

>> SOUTH AFRICAN TEACHERS EXPLORING TEACHER AUTHORITY IN A NARRATIVE SELF-STUDY PROJECT

“For, the Future of Our Young Children Lies in Our Hands”

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Introduction

Most teachers who are currently working in South Africa attended school and underwent their initial teaching training in the context of the racist and repressive Apartheid education system (1948 to 1990-94). In this system, learners and teachers were grouped into separate ‘Black,’ ‘Coloured,’ ‘Indian’ and ‘White’ schools and the bulk of funding and resources went to White schools, while the other schools were actively disadvantaged in countless respects. The training and management of teachers was explicitly intended to produce and control servants of the state who would strengthen the unjust Apartheid regime through the unquestioning and efficient delivery of a racially differentiated curriculum and the enforcement of absolute obedience in the classroom, usually through the rigorous application of corporal punishment.

Despite major education policy changes since 1994, the destructive legacies of the Apartheid education system continue to affect the professional experiences of many South African teachers. A challenge for teacher educators in post-Apartheid South Africa is to work with practising teachers to recollect and re-examine experiences from the past in order to inform engagement with current challenges in schools.

In this paper, I give an account of a ‘Teacher Self-Study Project’ that I facilitated (as preliminary fieldwork for my doctoral research in the field of curriculum and academic teacher education) with a group of teachers studying for postgraduate Honours degrees in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In developing and facilitating the project, my intention was to offer the scholar-teachers an opportunity to engage in a process of inquiring into ‘the stories of their teaching selves’ through discussion, reading and writing. The paper highlights how, as they re-examined their own past and current school-based experiences, the project participants began to explore the issue of teacher authority in South Africa.

The Teacher Self-Study Project

The Teacher Self-Study Project took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal over six, weekly, two-hour sessions. The 10 participants, six women (Theresa, Florence, Malara, Mangoato, Londy and Thabi) and four men (Bongani, Philasande, Sfiso and Vishnu) ranged in age from 29 to 46 years. According to Apartheid-era racial classification, nine of the scholar-teachers were Black and one was Indian. The participants’ home languages included English and the South African languages of Sesotho and IsiZulu. (The medium of study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal is English.) All the participants were practising teachers. Six were secondary school teachers and the other four were primary school teachers. Three participants were teaching in rural areas and the other seven in urban areas. The communities that their schools served ranged between low and middle-income groups. Despite post-Apartheid education policy changes, the bulk of the project participants were teaching in schools formerly designated as Black that had—like the majority of previously Black schools in South Africa—remained largely mono-racial in terms of the Apartheid classifications of race.

In designing the Teacher Self-Study Project, I drew on two areas in the education field. The first is *narrative inquiry*, which centres on using narrative as a way of making sense of the lived, contextualised experiences of teachers, learners and researchers in educational settings. The project design was underpinned by my conception of narrative (informed by the work of Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000 and others) as a mode of thought that understands the self as a protagonist that is situated amongst the storylines, settings and characters of an unfolding life story and yet is able to take action within and in response to those narrative conditions. My intention was for the project participants to make use of memory and story to bring the texture, depth and complexity of significant episodes from their teaching lives into immediate, felt experience so as to discern patterns

of personal perceptions and reactions over time. The aim of this narrative inquiry was not only for the scholar-teachers to recognise and make some sense of those patterns, but also for them to look at them critically and creatively in order to open up possibilities for informed, thoughtful teaching practice in the future.

The project is also informed by *self-study in teaching and teacher education*, which involves teachers and teacher educators examining their own teaching to inform future practice. In keeping with the principles of self-study in teaching and teacher education (as articulated in, among others, Hamilton et al. 1998, Loughran and Russell 2002), I aimed to make the Teacher Self-Study Project as collaborative and open as possible by holding group discussions throughout the process and by giving participants the opportunity to read and talk about their writing within the group. I also hoped that the writing tasks (comprising reflective journal writing, 'memory work' in the form of a 'letter to a teacher' and interpretive autobiography in the form of a 'teacher self-story'), the discussions and reference to texts such as Mitchell & Weber (1999) and Ritchie and Wilson (2000) would promote an ongoing process of "reframing" (Loughran, 2002, 243) by encouraging participants to re-evaluate their understandings of teaching practice and to look at the storylines of their teaching lives from a variety of vantage points.

When planning the project, I realised that it was essential for me to take into account the personal and sensitive nature of narrative self-study. With this in mind, I tried to structure the activities in such a way as to establish a supportive and constructive atmosphere within the group. I hoped that the journals and the group discussions would provide opportunities for the participants to raise any problems or concerns that might emerge during the narrative self-study process. In addition, I arranged to be available for individual consultations and found out about where to refer participants for outside professional support if necessary. To try to ensure confidentiality, I decided to advise group members only to reveal that which they felt comfortable with disclosing and to consider others' rights to privacy.

In this paper, my account of the Teacher Self-Study Project centres on the two sessions of the project in which the participants presented their written coursework to the group. First, I discuss the fourth session of the project, in which the scholar-teachers read and discussed letters that they had written (but not sent) to teachers whom they particularly remembered from their schooldays. In this 'letter to a teacher' session, the project participants came to two key shared realisations: one was of an entrenched, abiding manifestation of teacher authority in South African schools as the repressive, harsh treatment of learners, and the other was that the manner in which teacher authority is exercised has a profound and lasting effect on learners. I then look at the sixth and final session, in which the participants presented their teaching autobiographies. These 'teacher self-stories' show how, in the awareness of the insights gained in the 'letter to a teacher' session, the participants used the medium of teacher autobiography to re-examine the experiences and contexts that fed into and positioned their teaching practice and to think about how they were moved to act as teachers. From there, they began to build personal, guiding conceptions of teacher authority as power gained from informed, thoughtful practice and as power to make a positive difference in the lives of the learners in their care.

'Letter to a teacher'

In this session, each project participant read her/his 'letter to a

teacher' for the group. After each letter, I asked for observations and questions. And once all the letters had been read, we had a general discussion on the ideas and themes that had emerged. The scholar-teachers also reflected on the session in their journals.

Although the participants had been given the choice of writing about a positive or negative memory of a teacher, they had all decided to write about negative memories. In the discussion, it was agreed that this was not because the group members had no positive memories of their teachers, but rather because the negative memories had had the most powerful and enduring effect on them. As Philasande said, "Though most teachers have done good things to learners, bad things last in the heart of the learners."

The letters tell stories of emotional and physical humiliation and hurt at the hands of teachers. Since most of the letters describe incidents in which the participants felt that they had been inappropriately or unfairly punished by a teacher, much of the discussion in the session focused on the need for teachers to think carefully about why and how they assert their authority over learners. We talked about how teachers are charged with the twin responsibilities of maintaining order in the classroom and protecting learners from harm. Many of the scholar-teachers considered their former teachers' disciplinary strategies to be abusive rather than educative. They also felt that the maltreatment of children in the name of upholding teacher authority had been widespread in Apartheid South Africa. In his journal, Sfiso describes how the letters led him to think about this history of South African teachers' mistreatment of learners:

From the incidents [described in the letters] it became evident the amount of torture and oppression that learners have undergone in the schooling system of this country. One more thing that I noticed is that the majority of learners were in one way or another abused in school-life in this country. In a group of eleven, no one could not write or tell the story of abuse in school. One is tempted to question the position of the departments of education in as far as the rights of learners/children during that time. It seems as if learners were not given a chance to learn under conducive atmospheres, they were not liberated at all and they were not protected against unfair treatment in schools. (Sfiso)

The discussion and journal entries also revealed that, in the scholar-teachers' experience, the expression of teacher authority through the harsh and degrading treatment of learners is still common in post-Apartheid South African schools:

Most of our letters were about bad memories....Through our discussion, we find that these incidents are still happening. We also admitted that we sometimes treat a learner in a negative manner unaware. (Londy)

The worst thing for me that came out of the reading of the letters is that as teachers we get away with a lot. The fact that we are aware of these things but yet we do them and also allow other teachers to do them in front of us is even worse. We are elevated by the community and this makes teachers get away with a lot of wrong thing. (Thabi)

Teachers' use of physical punishment to assert authority in the classroom is very prominent in the letters. For example, Bongani's letter tells how, in 1988 in an urban secondary school, he made the mistake of not paying attention while his Religious Education teacher was reading to the class. His teacher responded by slapping him on the face with both hands more than 10 times and shouting, "You are not

concentrating here, yet your father is busy hitting children down there" (his father was a teacher in a nearby school). And in Theresa's letter, she recounts her experience at a rural primary school in 1978 when she and two friends truanted because they were afraid of the teacher who was taking their class while their own teacher was away. The substitute teacher decided to send three boys from the class to fetch the girls and told the boys to beat them if necessary to make them return to school. Luckily, the boys did not wish to hurt their classmates. Instead, they proposed beating the teacher and burning the school, but were dissuaded by the girls. When the girls eventually returned to class, the teacher beat them severely.

The participants talked about how, although corporal punishment had been made illegal in South Africa in 1996, in their experience it was still very prevalent in schools. All the group members had had experience of receiving corporal punishment at school and many felt it had jeopardised the physical and emotional well-being of learners. Participants also maintained that the use of corporal punishment was not an effective teaching strategy because it demotivated learners and alienated them from their teachers. In his letter, Philasande comments on how unconstructive he found his experiences of receiving corporal punishment:

Corporal punishment at that time was used severely at schools and I ended up being the victim of punishment. Having been punished all the time, I ended up being stubborn and not fearing stick and not working to my capacity.

The discussion also focused on the destructive emotional impact of being shouted at and belittled by angry teachers. This is starkly illustrated in Thabi's letter in which she recounts how, at an urban secondary school in 1992, she and her classmates were reprimanded by a teacher for making noise. He singled out Thabi, who was self-conscious about her weight, and said, "Some people should not be drawing so much attention to themselves by talking so much, especially people like you Thabi. You're the last one who should want people looking at her." When Thabi tried to protest about his treatment of her, he accused her of "talking back" to him and of influencing other learners to do the same. To punish her, he took her to the staffroom where he and five other teachers took turns to ridicule her. In our discussion, Thabi said that in her experience cruel verbal chastisement by teachers had an even more damaging effect than physical punishment. In her letter, she explains, "That kind of humiliation was worse than any beating as it destroyed my soul." Bongani agreed that he was more distressed by the remarks that his teacher made to him than by the blows that he received from him. This theme of the harmful consequences of teachers asserting their authority with unkind words is explored in many of the letters and journal entries:

The sarcastic remarks said (which at times one might not be aware of the impact they have on the receiver) are never forgotten. (Florence)

Emotional abuse is so hard to take but yet so easy to give. It lasts forever in our minds even when you are no longer a child but a grown person. (Thabi)

The group members made some suggestions for more constructive ways of maintaining order at school. Theresa and Vishnu both highlighted the importance of involving learners in processes of classroom management. Theresa explained how she and her learners decided on classroom rules together. Vishnu described how he worked to keep his learners' interest focused on what was happening in class by making sure that they were all actively involved in the learning process. A

number of scholar-teachers stressed the importance of being fair, consistent and thinking very carefully about responses to learners' behaviour. Bongani advised that it was important to "look before you leap" and to treat learners equally to avoid feelings of victimisation. All the group members agreed that teachers needed to be very careful and tactful in order not to damage learners' self-esteem and demotivate them. This concern is evident in many of the letters:

In my class, I try by all means to create a positive atmosphere for every learner. I make sure that every learner feels at home, secure and comfortable in my class. I don't want to punish my learners by [mocking them] or using vulgar language. (Malara)

I never talk down to my learners. I am always watchful and careful of the things that could hurt any of my learners. (Thabi)

As well as stimulating deliberation on negative and positive expressions of teacher authority, the experience of writing, listening to and discussing the letters generated awareness of the immense power that is wielded through the exercise of teacher authority over learners. Participants talked and wrote about how teachers' deeds and words affect learners profoundly and remain a felt reality for them for many years. Florence's closing journal entry draws attention to this feature of the session: "What I learned from this session and will or want to remember is that what we as teachers do to our learners especially if negative, it will stay with them forever." This point was demonstrated for the group by their own vivid recollections of the episodes they described in their letters. In her letter, Londy tells her former teacher, "It was about thirty-two years ago, but the incident is still as fresh in my mind as something that happened yesterday."

The session illustrated how the group members felt that their former teachers' behaviour had affected the course of their lives. Many of the participants wrote and talked about wanting to drop out of school because of negative experiences with teachers. And, although they all felt fortunate in having had parents who insisted that they remain in school, they spoke about other learners they had been to school with or had taught who had left school early because of maltreatment by teachers. In her journal, Thabi muses, "After the letters, I wonder how many of the school dropouts are direct results of our behaviour."

In addition, participants maintained that their teachers' harmful conduct had hindered their achievement at school and limited their educational choices. In his letter, Philasande explains, "From that day, I lost trust with teachers and my performance dropped in the classroom." As Thabi pointed out in the discussion, it was striking that many of the stories told in the letters involved discouraging encounters with Mathematics teachers. One example is Mangoato's letter, which tells the story of a Mathematics class in a rural secondary school in the 1970s. Her teacher hit and shouted at her classmates who had not performed to his liking in that morning's class. Although Mangoato had had no difficulty with that day's work, the teacher was determined that no one should escape his punishment. He scrutinised her past tests, then beat, and berated her for an incorrect answer that he found there. Florence and Mangoato, in particular, felt that their hurtful experiences in Mathematics classrooms had undermined their future performance in Mathematics and played a significant part in their subsequent decisions not to continue with the subject in higher grades.

A number of the group members talked about how they believed that their teachers' negative words and actions had damaged their self-esteem and confidence. In her letter, Thabi tells her former teacher how she had to struggle to undo the

emotional harm inflicted by him:

I just wanted to tell you that you broke and wounded me and you took a lot of my self-esteem with you in that one incident. It took me a long time to know that other people's opinions of me do not define who I am. I had to learn to love and appreciate myself.

Mangoato's letter explains how she felt that her teacher's harsh physical and verbal chastisement had done permanent harm to her self-concept and still affected her as an adult:

This memory affects me in my workplace as a teacher, since I ended up being a shy person. At times, I feel I am a pathetic person to be involved in arguments, especially where there is a misunderstanding among teachers.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the letters and group discussion revealed anger, bitterness and even hatred towards the teachers in the learners' memories. In her journal, Londy draws attention to the "anger shown in the words used in the letters" and explains how "even whilst one reads his/her letter we can still feel the pain that people went through." Sfiso's journal entry also indicates the impression that the loathing and hurt conveyed in the letters made on him:

It is surprising that after thirty...and sometimes more years, many letters contain much animosity even today....To me these letters sounded as warnings in that if we do not refrain from this bad habit, we are likely to breed the same hatred from our learners.

A number of the scholar-teachers talked about forgiveness for their teachers. Theresa said that through revisiting and re-examining the painful memory described in her letter she had been able to free herself of the bitterness that she had carried for many years and that although she did not excuse her former teacher's conduct, she had now forgiven her. Thabi, however, said that she did not think that she would ever be able to pardon her teacher. The participants all agreed that, even if they had not been able to forgive their teachers for what they had done, they had been able to look at how they could use these negative experiences to inform their own teaching practice. This is also evident in the letters:

Apparently, the incident is of tremendous importance to me because I always bear in mind that I do not want to do what was painful to me during my schooling days to my learners. (Mangoato)

The participants conceded that their former teachers might not have been aware of the extent to which the events described in the letters would affect the learners in their care. Group members also acknowledged that they and their colleagues at school often acted without thinking about the possible far-reaching consequences for learners. They felt that the most useful lesson they had learnt from their former teachers' actions was that, as Florence states in her letter, "the future of our young children lies in our hands." The scholar-teachers agreed that in the course of this 'letter to a teacher' experience, they had become more aware that they needed to live their teaching lives in the daily consciousness that the manner in which they exercised their authority over learners would have a deep and lasting, sometimes life-changing, effect.

'Teacher self-story'

During our final session, each person presented her/his teacher autobiography to the group. The group members listened

intently as each self-story was read. They seemed awed by the depth and honesty of the stories and did not make many comments, but those that were made were supportive and perceptive. There was no time in the session for a general discussion or for making journal entries. Mangoato and Theresa both became tearful while reading their narratives and others had to finish reading for them. After presenting her teacher autobiography, Theresa talked about the group feeling like a "family"—a space to share and listen.

The teacher self-stories contain anecdotes from and deliberations on the participants' schooldays, their initial and further teacher education and their ongoing teaching experience. The narratives also provide details about the political and socio-economic contexts in which the scholar-teachers lived, studied and worked.

In their teacher autobiographies, the participants revisit the theme of punitive, repressive manifestations of teacher authority in South African schools. Through her narrative, Florence conveys her anger at having felt dominated and silenced by teachers throughout her schooling: "In fact the experiences that I went through taught me that no matter what is done or said to you as a child, it has never taken seriously and you can never ever question things." In Thabi's self-story, she considers how her experiences of unjust and damaging treatment by teachers were fostered by the Bantu Education system in which, she observes, "as a Black child...life was about obedience," physical punishment was seen as a way of shaping children into "the desired adult that was needed by [the] society" and children had no rights.

The self-stories stress that the culture of domination and subordination that characterised the Apartheid education system subjugated teachers as well as learners:

During our times in the 1970s, children and teachers were kept in silence in most of the schools, especially Black schools. There were no such things as children's rights. You were sometimes punished for no reason, but you would simply shut up and say nothing to prove your innocence....It was the same thing with teachers. They were expected to comply with whatever rules of school and more especially those of the principal. (Londy)

Many accounts of the participants' experiences at teachers' training college and in the workplace illustrate how those student teachers and teachers who dared to defy the authority of those above them in the college and school hierarchies were heavily sanctioned. These anecdotes also reveal how young student teachers and newly qualified teachers were often humiliated and undermined by those more senior to them. Londy sees the misuse of authority in schools and teacher training colleges as part of a long-standing pattern of behaviour: "These kinds of situations/contexts were like being inherited or were from generation to generation....During those days, it was like, 'I was badly treated so I am going to take revenge by ill-treating the next person to come.'" Through his self-story, Sfiso examines his own conduct as a teacher and deputy principal and concludes that his educational and professional experiences led him to become part of this cycle of punitive and sometimes abusive expression of teacher authority: "I remained the reflection of my previous teachers who were unfortunately very harsh and unsympathetic towards the learners." He observes that his behaviour was accepted and reinforced by the culture of the school in which he worked. Sfiso goes on to describe how the self-study project engendered in him a new awareness of the possible negative consequences of his actions: "I started looking at the amount of damage I have done in terms of child abuse."

In their self-stories, the scholar-teachers welcome the post-Apartheid policy focus on justice and human rights in schools,

but many express their frustration at still having to witness learners and teachers being subjected to demeaning and damaging treatment. Their narratives draw attention to how hard it is for individual teachers to intervene in entrenched, destructive patterns of behaviour in authoritarian school cultures. And they emphasise that the changes in official expectations of teacher roles can present difficulties for teachers who were educated in a system in which *"corporal punishment was the weapon used to inculcate self-discipline and responsibility in learners"* (Vishnu)

The teacher autobiographies also look at how the culture of strict control and repression in schools meant that, in terms of the curriculum, teacher authority was viewed as the efficient delivery of prescribed content to passive learners. The scholar-teachers explain that *"teachers were used as vessels to receive information"* (Philsande) from the education departments and *"the teacher was the only giver of information"* (Vishnu) in the classroom. Although, Thabi's self-story points to the exception of her secondary school English teacher who sparked her interest in reading and helped to build her confidence and independence as a learner.

The narratives indicate that the participants did not feel empowered by their initial teacher education to challenge prevailing notions of teaching and learning. Bongani recounts how, as a novice teacher, he wanted to introduce innovative teaching methods, but felt so unskilled that he resorted to copying the methods of his former teachers. He goes on to explain how unhelpful he found subsequent in-service training for the new post-Apartheid curriculum. Bongani maintains that his further study at university has assisted him to develop participatory, learner-centred strategies, but he also draws attention to the difficulty of using these approaches when *"the school culture and learners were used to the traditional ways of teaching and learning."* Other participants also describe how attempts to change their approach to teaching are often met with disapproval by fellow teachers and by school managers and parents. An exception to this is Malara's account of how, after completing her initial teacher training, she began work as an assistant teacher to a more experienced colleague who gave her invaluable help and support in developing strategies to motivate and affirm each learner in their class of 112.

From their exploration of how oppressive and damaging conceptions of teacher authority in South African schools continue to feed into and situate their teaching work, the scholar-teachers move to set out alternative visions of teacher authority to illuminate paths for future teaching practice. In some of the teacher biographies, the participants explain their guiding conception of teacher authority in terms of power gained from informed, self-reflective practice. Philsande concludes his narrative by outlining the question of teacher authority that he wishes to explore in his teaching and his further study at university: *"What is a good teacher? Is it the teacher who is willing to receive information? Or is that the one who observes, critiques, and analyses the situation?"* At the heart of Bongani's teacher autobiography is his realisation that, through his ongoing struggle to *"be one of the best teachers,"* he has come to find great satisfaction in his profession and has begun to build a sense of teacher authority that is founded on ongoing self-evaluation and development. In Londy's self-story, she emphasises how the narrative self-study process has helped her to recognise and affirm her commitment to thoughtful teaching: *"I have now learned to reflect in my own teaching. I'm also trying my best to have my learners too to reflect on my teaching, although it is not easy because they are not used to that."*

The other vision of authoritative teaching that is evident in the self-stories centres on authority as power to take compassionate, constructive action in schools. In Mangoato's

and Theresa's narratives, they explain that, by revisiting their memories of how they, as learners from low-income households, were demoralised and maltreated by some teachers and encouraged and assisted by others, they have become even more determined to make a positive difference in the lives of disadvantaged learners in their school communities. Thabi's autobiography indicates that her self-study has made her more conscious of the extent to which the legacy of the Bantu Education system continues to disadvantage Black learners in South Africa. She explains how, drawing on her own positive and negative educational experiences, she will work to build her learners' self-esteem, and to bring the issues surrounding them, such as HIV/AIDS, into the classroom. In Florence's narrative, she voices her support for the right of learners to be acknowledged as valuable individuals who have important ideas and opinions to contribute. Malara and Vishnu both discuss how the narrative self-study process has made them more aware of the importance of using teacher authority to implement participatory, just practices in the classroom, even though this can be difficult to do in complex school environments. And in Sfiso's self-story, he describes how, through narrative self-study, he has come to realise that teacher authority can be viewed in terms of learner protection rather than abuse. Sfiso commits himself to applying that knowledge to his own practice and also, in his role as a deputy principal, to endeavour to *"ensure, with the help of the Education Act of 1996 of course, that teachers do not abuse the learners."* Sfiso finishes his teacher narrative by advocating the use of self-study in teacher education in South Africa so as to *"avoid the repetition of what happened to millions of learners."*

Conclusion

The participants' written and spoken contributions during the Teacher Self-Study Project indicated that they found it a beneficial and challenging experience. Some participants suggested that the project, which had consisted of six two-hour sessions, should have run for longer as more time was needed to engage fully in the narrative self-study process, particularly the writing activities. A number of participants also proposed that more South African teachers be given opportunities to practise narrative self-study.

Looking back on the project experience, I believe that the scholar-teachers and I were, on the whole, successful in establishing an environment in which each group member felt comfortable, supported and respected. Although many painful and sensitive memories and experiences did emerge and two participants were moved to tears while reading their teacher autobiographies, I would interpret the release of those tears as a sign of the trust in the group and the narrative self-study process. In his concluding journal entry for the project, Bongani (who had initially been worried that he would not be able to recall past experiences clearly enough to engage in self-study) considers the process of memory work and the potential value of revisiting unpleasant memories:

It is initially difficult to think or write about yourself. But when memories come back, the pages become small. There are memories that are both painful and difficult to remember. The memories and what we find difficult or painful to remember may indicate the kind of teachers we are.

Theresa, one of those who wept when she read her teacher autobiography, draws attention to how the backing of the group and guidance from its facilitator assisted her in her self-study process:

This reflective journey has not been a simple exercise. It has been filled with obstacles such as fear, uncertainty, cowardice and weakness (emotional). However, through the encouragement, understanding, gentleness and expertise of the tutor and support from colleagues I was able to deal with those obstacles and realised my potential and willpower.

Thabi stresses that individual agency and responsibility are also important in the narrative self-study process: *I enjoyed the way the lectures were handled. We were given the opportunity to lead in our own learning and have control over how we learn and understand different issues.*

The scholar-teachers' final journal entries reveal a heightened appreciation of the value of recollecting and re-examining past experiences in order to understand and inform current teaching practices:

When I look back at the sessions we have had on this module, I realise that I have learned a lot about myself as a person and as a teacher. I started out with the idea that who I am only has to do with my personal efforts to be where I am. I never realised that some of the decisions that I made for myself came from my experiences. (Thabi)

There were so many experiences that came to light that I had never taken time to think about or reflect on. One of the most significant memories or experiences was my schooling years.... The project allowed me to analyse my experiences and to see how they fit into the present situation. (Vishnu)

The journal entries also underline the importance of intervening critically and creatively in habitual patterns of teaching practice so as to generate wider possibilities for future work:

I now look at things differently. (Londy)

In this module, I collected so many techniques and better skills to approach learners. (Malara)

I have started to be more observant of the things I see and also careful of the things I say. This I do not only with the learners but also with everybody I come across. (Thabi)

I can proudly say that the self-study project has made me a better teacher. (Vishnu)

Whether or not the insights outlined in these closing journal entries will or can actually translate into measurable changes in teaching practice is not a question that I can answer with certainty at this point. But, I would propose that through the narrative self-study process, each scholar-teacher did succeed in constructing a personal, experientially based conception of teacher authority that could give her/him a sense of orientation and direction for future teaching work.

Of course, it is essential to acknowledge that the individual teacher's work takes place within a school community and her/his vision of authoritative teaching has to be tempered by an understanding of the complexity of school environments. The importance of support from and interaction with members of school communities was emphasised by the scholar-teachers throughout the project. A number of participants talked about wanting to share what they were learning through narrative self-study with their colleagues at school. Nevertheless, there was also awareness that self-study could actually make one's professional life more difficult because other people might feel threatened by new ideas or ways of working. Although more time for the project may have enabled us to look more deeply into this tension between individual teacher intentions

and deep-rooted patterns of school life, I do not feel that this is something that could have been completely resolved. Understandings of teacher authority gained through the Teacher Self-Study Project will need to be negotiated daily in classrooms and staffrooms and will evolve through a process of interaction with others and in responding to situations as they arise in schools.

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