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:162)
- **spontaneity**, which is the form of reflection which takes place in the midst of action. Louden (1991:177) cites Cole (1987) who describes this process as teachers' spontaneous adaptations to changing circumstances in the classroom.

In this study I will make use of Louden's classification of aims and ways of reflection.

The reflective process also seems to consist of several elements. According to Dewey (1933), Schon (1983) and Valli (1997) as cited by Jay and Johnson, (2002; 75) several common processes seem to take place during reflection, including the following:

- describing the situation
- surfacing and questioning initial understanding and assumptions
- persisting, with an attitude of open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness.

Lombard (1996:188) identified the following elements of the reflective process:

- awareness of problem
- formulation and possible reformulation of the identified problem
- testing the problem against similar problems solved in the past or recognizing the uniqueness of the problem
- covert experimentation with possible solutions to discover the implications
- deciding on a solution and how to implement it
- establishing consequences and evaluating the acceptability of these consequences.

The process can be described as a spiral one since there is a continuous process of monitoring, reappraisal and evaluation.

The process of reflection and becoming a reflective practitioner does not take place in a vacuum. Many factors can be impediments to becoming a reflective practitioner. Hatton and Smith (1995:37-37) have identified some of the problems associated with the use of reflection. They are:

- the view that reflection is not generally associated with working as a teacher
- the persistence and strength of the participants' own conceptualization of teaching
- time and opportunity for development
- a suitable knowledge base
- likely reactions to demands for reflection.

Day (1999:36) mentioned the following factors which can affect teachers' capacity to reflect:

- situational constraints, for example, work overload
- personal limitations, such as, phase of development
- emotional well-being.

According to Cole (1997:7) as cited by Day (2000:126) the 'conditions under which teachers work have generated feelings and psychological states that militate against reflective practice and professional growth'. By conditions she is referring to external structures imposed by schools and school systems, the profession, government and

the public at large, whereas the psychological states refer to perceptions that interfere with optimum productivity and practice (Cole, 1997:7). Day (2000:126) cites Jersild (1995) who argued that emotional factors like anxiety, fear, loneliness, helplessness, meaning, meaninglessness, hostility, are prevalent in teachers' lives in schools and classrooms and should therefore be addressed as part of teachers' professional education. Cole (1997) asserts that 'until these issues are addressed teachers will not be able freely and meaningfully to engage in the kind of reflective practice and professional development, that brings meaning to their own lives and the lives of their students' (Cole, 1997:14).

If reflection is to take place Helsby (1996) as cited by Day (2000:106) asserts that 'a number of enabling factors' need to be present. Helsby (1996) suggests that a degree of professional confidence, adequate time for reflection, and a certain amount of collaboration / collegiality with colleagues need to be present (Day, 2000:106).

Lombard (1996:187) cites Pollard and Tann (1987) and Goodman (1991) who specify two categories of preconditions for the development of reflection namely skills and attitudes. The skills which they suggest are necessary for reflection are:

- **empirical** skills, which involve the collection of relevant data and the objective examination of this data
- **analytical** skills, that is, the making of connections and interpretation of collected data
- **evaluative** skills, which are used to make educational value judgments from the collected information
- **strategic** skills, which contribute to the implementation of collected data
- **practical** skills, which act as the connection / bridge between analysis and practice
- **communication** skills, which are needed to communicate ideas so that they can be supported and corroborated.

The attitudes suggested by them are: open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness.

Another enabling factor is the availability of intellectual and affective support (Day, 1999:26). According to Day (1999:26) two problems are raised when inquiring into

one's own practice. The first is concerned with self-confrontation and the extent to which an individual can engage in this and the second is the extent to which the consequences of self-confrontation can be accommodated in thought and action by the teacher without assistance (Day, 1999:26). Day (1999:26) stated that teachers will need to be both individual and collaborative inquirers if they are to increase their professional effectiveness.

The importance of support and collaboration in the process of reflection and change cannot be underestimated. It is generally recognized that teachers' professional development is enhanced through meaningful interchanges with colleagues within the security of collaborative culture (Hargreaves, 1992). Underhill (1992) also supports this view that "people in groups can, under the right conditions, provide a facilitative climate strongly conducive to the development of self-awareness". James, (1996:81) cites Rappaport's (1986) definition of empowerment as "the force that releases powers of self-cure" as people gain greater control over the quality of their lives through cognitive, motivational and other changes." According to James (1996:81) "these powers are particularly vital and dynamic within a group context, in which people assist each other to reflect on those aspects of their lives which seem to render them helpless". James (1996) specifies that "(p)eople gain strength to act differently within their social worlds when drawing upon the help of others".

Day (1999: 47) argues that reflection demands emotional commitment. He states that it "involves the head and the heart" (1999: 47), that is, it involves the teacher as a whole person. The process of becoming a reflective practitioner can be a difficult and sometimes painful one, but it is one in which I believe teachers need to engage if they are to continue to grow and develop personally and professionally. Reagan, Charles and Brubacher (2000:147) state that the process of becoming a reflective practitioner is one with no end. "It is an ongoing commitment to growth, change, development and improvement" (Reagan et.al, 2000:147). Educational psychologists can play an important role in facilitating and supporting teachers in this process.

In this chapter various aspects of reflection, as well as factors which facilitate or hinder the use of reflection were explored. In the next chapter I will illustrate how the use of reflection has facilitated my personal and professional growth by telling my own story.

Chapter 4 – My Story

This above all: to thine own self be true
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man
Hamlet , I, iii, 78-80

In this chapter I will tell my story of how I started on my journey as a reflective practitioner. My story starts with the image of the ideal teacher which I had constructed, as well as my initial beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning. Incidents of professional and personal growth are then described. My teaching career is divided into three periods of three years.

I became a teacher by default. It was never really my aspiration to become a teacher, although I frequently played the role of the teacher as a child when my friends and I played “school”. I left school without an idea of what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to go to university, but I did not know what I wanted to study. In the end my father decided on my degree course and my subjects, because I kept procrastinating. I decided to do my Higher Education Diploma since I did not know what to do after I completed my undergraduate degree. My first choice would have been to complete an Honors degree in Counselling Psychology, but I was not selected. It never entered my mind that I would become a teacher. For me doing the Higher Education Diploma was just a temporary measure until I could reapply for the honors degree in psychology. The realization that teaching was a definite career possibility surfaced during my first experience as a student teacher. I discovered how much I enjoyed sharing my ideas and knowledge with children and how wonderful it was to have them respond positively. I also realized how much love I had to share and that I could make someone's life better by caring enough to notice that person.

My strongest motivation for deciding on embarking on a career as a teacher was the need to make a difference and a positive contribution to other people's lives. I am an idealist by nature, but this idea of using one's life to make a difference in the world was also encouraged and vividly demonstrated during my childhood by my father. My father was the local pastor. He believed that he could not just take care of his congregation spiritually, but that all other aspects of their lives also had to be addressed. Many people in his congregation lived in poverty, and socio-economic problems like alcoholism were rife. My father was a pastor at the height of Apartheid

where opportunities for races other than whites were limited and where inequalities in all spheres of life were legitimate. Although he believed that the spiritual aspect of people was the most important and that other changes would flow from that change of heart, he also believed that his Christian faith could be demonstrated in other ways like addressing poverty, the aim of which would be to direct people to God's love. Since society told people that they were not good enough, because of their race, part of what my father also wanted to do was to encourage and to help people to challenge this belief. According to the Christian faith, all people are made in the image of God and therefore all have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. My father wanted his congregation to be aware of this and demonstrated this in his own life by being interested in and concerned about all the members of his congregation no matter what their social status or level of education. He demonstrated to me as a child and adult what a difference showing genuine interest and concern for people can make in their lives. In a sense, my father was a role model of how one person can make a difference and I thought I could do that by becoming a teacher.

I entered teaching wanting to be like the teacher in one of my favourite movies, "Dead Poets' Society", hoping to encourage, inspire and make a difference. The character played by Robin Williams was so sure of himself and he made it seem so easy to encourage children to learn. He was unconventional and found interesting and unusual ways of helping them to enjoy learning and gain new perspectives. Everything he did was authentic, because it fitted in with who he was as a person. He could inspire respect by just being himself and he did his job with so much passion. The other thing I loved about the character was his ability to form deep and significant relationships with the pupils in his class. They wanted to talk to him and felt comfortable enough to take risks in his class. Although the teacher was a fictional character in a movie he made a lasting impression on me, because he was so similar to my image of the ideal teacher. I wanted to be able to engage children intellectually and emotionally in their learning and to inspire and encourage them to reach their full potential.

My image of the ideal teacher and my beliefs about teaching and learning and the role of the teacher in that process were constructed over time through my

experiences and observation of the many teachers in my family, as well as my own experience of teachers as a learner myself.

My family members who were teachers were passionate about being professionals and doing the job as well as possible. Some entered the profession reluctantly, since there were few other options available to people of colour during that time, but a sense of responsibility and professionalism led them to fulfill their role as teacher with dedication and pride. The teachers in my family taught during a time where there was a great respect for teachers since they were some of the most highly educated people in our communities. They saw themselves as role models and since they worked within mostly underprivileged schools and communities they were very conscious of the fact that their role included not just education within the school, but also the social upliftment of people. They were also teachers at the time when Apartheid was at its height, but believed that they could still provide quality education despite many constraints. I admired the fact that they were recognized and greeted by students they had taught during their careers and that they seemed to have made a difference in their pupils' lives. Based on these experiences of family members as teachers I came to the conclusion early in my life that teachers are role models and they are responsible for education in the broadest sense. Teachers are also supposed to behave in specific ways, for example, they have to be polite and responsible and they must practice what they preach. Being a professional was also important and that included how they spoke, dressed and behaved. I did experience distance between them and the rest of the community. This could have been due to differences in social class or the fact that they were more educated than most people in their communities.

I also learnt about what teachers were like from my own experience as a learner. My first and probably most positive experience of a teacher was my nursery school teacher. She was a German Catholic nun. Sister Servita never shouted at any of us and she was very patient. I cannot remember finding any of the work we did really difficult or boring. This was probably because it was presented as fun and in an interesting way. She also encouraged us to use our imagination. I can still remember my whole class walking behind her on tiptoe so that we could surprise the Easter bunny who lived in the storeroom. All our efforts were praised and we were made to feel special.

My primary school years were good years. I got on well with my teachers since I performed well scholastically and was well-behaved. I suppose I also had a certain status, because my father was the local pastor in the town. I saw teachers as powerful people who could punish or reward me depending on my hard work and behaviour. I learnt that teachers could sometimes be unfair, because they treated children from poorer areas in our town differently from children from more privileged areas. They could also be unwittingly cruel by humiliating children in front of their classmates. I remember one incident where I voiced my opinion that teachers should not humiliate children and tried to explain that people behave in unacceptable ways for a reason and that those reasons must be understood. Looking back now I can hardly believe that I actually challenged authority in that way, because I was a timid and docile child. I think I was allowed to express my opinion without negative consequences, because of my father's position and because I was not taken terribly seriously anyway.

When I changed schools in my standard five year, the adjustment was a big one. I went to an English school where the rest of my primary education had been in Afrikaans and we came to live in Cape Town. My classmates were wonderful during that time. They would come and chat to me during breaks and did not mind that my English was not very good. During that year our country experienced growing unrest and some of our teachers were very politically involved. I was not really politically aware and was suddenly faced with comments from especially my form teacher, because my father was involved in the president's council, which was a forerunner to the tri-cameral parliament. Nobody was really nasty and I was not unhappy at school, but I learnt about being judged by association. Who I was seemed to get a bit lost. I was seen as my father's daughter and a sibling of my brother, the clever one, and my sister, the extrovert of the family.

I went to a private girls' high school. I think my parents made this choice because they wanted me to have a good education and in order to protect me. Those were the times of student unrest and 'Liberation before Education' and my father did not want me to be hurt by his political choices. I received my schooling in a racially mixed Anglican school where the staff was mainly white. Growing up during the Apartheid era where separate schools for different race groups was the norm, I found it difficult

to adapt to being in the same class as white children and having to become friends with them. In the past I had had minimal contact with white people socially. I only really started feeling comfortable at my school at the end of my second year. Right throughout my school career however there was never a teacher who I felt comfortable enough with to go and talk to about anything that bothered me.

No doubt due to my own issues and the environment in which I received my schooling, I experienced teachers as distant and uninterested in me as a person. I was one of those unexceptional children who are not really noticed unless they do something out of the ordinary. I did my work and was well-mannered. It seemed that one had to be brilliant or exhibit behaviour problems in order to be noticed. Looking back now as an adult I suppose I also preferred this role since I did not feel that I had anything clever to contribute.

Teachers were also the people who knew everything and passed on their knowledge to me. They were the ones in control who expected me to perform to their standards academically and where behaviour was concerned. As a child I would not dare to step out of line. I was raised with the idea that one should show respect to adults and others in authority and was amazed and even a little shocked at fellow pupils who openly rebelled against teachers and who just would not toe the line. I did not like it when children were rude to the teachers or made fun of them. I expected teachers to be in charge and found it quite disturbing when they were so vulnerable and the girls took advantage of them.

Although I was not close to any of my teachers, there was one teacher who made an impression on me. She was my English teacher in grade ten and eleven. She loved English literature and shared her enthusiasm with us. When we had to do written work she always told us to write from experience. Unfortunately the topics she chose did not seem to fit into anything I had experienced. There was one occasion, however, when I found my voice and wrote about something I had experienced and felt strongly about and she read my piece in class. It was one of the best moments in my whole school career.

As illustrated by my story so far, teachers do not start their teacher training as clean slates, but already possess a great deal of knowledge of what it means to be a

teacher and about the teaching-learning process through being a learner themselves. Day (2000:) cites Lortie (1975) who refers to this pupil period as an 'apprenticeship of observation'. According to Lortie, teachers' socializing then occurs through the observation and internalization of particular models of teaching experienced as the recipient pupil. He then argues that these latent models, are activated during the training period, having often been 'carried in suspension' over a period of time, particularly during the undergraduate years.

I was not aware of these latent internalized models when I started my teaching career, but looking back now I had a definite image of and beliefs about the characteristics of the ideal teacher and how such a paragon would behave. The ideal teacher would:

- be hardworking, responsible and dedicated
- be kind, friendly and caring
- be passionate and enthusiastic about her job and the subject she taught
- behave in specific ways. She would be patient and would never lose her temper or raise her voice in anger
- be fun, interesting, creative and entertaining
- make children feel special by noticing all efforts and by giving a lot of praise and attention to all the children. Children would also be allowed to express their opinions.
- try to understand why children behave in specific ways
- make a difference in children's lives
- connect what children have to learn to their own experience
- always be in control of the class
- be a role model to her learners
- be respected due to her position and because of her care and hard work. Her work would be acknowledged.

I did not want to be a teacher who:

- treated children differently according to, for example, socio-economic status
- was unfair, authoritarian and intimidating
- humiliated children
- compared children to others, for example, siblings, peers

- did not know the children in her class
- was distant and uninterested in children as people
- was not in control of her classes
- was not respected by children
- was vulnerable and of whom children could take advantage

I also had certain beliefs about teaching and learning and the role of the teacher in this process. Teaching for me was about nurturing and passing on knowledge. I believed that learning would take place automatically if children paid attention to what was taught. They would accept what I offered, because I knew more than they did and I was the teacher. In my experience as a learner that was what teachers did.

My practice as a teacher, as well as my beliefs about teaching and learning seemed to have been based on my own experiences as a learner. These beliefs were not changed or challenged to a great degree by what I learnt about teaching and learning during my HED year. What I learnt in fact seemed to support my beliefs and assumptions. According to Conle, as cited by Britzman (2000),

it is an well known and often discussed issue that teaching candidates keep re-enacting their institutional biographies, that is, the scripts about teaching and learning into which they were enculturated as students, unless they experience some kind of awareness of those scripts and begin to counter the parts of their practical knowledge they do not like.

What I learnt during my HED year, then, did not really contribute to questioning or bringing to light my beliefs about teaching and learning. During my HED course we learnt about different teaching techniques and about how to present lessons in a way that would be meaningful to our pupils. Maintaining discipline and order was also a hot topic.

Two incidents stand out in my memory when I remember this time. The first one was the fun and creativity of presenting plays as part of my English didactics class and the second was the impression our lecturer made on me when he explained what a responsibility we had as teachers. He said that we could be the only significant other in children's lives. That comment has stayed with me and has been a criteria by which I measured and still measure my attitude and behaviour towards children. I wanted to be a teacher who made a difference in her pupils' lives by being interested in them as people and understanding them within the circumstances in which they

found themselves. I also wanted my classes to be places where learning was interesting and fun.

I started my teaching career in a school in a rural area about 160 km outside Cape Town. It was an Afrikaans medium high school where most of the children came from the surrounding farms, the other towns close by and from further afield. Many of the children were raised by their grandparents since their parents worked in Cape Town, and were exposed to alcoholism (which was rife) and poverty. Many of the children on the farms lived in two-roomed houses where there was very little privacy and no running water or electricity inside. Most of the children, apart from the ones who lived in the town or stayed in the school hostel, were bussed in. This made extramural activities after school a great problem. Our learners came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, but there was not much variety regarding culture or religion.

I was responsible for teaching English to seven grade nine classes and there was a lot of variety in ages and ability. In one of the grade nine classes I taught and also had as my form class, there were two 18-year-olds. One of them had been to prison. These two tended to behave in such a way that I dreaded teaching the class they were in. I taught English as a second language and the children displayed a variety of levels of proficiency in the language. The children were not very willing to speak English and homework was a source of great frustration for me.

My first year was a battle of trying to get to grips with the following:

- teaching
I realized in my first couple of months of teaching that children were not always willing receptacles of my knowledge and care. Caring about them and good intentions were not enough. The children did what they were told most of the time,, but they were not eager participants in their own learning and I wondered if this was due to the fact that I was terrible teacher. I also felt that my classes were boring compared to the lessons I observed during my practice teaching. I am not an entertainer by nature and I wondered whether my boring lessons were due to my personality. There was no thought about why I taught the way I did and about the function of education. All I knew was that what I was doing did not seem to work.
- practicalities of teaching, for example, the large number of classes and diversity of classes with regard to proficiency level and age.

- control and vulnerability

My biggest fear regarding teaching was that I would not be able to 'control' the class. I would be vulnerable and at the children's mercy like some of the teachers I had had as a learner. I hated the idea of being that pitiable. I struggled to find the balance between maintaining discipline as the teacher and being myself and loving the children. I sometimes felt as if the children were just watching out for any sign of vulnerability so that they could exploit it. I had to retreat behind my strict teacher mask to combat this feeling of vulnerability. I disliked the fact that I appeared distant and hardly smiled, but I felt that I would lose control if the mask slipped. Wearing this mask, however, prevented me from living up to my image of the ideal teacher and I struggled with a sense of failure and a feeling that I was letting my learners down.

- children

My image of the ideal child was similar to the kind of learner I was at school. I believed children should be hard working, obedient and respectful towards the teacher. These characteristics would be evident, because of the kind of teacher I was. I felt that the learners' co-operation would be a reflection of my ability to live up to my image of the ideal teacher. When children then behaved badly I took it personally and saw it as an indication of my inability to gain their respect.

- school context

I also struggled with a lack of professional and personal support throughout those first three years. Many teachers on the staff would say that what I had learnt at university was so far removed from the reality of teaching and that all the new fangled methods and ways of teaching were nonsense. Most of them were quite comfortable in their rut and preferred to do things the way they had always done them. My head of department tried to be helpful, but his whole style and approach to teaching was just so different from mine. I did not agree with his treatment and view of children. There did not seem to be anyone in my department to whom I could talk about my struggles and doubts and who I could bounce ideas off regarding my lessons and just general classroom management. I got on well with the staff, but I felt on the outside. I questioned whether I wanted to continue teaching, because I felt like I was not making a difference and because I was unhappy and felt isolated, socially and professionally.

- Circumstances (contexts) outside of school – alcoholism, poverty, lack of parental control.
- Self doubt
I took things like problems with homework not being done very personally and assumed that it said something about my lack of authority as a teacher. I took responsibility for everything and was very critical of myself because I could not live up to my own expectations.
- Being away from home
- Living in the hostel
I was also not happy living at the hostel anymore and felt that living there drained me and contributed to negative feelings towards children, especially when they were difficult and uncooperative.
- Teacher unions
The South African Democratic Teachers' Union was established and was affiliated to COSATU during my first three years of teaching. Schooling was disrupted by teachers' strikes about various demands especially salary demands. I did not join a union and I could not side with those on strike, since I felt that the children were disadvantaged, and in particular the matrics since there was very little time for them to catch up on the work they had lost. The teachers' strike also lead to a general breakdown in discipline in the school which I found hard to bear since it contributed to division within the staff.

Teaching was about survival at this stage and reflection was therefore mostly technical. I wanted to find ways to make my lessons more interesting. Although I was dissatisfied with my relationship with the learners most of my energy went into preparation for lessons and staying vigilant and in control of my classes.

My first three years (1993 – 1995) of teaching, then, were a time of adjustment in many areas of my life, but also a time of discovering whether I really wanted to be a teacher. I was faced with the reality of teaching and this was quite different from how I thought it would be. I wanted to be different from the teachers I had known as a pupil and some of my colleagues, but found it was easy to slip into those roles and be the way others said teachers should be. I found myself behaving contrary to my beliefs of how a teacher should be. Working with children sometimes brought out the worst in me and I felt like a failure, because I sometimes reacted in anger or did not

like a child. I felt I could not live up to my ideal. I wanted so much to be patient, understanding and kind all the time. It did not fit into the picture when I lost my temper and shouted at a child. The part of me that is the critic and perfectionist would then haul me over the coals and I would feel that I was a terrible teacher. There were many times when I despaired and this was especially prevalent in my third year of teaching which was also my worst year.

There were two incidents that made me realize that I could possibly do things differently where my relationship with the learners was concerned. One was an incident in my all boy class where I nearly smiled and one of the boys commented that I was not as strict as I appeared. The other was when the principal sat in on one of my classes. I was nervous about having him in my class. After he left, one of the grade nines asked me if I was OK. I told the class how I felt and it contributed to a closer relationship with that class which was not present in my relationship with any of my other classes. These incidents were my first inkling that being myself was a possibility in my classroom.

Many events occurred during my next three years of teaching (1996 –1998) which contributed to and encouraged personal and professional growth. 1996 was the best year of my teaching career. This was the year in which I decided that I wanted to be a teacher and that I could become a good one. Everything seemed to fall into place in my life both personally and professionally. I had moved out of the hostel and found it revitalizing not to have to maintain order and take care of children for most of my day. There seemed to be time for everything. I had five grade ten classes and this left me with enough time at home and at school to prepare lessons and to have time for myself. Since I had free periods at school, there was also time to talk to colleagues and I discovered that especially two of my colleagues in the English department were people who shared my vision of teaching and loved what they did. I discovered people who were enthusiastic about teaching and children and who were very willing to share information and resources.

I learnt a great deal about teaching and just being a teacher from four colleagues who became my mentors and later my friends. First of all, they modeled a way of interacting with children which fitted in with how I wanted to be, but felt I could not without a loss of control and without becoming vulnerable. I started realizing that one

could set boundaries without going to the extreme of distancing oneself. Maintaining order and discipline in the class was part of taking care of the children in my class, but I had to become more flexible and learn to read my classes so that I would be aware of when to be strict and when to be playful. I learnt to trust my intuition and realized that it was fine just to be human and not to try to be a superhuman teacher who never failed. My inner critic was silenced more often and this enabled me to talk about my experiences and to celebrate my successes.

Secondly, I learnt about teaching and learning. Both my colleagues were creative teachers. They had different approaches to teaching. One wanted the children to think and to form opinions that they could back up. He challenged them to question and not to just accept what they were told. He wanted them to be aware of what was happening in the world outside the boundaries of the town and to have a vision of where they were heading in the future. The children were exposed to things outside their everyday experience. His classes were different from the other classes. Sometimes the children would sit on the floor on a blanket while they discussed the prescribed book and he never sat behind his table. He knew the children in his classes and encouraged them to link their daily lives to what they learnt in the class and to take responsibility for their own learning. My other colleague believed that children would do their best in her class when she could make them see that she cared. She mothered them and refused to give up on a child. She would tease, cajole and nurture until she got a response. Through her lessons she would teach about life and set tasks that would help her to get to know the children better. She always had the scholastic end goal, namely the matric exams, in mind and tried to prepare the lower grades for what would be expected of them then. She seemed to be more aware of the steps that needed to be taken to learn certain skills and found creative and interesting ways to teach these skills. She challenged children in a different way mainly though encouraging them to be creative.

From both of them I learnt about accessing and respecting the knowledge children already had in ways that were creative and fun. I slowly started thinking about not only how I could improve my teaching, but also about the purpose of education. We were not just trying to prepare children to pass the matric exams, but to be thinking, caring and useful citizens of our country where so many opportunities were just starting to open up for our children. The only way we could do this was to start by

understanding and knowing the children within their specific contexts and to do what we could to help them get to where they wanted to be. Teaching was more than just passing on knowledge. I was helping to shape the way children looked at the world and other people.

Apart from the collegial support for doing things differently in my classroom and my greater sense of efficacy and connection, I also had wonderful support from all my classes who were willing guinea pigs. They were enthusiastic, hardworking and willing to try new things. I had taught or had some form of contact with all the children in my classes before they landed in my grade ten classes. This made it much easier to be more spontaneous and to just be myself. In this supportive atmosphere I also found it much easier to take risks and do new things. One of them was to write notes of encouragement to children. I wanted them to know that I noticed that they were trying or were working really hard. The learners were surprised but very gratified and this in turn led to greater openness in my classes. My learners even felt comfortable teasing me a little from time to time. I tried to be more creative and flexible where my lessons were concerned and they rewarded me with wonderful written work and by making a real effort to speak English. I was amazed at their creativity and growing confidence.

During 1996 the education department started on the “rightsizing” of schools. A number of teachers at the school were declared redundant. Teachers were offered a retirement package and about five of the teachers on the staff took it. For the first time job insecurity became a reality to me and to many other teachers. Rightsizing in the schools lead to a decrease in the size of the staff and this lead to, among other things, greater work loads for teachers, as well as big increases in class sizes. The school’s governing body could not afford to employ and to pay extra teachers since our parent body consisted mostly of lower income families.

1997 was a very difficult year. My mother had been diagnosed with cancer in 1995 and had been in remission for the greater part of 1996. At the end of 1996 she was told that the cancer had returned and that she had six months to live. My family and I watched her condition deteriorate and she died in April, 1997. Her last six months were a time of sadness and stress. The one good thing that came out of this time

was the realization that my learners cared about me. I received many homemade cards that were written in English.

The year also started badly, because I was told at the beginning of that year that I would be teaching guidance (grade eight to ten), as well as two grade eleven English classes. In addition a couple of music periods (five grade nine classes), as well as library periods were assigned to me. This was as a result of losing teachers due to rightsizing.

I was devastated since I had had no inkling of these changes at the end of my previous year and also because I had just started to find my feet and to gain confidence in my ability as an English teacher. I felt as if the little bit of security and certainty I had experienced during the stressful time of my mother's illness had been taken away. I had so looked forward to and had started planning what I was going to do with my learners, and now the rug had been pulled out from under my feet. I had also never taught or had any contact with one of the English classes that was assigned to me. For most of my classes I would have to start building a relationship from scratch and I felt angry that all my hard work of the previous year had been for nought.

Although I like to learn new things, I am not very fond of change especially if I have not been consulted or prepared for it. Day's explanation of people's reaction to change as cited by Kothagen (2001:266) resonated with me. He explained that people's reaction to change involves "the problem of dealing with the natural emotional reactions of human being to the threat of losing certainty, predictability and stability". When teachers are faced with change they can experience different levels of emotional reactions like anxiety and uncertainty depending on how these changes fit in with their personal theory of teaching and learning and their hopes and dreams of teaching. Varying degrees of emotional and professional support may be needed in this adjustment. The changes at school coupled with my mother's illness contributed to feelings of anxiety and anger. I seemed to have no control over what was happening both in my personal and professional life.

I had studied guidance as one of my subjects during my teacher training, but had not been responsible for teaching it up to this point. I did not enjoy being the guidance teacher for a variety of reasons:

- I had to figure out what it meant to be a guidance teacher. I felt that the guidance teacher should be different from other teachers, but I was not sure how. Looking back now I suppose the picture of the superhuman teacher who was always available and accepting and never showed or felt negative emotions towards her pupils loomed large. I wanted the learners to feel comfortable with me so that they could turn to me when they needed help. This brought me back to the whole issue of wanting to be like a friend and still remaining the teacher. I did not want to push them away, but I did not know how to get the balance right between being friendly and firm. I did not want to be the disciplinarian, just the nurturer and I could not do that. That was frustrating.
- Guidance periods were seen as free periods. The children wanted to come and relax and did not want to accept that in some aspects it was the same as other classes and that they actually had to come and work. I found it frustrating and difficult to make them realize that what we were doing was actually important even if we did not write exams on it. Part of the problem was that many of the children lacked a vision of the future. They did not have money to study further. What I tried to teach was just not relevant to their experience. For example, why learn better study skills if they were just going to end up on the farm like their parents anyway. I found this attitude understandable, but depressing. I did not know how to encourage them to have other ideals without also presenting them with the ways in which they could reach those ideals.
- I had to find new ways of presenting lessons. Although I did a needs-analysis I found it difficult not to try to prescribe what I felt we needed to do in my class. In the English class I decided what was to be done (keeping the children's interests in mind), but this approach did not work in the guidance classes. I could not figure out how to hook them. There was a curriculum for guidance, but it gave so much less structure than the English curriculum.

- I had no collegial support where guidance was concerned. The other guidance teacher at the school used these periods as free periods and my other colleagues felt I had an easy ride because I had so little marking and I did not have to set exams papers. To them, therefore, I did not do much. All the teachers had a greater number of classes and bigger class sizes. As a result there was very little time for conversation around our work or any exchange of ideas.
- I could not get to know all my learners and I did not even know all their names since I only saw them for one period every seven days. We followed a seven day cycle. Part of what makes teaching worthwhile is the involvement with learners and the satisfaction of getting to know them. I hated the fact that my classes were like an assembly line.

I also had so much less time than the year before, since I had to prepare for such a variety of subjects. I tend to be a perfectionist and I wanted to be well prepared for all my classes as it made me feel more organized and in control. I was responsible for teaching these subjects to different classes of children and I wanted to do the job to the best of my ability. This was how I felt a good teacher should be, always prepared and in control no matter what the circumstances. She owed it to her pupils. In this busyness of trying to be prepared for all my classes there was very little time to really think about my teaching. I was frustrated and knew that I did not get the same satisfaction from teaching as the year before, but somehow there was a lack of time and energy to do things differently.

Cole as cited by Day (2000) identified the following factors which could prevent teachers from being pro-active in their professional development:

- general intensification of working life;
- a marked reduction in the general resourcing of education;
- a growing insularity amongst teachers;
- increased demands for accountability

In my experience particularly the first three factors contributed to my lack of energy and initiative especially where my guidance classes were concerned. I was simply overwhelmed by the demands made.

My lifeline during that year was my two English classes. I worked very hard at trying to build a good relationship with my new English class in particular. They were the 11E class and were not seen as bright learners. I tried to make them feel special by writing them notes and praising them often, as well as choosing themes that would encourage them to tell me about themselves and also to share and talk about topics from their experience. They responded with a great deal of enthusiasm. The most memorable theme was the one on sport. The learners loved the fact that the tables were turned and that they could teach me something. I also enjoyed the fact that I could let them take over and allow them to share their knowledge. To this day most of what I know about cricket was gleaned from those grade elevens.

Another lifeline was my decision made in the middle of 1997 to go for psychotherapy. I was grieving for my mother and trying to come to terms with the implications of her death for the rest of my life. This has been one of the best things I have ever done for myself. I needed a place where I did not have to pretend that I was fine and that everything was under control, a place where I did not have to consider other people's needs and where I could be nurtured.

For me, therapy is also a form of reflection since it helps me to gain new perspectives and understanding within a supportive helping relationship. At first the focus of therapy revolved around my mother's death and what that meant for me, but it also led to greater insight and understanding into what drives me as a person. Learning more about and gaining greater understanding of myself has also contributed to a greater congruence between how I wanted to be as a teacher and how I am now. My relationship with my therapist allowed me to remember again how I want to be with other people including my learners. Since all this takes place within a relationship there is also the necessary support to take the risk of trying out new behaviour.

This remembered way of being with other people was further demonstrated outside the therapeutic relationship during my studies. I decided to apply for a Master's degree in Educational Psychology in 1998 and started my studies in 1999. One of my lecturers made a deep impression on me, because he had a way of drawing the students into class discussions. He knew how to listen and somehow found some way of including one's comments into what he had to say. Somehow he made sense of my contribution even if it was not necessarily stated in the most articulate way. He

listened to what was said and the meaning behind the words. This was one of the first classes where I felt I wanted to make a contribution and that what I had to say was valuable. He made me feel special. The class was also not a terribly solemn affair. There was a relaxed atmosphere in our class and we laughed often. Our lecturer was quite casual and laid back by nature and during our classes he was just himself. I was amazed at how he captured our attention and made us feel comfortable by just being himself and being a good listener. Furthermore he was able to gauge where we were regarding our knowledge of his subject and was flexible enough to adapt to our needs and level. I wanted the children in my class to feel special and heard and this lecturer was a wonderful illustration of how I could go about it.

1999 was another year of big changes for me. Since I wanted to study further I resigned from my post and the educational department. This was quite an issue, because it meant that I lost my benefits, such as medical aid. I accepted a governing body post at a high school in Cape Town where I was to be responsible for Afrikaans (as a second language for three grade nine classes) and guidance (grade eight to ten). The idea of teaching at a school in a city was quite a daunting one. I had heard all kinds of horror stories about how teachers struggled with discipline and socio-economic problems like gangsterism. Fortunately, the school was an old school with a lot of tradition and a proud history. It was smaller than my previous school and the students came from a variety of backgrounds. There were children from affluent neighbourhoods and others from the townships. The ratio of Muslim to non-Muslim children and teachers was roughly half.

The children were different from the rural children. Their behaviour towards teachers was more assertive and demanding. I found it rather intimidating initially when learners did not automatically do what they were told, but questioned a directive. Although discipline was not a problem at the school, they seemed to find my structured approach strange, as well as the expectation that others including myself should be treated with respect by, for example, being listened to without interruption. They felt, for instance, that it was acceptable to chat to each other during my classes if they did not find it interesting. There seemed to be a feeling that I had to entertain them and they could sit back and let me do the work. There was a lot resistance to group work and they found it difficult to stay on task. The children's attitude to

Afrikaans was also negative. Whereas the children at my first school felt that English was necessary if they were to get somewhere in the world, many of the children at my new school felt that Afrikaans was of a waste of time since they never used it and would not need it in the future. Many also voiced the opinion that Afrikaans was very difficult.

I had never taught Afrikaans before, but I did not find it a big adjustment. It was a second language and I used the same principles I had used for teaching English as a second language. I found the way that Afrikaans was taught rather old fashioned, however, compared to how English was taught as a second language. Afrikaans was my mother tongue and I felt comfortable reading and writing it. The only area that demanded some work on my part was the grammar of the language. I knew the right way of putting together sentences and could detect mistakes, but I could not always explain why something was wrong. I was very lucky to have a great deal support from my head of department who was always willing to supply structure regarding what he expected and what would eventually be expected from the children during the matric exams. He was also very good at explaining the grammar. I was also given a lot of freedom to do things my way and my department head was always interested in what I did. Since there was some resistance to learning Afrikaans, I felt the best way of getting around this was to get to know the children, to try to create a supportive and caring classroom atmosphere and to choose themes and material that they would find both relevant and interesting and that would help me to get to get to know them.

I felt comfortable and confident with regard to teaching Afrikaans, but I experienced similar problems with my guidance classes to what I had experienced at my previous school. I especially dreaded teaching the grade tens. They were rowdy and uncooperative and I found it difficult to build a relationship with them since the guidance class was the only place where I had contact with them. I felt as if I was at their mercy and that nothing I did made any difference. I wanted to create a similar atmosphere to what I had experienced in my classes at university and although this worked in my Afrikaans classes it did not seem possible in my guidance classes. I felt that there was no way I could just be myself with them and I hated slipping back behind my strict, aloof teacher mask for protection. In an effort to maintain some measure of control I ended up becoming rigid and authoritarian and of course this did not contribute to a closer relationship or a happier class atmosphere. I could not

really talk to any of the other guidance teachers, because I felt that it would be a negative reflection on me if I could not handle those classes. Their way of teaching guidance was also not very conducive to forming closer relationships with the children in their classes.

One of the grade ten classes who had guidance with me was also my form class. I enjoyed them tremendously outside of the guidance class. There was a range of children in my form class, from the docile, quite and hardworking ones to those who got into trouble regularly for not doing homework or being rude to the teachers. As their form teacher I felt that it was part of my duty to get to know, at least, my form class and they responded with amazing openness. I wrote them notes and made a point of walking around in my class and chatting to the children during the register session. I had told my form class that I was studying and this also brought us closer. They knew that I understood how they felt about writing exams for example or trying to organize my time since I was going through the same thing. I could also show the children in my form class that I was just human and that I also got tired and stressed. We supported and took care of each other. Although I did not always conform to my picture of the ideal teacher I knew that I was accepted despite it. There was one incident when I scolded my form class and felt very mean afterwards. When I saw them later during the day one of the boys looked at me and said: "Miss, you can rant and rave as much as you like, but we know you love us."

I found it quite difficult to study and work at the same time, but I found that I needed both. I gained new perspectives on behaviour and on how to create circumstances to help children to develop optimally. All this was assimilated over time, but since it fitted in with my idea of teaching and enabled me to move towards greater congruence between my ideal of how I wanted to be with children and what my interaction was like at that stage I did not have undue difficulty in accepting it. The whole eco-systemic approach fitted in with what I believed and had been exposed to during my childhood in my father's involvement in his congregation.

The value of this approach was also illustrated to me in my form class. There were quite a number of troubled children who showed their distress by getting into fights with peers or who were disrespectful to teachers. I wanted to be supportive, but I found this difficult in an atmosphere where all the children's problems were regarded

as being intrinsic to the child or blamed on the home. Although the teachers were aware that other factors contributed to a child's behaviour they did not want to admit that they could create circumstances in their classrooms which could contribute to a child's problems. The child was expected to change while his circumstances at home and school stayed the same. Helping teachers to have a more eco-systemic understanding of behaviour would be a more effective way of supporting the child.

My studies also helped me to reconnect with my ideal of how teaching and teachers should be. This had been lost in the initial busyness of teaching, but I had started to excavate this ideal again as I became more confident as a teacher. My slow conscious shift from viewing teaching and learning as the transmission of knowledge to realizing that these are interactive processes where knowledge is created together, also started at this time during my study. I slowly started implementing what I learnt and when it worked all the sacrifices I had to make in order to study seemed worthwhile. I felt that I was making a difference. These changes took place within the supportive relationships with colleagues at school and my classmates.

My last official year of teaching (2000) was a good year despite the stress of working and studying at the same time. I often felt as if I was being torn in two and that I could not give 100% anywhere. This was frustrating and I also felt guilty, because I did not always have the energy to give support and understanding at school. This was especially evident with children who were demanding and wanted a great deal of attention. I was responsible again for guidance (grades eight to ten) and Afrikaans (grade ten).

Guidance classes with most of the grades assigned to me, especially the grade nines, were still not satisfactory. The same problems that I had experienced before persisted. Discipline and a lack of cooperation was an issue in three of the five grade nine classes. All three of these classes consisted of 40 to 45 students and many of the students seemed to require a great deal of individual attention. I only saw them once a week and it took me a long time to even learn their names. It seemed to me that the only way to cope was to be very structured, but that also failed from time to time. I found it difficult to be myself and to be more spontaneous, because I was so busy hanging onto control. This of course did not encourage an atmosphere of trust, acceptance and support. I tried talking to the learners about the situation, but it

seemed that I was the one to blame and that I could do nothing right. When I talked to other teachers about this situation I found that these classes were experienced in the same way by a variety of teachers except teachers with obvious authority like the vice-principal or ones who were bad tempered and severe. They seemed to be better behaved when they were divided into two groups and received more individual attention, but this was not possible in my Guidance class. I felt overwhelmed by the situation and felt that I had let these children down, but somehow I did not have the energy to do things differently.

These problems were much less evident with the two grade ten classes (including my form class) who had both Afrikaans and Guidance with me. I had taught most of the grade tens the previous year either in Afrikaans or Guidance, so the foundation for building a good relationship had been laid. I liked the fact that I saw these classes more than just once a week. Since I saw these two classes for both subjects I was able to link them quite successfully. The prescribed book lent itself to discussions which would normally be addressed in the Guidance class. This was wonderful, because it gave me the necessary structure and the learners could relate their experiences to those of the characters in the book. We covered a wide variety of topics and I was amazed at their knowledge and wisdom. I suppose the fact that we started with the characters in the book and then linked them with the learners' experiences was also less threatening and could have enabled them to talk more openly.

At the same time I made every effort, in both the Afrikaans and Guidance classes, to help them to get to know each other and me. We had class projects and I got to know them better through their writing and by again just being interested and chatting to them during the time when the register was taken. We also talked about what helped to form trusting relationships during our Guidance periods. For the first time I also expressed my needs verbally to my form class. I had been feeling lonely and kept at arms' length by my form class. They were the 10A class (that is the top grade ten class) and I assumed that they did not need me. I wanted to be closer to them and wanted to be able to be supportive. When I explained this to them I realized that what I wanted was something new to them and that they had found me distant. We all made a concerted effort to be more open and not to assume that the other person did not want to be involved with them. I also started thinking again about what I wanted

to achieve through teaching Afrikaans and tried to structure my lessons and organized my classroom in order to achieve these goals.

Guidance with these two classes then seemed to be less of a challenge since we saw enough of each other to build a sound relationship and for them to understand what I required. Guidance lessons also became more relevant to both these classes since material covered was in line with our goal of trying to create a classroom where people felt accepted and supported. During this year I also started realizing how effective experiential learning was since the reference material I used included exercises that illustrated the theory.

The year before I started my internship (2000) teachers also had to start planning for the implementation of Outcomes Based Education in grade eight in 2001. There was a great deal of resistance to the implementation of Outcomes Based Education among the staff and this was evidenced by a lack of interest and negativity. Underlying this resistance were feelings of anxiety, anger and resentment. I was involved in the planning for the subject areas of Life Orientation and Language, Literacy and Communication. Due to the fact that we had discussed Outcomes Based Education as part of my course I felt quite positive about aspects of it. I felt it was a chance for teachers to reassess what they were doing professionally, to keep what was working and to either discard what was not effective or to find ways to make it more effective. Outcomes Based Education also offered exciting prospects like greater co-operation between teachers from all learning areas. The teacher was also going to be more of a facilitator and less of a conveyer of knowledge. This had implications for both teaching and learning.

Although I have been a full-time student for the past two years, I have had the opportunity of being involved with learners during my internship (2001), as well as experiencing some involvement at my previous school. Part of the practice during my internship was the presentation of workshops to students and I witnessed and experienced the value of experiential learning and accessing students' knowledge. I presented a workshop on career development to my former form class. The learners were in grade eleven at that stage. I made use of a variety of methods including experiential exercises, giving information on the whole process and helping them to discover their own steps in the process of career development, and the response was

overwhelmingly positive. The learners were especially positive about aspects of the workshop that involved their own discovery and experience. The fact that we had a good relationship also contributed to their willingness to consider other options and to cooperate. I really enjoyed the process as well. I think what I learnt was that I need to be flexible enough in my teaching to employ new and a greater variety of methods.

I have also experienced the power of experiential learning as part of my learning. I was exposed to and became aware of narrative therapy during my studies. It resonated with me and I decided to join a narrative therapy study group. Our facilitator regularly made use of experiential learning and I found it meaningful and powerful. Experiencing experiential learning myself convinced me of the usefulness of this way of teaching and has encouraged me to try it out in my practice.

In the last couple of months I have also experienced being on the receiving end of teaching where the first teacher employed a transmission method of teaching and the second a more constructivist way. I found that I responded to this experience physically, emotionally and intellectually. With the first teacher I was aware of tiring easily and the discomfort of the coldness of the room and the hardness of the desk I was sitting in. I felt bored and irritable most of the time and this coupled with physical discomfort did not contribute to my concentration. I experienced negative feelings towards the teacher and I just wanted to get away. Intellectually, I was definitely not challenged. I was just asked to sit back and absorb what I was told. Of course there are other factors which could also have contributed to my reaction, but I came to the workshop with positive expectations and I really wanted to learn.

I did not go to the second workshop with a great deal of excitement, because I knew the material that would be covered and I expected to be bored again. I went because it was required of me to attend two workshops. Although my initial feelings were negative this changed within the first hour of the workshop. The second teacher did not assume that the learners knew nothing and accessed that knowledge in a creative way. She also did not just concentrate on content, but encouraged the learners to link the content to what they were learning at school at that time. She made the content of the workshop relevant to the learners and helped them to apply it to their own circumstances and experiences. In the process they also learnt about themselves and what they wanted for their lives. I was less aware of physical

discomfort, because we did not sit all the time and I was more involved. I still just wonder how children manage to sit in hard and uncomfortable desks day after day. I felt valued, because she was interested in my contribution and I felt challenged intellectually, because I had to find creative ways of making the content work for me in my context. Throughout the workshop there was a sense of engagement and active interaction with the content. I was trying to make sense of it. The fact that the teacher presented the workshop in the way I would have done it and that she was addressing other issues like getting to know oneself, which is in line with what I feel education should encourage, also contributed to this positive experience. It confirmed what I believe and how I want to go about my teaching.

I am by no means the ideal teacher, but I have changed and grown in positive ways and I am doing things differently from when I started teaching. I have realized that I do not have to dismiss what I have been doing in practice as a teacher, but I need to assess its effectiveness (including who it is affective for and why), refine what I'm doing already, broaden my repertoire of knowledge and methods and be willing and flexible enough to adjust. I am excited about being on the way to becoming a lifelong learner.

Chapter 5 – Interpretation and Recommendations

These stories of change focusing on learning, growth and professional development are all fundamentally about voice – the discovery and rediscovery of voice, the development of increased capacity to listen to one’s own voice and the voices of others, and the expression of self through practice and writing. [I]t is through the telling and retelling of our stories of practice that we construct and reconstruct our understandings of who we are, can create new and more significant versions of ourselves’ and can transform ourselves. Through our stories, we hope that others will hear the sounds and the reverberations of their own voices and will be inspired to tell and retell the stories of their lives also.”

Beattie, 1995:140

The previous chapter in which I explored the different aspects of reflection serves as a background to this chapter in which I shall explain how the use of reflection has influenced my personal and professional growth and development. In this last part of my story I will illustrate themes and patterns which emerged from my story. Further I will try to gain a clearer understanding of how reflection encouraged growth and development in the two areas already mentioned by keeping in mind the following conceptual terms which were developed within Narrative inquiry:

- Image

In my story there seems to be an image of tension between what should be and what was. For example, the teacher I was and the picture of the ideal teacher.

- rules and personal philosophy

Contributory factors to these tensions were my personal rules and my philosophy of education. An example of a rule would be that teachers should be respected.

- cycles

Cycles refer to life cycle and cycles within my work life, for example, the development from an inexperienced student teacher to a more experienced teacher.

- narrative unities

This refers to factors in a person’s life which helps to account for the ways in which people construct the stories they live. In my case there would be a teaching component, as well as a family and social component.

This story of reflection cannot be told, however, without also taking into consideration the other stories that was part of my personal and professional contexts and which influenced the perspective from which I tell my story.

My view of professional development is based on Day's definition. He states that:

Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives.

I see personal development in terms of greater understanding of oneself and one's needs. This leads to changes in the way one views oneself and greater self-acceptance.

Looking back at my entry into teaching I seem to have started my career as a teacher holding tacit assumptions and beliefs about learning and teaching and what the ideal teacher would be like. These were not explored or challenged before I entered the school as a qualified teacher. These assumptions and beliefs were constructed from my own experiences of teachers in my family and those I experienced as a learner and were further entrenched during my training as a teacher.

The process of becoming a reflective practitioner started in the field with my realization that teaching was not what I expected it to be. There was an incongruity between my expectations and the reality of teaching. Initially I explained this by blaming myself. This was debilitating and contributed towards feelings of disillusionment and disappointment. It was also not very useful, because it did not contribute towards change in my classroom practice or an improvement in my situation.

My second strategy was to take matters into my own hands and to think of ways in which I could improve my situation. I decided that the problem was the way I taught and structured my lessons and that this was the result of my inexperience and lack of knowledge. I believed that I could solve the problem by becoming a better teacher in

a technical sense. This meant finding ways of broadening my knowledge of my subject and the range of my teaching skills. I hoped that by becoming a more knowledgeable teacher I would be able to present more interesting lessons. If the lessons were more enjoyable and interesting, I would also gain greater control of the learners in my class. I started reading books and getting ideas from them as to how I could engage the learners to a greater extent. I also asked my head of department for ideas and suggestions and evaluated these against what I was trying to achieve in my practice.

The following pattern emerged and seems to have been present in all the instances where I experienced dissatisfaction in my teaching:

- Awareness of dissatisfaction or incongruity
- Framing of the possible problem(s)
- Identifying the problem
- Thinking of different ways to solve the problem
- Implementing the solution
- Evaluating the effects of the solution

This process is similar to the elements to the reflective process described by Lombard (1996).

With hindsight it would seem that I made changes in my practice after a process of reflecting on the problem and its possible solutions. Reflection seemed to be in the form of introspection and mostly had a technical aim since it was done on my own and aimed at developing the technical skills of teaching. There was some reflection with a personal interest which revolved around my relationship with my learners. I wanted my relationship with the learners in my classes to be different from what I had experienced with my teachers as a learner, but I struggled with the conflict between my desire to create a friendly rapport with the learners and the need to maintain authority and discipline. Although I tried to establish a closer relationship with my learners most of my energy went into trying to stay in control of my classes and on top of learning material. During my first three years as a teacher teaching was about survival and the only solution seemed to be to arm myself with more knowledge and to be more vigilant.

Although I became more knowledgeable regarding the technical skills of teaching during the first three years I still did not find teaching satisfying, because my relationship with the learners was formal and distant. I became a teacher because I wanted to make a difference and I felt this was only possible if I could negotiate a less formal relationship with the learners. New possibilities of relating to children opened up through the modeling of a different way of being by respected colleagues. I observed how these colleagues related to children and also the effects of this way of relating to them. This modeling, coupled with my own underlying dissatisfaction around my relationship with my learners, pushed me to try these ways of relating in my own classroom where they received a positive response from the learners. Reflection regarding my relationship with my learners then seemed to motivate me to look for solutions.

The forms of reflection broadened in the following three years of teaching to include not only introspection, but also replay and rehearsal and enquiry. Reflection was done individually and collaboratively since I had started building up a support network and had started implementing and monitoring what I had discovered through reflection in my classroom practice. Although there was still reflection with a technical and personal interest, reflection with a personal interest occurred much more frequently than in my previous three years of teaching. I did not just reflect on how I could develop the technical skills of teaching, but also on how I could connect what I believed to actions within my classroom. This was especially relevant to how I wanted to be as a teacher and the type of relationships I wanted to form with the learners in my classes. Reflection with a problematic interest also became part of my process of reflection since I was reflecting on issues like how I could adapt the same lessons to different classes and how I could encourage more of my learners to speak English in class.

The result of reflecting on my practice in different ways and out of the need to achieve different aims where my English classes were concerned, was a greater flexibility in my lesson plans and a greater willingness to give learners choices with regard to themes around which lessons were planned. I involved learners more in their own learning and I tried to encourage the development of skills that would equip them for life outside school and not just to enable them to pass exams.

Throughout my teaching career my language classes, both English and Afrikaans, were the places where I felt the most safe and confident to experiment and to try out new ways of being and doing. Many factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, contributed to my willingness to change and to embrace innovation. Intrinsic factors include my feeling of competence and confidence that I could do a good job. I also feel in control in my language classes since a sense of structure is provided by the curriculum. Although I do find this restricting at times, it can also be containing. I need a point of reference from which to work and then I can adjust the structure to suit my needs and that of the learners in my classes. The main extrinsic factors which played a role in being open to change in my practice were support from colleagues and my learners and being exposed to new possibilities for teaching through books and conferences, but mostly from seeing them modeled and experiencing them myself as a student during my studies. It is through reflection that I could start identifying what I needed in order to feel sufficiently empowered to respond positively to change and to put those enabling factors I had control over into place.

Guidance classes, however, were a different matter. The strategies I used to teach and structure my English lessons did not seem to work in my guidance classes. Although I was aware of this I found it really difficult to adapt or change my practice. Many factors played a role in the difficulty I experienced in performing my duty as a Guidance teacher. During my first year as the Guidance teacher I was overwhelmed by all the changes that had taken place in my life both personally and professionally. Other factors which have played a role throughout my time as a Guidance teacher were my difficulty in defining my role, the lack of collegial support, the notion of what constituted guidance which was held by the staff and by learners and my need for structure and control. The extrinsic and intrinsic factors (mentioned above) which support my willingness to take risks and to adapt in my teaching practice were also not present for most of my career as a guidance teacher.

I have not been very successful in my role as a Guidance teacher. Part of the reason for this has been that I found that although I had the knowledge regarding the subject matter, it was more difficult to impart this knowledge to my learners. In the language classes I was the expert, but where guidance was concerned mine was just one of many voices. The learners were more influenced by their families, peers and the media. Since we only saw each other once a week our relationship was also not

developed to a degree where I could become a significant other. Through this process of writing this assignment and the reflection around my practice which this involved I have also discovered that another reason for my problem in adapting my teaching where Guidance is concerned could be the way I view the process of teaching and learning.

My construction of the teaching and learning process and of my role in this process is embedded in a specific approach to education. This approach in turn can be situated within a particular way of viewing reality and how it can be understood, namely positivism. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002:99) this perspective leads to what Paulo Freire (1970) referred to as a 'banking' approach to education. In this approach teaching attempts to deposit knowledge in the learners through the use of direct instruction (Donald et al, 2002:99). The teacher is seen as the conveyer of knowledge and it is her responsibility to see that children learn. Children's performance is seen as a direct reflection of the teaching received.

This approach to teaching is what shaped my assumptions and beliefs. When I started my teaching career this was also the approach which defined the teaching and learning process at the schools where I taught and in the rest of the education system. This approach to teaching and learning contributed to and influenced my classroom practice in several ways. Some of these are the following:

- I tended to take responsibility for both the teaching and the learning in my classes. My belief was that children would learn if they just listened to what I taught.
- Since learning was so dependent on my teaching I had to be fully in control of everything that happened in the classroom.
- All learning was teacher-centred since I was the expert.
- I determined what would be learnt and also how it would be learnt. Learners had very little choice since, as the expert, I knew best.

As a result of the use of reflection I broadened my repertoire of teaching skills and the ways of relating to the learners in my classes. In the first six years of teaching I never, however, questioned my assumptions around teaching and learning and my role in the process. Reflection with a critical interest only started when I was

confronted by other stories regarding the teaching and learning process and the role of the teacher during my studies in educational psychology.

During my studies I was introduced to another way of regarding the teaching and learning process and that was from a constructivistic perspective. From this perspective human beings are seen as active agents who are making meaning of their lives from within and through their social context (Donald et al, 2002:100). Knowledge is then not just passively received, but is actively constructed by people through social interaction (Donald et al, 2002:100). This framework for thinking about teaching and learning has implications in terms of the whole way the teacher structures learning environments and how she teaches. The teacher's role is also redefined from being a conveyer of knowledge to a passive recipient to a facilitator actively working with a learner in order to help that learner to construct his/her own meaning.

This new way of looking at teaching and learning was not just restricted to the Education faculty of the university I attended, but was also becoming the preferred way of looking at education in the whole education system in our country. With the move to a new democracy and the emphasis on human rights it was felt that our education system needed to be changed in order to reflect and encourage these values. Outcomes based education was introduced which is based on constructivistic principles.

The use of critical reflection opened up new possibilities of being a teacher and teaching. It helped me to become more flexible and democratic in my classes. I also became more interested in the knowledge that learners brought into my classroom rather than just wanting to pass on knowledge to them. There was also less pressure on me to be the expert and to know everything.

Although my way of thinking was changing it did not lead to immediate major changes in the way I taught. The process of making my practice more congruent with my beliefs is a continuous and slow one and depends to a large degree on my understanding of what constructivism is and how it is embodied in the teaching and learning process. I am still very much in this process.

My story of professional growth and development must also be seen as part of my story of personal growth and development. Who I am as a teacher is embedded in who I am as a person. My development as a teacher especially with regard to how I related to my learners was influenced by my growth as a person. My professional and personal development is inextricably linked and reciprocal. Growth and development in one area opened up possibilities for growth and development in the other.

For me one aspect of personal development has been the process of being myself in my classroom. Thomas (1995:11-12) gives a very apt description of the dilemma in which I found myself as a teacher. He said the following:

In teaching, it is difficult for the teacher to separate, convincingly and reliably, her self from the professional persona. Teachers are under such an intensity of scrutiny from an audience of psychologically acute observers that the professional persona becomes permeable to their gaze. Some teachers will attempt to inhabit their professional persona to the uttermost, whereas others agree with Paolo Freire on the value of 'being human in the classroom', while for others most teaching involves a continuing shifting from persona to person and back again.

At the beginning of my career this scrutiny made me feel extremely vulnerable. I was still trying to find out not only who I was as a teacher, but also as a person, and I was not sure that I could live up to my own standards as either. Inhabiting the professional persona was then a protective measure against this scrutiny and my own sense of vulnerability, but it left me with a feeling of incongruence. I felt that I was not being real and that this placed a restraint on the depth of relationships I could form with the children in my class. It is important for me to bond with my learners, because it is relationships that give me the emotional energy to want to do things differently and to improve my practice. I am in total agreement with Day's statement that "[t]eachers' emotional commitment and connections to students both positive and negative, energize and articulate everything they do" (1999:49).

My ideal classroom would be a place where "teachers can join with the children they teach in knowing each other better, seeing each other's tasks in the school setting in a realistic light, and helping each other feel stronger and better about themselves" (Oaklander, 1988:312). This would enable both teachers and children to open up to each other as human beings with human problems (Oaklander, 1988:312). The possibility of creating such a classroom environment started to become a reality in, especially, my last two years of teaching. The learners in both my form classes at my

new school were aware of the fact that I was studying part time and that I found it stressful. This knowledge and the fact that they saw that I also worried about things like exams and managing my time properly contributed towards making me human and opened new possibilities for mutual support.

'Being human in the classroom' is a slow and difficult process. It involves taking the risk of being vulnerable and allowing my learners to support me at times. In my case this process was supported by the fact that I had been in therapy. I see therapy as a form of critical reflection since the intention is to question assumptions and beliefs so that perspectives can be changed. All the expectations I had about how things should be and about how I should be were questioned. Understanding myself, my needs and motivation better helped me to be less critical and demanding of myself. It encouraged more taking of risks professionally and personally and contributed to a greater openness to innovation and change.

Professional and personal growth then went hand in hand. When I experienced success in my professional life, my confidence and self-esteem were boosted. This in turn then encouraged a greater willingness to take more risks and to try new things in my classroom. Understanding myself better and becoming more accepting of myself helped me to allow the learners to get to know me as a person and to see beyond my teacher persona. I became more authentic and this left more energy to nurture my learners. Growth in both these areas was then necessary, because the one strengthened the other.

This process, however, did not just happen. It was the result of consciously trying to make sense of teaching/learning and of myself as a teacher and a person. It was through the use of reflection that awareness of problems or incongruity, lead to an investigation and eventually to adaptation or change. I want to agree with Wellington (1991:5) when he says that reflective practice "heralds renewal, reclamation and change" and that it calls for personal and professional transformation.

Research starts and ends in the midst of stories that are being lived, told and retold. Although these are the last comments of this assignment my story of becoming a reflective practitioner is far from over. In this assignment a glimpse was given of the start of my journey, what compelled me to become reflective about my teaching and how becoming a reflective practitioner has contributed to my professional and personal growth and development.

Through the use of reflection both while I was still actively teaching and in the writing this assignment I have benefited in the following ways:

- I have become more aware of my beliefs and assumption around the process of learning and teaching and of my role as a teacher. Through reflection and in the telling of my story, I was able to start questioning these assumptions and beliefs and to start deciding if they contributed to my hopes and dreams for teaching and ultimately benefited my learners. I have also become much more aware of where my beliefs originated, which includes my biography and experience and also the context which shaped them.
- I have also gained greater awareness of who I am as a person and a teacher and what my needs are both professionally and personally. This has helped me to ask for what I need and to structure my context in such a way that I am supported in my efforts to offer quality education.
- I have realized again that teaching is always evolving. A teacher is always in the process of trying to improve her practice. Because of this fact teachers have to become lifelong learners. Change is part of our lives. If I am to create learning environments in which all learners will benefit I have to keep up with developments in education and keep reviewing whether my practice is helping learners to learn.
- I have renewed my commitment to making a difference in children's lives by trying to create a classroom where all their diverse needs are met.
- By wrestling with the problems I have experienced as a teacher I have started to take responsibility for coming up with my own solutions which fit my situation. In the process I have begun valuing and evaluating the knowledge that I have already to a greater extent. This has contributed to a greater feeling of empowerment since I feel that I can act to make a difference and that I have some measure of control in my professional life.

- By coming up with my own solutions I have had to form networks with teachers, parents, learners and others who could assist me in the creation of optimal learning environments.
- I have also become more open to and less threatened by change and innovation.

In this assignment the following were described and/or explained:

- My research puzzle, objectives, relevance and motivation of the study were explained.
- The research process, that is, research design and methodology.
- A literature review exploring reflection.
- My story.
- Findings, interpretation and recommendations.

My study revolved around the possibility that a teacher who becomes a reflective practitioner could feel more empowered and could be more effective in practice. In my experience this was indeed the case. Other areas that could be explored could include learners' experience of teachers who are in the process of becoming reflective practitioners, as well as the establishment of support groups for teachers to assist them to make greater use of reflection for personal and professional development.

Since I wrote about my own experience this study was not meant to offer any form of generalization in the traditional sense. The aim was not to prescribe, but to open up dialogue and new possibilities where teachers' practice is concerned.

From my experience of using reflection I believe that it can be a useful tool to nurture professional and personal growth by contributing towards the empowerment of teachers and to greater effectiveness in classroom practice. This is, however, not a process that teachers can get involved in without support from the management within the school. Time and space will have to be allocated for teachers to participate actively in their own development. Networks with colleagues and others who can contribute to teachers' professional development also need to be established and encouraged. It is my firm belief that encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners will help them to nurture their "inner expert" and this in turn could be the

support needed to help teachers to continue to provide quality education in a changing world.

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