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## **Reflections on the Development of a Black African Male Educator and Gifts of Doctoral Thesis Writing**

Jerome Thamsanqa Gumede

### **Abstract**

This article is an answer to my central questions of my doctoral research: Why do I do things the way I do? What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life? (Gumede, 2011) The paper aims to give hope to prospective researchers who are struggling with research. The message it aims to impart is that life after completing my research project opened my mind and opportunities in life. Demirbag (2015) refers to this realization as: "Gifts of the Doctoral Process" ...a journey of self-discovery. The opportunity to reflect on my journey in research is emotionally and rationally rewarding. It has also given me the opportunity to improve my thinking and writing skills.

This paper is a reflection, after action, and looks at the benefits of doing research through a process of reflective thinking, a part of a critical thinking process referring specifically to the process of analyzing and making judgments about what has happened. This article presents reflective thinking about the value of my completed doctoral research through an abstract, an introduction, Brown and McNiff's questions, my thesis' conclusion, my learner-educator viewpoints and a conclusion to reflect on what I have done in my research and looking at the gifts of doctoral research writing.

**Keywords: Apartheid, Auto-Ethnography; Development; Qualitative Research; Reflective thinking.**

## Introduction

I believe in what Frankl (2014) states in that ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of life is, but rather must recognise that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible. My research was my response and responsibility towards the questions of life.

I started writing and doing my research in 2005. Little did I know about the challenges I was to face but the results of the struggle – that is, overcoming challenges of doctoral research as they are found in Gumede (2017) – were sweeter than anything that I know. Research and thesis writing are rewarding aspects incomparable to any of my previous learning experiences.

My doctoral thesis was a product of four research methods, that is:

1. Auto-Ethnography focus: Cultural context research design
2. Self-Study focus: Practice/ improvement research design,
3. Narrative Inquiry focus
4. Story research design and Educational Theory focus: as an explanation of own educational influence in own and others learning – in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work (Whitehead 2008, p. 104).

This paper is an extract of my experience after my research and thesis writing. The article begins with an introduction that presents the journey and the pleasures of the finished research project trek that is the writing of my doctoral research thesis. The paper provides responses to Brown's and McNiff's questions that are reflective questions to which I responded when I reflected about the value of my doing doctoral research, to reflect on what I did in my doctoral research. The responses are followed by an assertion that: I believe that other people should attempt this kind of study because it is challenging, worth doing, and it unravels inert potential. (Gumede, 2011, p.300)

I then offer my views about education based on my teaching and learning. These are my viewpoints that are derived from my education experience as a learner-educator. I finally provide a conclusion, which outlines my journey through the article.

## The Abstract Of My Thesis

I present my abstract as a means of giving my reader an idea of my thesis. My thesis sets out to demonstrate the influences on the personality of a Black African Male Educator – specifically mine – as I enquire: 'Why do I do things the way I do?' and 'What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life?'

I have addressed these questions from a self-study perspective, using narrative enquiry, Living Theory research methods and Auto-Ethnography. I have written this thesis aware that I lived the first thirty-seven years of my life under the potentially personality

deforming oppression of apartheid, and that I have conducted my study and written my thesis in the context of the HIV&AIDS pandemic.

In creating my own 'living-theory' philosophy, I look at my epistemology – How do I know what/that I know? My ontology – Who am I? Who am I becoming? What do I believe? And my axiology – What do I value? In creating my own 'living-theory'(Whitehead, 2008), I examine the influences, which have informed my personality development and that of my research participants.

The originality of the contribution of this thesis to the academy is to demonstrate the influence of my personal origin and naming, carer/nanny and family, childhood experiences and learning, sport and sport instructors on my personality development. In addition, the thesis highlights the usefulness of forms of knowledge – herding and *induku* (stick fighting and all the educational value it promotes in herd boys – that have not been explicitly declared as useful and included formally in education (Gumede, 2011). To this end, I demonstrate the connections that exist between, *induku*, herding, work, community involvement and education as influential in personality development. I use my personal beliefs and values – principally *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukuhlonipha* (respect) – and the Critical Cross Field Outcomes that are part of the Republic of South Africa Curriculum from grade 1 to PhD as outcomes that have to be attained as teaching and learning takes place to demonstrate the relationship between these values, outcomes, my personal account and the development of my human personality.

I look at the implications of beliefs and values for education. I review the Republic of South Africa's National Curriculum Statement in Life Orientation Grades 10–12. I suggest ways in which the Beliefs and Values demonstrated and examined in this thesis, and Critical Cross Field Outcomes can be incorporated in Community Service Integrated Projects that can help learners to make their beliefs and values explicit in their learning, all to the end of influencing values-informed personal development (Gumede, 2011).

## **Robert Brown And Jean McNiff's Questions**

I use an adapted version of Brown and McNiff's (2008) questions to reflect on what I have done in my research thesis: *An Auto-Ethnographic Enquiry: Critical Reflection on the Influences in the Development of a Black African Male Educator*. (Gumede, 2011)

### **What did I do?**

In my study, I have asked and attempted to answer the questions: "Why do I behave the way I do?" and "What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life?" In my responses to my questions, I have accounted for who I am as a Black African Male Educator as a result of the influences of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my carer, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming in my life, in spite of the fact that I lived the first thirty seven years of my life under the potentially destructive and deforming oppression of the apartheid regime in South Africa. For example, the effect of Group Areas Act of 1950 that separated people from other people that they had lived with for years because of their race. This separation of people due to their race had both emotional and rational effects. People that were moved were not given enough

time to relocate and not given land to occupy. People's homes were demolished and their belongings were left in the open area. People's belongings were stolen or damaged. Any resistance would be met with arrests or being shot at by the police or the army.

I have also interacted with and reflected on the accounts given by a number of *induku* performers of their understanding of *induku*, and its role in their personality development. I conducted this aspect of my research in rural areas between 12 and 50 kilometers from the small town of Port Shepstone in KwaZulu-Natal Republic of South Africa. My participants are former herd boys who are now educators, counselors, *induna* (headman), an incapacity declared policeman, retired labourers and a female that was an ex-herd girl, a housewife and now a pensioner. My participants are *isiZulu* speakers, and most have little or no formal education except three educators from Mthusi High School in the Shobeni area. For all my participants, this was the first time that they had taken part in an academic research project, and they were all excited about their participation. I have analysed all our accounts using my beliefs and values and the critical cross field outcomes. Throughout, I have kept the criteria for rigour in mind. Criteria for rigour are research tools that we, my fellow researchers and I, developed in collaboration in 2003. I name and explain the use of criteria for rigour as tools for authenticating my narrative as academic writing.

To assist my reader who is not an *isiZulu* speaker, I wrote *isiZulu* words and an English equivalent if there is any. I further provided a glossary of those terms that I think will be difficult to understand with no explanation of their meaning. In each chapter I provided an introduction, context of the chapter with an embedded analysis and give a conclusion that explains what I did in the chapter.

I have provided a DVD, which includes my *isithakazelo*, my genealogy, photographs of significant places and people, and some songs and music, which have significance for me.

### **Why did I do it?**

I have accounted for my experiences and reflected and analysed in this way because I believe that the stories of researchers' lives are more than 'just stories'. I believe that because, when human beings tell their stories, they relive many of their more significant experiences, they rediscover their values, they reconnect with significant people in their lives – both those who have passed on and those still alive, and – in some very important ways – they discover themselves, and the whole process can result in personal(ity) growth and healing (Gumede, 2011, p. 117). The visits to graveyards had no meaning to me before my father's death, but the deaths of my loved ones recently have assisted me to understand the meaning behind visits to graveyard/cemeteries. I have found a healing effect in talking my troubles through at the family graveyard.

### **What happened?**

I found that as I told my story of the influence of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my career, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming in my life, all these experiences came back to life in me. I remembered more clearly, saw in my mind the events I was writing about. I heard the voices of the people in my stories. I not only remembered the facts – the days, the times, the places and the people – but I also remembered the feelings, the emotions I felt then, such as my near-drowning in the Ubangi River. I heard the

voices of the people in my stories as my mother, when I was eight years old, said as she gave us money for school fees: "Shushu (my brother Bungan's nickname) Thami (my shortened name for Thamsanqa) *thathani le mali ningadlali ngayo ngoba ngizofa ngolunye usuku*". ... "Take this money and do not misuse it because I will die one day". Those words are still fresh in my memory and they caused me to be serious at school. They also taught me the value of money (Gumede 2011, p. 104). My elder brother died and after two weeks my mother died, so my brother did not experience what my mother said – but I experienced the pain of losing a mother.

I laughed again. I cried again (as I remembered my deceased nanny, parents, siblings and friends) – as I remembered how I dealt with cases of educators such as that of Ms. Mji as she came in my office crying and left the office happy. *Gumede: Such is life! (I then left her smiling and proceeded to the principal's office )...* in (Gumede 2011, pp. 194–199). I was puzzled all over again about the strangeness, and what I still cannot explain. I began to understand events and people's actions more clearly and sometimes differently, like in my story for honesty as I now tell it below.

## A Lesson In Honesty

When I was nine years old, one of my brothers' friends, who was older than me, and I, were walking home from school. On the way I picked up an item that was rolled up in a piece of paper. Two and a half shillings were rolled up in that paper. My brother's friend insisted that I keep quiet and not tell anyone about my find, so I kept quiet. My brothers' friend and I had a feast that afternoon at a restaurant that is about a kilometer from the Mbango Bridge.

On the following day, whilst lessons were on, I was summoned to the principal's office. I say 'summoned' because that was my first case at school and it changed my perception of school life. I did not wait to be asked as to why I was called. I wept from the time I entered the office until the time that I left. The Principal, Mister Ndimande could not bear the sight of a nine year old weeping. He asked me to leave, and as a kind man, asked one of the learners to console me. That experience helped me a lot in life because I still fear anything that could bring me close to the police or criminal justice (Gumede 2011, pp.142–143).

I began to understand events and people's actions more clearly and sometimes differently. I learnt to critique myself in all possible ways as I shaped the personality that I saw myself yearning to attain as I say: I yearn to be a well-rounded respectful individual as this conforms to my *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *inhlonipho* (respect) as phenomena with life-affirming energy (Whitehead, 17 September 2006).

My collecting, accounting, reflecting and analysing have shaped my thinking, my decision making, my insights and conclusions. I am more observant that I was before doing my doctoral research and I have learned a better use of words so that I can express my ideas clearer than before. I am conscious of the use of Critical Cross Field Outcomes, beliefs and values in my life and work place. I now more consciously practice the beliefs and values that I advocate as I declare in my reflections about my personality development (Gumede 2011, pp.192–297). I have also discovered my hidden talents of writing in forms other than prose,

for example dialogue and poem writing. I am now learning how to write academic journals (Gumede, 2017). I wish to finally write a book about my experiences as an educator as a way of inspiring young people to take up teaching as a career.

### **What Does This Tell Me About My Practice?**

This tells me that my practice has changed. I now automatically adopt a scientific approach about things that I have taken for granted. My work has taken on a new enjoyment, because of the new look / expression that my research and my practice has revealed. I am methodical in my approach in thinking as well as in doing. I do not rush when doing my work, but I give myself time to think in different ways. I question things and find out the true essence of what a phenomenon is. I can be alone for a number of hours without feeling lonely but marvel at my stupidity of having not been able to explore life and its beauty before, write and review my thoughts as I write. My practice has ceased to be a duty, but a way of life. I now enjoy life and have realized that challenges are a part of life that has to be embraced as they are as I assert that: I am in the process of learning detachment or accepting that clinging to imperfect and impermanent things in life is the real cause of suffering, as espoused in the teachings of Buddha (Chopra, 2007). I know that, as in nature, there are storms and other undesirable occasions that are necessary. After an earthquake people forget about their differences but look at attending to the aftermath of the earthquake. Hard times toughen us and make us more human and humane than we think we are; as I avow that, I have also had many deaths in the family that have been devastating, but as I reflect, on a positive note, I see the formative shaping influence that these have had on my life (Gumede, 2011, p. 108) and on reflection as (Schön 1983, p. 68) who asserts that:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation he finds uncertain or unique, he reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understanding which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both new understanding of the phenomenon and change in the situation.

I now realize how my completed doctoral research has become a phenomenon of reflection and helped me to change my way of thinking and doing as an e-tutor in African Languages and Culture in Practice at University of South Africa, as I reflect on my thesis's value. The change in me is manifested in my working as well as my learning journal writing.

### **What Does This Tell Me About My Theory?**

This confirms in me my belief in the self-developing influence of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my carer, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming in my life. This confirms in me my belief in the transforming effect of accounting for the influences in my personality development through Narrative Enquiry (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 1998; Clandinin and Huber, 2002), Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1999, 2008a 2008b, 2008c, 2009a 2009b), Auto-Ethnography (Taylor, 2004, 2005) and Self-Study (Jousse, 2000, Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; McNiff, 2002). The account of the living-theory of my life enhances my life. I believe that my theory is living because it is derived from my childhood, other people's experiences and activities in my life. It comes from my living and lived practice and those of

people that influenced my research-participants and me. My research talks about life of thinking-feeling beings that I am part of.

## How Can My Reader Understand This?

I was born at the height or the strength of Apartheid in 1957 and the regime ended in 1994. I have lived most of my life under the Apartheid era and am fighting its influence almost daily. It is for this reason that I have this poem to demonstrate how I felt and believe how most people that are oppressed feel and end up blaming themselves for who they are.

### Apartheid...

*Made me  
Feel  
Think  
Lost  
Angry  
Unwanted  
Inferior  
Frustrated  
Worthless  
Valueless  
Insignificant  
Rubbish  
Miserable  
Amazed  
Shocked  
Flabbergasted  
Inhuman  
Inhumane  
Cold-hearted  
Strange  
Eerie  
Unfeeling  
Vicious  
Aggressive  
And*

*Finally confused and blaming my being ... and wondering why God made me so.*

(Jerome Thamsanqa Gumede)

I hope that my reader will bear in mind that I lived the first 37 years of my life under apartheid, which I consider to be among the most oppressive and potentially personality-deforming regimes in recorded modern human history.

I have learnt about other oppressive regimes or times like the Holocaust, Stalin's purges or Mao but apartheid is something that I experienced from birth and still shows its ugly head now and again through incidents that are reported in South African Broadcasting news. There are still killings that are racially motivated such as elderly white farmers or black farm workers killed. Sometimes these killings can be disguised as robbery or punishment but

any one of them that is the residue of apartheid can be easily identified if one knows apartheid well as I do.

I hope that my reader will bear in mind that my research participants lived as many and more years of their lives under the same oppressive regime, and that we are all living in the context of the HIV&AIDS pandemic. I hope that my readers will also note that my research took place on the Lower South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal in the Republic of South Africa in the rural areas of Betania, Shobeni, Shabeni, Izingolweni, KwaNzimakwe, KwaNyuswa and Murchison, in communities which are still characterised by deep material poverty, and which are far removed from the benefits of sophisticated city environments and its many advantages – but are steadily improving in terms of infrastructure, water, sanitation (but still having pit-toilets), increasing numbers of schools and clinics, electricity (but all these areas still have gravel roads). I hope that my readers will realise that all the people in my story are human beings who live lives of humanising quality and significance. I hope that my readers will recognise the influence of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my carer, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming in my life.

I hope that my readers will reflect on their own lives in a similar way.

### **How Can I Evaluate The Educational Influence Of My Actions?**

I evaluate the educational influence of my actions from what people say to me, and about me, and what I do such as Ms. Mji who came in my office crying and left it smiling and later thanked me for helping her (Gumede, 2011, pp. 197–199). As a Black African Male Educator and a Governance and Management Co-Coordinator in uGu District, I have talks with parents, school governing bodies and learners who comment positively about my work and my approach to problem resolution. They say that I am approachable and give help or advice when asked as I sought admission for learners who could not find a school; also parents and learners that would come worried about not having been admitted in any school would get admission and leave the office happy. Seeking admission for learners was part of my duties in Governance and Management in learner affairs.

One particular example that I remember is that of a parent that came seeking admission for her daughter in February. I asked her why she did not apply in time as all admissions in KwaZulu-Natal were done and completed in October of the previous year. The closing of admission was done after a process where there would be a provincial advocacy meeting in which all details of the admission procedure are given to provincial officials and they are given all the necessary learner admission information. The provincial launch of the admission procedure is then followed by district launches and final launches are held at ward level.

The parent of the girl learner said that she knew about the admission launches and the procedure, but her case was different. She said that she had applied for a promotional post in the uGu municipality during the course of the year and went for an interview. She had completely forgotten about the interview, as it took long for her to get a response that approved of her job interview.

The municipality wanted her to start immediately in March, which meant that her daughter had to come and stay in KwaZulu-Natal as the family would have to relocate from



the Gauteng province. She said that her job approval came a few days at the beginning of February and she had to find accommodation for the family, find admission for the learner, her girl child, and serve a notice of one month with her then employer. She then apologized for the inconvenience she believed she was causing as all that happened about her job and the learner admission was beyond her control. The parent provided proof of what she was saying in the form of the job approval letter, learner's transfer letter from her school, documents of the new accommodation for the family, learner's report and other information that satisfied me about her request.

I then understood that she had no control over the turn of events. I immediately informed my supervisor and my colleague as there were only two of us dealing with learner admission matters. I also 'phoned the ward manager of the area in which the schools were where admission would be sought. I was turned down by three high schools who said they had no vacancy for grade eight, but two schools promised that they would look at the case that I was presenting since the parent had no alternative and could also not leave a girl child in the care of other people: she had to be where the mother was. The idea of leaving a girl child in the care of other people really touched me as a father of five girls and I knew the possible risks of doing so.

I then drove to one of the two the schools that had promised me and met the admissions officer who then referred me to the principal. The school principal was sympathetic, and the learner was admitted. The parent and the learner left delighted that they finally got admission. This case is one out of many that I dealt with in my eight years as a governance and management coordinator.

I visit schools, give advice to educators and ensure that I leave them with challenges that keep them productively occupied, until my next visit. Most educators say I have good sense of humour, that I make them laugh, even though I seldom laugh. (I think that there is a significant irony in this.) Educators say that they do what I ask them to do so as not to disappoint me. I am glad that they do as I ask, but I do hope that in time they will do as I ask because they want to do it for themselves and their learners. This will take time, but I believe that it will happen.

I talk with my colleagues, at district and provincial levels and most of them comment about my positive approach to life and work. As a teacher, my ex-students remark about my teaching, citing my diligence, my taxing teaching and learning approaches, and my love for my learners. One ex-student of mine asked me recently whether I still respect people as I respected them as learners.

The pensioners and disability grant holders that I served as a clerk call me by my nicknames, which are *Gumejana* (small Gumede) *Mfanyana* (small boy) because I was short and thin at that time. They say they still remember my courtesy and humane approach to them as clients.

As a principal of a high school, my good track record has made me respected by my colleagues and people in the district and those who learn about it at the province. When I meet them, they sometimes bow and say *Mhlonishwa* (the honourable one). They invite me to their speech and prize giving day functions to motivate parents, learners and educators. Many people comment about my lively and welcoming approach to people even those

whom I meet for the first time. They say 'Jerome, *uyakwazi ukuxhumana nabantu,*' – 'Jerome, you interact with people easily, and can make them feel comfortable'. I have noted and learnt that people need to be treated with respect as Goleman (1995, p.149) notes that leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people towards a common goal... there is nothing more essential than recognizing our deepest feelings about what we do... My *Ubuntu* and *inhlonipho* are based on great regard of my feelings and those of others because I know the impact of an imbalance between the emotional and rational in my life and those of others. I thus treat people with respect.

As karate instructor, parents of the young boys and girls that I trained still request me to re-open a karate club but I cannot due to my added responsibility as a family breadwinner and a governance and management coordinator in uGu district. Perhaps when I retire I will do this. I will not fulfill the desire to train the children of uGu as I have now relocated to Pretoria.

## The Conclusion To My Thesis

Lesi yisikhathi sokokhela, sokuthungela umlilo omusha, sokotha amaziko amasha. Kwanga lomlilo obaswa yintsha ungavutha njalo, uyigculise esikhathini sayo njengoba obabamkhulu babegculiswa ngowabo esikhathini sabo. (Nxumalo, 1973, p. 179)

English version:

This is the time to rekindle and bask in the new fires. May the fires rekindled by the youth satisfy them in their time, as it satisfied our forefathers in their times.

I believe that one of the most important outcomes of my research is that it has brought about a growing awareness of me, the significance of that awareness, and the significance of the purpose of the enquiry. "The purpose, in short, [grew] clearer as the powers needed for its realisation [grew] greater" (Joad, 1948, p. 147). My research and discovery of my origins, reflection about my carer, my siblings, my parents, my *karate* instructor and my naming has helped me to attain a better understanding of who I am, where I come from and where am I going. I identify with Conolly *et al.* (2009: 98) who argue that:

Awareness of self as an essential element of human wellbeing has a long global tradition. This is manifest in the Oral Tradition Adage, echoed in numerous cultures and languages: 'We cannot know where we are going unless we know where we come from.'

I believe that my narrative has achieved what Goduka (1999:1) asserts that, through writing or telling our stories, we use the power of narratives to deconstruct and reconstruct new identities in order to begin to heal. I know that this is true of me, Jerome Thamsanqa Gumede. After losing my elder brother and my mother in 2005 and my younger brother in 2007 I felt devastated. Writing about my feelings and expressing them in my thesis had a profound healing effect. I felt better after writing (Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane, 2009:102).

My research has also taught me ways of reflection, recollecting and reliving the past so as to be able to appreciate the present. I believe that ability to face the present has its

basis from the past good and bad experiences. My research has revived my confidence. It has helped me to learn to sympathise and empathise with other people and value the trials and tribulations that make them to behave the way(s) they do without becoming judgmental. I exhibit my beliefs in my poem 'The Unemployed' (Gumede 2017, p. 16-17).

My claim to my declarations is further backed by my abstract of the thesis in this article as well as my responses to Brown and McNiff's questions and the conclusion to my thesis:

- *What Did I Do?* As I give my account of the potentially destructive and deforming oppression of the apartheid regime in South Africa. For example, the effect of Group Areas Act of 1950.
- *Why Did I Do It?* As I declare that I have accounted for my experiences, reflected and analysed phenomena because I believe that the stories of researchers' lives are more than 'just stories'. I believe that, as when human beings tell their stories, they relive many of their more significant experiences, they rediscover their values, they reconnect with significant people in their lives – both those who have passed on and those still alive, and – in some very important ways – they discover themselves, and the whole process can result in personal(ity) growth and healing. I hope that my readers will reflect on their own lives in a similar way.
  - *What Does This Tell Me About My Practice?* To which I respond that my practice has ceased to be a duty, but a way of life.
  - *What Does This Tell Me About My Theory?* To which I reiterate that the account of the living-theory of my life enhances my life as I also respond.
  - *How Can My Reader Understand This?* To which I retort that I hope that my readers will reflect on their own lives in a similar way.
  - *How Can I Evaluate the Educational Influence of My Actions?* To this I rejoin that people say that I am approachable and give help or advice when asked – as I sought admission for learners who could not find a school; parents and learners that would come worried about not having been admitted in any school would get admission and leave the office happy.

*The conclusion to my thesis* ends with Nxumalo (1973, p. 179), 'This is the time to rekindle and bask in the new fires. May the fires rekindled by the youth satisfy them in their time, as it satisfied our forefathers in their times.'

As I implore my reader and other people to realize that present has to be celebrated, as it is an opportunity given to mankind to enjoy, as their forefathers enjoyed their time. My plea includes looking at working as people enjoy, as I believe that work can be daunting but can produce enjoyment when it is well done. As Nxumalo (1973, p.3) further warns: 'We people think that ancient pastures were green/good and those that we graze in now are deserts, eroded, bad but in fact the wheel of change goes forward uncontrollable – no one can stop it or reverse it.'

I have learned about challenges in research and how to face or overcome them. I have learned how to interrogate myself and engage in self-reflection with the end of

knowing myself better. I have learned integration of knowledge, finding connections and testing the appropriacy of data using the criteria for rigour. Due to the demands of my thesis, I have a better understanding of values such as patience, diligence, time management, and honesty to the self, and being honest to other people. I have learned more about being an *independent learner*. I studied my Further Diploma in Education Management, my Junior Degree to Doctor of Technology through distance education. I am learning to write journal articles, essays, and poetry independently. I believe that patience, diligence, time management, honesty to the self, being honest to other people has enabled me to do what I avow to have done.

I have realised that, before knowledge finds its way into books, it has its origin in memory. By the time any knowledge reaches a book, it is changed, refined, for it to be a 'writerly', or 'readerly' (Whitehead, 2009, seminar DUT Durban). The reader can only guess the stages through which it has gone before it is ready for a reading public or as a text for publication.

I have learned how to sift, integrate and arrange knowledge, for it to make sense to my anticipated readers and me, and that this requires a lot of time and patience. I have realised that I had and have a lot of knowledge that is in me, but it needs clear thinking for it to be made available to other people in a clear manner. I have realised that my fear of the authenticity of my knowledge has been my biggest enemy in my knowledge production. I have learned how to write a thesis and do my own editing.

In my school career at primary school I was taught by teachers who hero-worshiped authors and that instilled the fear of authors as people with supernatural powers. At secondary school I remember that two teachers, who were graduates, taught me and I had no idea of what a graduate was. I then grew up having a distorted view of being an author, or a graduate and it took me some time to realize that being an author or a graduate was possible even for me. I also grew up in a community where I never met an author. The two authors that I personally met before 2002 and four authors that I have approached and showed my work to never commented about my work but simply ignored me. It is only when I met Professor Cekiso of Tshwane University of Technology that I had positive remarks. Among other things he said was: "I am told, you have successfully written and edited your doctoral thesis, what can then prevent you from being an author?" Finally my publication of my first EJOLTs journal has boosted my confidence and my zeal to write about what I believe and know.

I have learned that I will never be able to know how much I know because I might find it difficult to be a player and a referee in the knowledge acquisition game... As Wittgenstein (1986, p.129.) writes:

The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something- because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundation of his enquiry do not strike a man at all...we fail to be struck by what, once seen is most striking and most powerful.

My doctoral research questions, *Why do I do things the way I do?* and, *What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life?* (Gumede 2011), reveal that what I observed in my doing things and the ability to meet and

face as '*the hidden*', '*simple*' and '*familiar*' to me that did not strike me, as I failed to realize it until when I started my doctoral research which was an answer to my doctoral questions. As '*the hidden*', '*simple*' and '*familiar*' to me became clear to me, I began to understand myself better as I say:

As I have written this(thesis), I have realized that 'The purpose in short grows clearer as the powers needed for its realization grow greater' (Joad, 1948, p. 147). I have realised that my purpose of writing this thesis is becoming clearer to me as a Black African Male Educator. (Gumede, 2011, p. 176)

My zest to know has been a motivator to attain knowledge as well as made me to fail to see how much I know. This self-study research has helped me in the discovery of myself as a male educator and a budding researcher in understanding my strengths and weaknesses and thus helped me improve as a student researcher, and an education specialist. My work rate and approach to problems has improved. After this study I hope to assist those who might have similar challenges as I had in my study.

As a human being I see my fellow human beings differently because of my beliefs of *ubuntu* (humanity) and *inhlonipho* (respect) and my better understanding of the role in knowledge of beliefs and values. I accept that, as people, we will always differ due to our upbringing and the environment that we grow/grew up. I am now aware of influences that shape people's personality more than I was before I started my research. The awareness of the influences has made me respect people's behaviours and, therefore, not be judgmental in my approach. Some of my beliefs and values have been reinforced and new beliefs and values have been added. I believe that my central values in my future work will be *ubuntu* (humanity) and *inhlonipho* (respect) as the basis of all my beliefs and values. I hope to apply my beliefs and values in all my future work. I believe that other people should attempt this kind of study because it is challenging, worth doing, and it unravels inert potential.

My Living Theory research and self-study unearthed my skills in observing myself and others, listening to my voice, both the inner voice and outer voice, as I have learned to critique what I do and say more than I did before my research project. As I have said, I now empathise with other people. I have learnt to be sympathetic to myself in that way and learned to forgive myself for the mistakes that I have done. I have also learned what self-education is. I have also taught myself computer skills that are improving on a daily basis. I can proudly say the doctoral research has taught me to be a life-long learner and teacher as I teach myself most of the things that I am now doing such as IsiZulu essay writing.

## I, The Teacher

I have personally learned that the best teacher is the learner or researcher himself. If I were to be a teacher or teach again, I would be more aware in incorporating my beliefs and values in my teaching in an explicit way. I would discuss with my learners / make the learners aware of the values that I intend to help them achieve. For example, giving homework to a learner will be aimed at helping them in time management. I would also deal with the Critical Cross Field Outcomes. The Critical Cross-Field Outcomes, identified by the Department of Education of the Republic of South Africa, are generic, underpinning learning

outcomes to be integrated and assessed in every programme of study from Grade R to Ph.D. (Government Gazette, 1997, p. 46) explain them well to the learners for them to understand their importance in every lesson.

If I were to be a principal I would ensure that my teachers understand the importance of Beliefs and Values in teaching. I would have workshops or meetings with my teachers in which the Critical Cross Field Outcomes would be dealt with, so as to enhance our teaching in my school. I would stress the importance of time management and time analysis as important factors in achievement of goals set by the school.

## **I, The Professional Colleague**

My research has improved my relationship with my colleagues because of my being focused and using my time wisely. I can also handle challenges more calmly than before. I can now solve problems and some of my colleagues marvel as to how I come with novel ideas as we try to solve problems. My novel ways of doing things has helped me and my colleagues to have a more positive view about work and life in general. We have been through three weeks of a public servants' strike in August 2010. As we discussed the impact of the strike, we have learned to appreciate the positive/ vital role that work plays in our life. My work has now ceased to be a threat but a challenge within my capabilities.

As we discussed the impact of the strike, we had learned to appreciate the positive role that work plays in our lives. For example, we realized the crucial role that work played in keeping us occupied. The strike came during my thesis writing, I had hoped that I would do some writing. I did not do any writing as the strike disorientated me. I had not been part of a national strike before as a worker, I had an experience of a strike as a school principal for only four days and as a manager had an idea when it was about to end. The strike that we had as educators was a national strike. My work including my journal writing has now ceased to be a threat but a challenge within my capabilities.

## **I, The Family Member And Leader**

I now know better who I am, my origins, my family, its needs and wants. I know better what to do and what not to do. I have a better understanding about the basic needs of my family and have learned how, when and why I need to provide for my family. I can differentiate between traps from family members and real needs. I have learned more about the Qwabe clan. I now understand what it is to be a Gumede and am proud to be a Gumede.

What I learned about my personality is that reflecting on/upon my beliefs and values has helped me to know myself and my personality. I believe that I have *ubuntu* (humanity), *inhlonipho* (respect) for others, the environment and the ancestors that is based on the respect for God. I know my origin, my genealogy, meaning of my names, what has influenced that me to be who I am.

I believe that my personality development is dependent on my values, beliefs, and the influence of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my carer, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming. I provide an account of the influences that have impacted on my development and my own understanding of my own development. I have also made

connections between indigenous knowledge systems and in formal education (Gumede, 2011).

## I And Myself

My research has helped me remove misconceptions about who I am and what I am capable of. I now know my weaknesses and strengths better. I know things that I can change in me, and those that I have to live with. I have improved my critical thinking and my creativity. I have encountered problems, tried a variety of strategies to solve them and made good decisions sometimes with no outside help. I can confidently say that I have mastered some of the techniques that are essential in learning. I have used all the Critical Cross Field Outcomes in my writing of the thesis. I therefore believe that I demonstrated my planning, organisation and coordination skills in the writing of my thesis. I have learned to appreciate myself and motivate myself in times where I felt down and tired.

My relationship with my work has improved. I learned / improved on how to manage my time and how to use it for my studies and my work. I can see the improvement in my work caused by my clear thinking and the ability to sort things out for myself. I have learned to sense that which is profitable for me and the people that I am serving. I have realised that my change of attitude can benefit me a lot rather than grumbling and failing to change myself or change my situation that causes my grumbling. I have learned to search within me for that which I believe is lodged in me but needs my effort to unearth. I have learned to enjoy who I am.

I have composed my own poem about a little boy that was complaining to his mother when she gave him a slice of bread with a hole in it.

### Mother to Son/ Son to mother

*A thin slice of bread!  
From the bag to the son,  
From son to mother from mother to son  
Gazes were exchanged  
No words!  
But words in gawp.  
Silence that would stifle a housefly prevailed.  
Lips moved  
Son to mother  
This slice has a hole!  
Mother to son  
Eat the slice!  
And look for the hole later.  
The wise mother advised  
Thank you mom!  
Said the son  
The slice was between the lips/in the mouth.  
Bolus it became.*

*So! Tasty it was.  
 The hole disappeared.  
 The slice disappeared  
 The question remains:  
 What is vital?  
 The slice  
 Or  
 The hole?  
 Which is tastier?  
 The hole  
 or  
 The slice?  
 CHOOSE!*

(Jerome Thamsanqa Gumedede)

Like the wise mother, I can distinguish between the bread and the hole, and ask: “What is more and less valuable in life?” I do things that are needed than those that I want for I believe wants are never ending they benefit the ‘me’ than us.

I am a Christian and also a *karateka* – a *shitoryu* – a practitioner of *shitoryu* style. The word *shitoryu* means immovable heart, immovable mind. The *shitoryu* karate style was founded by Kenwa Mabuni, who was born on 14 November 1889, and died on 23 May 1952. Kenwa Mabuni was Japanese policeman.

As a *karateka* I abide by Kenwa Mabuni’s motto: *Kunshi no Ken* which means: To concentrate on cultivating oneself to be a well-rounded respectful individual from [shitokai.com/cyber-academy/principles-philosophies/kunshi-no-ken-2](http://shitokai.com/cyber-academy/principles-philosophies/kunshi-no-ken-2). I yearn to be a well-rounded respectful individual as this conforms to my *ubuntu* and *inhlonipho* as phenomena with life-affirming energy (Whitehead, 17 September 2006).

## My Hopes

I hope I will influence education through my work as governance and management coordinator in uGu district because I meet with learners, educators as well as parents in my work. I also meet with different stakeholders in my work and hope to influence them and they will in turn directly or indirectly influence other people. I hope to be more involved in curriculum matters so as to apply my knowledge in it.

I hope that I will have the opportunity to share my knowledge of learning and teaching with student teachers and teacher educators. I hope to motivate learners and educators to be life-long learners. I hope that I will see more people furthering their studies up to PhD level and be involved in research including self-study. I further hope that I will influence learners and educators in realizing the value of education as a series of activities which can help to alleviate poverty; education is among the activities that can help alleviate poverty if used correctly.

I hope to be a foot-soldier in promoting Self-Study, Narrative inquiry, Living Theory research and Auto-Ethnography research methods. I hope others will benefit from reading



my thesis. I hope it will help them in reflecting about their past and have some answers to the way they behave. I hope it will assist those that had some doubts about writing a thesis using Self-Study, Narrative Inquiry, Living Theory and Auto-Ethnography research methods. I hope that it will whet their appetites towards ways of looking at some of the things that they took for granted. I hope that my thesis might change their mindset about what it is to be an African in South Africa and the world. Some parts of the thesis might make the readers learn to be more observant and learn to appreciate their environment. The thesis might also encourage the reader to see the Hand of God in most of man's deeds and successes.

As a Christian I now see the Beliefs, Values, and the Critical Cross Field Outcomes as nothing other than a way of helping me to enhance my faith and belief in God. The Beliefs, Values, and the Critical Cross Field Outcomes to me reveal the message that God has given through his word, as they encourage purposeful and positive work ethics.

I say again that the influences of *induku*, herding, karate, soccer, my parents, my carer, my siblings, karate instructor and my naming in my life that I attained knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, ethics have influenced my school career, my studies at different colleges, universities, in my community involvement, karate training, as a karate instructor, my teaching and my present work place as a Black African Male Educator. I am not alone. I believe there are many Black African Male Educators who share my beliefs, values, hopes and dreams for a better future for all humanity.

## **My Learner-Educator Viewpoints**

### **The learner and learning**

No learning is useless; it is only the level of judgment of the utterer of such words that need maturity. Any utterance that subscribes to the notion of uselessness is an utterance that reveals the need for teaching and learning. The speaker of the uselessness remark is challenging the educator who must then see the need to educate the learner and be sympathetic to such thinking. In my teaching career I taught Biology in grades ten to twelve. I had a challenge that led to learners saying the subject is difficult and useless as it had terms that were difficult for non-English learners. My experience was also shared by other teachers, who would complain about the non-cooperative nature of the learners. I took me some time to realize that the challenge of the learners was not their reluctance to learn but their need to be led towards understanding the importance of each subject, education and its importance in life. As a high school principal and ward manager, I would use my experience and the assertion about uselessness of education as a motivation as I would say, "... the mere fact that the learner does not want to learnt is the very reason the learner has to be taught".

I equate a teacher to a mother who feeds a child that is resisting feeding due to its ignorance but the knowledgeable mother who knows about the consequences of hunger feeds the child to avoid the result that might lead to loss of life. This, I believe, is true to education as one of my cousins Daniel Zama said, "Education is expensive but ignorance is most expensive." (personal communication, 2002) as it would cost a professor thousands of Rand to have his car fixed due to ignorance in motor mechanics.

As human beings, we are forced by nature to learn. Learning should be viewed as a way of life, as life presents us with a myriad of information that we unknowingly find ourselves learning. It is a pity that whenever we think of learning we equate it to the school and the learning that takes place with the subject matter.

I think the challenge that we have is that the school removes the freedom that we have in play where learning is not formalized but occurs in a spontaneous and natural way. I believe learners need to be made aware that the 'boring' nature that the school has for some learners is a social demand, but the work situation usually emulates the natural way of learning. School is a social creation that since its creation has had no alternative, even though the school is criticized for what and how it is traditionally operated. The responsibility lies with the educator to make learning exciting. Among other things the road to success should be paved and the learners be motivated to learn. As I have quoted (Gumede 2011, p. 70), 'I believe that when the educator unlocks the talents of his/her learners, s/he has helped the learner to blossom from within. (Jousse, 2004)'.

### **Education then and now**

There is a usual cry from elders that education and other life activities are losing their value. The cry is echoed by (Nxumalo, 1973) as he asserts that:

*Thina bobantu side sicabanga ukuthi amadlelo asendulo ayemahle, lawa eseluka kuwo agwadulekile, mabi,kanti eqinisweni isondo lenqubekela-phambili liyaziphendukela, akekho ogalimisa aliguqule alibhekise nyova (p.3.)*

English version

We people think that ancient pastures were green/good and those that we graze in now are deserts, eroded, bad but in fact the wheel of change goes forward uncontrollable – no one can stop it or reverse it.

Nxumalo was looking at the changes that western civilization came with, including education, that was unknown to the black South African community who in turn failed to embrace it as it was known by the West.

I think this type of thinking is fatalistic rather than being progressive. Education as activity has essences that do not change but ways of conducting the activities change with changes in the community of learning; in education we will always have the learner, subject content and the teacher as essences that do not change. Those who keep on crying about things sometimes fail to embrace change as a necessary ill. I am completely against such a comparison when it is used in a negative sense. My conviction emanates from my experience in my research where I nearly stopped my research because my research was not compatible with canonical research methods. I subscribe to progressive mindsets such as the one that the Mail & Guardian (March 2017 p.30) asserts: 'It is natural that we strive for progress and advancement, such that we endeavor to search ways for innovation, ways to simplify our lives'.

This is a plea or a way of looking at things in an 'eye' that looks at progressive and innovative ways that see the blended learning as e-learning and technology is making inroads in education. This progressive way of doing things is brought about the challenges

that education is facing the Republic of South Africa. The so called #FEES MUST FALL call of higher education in the RSA seem to be pushing towards the new views about how education should be. It is worth noting that none of the changes come tailor-made with no challenges therefore we need to embrace innovations and challenges.

My experience of education for the first five years was filled with negative involvement such as:

- Management that was not based on any clear principles.
- Working in silos effected by management of leaders that were primarily isolated.
- Primary school teachers used to being both subject and class/grade teachers.
- Teaching learners of eighty-plus in one classroom who were no longer of school-going age, although that was caused by conditions beyond their control.
- Being asked to teach a subject that I did not do at training college.
- Teaching learners with no textbooks, thus turning teaching to a note–writing exercise.

On reflection the challenges help me to be innovative and learn improvisation. They proved useful when I was doing my studies with all the requirements were available. My motto was: *Why should I fail?* If my learners were able to pass provincial examinations under such trying conditions, what would then make me fail as a part-time university student, with all the resources and support that the universities offered. One of the challenges of education in the Republic of South Africa is shortage of human, physical resources, coupled with properly qualified educators at school level. If education at school level received similar attention as tertiary education in resources, the country would have better qualified people and in turn improved quality of life. Economic development as profit or the generation of money, profit and wealth-creation receive better attention than education. I sometimes feel that the adage, *Rough seas make skillful sailors*, is true to my struggles in my learning as a learner and my teaching as a teacher. My experiences as headmaster were better because I had some power to control issues of shortages of resources. It is for the overemphasis of money and profit that the Cree Indian proverb came into being:

Only  
When  
The last tree has died  
and the last river has been poisoned  
and the last fish has been caught  
will we realize  
we  
cannot  
eat  
money

One of the disadvantageous events in education in schools, especially rural and township schools is the employment of privately paid or unqualified teachers. This prevalent practice is not found in tertiary education and private schools. Many factors such as living conditions in rural areas and townships can be contributory to the employment of unqualified teachers. Safety and security measures can also be cited contributing to the practice. The conditions that prevail in rural and township schools together with

remuneration are some of the deterrents that lead to poor education in schools that are basically black schools.

My final ten years as an official were dismal in human resource management. In a position that indicated that an organogram was supposed to have fifteen officials, two were provided and with no personal assistance but required to produce monthly reports as if all was well. Another unpleasant situation is that of having more than one reporting official – say two or more – who seem not to fully understand your role or are not interested in listening. Tools for any job must be provided. I usually say: You cannot be required to use a wooden spanner to fix a Mercedes Benz. My early retirement was due to such conditions of an unpleasant beginning in the 1980s (first five years) and finishing in the 2000's (my last ten years).

## Conclusion

This article has partially answered my central questions of my doctoral research:

- *Why do I do things the way I do?*
- *What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life?*

(Gumede 2011)

... through responses to six questions of Robert Brown's seven questions (1994) and one of Jean McNiff's (2008) to reflect on what I did in my research. My declaration is that: I believe that other people should attempt this kind of study (Auto-ethnography, Self-study, Narrative Inquiry, and Living Theory research) because it is challenging, worth doing, and it unravels inert potential.

The paper aims to give hope to prospective researchers who are struggling with research. The message that the paper aims to impart is that life after completing one's research project opens one's mind and opportunities in life. (Dermibag, 2015) refers to this realization as, "Gifts of the Doctoral Process". Moreover, research is more than challenging, worth doing or unravels inert potential, but it also opens new avenues of thinking and doing.

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