

## Towards In-Service Training for Male Teachers: Muhammad Ali and Teacher Masculinity

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### ABSTRACT

Male teachers often experience contradictions in their role and their identity. Teaching is sometimes not regarded as a masculine occupation, as it is associated with caring for children and associated with the home, where love and obligation drive production rather than pay. There is a contradiction in the viewpoints that men engaged in caring professions are both seen to be feminized but, at the same time, to be sexualized and hypermasculine. As such, the male teacher is positioned within a discourse of suspicion: they are suspected to be potential child molesters. At the same time, male elementary teachers are wanted in schools expressly as disciplinarians, and these teachers can be exploited when their female counterparts do not share the role of disciplinarian. Despite noting that many males leave teacher training because of these challenges, researchers have spent much less time investigating strategies to assist men in coping with them and persist in the profession. Considering this, an effort was made to develop an in-service workshop for male teachers by appreciating the life and career of Muhammad Ali, arguably the greatest boxer of all time. This was qualitative research which made use of primary materials, collected from discussion using Appreciative Inquiry methodology and principles, and secondary materials, such as a documentary and videos, and in the following manner: after watching videos of some of Ali's best knockouts, and watching a documentary of his life, 19 volunteer male teachers conducted interviews in pairs and, following feedback and discussions, five themes from Ali's life and career were qualitatively identified: the thief who stole Ali's bicycle; success is 10% talent and 90% hard work; proper preparation and having confidence about one's work; male teachers mold our learners' diversity; and confidence before and during his fights. These themes were suitable for application in the male teachers' careers and could serve as a curricular framework for professional development.

### KEYWORDS

Male teachers; teacher masculinity; Muhammad Ali; themes for professional development; appreciation.

## INTRODUCTION

One can, like Moosa and Bhana (2020, p. 177) argue that suspicions about male teachers, particularly in the Foundation Phase but also other phases of education, have become normalized. They argue that there are limitations and stigma that men must endure when they teach young children: men cannot hug children or show affection in the same manner as female teachers. In fact, Cruickshank et al. (2021, p. 79) point out that fear and uncertainty surrounding physical contact can be a substantial challenge for male primary school teachers. Palmer et al. (2020, p. 268) report that many of the men in their study, which took place in regional Australia, employed compensatory tactics such as high fives, handshakes, and pats on the back with their students to offset the allegation that they were “soft” or had sinister motives for wanting to work with school children.

### **Theoretical background: Masculinity in education**

Moosa and Bhana (2020, p. 180–1) point out that dominant constructions of masculinity, particular South Africa, include the view of men as being highly sexualized and claiming sexual power over women and children. They discovered that, while some teachers in their study welcomed the idea of more male Foundation Phase teachers, this was qualified by a suspicion that the men might be potential child molesters. They found that the elevated levels of abuse of young girls in South Africa further fueled the speculation surrounding men who aspire to teach young children, and young girls even more so. Heikkilä and Hellman (2017, p. 1212) call this “the ever-present paedophilia dilemma”.

This unidimensional, ruinous perception of men is problematic (Moosa and Bhana 2020, p. 181), as it causes men with a sincere and honest desire to educate and mold young children to avoid the profession. In addition to this, male teachers are expected to be tough disciplinarians (Palmer et al. 2020, p. 266). They are also expected to take on additional extra-curricular labor, largely in sport. At the time the first author of this paper was teaching, the school principal expected men, not women, would drive the school bus to extramural activities in neighboring towns. Men are thus needed in schools, but men also need to present their masculine identity in safe, non-threatening ways (Palmer et al. 2020, p. 266).

The ability to do this, though, is affected by the complex and changing nature of masculinity, particularly as it intersects with professional identities (Palmer et al. 2020, p. 266). Connell (2008, p. 134) argues that masculinities are in a constant state of change. In addition, Moosa and Bhana (2020, p. 181) point out that men’s identities are multiple and intersectional, rather than homogenous. These authors suggest that gendered apprehensions about male sexuality and danger can potentially be deconstructed during gender-sensitive teacher training workshops.

Palmer et al. (2020, p. 271) seem to agree, since they recommend that male teachers be provided with assistance in developing strategies to approach their particular challenges. They argue that greater attention should be paid to the realities of male primary school teachers’

situations; their research, they posit, provides a point of departure for a nascent research agenda in further studies of career identities and the teaching profession.

Our research article is a response to their suggestion.

### **Aim of our study**

Following the suggestion by Palmer et al. (2020, p. 271) the researchers presented an in-service workshop with a focus on what male teachers could learn from Muhammad Ali exclusively for twenty-one male primary school teachers from a number of schools in Welkom, a town in central South Africa. The research was conducted to establish which strategies could be used or applied by these male teachers in their teaching environments to empower them in their struggle to negotiate the demands of their situations as male educationalists. These could then be used to develop a basic curriculum for training male teachers.

### **Why Ali?**

Our decision to use Ali as a role model for in-service *teacher* training might not seem obvious, or even logical, at first. When one considers the fact that Ali in his time was probably the most famous person in the world (Hoffer, 2016, p. 32), that he was a glorious athlete, and that he took a principled stance against an unjust war in Vietnam, even risking jail (Hoffer, 2016, p. 35), then our decision might become clear. Hoffer (2016, p. 35) has said that this stance was not frivolous, but that he had convictions and stuck to them, even if it meant paying a tremendous price.

Ali explained his objections to the war, not just on religious grounds (at age 22 he had converted to Islam), but also racial (Hoffer, 2016, p. 39): “No Vietcong ever called me nigger,” he explained. And, perhaps more famously: “I ain’t got no quarrel with them Vietcong.” He was sentenced to five years in prison for refusing to fight in the war – a decision which was overturned by the American high court four years later (Hoffer, 2016, p. 39). He was also excluded from boxing for more than three years when the New York commission stripped him of his world title (won at age 22 by beating Sonny Liston twice – see Figure 1): “The exile robbed him of his prime but deepened his significance as a political icon. The war would not long remain popular, or even viable; Ali, as the times caught up to his convictions, was restored as a man of substance, possibly even history” (Hoffer, 2016, p. 39).

Upon his return to the ring at age 28, he first fought Joe Frasier, a fight he lost (Hoffer, 2016, p. 40); but he won his second and third fights against Frasier. It was the fight against Foreman on 30 October 1974 in Zaire, though, that would provide the basis for Ali’s development as a world citizen (Hoffer, 2016, p. 41). Seeing Africa for the first time, he heard the crowds chanting “Ali, *bomaye!*” (Ali, kill him! – Hoffer, 2016, p. 41) and recognized his ability to gather different cultures around him.

Ali seemed incapable of beating Foreman though, but he invented a stunning strategy, which demanded he accept the blows of Foreman’s heavy hands as he sagged back into the ropes (Hoffer, 2016, p. 41):

Later christened rope-a-dope, the game plan at first appeared suicidal but then, as Foreman grew arm-weary, brilliant. Although Ali suffered the kind of punishment that can take years to manifest itself, the tactic did result in an amazing victory when he took Foreman out in the eighth round.

**Figure 1.**

*“Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali stands over fallen challenger Sonny Liston, shouting and gesturing shortly after dropping Liston with a short hard right to the jaw on May 25, 1965, in Lewiston, Maine. The bout lasted only one minute into the first round” (Schuppe, 2016).*



A third fight against Frasier followed. He should have retired then (Hoffer, 2016, p. 41), but he fought on. This led to him being diagnosed with pugilistic Parkinsonism, according to Hoffer (2016, p. 41), an artefact of his competitive drive and “a cruel coda to a career built on the beautification of an ugly sport.”

Despite this, Ali was never bitter, nor did he recognize the irony, or even tragedy, in the loss of gifts that had been so central to his being: “Instead, he bent himself to a new purpose, which was simply humanizing the rest of the world” (Hoffer, 2016, p. 42). He accepted honorary degrees, delivered letters on world peace and testified before the American Congress on Parkinson’s research.

At the same time, argues Hoffer (2016, p. 42) he was able to relax in his celebrity, to enjoy a life of missionary work and statesmanship. The spirit beneath was never in doubt – “You could always see the twinkle in his eye (Hoffer, 2016, p. 42).

In the aftermath and development of the Black Lives Matter movement, one could hardly think of a more appropriate and inspiring person to appreciate and learn from.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Design and approach: Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

According to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), AI is the study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. They call it an approach to personal change and organization change that assumes that questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams are themselves transformational. AI, according to McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2018), engages people and organizations in exploring, through asking questions and telling stories, what is currently working well to manifest the future. Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) call AI an energizing approach for sparking positive change in people, groups, and organizations.

Pretorius (2022) has used the method of AI to conduct a personal investigation into the performances of the singer Neil Diamond in which he identified five themes which relate to what he as an educationalist and lecturer learned from Diamond: the interaction between Diamond and his audiences; keeping up with the latest technology; Diamond's enjoyment of what he did; his enthusiasm about his performances and his passionate immersion in those performances.

The current study facilitated an appreciative process, in the form of a day-long workshop. This allowed male primary school teachers to engage in discussions about the strengths, successes, and legacy of Mohammad Ali, arguably the greatest boxer of all time. After identifying these themes, it was posited that what had been learned from the discussions could be applied to improve the male teachers' educational practices.

Although AI is a qualitative process, and primarily constructionist in nature (Cockell and McArthur-Blair 2020), it is well-structured. Watkins et al. (2011, p. 36–7) were the first to identify the fifth stage of AI (previously, there had only been four – see Figure 2).

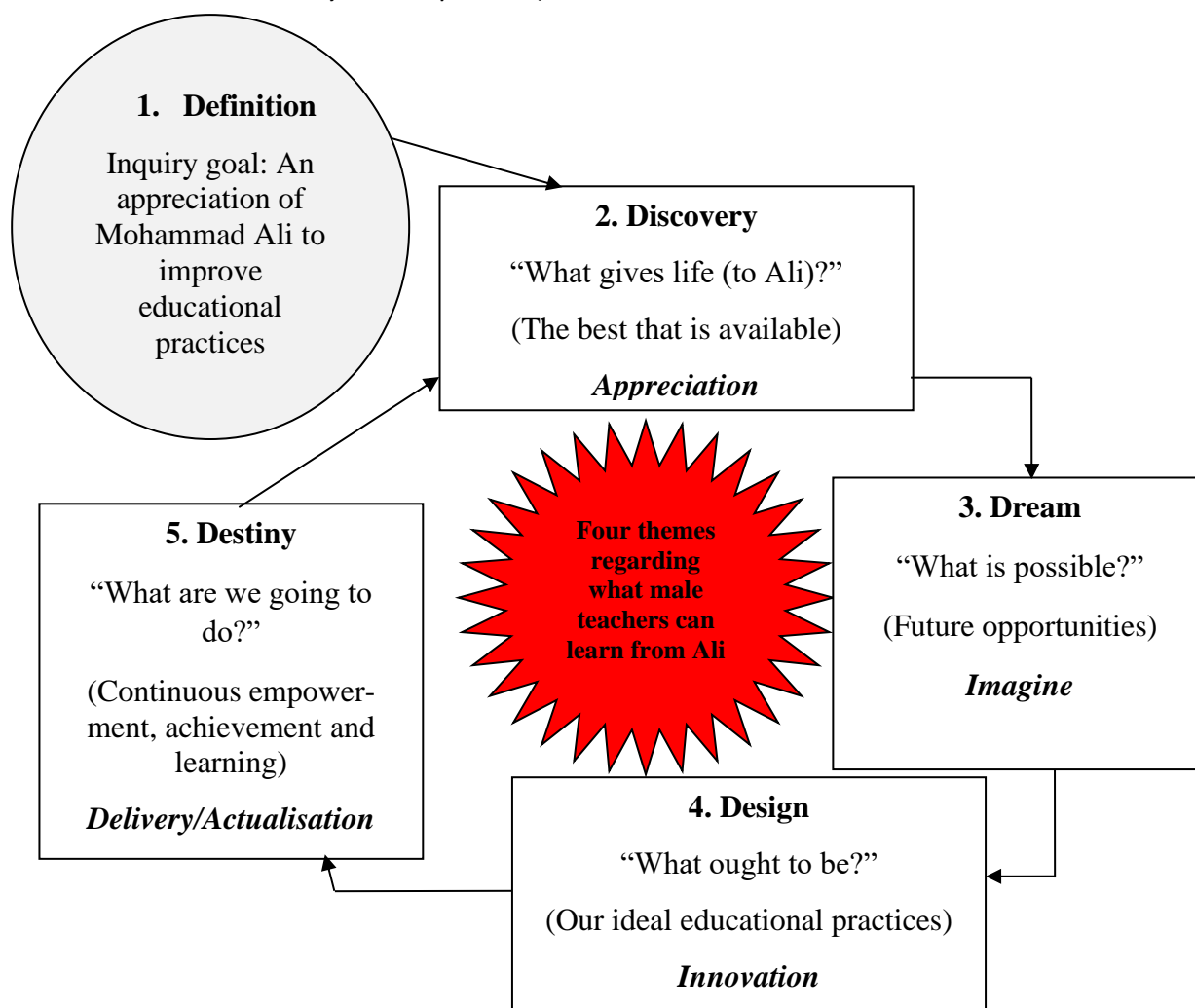
During the first, *Definition* phase, the inquiry's goals, including the framing of the principal question and the inquiry protocol as well as the participation strategy, should be developed (Watkins et al. 2011, p. 36). The goal of our inquiry was to undertake an appreciation of Mohammad Ali to improve the educational practices of male primary school teachers. A comprehensive inquiry protocol was developed, with appreciative questions about Ali, to serve as the scaffolding for events during the workshop. The first author also contacted a school principal in Welkom to recruit volunteer male teachers from primary schools in the area.

Babbie (2021, p. 63) points to the principle that no one should be forced to participate in social research. In the case of the research, this was also very important since male teachers were needed to participate in an experimental, creative, and possibly novel research activity. As far as could be established, no research has been conducted about what male primary

school teachers could learn from Muhammad Ali that would relate to their educational practices.

**Figure 2.**

*The Appreciative Inquiry “5D Cycle” (Adapted from Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 6; Watkins, Mohr and Kelly, 2011, p. 36–7)*



**Sources of data**

After the school principal confirmed that twenty-one male teachers had volunteered to participate in the workshop, it was conducted in May 2021. Because of local Covid regulations, participants had to wear masks and had to adhere, as far as possible, to the regulations then current (see Figure 3).

At the start of the workshop, participants were given a brief orientation about the aim of our research. The AI process was also explained to them. To add a bit of competitive flavor to the workshop, it was announced that the members of the best group would each receive a little trophy with an Ali sticker, while the best participant and the one who wrote the best poem would each receive little boxer trophies (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3.**

*The participants watching a video of Ali's ten best knockouts*

**Figure 4.**

*Trophies for, on the left, two boxer trophies for the best participant and the best poem and, on the right, the best group*



### **Data collection**

The second, or data collection, phase – the *Discovery* phase (see Figure 2) – started by handing out the interview protocols and projecting two short 10-minute videos on the screen of the school hall at which the workshop was conducted (see Figure 3). Then the participants engaged in interviews in pairs (see Figure 5). During the first round of interviews, one member of the pair put the questions in the interview protocol to the other member wrote down their responses. For the second round of interviews, the pair reversed roles.

After this, the participants wrote down highlights from the interviews with their peers. These were shared with their home groups, of which there were three (see Figure 3).

**Figure 5.**

*Participants conducting interviews in pairs with interview protocols*



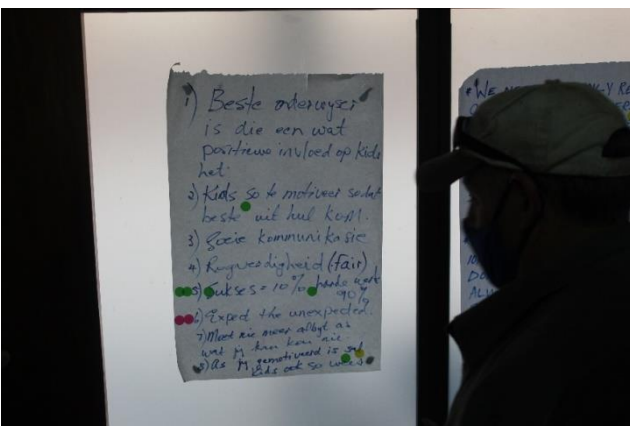
After all the groups had finished their feedback, the group leaders wrote the group's highlights on a flipchart and reported them to the whole workshop (see Figure 6). There were three presentations in total from the group leaders. Each workshop participant had already received four stickers to be used to “vote” for the four best stories, insights, or themes from the three feedback sessions (see Figure 7).

**Figure 6.**

*Feedback from leader of one of the three home groups*

**Figure 7.**

*A flipchart with some voting stickers on it*





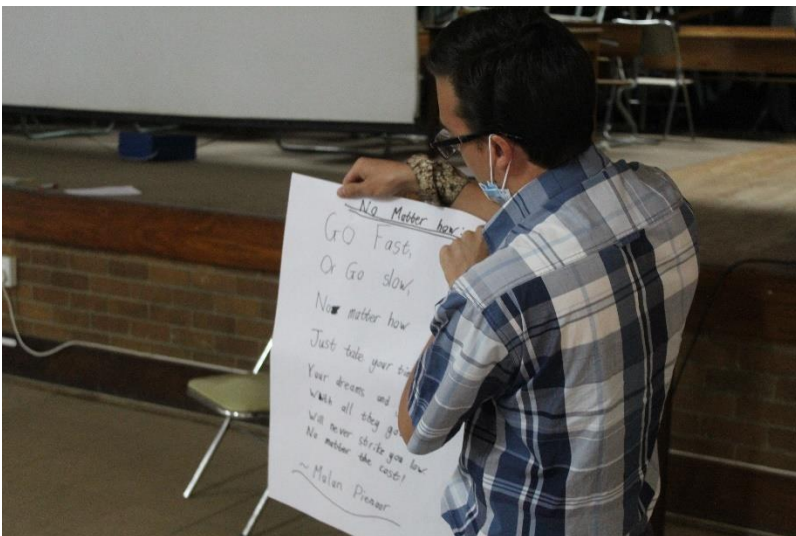
## RESULTS and ANALYSIS

After the voting, the four most popular themes were identified by counting the number of stickers for each item on the three groups' flipcharts (see Figure 7). They will be mentioned briefly here, to be discussed further later. The four most popular themes were: the thief who stole Ali's bicycle; success is 10% talent and 90% hard work (proper preparation and planning); confidence before and during the class/fight; and how to mold the diversity of our learners. This concluded the *Discovery* phase of the workshop and the commencement of the *Dream* phase (see Figure 2).

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010, p. 183) suggest that AI dreaming can involve anything from guided imagery and silent reflections to playful, dramatic skits: talk shows, commercials, songs, or poems. It was decided that, since Ali often wrote and performed playful poems himself, participants would each write poems that would capture the essence of the four themes mentioned above. These were then presented to the workshop (see Figure 8).

### Figure 8.

*A participant presenting his poem to the whole group*

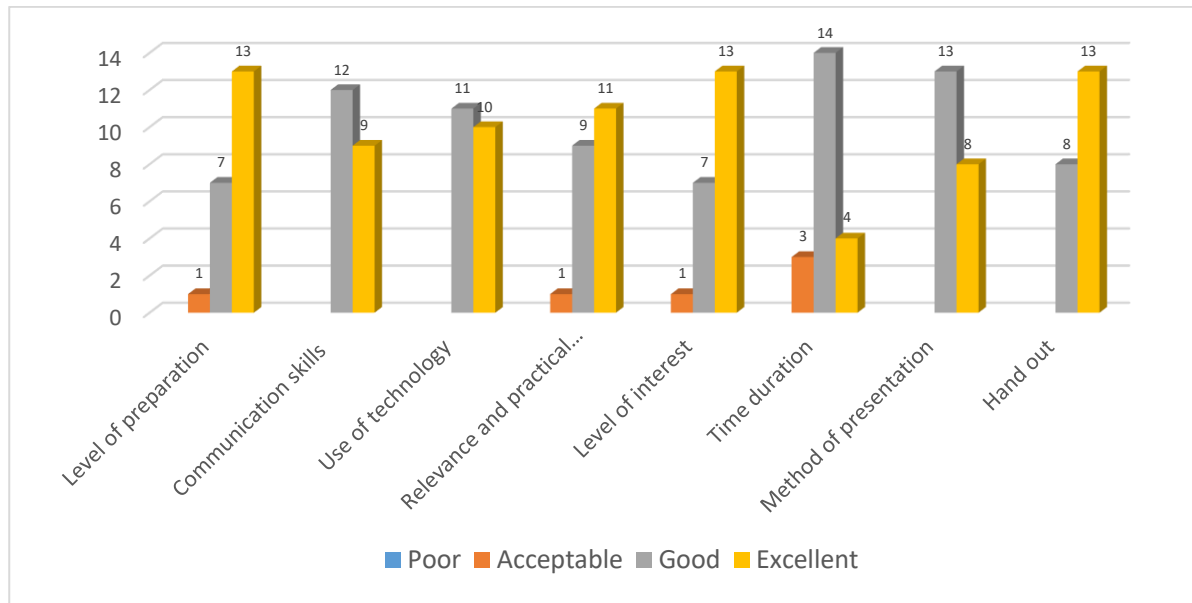


This concluded the first three phases of the AI process. Participants were asked to complete a feedback form to establish the success of different aspects of the workshop (see Figure 9).

One could be quite satisfied with, and encouraged by, the feedback, especially since 20 of the 21 participants responded that the relevance and practical application of the workshop were either "good" or "excellent", and that the responses to the other criteria were also relatively good.

To complete the final two phases of the AI process (*Design* and *Destiny* – see Figure 2), participants were asked to decide how they would apply the four themes in their classrooms upon their return to their respective schools. It was requested that they send feedback about the success of these applications after their implementation.

This was followed by a social event in the form of a braai, included because the men were able to meet and reflect informally in a relaxed environment.

**Figure 9***Feedback about the workshop (n = 21)*

We shall now discuss the themes identified from the workshop, embedding them in the literature to demonstrate their validity for teacher training. We shall do so by referring, firstly, to an authoritative biography of Ali written by Hauser (2012) with the co-operation of Ali himself; and, secondly, an equally authoritative educational source, written by Killen (2015). Of course, none of the themes are novel. It will suffice, then, to connect them with two authentic and respected sources: one historic, the other educational.

### **The four themes**

#### ***The thief who stole Ali's bicycle***

In some ways, wrote Hauser (2012, p. 17), the Clays (it is widely known that Ali, upon his conversion to Islam, changed his name from "Cassius Clay" to "Muhammad Ali") were a closely knit family; but as with most families, there were problems. The police records of Louisville, Kentucky, where they lived, reveal that Cassius Clay, Sr., was arrested four times for reckless driving, twice for disorderly conduct, once for disposing of mortgaged property, and assault and battery. Hauser (2012, p. 17) also reported that his penchant for women led to discord at home, and he sometimes turned violent under the influence of alcohol. On three occasions, Odessa Clay, his wife and Ali's mother, called the police for protection from their husband: "Ali preferred not to talk about those times, but they weighed upon him, as did the 'ugly etiquette' of the South. Segregation was a way of life in Kentucky, and reminders of second-class citizenship were everywhere."

Ali had the following to say about this:

When I was growing up, too many colored people thought it was better to be white. And I don't know what it was, but I always felt like I was born to do something for my people. Eight years old, ten years old; I'd walk out of my house at two in the morning, and look up at the sky

for an angel or a revelation or God telling me what to do. I never got an answer. I'd look at the stars and wait for a voice, but I never heard nothing. (Hauser, 2012, p. 18)

Then, the twelve-year-old Cassius Clay's red-and-white Schwinn bike got stolen.

It happened in October 1954, in front of the Columbia Auditorium in Louisville, where Ali and a friend had been attending a home show (Hauser, 2012, p. 18): "For much of the afternoon, they canvassed the floor, eating free popcorn and candy. Then, when it was time to go home, Clay discovered his bike had been stolen. Meanwhile, a Louisville policeman named Joe Martin was at work in the basement, teaching youngsters how to box."

Ali said:

Then my bike got stolen and I started boxing, and it was like God telling me that boxing was my responsibility. God made us all, but some of us are made special. Einstein wasn't an ordinary human. Columbus wasn't an ordinary human. Elvis Presley, the Wright Brothers. Some people have special resources inside, and when God blesses you to have more than others, you have a responsibility to use it right. (Hauser, 2012, p. 18)

Martin remembered the incident quite well (Hauser, 2012, p. 18):

And one night this kid came downstairs, and he was crying. Somebody had stolen his new bicycle, and of course he was very upset about that and wanted to report it to the police. And as I was a police officer, well, someone told him there's a police officer downstairs in the gymnasium, go down and tell him about it. And he was having a fit, half crying because someone stole his bike. He was only twelve years old then, and he was gonna whup whoever stole it. And I brought up the subject, I said, 'Well, you better learn how to fight before you start challenging people that you're gonna whup.'

The rest is history. Ali eventually became the best boxer of all time, but his career was ignited by a seemingly unimportant event, one that surely happens many times daily all over the world. There is no way that Martin could have known that the future heavyweight champion of the world was standing in front of him. He acted intuitively, almost without thinking, as he had probably done on many occasions.

The reason the male teachers found this remarkable is that they recognized the situation. They encountered the same situation repeatedly. On the sports fields, in the classroom, at extramural activities: learners in need of advice and guidance.

They respond in manner similar to Martin: they give intuitive advice. Sometimes in vain, but they will never know whether that is the case. All they know is that they need to, have to, do it. This commitment is, according to Killen (2015, p. 34), one of the characteristics of effective teachers. He refers to Crosswell and Elliot (2004), who said: "Committed teachers have a passion for their work, invest time outside of contact hours with students, focus on the individual needs of students, take responsibility for imparting knowledge and values to students, maintain their professional knowledge and engage with the school community."

***Success is 10% talent and 90% hard work (proper preparation and planning)***

After joining his boxing gymnasium, Martin's impression of Ali was that he looked no better or worse than the majority of the thousands of boys he taught to box over the years (Hauser, 2012, p. 19): "If boxers were paid bonuses on their potential like ballplayers are, I don't know if he would receive one. He was just ordinary, and I doubt whether any scout would have thought much of him in the first year."

Things would change within a year though, since one could see that "the little smart aleck – I mean, he's always been sassy – had a lot of potential" (Hauser, 2012, p. 19). Martin mentioned something important about this young boxer: "He stood out because, I guess, he had more determination than most boys, and he had the speed to get him someplace. He was a kid willing to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve something worthwhile in sports. I realized it was almost impossible to discourage him. He was easily the hardest worker of any kid I ever taught (Hauser, 2012, p. 19).

Ali described how he would train six days a week and never drank nor smoked a cigarette. The only thing he ever did that was like drugs was that he twice took the cap off a gas tank and smelled the gas, which made him dizzy. Boxing kept him out of trouble (Hauser, 2012, p. 19).

One of Ali's contemporaries in Louisville was Jimmy Ellis, who later held the World Boxing Association heavyweight championship during Ali's exile from boxing (Hauser, 2012, p. 20). He confirmed that Ali spent all his time in the gym – that's where he lived, Ellis said. He learned about what went on in the ring because he was working at it constantly and he had the desire to fight: "I mean, he was a fighter. Even when he was young, he had a fighting heart. I saw him get knocked down and get up and get up and knock other guys out. He could be in a hole, getting beat, and still come back to win" (Hauser, 2012, p. 20).

Ali also spent a lot of time studying his opponents. When he had to fight Sonny Liston, everyone predicted that Liston would destroy him (Hauser, 2012, p. 60). But, said Ali, it's a lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges, and he believed in himself. He was confident that he would "whup" Liston: "So what I did was, I studied his style, I trained hard, and I watched Liston outside the ring. I went to his training camp and tried to understand what went on inside his head, so later I could mess with his mind" (Hauser, 2012, p. 60).

Ali knew what was required to be successful as a boxer: simple, honest hard work. This can, of course, be very easily applied to teaching. Killen (2015, p. 35) argues that the best teachers are steadfast in their endeavors. They do not give up easily or look for lame excuses when things do not go well, or when their learners are not achieving the high standards that are required. They don't expect every learner to be equally successful the first time the learners try something new, but they do take responsibility for the learners' ultimate success. Thoughtful persistence – determination coupled with reflection – is particularly important when teaching young children, as the male teachers who participated in the workshop were doing.

Expert teachers engage regularly in what is sometimes called "mental scripting" (mentally rehearsing what they will do in their lessons and how they will do it). "This is also a

useful technique for novice teachers, as it helps them gain confidence that they can put their plans into action. With experience, teachers can develop effective techniques to streamline their planning, but there is never a point at which planning is unnecessary” (Killen 2015, p. 91). Ali apparently also practiced mental scripting – he would often predict in which round he would knock his opponent out (Hauser, 2012, p. 55, 134; Hoffer, 2016, p. 32). This takes us to the next theme identified during the workshop: Ali’s confidence before and during his fights.

### ***Confidence before and during the class/fight***

Throughout his career, Ali was always bursting with confidence. He proclaimed: “I’m the boldest, the prettiest, the most superior, most scientific, most skillfullest fighter in the ring today” (Hauser, 2012, p. 55). John Condon, who oversaw his publicity, remembered that Ali would walk up to people in the street and say: “My name is Cassius Clay, and I’m going to be the heavyweight champion of the world, and I’m fighting at Madison Square Garden on such and such a date” (Hauser, 2012, p. 45).

This bravado did not mean that Ali did not sometimes doubt himself. When asked in private what he thought would happen in his fight against Sonny Liston – a contest about Liston’s world heavyweight title – he became thoughtful and referred to Columbus again: “Well, I’m like Columbus. I think the world is round, but I’m a little scared because now I’m reaching the point where I’ll find out if it’s really round and I can sail around it or is it flat and will I fall off. I think I can beat him. I think I’m going to do what I say. But I won’t know for sure until I get there” (Hauser, 2012, p. 80).

He also admitted that, when the referee was giving them instructions before the start of the fight, Liston was giving him the stare: “And I won’t lie; I was scared. Sonny Liston was one of the greatest fighters of all time. He was one of the most scientific boxers who ever lived; he hit hard; and he was fixing to kill me. It frightened me, knowing just how hard he hit. But I was there; I didn’t have no choice but to go out and fight” (Hauser, 2012, p. 74).

Ali beat Liston not once, but twice, knocking him out in the first round of the second fight (see Figure 1). After his first victory, he proclaimed, typically: “I am the greatest! I am the greatest! I’m the king of the world! I’ve upset the world! Give me justice! I told you! If he wants to go to heaven, I’ll get him in seven! I am the king! I am the king! I am the king! [...] I am the greatest! I shook up the world! I’m the greatest thing that ever lived. I don’t have a mark on my face, and I upset Sonny Liston, and I just turned twenty-two years old. I must be the greatest” (Hauser, 2012, p. 78).

It would indeed be rather suspicious if male teachers acted in similar manner, but the male teachers nevertheless identified confidence before and during classes as one of the factors that could enhance their professional practices and development. Killen (2015, p. 33) confirms the relevance and applicability when he identifies confidence as one of the characteristics of effective teachers: “These teachers feel secure about their knowledge, understanding and skills, and about their ability to help students learn (their personal teaching efficacy).”

### ***Molding learners' diversity***

In the three years before his first fight with Sonny Liston, the young Cassius Clay attended meetings of an American organization, the Nation of Islam to learn about their beliefs (Hauser, 2012, p. 97). Soon after he began attending meetings, Clay was introduced to his next teacher – a man named Jeremiah Shabazz (Hauser, 2012, p. 91). In some of those meetings, Ali would be told that white people are inherently evil (Hauser, 2012, p. 93).

Shabazz would put it like this: “And I still don’t know why the white man hates us so. What have we done to him that makes him hates us, come in lynching, killing black people, kicking and stomping black women, for what?” Ali himself talked about a horrific experience he had when he was growing up (Hauser, 2012, p. 89): “... a colored boy named Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi for whistling at a white woman. Emmett Till was the same age as me, and even though they caught the men, nothing happened to them. Things like that went on all the time. And in my own life, there were places I couldn’t go, places I couldn’t eat. I won a gold medal representing the United States at the Olympic Games, and when I came home to Louisville, I still got treated like a nigger. There were restaurants I couldn’t get served in. Some people kept calling me ‘boy.’ Then in Miami [in 1961], I was training for a fight, and met a follower of Elijah Mohammed named Captain Sam. He invited me to a meeting, and after that, my life changed.”

Amongst other things, Clay was also told that his name had been given to his family by their slave master: “And I said to myself: ‘Cassius Marcellus Clay. He was a Kentucky white man, who owned my great-granddaddy and named my great-granddaddy after him. And then my granddaddy got named, and then my daddy, and now it’s me” (Hauser, 2012, p. 91). He was given the name Muhammad Ali. He explained that changing his name was one of the most important things that happened to him (Hauser, 2012, p. 102): “It freed me from the identity given to my family by slavemasters. [...] I was honored that Elijah Mohammad gave me a truly beautiful name. ‘Muhammad’ means worthy of praise. ‘Ali’ was the name of a great general.” Ali did, however, refuse to hate white people: “All I want is peace – peace for myself and the world. I don’t hate any man, black or white. I just want to live with my people.” And: “I didn’t hate. Not then, not now.” He went further: “I like white people. I like my own people. They can live together without infringing on each other. You can’t condemn a man for wanting peace. If you do, you condemn peace itself.”

Acting on these values, Ali would come very close to conquering the hearts and minds of people of all cultures and religions. Earlier, it was mentioned that, when arriving in Africa for the first time, he heard the crowds chanting “Ali, *bomaye!*” (Ali, kill him! – Hoffer, 2016, p. 41) and he recognized his ability to gather different cultures around him (see Figure 10). This was another pivotal moment where he realized that he had an ability to father different cultures around him.

**Figure 10.***Ali in Africa for the first time*

Source: <https://new.finalcall.com/2021/02/03/the-power-of-a-name-and-alis-trip-to-africa/>

Osman Karriem, an advisor to Ali who was present, described it (Hauser, 2012, p. 112): It was in Africa that he became something he hadn't been before. We were driving down a road in Ghana. Usually, there was nobody on the road. Outside of the capital, it was just towns forty miles apart with nothing in between. One day, we got in the car with no plan, and five minutes after we started driving, there was like a beating of drums. Then people started showing up on the road.

'Ali! Ali!'

I'd never seen anything like it before. I was sitting there with this kid, and people were getting out of nowhere, lining the road, calling 'Ali! Ali!' I saw this kid sitting there. He didn't say anything. It's like he was hypnotized. Do you any idea what it must have been like for him to see thousands of people materialize out of nowhere and know they were there just for him. That day, I saw the birth of a new human being. It was like Cassius Clay coming to an end and Muhammad Ali emerged.

As noted earlier, Hoffer (2016) observed Ali's ability to relax into his role as a celebrity, missionary work and statesmanship "with a twinkle in his eye".

Which is exactly what male teachers in South Africa, but also all over the world, should keep in mind – and strive to accomplish.

## CONCLUSION

Killen (2015, p. 91) indicates that expert teachers usually spend large amounts of time planning: thinking about their teaching, and looking for new ways of making it easy for students to learn. The participants in the workshop were asked, when they returned to their schools, to try to apply what they had learned and to report their results. This completed the last two phase of the workshop – *Design* and *Destiny* (see Figure 2). Watkins et al. (2011, p. 36–7) describe what ideally happens during these phases.

During the Design phase, system members – in this case the men from each school – agree on the principles that should guide changes in the organization’s socio-technical architecture and develop the details of whatever changes they think are needed, based on the workshop’s themes. During the Destiny phase, the participants were encouraged to evolve in the direction of the preferred image of Ali created during the workshop.

A few of the participants did indeed provide us with feedback describing their efforts. One wrote:

The lecturing on the former boxing champion was fruitful because some of the teachings could be practiced during teaching and learning.

The saying of Muhammad Ali “don't count the days, make the day count”, taught me to make every aspect of life important and while I’m teaching, I should make justice to my daily preparations so that learners can benefit from the lessons to be presented.

Muhammad also had an ego of telling his opponents that he is a champion, and no one could defeat him, this also taught me not to give up no matter the situation or learning barriers I’m going to encounter in the classroom – always deal with the situation and believe that at the end of the day you are going to make your learners understand the content delivered in classroom.

Patience was one characteristic I noticed from the former champion, where he [would] let the opponent to enjoy their time – and only strike when the opportunity arises; this applies to my teaching strategies of taking learners through different stages of the topic and at the end they would notice how the topic relates to their prior knowledge or the one they are going to do next.

A principal of one of the schools said the following, the first with his tongue firmly in his cheek:

I must confess, I’ve been tempted at a number of opportunities to send someone for the full count to the canvas ... but I have thankfully not applied it yet.

What I do apply:

Thorough preparation. I find that it helps to set a long-term objective and then work towards it.

Remain calm in a crisis. Like things would not necessarily develop according to plan, things land on my table that require immediate decision taking and a change in strategy. The Covid situation contributes a lot towards this.



Approachability. Ali was always prepared to talk to the media. Stress and crisis are not sufficient reasons to isolate yourself.

The last report came from one of the younger participants:

Firstly, we want to thank you for the enjoyable workshop that you presented. It made us realize the importance of the work we do as male teachers again. We have organized the male learners into groups and held motivational talks with them. We have emphasized the importance of the setting of objectives in life and the difficult times in which we live. We have used Ali's struggle as an example to show that, with hard work, you can achieve anything you like.

The boys have rather enjoyed it and we were surprised to see how many of them did not know about Ali.

As stated in section 3, the study authors presented this in-service workshop about what male teachers could learn from Muhammad Ali to establish strategies that could be used or applied by these male teachers in their teaching environments. These, the authors hoped, could then be used to develop a basic curriculum for the training of male teachers.

When connecting the four themes with Ali's life and with educational theory, the authors were struck, and pleasantly surprised, by the power of his life, and the role model that he has been and still is. The authors do believe that some progress has been made in the complicated process of empowering a few male teachers, and in developing a curriculum to further accomplish this aim.

The authors recommend that an in-depth study of Muhammad Ali and his life should be part of this curriculum.

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