

OoNomfundo: a teacher raised by teachers¹

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INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this reflection piece originates from dialogues shared with colleagues over mealtimes at the 2022 Learning and Teaching Arts Faculty Writing Retreat for early career researchers and academics. As an early career academic, researcher and relatively newly appointed member of the Linguistics Department at the University of the Western Cape at the time of the retreat, it was these moments that allowed me to find my feet in what was initially a daunting experience. Through the conversations, laughter and sometimes tears, we began to share pieces of ourselves - from the commonality of our present daily personal lives right to our lived experiences and histories.

fetching
myself

I used to think that *ukuzilanda*, which Masola (2020 and this issue), describes as 'connecting oneself to the past in the present moment', was only practiced by isiXhosa speakers when we have to introduce ourselves by reciting our clan names and recalling our places of birth and/ or upbringing. At the centre of this concept lies the task of actively acknowledging all the parts of you, from the past to the present, that make up who you are. As the retreat progressed and as we began to open up, it was evident that we were in fact actively engaging in *ukuzilanda*.

During the retreat, *ekuzilandeni kwam*, I began to interrogate the reasons behind my current path as an academic. To a large extent, being raised by teachers has had a significant impact on who I have become, both personally and professionally. While parents live their lives doing what are considered as best practices for raising their children, they intentionally, or unintentionally, shape their children's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Heath, 1982). Although not all children raised by teachers become teachers themselves, it is worthwhile to note that connecting with our shared and diffuse pasts can resurface important [...] ways of being and doing to inform our current activity (Bock & Stroud, 2021). Upon

In fetching
myself

reflecting on how the experience of being raised by teachers has impacted my actions, I share anecdotes about my childhood role models in an effort to understand my trajectory as an academic and researcher.



**UNOMTSHAKAZI
VICTORIA BOBUNTU
SAULA – MY
MATERNAL
GRANDMOTHER.**

UMamCwerha, uVambane, uPotwana...ⁱⁱ Ozalwa nguMamBhele, uKhuboni...

My grandmother was a primary school English and Mathematics teacher. At home, reading was a big part of our routine and inevitably, I fell in love with language and learning. On random Saturdays, my grandmother would call us to her room, make us stand in a row and hand us a book – any book. “*Fundani ndinive*”, she would say, emulating her classroom. We would nervously read aloud, one after the other. From time to time, we would tease each other as we sometimes struggled with the pronunciation and meanings of English terms. I enjoyed this activity, so I always obliged. It meant that I could spend time with my grandmother, whom I admired and aspired to be like. *Makhulu* also often told folktales about *uDyakal Ashe noMvolofu* or *uTselane* – of course once the house was in order. *Ekuzilandeni kwam*, in terms of my early socialisation into literacy practices that led me to my current self as an academic and writer, this is one of the earliest memories I have of my introduction to the world of stories and storytelling. Heath (1982) suggests that the activity of storytelling is a significant literacy event which establishes [socialised] patterns which recur in one’s life. I suppose as a school teacher, *Makhulu* was preparing us for “the kinds of learning and knowledge displays expected in school” (Heath, 1982, p.51), which would be a recurrence in various forms throughout one’s lifetime in diverse contexts. It is also said that children are generally initiated into literacy by their parents or other adults in the home (Tatel-Suatengco and Florida, 2020). During these sessions with my grandmother, the parts I enjoyed most were the debriefings. We unpacked, poked and prodded different aspects of various subject matter and themes, much like I do today as a researcher and academic.

My grandmother and I also frequently discussed spelling and pronunciation conventions during our Sunday afternoon

“Read aloud”

grandmother

In fetching myself

crossword puzzle sessions. It was the first time I had heard someone pronounce the word “plait” as [pleit] (as it is spelled). To my knowledge, at the time, it had been [plæt] as in “plat”. But who was I to argue with an English teacher about an English term? I remember my disbelief when my grandmother refused to accept something I knew very well to be true. Many years after that, I realised that our differences in opinion were because I was a product of what is known as a former model C school and she was not. Which meant that she spoke what has been coined Black South African English (Wissing, 2002). Although we often had disagreements, she provided a safe space for those disagreements to take place. I suppose that differences in opinion are simply a reflection of diverse backgrounds, experiences and encounters actively engaged in the here and now (Morgan, 2020). Of course this would result in what would sometimes be polar-opposite worldviews, which Morgan (2020) describes as “perceptual and cognitive maps of the world” (p.83). I look back in appreciation of the heated debates – as they sometimes were. The exercise cultivated thinking and allowed for the processing of information in a way that I can now label moments of co-creating knowledge.



**THOZAMILE
SAMUEL
JONAS – MY
MATERNAL
GRANDFATHER**

In our cultures usually each clan has a totem and in this case it is the mole

**UMotaung... Aphinde abenguTolo,
uDlangamandla, uMdenge... Ozalwa
nguGosesemang Thamoethata. URapulana,
ooSekela so Mojanaga, sekela ga se bonwe hela
ga o se bona ke botubi, se bonwa ha pula e nele se
epolotswe ke banna ka megome, ke seepa se
ikepela.**

My grandfather, on the other hand, “...[had] no formal education to speak of, ... [but] made sure that the same fate [did] not befall his four children...” (Unknown, 1994, p. unknown). I came across this description of my grandfather in an article in the *Uitenhage-Dispatch Newspaper* after my grandfather’s passing in 2019. Therefore, I could not get any comments on it directly from him. However, *Tamkhulu* had an extensive general knowledge as he was an avid reader – mainly of the newspaper. My mother says, growing up,

He is Motaung... then again he is Tolo, Dlangamandla, Mdenge. Who is birthed by Gosesemang Thamoethata. Rapulana, Sekela of the mole. The mole does not get seen by anyone. If it does, it is a bad omen. It can only be seen when it is dug out by men with their ploughs. It is a digger; it burrows and buries itself.

my grandfather

Loosely: In Ngolwane (the street where we live), people used to borrow his newspaper. The Herald was bought daily at home. We used to ask him things we were not sure of.

“*yayibolekwa kuye i-newspaper eNgolwane. I-Herald ibithengwa every day. Besizibuza kuye izinto esingaziqondiyo*”. Apart from the general consensus – in the home – of making sure that the children (and grandchildren) received an education, Tamkhulu’s wide knowledge base – after receiving a limited education himself – demonstrates that knowledge can come from different yet equally valuable sources, supporting the idea that literacy is a social practice that occurs in different parts of our daily lives (Theodotou, 2017). In terms of the social practices perspective on literacy, its meaning has now expanded to include other forms of literacy that take place in the home, such as music, sports or numeracy to name a few (Tatel-Suatengco and Florida, 2020). It does not always have to come from formal literary texts like the ones my grandmother integrated into our lives or the ones one is normally exposed to in a formal school setting.

“English or Afrikaans?”, he was once asked at a hospital helpdesk. “*Zonke!*” he answered, followed by a loud howling laughter. I can still hear that infectious laugh. Tamkhulu’s complex history as an ‘adoptee’ⁱⁱⁱ also meant that he had a diverse linguistic background which consisted of five languages, namely, Setswana, Sesotho, isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English. He was my debut to what I now know is comparative linguistics, among other things, which is essentially the comparison of aspects of different languages. Tattel-Suatengco and Florida (2020) put forward that the use of multiple languages in the home provides children with “conceptual ground knowledge” (p. 335) in those languages. Somehow I feel as though I have been secretly conditioned by the universe to conducting research on the impact of linguistic differences on cognitive processes – this topic has occupied me for the last few years as part of both my Master’s and Doctoral studies.



**UNOMFUNDO CYNTHIA
JONAS (KEYE IS HER
MARRIAGE SURNAME).**

**UMaTaung... UMamTolo, uDlangamandla,
uMdenge... Ozalwa nguMamCwerha, uVambane,
uPotwana...**

Her name means education

My mother, *uNomfundo*, situated herself in a lifelong career of being a teacher, too. Unlike my grandmother, however, she teaches high school isiXhosa Home Language. *Umama yena uthi, “mna ndandifuna nifunde. Nikwazi ukuzimela. Nebizizinto ebomini. Nibenegalelo kwi-society*”. As a result, she encouraged and nurtured

My mother says, “I wanted you (plural) to get an education; to be able to stand up for yourselves; to be something (worthwhile) in life; to make a (valid) contribution to society.”

my love for writing. I thought I would be the editor of a fashion magazine one day, and with that in mind, once a month she would let me choose a magazine – *ELLE BEAUTY* or *Cosmopolitan* were my magazines of choice – and write a reflection about what I had read. At another point, I thought I would be a poet. And with that in mind, she encouraged me to write and file away my poetry in case I would like to share it one day. She also made me keep an updated CV of all the things I had done. I was in junior school at the time, so this included things such as my personal details, the grades I had completed and the subjects I was taking. It is believed that parents assisting with things like homework is a good predictor for academic success (Tatell-Suatengco and Florida, 2020) and I suppose my mother knew that given her profession. Without really knowing it, my mother provided a space in which I could learn to hone my soft skills, as I have come to know them. Practice makes perfect – an understated yet fundamental truth.

My mother was also what one would describe as ‘hands-on’ when it came to my schooling. For example, she has little knowledge of Afrikaans, so whenever I had Afrikaans homework she could not assist me with, we would take a walk to the neighbour’s house – uMakaKurt – and she would quietly sit next to me while Kurt’s mother tutored me. Evidently, she was supportive. She also knew when to ask for direction and guidance from more experienced individuals in areas she had little knowledge of. In hindsight, she demonstrated the effectiveness of outsourcing and collaboration when you do not have the needed resources to see a particular task to completion. Lee et al. (2006) lists creating networks of support and collaborative problem solving as some of the most important things to do by mentors – which I see my mother as – for successful mentee-mentor relationships. As I am sure you already know, this is one of the core features of being a researcher and an academic teacher, as I mentor and assist next generations of students to learn and grow.

March, June, September and December: these were the most important and busiest months of the year in the Jonas household. Marking, CAs (Continuous Assessments) and the occasional, “where is my red pen!?”. I still do not know how she never knew where it was, because after 30 years of being a teacher, she always keeps a spare one in her handbag. As my mother scrambled to get her marking done, she would gather my siblings and I, hand us a red pen and memo each, and instruct us to assist her with her marking. It was typical of my mother to involve me in her work activities and I enjoyed it. It meant I could spend time with her while she did what she loved. I felt needed, important and most importantly, trusted. ‘She trusts me with her learners’ marks’, I thought to myself. I felt empowered, as 15 year old me held that red pen and made important decisions. She often said that I marked “too strictly” and that I did not give her students enough leeway by understanding their context and learning needs. I understood her perspective. She not only trusted me to perform the task but she also trusted our relationship enough to be constructively critical. Trust in mentee-mentor relationships plays an important role in the mentor sharing unbiased feedback with the mentee (Chandra et al., 2019), the result of which is almost certainly positive for the mentee. I can attest. The years of ‘training’ in (her) students’ assessments broadened my thinking when trying to be objective in situations where it is difficult to do so.



**U-ANNE
WAKWAPELTASON**

Intombi yaseRhafu
(Graaff-Reinet)

When I moved onto high school, I met Miss Peltason (Miss P.) – one of the most remarkable teachers I have ever come across. Miss P.’s affection for the English language unleashed a curiosity in me that I am *still* exploring. Ms P. often alerted me to learning opportunities outside of school, such as the annual De Beers English Olympiad, where we critically examined themes such as morals, ethics and character development in texts, to name a few, through discursive essay writing. Lock et al. (2006) also highlights knowledge and information sharing as one of the responsibilities of a mentor to his or her mentee. I would describe the exposure to new and external opportunities for growth and development as Ms P. fulfilling her role to share knowledge and information.

Towards the end of high school, I noticed that my younger sister was struggling with her speech. She stuttered. I lost my patience with her quite often as I could not understand why she knew what she wanted to say, seemingly, but could not just say it. Could she not remember? I later learned in year two of clinical linguistics – which is a branch of linguistics that describes and analyses language impediments - that stuttering was in fact not related to cognitive abilities. As usual, at the time, I discussed my frustrations with Ms. P. This discussion happened at a time when I had to decide what I was going to study at university. “Linguistics,” she said. “Have you ever heard about that?”. And of course, I had not. In updating her, years later, she says that, “it is all about the learners: their lives, problems, their pain, thoughts and triumphs. As I teacher I was engaged with what young people wanted to do and to be”. And it showed.

I later learnt that children (or people) who speak an African language were not fully catered for in terms of research which could be applied to remedial treatments if or when they suffer a speech impediment. This greatly bothered me and it still does. Slowly but surely and well into my university studies, I became interested in making an impact on the slow growth of studies on language and cognition in non-WEIRD (non-Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich and Democratic, Henrich et al., 2010a, 2010b) contexts such as South Africa. This is of practical concern, specifically in areas such as health care and education. Research on acquired and developmental language disorders in multilingual populations is limited, which has implications for (i) correctly assessing, diagnosing and remediating specific language impairments in children and adults, (ii) addressing problems with the acquisition of literacy in multilingual contexts, or (iii) detecting early signs of dementia in elderly people, for example. That afternoon led me into a learning journey I still find myself in ten years later. So, yes, the catalyst in my decision to embark on studies on language was my sister’s stutter and a little push from Ms P. in the right direction.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

And then there is me. UKhanyiso wakwaJonas. According to Mpuma (this issue), what should follow is: UMotaung... ((incomplete) - as umntwana wentombi. However, in writing this paper, I have recently learnt that there is no concept of umntwana wentombi in the Sesotho culture (Motinyane. 2023). I know, you have questions. So do I, but I'll walk you through it some day. So, as a result, I carry and identify with my father's clan name even though *ndingumntwana wentombi, ngokwesiXhosa. Kunjalonje, ndinguMamNgwevu, uZulu, uSkhoma, uRhudulu, uMhlatyana. Ndizalwa nguNomfundo wakwaJonas, uMotaung. Ozalwa nguMamCwerha. Ozalwa nguMamBhele*. You'll note that in the relevant sections, the clan names are incomplete⁴. You may be able to gather from Tyler, Masola and Mpuma (this issue) that in this act of ukuzilanda and therefore ukuzithutha, sometimes we have to make peace with the pieces of our pasts we don't know and it does not make us less than or change who we currently are. Ekuzilandeni kwam I acknowledge the 'communal histories' Mpuma (this issue) refers to and in conducting my research for this paper, to answer her question: no, I think that the interrogation of personal history does not create a fully realised self through ukuzilanda. Evidence of this is not only the fact that I had to start somewhere, as far back as I can trace and stop somewhere, where I am located in the lineage. But it is also evident in the gaps from start to finish, where the lineage is "murky" (Mpuma, this issue) . I consistently ask myself who do I include and exclude? What does the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals mean for who I am? Does this mean I'm shaping who I want to be rather than who I am? I do not know what I do not know and the things I do know do not only belong to me. They heavily rely on memories which are not mine. Even if they were, there would still be margin for error. On one hand, ukuzilanda is complicated, messy and incomplete! On the other, it can go beyond ukuzithutha and recalling complex histories that sometimes do not want to be remembered. I firmly believe that we can make it beautiful by reflecting parts of our pasts that most impact our current ways. *Ekuzilandeni kwam, kungaphelelanga kunjalo, ukongenza*, my makeup also includes the emergence of my love for language, literacy and education; and the roles played by significant role models throughout my life. The relationships filled with deep care are what enabled my interest and nurtured my curiosity to grow and become what I am today. This part of my past together with my lineage mirrors our development as scholars and humans. In the same way, our development as scholars and humans throughout life is supported by any number of people and processes which are always complex, messy, and incomplete. Nonetheless, 'Respice Prospice' (UWC motto) – we take what is worthy from the past and build the future. Embracing the complicated and incomplete past is part of enabling growth.

according to isiXhosa culture, I am the child of an unmarried woman.

Listing MY clan names

Kunjaloje - As such

ndinguMamNgwevu, uZulu, uSkhoma, uRhudulu, uMhlatyana - Listing MY clan names
Ndizalwa nguNomfundo wakwaJonas - I am birthed by Nomfundo Jonas
uMotaung. Ozalwa nguMamCwerha. Ozalwa - who is birthed by *nguMamBhele* - Listing granny's clan names

In fetching myself, as incomplete as it is, to add,...

ENDNOTES

1. I decided to title this text OoNomfundo: a teacher raised by teachers because the idea to write it came from a space where academics, izifundiswa (oonomfundo), sat around a table and

learned about each other's histories. It was also fitting because each of the people, apart from my grandfather, referenced were actual teachers who raised and moulded an academic – myself. And lastly, Nomfundo happens to be my mother's name.

2. Each section title is each character's names, last name and clan names – followed by the clan names of their mothers'. Typically, ukuzilanda entails ukuzithuthua (Mpuma, this issue) by reciting your clan names as well as those of your mother. It is normally implied that your clan name is also that of your father's, therefore there is no need to repeat it after your mother's. Here, I have listed my grandmother's clan names and those of her mother.
3. 'Adoptee' is written as it is, because Tamkhulu was not formally/legally adopted. Rather, wakhuliswa ngumakazi wakhe together with her husband (UTata uJonas) and not his birth parents. In fact, Jonas is not his surname by birth but rather by 'adoption'. This was a family secret for as long as I can remember until 2013 – when he needed to ukuzigodusa. His actual surname is Kodisang (paternal). Our actual surname should be Kodisang. The concept of adoption in African culture also lends itself to vulnerability in the context of ukuzilanda. Therefore, the story of my grandfather as an 'adoptee' begs the question of xa ndizilanda, ndiqala phi ndiyeke phi? Ndibandakanya bani ndingabandakanyi bani? Ithehta ukuthini le nto kum? Ngam? It is a story for another day.
4. Sadly, I do not know the rest. While I did do some research on my family history while compiling this paper, I was unable to get to some things. Like I said earlier, my grandfather's complex past and upbringing means that some parts of me have fallen through the cracks and in some cases I am left with a faint outline rather than a complete and vivid picture. So, this will have to do.

culturally
reconnect with
his family

he was raised by his
aunt

when I fetch myself,
where do I begin and
end? Who do I
include and exclude?
What does this mean
to me? About me?

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