

School experience

Theme 1: Working with others and learning from them (1)

Teaching assistant handbook



The Open
University



Keeping Girls in School scholarship programme
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‘Keeping Girls in School’ Scholarship Programme

School Experience Year 1

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Theme 1 Unit 1

My learning life

Welcome to the KGIS Scholarship programme. We wish you every success. When you have finished this first unit, you will know how to work through the units in the School Experience Handbook during your school placement.

To start your Scholarship, you will explore your own learning story. You will think about your own learning both in and out of school: the good parts and the bits you found harder or more difficult.

When you complete this unit you will have developed:

1. your understanding about your own experiences as a learner
2. your understanding of how your experiences have affected your attitude to learning.

In this unit you will read the following terms:

Thinking aloud: when you ‘think aloud’ you are trying to understand something better by talking about it with someone else – this could be a friend, a member of your family, your Mentor or a fellow Scholar.

Key points: these are the main points – what you think are the most important or interesting ideas – in a discussion, in something you read, or in something you have written yourself.

Review: to look again at something you have said, done or written.

Timing

Your School Experience unit will take about four hours each week spread over two weeks.

Study activity

Real life example

1. Read ‘Chikondi’s story’ below. You might like to read it more than once. As you read, think about whether you have any experiences which are similar, and how your experiences are different from Chikondi’s. What do you think are the key points of her learning story?

I’m Chikondi. I’m 26 and I live and work in Katanda, where I am a teaching assistant in my village primary school. I was not always a teaching assistant. For some years after leaving school I worked on my father’s farm. I liked working with my family, but I really wanted to teach children. I have always wanted to be a teacher since I looked after my younger brothers and sisters and helped them learn to read.

When I was little I liked to watch my mother doing her chores and she taught me to cook as I got older, showing me how to grind and cook nsima. My mother also taught me traditional songs and dances. I helped my father with growing our own vegetables and he was very good at

showing me what to do, especially in planting the seeds properly and letting me have a go under his gentle guidance. With practice I became quite good at cooking and a helpful worker in the garden. My mother would let me do a meal all on my own when I was older. And my father allowed me to have a small part of the garden which I tended all by myself. I grew tomatoes there and sold them in the market.

I went to school in my village. I enjoyed reading and although there were not many books I would read every book in the classroom, no matter what the subject. I think I loved reading because my father was a very good storyteller and gave me a love of words. But mathematics was hard for me. The teacher would go very quickly and I could not keep up with his teaching. I fell behind and I was embarrassed to ask for help.

I studied for the MSCE, but before I could sit the examination my mother died. Then I did not have much time to study, and some days I could not go to school because my family needed my help. I found it hard to study at home because of my chores and I could not read after the sun had gone down.

I did not pass MSCE, and my father did not want me to stay in school and re-sit the examination. He wanted me to get married. I had to argue very hard with him about this. I tried to revise after all my chores were done. I had to prove to him that I could do it. He finally agreed that I could return to school. This was difficult, because I was now older and the teachers and younger learners teased me. I ignored the teasing because I wanted to pass the MSCE.

As I was revising, I volunteered in my village primary school. I enjoyed this and I learned a lot from watching the teacher. He was friendly, but also firm in his approach. The class was very large – over 100 learners – and he had very few books and not enough seats for everyone to use. The learners had to take turns to do any writing as there were not enough books to go round the large class. I saw how the teacher was very organised in managing so many learners.

I was sympathetic with the children, especially the ones who found learning difficult. I would sit next to the girls especially, because I wanted them to learn from my example. I told them, 'Don't give up on school, even if your family wants you to stay at home.' I even visited some families in the village to gently persuade them to let their daughters come to school.

I was lucky to work with this teacher. Although he was very busy, he would often take time to explain to me the purpose of a lesson. He would give me small tasks, such as distributing books and marking learners' spellings. When I struggled with my mathematics MSCE revision, he would take time to explain a formula or calculation method. The teacher also went to the Teacher Development Centre to borrow revision books for me.

When I think back to the people who have helped me, first of all I think of my mother and my father as my first teachers when I was a child. They taught me very patiently – I learned things without being aware that I was learning. But when I was older my father expected me to leave school. He did really not believe in education for girls and women.

I also think of the teacher in the school where I was a volunteer. He took time to talk to me and he also encouraged me in my MSCE studies. I think without his encouragement I would not have succeeded.

I finally passed the MSCE examination – after two more tries. Next year, I will apply to go to teacher training college. I think the most important qualities of a teacher are being able to explain things to learners, and being very organised. But I also believe a teacher should have sympathy for the challenges learners face and help them to overcome these challenges. When I am a teacher, I will be a strong role model for girls. Too many girls drop out of school. It almost happened to me. I want to encourage girls to stay in school, so they have good life chances.

2. Now you will think about your own learning experiences. Read these seven questions. Try to recall as much as you can:

1. What do you remember most about being a learner in primary school?
2. What did you find easy to learn? Why was this easy?
3. What did you find hard to learn? Why was this hard?
4. Did you have a favourite teacher? What was good about this teacher?
5. Did you enjoy going to school? Why, or why not?
6. What kinds of things did you learn outside school, at home or in your community?
7. How has being female affected your learning experiences? What has happened, do you think, as a result of your gender?

3. In the space below, write two or three sentences to answer each question. For example, an answer to Question 4 could start:

My favourite teacher was Miss Patricia in Standard 3. She was my first lady teacher. In her class, I used a long pencil for the first time.

And, for example, an answer to Question 7 might start:

When I reached puberty I was often too embarrassed and even frightened to go to school. There were no separate toilets for boys and girls. Girls were often harassed by the boys. We were even harassed by some teachers.

You can use the other side of the page to continue. Leave space between your answers because you will add more thoughts later on in this unit.

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Practical activity

1. Talk to another Scholar. Sit together and **think aloud** about each of the seven questions. Take turns to listen and answer. In this conversation, you might remember other things about your learning story.
2. Try to write one or two more sentences to add to the answers you wrote earlier. For example, after talking to the other Scholar an example of an addition to Question 4 could be:

She let us do interesting things. One time we went outside to catch insects and put them into gourds to examine them.

And, as an example, an addition to Question 7 could be:

I missed many lessons, and I fell behind. I envied the boys, who did not have our problems. Even today, as an adult, I still feel a bit afraid and threatened when I go into a school.

3. Read through your answers. What do you think are the most important points – the **key points** – of your own learning story?

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Review

When we talk together and listen to others, we can remember things that happened to us and think about why these things happened. We can also find that others have had similar experiences to us.

We often hesitate to tell our own stories because we think they are not important to anyone, but everyone has a story to tell and these stories have shaped us into who we are now. We need to understand which things we could have changed and which things were beyond our control. For instance, Chikondi found her father and mother good teachers but she could not change the situation of her mother's death even though this probably contributed to her not passing her MSCE the first time. She does not need to feel guilty about this.

Did you have things that were out of your control that stopped you progressing in your learning? Could you have done anything to change the situation? What could you have done? Do you know what you will do this time to make your learning experience really positive?

To finish this unit, complete these thoughts in writing, in the spaces below:

My best memory of school is...

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My worst memory of school is...

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I have found learning easy when....

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I have found learning hard when...

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I think a good teacher is someone who...

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In your experience, what do you think are the main reasons why girls drop out of school today? Has this changed since you were a girl?

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We hope you have enjoyed this first unit of your School Experience Handbook. We hope it has helped you to think usefully about your learning and life experiences, and that it has helped you to understand how to work through the other units.

Scholar's signature: Date:

Mentor's signature: Date:

Theme 1 Unit 2

How the school works

Welcome to your placement school.

The title of Theme 1 is 'Working with others and learning from them'. In the five units of Theme 1 you will be meeting teachers and learners. You will get to know how the school works, and you will start to help in the classroom. You will meet other Scholars, your Mentor, the Head teacher, class teachers and your MSCE Tutors. All of these people can help you, and you can learn from them.

It might be a long time since you went to primary school as a learner. Now you are in school again, but this time you are learning as an adult. Is the primary school today different from when you were a child?

When you complete this unit you will have developed:

1. your knowledge of how the school works, and people's roles and responsibilities
2. your skills and confidence in working with and learning from others
3. your understanding of issues affecting girls in the school.

In this unit you will read the following term:

Roles: these are the jobs and tasks that people do, and sometimes also the job titles they have. One of your jobs is to be a role model – this means you set an example to others about how to learn, how to behave and how to succeed.

Timing

Your School Experience reading, writing and practical activities should take you between three and four hours each week – not all at once but at different times during the two weeks which each unit takes. In this unit, you will need to plan time to introduce yourself to and find out more about the people who work in the school.

Study activity

Preparation reading

1. In any new learning situation we need to be able to ask questions and find out how things are done. It can be difficult to be the 'new' person who has a lot of questions, and we need to develop confidence in asking for help. One way we can find out who can help us is to get to know the people we work with as much as possible.

In your school there will be teachers, of course, and the Head teacher, but are there others? Other people in the school might include volunteers and perhaps an assistant head teacher. Your Mentor will be in the school or in a nearby school. Are there people who come into the school from time to time, such as a health worker, someone from the local government, the District Education Officer, or someone from a community or a volunteer organisation, an administrator, a cleaner or a clerk?

As a Scholar you will need to ask others in the school for explanations, information, help or advice. If someone is very busy, you will need to arrange a time when they will be free to talk with you. Think about how you have asked people for information or help in other situations in the past. Were there certain words or phrases you used? You can practise ways of asking for information, such as:

Could I make a time to ask you for some information about ...?

I know you are very busy, but if you have a moment could you tell me ...?

When you have time could you show me how to ...?

I would very much welcome your ideas about...

I would like to ask for your advice about...

2. Now go to the Introduction section of the School Experience Handbook and find the page which begins **'Moni!'** – this is a description of your role and how you can help in the school. Read this several times, so that you feel confident to tell someone else why you are in the school and what you will be doing.

Without looking at the Introduction, try to explain your role to someone else you know – perhaps to someone at home.

Practical activity

1. This week, go around the school and find out how many people work there. You can spend a few minutes each day speaking to different people, during school time or before or after school. Try to do this with another Scholar.

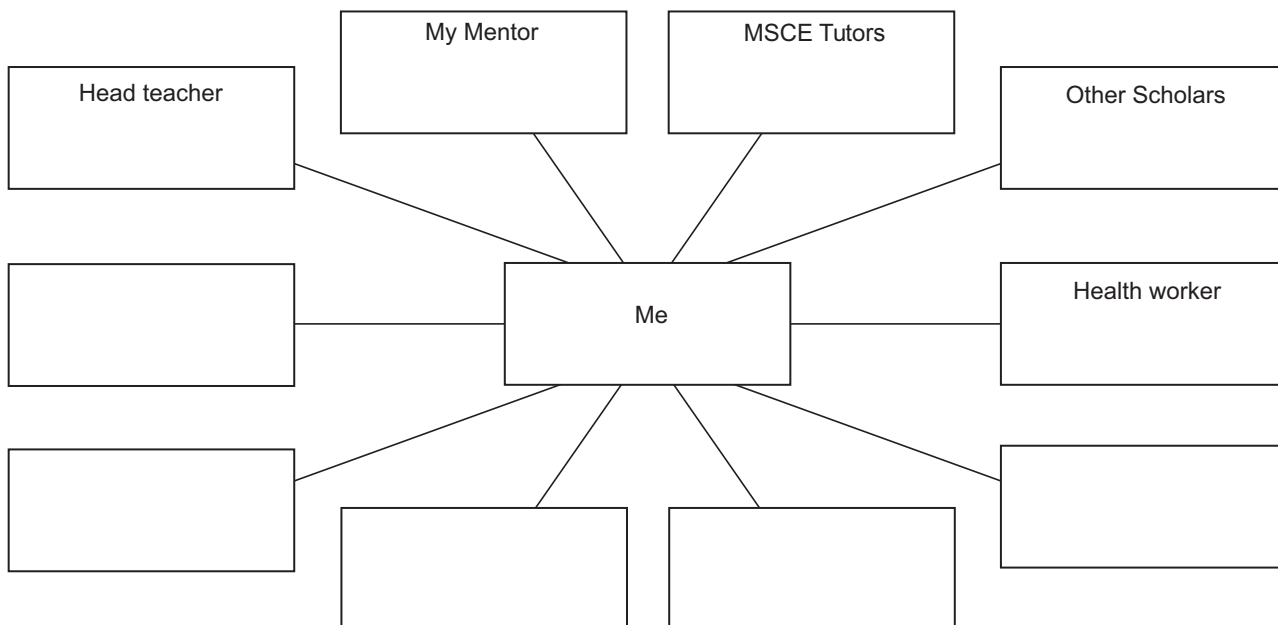
Introduce yourself to each person who works in the school. These can be people who work directly in the school, such as teachers, and those who work indirectly such as a health worker or the District Education Officer. Remember their names, and what they do. If they are not too busy, ask them to tell you about how they came to work in the school or the zone. You can also tell them about your own role in the school as a scholar and learning assistant. You might like to show them the **'Moni!'** page of the School Experience Handbook.

As you go around the school, look for issues affecting girls as learners. Here are some things you might look for:

- Does the school have separate toilets for boys and girls?
- What happens when girls reach puberty?
- Are there other women teachers in the school?
- Are the numbers of girls and boys in the school equal or are there more boys than girls, especially in the higher Standards?
- Do teachers treat boys and girls differently?
- Do boys and girls have different jobs around the school?
- Do girls and boys sit together or separately?

As you introduce yourself and speak with people in the school, try to ask what are the problems facing girl learners. Listen carefully to what people say about this.

2. In the diagram below, write the names of the people you met and their roles. Put yourself in the centre of the diagram, and include people such as your Mentor and the teacher you will work with in Standard 1 or 2 and your MSCE Tutors. Don't forget the learners too. We have started one for you, to show you what it might look like. Fill in the names, and add others.



Review

How did you feel introducing yourself to others? Was it easy or difficult? Were people friendly and encouraging? Did you find out a bit about them?

In our lives we will work and learn with different people, in different situations. We will find people who are encouraging and sometimes people who are less encouraging. It is important to keep confident in ourselves, no matter who we meet.

By talking to others who work in the school we can get to know the whole situation better. As a result we can feel more confident about our own role and about doing our best in the school and the classroom and for the learners. Are there people in the school who you felt you could talk to and ask for advice? Who are these people? Asking for advice and seeking support is not about gossiping but about building up our knowledge of how effective schools work.

What did you learn about factors affecting the education of girls in the school? This may have been difficult to discuss with others. Even if you could not talk to people in the school about this, you may have seen things that you would like to talk about with other Scholars or your Mentor.

To finish this unit, complete these sentences in the spaces below:

If I need information or advice about my School Experience I could ask...

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Issues that seem to affect girls in the school are:

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There are many ways in which other people can help us to learn and develop – by talking with us, listening to us, giving suggestions and advice, demonstrating and explaining things, and by being encouraging and positive.

Listening to others is an important learning skill. Looking carefully at a situation is also an important learning skill. Sometimes we can take action based on what we hear and see. You may have learned things about girls in the school that you feel should be improved. Even if these things cannot be changed right away, your knowledge may help to change things in the future.

Scholar's report and self-assessment

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Mentor's comments and evaluation

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Scholar's signature: Date:

Mentor's signature: Date:

Theme 1 Unit 3

Observing a classroom

As you help in the school and get to know the learners and the teachers, you will also be watching and listening to what is going on around you. This is an important part of your own learning about primary education. In this unit, you will begin to develop your skills in watching learners and teachers ‘in action’ in the classroom.

When you complete this unit you will have developed:

1. your skills of observation (watching and listening carefully)
2. your knowledge of how teachers manage the classroom.

In this unit you will read the following terms:

Observing/observation: paying close attention to what you see and hear.

Making notes: writing one or two words, very short sentences or even making a quick drawing, to help you to remember something you see and hear.

Timing

Four hours each week – not all at once, but at different times over the two weeks. A lesson, for instance, usually lasts around 30 to 35 minutes. You will also need to make time to discuss your lesson observation with another Scholar.

Study activity

As we go about our daily lives, we are surrounded by sights and sounds. If something catches our attention, we stop and look more carefully. In school, you will observe many things and these daily, informal observations will help you to develop your understanding of teaching and learning. For example:

A girl in Standard 1 regularly complained of leg pains. The teacher noticed this and decided to casually watch and listen to the girl over several days. The teacher noticed a pattern: the girl complained of pains every time her father, a long-distance lorry driver, went away. The teacher made a note of this and made time to reassure the girl.

Real life example

Read the following observation of a lesson, written by a Scholar, Tamanda from Salima. She wrote this description after the lesson, thinking back on what she had observed. During the lesson, Tamanda made notes in her School Experience Handbook which helped her to remember what she saw and heard.

Observation: Standard 3 class

What I saw and heard

The teacher's instructional style was interesting and different because she constantly made little jokes and made the learners laugh. It was the first lesson of the day, and when she first came in, the learners were very quiet, but her being lively and funny made them more cheerful and I saw that this made them participate more.

She put the learners into mixed groups of boys and girls, so that there were one or two good writers in each group. She was able to do this because she had asked the learners write a letter to her at the very beginning of the term so she could estimate their language abilities as well as their personalities.

In the lesson, the teacher directed the learners in their groups to share things about themselves, such as their favourite things to do in their free time, their favourite song or story, or their favourite food. At the end of the lesson, each group had to list five things they had in common, which I thought was a good way of encouraging friendship.

The teacher's way of managing the class was cheerful. Even when she faced a disciplinary situation (a learner fell asleep), she could make a joke out of it while also sending a sharp message about attention. Asking learners to find five common things made them focus on what they had in common instead of their differences. I noticed that she was always very careful to make sure that girls and boys had equal time to talk and to participate – she never let boys dominate the girls in the tasks. She made sure girls had chances to lead their groups.

I believe, from this observation, that the mood of the classroom is important. The teacher is important in creating this. The lesson gave learners a chance to get to know each other and to do some writing. When the teacher knows something about the learners, this knowledge can help her to create good lessons.

Tamanda wrote this observation at the end of her School Experience. Remember that you are just beginning to observe and write about this, so we do not expect you to write in the same way. You would also write different things because you are in a different school and classroom. But we would like you to notice how Tamanda writes about her own feelings, her learning and understanding – as well as what she sees and hears.

Practical activity

1. Arrange with your teacher or Mentor to watch a lesson this week. This can be in your class or in another classroom in the school.

If it is possible, arrange for the other Scholar in the school to watch a different lesson so that you can compare your experiences. Make a time to talk about the two lessons which you observed – perhaps towards the end of the week.

You may need to explain to the teacher that you need to watch lessons as part of your School Experience. You are not judging the style of the teacher. You are trying to understand how classrooms work.

Take your School Experience Handbook with you to the lesson so that you can make notes as you watch and listen.

2. Pay attention during the lesson. As you watch and listen, in the spaces below, write a few words about what you see and hear, starting with:

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I hear ...

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Write just two or three words about:

- The time of day

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- What the room looks like

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- What the girls are doing

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- What the boys are doing

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- What the teacher is doing

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3. After the lesson, look back on these notes, recall as much as you can, and write a description of what you saw and heard.

Write your description here (you can use the next page as well):

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It features approximately 28 horizontal dotted lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. The paper is otherwise blank, with no margins, text, or other markings.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Review

Make time to talk about your observation with another Scholar. How did you feel about the lesson you watched? Perhaps you recalled the time when you were a learner in primary school. You may have found the teacher's methods familiar, or maybe there were new things that you saw since you were in school. Did you remember learning this lesson yourself? Were these good memories? Share your thoughts with another Scholar, and find out what she observed in the lesson she went to.

Try to say what the teacher did that you think worked well, and why. Think about what you observed in the lesson that was positive for learners. Try to say what you think was positive, or not positive, for girls in the class.

Scholar's report and self-assessment

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Mentor's comments and evaluation

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Scholar's signature: Date:

Mentor's signature: Date:

Theme 1 Unit 4

Getting to know the learners

So far in Theme 1 you have thought about your own experiences of learning. You have also learned about how your school works and about your role as a Teaching Assistant. In this unit, you will get to know the learners in your classroom.

When you complete this unit you will have developed:

1. your knowledge of primary school learners
2. an understanding of appropriate confidentiality when working with children.

In this unit you will read the following terms:

Word portrait: this is a simple description in writing, based on what you see and hear.

Child study: watching, listening and talking with a child to find out more about him or her.

Confidentiality: making sure that personal information is kept private.

Timing

Four hours each week – not all at once, but at different times during the two weeks. In this unit you will need to plan time to get to know the children and write about two of them in your Handbook.

Study activity _____

Real life example

Read the following story about Thokozani, a Scholar in Salima, her teacher and her mother. As you read, think about whether you know of learners who have had similar experiences.

Thokozani was a star performer in Standard 6 at Funzani primary school. She lived with her parents in a village close to the school. Her father, who was employed as a manager in one of the tobacco estates, provided her with all the resources she needed for her education. He always encouraged her to work hard in class. He used to check Thokozani's school work from her notebooks at home and correct them, and advise her on how to improve. When he could, he used to visit the school to discuss Thokozani's welfare with the class teacher and talk about any concerns he might have regarding her performance.

As time went by, things changed for Thokozani. Her father died after a short illness. This was a heavy blow to the family. He was the sole bread winner.

The mother never had a chance to attend school as her parents died while she was very young and her grandparents were too poor to

put her in school. After getting married and having children, she did not have enough time to develop her own income-generating activity. Thokozani's father had provided everything that the family needed.

After the death of her father, Thokozani started coming to school without notebooks and pens. Sometimes, she would even go to school without having breakfast and in dirty clothes. Her mother did not have any reliable source of income and could not meet the family's needs. Although the mother encouraged her daughter to go to school, she was illiterate, and she could not check up on Thokozani's school work. Gradually, Thokozani's performance in class started going downhill.

Miss Ndhlovu, the Standard 6 teacher, noticed Thokozani's drastic change in performance but she did not understand why this was happening. One day, she took Thokozani aside to talk to her. After hearing her story, the teacher made an effort to meet Thokozani's mother. Miss Ndhlovu told the mother about a community organisation which could help children in need of the resources required for school.

Thokozani's mother, knowing the importance of education, went to seek assistance from this organisation. This was not easy, because of the change in her situation. But the chairperson was sensitive and put Thokozani's mother at ease. Thokozani was accepted as a beneficiary of the organisation and began to receive the basics for her schooling. With the encouragement from her mother and her teacher, Thokozani started excelling again in school.

What do you think might have happened if Miss Ndhlovu had not talked with Thokozani's mother? Learners may not feel it is appropriate to tell a teacher about their family circumstances, and parents may also feel uncomfortable about talking to teachers. This makes us realise how important it is for teachers to be alert to changes they see in learners, and for teachers to be able to talk to parents in a sensitive way.

It is important to understand that learners' performance in school is influenced by different factors. Apart from mental capability, a learner's home life is important, as Thokozani's teacher learned. Teachers need to know about what is happening in learners' families and communities because these events can influence, for better and for worse, learners' chances in school.

In your own life, you may have had encouragement from your family and from teachers, or you may have been discouraged from going to school. Perhaps in your life there was a change in your situation which you felt you could not talk about, or maybe you were able to talk to an elder or a teacher and then felt better about things. Children's chances in school and in life often depend on the sensitivity and willingness of others.

Practical activity

1. This week, make time to get to know the learners in your classroom, in a very informal way. You can start by asking them: What is your name? How old are you? How many brothers and sisters do you have? What did you have for breakfast this morning? Do you like school? What do you like to learn? What do you want to be when you grow up? What jobs do you do at home to help your family? Do you live far from school, or near?

2. Choose two girl learners. During the week, make time to watch and listen to these two learners. Talk to them very informally. As you do this, ask yourself: do they seem to enjoy school? Are they on time, or are they late? Do they like being with their friends in school? Are there certain subjects they enjoy more than others? How do they get along with the teacher? Do they sit at the front of the class?
3. Write a short word portrait of each girl (not more than eight sentences for each learner), based on what you have seen and heard.

When you write about learners in your School Experience Handbook, you should use only their first names. If a teacher, a parent or a child asks why you are writing about learners, you need to explain that this is a task for your School Experience, and it is not anything bad about the children. You should always keep in mind that anyone in the school can see your Handbook, and so it is important that you write with sensitivity and respect about teachers and learners. But you must also be prepared, if you see or hear anything about a child which worries you, to report your worries to the teacher, your Mentor or the Head teacher.

Here is an example of a word portrait of a learner, written by Charity, who is a Scholar in Nsonje. Remember that you are just beginning your school placement, so you should not expect to write in the exact same way as Charity. Also, you will write different things because you are writing about different children:

Ruth is 9 years old. She is often late for school because she has to make the fire and cook breakfast for her brothers and sisters – her mother and father go off to work very early in the morning. Ruth says she enjoys school and her favourite subject is mathematics. I can see that she is quick at maths and does all the sums in her head. She is attentive in lessons, but the teacher does not call on her often and criticises her for being late. Ruth wants to have a market stall when she grows up, selling vegetables or cloth. She likes to dance and sing with her friend Agnes. She likes to play ‘shop keeper’ using stones as pretend money. I feel she is a clever and confident child who has many responsibilities at home even though she is still very young.

Chisulo is 10 years old. He is never late to school. He told me this is because his mother forces him to run from his village to school so that he can be on time. Chisulo says he enjoys school and that his favourite subject is mathematics because he can do the sums in his head. He is attentive in lessons. He wants to be a bus driver when he grows up, and he likes to play football after school with his friend Dulani. I feel he is a clever and confident child.

Write your two word portraits here (you can continue on the other side of the page, but leave some space after each word portrait because you will write a bit more later on):

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[illegible]

Review

When you get to know learners, you can help them with their learning better.

For instance, if Ruth wants to have a market stall when she grows up, she might enjoy writing a story about a market or a business woman. She might enjoy solving mathematical problems about the cost of food items or metres of cloth. She might also enjoy designing patterns for cloth.

Read your word portraits of the two learners. Then try to answer these questions:

- Did you find out anything which surprised you?
- What else would you like to find out, and why would you like to know this?
- Did the girls say anything which helped you to understand their behaviour in school?

Go back to your word portraits and try to add a bit more to them, based on your answer to these questions. Charity added this, about Ruth – but you will write something different because you are writing about different children:

I was surprised that she has so much responsibility at home. It has made me understand why she is often late, and not washed, and often very tired – she is looking after her brothers and sisters. I would like to find out if someone helps her at home with her school work because she is very quick at mathematics even when she is very tired.

To finish this unit, take a moment to appreciate what you have done – a child study. When you do this kind of child study, it can help you to feel more confident about helping in the classroom. You have also thought about confidentiality.

Scholar’s report and self-assessment

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Mentor's comments and evaluation

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Scholar's signature: Date:

Mentor's signature: Date:

Theme 1 Unit 5

Helping in the classroom

In this unit you will focus on what you can do as a Teaching Assistant. It is important to remember that you are in the school to help and to learn about primary education. As you learned in Unit 2, there are people who can support you as you work and learn.

When you complete this unit you will have developed:

1. a practical understanding of your role
2. your confidence in supporting the teacher and learners
3. skills to identify personal goals.

In this unit you will read the following terms:

Role model: someone who sets a good example and who is admired by others.

Timing

Your School Experience reading, writing and practical activities should take you between three and four hours each week during the two weeks – not all at once but at different times. In this unit, you should start to take part in the day-to-day life of the classroom in a practical way, helping the teacher as much as possible.

Study activity

Real life example

Read these stories about three Scholars in different rural schools:

Grace is a Scholar in a primary school in Chikwawa. When she first came to the school, Grace made time to greet and introduce herself to the other teachers. This was not easy for her to do because she was very shy, so before school she would practise what she would say to each person. Now, every morning she tries to find a good moment to ask the class teacher to describe to her what will happen that day in the classroom, and then she asks what she can do to help him. The teacher allows Grace to distribute books in lessons and to sit with the slower learners to encourage them to participate in the lesson. Grace meets with her Mentor and other Scholars after school, where she finds it helpful to talk about her experiences and what she sees in school. Her Mentor takes time to answer their questions and encourages them to share their school placement experiences. Grace tries to be a good role model so that the teacher will allow her to do more in the classroom. She is always punctual and asks to be given jobs.

Towela is a Scholar in a primary school in Zomba. She tries to speak with the teacher, but because the class is very large (over 100 learners) he is always too busy to explain his plans and lessons. He does not give Towela jobs to do, so she watches the class and tries to help if she feels it will not make the teacher angry. Other teachers in

the school tell Towela she must keep her eyes open and watch what the teacher does, but not to bother him with any questions. Towela feels isolated, and is not sure who to turn to. She feels embarrassed to tell her Mentor what is happening, but realises that if she does not say something then she will not learn as much as she could. So Towela asks her Mentor if she could have a private word with her. Towela tells her how hard it is for her to understand everything that is going on in his classroom. The Mentor says she will speak informally to the teacher about the school placement generally and what Scholars are expected to do – as it says in the Introduction to the School Experience Handbook. The Mentor does not promise that Towela's situation will change, but makes time to explain to Towela how the teacher organises the classroom and the learners.

Joyce is a Scholar in a primary school in Thyolo district. When the Standard 1 teacher becomes ill, the Head teacher decides to put Joyce in charge of the class. Joyce does not feel she can refuse. She tries to organise the class but she has no previous teaching experience and is not trained as a teacher and she has never managed a class on her own before. When the class becomes too noisy the Head teacher comes in and restores order. Joyce wants to continue as a Scholar but is very unhappy in this situation. She is not sure what to say or do. If she complains, she is afraid that the Head teacher will make her leave the school. She decides to talk to her Mentor and asks the Mentor to keep their talk confidential to them both. The Mentor understands the problem but cannot promise that Joyce will get help in the classroom, and she suggests ways for Joyce to manage the class. The mentor also decides to contact the District Education Officer for advice.

Grace has a teacher who is supporting her work as a Teaching Assistant and as a Scholar – this is as it should be. But what do you think Towela should do? Do you think there are other things which Joyce could do or should do? Perhaps they could talk to their Mentors, or to other Scholars, or to people in their families or in their communities.

As you were reading about these three Scholars, you were probably thinking about your own school placement. It is important to talk to others about what you are doing in the classroom. Do not try to struggle on your own.

Practical activity

Here is a list of some of the things you can do to help in the classroom. How many of these things do you feel you could do? Make a 'tick' next to the things you feel you can do. Perhaps you are already doing some of these things – well done!

- Prepare the classroom in the morning
- Ring the bell to call learners inside
- Call the register
- Distribute resources (books, paper, pencils)
- Write in the sick book
- Write in the punishment book
- Write in the progress book

- Tidy the classroom
- Help to maintain quiet and discipline
- Encourage learners
- Help slower learners
- Prepare visual aids or drawings for learning: word lists, mathematical charts, diagrams or pictures
- Mark learners' work, using the teacher's mark guide
- Take a group of children to collect water for the classroom
- Take a group of children to teach them a song, a poem or a dance
- With the teacher's guidance, take a group for additional practice or revision
- As a reward from the teacher, take a group of learners on a visit to a local farm or other place
- Prepare a display
- Make a 'nature' display for science (of leaves, seeds, rocks, wood).

Are there other things you could do – or already do – to help in the classroom? List them in the space below:

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Review

As you help in the school, remember that you are not a teacher. If you feel unsure about what you are doing, you should ask the teacher for advice and always take the teacher's direction and guidance. Remember there are others who can help you, such as your Mentor.

But although you are not a teacher, you are an important role model – especially for girls. You can show learners how they should behave, respect each other, pay attention and work hard. Everyone has the right to be in school and to learn. Every day you are in school you should set an example to all learners about the importance of education. You should always be punctual, positive and ready to help.

To finish this unit, think about what you would like to do as a Teaching Assistant. You might like to help learners with mathematics because you are good at mathematics yourself. You might like to help learners with reading because you enjoy reading. You might like to help with classroom management because you are good at encouraging children. Perhaps there is a special activity you would like to do that would give girls more confidence. Write your thoughts in the spaces below:

I would like to help in the classroom in these ways:

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If you can, talk to your class teacher and your Mentor about what you would like to do to help. They might have some ideas too.

Finally, write down three personal goals. Think carefully about what you want to achieve by the school break. Your goals can be small steps, for example, to become confident about supporting mathematics in the classroom. Or your goals might be to do something positive for girls in the class – you should discuss this with your Mentor.

Next to each goal, write a few words about what, or who, can help you to achieve it.

Think about your personal and professional development, set yourself three goals and identify who or what can help you to achieve them.

My goal	Who or what can help me to achieve it

Discuss what you have written with your Mentor, the next time you meet.

Scholar's report and self-assessment

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Mentor's comments and evaluation

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Scholar's signature: Date:

Mentor's signature: Date:



The Open
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