

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE POWER OF STORYTELLING ABOUT PAST
EXPERIENCES IN EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

BY

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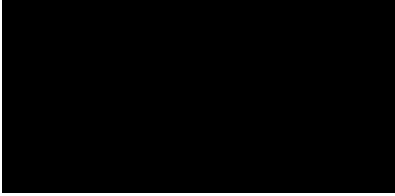
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ABSTRACT

I am a newly qualified teacher, interested in enhancing my professional knowledge and learning. I wanted to understand the power that storytelling about past experiences could have on developing early-career teacher identities. My narrative inquiry focused on four early-career teachers, including myself, who shared our stories. This study was framed by a constructivist approach, which helped me identify that identity is contextual, and always being formed and re-formed through experiences and interactions with others. Teachers' identities are actively being constructed and reconstructed through exposure to life experiences and our interpretations of them. The main research question was: *How can the power of storytelling influence the identity development of early-career teachers?* This was divided into two sub-questions. The first was: *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?* The second sub-question was: *How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?* The data generation methods of memory drawing, collage making, interviewing, and journalling allowed me to witness the early-career teachers' stories. I drew on the generated data to compose creative nonfiction pieces. After that, developing an interpretive memory drawing and collage enabled me to recognise and make visible connections across participants' drawings and collages. These creative analytical practices assisted me in understanding and perceiving aspects of the research that I would not be able to otherwise. I developed insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and identified similarities and differences. I created themes to highlight the stories shared and to recognise the identity shifts. These were Stories of Hardships, Stories of Appreciation and the Desire to Improve, and Stories of Excitement and Clarity. These themes represent stories which early-career teachers told about their lived experiences, what shaped their professional identities, and their recognition of the shifts in their identities. This research highlights significant links between past experiences, storytelling and early-career teacher identity development. It invites readers to become aware of our stories' power to influence who we are and potentially positively impact who we will become.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|---|
| PGCE | Postgraduate Certificate in Education |
| UKZN | University of Kwa-Zulu Natal |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

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CHAPTER ONE

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF STORYTELLING ON EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Introduction

This narrative inquiry study explores the influence of storytelling about lived experiences on the development of early-career teachers' identities. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of storytelling about past experiences on professional identities when early-career teachers are given a platform to share these stories.

Chapter One provides the focus and purpose of the research, my background, the rationale behind this research topic, and an explanation of who early-career teachers are. This chapter also includes the aim of the study, and its research questions. The research questions are followed by a review of the literature, and a theoretical perspective, to provide an understanding of the phenomena being researched and the theoretical perspective utilised. Thereafter, there is a brief introduction to the methodological approach, for the purpose of understanding how it was appropriate for this study.

1.2. Focus and Purpose

This research focused on the influence that storytelling about past experiences has on the development of teachers' identities in the early career phase. The phenomenon being explored was storytelling about lived experiences and the power this might have over one's current and future experiences, both personal and professional. This examination included the power of the story itself and the impact of components involved in telling and re-telling a story.

The purpose of this research was to understand what could happen when early-career teachers told stories about how their past experiences might have shaped their professional identities. Furthermore, the aim was to understand what could happen when teachers were invited to become aware that a particular experience does not necessarily define them – they have the power to re-tell their stories in *their* way.

1.3. Early-Career Teachers

1.3.1. Who are Early-Career Teachers?

The term ‘early-career’ teacher can evoke multiple interpretations and definitions. In this study, early-career teachers are defined as teachers starting out in the profession, who are 3–5 years out of their initial teacher education (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Day (2011) describes teacher identities as how we make sense of ourselves as teachers; as an early-career teacher, it is defined as the renegotiating of our identity, especially in the first year of working in a school. The idealism of who an individual is before entering the practical environment of a school had to be reevaluated. A study conducted by Eteläpelto et al. (2015) found that early-career teachers struggled to find their sense of agency relative to pedagogical practices, management of classrooms, and coping with the learners’ socio-economic problems, and required multiprofessional support. The participants within a study conducted by Eteläpelto et al. (2015) stated that they felt it was necessary to reshape their ideals and graft their professional identity onto their previous identity, due to the circumstances they encountered at work. Early-career identities were said to be made up of the individual’s beliefs of being a teacher as well as the purpose of the school. They were constructed by their professional training, together with the larger political and social context (Lasky, 2005).

Early-career teacher identity construction tends to be more flexible within the first few years. According to McKay (2019), professional identity fluctuates, and gains stability as teachers obtain more experience and exposure to the profession: “Professional identity is less stable in the early years of teaching and during preservice teacher education. Therefore, it is a time when awareness, shaping and reshaping of identity is possible, although it is likely to include unsettling moments as beliefs, values and expectations are challenged and may be transformed as part of the process” (McKay, 2019, p. 2). According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), within the first few years in the practical environment, early-career teachers should expect to experience the most considerable influence from their surrounding contexts – from their colleagues, school administrators, and the nature of the educational institution. The influences expected to be experienced need to be incorporated into teacher education programmes to prepare these teachers for the development of their professional identities in a strong and positive manner. After first-hand experience within the professional environment, one starts moulding and shaping their identity.

Numerous people and contexts play a role in defining who the early-career teacher becomes. Hamman et al. (2010) describe early-career teachers as being at the stage in their career when formal practice begins. It is a preparation marked by personal adjustment, and elicitation of practical knowledge from cooperating teachers and mentors. It is also known as the realignment or accommodation of professional identity. Furthermore, it is the process of figuring out what it means to be a teacher (McKay, 2019). Early-career teachers often experience feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, alienation, loneliness, insecurity, alienation, obscurity, culture shock and foreignness (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). Early-career teachers are expected by schools and society to be willing to learn as well as to reflect (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The first few years of a teacher's career tend to play the most prominent role in influencing who they are and who they will become.

Early-career teachers' identities can be explored in various ways, but my study focused on sharing these teachers' stories and their identity development through storytelling. In my study, early-career teachers are defined as those who have recently entered the profession and are navigating their way through the journey of being an educator. I view these teachers as 'finding their feet', enhancing their pedagogical knowledge, experimenting with new techniques and practices, and being exposed to different elements of the profession. I wanted to invite early-career teachers to share their challenges and how they are coping with the profession. I was interested in exploring how early-career teachers are finding aspects of this profession they love and those aspects they have grown to enjoy. My focus included how these early-career teachers are striving to make a difference one day at a time, despite the existing hardships of being a teacher, and creating my own perceptions of the teaching profession. These are the ways in which I considered an early-career teacher within my study, and utilised storytelling.

1.3.2. How do Early-Career Teacher Identities Develop?

McKay (2019, p. 8) describes identity as an ongoing process: “I’m creating a teacher identity, but my teacher identity is also creating me”. Teacher identities are never fully formed and potentially constantly changing (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), and the transition into teaching in the early-career stage is often less stable (McKay, 2019).

There are internal and external factors that contribute to identity development. As Rodgers and Scott (2008) indicated, “Life history research highlights the social contexts that shape identity, while personal narrative emphasizes that learning, including learning to teach, involves the construction of personal stories”. Lasky (2005) recognised internal and external developmental factors. The internal factors comprise psychological components, such as the teacher’s beliefs, past experiences, relationships, life history, goals and personal narratives (Hamman et al., 2010), while external factors include cultural, historical and social aspects. Other factors include emotional experiences, stressors, and vulnerability (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Gulla, 2014). Schatz-Oppenheimer and Dvir (2014) identified the effects of conflict, tensions, challenges, confusion, experimentation, beliefs and compatibility with the profession as factors contributing to the development of one’s identity. Day (2011) states that the way we approach classroom management, pupil testing, classroom management, and the interactions between the personal experience of the early-career teacher with their environment, are factors that contribute to the construction of their identity. By experiencing internal and external factors, and engaging with the positive and negative challenges, one can grow and develop their identity.

Factors contributing to the development of the identity of an early-career teacher can include tertiary education and practice teaching experience (Eteläpelto et al., 2015). Ball (2016) explained how teacher education programmes can create awareness and learning about self and define areas to be worked on and improved. An individual’s teacher education and formal training can thus form the basis of their initial professional identity development.

Engaging in techniques that create self-awareness can cultivate the identity of an early-career teacher. For instance, as Urzua and Vasquez (2008) state, “Reflection for action allows new teachers to consider their past experiences ‘with a view toward the future: to imagine the kind of teacher they want to become, and to use their formative years as a means to project a

designated sense of self as a teacher” (p. 1944, as cited in Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1350). In addition to the aforementioned factors, identity work, such as reflection and storytelling, contributes to developing an early-career teachers’ identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Thus, reflection and identity work can influence the early-career teacher to become more in tune with self.

1.3.3. What Influences Early-Career Teacher Identities?

Teacher identities are not fixed and are constantly potentially fluctuating due to multiple influences. Early-career teacher identities are influenced by the change they experience, as well as contextual factors (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Change affects how teachers feel about their environment, work, and learners (Day, 2011).

Gulla (2014) states that influences include interactions with the school, the community, the job itself, as well as life experiences. He adds that teacher education programmes and experimentation with different learning modalities help shape and reshape identity. Other influences include trends, changing policy, and individual expectations (Day, 2011). McKay (2019) builds on this, stating that identity is influenced by biographical histories, knowledge, the learning environment in teacher education, and the experience gained in schools. Eteläpelto et al. (2015) add that structural elements such as support from the school and resources are defined as factors of influence.

Early-career teachers are also influenced by their multiple personal identities, which all impact their professional identity in some way. These various personal identities are connected with gender, race/ethnicity, social class, (dis)abilities or social orientation. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) describe the influence of personal identity on professional identity as a mirror image of the other.

1.3.4. Why do Early-Career Teacher Identities Matter?

Early-career teacher identities are crucial not only for the teacher, but also for the learners and the educational environment. Teachers exploring their identity is pivotal in their early career, as this is when they experience the most challenges and are less confident (Leitch, 2010). They may have difficulty transitioning and experience tensions in the first years (Eteläpelto et al., 2015).

Identity plays a role in the motivation and passion of the early-career teacher (Leitch, 2010). Exploring their identity early on can help teachers situate and position themselves relative to learners and make appropriate adjustments to their practice and beliefs (Day, 2011). It also aids in gaining control, evolving and changing the classroom according to the needs of the learners, as well as experimenting with teaching styles best suited for the teacher. Finding suitable and enjoyable teaching styles will enhance job satisfaction (Ball, 2016) and enable a rich, meaningful experience in the profession (Li & Craig, 2019). Developing a teacher's identity in their early career will aid in their transition from student to teacher.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) identify the link between agency and identity; this needs to be understood for the teacher to be effective. They add that this link enhances the professional environment for early-career teachers. It also provides a platform for teachers to create their own perceptions of how to be in school and in society and to understand their work. Therefore, it is pivotal that early-career teachers become aware of their identity for purposes of professional expectations and to become comfortable taking calculated risks (Lasky, 2005). Noonan (2018) adds that you can seek professional development that aligns with your individuality and professional needs, and aids in your growth and development by exploring your identity. It is also beneficial to discover what needs to be learned, and to construct your own understandings and solutions (MacKinnon & Moerman, 2016), and find appropriate reactions (McKay, 2019).

Identity also acts as an organising element and an instrument that teachers use to justify, make sense, and explain themselves to the world. Furthermore, it assists early-career teachers in adhering to professional norms and obligations and placing effort. Exploring identity can enable the early-career teacher to evaluate and recognise the expectations and perceptions of others within the profession and themselves to realign them with being an educator (McKay, 2019). Exploring who you wish to become allows insights into being effective in a specific context (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). A self-reflective foundation and identity construction will be advantageous, as exploring professional identity is at the core of professional success and satisfaction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Early-career teachers must become mindful of their identity for wellbeing and stability and to avoid being consumed by the profession. Lasky (2005) conducted a study that demonstrated the importance of identity development and showed that many educators become emotionally tied to their careers and ‘lose’ themselves to the profession. It is therefore pivotal to establish identities that support wellbeing, mental health and self-esteem. Hamman et al. (2010) reiterate that how we currently define ourselves and how we will think about our future and use our potential can influence our future self. It is vital to become mindful of your identity for professional satisfaction, success and well-being.

Recognising who they are and what they want early on in their career allows for early-career teachers’ productivity, and nurturing development to avoid burnout and enhance practice (Li & Craig, 2019). It also avoids wasting the schools’ and government’s time when they spend time, money, and effort training an early-career teacher who will leave the profession (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). There will be changes and challenges in the teaching environment (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Early-career teachers must set boundaries to relieve external pressures (McKay, 2019).

Because teachers have such an impact on the lives of their learners, the creation of early-career teachers’ identity matters for the learners with whom they interact. It is essential to identify early on what it means to be committed to and flexible in responding to the needs of diverse learners (Ball, 2016). Lasky (2005) states that being conscious of your identity helps in establishing relationships with learners, and McKay (2019) reiterates adding that learners need an educator who is comfortable within themselves. Learners need a self-reflective and responsive teacher to prepare them adequately for the world outside of school and provide a positive role model.

1.4. Background of the Researcher

I am a newly qualified teacher specialising in the Further Education and Training Phase and a postgraduate student at a university in KwaZulu-Natal. I completed my first degree, a Bachelor of Administration, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Westville. I obtained my Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and my teaching subjects were Business Studies and Economics, based on my previous degree. Thereafter, I completed my Honours degree in

Teacher Development Studies. I grew up in a quiet suburb in Durban, into a family that instilled the value of education within me and allowed me to find my passion for learning and teaching. I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in Teacher Development and Professional Learning. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, I conducted all of my research using online resources.

1.5. Rationale

This research topic was essential to me as a postgraduate student and a newly qualified teacher. As teachers, we have a great responsibility towards our learners; we influence and affect their lives. It is pivotal for me to know who I am and what has shaped me due to my past experience and give my learners the best version of myself. What sparked my interest in this topic was my awareness of the number of negative perceptions accumulating around the teaching environment in the news and the increasing number of teachers leaving the profession. A report by UNESCO reiterated this, stating, "between 18,000 and 22,000 teachers leave the profession every year. This figure is higher than teachers who join the profession" (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2019). I questioned the motivation behind the departure of teachers from the profession and wondered about the impact that teacher identity might have on this.

My personal rationale behind my research came about because of the value of education instilled within me from a young age, which encouraged me to explore teacher identities and encourage teachers to become more committed to the profession. Through my research, I wanted to make sense of the role that identity plays in the early career phase and assist teachers in becoming aware of the experiences that have influenced their identity, to highlight the need to reflect and improve.

Teacher identities matter, as it is essential to be aware of who we, as teachers, are now. How we view ourselves in the present influences who we will be in the future. In this study, I was interested in exploring how through reflection, utilising storytelling, we might gain clarity on our experiences, to decipher what we want to have and what we want to avoid in our professional careers. I viewed this as extremely important, especially for early-career teachers to understand how to handle this profession. I also anticipated that it would help us see if we possessed the characteristics, commitment and adherence to professional norms required to be

in the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Furthermore, I expected that it would put into perspective our aspirations, expectations, and fears, and indicate where to direct our effort and attention for professional satisfaction (Hamman et al., 2010). I saw identifying the impact of our past experiences on early-career teachers' identity development as necessary because knowing ourselves might allow us to make sense of our affairs and act according to the context (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). For instance, if one had undergone a negative experience in school, one might recall and reflect on this memory through storytelling, thus avoiding making the learners feel the same way.

Becoming aware of the impact of past experiences is pivotal for teachers, as they are exposed to diverse learners with different backgrounds. Therefore, they need to adapt their behaviours and practice to meet their learners' varying needs and circumstances (Ball, 2016). Teachers face additional challenges in the schooling environment that require adaptation, such as changes in policy and lack of resources, and need to be stable within themselves to cope with the pressures in this profession. In addition, becoming mindful of one's professional identity in one's early career allows the individual to note their own needs and focus on their wellbeing, satisfaction, mental health, and job satisfaction. Identity development also improves self-esteem and establishes healthy boundaries (Day, 2011; McKay, 2019). Developing one's identity through storytelling is pivotal, as it shows the individual how and why they are interpreting their surroundings. It creates self-awareness, enhancing interactions with learners and the teaching and learning environment (Gulla, 2014).

1.6.Aim and Research Questions

The overall aim of the study was to understand the power of storytelling and how it can influence the identity development of early-career teachers. The primary research question that guided the study was: How can the power of storytelling influence the identity development of early-career teachers?

This was organised into two sub-questions:

1. What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked about their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?

2. How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?

1.7. Review of the Literature

1.7.1. Understanding Teacher Identities

1.7.1.1. What are Teacher Identities?

Teacher identity is a complex concept. Teacher identities can comprise personal identity, resilience, agency, and the emotions that contribute towards emerging professional identity (McKay, 2019). Teacher identity can be defined as “an on-going process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participants and self-investments in one’s (working) life” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 315). Individuals can understand teacher identities as what a teacher embodies when in a professional environment, within the classroom context, or when thinking of themselves as professionals (Ball, 2016). This complex concept of teacher identity influences who we will be as teachers and how we perceive the world.

Teacher identity has various interpretations, and the context adds another dimension to its meaning. The understanding of the context plays a vital role in how individuals build their professional identity; for instance, “Brizman (1986) suggests that a teacher must learn to sift through multiple interpretations of events in order to build an identity as a teacher” (Rice, 2011, p. 146). The identity of a teacher can further be described as “a matter of where, within the professional pertinent array of possibilities, a particular person is located” (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 734); this means that based on the location/context, teachers can find a different version of their identity. Their teacher identity is influenced by individual events, and the experiences and challenges they have faced (Masinga, 2012).

Schatz-Oppenheimer and Dvir (2014) referred to teacher identities as hybrid, unstable, and full of contradictions and fragmentation. They are dynamic phenomena, constantly being constructed and reconstructed based on time and context (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Teacher identity is thus the knowing of oneself as well as the world we inhabit (Leitch, 2010). They are the perceptions and attitudes one has within the professional environment (Ball, 2016). Rodgers

and Scott (2008) add that contexts and relationships describe the external aspects of identity formation, and stories and emotions describe internal elements. Different contexts can cause our identities to fluctuate.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) have referred to teacher identity as an analytical lens or frame used to assess teaching aspects. Teacher identity can also be viewed as an organisational component in the teachers' professional life, even a "resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large" (MacLure, 1993, p. 311, as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas. 2009, p. 175); a way in which individuals interpret their actions relative to others and the world. McKay (2019) adds that teacher identity is the process of figuring out who you will be within the teaching and learning environment; this includes conversations about how self-care fits within one's professional identity. Teacher identity is a composite, comprising interaction between personal, professional, and situational factors. In contexts where one or more of these dimensions create unnecessary strain, teachers may lose the relative stability of the previous identity (Leitch, 2010). Teacher identity can be defined as how we make sense of ourselves as a teacher (Day, 2011) – how we interpret our reality and the image we present of ourselves to others.

1.7.1.2.How Do Teacher Identities Develop?

Teacher identities develop through changes, such as adapting to new professional roles (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). For instance, the identity of an early-career teacher is developed through the transition into teaching (McKay, 2019). In this 'intern' stage, early-career teachers examine their beliefs, educational conceptions, professional goals, compatibility with the profession, and the best way to accomplish their goals (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). Different phases of one's career demand that other areas of one's personality are utilised. For instance, promotion demands an increase in teachers' commitment, effectiveness and motivation (Day & Gu, 2007). Thus, the different stages in one's life add distinct elements to one's identity.

Teacher identities are developed through reflection, as this assists in becoming conscious of one's identity. Once the individual becomes aware of something, it provides the opportunity to change and develop (McKay, 2019). Reflection can be advanced by using tools, such as

reflective journals, storytelling, and archived conversation records, which assist in creating a new sense of meaning and significance (Li & Craig, 2019) and (re)interpreting one's values and experiences (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). These activities enable the subject to engage with their past 'selves' to reach the memories that are part of their existence and history and have contributed to shaping the present self that they know themselves to be (Masinga, 2012). Reflection includes reassessing professional ideals based on experiences of applying them in the classroom (Etelapelto et al., 2015). Using different reflective techniques helps the teacher to more clearly picture and add depth to understanding their identity.

Engaging with others and unfamiliar or fluctuating environments stimulates the formation of new dimensions in our identities. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) state that for teachers, identity development comprises an understanding of self and a conception of that self in various contexts, such as at school, in a classroom; entailing analysing oneself concerning others. Smagorinsky et al. (2004) describe identity as being co-constructed by engaging in cultural practices with others. They add that identities are developed in numerous settings that include political, cultural, historical and social forces. Teacher identities are constructed through relations and interactions with others. This interaction enables teachers to clarify their professional perceptions and roles. They develop through interactions with significant others in society and the social systems they represent. Interaction allows self-awareness to crystallise and identity to be formed (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). Through tensions, confusions, experimentation, and inquiry with others, we are led to choices that help us understand who we are and wish to be (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). Thus, environments and interactions with others play a significant role in identity development.

Emotions are pivotal to teacher identity development as they connect beliefs and thoughts, connect judgements, and give meaning to experiences (Lee & Yin, 2011). Emotions can be defined as four elements being experienced simultaneously, such as experiencing sensations of change in the body, appraising a situation, expressive motions being displayed, and applying labels to clusters of the elements mentioned above (Lee & Yin, 2011). The power of positive emotion can enable transformation in teachers, spark creativity, enhance their knowledge, aid in social integration and assist them in being healthy individuals (Gu & Day, 2007). Lee and Yin (2011) highlight the link between emotions and identity, stating, "inquiry into teachers' professional identity requires connection [with] their emotions and feelings" (p. 27). However,

Lee and Yin (2011) added that teachers' emotions are often not given the necessary attention. As Gu and Day (2007) advised, "the investment of emotional energy in the workplace is...not an optional extra for teachers" (p. 428). Teachers need an emotionally safe space to grow, take risks and learn.

Distressing emotions and trauma also play a significant role in developing teacher identities. This is made evident by the teacher-researchers in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019b), who describe the emotionally difficult memories they relived while engaging in memory drawing. They shared trying times impacting their mental health, emotions and identity, including when they were "punished or were chased out the classroom" (p. 61) and referenced their oppression and the challenge of growing up in the apartheid era, for instance. These occurrences caused the teachers' identities to shift because of what they experienced. Notably, storytelling through drawing and writing about emotionally challenging early school memories helped these teachers conceive of new, more hopeful future stories. Professional identity is linked to emotions and attending to emotions can enhance one's understanding of identity.

McKay (2019) adds that teacher identities can develop by actively participating in professional development teacher education programmes. Teachers can understand the link between identity and agency through these programs and the contextual factors that influence identity construction. Teacher education programmes can allow student teachers and practicing teachers to explore new and developing identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The factors that contribute to teacher identity development are overlapping and interacting domains. These include personal experience (aspects of teachers' personal lives), professional context (characteristics unique to teaching relative to other professions), and political environment (the discourses, attitudes, and understandings surrounding education) (Noonan, 2018). By understanding the link between personal and professional identity, one has the opportunity to reflect on this for growth and development.

1.7.1.3. What Influences Teacher Identities?

Various factors influence teacher identities. For instance, stories influence teacher identities – the stories we are told and tell ourselves (Adichie, 2009). Through storytelling, teachers can reappraise their experiences and evolve their identity (Noonan, 2018). Through storytelling and

meaning-making in a community setting, telling and re-telling one's story, these stories are interpreted and understood. Storytelling enables the teacher to gain a new perspective, refine their knowledge and inform their practices (Li & Craig, 2019). Stories shape how we perceive the world and view others (Masinga, 2012).

Noonan (2018) adds that teacher identities are influenced by the teacher's belief system, personal narrative, attitudes, learning, and experiences. Reflection is thus recognised as an influence on identity. It is a crucial way in which teachers develop their understanding of how the 'self' fits into the context involving others, and how they become in tune with the self they perceive themselves to be. Effective teaching, and allowing for thinking and reasoning, are core components derived from the influence of reflection (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). These influences can affect one's professional identity.

Contextual factors influence teacher identities, including learner profiles and teaching environments (Ball, 2016). Other contextual factors are teacher interactions, resources – or lack thereof – and the support received within the school (Etelapelto et al., 2015). Teacher identity is influenced by the structural elements of the school setting, the norms of their school, and externally mandated policies. Specifically, school culture can affect teacher identity as it develops throughout the teacher's career stages. Furthermore, literacy policy, state education policies concerning accountability and instructional reform, and district context act as mediational systems to shape teacher professional identity and agency (Lasky, 2005).

Some literature suggests that the choice of teaching approaches may also influence identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Gulla (2014) adds that teacher identities are affected by specific techniques and exercises, such as teacher education courses that allow candidates to experiment with multiple learning modalities, including the artistic and kinaesthetic. Teacher identities can develop through inquiry, imagination, and creativity. Identifying individuals' unique talents can bring these into their teaching richly and productively (MacKinnon & Moerman, 2016). Being open to creative practices and processes can help teachers develop their identity (Gulla, 2014).

Teacher identities are dynamic, and the changes teachers encounter influence them. Day (2011) adds that change and context influence identity, as it changes the way teachers feel about their

work, how they think about themselves, and how they will think about others. In addition to this, teacher identities are influenced by changing socio-cultural and policy expectations of teachers and teaching (Day, 2011). Social or workplace influences are found in the social and micropolitical relationships of specific contexts, schools, classrooms, or departments, and are impacted by local conditions. It can be seen that many changing factors influence how teachers' professional identities will develop.

1.7.1.4. Why do Teacher Identities Matter?

Teacher identities are vital, as they provide clarity and direction for one's career. Being aware of who you are or would like to be allows individuals to recognise what they want and to work for growth and improvement (Day, 2011). This knowledge of self is pivotal, as teacher identities create awareness of what is projected to the rest of the world (Adichie, 2009). Teacher identity provides clarification for the teacher in understanding their work and finding their place in society (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Furthermore, teacher identities matter in distinguishing and making connections between the personal and professional, which allows the individual to behave appropriately according to the context (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). A clear vision is a necessity for professional success and job satisfaction.

Ball (2016) reiterates the importance of teacher identity for being responsive to the needs and circumstances of marginalised, disenfranchised, and under-achieving learners. It is crucial to be self-aware and understand how to handle these circumstances in the learners' interests. In addition, some teachers face the challenge of educating large numbers of learners in under-resourced contexts. Teachers need to be confident within themselves and their sense of efficacy to teach all students effectively, which stems from an awareness of their identity (Ball, 2016).

As teachers who shape and influence the youth, it is pivotal to know who we are as we affect others and develop their identities. When teachers establish a self-reflective identity, they can develop attentive relationships with their learners (MacKinnon & Moerman, 2016) and enact a version of themselves that is whole and authentic. This invites learners to bring their authentic selves into the class as well. By authentic self, I mean that learners allow themselves to be who they are in terms of their personality; they feel free to think and be who they are without fear of judgement.

Becoming mindful of their identity also allows teachers to adapt their teaching style according to their expertise and strengths. Kehily (2002, p. 215, cited in Masinga, 2012, p. 122) states that “Teachers’ biographies and personal experiences play a significant part in shaping and giving meaning to the pedagogy styles they adopt”. Knowing themselves allows the individual to teach in their own way, making the process enjoyable for the student and the educator (Li & Craig, 2019). Teacher identities and sense of self matter, as teachers can explore the most suitable practices in relation to mandated content and measurable outcomes (MacKinnon & Moerman, 2016) and effectively change the workplace and personal contexts (Day, 2011). Adapting teaching style to one’s strength or expertise based on one’s individual identity can benefit the teacher and the learners.

A study conducted by Zhu et al. (2020) has recognised the high levels of teacher attrition. Teacher attrition is defined as an identity construction process and an interpretation in contextual and shifting professional knowledge landscapes (Zhu et al., 2020). It is believed that developing awareness of one’s professional identity can reduce the large volume of teacher attrition (Zhu et al., 2020). When teachers are confident within themselves and their practice, it can ease internal conflict and reduce the rate of teachers leaving the profession (Schatz-Oppheimer & Dvir, 2014). An individual’s developed identity shapes their disposition, where effort is placed, where and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations are seen as intrinsic to their role (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Leitch (2010) states that interiority plays a significant role in the exterior performance of professional obligations. Thus, teacher identities matter as they influence an individual’s motivation, passion, effectiveness, and competence.

Establishing professional identity is vital for teachers, as the profession is described as an “intellectual endeavour” (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1304) which involves hope, depression, anger, love and possibility (Gu & Day, 2007). Gu and Day (2007) highlight the struggle to balance work and life and that attending to one’s professional identity is significant in setting adequate boundaries and tending to personal needs. Teaching is viewed as a demanding job, and teachers need to be at ease in their identity to sustain their commitment and motivation (Gu & Day, 2007). McCarthy (2019) highlights that the teaching profession is demanding and can result in fatigue, reduced dedication, burnout and job dissatisfaction. Teachers are expected to adapt to these pressures and accept the multiple innovations – under conditions that are stable in some

cases or deteriorating in others. Teacher identity influences their decision-making and meaning-making (Zhu et al., 2020). A teacher's identity thus plays a vital role in commitment to the profession.

Becoming aware of one's professional identity allows individuals to discover what is best for them in the work environment. Identity is pivotal in identifying responsibilities, thriving professionally, developing resilient qualities, perceived efficacy and constructing a feeling of belonging (Gu & Day, 2007). Teacher identity development also aids in avoiding the potential negative consequences of professional stress in the future and gaining resilience (McKay, 2019). It allows for consideration of alternative responses that might better support wellbeing; for instance, this will enable the teacher to be aware of their emotions (McKay, 2019). Li and Craig (2019) add that a self-aware teacher can better disentangle the knots of tension in professionally challenging contexts.

Resilience is a significant factor in teachers' identity development. Resilience can be defined as "the capacity to continue to 'bounce back,' to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity, is closely allied to a strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach which are fundamental to a concern for promoting achievement in all aspects of students' lives" (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1302). It is developed by the interaction between the external environment where teachers live and work, and the teachers' assets. Identity linked with resilience affects whether teachers adapt or leave the profession (Gu & Day, 2007). In a career such as teaching, resilience is pivotal for professional success and satisfaction.

1.8. Storytelling

1.8.1. What is Storytelling?

The term 'storytelling' can have multiple interpretations and purposes, based on the context. Storytelling can be defined as sharing a story where its strength has been preserved and concentrated, and can be released even after a long period of time (Lewis, 2011). As we tell stories, they give meaning to who we are: "We use the story form and the story forms us" (Lewis, 2009, p. 22, cited in Lewis, 2011, p. 506). This means that we use stories to share and

make sense of something we have experienced, and doing so contributes to the development of our identity. Carter et al. (2014) add that storytelling reveals the self through a story – a vulnerable but valuable act. Furthermore, storytelling can support a mindful, thorough research process, and produces more honest and ethical research (Carter et al., 2014). Madondo et al. (2019) state that storytelling is a fundamental component of being human and learning to relate to others in a cultural and social environment. Storytelling validates experiences (Iseke, 2013) – and to understand one another, we need to begin with our own story (Carter et al., 2014). Storytelling can aid in forming identity, supporting research and making sense of experiences.

Different types of storytelling methods are used, based on the purpose of the story itself. Iseke (2013) describes storytelling as the central focus of research approaches. The research approach utilised by Iseke (2013) has been to work collaboratively with elders to examine their shared pedagogies, stories and histories in storytelling sessions. There are two types of stories: personal stories and mythical stories (Iseke, 2013). Personal stories are characterised by drawing on the individual life experiences of the storyteller or of another (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019a). Iseke (2013) adds that personal stories are stories about human life and events, and have been observed, and can also be formed by things heard from others. A mythical story, which is related to a fable or legend and cannot be factually verified, is shaped by the storyteller and is based on the teller or listeners' experience; however, the underlying message remains constant. Both mythical stories and personal stories are told with an educative purpose (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019a). The different types of stories serve varied purposes and are chosen based on the context and meaning behind the particular story.

There are many ways in which storytelling can be used, different forms in which it can be expressed, and various contexts in which it can occur. In my study, I chose storytelling to share the past experiences of early-career teachers. I saw it as a platform to enable early-career teachers to find their voices and express their stories. In addition to this, I anticipated that they could reflect critically and creatively on their stories, and use this process to re-story, grow and develop. I saw storytelling as a tool to enable early-career teachers to gain new perspectives on forming their identities. I anticipated that they could reflect on the memories and events that contributed to their early-career teacher identities. While sharing experiences through storytelling, this platform could allow participants to relive an event and feel the emotions attached to it. Storytelling could also serve to release past traumas and appreciate the positive

experiences we have encountered, which have enhanced our growth. I expected that the early-career teachers could use storytelling to develop meanings of their experiences. Through this reflection, participants could have the power to rewrite their stories and recreate themselves.

1.8.2. How, Where, and Why Does Storytelling Happen?

Storytelling can be expressed and conducted in many forms and can occur in various places. This includes expression through oral dialogue, written dialogue, books, chapters, films (Iseke, 2013), and arts-based methods such as poetry (Liu, 2020). Storytelling should happen in a safe and supportive environment, where constructive and sensitive feedback is offered to deepen the reflective narrative (Carter et al., 2014). This is a space in which the storyteller feels safe to share with trusted friends (Masinga, 2014), as the stories shared are as sacred as the space in which they were created (Iseke, 2013). Stories are told in families, homes, communities, and schools, are inspired by unique lived experiences, and are generally told for educative purposes (Madondo et al., 2019). Through storytelling, we are involved in people's way of life, communities, cultures, traditions, and families; we create new stories based on our connections (Iseke, 2013). There is no set method or place for storytelling to occur; storytellers can be inspired to share within the right environment and the right circumstances.

The telling of stories can serve multiple purposes. Storytelling happens for us to get to know ourselves and the world we live in, find insights, discover the new (Lewis, 2011), and describe our identity (Lewis, 2011). Liu (2020) adds that storytelling can happen in such a way as to create the conditions that enable change, including change in the community, organisations, personal change, as well as social and educational change (Madondo et al., 2019). Iseke (2013) describes the occurrence of storytelling to remember and witness shared stories, share the knowledge of cultures, and share stories of spirituality as a source of strength. It is a way to describe the experience of human affairs (Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, it is used for empowering a deep connection of authenticity in educational research (Lewis, 2011), teaching and learning, and writing books (Liu, 2020). Storytelling is also used for professional and collaborative learning and sharing (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019a). Storytelling occurs to develop identities and understand experiences, enable and assist in meaningful change, and acts as an educational tool.

Storytelling plays a role in interpreting the past to make sense of our current positioning. Madondo et al. (2019) state that storytelling is used to take a critical stance on stories of the past. Liu (2020) adds that it is a way to honour the memories we have created, as a way to explore positionality (Carter et al., 2014), and to process thoughts, feelings and emotions. As humans, we have the need to feel and to be heard (Liu, 2020). Storytelling is utilised to acknowledge the intersection between personal and professional and identify diverse beliefs (Madondo et al., 2019). Masinga (2014) adds that storytelling is used to gain understanding and perspectives and learn and teach valuable lessons and norms (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019a). Storytelling is a way to give the storyteller or researcher a voice (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019a) and be free because there is freedom in knowing who you are and your beliefs (Liu, 2020). Storytelling is used as a form of entertainment (Iseke, 2013) and to allow and create faith and trust in the story and the storyteller (Lewis, 2011). It can also allow for a repertory of tactics for future use (Lewis, 2011) and can be used to create the future (Pithouse-Morgan, 2019). Storytelling is an essential aspect of the human experience and allows individuals to connect the different aspects of their lives.

Storytelling plays a role in indigenous and cultural knowledge. In some cultures, storytelling serves to deliver warnings and raise concerns. Stories show people how to understand the world and how they live. In a study conducted by Iseke (2013), elders used stories to encourage listeners to continue their journey into spirituality, envision future relationships in relation to complex pasts, and make connections in their lives. Iseke (2013) adds that stories can be developed for and by the community and are told to empower people by reflecting on collective knowledge. This knowledge is used for the collective good: to gather wisdom, skills, expertise, and cultural understanding and to appreciate history. Stories present indigenous people in communities and re-present indigenous knowledge, helping in understanding the histories of families, communities and cultures, and helping us become proud of who we are (Iseke, 2013). Furthermore, storytelling allows us to become who we intend to be. We can share our history, our origin, find our understanding, create ourselves, make connections to the world, and discover who we are through stories (Iseke, 2013). Storytelling contains essential information about the histories of cultures and connects the past to the present.

1.8.3. How Can Storytelling Influence Teacher Identity Development?

There is great power in stories, their content and the way they are told. Stories can influence lives in different ways, as Adichie (2009, 17, 33):

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity

Storytelling can influence teacher identity development, as it is a powerful educational form that enriches lives and creates a sense of connectedness. It aids in the understanding of self and of the world (Iseke, 2013). When we understand the self and our perceptions, there is an adjustment in our identity. The influence of storytelling on teacher identity development is established from the impact of the stories we hear and tell, as they influence how we see ourselves (Adichie, 2009). Carter et al. (2014) add that by telling stories, we become more self-aware, which assists in noticing areas within our identity that cause tension or challenges. Furthermore, the stories we are told impact our beliefs, and our beliefs create our identity (Masinga, 2012). Our memories are linked to and are interdependent with the emotions experienced at the time of the event; which influences our identity; we create stability and control emotions (Masinga, 2012). Storytelling creates self-awareness, memories and feelings, and highlights areas for growth and development, which influences the development of professional identities.

Storytelling can also influence teacher identity development as it allows the individual to put their experiences together and make meaning of their life (Iseke, 2013). Storytelling allows us to engage with past ideas and to transform (Madondo et al., 2019). Everyone has a unique story, and when we tell this to others, or ourselves we augment our understanding and create clarity. Through this narration, questioning and feedback, we find ways of being and knowing, influencing our identity (Lewis, 2011). In integrating old and new experiences, we identify the ordinary and exceptional, give personal accounts, express intentions, and interpret and evaluate a coherent chain of events (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). These stories of the past when consciously incorporated into our identity construction and reconstruction (development) informs who we are becoming and want to become in the future.

Storytelling helps the teacher to develop skills, improve practice and gain knowledge. Storytelling influences teacher identity because knowledge is passed on to the individual through stories, which enhances their understanding and is a powerful tool for learning, growing, and further developing knowledge and skills (Iseke, 2013). These skills include reading, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, and enhanced communication (Tiba et al., 2015).

The stories we tell as teachers indicate how we will perceive others and can be the foundation of establishing positive relationships with learners (MacKinnon & Moerman, 2016). Madondo et al. (2019) found that participants in their study amended their thinking and teaching styles through stories and reflection on their meanings. This occurred because the participants reflected on their experiences as learners and found ways to improve based on the adverse events they had encountered, since they wanted to ensure that learners in their classrooms did not experience the same. Storytelling allows teachers to build on unfortunate experiences to enhance their practice.

1.8.4. Why Does Storytelling Matter in Teacher Identity Development?

The use of storytelling has the potential to alter one's professional identity. As humans, we have multiple identities which are formed through stories based on one's lived experiences; "What this suggests is that 'identities' are collections of stories about persons" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16, as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 181). Rodgers and Scott (2008) describe a teacher's identity as developing in multiple contexts formed by social, cultural, historical, and political forces. Identity is unstable, multiple, and shifts – it involves constant construction and reconstruction; storytelling matters in teacher identity development as the story we tell is how we present ourselves to the world (Li & Craig, 2019). Stories help us identify our beliefs and question those beliefs that do not serve us (Lasky, 2005). By sharing stories of memories and theorising them, one can create new meanings and dimensions of one's identity (Masinga, 2014). In engaging with our professional identity, it is essential to be mindful of the story we are telling, and the people and events affecting the construction and reconstruction of our identity.

Storytelling can aid in early-career teachers' professional development. Madondo et al. (2019) recognised that teachers can become more aware by learning from the past through storytelling

and inquiring into the self and practice, which helps them improve. This is especially important for early-career teachers, as they often face the biggest challenges of their new profession in the early years. Therefore, they can utilise storytelling to confront previously learned theories with new theories and form a meaningful bond between theory and practice (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2014). This also prompts the questioning of conventions and analysis of the concepts and social structures that formed them. Storytelling matters as it is a tool that assists in clarifying professional perceptions and roles; these stories reflect reality while constructing and forming it (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2014).

Storytelling provides teachers with new insights and ideas, allowing them to perceive events, experiences and events in a way they might not have previously. Storytelling allows for the discovery of different perspectives and information:

Storytelling can engage teachers meaningfully with ideas, materials and colleagues, and it opens up possibilities for viewing ... experiences from alternative perspectives, which in turn impact teachers' views of who they are and who they want to be in their own professional landscape. (Li & Craig, 2019, p. 921)

Li and Craig (2019) recognise that storytelling matters in identity development, as teachers can create agency in their professional life and self-development. This clarity allows teachers to disentangle tensions and find enjoyment within the profession (Li & Craig, 2019). Iseke (2013) concurs that storytelling is used to witness and remember, allowing engagement with ideas from the past and supporting identity transformation. By learning from storytelling, we can recover from past effects and remake ourselves. Liu (2020) reiterates this by stating that storytelling is an essential component for healing and teaching. Sharing one's stories shows courage, reinforces these memories' importance and authenticity and allows healing to transpire.

Storytelling facilitates learning by constructing knowledge, skills, and teaching practices among storytellers and listeners (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2014). Storytelling makes sense of agency and beliefs, and aids in improving teachers' comprehension of the purpose of school; being aware of what you are doing and why is key to developing one's identity (Lasky, 2005). As they share their stories, the reflection that occurs may also motivate a teacher to embrace new practices (Rice, 2011). As teachers influence youth, it is pivotal to be aware of who we are and our stories.

Adichie (2009) raises the importance of stories and the power within them. Storytelling helps listeners understand that one story does not define our entire identity – we have the ability to grow and develop through storytelling and restorying ourselves (Adichie, 2009). Lasky (2005) identified that the stories we tell are tied to our self-worth, and Hamman et al. (2010) reiterate this, stating that storytelling creates awareness and reflection of self. This can bring about changed behaviour, development and improvement.

Stories potentially have the power to change lives when we actively interpret and apply their meanings to our lives. Carter et al. (2014) remind us that any story engaged with affects how we perceive and live with our own stories. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) state that storytelling helps us generate ideas and become aware of emotions. When faced with negative past experiences, storytelling can allow us to re-story these events more positively; the past is linked to the present and future (Masinga, 2012). Masinga (2012) adds that storytelling helps us engage with our past self to reach memories that are part of our history and existence and have contributed to our present self. As we share our stories and thoughts are provoked, we can see other interpretations and their contributions to developing our identities. McKay (2019) concurs that by reflecting, the individual can decide what is best for them; this provides an understanding to interpret behaviours and seek the necessary help (Noonan, 2018). Overall, whether an individual is hearing a story or sharing their own, it is crucial to pay attention to what is being said and its significance.

Teachers sometimes find it easier to share their stories in ways that do not require words. De Laurentiis Brandao (2021) found that telling stories through creative processes was valuable and effective. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 25, cited in de Laurentiis Brandao, 2021, p. 2) added that these processes are, “an important part of teachers’ professional practical knowledge; their particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation,” reflecting life stories, context, and feelings. These methods (written narratives, spoken word, and visuals) helped teachers make sense of and share the stages of their teacher identity formation (de Laurentiis Brandao, 2021). The sharing of stories to make sense of one’s professional identity can be aided by using creative processes.

The use of creative techniques serves numerous purposes and can enhance professional practice. De Laurentiis Brandao (2021) found that these methods allowed teachers to share their stories through triggering critical reflection and gave the researcher access to their emotions and experiences. For instance, a technique such as a metaphor allowed participants to shape their understanding of the world, and make sense of their experiences, their learning, assumptions, expectations, backgrounds and contexts (de Laurentiis Brandao, 2021). Storytelling allows teachers to engage in the process of being as well as of becoming. These creative processes articulate learning and influence teaching conceptions and professional and personal narratives (de Laurentiis Brandao, 2021). In addition, they operate as guidance for future action. They enable teachers to comprehend the tensions, challenges, and conflicts they face throughout their careers, and aid in teacher preparation (de Laurentiis Brandao, 2021). Utilising creative techniques can stimulate and provide clarity for teachers on their identity development.

While storytelling is pivotal to identity development, it is also dependent on the context in which the story is being told. For instance, Rice (2011) recognised that the stories she was telling about the development of her professional identity were based somewhat on whom the story was being told to. Although she told different stories, which seemed to be conflicting or contrasting, they were both factual and applicable to how she reached the point that she was at in her career. Hence, what is shared in a specific context may not be the only plotline that exists.

Stories have multiple interpretations, and different avenues to the story should be considered, as there are various aspects to the story itself that are not always considered or stated (Rice, 2011). Stories have many facets and are broken into convenient, appropriate, or even beneficial pieces and allow the storyteller to be perceived in a way they desire (Rice, 2011). It is vital to remember that a single narrative does not fully unpack one's story, beliefs or experiences (Rice, 2011). Embracing multiple narratives holds the potential to attend to various plotlines, premises, and self-positioning. These narratives may open the window to complex understandings and raise awareness (Rice, 2011). It is pivotal to consider various factors when interpreting a story.

1.9. Theoretical Perspective

A constructivist approach was the theoretical perspective that I decided on to understand and explore early-career teacher identities in relation to storytelling. As Gee (1990, p. 99, cited in Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 310) explained, the type of context that early-career teachers inhabit affects their teacher identity:

The ‘kind of person’ one is recognised as ‘being,’ at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context.

I chose this approach because it helped me identify that identity is contextual, that the things and people around us, how we learn, and how we perceive our surroundings are linked (Richardson, 1997). This theoretical perspective was beneficial in understanding how identity shifts based on context and provokes different parts of the self, leading to the development of unrelated elements of early-career teacher identities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). A constructivist approach assisted me in understanding and exploring influences on early-career teachers’ identities through storytelling.

Lived experiences influence the development of early-career teacher identities, and I anticipated these would be reflected in my study through storytelling, using a constructivist approach. I expected that when we engaged with someone, we would consider the influence of lived experiences on that engagement. As Adichie (2009) pointed out, “I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person” (13:38). The constructivist theory was essential for my study, as it was based on the premise that early-career teachers were actively constructing their own identities. This refers to the active construction of self through storytelling, as a conscious act of telling. Their knowledge gained through lived experiences had allowed them to combine these different aspects to form and re-form their identity (Steenekamp et al., 2018). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) reiterate that our stories influence our early-career teacher identity, and that storytelling is a way to express and develop that identity. Therefore, I expected that utilising this approach by reflecting on lived experiences through storytelling would allow individuals to engage with their identity for growth.

I expected that a constructivist approach would help us explore and understand how previous knowledge and insights influence teacher identity, and storytelling would enhance this. As

Carter et al. (2014, p. 363) advised, to understand others, we have to be open to understanding the contributors to our identity development:

As one seeks to understand the other, one needs to begin with one's own story – being as explicit as possible about one's social background, political, and ideological assumptions.

This theoretical perspective supported the belief that previous knowledge and insights were all foundations for continued learning (Steenekamp et al., 2018). Through storytelling and identification of these foundational factors, individuals can get to the roots of their identity and construct a vision of their identity aligned with their path (Noonan, 2018). I saw that using this approach could be vital in recognising how factors related to one's previous knowledge and insights contributed to one's early-career identity.

Relationships and interactions with others need to be understood to explain how one reached the current perception of one's identity. Relationships are essential to early-career teacher identities. As Rodgers and Scott (2008, p. 735) explained, "Relationship is essential to identity primarily because to have an identity one must be recognized as a particular 'kind of person by others'". Constructivist theory enhanced my awareness of how the construction of early-career teacher identity is influenced through associations and connections with others (Richardson, 1997). Storytelling allows one to relive the memories experienced, and interactions with others provoke emotions; through these experiences, early-career identities are developed. Adichie (2009) added that identities were formed through the places we visited and the people we met. A constructivist approach allowed me to understand how early-career teacher identities could be developed and reimaged through storytelling.

1.10. Research Methodology

The research methodology I chose was narrative inquiry, described as sharing stories about one's lived experiences to create meanings, knowledge, and build lives and communities (Clandinin, 2013). I chose to use a narrative inquiry methodology as its key characteristics include inquiring into the past memories of participants, and sharing their stories. This methodology is used to make sense of past experiences and attach meaningful interpretations (Clandinin, 2013).

Identities are constantly evolving and being impacted by experiences and the stories we tell. Clandinin (2013, p. 203) reiterates this by stating, “there will never be a final story. Each story of experiences opens into new stories to be lived and told, always with the possibility of retelling and reliving”. A study by Rice (2011) found that engaging in narrative inquiry could reveal implications for self-positioning in one’s professional practice. Similarly, I saw a narrative inquiry methodology as appropriate for inquiring into early-career teachers’ past experiences and understanding how storytelling of these lived experiences might influence their identity development. This methodology was suitable to inquire into the past and share stories to allow for reflection. My methodology and research process are discussed in more detail and depth in Chapter Two.

1.11. Conclusion and Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter provided an understanding of the focus of the research, the researcher’s background, the rationale for the chosen topic, who early-career teachers are, and the aim and research questions guiding the study. It included a review of the literature to provide a background to the research topic and why it is of interest, and the chosen theoretical perspective. There is also a brief introduction to the methodological approach, further explained in the following chapter.

From this chapter, readers should keep in mind that this narrative inquiry research focuses on early-career teachers’ identity development through storytelling. Readers should also keep in mind that early-career teachers are defined as those teachers with 3-5 years in the profession, that teacher identities are constantly shifting, are influenced by multiple factors, and are extremely important for teachers and their learners. It is also essential to keep in mind that storytelling is the sharing of one’s stories, and that sharing stories can allow teachers to reflect on and shift their identity. This research was intended to be beneficial for the participants, readers and the researcher.

A short synopsis of each of the chapters follows.

Chapter One, titled Exploring the Influence of Storytelling on Early-Career Teachers’ Identity Development, introduces the research to the reader. It provides readers with the focus and

purpose of the study, insight into my background, and my personal and professional rationale. Chapter One also explains who ‘early-career’ teachers are and how their identities are formed. It focuses on the aim of the research, the research questions developed to guide the study, a review of the literature, theoretical perspective, and a brief introduction to the methodological approach utilised.

Chapter Two, which is titled *Approaching the Inquiry*, is focused on showing readers how I prepared myself to engage in and conduct these activities. It provides readers with details of the study, including where the study was conducted and the research approach used, with an introduction to the participants and a brief description of their background. It also includes the activities used to generate data, how I analysed and interpreted the data, how I ensured that the research was trustworthy and up to ethical standards, and how I dealt with problems during the study.

Chapter Three, which is titled *Putting Together the Pieces of the Puzzle*, focuses on the data that participant Norah and I generated individually. It includes our memory drawings and lived experience descriptions that I created, our collages and collage descriptions I developed, a selection of excerpts from my self-interview, and the interview Norah and I engaged in, with reflective comments. Chapter Three also includes extracts from our journals and clarifying comments.

Chapter Four, titled *Putting Together More Pieces of The Puzzle*, focuses on the data that participants Kira and Serena generated, including data from their memory drawings. It presents the lived experience descriptions I created, their collages and the collage descriptions I constructed, a selection of extracts from their interviews, including reflective comments, and relevant excerpts from their journals with clarifying comments.

Chapter Five, titled *Zooming In and Out*, focuses on interpreting and analysing the data to address the aforementioned research questions. It consists of an interpretive drawing and description, followed by an interpretive collage and collage description that I developed. Based on these interpretations, three themes were created, which illustrate similarities and common ideas in the data generated by participants. An explanation is provided of how these themes helped me as the researcher understand the stories shared by participants and grasp how their

identity development was influenced through storytelling. Chapter Five also displays my recognition of how early-career teacher identities shifted when the participants were invited to share their past experiences through storytelling.

Chapter Six, titled From Darkness to Light, gives readers an overall review of the dissertation, and reiterates what this study is focused on and its findings. This chapter provides insight into my personal and professional learning and reflects on the methodological learning. Chapter Six also includes insight into how this study has influenced my educational practice and me as a researcher. Lastly, this chapter explains what I plan to do differently after generating these findings through research, and future questions and research topics that I plan to explore.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH PROCESS

APPROACHING THE INQUIRY

2.1. Introduction

This study focused on understanding how sharing past experiences can shape professional identities and the impact of storytelling on developing early-career teacher identities. The previous chapter covered the focus and purpose of the study, providing an overview of my background, the rationale of the chosen study, and the aim and research questions that would guide the study. The previous chapter also included a literature review, an in-depth explanation of who early-career teachers are, the theoretical perspective utilised, and a brief introduction to the methodological approach.

This chapter describes where the study was conducted, the research approach used, the participants involved in the study, activities that participants engaged in to generate data, and how the generated data were analysed and interpreted. This chapter covers the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and problems and limitations that were experienced. This chapter also includes the advantages and drawbacks experienced and the procedures followed to ensure that the study was conducted ethically.

2.2. Location of the Study

The immediate and broader environment in which the study took place was mainly via online platforms. The use of online media was due to the coronavirus pandemic, which restricted face-to-face interactions. Therefore, to ensure safety, I utilised digital technology. Digital technology allowed me to have recorded information through Zoom sessions, emails, voice notes, and images – all of which I referred to throughout my study.

I managed to generate rich data without meeting my participants in person because I established an understanding with them. From the beginning, I provided them with a document containing an overview of how this process would work. I gave specific guidelines and examples of the activities that participants could access at any time. Participants and I also had access to each other at any time. They were free to contact me for help or clarification if necessary, and I

could reach them if I needed more information or details. Planning this in advance allowed me the luxury of time to go back to participants to expand on a particular piece if necessary. Social media also enhanced the use of online platforms. Participants were able to send me their drawings, collages, and journal entries instantaneously. I was also able to conduct the interview process at a convenient time. The abovementioned factors allowed me to generate fruitful data with participants despite the COVID 19 restrictions.

The participants in my research were four early-career teachers, one of them being myself; of the other three, one is studying towards their Master's degree, one is a Foundation Phase teacher, and the third is a recent graduate. All the participants were well-resourced with the necessary tools to generate appropriate data. Having resources allowed my participants the comfort of choosing their setting, to answer and respond in the space and time in which they felt best and most willing to communicate.

2.3. Research Approach

In this study, I used a qualitative approach to elicit information from various sources, such as documents, pictures, and audio; drawing on experiences and meanings (Cohen et al., 2011). Qualitative research provided a detailed, in-depth, and intricate understanding of actions, meanings, observable and non-observable phenomena, behaviours, intentions and attitudes. A qualitative approach allowed me to give a voice to participants and examine underlying issues that existed within actions and behaviours (Cohen et al., 2011). The qualitative approach included multiple data generation methods and careful procedures, framing assumptions, and inquiry; having a specific focus on a problem or issue. In addition, criteria were utilised when writing the dissertation, such as composing in ways that empathised with participants and readers. There was an analysis of data at different levels, and the writing was completed to engage the reader, and contained unexpected insights while maintaining trustworthiness and accuracy (Cohen et al., 2011). Overall, a qualitative approach was most suited for my research to generate data and conduct a high-quality study.

2.4. Methodology

2.4.1. Essential Features and Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry has various characteristics and features, including eliciting and sharing stories that create meaning and give significance to human experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Stories express and carry knowledge that uniquely describes human experience and contributes to fulfilling purpose and attaining goals (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is vital to identify where the stories unfolded and the social, political, and personal contexts that shaped them (Clandinin, 2013). Thus, my research represents participants' experiences related to sociality, temporality, and place (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017).

Clandinin (2013) adds that narrative inquiry's features include finding participants who are willing to share their stories of lived experience over some time. The narrative inquiry involves co-compositions and conversations with participants, recorded to create field notes and transcripts. The research requires close observations of participants to elicit information. It is also crucial in a narrative inquiry to understand the participants' backgrounds.

As a researcher, I purposefully chose participants I knew and had access to. Because my interviews were done via Zoom, I could visually observe their moods and feelings. I also had multiple conversations with my participants throughout the study; for example, they would ask me questions, or I would ask them to explain or clarify something. It was through this that I was able to observe my participants. These observations were crucial to the study, and added to the stories generated, because I used these to develop my creative nonfiction pieces (presented in Chapters Three and Four). The observations helped me tell the story from 'their perspectives'. I put myself in the shoes of my participants as I told stories and made reflective comments. This was evident when I wrote stories for the memory drawings, developed collage descriptions, and reflective comments in the interviews and journal writing (see section 2.7. Data Representation).

An additional feature of narrative inquiry is that researchers build relationships with the participants and situate themselves in relational ways (Ellis, 2007). Thus, researchers must act from the heart and mind, acknowledge interpersonal bonds, and initiate and maintain conversations with participants (Ellis, 2007). The researchers must consider that they represent

multiple voices and admit to vulnerabilities to engage fully (Ellis, 2007). My perception of my role as researcher was to be empathetic with participants and gain as much information as possible while also representing the participants' stories for the readers and communicating them accurately.

Witnessing participants' stories and the questions I had to ask as a researcher could sometimes be awkward and uncomfortable. I was trying to obtain the necessary information while not crossing any lines – especially when I know some participants personally outside of the study. To illustrate, there was an occasion when a participant had mentioned an event, but she did not disclose any more details about what had occurred. I wanted to know more, but I sensed she was unwilling to share. As a researcher, I realised I had to respond and react appropriately. I had to remember I was there to listen and get as much information as possible to share the story in-depth and sensitively. I had to be attentive and remain professional. Because I did not want to cross any lines and scare away my participants, I had to sometimes hold back from asking specific questions.

Attention to the plot, setting, characters, and readability is vital in narrative inquiry to compose and share stories to keep readers interested. Polkinghorne (1995) describes a plot as “the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives” (p. 7). The function of a plot is to configure or compose an event into a story and select from the happenings that directly contribute to the story's situation. In addition to this, the plot relates events by linking choices made earlier to an occurrence later on (Polkinghorne, 1995). When developing the setting of the story, the researcher should be aware of the person embodied, and the cultural environment, as well as others in affecting the goals and actions of the protagonist (Polkinghorne, 1995). The researcher must also be mindful of the character's individualities and historical continuity. Imagination is essential to relate the story in an engaging, meaningful, and relational way (Clandinin, 2013). Lastly, the story collectively should be understandable and plausible (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Awareness of the participants and audience shapes narrative inquiries; it is essential to identify who you speak for and speak to. Hamilton et al. (2008) add that narrative inquiry reveals personal identity and knowledge, which can offer an understanding of how personal experiences influence educational experiences. Narrative inquiry helps build lives and

communities by allowing stories to be heard and told for improvement in communities' and individual lives (Clandinin, 2013).

2.4.2. Guidelines for Quality in Narrative Inquiry

To ensure a quality narrative inquiry, it is necessary to select participants who meet the criteria; including appropriate life experience, heritage, socio economic grouping, and constellations. The engagement with participants should be conducted respectfully and relationally. Narrative inquiry relates to personal experiences and memories (Pillay et al., 2019). Thus, the researcher should be sensitive when generating data since this may stir up emotions within the participants; narrative inquiry should promote understanding rather than demotivate or cause trauma (Clandinin, 2013).

The researcher needs to ask pertinent and considerate questions to elicit valuable information from the participants (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin (2013) adds that flexible questions should be prepared in advance to decide what needs to be explored further or revisited; this can be done by listening to previous conversations. Clandinin (2013) states that it is also essential to keep field notes to document and reflect on the participants' experiences to produce a quality narrative inquiry.

The narrative inquirer needs to think about the stories in multiple ways and ensure that enough data have been generated and enough reflection has occurred to tell the stories from various perspectives, also considering the time and place (Ellis, 2007). The researcher needs to understand participants' experience within the stories at a deeper level and reflect on the people and places they have encountered, to consider how these shaped who they are and their knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2019). There needs to be an identification of tensions and bumping points within the field texts (data sources) to identify common threads and produce research texts (Mitchell et al., 2019). The narrative inquirer needs to consider participants' voices and the audience and be as authentic as possible when writing about experiences. In addition, the researcher must remain open and self-reflexive about the perceptions and perspectives they bring to the research and examine and acknowledge their subjectivity (Clandinin, 2013). Overall, the research texts should be filled with rich detail, unfolding temporal and narrative

acts as they represent participants' and researchers' lived and told experiences as they engage in the inquiry.

2.4.3. Why Narrative Inquiry is Appropriate to Study the Influence of Past Experiences on Early-Career Teacher Identity Development

I anticipated that this methodological approach would be appropriate to study my area of interest by relating my stories and those of my participants; this could contribute to understanding the development of our early-career teacher identities and the experiences that shaped us. Zhu et al. (2020) state that “while thinking narratively, we are open to multiple identities, including the personal, professional, institutional, cultural and familial stories in which we are embedded” (p. 774). This means that when we think narratively, we are exposed to multiple influences on our experiences, to realise how we develop our identities. I expected that studying teacher identities through telling stories would broaden our understanding and expand our knowledge, allowing us to analyse the relevant circumstances and events (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin (2013) adds that this process can significantly impact and shape future and current identities. Thus, choosing narrative inquiry could allow me as the researcher to fully explore the influence of past experiences on early-career teacher identity development.

Narrative inquiry was suitable as it yields detailed accounts of lived experiences, and focuses on the individual and their unique experiences, which was vital to my research (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry also enables one to turn inwards. Through narrative inquiry, we can analyse our stories, interpret them, revise, change, and improve in a way that benefits our growth and development (Clandinin, 2013). Mitchell et al. (2019) add that sharing our stories can trigger other memories to put our stories into context and add a sense of appreciation to one's identity. Narrative inquiry was thus suitable to enhance an understanding of early-career teacher identity development, enabling reflection and allowing for growth and development.

In addition, I expected that this methodological approach could assist us as early-career teachers in questioning why we were in this profession and defining our responsibilities to learners. The methodology could allow us to identify the roles we played in the stories of others – and as teachers who influence learners, this was key (Clandinin, 2013). Overall, narrative inquiry as a methodological approach could facilitate an understanding of self and others and help us as early-career teachers find our purpose.

2.4.4. Advantages and Drawbacks Associated with Narrative Inquiry as a Methodological Approach

There are many potential advantages associated with this methodological approach. We can reflect on and re-story ourselves through narrative inquiry and begin to shift the social, cultural, and institutional narratives embedded within us (Mitchell et al., 2019). Narrative inquiry enables sharing lived stories and passing them on to others, building lives (Hamilton et al., 2008) and communities (Clandinin, 2013). Hamilton et al. (2008) add that readers can share in and learn from storied exchanges of knowledge, skills, practices, and evolving understandings. Additionally, narrative inquiry can provide a better sense of self, leading to growth and development for participants and researchers. Sharing stories of the past allows us to transform the present and future by recognising the past, present, and future and identifying our needs and wishes, navigating and changing our lives (Mitchell et al., 2019). Overall, narrative inquiry can be valuable and beneficial in understanding and re-inventing identities, sharing knowledge, and having meaningful engagements with others.

While the narrative inquiry can be advantageous, there are also possible drawbacks. Drawbacks may include the lack of a straightforward process or defined rules that can be learned and applied. Clandinin (2013) cautions that this may lead to a state of contradiction and confusion, leaving the narrative researcher in a perilous and uncertain situation. Moreover, although working with others can add vital dimensions to a narrative inquiry, it can also be a challenge because participants may disagree with how you tell their stories or portray them (Ellis, 2007). Also, as a researcher, you can only find out as much as the participant is willing to share; therefore, data generation may be limited, which can cause frustration. Furthermore, tensions may arise when engaging with others about specific topics, causing the researcher or participants distress and discomfort (Ellis, 2007). The researcher may also experience panic or guilt when discussing issues that recall unpleasant or traumatic experiences. All of this means that a decision to take up narrative inquiry should not be made lightly. Narrative inquiry requires a safe space marked by ethics, openness, care, and mutual vulnerability, which are pivotal in sharing personal stories (Ellis, 2007).

2.5. Participants

In my study, I took on the dual role of researcher and participant through narrative inquiry. My research included a reflection on my positive and negative past experiences through storytelling. This reflection allowed me to understand my early-career teacher identity, and how these experiences had shaped it. I also researched and included the stories of other early-career teachers and their identity development. In my dual position, I shared the story of my role as a researcher and shared my personal stories through storytelling activities. My aim as a researcher was to enhance my understanding of early-career teacher identity development through engaging with stories and storytelling. My position as a participant involved understanding my identity development through exploring my experiences and the power of stories I told about my past. I negotiated my role between researcher and participant by engaging in all activities in the same manner as my participants. As the researcher, I generated data and made meaning of these data to identify patterns and understand what had been generated. Engaging in this study with my dual role broadened my understanding of the influence of storytelling on early-career teacher identity development.

As mentioned previously, my study involved other participants and included understanding their early-career teacher identity development through storytelling about lived experiences. There were three additional participants, and they were selected based on their appropriate educational and work status, and unique life history, diversity, and different socio economic groupings and backgrounds.

The first participant was Miss Norah Shaik (real names are not used for any participants). She is a 28-year-old coloured¹ Foundation Phase teacher at a primary School in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. She recently qualified and currently has five months of work experience, excluding her teaching practicums. The second participant was Miss Serena Singh, a 23-year-old Indian Intermediate Phase educator who also recently graduated. She has worked as an Educator Assistant at a primary school in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. My final participant was Miss Kira Omar, a 28-year-old Indian Master's candidate specialising in Teacher Development and Professional Learning. I am a 24-year-old Indian Master of Education candidate specialising in Teacher Development and Professional Learning. The participants' diverse backgrounds

¹ The racial categories introduced by the Apartheid regime were black African, coloured, Indian, and white.

provided different perspectives on how storytelling about past experiences could influence early-career teacher identity development.

This selection of participants did include only females and of two racial groupings. However, that was not my intention. I had invited other participants to participate in my study, for example, a fellow M.Ed student who was a male and not from the aforementioned racial groupings. Still, due to his busy schedule, he was unable to participate. Other factors also played a role in my selection, such as the constraints of COVID 19 and early career teachers having to focus on their own workload.

2.6. Data Generation

Expressing one's personal stories can be beneficial for numerous reasons, especially in a safe space with trusted others. Participants can open their minds to the new, discover ideas, find their voice and help others (Pillay et al., 2019). Faulkner and Squillante (2016) have identified that communicating personal stories can allow one to express oneself, gain clarity, and 're-story' oneself. Furthermore, it is seen as a way to heal wounds, receive support, and improve relationships. Sharing and engaging through narrative inquiry can enable participants to reinvent and rediscover themselves (Pillay et al., 2019). Opening up can lead to new insights and promote change for the future (Pillay et al., 2019). To illustrate, teacher-participants in a narrative inquiry study reported by Pillay et al. (2019) stated that they are now more aware of their role in contributing to an understanding of teachers and their potential.

Both researchers and participants can benefit from using arts-based methods in a narrative inquiry. The arts can offer participants a more creative and flexible way to express themselves and their inner feelings (Pillay et al., 2019). Using arts-based methods allows for sharing intimate feelings, thoughts, and experiences and allows for healing (Pillay et al., 2019). Arts-based methods enable researchers to empathise further and evoke their understanding and awareness (Pillay et al., 2019). According to Caulley (2008), such techniques can conjure emotions and allow users to establish details. Furthermore, they promote creativity and imagination (Pillay et al., 2019). Arts-based techniques can thus be used to tell stories that have compelling qualities and are emotionally vibrant (Caulley, 2008). They can also offer a more profound way to understand a topic and discover underlying meanings (Caulley, 2008).

The different data generation methods used in this study and the data sources/field texts created from these activities are described in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Data generation

| Data generation activities | Participants | Data Sources/Field Texts |
|--|--|--|
| Memory Drawing: This included individual creations of images by myself and participants, which depicted experiences that we felt defined or helped develop our early-career teacher identities. | Me Norah Shaik Kira Omar Serena Singh | Memory Drawings |
| Collage: Participants and I individually constructed a collage reflecting our past, present, and desired future identities as teachers. | Me Norah Shaik Kira Omar Serena Singh | Collages |
| Interviewing: I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant. I posed some questions, but there was the flexibility to discuss beyond the prepared questions through Zoom calls. Discussions were prompted by participants' submissions of collages and memory drawings. I also completed a self-interview, in which I answered the questions over a recording, and transcribed the interview. | Me Norah Shaik Kira Omar Serena Singh | Interview recordings Transcripts |
| Journal Writing: Participants and I individually reflected on our thoughts and feelings after completing each data generation activity. In addition, as a researcher, I documented the research process. | Me Norah Shaik Kira Omar Serena Singh | Reflective journal entries on thoughts and feelings about relived experiences and the activities engaged in. |

2.6.1. Memory Drawing

Memory drawing is a creative tool that can produce many possible outcomes to potentially provide insights into identity development when interpreted. Putting pen to paper to create images and gain valuable insights into the lived world of individuals and their experiences is known as memory drawing (CohenMiller, 2018). Memory drawing is a way to articulate thoughts and outcomes, reflect, learn, generate valuable learning, and remember (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019b), which is vital when teachers are recounting their experiences through storytelling. Furthermore, memory drawing can bring participants face-to-face with their feelings, lived experiences, and events that have moulded and contributed to the story's development (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019b). Memory drawing provides the freedom to explore and express using an informal and creative platform, while giving participants distance from a possibly intense verbal process (CohenMiller, 2018). Memory drawing allows for sharing stories visually, showing the critical contributions of past events to identity development (CohenMiller, 2018). The use of memory drawing can therefore be helpful to express creatively and obtain different outcomes that enable individuals to understand the impact of their past experiences on the development of their identity and growth.

When my participants were asked to create their memory drawings, certain guidelines were stipulated for their information and for enhancing the pictures. Participants were asked to think as far back as possible into memories of their lived experiences and create and share a series of drawings based on events they felt had made the most significant impact on developing their early-career teacher identities. This included 3–5 pictures, with attached titles and captions to describe the events and the contexts. The drawings (shown in Chapter Three and Four of this dissertation) represented the participants' perception of the events.

I anticipated that memory drawing would allow participants to relive experiences they might have forgotten (CohenMiller, 2018) or that were unclear, but which had impacted their early-career teacher identity development. In my study, a series of memory drawings were done by each participant individually and shared only with me as the researcher, to ensure participants felt comfortable. I provided an example of my own drawing to illustrate to the participants how to approach this task.

The process of doing my own memory drawings was beneficial and helpful. I started by thinking about memories that I felt impacted me the most concerning my teacher identity. At first, I had mainly been thinking of positive memories; however, I knew that I had to draw on some not-so-positive experiences to really understand the development of my early-career teacher identity.

I decided to draw a memory from my preschool years, when I remember feeling such awe for my teacher. I drew on a memory from Grade 4, where my teacher made me feel good about myself and my poetic capabilities. After that, I drew a memory where I experienced my friend being mistreated by a teacher. Next, I depicted a memory where I was made to feel inadequate by a tutor. I also drew a memory that reflected me receiving my matric results, and not obtaining good results, titled 'Heartbroken'. Lastly, I drew on a memory of an event during my first teaching practicum, where I finally felt like I was in the right place, at the right time – as an educator. The memories that I decided to draw were chosen based on what I felt affected my early-career teacher identity (see Chapter Three).

While I was drawing, I experienced a variety of emotions. For instance, when I drew a memory drawing titled 'Heartbroken', I honestly felt ashamed. I was in disbelief that there was a time in my life that I was lazy and unmotivated to achieve in my academic subjects. I was embarrassed as I drew and reflected on the event. I thought, "*What would people think of me if they had to read this?*" Therefore, I initially avoided reflecting on the negative memories I had experienced in my life. While reflecting on another memory I perceived as negative that occurred in my matric year, where my tutor made me feel bad, I felt a sense of disappointment in myself. I realised that he was not the 'bad person' that I painted him to be. I began feeling a sense of appreciation for the time and effort he put into his lessons with us, and as a teacher, I began relating to his frustration. I found myself healing from that incident and understanding that I needed to experience that period in my life to gain the motivation I currently have, which has encouraged me to pursue my Master's degree. I felt proud of where I am today. When reflecting on the more 'positive' drawings, I felt happy about how good my teachers made me feel. I felt even more elated when I realised through my final drawing, which reflected on my experience during my teaching practicum, that now I was the teacher making her students feel good and proud of their achievements. Overall, my emotions varied – from happiness to

sadness, from anger to understanding – and finally to appreciating every memory, which contributed to the teacher I am today.

Creating my own memory drawings provided me with insight into preparing my fellow participants to do their memory drawings. This is because when I was doing my own memory drawings, I was hesitant. I was not confident in my creative abilities, and I was also afraid to draw negative memories. I felt the fear of facing and reliving these memories. However, with some encouragement from my supervisor, I attempted to draw uncomfortable memories. I found that once I began drawing, the fears subsided, and the aesthetic of the drawing was less critical, as I was focusing on the overall message of the image. It became evident that I needed to make my participants aware of the purpose of memory drawing.

Through creating my own drawings, I was aware that my participants might feel reluctant to engage in the process due to their own limiting beliefs. Concerning limiting beliefs, I refer to their confidence in their ability to draw. My participants expressed that they did not have creative skills and were afraid to disappoint me. I am also referring to their initial disbelief in the power of using this visual method and its impact. Nevertheless, they were surprised by the emotion they experienced when actually creating their own drawings. Overall, I think that this experience broadened my understanding and that I related to participants more. I became aware that I had to be patient with my participants, encourage them to share what felt comfortable to them, and enable them to attempt to face their fears, as I knew the relief that followed.

Before this process, I had not anticipated the emotions I would feel as I engaged in it. However, I was enlightened with the knowledge that my participants may experience the same feelings. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure that they were aware that this platform was a safe space and felt the benefits of creating their own drawings. Making my own drawings before asking my participants to do their memory drawings revealed the actuality of the process. It produced within me an understanding of how to assist my participants.

My participants had different experiences with the memory drawing process. My participant and Master's Candidate, Kira, was extremely comfortable as she was familiar with memory drawing from her Honours degree. She enjoyed sharing the repeated patterns she identified in her transition from student to teacher. On the other hand, Serena expressed her reluctance, as

she felt she lacked creativity; which was my hesitation as well. I was able to comfort her that it was not about the aesthetic of the image but the meaning and symbolism of the drawing. She was reassured, and after that, she relaxed and allowed herself to enjoy the process. Norah shared that her experience with memory drawing was one of healing. She admitted she broke down as she drew her images because she came to terms with her reality and faced situations she had suppressed. Her experience was an emotional one that brought about relief and comfort in rediscovering her strength and resilience. Although each participant had a different experience with the memory drawing process, they all contributed significantly to this study.

2.6.2. Collage Making

Collage has many features and can be helpful to explore and understand phenomena. A collage can combine an assortment of texts and images, such as cut-outs of print media or the use of photographs (for instance), to create an entirely new and reimagined image (Charlie, 2016). Collage making puts together a diverse range of seemingly unrelated pieces of text, places, people, practices, histories, contexts, and experiences (Charlie, 2016). Combined with the re-telling of stories, this can allow participants to gain a rich, deep, and clear understanding of the development of their identity (Hiralaal et al., 2018).

In my study, collages were created individually, on each of our own lived experiences (see Chapters Three and Four). I offered guidelines to assist participants in creating their collages. These included participants choosing images and texts to represent their past, present, and future teacher identities to construct their collage. The construction of this collage was vital to enable participants to see who they were, how far they had come, and where they wanted to be. This aimed to potentially motivate participants to know what they could aspire to change about their current state to enhance their professional identity. I provided an example of my collage to give participants insight into attempting this task.

The process of creating my collage stimulated my mind and helped me identify how I viewed my past, present, and future teacher identity. When developing my collage, I reflected on how I perceived my identity at the different stages of my life (see Chapter Three). I concluded that in the past, my teacher identity was that of being ‘self-involved’. I was finding my way in the profession, developing myself as a professional and as a teacher. When looking for images for this era, I searched for pictures that represented an individual focused on herself, finding

herself, achieving her academic goals, and finding opportunities that would bring about improvement and change. Examples of images chosen for this time include a woman with hands pointed towards her, symbolising the focus is on her, and a picture of a graduate with the words ‘I’m up for any challenge’, representing my ventures into the pursuit of academic achievements.

When looking for images for my present teacher identity, I searched for those that represented how I perceived my current identity: a teacher who is furthering her education to enhance her professional practice, effective in the classroom and able to handle diverse situations. I chose to include a picture with the words, ‘Research helps rural communities’, another stating, ‘Clarity’, and a visual of a woman speaking. This represents the clarity I feel in my current identity and my pursuit of research to aid in my development, while the woman speaking represents helping others with my newfound knowledge. Lastly, when exploring images to express my future teacher identity, I aimed to find pictures that would describe a teacher creating a better environment for her students. Examples of images that I chose to represent this era include blankets and sports equipment to highlight how I intend to give back. I also included the words ‘pioneer of youth development’, ‘we must act for betterment of all’, and an image of children from different races joining their hands to form a heart. These pictures affirm my mission to create a better future for all and to promote equality for my learners.

I experienced many thoughts and feelings while creating my collage. The first was excitement, as I had a vision in my head, and I was excited to visually represent what I was imagining. I was conscious that as this is a creative process, it is easy to allow yourself to get ‘lost’ in it, and the expression of oneself becomes enjoyable through visuals. When I started with my past teacher identity, I felt a bit ashamed of how self-involved I was. I knew that at that time, I was thinking selfishly. When I created my present teacher identity, I felt proud of how far I had come and the teacher I am today. I thought about my exposure to the teaching and learning environment and the reality of the teaching profession. I felt good knowing I was conducting research to hopefully improve the understanding of teacher identity and thus enhance teachers’ professional practice. The creation of my ‘future’ was the most enjoyable. It provided me with such clarity and made me feel a sense of pride and purpose. It helped me put into perspective the type of teacher I want to be, and how I want to help my learners and improve their lives.

The process of collage making helped me put into perspective the different stages of my teacher identities and clarify my vision for my future teacher identity.

The development of my own collage assisted me in getting prepared to ask my fellow participants to make their collages. As I created my collage, I became aware of the difference between my past, present, and future teacher identity. It was my personal decision to distinguish these different eras and approach my collage in this manner. I did not anticipate beforehand that I would separate my collage into various sections. When making my collage, I thought about how my teacher identity has fluctuated from who I was as a student teacher, to gaining work experience, to the type of identity I wanted to embrace. I, therefore, decided to divide my collage into three stages: past, present, and future. Once I established different categories to represent the shifts in my teacher identity, I began selecting the most appropriate images to illustrate my teacher identity of the past, the present, and the future. I was able to share this layout with my participants, who chose to similarly develop their collages. I realised that there are other ways to create a collage and encouraged my participants to develop their collages in a personally meaningful manner. I also became aware that the images best suited to represent my participants' vision may not always be available. Overall, I wanted my participants to enjoy the process and approach it to express their unique abilities and attributes.

Making my own collage helped me in understanding that participants should approach this activity in their own way. They should choose images and organise them as appropriate to represent events that contributed to developing their teacher identity. However, it was my responsibility as the researcher to guide them through attaching meanings and insights to the visuals for the benefit of the research, for the reader, and for themselves. Nonetheless, I was also aware that the pictures should be interpreted in the way of their choosing, based on their intentions. Hence, after the participants made their collages, I asked them to explain their collages to avoid me misinterpreting them. I had a one-on-one discussion with each participant to ensure they felt comfortable sharing and explaining what their collage meant and represented.

Charlie (2016) highlights that collage making entails working through and translating feelings and emotions, which morph into new forms to enable participants to make sense of past experiences and identify what shaped their identity. Furthermore, this platform of collage

making allows participants to face the power of storytelling in a way that is enjoyable, playful, and situated within a safe space, to share beliefs, and gain feedback and other perspectives through sharing (Hiralaal et al., 2018). Collage making also allows participants to explore their shared stories in a way that is innovative, unexpected, productive, and purposeful (Charlie, 2016), enabling the participant to grow and take action (Hiralaal et al., 2018). Collage making recognises past and present stories meeting to align with the desired future, and allows these elements to be in proximity with one another (Charlie, 2016). Using collage making in my study enabled participants to reflect and become self-aware, think deeply, and heighten their engagement (Hiralaal et al., 2018). Collage making allowed the participants to draw on past stories to envision their desired future as teachers. Collage making was beneficial in drawing on past stories to examine early-career teacher identities and explore who we want to be in the future as teachers.

2.6.3. Interviews

Interviews can elicit rich, first-hand information that broadens perspectives and creates understanding. Interviews also have other beneficial purposes: Pezalla et al. (2012) add that interviews can establish an interpersonal connection with participants, vital to observing and interpreting their responses. Interviews can further stimulate conversations between participants and researchers (Packard et al., 2004). In addition, interviews can enable participants to gain insights and understand significant issues (Packard et al., 2004).

Interviews can provide a conversation space for participants to share their stories (Pezalla et al., 2012), and there is more than one way to approach them. The outcome of the interview depends on how it occurs. In my study, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used. I posed some questions, but there was the flexibility to discuss issues beyond the prepared questions. I allowed opportunities for unstructured storytelling within the interview session. As the research gathered momentum, we revisited and discussed the collages and memory drawing entries during the interviews.

Semi-structured refers to having a set of questions to be asked in the interview process. As a novice researcher, I felt more confident having prepared an initial set of questions to guide the interview. However, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer also has the opportunity to

deviate from a particular question. I ensured a conversation by asking impromptu follow up questions in response to what participants told me. This allowed participants to explore other avenues and stimulated their thinking and ideas. It also allowed me to expand my thinking beyond the prepared questions.

To conduct a semi-structured interview with each participant, I prepared a set of questions that I intended to pose. The interviews were conducted via the online platform of Zoom, and included questions such as:

- (i) Can you describe the school that featured in your drawings; was it a rural or urban setting, was it well or poorly resourced, did the drawings take place in a primary or secondary school, what was the number of learners and teachers, and learner-teacher/staff-student ratio, was it a public or private school?
- (ii) How has reflecting on past experiences through storytelling utilising memory drawing, reflective journalling and collage making influenced you?
- (iii) How is the development of your professional identity through storytelling activities impacting current and future experience?
- (iv) How did reflecting on your story through storytelling activities such as memory drawing, reflective journalling, and collage making cause you to see the profession you are in differently? Do you feel more or less passionate about being a teacher?
- (v) Now that you are aware of the story and the power it holds,
 - What effect has this had on you? And in what way?
 - By becoming self-aware, what influence has this had on the story you tell about the type of teacher you are, and how – and in what way – has the story changed?
- (vi) Through storytelling, how will/has the change in the story about your professional identity impact the other aspects/identities that exist in your life?

My self-interview consisted of answering the aforementioned posed questions, which were recorded and then transcribed into text. My process and experience of being interviewed involved my sister asking me the questions I had set out, and my answers being recorded using my phone. After that, I transcribed the answers I gave, playing back the recording and typing my answers into a Word document.

During the self-interview process, I felt nervous and shy as I revealed my inner feelings about the drawings, collages, and journal entries I had made. Even though it was someone close to me posing the questions, I had to relive some moments when I had felt terrible about myself, and about my life. I had to discuss moments when I felt like a complete failure and when I thought I was at a dead-end and there was no hope for me. It was scary to relive these experiences and share my inner thoughts with someone, as I feared being judged. Even though my sister was with me when I went through these experiences, I feel that we humans tend to hide the truth of our feelings, so it took me a while to get comfortable and realise this was a safe space to share my thoughts and feelings.

Afterwards, I was relieved that the interview was over and the attention was not on me anymore. I felt happy to get through the questions. There were times that I was keen on sharing, for example, when we discussed the positive memory drawings I had made, the clarity my collage gave me, the way I see teaching differently after reflecting, and my passion for teaching. We went on to discuss the power of story; how realising the power that a story holds has affected me as a teacher, and how this will affect the stories I tell in the future. We also discussed how changes in the stories I tell about my professional identity can impact the other aspects of my life.

Through transcribing my responses to the interview questions, I noticed how I really felt about these topics. My actual thoughts were realised, as there was no time to practice the ‘right’ answer that I would have deemed most appropriate. I was speaking from how I felt at that moment; it was unrehearsed and natural. I had the freedom to express the way I really felt, and using an interview, my thoughts took on their own form, and I was free to express myself. This process allowed me to generate ideas and become more conscious of my thoughts and feelings.

Engaging in the self-interview assisted me with preparing to interview my fellow participants. I heard first-hand the questions that were being posed and noticed the thoughts that went through my mind and the nervousness I experienced. I became aware of the initial discomfort I felt when being interviewed and how silent the whole room became; it was as if time had stopped and everything awaited and depended on my answer. Although I eased up pretty quickly, I knew this was because I was familiar with the research and the purpose of sharing. However, I did not anticipate how nervous I would become in this process. In becoming aware

that some participants may become anxious or be on edge, I realised I should ensure that they were aware that it was a safe space and make them as comfortable as possible to share their answers with me.

Furthermore, as I conducted my self-interview, I realised that I sometimes drifted away from answering the question. This may be beneficial in gathering additional information; however, I became more mindful of this. I also became aware that the questions might be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Therefore, I had to ensure that my participants clearly understood the question posed to answer as accurately as possible. Lastly, I had become aware that I was sometimes answering the question based on what I thought would be the most suitable answer. However, when approaching my participants to engage in the interview process, I wanted them to be as authentic and open as possible and share their honest opinions and thoughts.

After my self-interview, I was satisfied with the questions I had developed, and I did not change or add any questions to the interview process. Conducting my own self-interview broadened my understanding of the interview process and gave me insights into what to expect and how to prepare my participants as best as possible.

My participants' experience of the interview process varied. Norah, who was my first interview, started slightly slowly. It was my first time doing an interview of this sort and the first time someone else heard my questions. I felt nervous. Norah was distracted at first, as her son wanted her attention, but as the questions progressed and he settled, she could relax and share her answers with me. Serena was my second interview. She had made some time for our call during her lunch break, for which I was grateful. She is the most talkative of the three, so she was in her element and enjoyed addressing my questions. Kira was my last interview, and as a fellow Master's student, I knew her schedule was busy. I tried not to take up too much of her time, and we got straight into it. She answered the questions as best she could and provided me with the necessary clarity. Although each interview was different, they were all equally important and made significant contributions to this research. Conducting interviews was an effective tool in my study to discuss issues, stimulate conversation and generate data.

2.6.4. Journal Writing

Journal writing can document personal experiences for professional research, growth, and reflection (Scott Shields, 2016). Furman et al. (2008) state the importance of journal writing for enhanced personal and social understanding as follows: “To write about the world is to write about the self and to write about the self is to write about the world” (p. 75). During the data generation process, my participants and I kept journals to document and reflect on our experiences. As a researcher, I also recorded my thoughts and feelings about the research process in my journal.

My journal writing process entailed the creation of journal entries that reflected my thoughts and feelings at the time of the journal entry. As I took on the dual role of participant and researcher, my entries reflected both roles. I made journal entries reflecting my position as a participant by reflecting on creating my memory drawings, the development of my collage, and the interview process. I decided to write about how I felt after engaging in these activities and used this platform to express my thoughts and feelings and put them into perspective. This was my space to share freely and really identify what was going through my mind. This platform was used as an outlet, which was highly beneficial, especially after engaging in exercises that stimulated my emotions. Journalling was used to reflect and decipher how I would proceed now that I had re-lived the experience. I could now decide what I would do with the new perspective on the events that transpired. Journalling aided me in my outlook as a participant, as well as with generating data.

For participants to use this platform effectively, I developed a set of guidelines. Participants were made aware that their journal would be their own private space to share their thoughts and feelings and reflect after creating their memory drawings and collages. Participants were steered by suggestions: (i) Were there any physical sensations when you relived the memory through storytelling in the memory drawing and collage-making process? (ii) How do you feel about the event now? (iii) Does this ‘story’ still affect you and have power over you? (iv) Has this ‘story’ shaped/influenced your early-career teacher identity? (v) As you created your collage, and combined past, present and future, how has your vision for your identity as a teacher developed or changed? (vi) Now that you have reflected and been able to express through storytelling, are you able to utilise this memory to improve and release? These suggestions were aimed to enable participants to share and express themselves fully.

I also asked participants to make a final journal entry based on the interview, and as an overall conclusion to the activities we engaged in. The guidelines for the final entry were different from those posed for the memory drawings and collage making. They included the following: (i) Any thoughts and feelings you felt before, during and after the interview. (ii) Your overall thoughts about the activities that we did. (iii) How did participating in the study affect you; did you find relief, healing, or has reliving these memories negatively impacted you? (iv) What have you noticed or become aware of about your early-career teacher identity? (v) What are your final thoughts after being a participant in this study? I hoped that the guidelines would give participants a sense of the thoughts and feelings they could look out for when reflecting. I hoped this would allow participants to come to terms with how they felt during and after the activities and notice any changes they experienced.

Journalling was beneficial to me as I took on my role as researcher. As a researcher, my journal entries comprised my thoughts on the data generation process and my experience of working with participants. I was able to express ideas that had been formulated through the research process. For instance, on 10 June 2021, after creating my own memory drawings and collage, I wrote:

This has been beneficial to me as I know how to assist my participants when they are creating their own collages and memory-drawings

and

Interpreting my collage was enjoyable for me, as I knew why I selected those images. However, it might not have been as easily interpreted by another. Therefore, it was a good experience to share my thought process and put the images into context.

I also made a journal entry after engaging in a self-interview, which stated:

By answering the questions in the self-interview, I was able to see first-hand how some of the questions might be tricky. However, this encouraged me because I knew these questions were open-ended and would stimulate conversation, which would lead to the generation of additional information.

The aforementioned journal entries were helpful to me as the researcher, as I was able to organise my thoughts and feelings about the activities I engaged in. I could look back at these

entries to relate to my participants' experiences and assist in their process. Reflecting through journal entries helped me to generate ideas and organise my thoughts.

Journalling also provided me with a safe and comfortable space to convey the positive and challenging aspects of the research process. Dealing with others brings its own set of challenges; journalling allowed a release of emotions, and I could experience a mental break. It was a time to share informally and communicate anything I chose to, as this was *my* personal outlet. In my journal entries as a researcher, I included my reflection on the stress I experienced after viewing dissertations written by other students. I also realised the amount of work that still had to be conducted. I also shared that I felt nervous after engaging in the data generation activities myself and wondered if this process would go smoothly with my participants. I wrote:

It was crucial for me to attempt these activities first to assist my participants. After today's experience and becoming aware of my reservations, it makes me nervous for the reactions and feelings participants might have about these tasks. (10 June 2021)

It was overwhelming, but I felt a sense of relief and calm after journalling.

My entries include my reflections on the data generation activities that I engaged in. For instance, when my supervisor encouraged me to reflect on more challenging memories, I journalled (11 June 2021) about the discomfort I experienced:

I have created memory drawings suggested by my supervisor, in which she had asked me to reflect on more of the negative memories. I personally avoid recalling these negative memories due to the emotions that arise.

As a researcher, this was also essential for me, as I will be in contact with participants who might be hesitant to share negative memories as well. But it is my responsibility to seek out as much as I can for their benefit and the benefit of the study. So, although I had my reservations, I am glad my memory drawings took a different approach.

I encountered many emotions and thoughts while journalling. I felt very comfortable, as I was familiar with what I was writing about – it was almost like talking to myself. I allowed myself to write about anything and everything that was going on in my mind. Doing this allowed me to organise my thoughts. If I was experiencing an issue, I often felt a sense of clarity and peace after journalling. After making entries, I always felt a tremendous sense of relief – it was as if any negative emotions I was currently experiencing were transferred from my mind onto the

page. If I was confused, I was able to see more clearly what the next step would be. There were times when I used the journal entry to remind myself not to feel overwhelmed and that everything was on track. Using this tool to reflect also reminded me of my progress and how far I had come. Overall, journalling allowed me to check my progress, express myself, and clarify how I felt.

Making entries into my reflective journal prepared me to ask my participants to make their own journal entries. I became aware of how vital these entries were, especially after engaging in memory drawing and collage making. I had not anticipated how emotional these activities would be. Therefore, to express myself in my journal was a relief and enabled me to uncover and share my thoughts and feelings in a safe space. I could speak freely, and that is how I wanted my participants to approach journalling.

Since I had made my own journal entries, I could guide the other three participants on making theirs. For instance, I advised them to use this as an outlet to share their inner speech and organise the ideas and thoughts they may have been pondering. I informed them that they could write in their journals at any time and in any space. This journal was theirs to use to reflect and release, open up, vent, appreciate, and express gratitude. This could be especially beneficial for participants who prefer writing to speaking, and those who may have reservations about expressing themselves orally and being put ‘on the spot’. Before making my own entries, I was unaware of how therapeutic the process could be. Now that I was aware, I encouraged my participants to use this platform for their benefit.

Journal writing allows the writer to identify details, feelings, viewpoints, and actions by inquiring into their understanding and demonstrating their knowledge and thinking (Scott Shields, 2016). Participants made journal entries in their own space and time, which allowed them to express themselves. Participants did not express anxiety about the journal writing process. However, they did express uncertainty about where to begin and how to journal. Therefore, I stipulated guidelines for this process, to provide clarity to participants. They were invited to include any images and visuals of their choice that they felt resonated with and better depicted their train of thought. This visual journalling technique was beneficial for my participants and me, enhancing reflection and self-awareness (Scott Shields, 2016).

Journal writing was helpful in my study as it enabled participants to share their personal feelings whenever they felt the need. As shown in Chapters Three and Four, it helped us process the complexities of our unexplored emotions, give thought to our words, focus on the sensory details, connect to our past experiences, and become mindful of our early-career teacher identities (Furman et al., 2008). Furman et al. (2008) add that we can develop the capacity to understand our personal history, present life, and social condition in a critical and potentially transformative way through journal writing. Engaging in this reflective process allowed participants to reflect on identity development using an easily accessible platform to express and explore their experiences, with endless possible outcomes (Furman et al., 2008). Furthermore, this tool was beneficial for me as a researcher to explore ideas, document knowledge, create tangible evidence, and provide a starting point for moving theory into action (Scott Shields, 2016).

2.7. Data Representation

The following section describes how I drew on the generated data to compose creative nonfiction pieces presented in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. They are based on the representation of memory drawings, collages, reflective journal entries, and interview transcripts.

According to Caulley (2008), creative nonfiction can be described as a technique to tell a story using facts and presenting concrete details. However, it uses numerous techniques of fiction for its emotional vibrancy and compelling qualities. Creative nonfiction delivers knowledge in an imaginative way that directs the reader towards deeper understandings and insights of the topic (Caulley, 2008). This technique aims to utilise imagination and spontaneity to accurately capture and describe a subject in a manner that sparks the readers' curiosity and increases their interest while remaining faithful to the integrity and validity of the information. According to Pillay et al. (2019), creative nonfiction narratives serve the purpose of inviting audiences into connecting with and experiencing the work and world of the researcher. Furthermore, this format invites readers to pause, understand the participants' lives, and learn more about them (Pillay et al., 2019). Overall, creative nonfiction provides a different dimension to sharing stories based on factual events.

The creative nonfiction format was appropriate and beneficial to relay aspects of the data obtained from my study. This format allowed me to provide accurate information while preserving confidentiality where necessary by altering dates, descriptions, names and places (Caulley, 2008). It also permitted me to add details and share stories creatively to excite readers and enable them to experience emotions as they read through them (Caulley, 2008). And it helped me as the writer set the mood and appeal to the senses to create more memorable, relatable, and understandable texts (Caulley, 2008). This format was suitable as it allowed me to make my readers feel more connected to the stories and maintain their interest.

The data produced by the data generation process had to be organised in a way that was understandable and easy to follow for the reader. For this reason, I had decided to share each participant's story one after the other in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, starting with myself. I began by arranging my memory drawings, followed by written descriptions of the drawings. Then, I included my collage with a written explanation. Next, I selected a set of excerpts from the self-interview I engaged in, with comments for clarity. I also chose a collection of extracts from my reflective journal pertinent to the activities I engaged in, with additional thoughtful comments.

My data were followed by those of the remaining three participants. These included: the memory drawings they created, followed by descriptions I developed; the collages they created, with descriptions I added to make meaning of them; a set of interview excerpts, with comments for clarity and emphasis; and lastly, excerpts from their journal entries, with my comments.

The data selected to feature in Chapters Three and Four were chosen as they were most appropriate to the question posed or the guidelines stipulated. The data were depicted concerning one participant at a time to allow the reader to grasp each participant's story entirely before moving on to the next. This was designed to enhance clarity and readability for the reader.

The following section consists of insights into how I elaborated on each data source (as shown in Chapters Three and Four). I explain how I wrote "lived experience descriptions" (Van Manen, 1990) for the memory drawings, collage descriptions for the collages, interview

descriptions for the set of excerpts I chose to include, and reflective journal descriptions, which include thoughtful comments on the extracts I chose.

2.7.1. Memory Drawing Descriptions

The first set of creative nonfiction texts were inspired by my memory drawings and those of my other participants. These research texts are known as lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 1990), which I constructed and included after each memory drawing. CohenMiller (2018) states that memory drawings are a technique that places one face-to-face with their past experiences, and adds that “through drawing, participants [can create] another means of articulating their thoughts and sharing them” (p. 9).

After developing multiple memory drawings and receiving those created by my participants, I reviewed them and attempted to story them. I tried to articulate my thoughts of each memory, articulate the way I interpreted what I assumed to be the experience of my participant within the drawing, and share this in a description. With my own memory drawings, I chose memories that I remember clearly, as they impacted me. I distinctly remember the thoughts going through my mind, the feelings I was experiencing, and my surroundings, including the environment and the people around me. With the drawings of my participants, I allowed myself to travel into the drawing and describe the scene as if I were them.

I shared thoughts and feelings from all drawings as if I were reliving them as my present. I wrote as if I was relaying the event to another and as if it was happening currently. This entailed describing the moods, emotions and feelings I was experiencing internally and those I understood my participants to have been experiencing. My participants explained their memory drawings to me by providing short descriptions or captions. Guided by these, I focused on aspects of the event or situation that stood out to me. I narrated the bodily sensations that were occurring or potentially occurring (van Manen, 1990). Describing the memory through writing a lived experience description of a memory drawing enabled me to process and put my thoughts and feelings into context and perceive the event from my participant’s perspective. An aspect that stood out to me was the authenticity of the events my participants recounted. By telling the story from their perspective, it was as if I was living it with them and feeling the thoughts and emotions they experienced at the time.

2.7.2. Collage Descriptions

The second set of research texts were inspired by collage making and can be described as collage descriptions. My own collage description began with numbering each image and explaining what each image represented (van Schalkwyk, 2010). After this, I wrote the collage description by explaining the images, why they were chosen, and how they related to my early-career teacher identity. As described previously, my collage was separated into three categories: past, present and future. I wrote three separate stories based on the three eras included in my collage, formulated to share the meaning of the chosen images.

I created the descriptions of my participants' collages in a similar manner. When participants had completed their collages and sent them to me, they attached an explanation of what each image was, according to a numbering system, like in the example I sent them. Once I had clarity on each image, I could story their collages from past, present, and future. Each description entailed an understanding of what each picture was, why it was chosen, and its role in representing their early-career teacher identity. Each era was storied separately, and I ensured a flow in the information provided, to enhance the reader's enjoyment. As a researcher, creating collage descriptions for each collage, an aspect that stood out to me was how far all participants had come, and the clearer vision we now had for our future.

2.7.3. Interview Descriptions

The third set of research texts were inspired by the interviews I engaged in. Interviews provide a space to elicit narratives and stimulate conversation (Pezalla et al., 2012). When finding ways to represent the data obtained through interviews, I selected parts of the transcribed interview that fit the question posed most appropriately. Once arranging excerpts from the interview transcripts according to the relevant question, thoughts flowed to me, and I added these to enhance the clarity of the answer.

I initially worked with my self-interview, where I was both researcher and participant. Through recording my responses to my questions, I was able to transcribe the interview and select the most relevant excerpts. Those seen as applicable directly answered the question that was asked and contributed to the research. I then reorganised the extracts to tell my story and relay the meaning behind the answers I gave.

I worked with participants' interviews in the same manner that I did with my own. I transcribed the recorded interview, and then organised their answers under the appropriate questions, eliminating excess information deemed unnecessary or repetitive. After that, I added my thoughts to the research texts. This was to provide readers with insight into what I thought was meant, what the participant was trying to achieve, and/or what I as the researcher observed the participant experiencing when a particular question was posed or answered. This process required careful consideration, sifting out the most relevant data and organising the chosen excerpts. I anticipated that the reflective comments would provide readers with additional insight into the conversations that took place. Interviews can be unpredictable and raw, and the use of comments was intended to put the thoughts of participants into context.

2.7.4. Journal Entry Descriptions

The final set of research texts were inspired by a series of journal entries made by my participants and me. Journalling is a tool used for discovery, reflecting and exploring the reality of an experience (Furman et al., 2008). From my reflective journal and those of my participants, I read the multiple entries and selected excerpts that I felt to be most relevant to the research, or research question being posed. These were selected based on the data generation activities that we engaged in individually and best described the thoughts, feelings and discoveries that arose. Journal entries were chosen to reflect the positive and negative happenings as we attempted to navigate this process as participants. Lastly, I added my own thoughtful comments on the journal excerpts to enhance clarity and readability. These descriptions were intended to give readers an understanding of my interpretation of what participants really meant in their entries.

2.8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

As Dywer and Emerald (2017) explain, narrative inquirers can take different approaches to analysis, including “thematically-informed approaches” (p. 19). They also make the point that “thematic analysis, ... is often the ‘go to’ analytic for first-time narrative inquirers”, which was so in my case. I chose to do a themed analysis because I could see how it would allow me to analyse the data to identify patterns and make meaning in a way that made sense to me.

To respond to my research questions and make meaning of the evidence obtained from the data sources, I analysed and interpreted the data represented in Chapters Three and Four. These

activities occurred concurrently, were not rushed, enriched the generated data, and filled in the gaps in my understanding (Chang, 2008). I started by reviewing, rearranging, categorising, probing, selecting, and deselecting, as well as gazing at the data. Descriptions and explanations were created to understand how behaviours, materials, objects, experiences, and ideas derived from the data relate to the environment and its actors (Chang, 2008). I identified essential features and wrote descriptions of interrelationships (Chang, 2008).

When interpreting the data, I focused on making sense of and creating the meaning of the data relative to the context and process to address the posed research questions (Chang, 2008). To make meaning of the data, I excavated meanings from different contexts and established similarities and contradictions (Chang, 2008). Analysis and interpretation of the evidence obtained from data sources allowed me to understand generated information as the researcher.

There are different ways in which data can be dissected and connected. I examined the data using various methods to connect the data and the relationships within the different elements (Chang, 2008). Exploring connections between contexts was pivotal for me as the researcher to establish and interpret biographical data (Chang, 2008). Chang (2008) describes data analysis and interpretation as an act between connecting and fracturing and zooming in and out between art and science. By zooming in, I identified details, focused on a specific set of data, and probed into smaller segments while respecting the broader context and bigger picture (Chang, 2008). Interpretation through zooming out allowed me to ‘hover’ over the context and set it out collectively (Chang, 2008). The balancing act of science and art allowed for transparency, reflexivity, credibility, and a systematic approach to the research; furthermore, it enabled intuition, impression, and insight (Chang, 2008). I read the data text and listened, and reviewed the data as segments; this was done separately for each participant. I created arrangements to understand the data and kept memos of impressions to discover repeated topics. This enabled me to begin to recognise patterns and exceptions (Chang, 2008). I also created a connection between the past and present, and between relationships, compared the data with other cases, broadly contextualising them and creating recurring themes (Chang, 2008). As a researcher, it was pivotal to ensure that I comprehended the information I had generated, which aided me in addressing my research questions.

Creative analytical practices assisted me in understanding and perceiving aspects of the research that I would not be able to otherwise (Richardson, 2000). Creative analytical practice is beneficial in a narrative inquiry, as it provides a different approach to investigating how the world, others, and our identities are constructed (Pillay et al., 2019). I developed an interpretive memory drawing and collage based on the memory drawings that participants and I individually created; these appear in Chapter Five. The interpretive memory drawing was designed to exhibit my understanding of the generated series of images, followed by a description of what was depicted. I also developed an interpretive collage to display the visible connections recognised across participants' collages. After that, I wrote a collage description to explain my comprehension of the collage. These interpretations assisted me in gaining insight into participants' thought processes and feelings, understanding their experiences, and identifying commonalities and differences. This led to the development of themes to further relay my comprehension of participants' stories.

These creative analytical techniques benefitted me as a researcher. As Richardson (2000) describes, I raised my consciousness, expanded my interpretive skills, and was open to fresh perspectives through these practices. I was also able to relate differently to the data, which stimulated my thinking of concepts and ideas, and evoked new questions (Richardson, 2000). Creative analytical practices allowed me to see through and beyond the bigger picture (Richardson, 2000). Furthermore, they allowed me to gain self-insight through my research. Creative practices enhanced and assisted me in the analysis and interpretation process.

The critical principle that informed my composition was to ensure that even though I was creatively sharing the story, I remained respectful to the participant and the story's authenticity. I also included elements of creativity, emotion, clarifying elements, and I aimed to add a sense of delight and fun. Creatively telling the story allowed me as the researcher to gain a different perspective than if the story were just regurgitated. I gained access to different viewpoints, information, and emotions to achieve a richer understanding. I decided to bring in my own thoughts, feelings and perspective when telling the stories to provide readers with an in-depth experience of my witnessing of the story and ensure I retained their interest.

2.9. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is pivotal to the research process, affecting the researcher, participants, and readers. As narrative inquiry is contextual, it is vital to establish trustworthiness by evaluating the research based on its parameters (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). Verifying the study's trustworthiness requires my topic to be deemed worthy and my account of the research to demonstrate credibility, express authenticity, and be relatable (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). As the researcher, I was aware that I should tend to ethical responsibilities, display sincerity, create meaningful coherence within the research, and ensure that the research was thorough and intended to make a substantive and significant contribution to the lives of others (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research, I chose participants with appropriate life histories, educational backgrounds, and diverse experiences (Clandinin, 2013). I also asked questions aligned with my research's focus and purpose to identify pertinent information and be authentic when writing about participants' experiences (Clandinin, 2013). It was my responsibility as a researcher to be prepared and accurate, consider all parties involved in the narrative inquiry process and tend to the needs of participants (Clandinin, 2013). I paid careful attention to the descriptions of methods and design in my reporting and put thoughtful consideration into the challenges and strengths of the study (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017).

To ensure I met the standard of my stipulated guidelines, I approached qualified teachers, ensuring they met the educational backgrounds. Second, I wanted to witness different stories based on the participants' varied backgrounds and life experiences. I hoped to bring in various stories and perspectives. Because the participants' life histories were so different, I found their stories interesting and wanted the reader to feel this way, too; I wanted to hold their attention.

My research was committed to understanding my participants' lives and ensuring that my account of their experiences was credible and reflective (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). I attended to the participants' voices and the audience (Clandinin, 2013). I had to be careful and mindful when using terms and sharing experiences, as the research could affect lives. Ensuring the research was trustworthy was vital as it represented the lived stories of the participants.

2.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethical review is mandatory for research with people, and engaging in narrative inquiry requires the researcher to think of ethics responsibly and responsively (Clandinin, 2013). There is also a consideration of social responsibility regarding how we interact with others and use our words. As a researcher, I needed to put myself in participants' shoes and be cautious in the way I portrayed others (Clandinin, 2013).

To obtain ethical clearance (Appendix A) from the University Research Ethics Committee, I had to follow specific procedures. Acquiring ethical clearance was vital and had to be completed before obtaining informed consent from participants and generating data. An initial step in getting ethical clearance entailed seeking gatekeepers' permission to work with my participants, which varied according to their occupation. For instance, I received permission to participate from a school principal for participant Norah Shaik, an employed teacher. For Kira Omar, a Master's student, I sought consent from the university's registrar. The gatekeeper's permission that was obtained was submitted as part of the ethical clearance application.

When conducting research involving others, it is pivotal to obtain informed consent. I completed several steps to get the permission of my participants. Obtaining informed consent entailed ensuring ethical considerations were made clear to participants before inviting them into the research project (Clandinin, 2013). Obtaining informed consent included informing them about the purpose and process of the study and that they had the right to exit the study at any point, should they wish to do so (Mitchell et al., 2019). The participants needed to be aware of the situation they were entering into, as there may be consequences once the information is released (Clandinin, 2013). I provided consent forms (Appendix B), which needed to be read and signed to protect both parties (Clandinin, 2013). I also required permission from participants when I used photographs, recordings and emails (Mitchell et al., 2019). I checked in with my participants through the stages of the inquiry to ensure that they still gave their consent and to reflect on their wellbeing (Ellis, 2007). Furthermore, I ensured that participants were not subject to harm and that guidelines followed the University Research Ethics committee processes and procedures (Ellis, 2007).

In the research process, ethically important moments are bound to arise. Ellis (2007) cautions that researchers should always prepare for complexities to emerge, even when consent is given.

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to address these effectively and honour and respect my participants. For instance, an ethically challenging moment arose when one of my participants was unsure if she could participate in the study after I had sent her the activities. As a researcher, I had to respect her decision; fortunately, it all worked out.

Ethically crucial moments were dealt with by thinking about ethics responsibly. Particular areas were approached with sensitivity for the participants and the communities in which they work and live, and with caution (Clandinin, 2013). I established my responsibilities as a researcher per the University Research Ethics Committee guidelines and carefully worked alongside participants. This process required trust, openness, and reflective conversations for checking for any distress (Clandinin, 2013). I used these strategies for the comfort and protection of my participants. In addition, when writing about participants' lived experiences, I was aware of the importance of using pseudonyms. I also followed the advice from Ellis (2007) on altering some details or omitting certain aspects when writing to protect participants' privacy and welfare. Unpredictable events occurred, but I addressed these with participants' wellbeing in mind and according to ethical standards.

Relational ethics deals with the reality of the researcher's relationships with family and friends implicated in personal stories revealed in the research report (Ellis, 2007). This required me to balance my role as the researcher with such connections (Clandinin, 2013). As Ellis (2007) highlighted, dealing with relational ethics may cause a shift in the researcher's relationships with family and friends (Ellis, 2007). I was aware that it was my responsibility to act from my mind and heart while providing an authentic account of my lived experiences (Ellis, 2007). Furthermore, I was conscious of being responsible for my actions and the possible consequences of the writing (Ellis, 2007). I acted as best as I could at that particular time; guided by the stories, I aimed to portray them as accurately and honestly as possible, and I sought the good that existed within these shared stories (Ellis, 2007). Relational ethics posed a different set of challenges to ethical procedures; however, by approaching this narrative inquiry with sensitivity and caution, I sought positive outcomes for all involved.

2.11. Challenges Encountered

A challenge that I faced related to my participants and the data generation process. As my participants were working or studying, a threat arose when they took longer than anticipated to

complete the activities since I needed to conduct my research process. I provided timelines well in advance to ensure that participants prepared themselves for working with my activities. Furthermore, when participants would unintentionally not send me their activity by the stipulated date, I would send gentle reminders and sensitively encourage them to complete the activities. I was also flexible and accommodating during this time, as I was appreciative that my participants were engaging in this research without any incentive. Therefore, when they were a little behind schedule, I would politely ask which day would be suitable for sending it through while I continued with other aspects of the study. Overall, I found that understanding different participants' needs and schedules worked well for the data generation process.

In addition, conducting research of this nature, which entailed accessing memories, could have negatively affected my personal relationships with the participants. Mitchell et al. (2019) warned that researchers sometimes carry guilt from provoking negative emotions from participants. Aware of this possibility, I approached areas of sensitivity with caution. I sought to be attuned to the participants' feelings, desires, reactions, and needs and ensured that the research process was not negatively affecting them or our relationship (Clandinin, 2013). As a researcher, I also aimed to be as sensitive and open-minded as possible towards all discussions and information obtained throughout the process.

2.12. Conclusion

From this chapter, I want readers to remember that this study was conducted via online platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A narrative inquiry methodology was utilised to elicit and share participants' stories as it was most appropriate. This chapter outlined the data generation activities I utilised: memory drawing, collage making, interviewing and journalling. I explained the descriptions and reflections that followed these activities to ensure readability and comprehension of the study. I also described the creative analysis activities I engaged in to explain how I made meaning of the generated data. This chapter also indicated the ethical considerations and challenges I encountered during this study, such as those faced when working with others. Readers should remember that the data collected were analysed and interpreted to create meaning and understand the data in relation to the context and research questions guiding this study. What was special about this research process for me is that the creative data generation activities produced extraordinary sets of information. And each

participant added distinctive and valuable elements to this study. The data generation activities combined with the specifically selected participants made this research a unique and riveting experience.

In the following chapter, I address the first research question: What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities? Chapter Three displays the collected data of myself, and the participant, Norah, in the form of our individually created memory drawings, individually compiled collages, a selection of excerpts from our interview transcripts, and lastly, a selection of extracts from each participant's journal. The interview and journal entries sections both contain reflective and thoughtful comments added for clarity and comprehension. Overall, readers can expect an insight into the stories Norah and I shared when asked about our past experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

PUTTING TOGETHER THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

This chapter title was chosen as it shares the stories of myself and my participant, Norah, to make visible how our lived experiences contributed to and influenced our early-career teacher identities

3.1. Introduction

The purpose and focus of this study is to understand how our past experiences influence professional identities and the effect of storytelling on developing an early-career teacher's identity. The previous chapter explained where the study was conducted, the research approach, the participants, and the data generation activities. Chapter Two also described how the generated data were analysed and interpreted, how the study's trustworthiness was established, the ethical considerations, and the challenges experienced.

This chapter addresses the first research question: *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?* In this chapter, the memory drawings created by myself and Norah are followed by our individually compiled collages, then a selection of excerpts of the interview transcripts, and lastly, a selection of extracts from each participant's journal. The memory drawings are accompanied by descriptions constructed by me, putting myself in the 'shoes' of my participants. I wrote directly as if I were them, recalling the possible surroundings, moods, feelings, and bodily sensations they potentially experienced during the event. Likewise, each collage is followed by a collage description that I developed. For clarity, every image is described, along with the reasoning behind the chosen picture, and its role in contributing to our early-career teacher identities.

In this chapter, readers will encounter the different stories shared by each participant and their interpretations of the activities they were presented with. This provides insight into my participants and me based on our experiences. The collages also give an understanding of the differences between our past and present experiences and our future aspirations. While differences were identified, readers can also expect to find various similarities in the stories shared. Later, especially in the interview section, it will be seen how these experiences

influenced our identities. The last activity directly provides understanding from my participant, Norah and me, based on our thoughts and feelings about the activities and the emotions experienced during and afterward.

Particular memory drawings were selected based on the amount of information provided, and what I, as the researcher, felt had the most considerable influence on the participants' early-career teacher identities. Certain excerpts from the interviews and reflective journal entries were selected as best representing the feelings and thoughts of myself and Norah, and what I felt responded to the posed questions.

This chapter is organised one participant at a time and includes each activity they engaged in. This arrangement was chosen to avoid confusion between the stories, focus on one participant at a time to clearly represent each activity, and see the pattern and development of their early-career teacher identity. I wanted readers to follow one participant's story at a time, fully grasp and enjoy what has been presented, and get a clear understanding of who the participant is, to notice the shifts in their identity through influences from the events they experienced.

3.2. Sonam's Data

3.2.1. Sonam's Memory Drawings

These are my memory drawings, which entailed thinking as far back as possible into memories of my lived experiences. I produced a series of drawings based on events that I felt have made the most significant impact on developing my early-career teacher identity. Three pictures were chosen. The first is titled 'The Day I Walked Out Crying', and represents a time that I was shouted at by my Grade 12 Mathematics tutor and felt hurt. The second is titled 'Heartbroken', which portrays a time in Matric when I did not earn enough points to be accepted into my chosen university. The third drawing is titled 'The Moment I Felt Like I Belonged', displaying a positive memory from my first teaching experience. Each picture is followed by a lived experience description to verbally communicate the events occurring.

3.2.1.1. The Day I Walked Out Crying

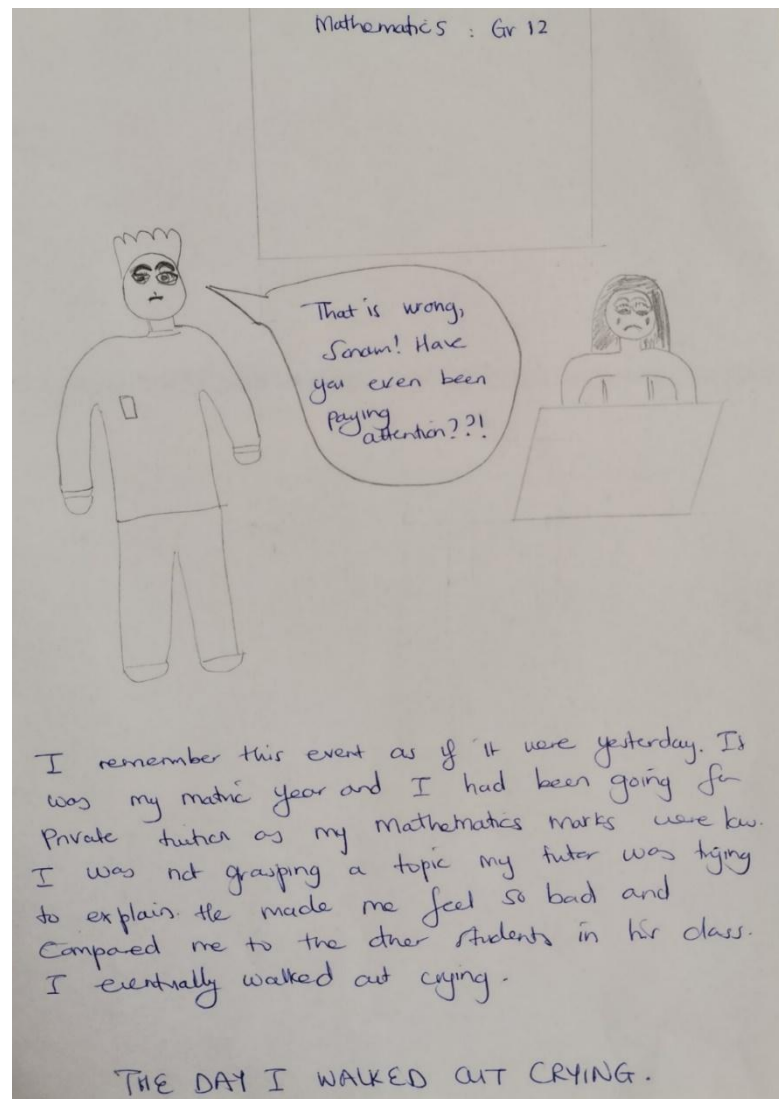


Figure 3.1.

A memory drawing created by Sonam, describing a time when she was shouted at by her matric tutor, and ran out crying.

I remember this event as if it were yesterday. It was my matric year and I had been going for private tuition as my Mathematics marks were low. I was not grasping a topic my tutor was trying to explain. He made me feel so bad and compared me to the other students in his class. I eventually walked out crying.

[Excerpt from the Interpretive Memory Drawing seen above]

I remember this day as if it were yesterday. I was sitting in my Mathematics tuition, which I dreaded especially today, because it was a one-on-one session. I found comfort in the group sessions because it took the pressure off me and having to answer the questions – as I knew my Maths was weaker than the other students. I felt at ease in the group setting as the others always jumped at the opportunity to answer first. I would merely observe and take in as much as I could – trying to keep up. Then, he entered. Unfortunately, the lesson was now in session. I could feel myself wishing I was anywhere but here; with this sinking pit in my stomach, my entire energy felt low. My tutor would ask me something, and I had no idea what the answer was. I felt like a failure. I felt myself sink down in my chair, my posture was weak, my head looking down at the paper in front of me, emotions gushing over me – I couldn't answer yet another question. My tutor was furious with me; I could feel his anger as he asked, "How could you get this wrong? This is the basics?!" I could feel the frustration in his eyes, the disappointment because he spent many hours thinking I was on the same level as the other students. Hearing him yell at me and feeling his fury when I was already feeling terrible caused tears to fill my eyes; everything about the room became a blur; I couldn't see or hear anything else – I just needed to get out. I picked up my things as fast as I could and had to leave. I picked up my things and walked out as quickly as I could. I was grateful to be out of that room, to be outside and breathing in the fresh air. However, that was short-lived as feelings of fear, for walking out, had swept over me. Then I felt the fear of failing rushing over me. Anxiety followed straight after – what if I failed matric because I failed mathematics? What if I couldn't get into university? I felt overwhelmed as my mind raced with these thoughts. Soon after, my tutor followed. He had calmed down and cautiously approached me as my emotional state was evident. We agreed that the session was over for the day, and I left shortly after.

3.2.1.2. Heartbroken

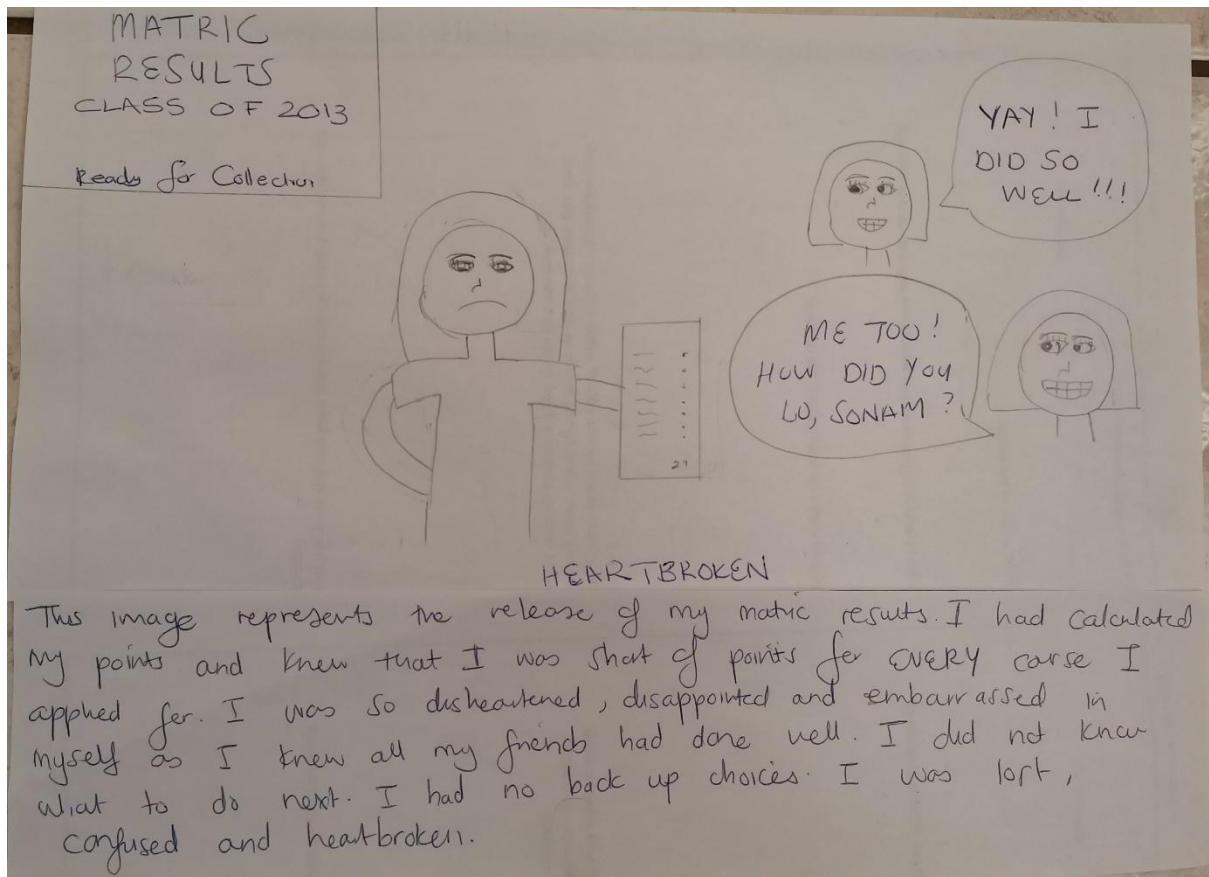


Figure 3.2.

An image created by Sonam illustrating a time when she achieved unsatisfactory results in matric, was afraid for her future and felt heartbroken.

This image represents the release of my matric [final school year] results. I had calculated my points and knew that I was short of points for EVERY course I applied for. I was so disheartened, disappointed, and embarrassed in myself as I knew all my friends had done well. I did not know what to do next. I had no backup choices. I was lost, confused, and heartbroken.

[Excerpt from the Interpretive Memory Drawing seen above]

Blurry vision, thoughts racing, so confused and lost, and I try to process my reality. One of the most mind-numbing moments of my life. I hear voices speaking to me. It's my friends. They are cheerful after receiving excellent results. They talk to me, and I am forced to come back into the present moment. They ask how I have done. I told them, a bachelor's pass, with one A. However, this pass was not good enough to be accepted into the university I applied for; the ONLY university I applied for. Messages were being received on my phone, one after the other – I am sorry to inform you, but you have not been accepted for this course. My mind raced as I read these words, feeling as if I was watching my whole future crumble before my eyes. I felt helpless and lost. What did the words on this paper mean – was I not going to study further? Were all my friends going to go off to university, and I would be left behind, forgotten by them all? As my first-choice university, the tuition would be paid for through my father's staff concession. I wondered, would we be able to afford another tertiary institution? How would we get the money to pay for it? We were barely making ends meet as was. I was experiencing so much panic and anxiety, overwhelmed with fear about the future. I was highly disappointed – I knew I didn't do enough. I knew this was the result of all the days I chose to procrastinate and not study. But it was one of those moments when I knew it was too late. I had to face the consequences of my irresponsibility. Unfortunately for me, I had to suck it up and put on a brave face. I didn't want anyone to know that I was short of points. I tried to hide it for as long as I could because I knew how disappointed and heartbroken my parents would be. I knew everything was not okay at the back of my mind, but I put on a smile and proceeded to make plans with my friends for how we would spend our day after receiving our results. What would happen next? I was yet to find out.

3.2.1.3. The Moment I Felt Like I Belonged

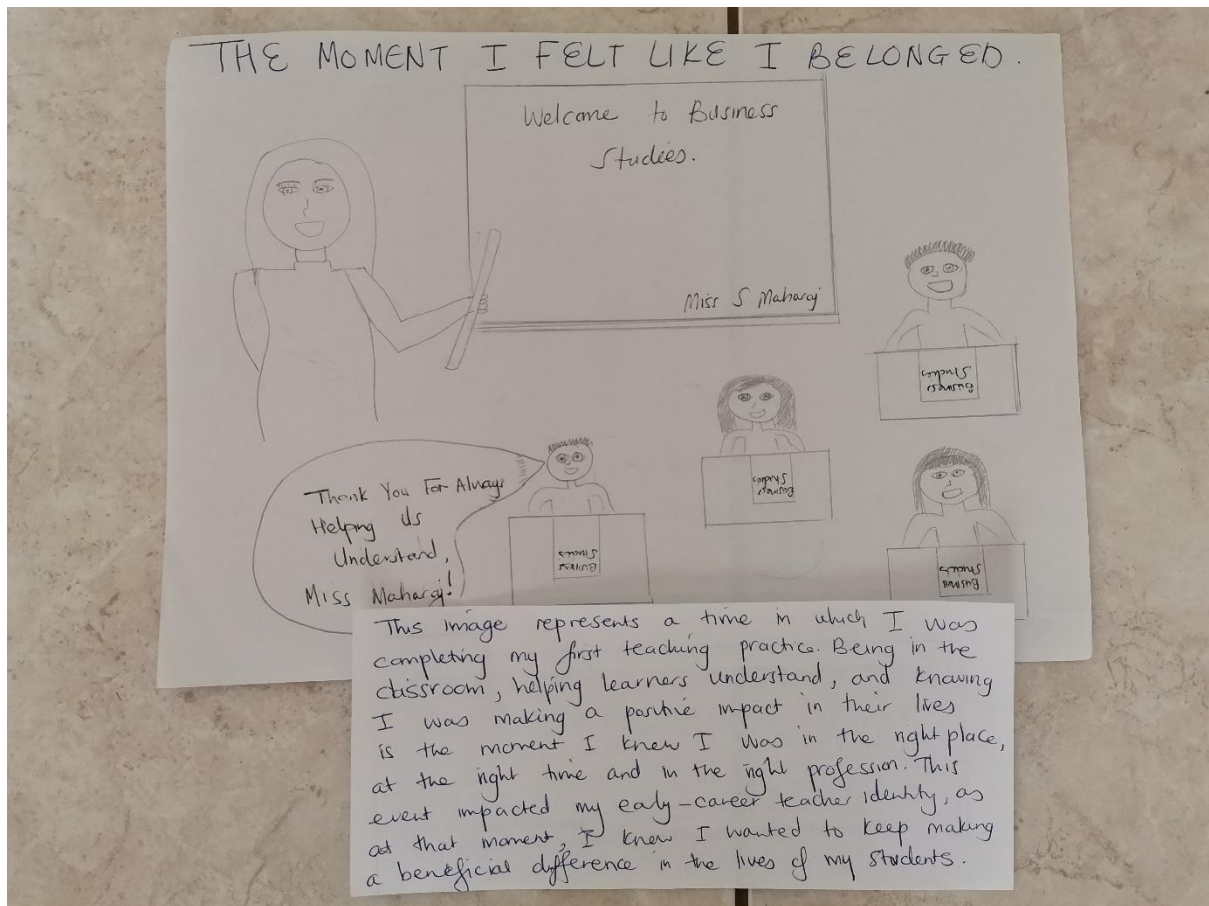


Figure 3.3.

A memory drawing created by Sonam depicting her first teaching practicum, when she finally felt like she had found her place in this world.

This image represents a time in which I was completing my first teaching practice. Being in the classroom, helping learners understand, and knowing I was making a positive impact in their lives is when I knew I was in the right place, at the right time, and in the right profession. This event impacted my early-career teacher identity, as at that moment, I knew I wanted to keep making a beneficial difference in the lives of my students.

[Excerpt from the Interpretive Memory Drawing seen above]

“Good morning, class. I would like you all to welcome our new student teacher, Miss Maharaj.” I felt 30 pairs of eyes glued to my every move. I greeted them back nervously, almost stuttering my words. I heard soft whispers filled with curiosity about who this new teacher was in their classroom. I felt excited, nervous, and somehow calm all at the same time – like I was in the right place at the right time. Classes had begun, and I knew I would have to step in sooner or later. Then I was called to explain a section my Mentor teacher and I had discussed previously. I walked up to the board, my legs feeling like jelly. I was so nervous. I started the lesson as discussed. I had thoughts flying through my mind – are the learners engaged? Are they paying attention and grasping the information? Is the information I am trying to convey coming out correctly? All these thoughts, while trying to remain composed. It was as if I was watching myself deliver the lesson while trying to ensure every aspect outside of me was going accordingly (such as learner interest and engagement). Once the initial nerves from standing in front of students delivering content were settled, and I knew I had the learners’ attention, we engaged in an activity to reiterate the knowledge learned in this lesson – and I must say, this was the best part. They were excited to answer and share their answers with me. It was clear that they had retained the information and understood the content. When the bell rang, they thanked me for such an interesting lesson, and told me many good things that they had enjoyed throughout the lesson – such as the way I explained and how eager they were to come back into my class tomorrow. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief; I had survived my first lesson! I felt calmer and happy with the way the lesson went. This made me eager and excited to continue with the rest of my teaching practice.

3.2.2. Sonam’s Collage

The collage is an exciting way to work through the feelings and emotions one is experiencing and offered my participants and me a platform to realise our history, present reality, and desired future in an innovative way.

The collage is divided into three stages; past, present, and future. Appropriate images and texts were chosen to represent my past, present, and future teacher identity. Through these images, I was able to formulate a story and express myself. The collage is followed by a description of each image, what it represents, and its role in my story.



Figure 3.4.

Sonam's collage representing her past, present, and future teacher identity.

3.2.2.1. Past

These images represent a time in my life when I would best describe myself as confused and self-involved. At this time, I was working on myself, figuring out the career path I would take. I had already completed my Bachelor of Administration degree, but my passion for teaching remained with me. I had no idea how I would break the news to my family – that I wanted to pursue yet another year of studying when I knew they were expecting me to get a job and start contributing towards the household responsibilities, financially, that is. On top of that, I was surrounded by my peers who were working already – buying cars, apartments, travelling. I wasn't sure if I would be able to sacrifice yet another year for my education. It was a confusing time. But I knew my heart was in teaching and that this is what would make me the happiest.

I was ready to take on this career path; I was prepared to change my life, but also afraid of change. Eventually, I gathered the courage to tell my family and pursue this career path I had dreamed of. I was lucky enough to have the support of my family in everything I do. I obtained my Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which is represented by the graduation gown. The image of the man kissing the trophy represents how I felt when I had completed my PGCE; it was a feeling of accomplishing what I always wanted. My attitude towards my initial teacher identity is represented by the words, 'I'm up for any challenge' – which I was. I was ready to take the teaching and learning environment by storm. I was ready for the new challenges and opportunities.

3.2.2.2. Present

'BETTER' – that is the only thing my current self is working towards. I have achieved my Honours in Education, represented by the graduation image, which I pursued to enhance my professional practice and ensure I am well equipped to handle scenarios in the classroom. This is also why I have chosen to pursue my Master's in Education, to broaden my knowledge and become an effective teacher. I am preparing myself to be exposed to diverse learners and settings that exist within the schooling environment. I want to be ready for all kinds of environments and experiences, and be stable within myself and my professional identity, to ensure I act in the best interests of myself, the learner, and the school.

The images of the woman speaking and the phrase 'research helps communities' and 'clarity' were chosen because of how I see myself and my research process. My teacher identity is

focused on achieving clarity within my identity, engaging in research to help me and my colleagues improve, and getting involved in initiatives to improve the lives of my learners. I want other teachers to benefit from my research and understand their identities to succeed in their classrooms. As a teacher, I am working towards improving myself to ensure I am a better version of myself for the youth that I am interacting with. 'Clarity' represents my clear vision for the reasoning behind my research, and the woman speaking symbolises me educating others through my newfound knowledge. 'Current challenges' represent what my current teacher identity is experiencing, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which hinders the teaching and learning environment. The images of the woman next to the learners represent us, teachers, standing as a united front to overcome challenges and educate the youth.

3.2.2.3. Future

These images represent the way I see my future teacher identity, as a pioneer of youth development. The blankets and sports equipment represent how I plan to give back and implement initiatives to keep learners safe and warm; especially those learners who come from unsafe environments. I want to be the teacher they can always turn to. The sporting equipment is aimed at being an initiative to keep learners in school and off the streets – through sporting initiatives. The image of the different hands joined together illustrates my aim to create and encourage unity amongst learners of all races and promote diversity and inclusion. The phrase 'betterment of all' includes what I hope for and falls under my aspirations to give back. The images of the children playing freely represent my aspiration to be the teacher that allows her learners to be free, express themselves in their own way, and enjoy their youth and their schooling environment. I want to create an environment that allows and promotes learners to fully discover and be the people they want to be.

3.2.3. Sonam's Interview

The following section represents the self-interview I engaged in. The purpose of the interview process was to reflect on the previous two activities and gain a deeper insight into my overall thoughts and feelings. The interview was conducted to gain a deeper insight and develop meanings and understandings of my experiences. As explained in Chapter Two, questions were designed before the interview. Discussions were had about the activities already engaged in and questions for further clarity about my identity.

I made selections from the interview transcript that fit the question that was posed most appropriately. As I was arranging excerpts from the interview transcript according to the relevant question, thoughts flowed to me that I added, either within the question or at the end, to enhance the clarity of the answer provided.

When asked to describe the schools that featured in my memory drawings, I answered:

The high school I went to was somewhat public. I say 'somewhat' because, how can I explain it, it wasn't like other public or government schools? It was more expensive than other public schools. It was just different. There was more discipline enforced as opposed to a regular public school. The teachers were very hands-on. But with that note, it was not as... 'exclusive' as a private school. There was a distinction between the two. However, this school was very well resourced. It had the latest technology, everything was fully functional, the classes were never overcrowded. I think the ratio was between 25–35 to 1 teacher, and this school was also located in an urban area.

The school that I did my teaching practice in was not as bad as I expected it to be for a public school, physically. They had a science and mathematics-oriented principal, so he ensured their lab was up to date. He was very savvy! He managed to get sponsorship to build a high-quality kitchen for the school. Some of the classrooms had whiteboards with projects, etcetera. He really aimed for his staff to be technologically advanced. It was a high school, and there were about 35–40 learners to 1 teacher in the classroom.

When asked how reflecting on past experiences through storytelling activities have influenced me, I answered:

Well ... Storytelling and using memory drawing have caused me to reflect on times that I felt impacted and influenced my early-career teacher identity. I was able to sit back and think about the events I experienced that shaped my identity.

[Collage making] The collage making was my favourite activity! I think I chose this particular activity mainly for myself [laughs]. I'm a visual person, and I believe that we need to have a vision in our minds now to have something in the future. So, this activity was beneficial for my research and also for my own personal benefit. My 'future' aspect of my collage gave me a

clear picture of the teacher I want to be in the future – one that gives back. This particular exercise gave me a sense of what I'm working towards.

Reflective journalling has also been fun for me. I journal as a form of expression ... It's a tool I use to clear my mind and make sense of my experiences. So, it's been helpful in understanding the development of my activity.

I would say that overall, doing these activities has impacted the way I see myself as a teacher. I am more committed to being a better teacher for myself and all the lives I am influencing. I am more motivated to improve myself and become the 'future' teacher I can see myself being.

It was found that through each activity I engaged in, I remembered a different detail or aspect of that occurrence, which I had previously forgotten. Although the activities all produced different outcomes, I benefited from interpreting my past experiences utilising these techniques.

When asked how my professional identity, future and current experiences, was being impacted through storytelling activities, I stated:

Okay, where to begin ... These storytelling activities have opened my eyes to many things that I haven't previously been aware of. I'm more aware of the story I tell now, and it has made me question if this story is appropriate for the person I am trying to be right now, or even if it is aligned with who I want to be in the future. I started with the collage making to 'tell my story', and I found this activity to be fun. It put a lot into perspective about where I came from – being self-involved and confused about my career choices. Then it showed me where I am now, which is just trying to gain as much knowledge as possible to become the teacher I want to be.

I reflected specifically on the trepidation I initially faced when engaging in arts-based techniques, but also on how my thought process began gaining momentum as I was remembering more memories. Engaging in these activities helped me realise how far I had come and helped me develop a vision for how I perceived my future professional identity.

Storytelling through memory drawing was also more manageable than I thought! Initially, I was dreading drawing; even when I began drawing, I felt embarrassed about my drawing abilities [laughs], but then I remembered it was more about the story that I was telling. Even

reflecting through journalling allowed me to sift through the memories that I had previously forgotten about, and it made me think – wow, I really went through that, and here I am now.

Storytelling is impacting my current experience by allowing me to appreciate more and realise that I actually am on track. It has shown me how far I have come. Storytelling is affecting my future experience by giving me a clearer insight into the future educator I want to be and the characteristics I will possess.

Many different memories, thoughts, and ideas have been stimulated and have resurfaced through these creative processes that I had totally forgotten about but needed to be reminded of to appreciate where I am and remind me of where I want to be.

When asked how reflecting on my story through storytelling activities impacted my passion and caused me to see the profession I am in differently, I said:

Reflecting has caused me to definitely feel way, way more passionate about being a teacher! I was reminded of a time when I was struggling academically – I would have honestly never thought I would be here today after that period in my life. I felt like all hope was lost. So, to be here is truly a plot twist. This enhances my passion because it makes me think of all the young children out there who have potential like I did, but nobody around to help them tap into this potential. Nobody around them to help them realise how worthy and capable they are, you know? This is where I come in. As their teacher, who has been through what they are going through and can relate, I want to help these students learn from my mistakes. I knew that was my initial motivation for entering the profession; however, being reminded of this increases my passion for teaching and working with the youth.

Remembering the teachers who didn't believe in me and thought that I wasn't capable motivates me every day to make sure I never make another child feel inadequate. Going through those events only inspires me to show children that there is someone who believes in them and their capabilities.

I was able to reflect on my motivation behind joining the profession. It became evident that this enhanced my commitment.

Besides reflecting on the negatives, the positive memories that came to mind were pretty great in enhancing my perception of teaching. Remembering how good my teachers made me feel

when I was younger encouraged me to be the teacher who makes her students feel like that too. This was also evident in my teaching practice. It was my first experience interacting with learners, and I always remember that as being such a wonderful time. I want that feeling always!

When the statement ‘Now that you are aware of the story and the power it holds’ was posed, I was asked what effect this has had on me, and in what way. I stated:

Now that I am aware of the power of story, I am way more cautious of what I say, because I realised that the story I am telling is how I actually feel and think about myself. And the way I think and feel about myself is how others are going to think and feel about me. It is the way the world will see me. So, I am more cautious; I am more aware. I’ve begun to sit and think about the story I can tell now that I understand its power. And in the future, I want to tell a story that actually serves me.

I feel like coming to this realisation and understanding has made me realise that I have the opportunity to change the story at any point that it doesn’t please me. Since I am the one telling the story, I can relate a story aligned with the life I want to live and the teacher I want to be.

Becoming aware of story has also impacted me because now I see that everyone has their own story; everyone I am surrounded by is reacting based on their own past experiences – positive and negative. This helps me be more open-minded about the people I am interacting with, which will be extremely helpful in my profession since I am exposed to learners from diverse backgrounds. I will definitely try and be more mindful of this new knowledge and apply it to everyday scenarios.

When asked what influence this has had on the story I tell about my teacher identity, and in what way the story has changed now that I am self-aware, I said:

I would say that the activities I engaged in, in this research has contributed to this shift. For instance, in the collage-making process, I realised that my ‘past’ professional identity represented a more self-involved individual. I would even say I was confused about my teacher identity and about my teaching styles.

Collage making allowed me to see that the identity I now associate myself with is someone who is expanding and enhancing her knowledge through research and furthering her education. I am doing this to ensure I can be effective and beneficial to the learners in my class.

Many realisations occurred during these activities. I began seeing myself, my environment, colleagues, learners, and the profession in a whole new light. My perception had been shifted.

This realisation has paved the way for the future story I will tell and the teacher identity I aim to embody. The past and present have put into perspective that my education now is purposive of my future identity and will contribute to my professional learning. I have come to realise that in the future, I want to be a teacher who has the necessary grounding to handle diverse situations and who wants to improve the lives of her students.

When asked how has/will the change in story about my teacher identity change and impact the other existing identities that exist in my life, I said:

Hmm ... I would say that changing the story I tell about my professional identity definitely impacts the other aspects and identities in my life. This is because, now that I have reflected, I feel more confident in my choice of profession. I also feel more committed to the profession; I feel more motivated to be a good teacher. I actually feel delighted with choosing to be a teacher for the rest of my life. I would say every aspect of our lives correlates with and affect each other. With that being said, I am satisfied with my occupation choice and secure in this decision; I feel that this contentment spreads to the other aspects of my life.

For instance, if I was miserable in my professional career, this would negatively impact my personal life. So, I would say that reflecting and reminding myself of why I chose to become a teacher positively affects the other aspects of my life and my other identities.

Storytelling also reminded me of who I would like to be in the future. This assisted me in identifying what I need to work towards. Now I can amend my other identities to allow me to achieve my desired professional identity.

3.2.4. Sonam's Reflective Journal

The reflective journal documented my thoughts and feelings about each activity, and realisations about my lived experiences. It was also used as a platform to share and put my thought process into perspective. Through journalling, I came face-to-face with the emotions and thoughts that transpired through these activities and decided how I planned to address these.

I made selections from my journal relative to each activity to be presented in this section, and any additional contemplating, ideas, beliefs and thoughts I pondered and felt willing and comfortable to share. I shared my initial thoughts, then the way I felt after completing my memory drawings and collage. After that, I shared my thoughts about some additional drawings I was encouraged to make, and I reflected specifically on one that had a significant impact on me.

I have arranged the excerpts following the journal entry's date, to display the progression of thoughts based on the activity conducted. I also included additional thoughtful comments to further clarify what I was thinking at the time.

When I began this process: I felt excitement and fear at the same time [08 June 2021]

Today I have started thinking about my memory drawing, my collage, and my self-interview that I will be conducting. The first step in the process is to create examples, so participants have an idea of how to attempt this activity... I will admit that the creative processes are definitely more challenging for me to tackle than responding to questions in an interview or journalling.

When reflecting on the initial completion of my memory drawings and collage making: I shared my insights into these processes [09 June 2021]

I have just completed my memory drawing and made my collage. That was much more exciting than I initially anticipated. I began with the collage. I already had pictures cut out from yesterday, and today I started assembling. I had an idea of what my past, present, and future teacher identity entailed; however, it was exciting to find images that accurately represented

the images I had in my head. I was lucky enough to find and complete the collages representing the different stages within my career.

This exercise gave me insight into how far I have come, which I felt proud of. Finding images that represented my current identity also made me feel very proud. Now I see myself as a researcher, whose research might positively impact the lives of all those it is exposed to. The teachers who read this study will reflect on their own lives, and this self-awareness will hopefully lead to self-improvement, which benefits themselves and all those they interact with! Finding images that represented the future teacher I strive to be was probably the easiest. I knew that I wanted to make a difference and better the lives of my students. My vision is clearer than ever. Determining the 'future' educator I strive to be is definitely exciting.

I do not normally define myself as being creative, but I could easily draw images that were in my head; it all begins with imagination.

After reflecting, I feel content with where I am as an educator, and I am excited for my participants to develop their own memory drawings and collages. Hopefully, they will feel the same way I am feeling, and it will enhance their motivation and commitment to the profession.

Reflecting on the 'negative' drawings I created: I shared the discomfort I experienced doing this

Today [11 June 2021] has been an overall productive day. I have created memory drawings suggested by Prof. Kathleen, in which she had asked me to reflect on more of the negative memories. I personally avoid recalling negative memories, and choose to focus on the positive. However, as a participant, this was beneficial for me. As a participant, I was able to identify unpleasant memories, but this time I found the benefit in thinking about them. I thought of some memories, and realised that it was because of these events that I aim to develop different disciplinary practices, and ways to address learners who may be struggling. In a sense, these memories helped me make peace with the past. It was as if the pencil on the paper was a form of release.

When completing my most challenging memory drawing, I shared my thoughts and feelings about the difficulty I experienced [18 July 2021]

Dear Journal,

I had finally completed the drawing of my matric results. This has been a defining point in my life. I think I was trying to avoid the negative memories. I was trying to repress the negative emotions I had felt during that time. It was so embarrassing to think of myself as someone lazy, uninterested in her education, unfocused, and simply just going through life. By avoiding these memories, I feel like it seems as though they never actually happened, and I don't have to face the disappointments I once faced. But that's not how life works.

I realised that I have to face those 'bad' experiences because those made me who I am. From not being accepted into university, to now completing my Master's! It made me appreciate my father, who helped me get in to university by paying for a bridging course. It made me grateful that I didn't get in at first because I worked harder once I was accepted. Finally, being a student at a university was a feeling I never thought I would have. But once I obtained it, I never wanted to give up this feeling – which might be why I have pursued teaching after my first degree.

I've realised that it's normal to want to forget things in the past that haven't been the greatest. But if it wasn't for those lows, I would never appreciate the highs as much as I do. I would take many things for granted if it wasn't for hardships.

In my life, the thing I am most proud of is my education. And to understand why it means so much to me, is to realise that I was once a young girl who wasn't even able to get in to university. But now, I am a woman who has a Bachelor of Administration degree, passed her Honours in Teacher Development Studies Cum Laude, and is a Master's candidate.

If there were anything I wish I could tell my past self, the girl in the image who felt like her life had crumbled, it would be to say that absolutely everything is going to work out for her. And she need not worry. One day she will be everything she has ever dreamed of being.

Reflecting on the interview process: I expressed my feelings of nervousness towards the self-interview [11 June 2021]

I asked my sister to ask me the questions, and I recorded myself. At first, it was a bit nerve-racking and slightly intimidating to share these inner thoughts and feelings with someone else. Throughout the process, I felt like I was on the spot. I didn't expect to be as nervous as I was. I felt hot flushes, and I was often stilted – there were so many things going through my mind. I had to think of the answer, the way to word my thoughts in a manner that made sense and was relevant to the question. I often found myself drifting from the question, and getting distracted by any sound. I also felt intense nervousness as my sister stared at me, waiting for me to say something, and then the embarrassment I felt from sharing.

As nerve-racking as it was, I found some valuable information. Thinking on the spot forced me to reveal my inner thoughts and feelings, and I could face these. Like, did I really say that? Do I really think that? Why do I think that way? Is it healthy, and can it be revised?

Reflecting on the activities as a whole: I expressed my contentment [20 June 2021]

Overall, I was happy with the outcome of the activities that I engaged in. I gained valuable insights, and I feel each activity has provided me with clarity about why I think and act in the way I do. I see how every event has had a ripple effect and has led me to the teacher I am today.

I have found tremendous benefits with each activity, and they have all produced and stimulated different outcomes, different perspectives and different awarenesses within me.

I feel enlightened and content.

To conclude, the memory drawing process helped me face memories that I wanted to forget. I was able to remove the embarrassment that was once attached to specific events. A range of events was displayed, but I am not 'that' person anymore. I have learnt and I have grown. The collage making process helped me appreciate my journey; I often feel lost and behind in life compared to others, who I perceive as having accomplished much more than I have. But this activity reminded me to appreciate my unique journey and be excited as I am on the path to reaching the future teacher identity I aspire to embody. The interview process was the most challenging, as I did not expect to feel as intimidated as I did by a little audio recorder, but

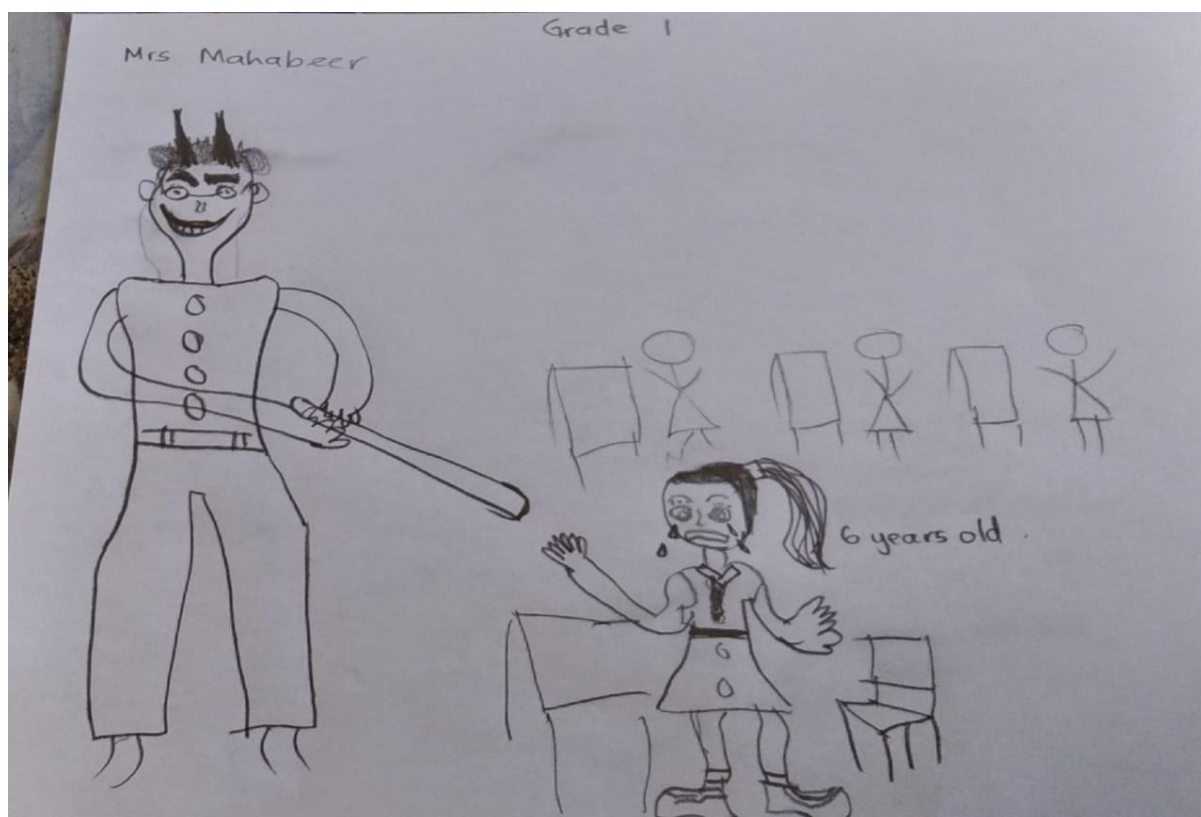
being put on the spot forced me to be honest about how I felt and to face my thoughts. Having to think in the moment eliminated the need to give the perfect answer and allowed me to express myself openly and honestly. I was shown my own true feelings. The reflective journalling was enjoyable and felt a release at the end of it all. It felt like a warm blanket, a safe space where I could just be myself and express what I was really thinking, without fear of judgement. I felt contentment and warmth for the person I was and excitement for the person I am becoming.

3.3. Norah's Data

3.3.1. Norah's Memory Drawings

Norah's engagement in developing memory drawings entailed her thinking as far back as possible into memories of her lived experiences, and then creating a series of drawings based on events that she felt had made the biggest impact on her development early-career teacher identity. The first drawing is titled 'My Monster Teacher', representing Norah's first grade teacher, who hit her. The following picture is titled 'Evil Aunt', and illustrates Norah's aunt, who she would spend weekends with, who constantly belittled and degraded her. The final drawing is titled 'Broken Dreams' and depicts Norah's partner of 12 years leaving her and their son. Her dream of a family is broken. Each drawing is followed by a lived experience description which I, as the researcher, developed. As explained in Chapter Two, I wrote the descriptions to give the reader an understanding of the events occurring within the image.

3.3.1.1. My Monster Teacher



In Grade 1, I had a teacher who on a daily basis would hit all the learners in class with a stick or the dusters on our palms or knuckles. This was my introduction into corporal punishment. This made me hate school as it instilled fear and demotivation in academics.

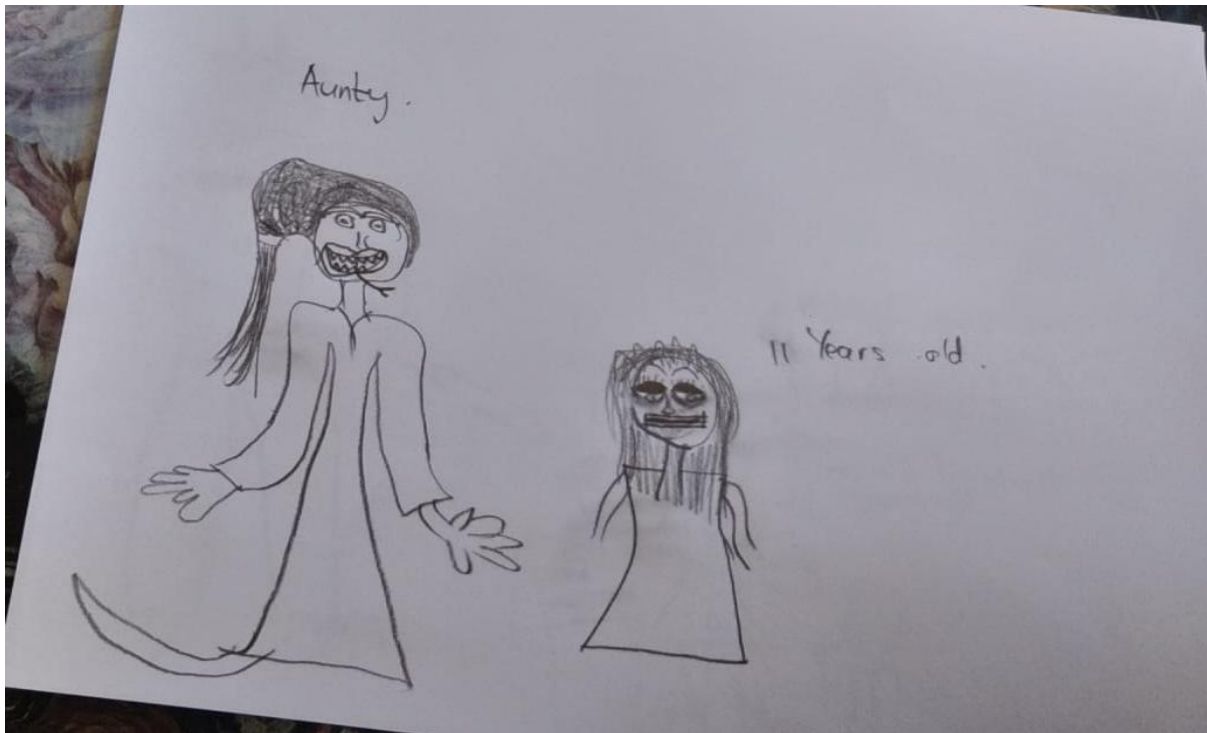
Figure 3.5.

A memory drawing created by Norah, describing a time when she was in Grade 1 and had a teacher who enforced corporal punishment.

“Not again,” I think to myself as I see my Grade 1 teacher picking up her stick and walking around the class. I could feel the fear building up inside of me. I put my head down and continued with my work, doing my best to avoid any attention being on me. I avoided eye contact at all costs and stared at the clock waiting for the time in the presence of this teacher to end. I start to get into my work, and somehow manage to relax. The work itself distracted me, and I eased up. It was just then that I heard a loud noise! One of my class members had been talking and got hit with the stick on his knuckles. I could see his face turn red and tears filled his eyes. He burst into tears. I felt terrible watching this happen, and I felt helpless. I

knew at that time there was nothing I could do. I just had to endure this fear day after day. My time within this classroom was filled with dread and fear. I could not understand why this teacher enjoyed hurting us. The anxiety of entering her class was affecting my confidence and my academics. I could not concentrate out of fear of when I would be hit next. I wondered, "When will this all end?"

3.3.1.2. Evil Aunt



Growing up my Aunt would always beat me or degrade me, she would grab a broom and a cigarette and yell to me her famous statement to me would be "when you grow up you will be the worst mother with 5-6 children, acting crazy" and she would act out a scenario. Growing up my parents were divorced my sister and I were back and forth as both my parents prioritized their partners emotions then that of my sister and mine, we were often left with other family member on weekends and holidays and due to us being mixed race there were many racial comments as well as abuse in different forms. Growing up I was the child never fitted in, I acknowledged behaviours and how people treated each other and I promised myself I would never mistreat people.

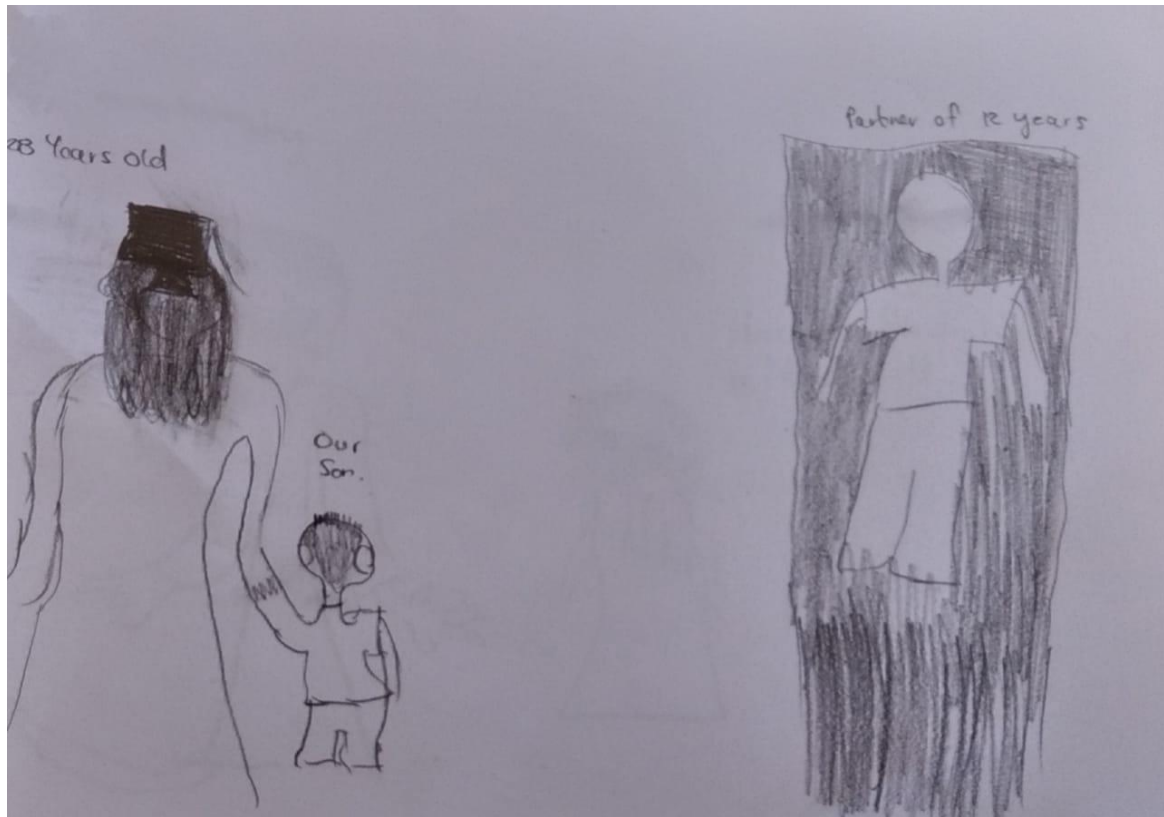
Figure 3.6.

Norah's memory drawing, describing the difficulties she experienced growing up with an aunt who constantly belittled and degraded her.

Here she comes again ... I see my aunt walking in the door.

My childhood had never been easy for me – the derogatory comments about my race, constantly feeling like I never fit in, and my parents were separated to top it all off. Due to this, my siblings and I were always left with other family members. Unfortunately, one of the frequent family members my parents trusted to look after that was my aunt. Little did they know that she would beat us with a broom at any opportunity she had. With the physical abuse, came the mental abuse. She would pick on me, an innocent little girl, who did not know any better and could not defend herself. When I look back now, she truly broke my confidence, and her negative words harshly impacted my self-esteem. I was so easily influenced at that age, and I began believing these negative things she would say about me. I started thinking that maybe she was right, perhaps I was really not good enough. As an adult today, with a child of my own, I have to fight these negative beliefs daily and try to create new ones. I have to see myself as the woman that I am now, and not that defenceless little girl I was who had to hear those nasty and untrue things being said about her over and over again. When I look at my aunt, I feel sorry for her, because if she could say these things about me, I could not even begin to imagine all the negativity brewing within her. I no longer see her as the adult who is always right, but now I see those incidents as her cry for help.

3.3.1.3. Broken Dreams



After 5 years of sacrifice to build myself a positive career in the world of education and obtain my degree, my partner of 12 years moved on with someone else leaving my son and I. This was by far the most challenging obstacle to overcome. This situation however had a positive impact as I acknowledged that I am capable of being independent, grateful for my sacrifice to gain stability and made me aware that I need to value myself.

Figure 3.7.

Norah's memory drawing, describing her current experience; her partner of 12 years left her and their son, and broke her dream of having a family.

Looking at my life ... Not once did I imagine things would be this way. I look around in my empty apartment. All the memories come flooding back to me – the excitement I felt when we first moved in here, the memory of having our son, all our conversations, our plans for the future – all just empty promises now. I can feel the tears running down my face. I had been

going through this depression for months, as we went back and forth in our relationship. I wondered if I would ever heal from this toxic environment. I was in disbelief that after giving up 12 years of my life to someone, doing every single thing I could to make them happy, that they could just leave me – and for someone else. Was I not good enough, I think to myself? I could not believe that he threw away our family. I did not know how I would overcome this overwhelming pain in my chest. At times the pain was excruciating. I sometimes feel lost and do not know if I have a place in this world anymore. I find myself often lying in bed for hours, zoning out, and wondering how I got here. I think about my son; he too will grow up in a broken family, just as I did. I promised myself I would do better, that I would give my children better. My heart hurts for my son. I feel like a failure. As I look around and hear the loudness of the silence and the emotions building up inside of me, I hear a little voice saying, “Mommy, what’s wrong?” I instantly snap back to reality, and I know that the only way out is to go through what I am going through. I know that I cannot give up because this precious little boy depends on me; he needs me. I wipe the tears from my eyes and give him the warmest hug. I think to myself, “Everything is going to be okay.”

3.3.2. Norah’s Collage

The collage is an exciting way to work through the feelings and emotions one is experiencing and offered my participants and me a platform to realise our history, present reality, and desired future in an innovative way.

The collage that Norah constructed is divided into three stages: past, present, and future. Different categories were established to represent her teacher identity. Appropriate images and texts were chosen to illustrate her past, present, and future teacher identity. Through these images, Norah was able to formulate a story and express herself. The collage is followed by an explanatory description that I composed, describing each image and its representation.



Figure 3.8.

Norah's collage representing her past, present, and future teacher identity.

3.3.2.1. Past

These images represent a time in my life where I was figuring out the type of teacher I wanted to be. The image of the confused child was chosen to signify my struggle with academics and my learning difficulties, because it inspired me to be more like the teacher I never had. As I went through this, my initial identity formation was driven by my wanting to help learners like myself. The image of the girl 'burning the midnight oil' signifies the difficulties I faced to obtain my degree in teaching. I had to work harder than most because I was working full time to pay for my education, attending classes full time, taking public transport, and still trying to raise my son. It was a strenuous time in which I lacked sleep, a social life, and time with my child and partner, and I was extremely overwhelmed and stressed. The words 'Problem' and 'Solution' sum up my past teacher identities perfectly. I always felt like life kept handing me problems, especially with the curve balls I felt when trying to attain my degree. It was up to me

to find solutions continuously and address these problems as best I could. It sometimes felt like a never-ending battle of problems and solutions.

3.3.2.2. Present

The image stating 'teacher burnout' is how I feel about my current teacher identity. As a recent graduate, it is my first time dealing with the responsibilities of a teacher. I have to prepare lessons, manage the class, enforce discipline, complete administrative work and manage my personal life. At times it becomes incredibly overwhelming, especially in the first term of starting my new job. The workload was more than I expected and I constantly felt burnt out. The words 'Never stop learning' represent my constant learning, especially as a first-time teacher. I am discovering new teaching techniques and finding my teaching style and what works for me. I am constantly being exposed to things and ways of thinking I never have been exposed to before. I am being exposed to learners from diverse backgrounds, and unique learning needs. It is all new to me, and I feel like I will forever be learning and growing. The image of the learners who are social-distancing depicts the challenge I am facing in my new job. I have to teach learners from a distance to ensure they actually follow the COVID-19 protocols. As young learners in Grade R, these learners do not understand why this is necessary. This has become an ongoing challenge for me and has definitely slowed down the rate at which we progress in the classroom.

3.3.2.3. Future

My future teacher identity section comprises images that show happy learners and an image of a brain connected with a heart. This represents the teacher identity I want to embody and how I want to make my learners feel. I want my learners to be enthusiastic about learning. I want my learners to be excited to see me as their teacher and anticipate the lesson I have planned for them. I want my learners to love the process of expanding their knowledge and being exposed to new information. I want to be a teacher who ignites my learners' passion for knowledge and learning, and I want my learners to be excited to be in this environment. The final image I interpreted as a before and after picture, which displays a tree with no leaves and a broken swing on one side, and on the other side, a tree blossoming and restored. This ties together my personal and professional identities and how I perceive these. As I cannot separate

who I am personally from who I am professionally, I always take parts of myself into my different environments. Currently, I have been struggling in my personal life, represented by the first half of the image. But I know that I am on my way to the other side. I want my future teacher identity to represent my growth, hence I have chosen the blossoming tree. I want to be full of life like the tree is. I want to heal all parts of myself and blossom, and this will lead into my professional identity. I want to feel fulfilled and know that I made it out of that situation. I want to know that I am on the other side, I survived the storm; I made it.

3.3.3. Norah's Interview

The following section represents the interview Norah and I engaged in. The purpose of the interview process was to reflect on the previous two activities and gain a deeper insight into her overall thoughts and feelings. The interview was also conducted to gain a deeper insight and develop an understanding of her experiences. As explained in Chapter Two, some questions were designed before the interview. Discussions were had about the activities already engaged in. Further questions were asked to gain clarity about her identity and about any gaps in her story for me as the researcher.

I made selections from the interview transcript that most appropriately fit the question that was posed. Once arranging excerpts from the interview transcript according to the relevant questions, thoughts flowed to me that I added, either within the question or at the end, to enhance the clarity of the answers Norah provided. I elaborated and added thoughts based on what I thought would emphasise the participant's point. I anticipated that this would influence the text by improving the readability and adding clarification. I also aimed to enhance the flow and link to upcoming aspects of the text and in the following chapters. I hoped that these comments would also give additional meaning to the text and help generate a new understanding by opening up the complexity of the teacher participants' experiences as witnessed by me.

When asked to describe the schools that featured in her memory drawings, Norah answered:

Okay so, the school I attended was a public school in a suburban area. It was well resourced, it was a primary school, the ratio of learner to teacher was roughly 30–1, and there were

sufficient facilities within the school. For example, we had a pool, a library, a science lab, and an art centre; overall, it was a well taken care of school that catered for its learners' needs. (And the actual setting of the school?) If I had to describe the setting of the school. It was a beautiful school. It was always ... you know, they had beautiful garden plants. So, let's put it in a way that created the garden of Eden vibes because of the plants and trees around it.

When asked how reflecting on past experiences through storytelling activities have influenced her, Norah answered:

Uh ... it has made me more learner-centred, and it makes me value my experiences so that I will always try and uplift my learners. It has also made me more considerate in terms of using different approaches to learners as well as understanding that all learners are different. And... I have also come to the realisation that we are all fighting our own battles.

When asked how her professional identity, future and current experiences were being impacted through storytelling activities, Norah answered:

Through storytelling, it just made me feel like I can better my life. And it showed me that every day is a day that we learn, whether incidental or through experience, we learn every single day. 'Cause especially within the classroom, every day is a different day in terms of teacher-learner interaction.

(Can you be more specific about how this affected your 'future experience'?) *Um ... it has also shown me that growth is inevitable, and if you want growth, you will receive it. It is all up to how ambitious and determined you are to reach your goal. Dude, in the future, I want to study further; I want to go into Honours. I'm looking into either educational psychology or school management. Either one, I'm still contemplating which one I want to do.*

Through reflection, Norah has come to realise how the events of the past have influenced her. This has motivated her more than ever to keep working hard and to further her studies.

When asked how reflecting on her story through storytelling activities impacted her passion and caused her to see the profession she is in differently, Norah answered:

These activities that we have done have just shown me that I've always had a passion for teaching, and there's a reason why I've been pulled to the field of education. I feel like it was destiny. And these activities have just provided clarity and emphasised ... I am where I should be in my life.

When the statement 'Now that you are aware of the story and the power it holds' was posed, Norah was asked what effect this has had on her, and in what way, and answered:

It had intrinsic motivation, as well as gave me ... No, made me feel that through my story I can empower people to believe in themselves and make them understand that no matter what you go through in life, you can become whatever you come through persistence, through research, you can become whatever you want. I feel proud of myself, like, everything that has been happening in my life has been so rushed that I didn't acknowledge that I went against all odds. Especially coming from a poor background.

I feel like I levelled up in my own way. Like to other people, I might just be a teacher, but I went against a lot of things to be where I am.

When asked what influence this had on the story she tells about her teacher identity, and in what way the story has changed now that she is self-aware, Norah said:

In a way, the story that I told now is the same story I've been telling about why I went into education. This was because basically when I was younger, I went back and forth, you know, I told you in my personal life, especially with my parents being divorced. And that's why I became a teacher, because I never had 'that' teacher. So, the story has never changed, but as time went by, as a teacher, at this point in my life, I am more grateful, and I value the efforts I put into being a teacher. Regardless of where I am in my personal life, I go to school happy every day. The other teachers always look at me, like, 'is this for real?'. But I can be happy because I am where I want to be

So, the story hasn't changed; it is just that now I'm more grateful for where I am. Imagine if I didn't study and didn't take the call to get the job I have. I would have been experiencing all

these things in my personal life; I would have been left with a kid, and still have nothing. So, in a way, my career has been getting me through my personal issues.

Norah found that her career was helping her get through the difficulties she was having in her personal life. She felt that through her career, she had a purpose in life. Norah had another reason to wake up every day and get out of bed – as tough as it was. She knows she is making a difference in many lives and has to put aside what she is going through because these children need her.

When asked how has/will the change in story about her teacher identity change and impact the other identities that exist in her life, Norah said:

I have developed an ego in the sense that I now know where I stand with myself. I have integrity.

My professional identity has played a role in my general identity, let's put it that way.

(What do you mean by your professional identity has influenced your personal identity, in what way?) *Because I have direction. I know what I'm doing with my life. I have direction career-wise, and because I have this, I have direction in other aspects of my life. I also have direction in terms of my autonomy, meaning I am more assertive about myself. I'm more sure and confident about who I am in my life*

Before, I always felt like I was the odd one out, in my family as well. Like I was constantly teased in school very badly. On top of the story about my teacher, I was also getting bullied in school. So now I feel like I finally have a place and I have direction.

3.3.4. Norah's Reflective Journal

Norah's thoughts and feelings were documented in this reflective journal. She used this space to express and put her thoughts into perspective. Norah shared her thoughts and feelings on the memory drawing process, the collage making activity, the interview, and the process altogether. Journalling enabled Norah to face the thoughts and emotions brought to the surface through the data generation activities and contemplate how they would be addressed.

I selected excerpts from Norah's journal that are relative to each activity. These are presented below, with any additional thoughts, beliefs, and ideas Norah was comfortable expressing.

I have arranged the excerpts per the date the entry was made to display the progression of thoughts based on the activity conducted. I also included my thoughtful comments to further clarify and emphasise my readings of Norah's reflections.

Norah's reflection after completing her memory drawings: The intense and unexpected emotions she experienced [10 August 2021]

There were physical sensations that I felt. When I did it, I thought that the image regarding my time in school made me feel discouraged and withdrawn. I felt sad for my younger self to have been put through the phase of being unaccepted. This also made me feel overwhelmed with pity for my younger self. I began to feel anger because if that didn't happen, if I wasn't mistreated, I might have thrived academically. The image with my auntie reignited feelings of anger and hate because I could feel her hostility towards me; it broke my heart because she was a mother figure. When I reflect on the event, even though I felt terrible, I actually feel sorry for her because she must have been facing an internal struggle herself to treat a child that way. And I feel proud that I didn't turn out the way she thought I would and be the stereotype that she expected me to be.

Recalling the recent event made me cry; it broke me down because I always pictured my life to be a certain way. As I was drawing it, I was forced to face my reality. I felt this dry ball in my throat. I felt disappointed, let down, I felt broken, but at the same time ... I felt like this happened and I had to make peace with it. It showed me what I can achieve even though I'm alone. And nobody around me can bring me down. I have found my independence. And I can be alone. This is my time to develop and find my self-value.

This activity has helped me to release. Doing these drawings has helped me heal beyond my situations. It allowed me to face reality, especially my situation with my ex; this has shaped whatever I do because I realised, I have to have my own back. I have to develop happiness within myself.

Norah expressed that this activity evoked emotions that she did not expect. As she drew the images, she came face to face with her reality. She was reminded of all the things her younger self went through, which hurt her to think of. As she drew the final image of her story, she felt empowered that she had overcome all these events, and that she was stronger than most gave her credit for. She became, and is in the process of becoming, everything she aspired to be.

Norah's reflection after completing her collage making: The clarity she now has about how far she has come, and how proud she feels of herself [13 August 2021]

After reflecting on the collage and the images I chose, I realised that I always felt like I wasn't good enough in the past. But I know I have to try and be better, so I make sure I put in the work to find solutions to my problems. Presently, I am still learning and sometimes I feel overwhelmed, but it's exciting because I am learning something new every day. There are days when I think about the past, and every experience I had has built up to this moment and this version of me. The future excites me, and it makes me happy to know I am building up to where I want to be. Just from looking back from the past to the present, I feel like I have made it.

The pasts' memories sometimes give me anxiety and make me feel nervous, but also motivate me not to go back to where I was and become a better teacher. It does help me develop in a sense. It makes me want to inspire my learners and create their love for learning. I want my learners to be enthusiastic when they come in. I want them to say, 'Ma'am, you're here!!!'. I also have a passion for motivating my learners through positive reinforcement. I want my learners to know that they can do better because they have potential and a teacher who believes in them. I want my learners to have a teacher that I never really had growing up.

This collage might not serve as a release, but it gave me an insight into my memories and serves as a reminder of where I am heading. It showed me that if I can bring myself from past to present, I can take myself from present to future and accomplish everything I want. Creating a future vision for my teacher identity has shaped my vision and made it much more defined. I was able to reflect and revise. I feel like my brain told me what I need to work on, and I have seen places for improvement.

Norah has used these images to remind herself how far she has come. She said that if she can come from past to present, as hard as it was, she knows that going from present to future is entirely attainable. This activity reminded her of her strength and that she can do anything she puts her mind to.

Norah's reflection on the interview and being a participant: Her realisation of the importance of reflecting and of having direction in one's career [19 August 2021]

During the interview, I felt like I was taken back to my younger days in school, especially since I was talking about my younger days – I felt very nostalgic. Talking about these memories made

me think of experiences in school, fun and bad, and took me back to the way I felt in those situations when I was a child.

Through these activities, I basically want people to know that you have to have direction to make your life easier. No matter what you are going through, find out what you want, and let your entire world revolve around what you have decided you want to do. All my teachers have told me negative things about myself. They told me that I was going to be nothing, that I would end up pregnant. But I want to be the teacher telling others that they can be something. Like, if you know what you want to be, everything else will fall in place once you've developed your professional identity. Everything else in life will happen more smoothly. Developing yourself professionally will put you in a different space. But we all learn from our experiences.

I want to be known as a teacher who is fun, bubbly and vibrant. My experiences haven't dimmed my light. I go to school happy every day, even with everything that has happened. I have been sad all my life, so I won't let that sadness affect my work and the people I interact with.

Through the interview process, Norah's teacher identity was reaffirmed and her passion for teaching was reignited. Her goal of being the teacher she never had growing up was more alive than ever. After engaging in the activities, she had more clarity and direction than ever before.

Norah's final thoughts on the activities: Appreciation for her experiences and contentment for where she is in her life, and her career [19 August 2021]

I'm happy I did this because everything resurfaced, and I've been in emotional turmoil. It helped me value myself more. Before this I was undermined, and I never reflected on myself or took the time to appreciate myself and reflect on my short-term goals and all that I have achieved. It made me find more value within myself and the things I've done for myself. If I had never done this reflection, I would have never built the ego and confidence I have now. After reflecting, I felt like, 'Hey, I really have done it', and after these activities, I've just been more motivated.

Overall, Norah was happy to share her stories. She also found the benefits of reflecting, such as reliving her stories, understanding their meaning and purpose in her life, appreciating their occurrence, and using these as an opportunity to grow. Norah also used this reflection as a tool to appreciate how far she has come in life, and to take the time to stop and be proud of herself

for achieving all that she has. Reflecting also gave her the chance to see where she wants to be in life, and after seeing all that she has already accomplished, she is ready to take on anything.

To conclude, Norah's memory drawings provoked raw and unexpected emotions in her. She admitted to being in awe that a picture (the creation of a memory drawing) could cause her to break down and feel so hurt for her younger self. The collage was her ray of light in this process. Although she has had a challenging life, she realised that she would never want to make another feel that way. She also realised that if she could move from 'past' to 'present', she was more motivated than ever to move from 'present' to 'future'.

The interview with her gave me a sense of understanding of what she is carrying and how much is on her shoulders. This was evident when I battled to get answers from her, with her son requiring her attention every few minutes. She was facing a lot – but she expressed how these data generation activities have elevated her confidence and said she realised she was developing an ego as she was proud of everything she endured and overcame. She also recognised that her career gave her strength and purpose to get through all her personal issues. She was showing up every day without fail for her learners. Norah's reflection nicely communicated what she was thinking and feeling and clarified who she wanted to be. She stood stronger than ever in her belief that she would continue to overcome, thrive, and succeed.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter addressed the question guiding this research: *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked about their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?* The purpose of addressing this question was to understand the teachers' stories about their past experiences to decipher what they feel shaped and contributed to their professional identity development. I hoped this might also enable participants to become self-aware, for self-improvement. Arts-based methods were utilised to generate responses and to stimulate thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The reasoning behind using these techniques and the benefit of posing this specific question was to help participants become aware of the stories they are telling, provide clarity on their experiences, and consider the influence of these stories on early-career teachers' identities. They were also intended to help me as a researcher gain insight into the participants' thought processes and reflect on my own experiences.

This chapter included various memory drawings that were developed, collages, a self-interview that was conducted, a participant interview, and excerpts from a reflective journal from myself and my first participant, Norah. The chapter shows how different responses and reactions were stimulated using these creative data generation processes. We became aware of our stories and recognised some key moments, encounters and relationships that influenced our early-career teacher identity development. We could think about how specific stories served us and if it was time to release them. The activities assisted my participant and me realise the contributing factors to our early-career teacher identity and how we wished to revise this identity in the future; we became more self-aware.

A key message I took from our stories is that we need to acknowledge what and how we want to be as teachers and consider how we might achieve this. Developing our identities as early-career teachers can involve being aware of our limiting beliefs, and shifting them through reflective and creative activities.

CHAPTER FOUR

PUTTING TOGETHER MORE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

This chapter shares the stories of my participants, Kira and Serena, to make visible how their lives experiences contributed to and influenced their early-career teacher identities.

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter represented the stories of me and my first participant, Norah Shaik, through a series of memory drawings, a collage, an interview, and reflective journal entries. These activities assisted me in discovering the stories told when we were asked about events and experiences that have made the most significant impact on us as individuals, to uncover their effects on our professional identities.

This chapter continues from the previous one, addressing the first research question: *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked about their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?* Arts-based methods were chosen for participants to share their stories, gain different perspectives, and uncover information that we might not have found otherwise.

In this chapter, the data are arranged starting with the memory drawings of Kira Omar, a Master's candidate, and Serena Singh, a recent graduate. This is followed by individually compiled collages, a selection of excerpts from the interview, and extracts from their journals. The participants' memory drawings are followed by lived experience descriptions, which I developed by writing as if I were them. I described the surroundings that I imagined them to be in and the moods, feelings, and bodily sensations they possibly experienced at the time. A collage description that I constructed also follows the collages that my participants individually developed. This entailed explaining what each image meant and why it was chosen to represent a contributing factor to the participant's past, present, and future teacher identity.

Particular images were selected based on the amount of information provided and what I, as the researcher, felt has had the most significant influence on the participants' early-career teacher identity. Specific excerpts from the interviews and reflective journal entries were also

selected. I thought that the chosen statements best represented my and the participants' feelings and thoughts, and directly answered the posed question.

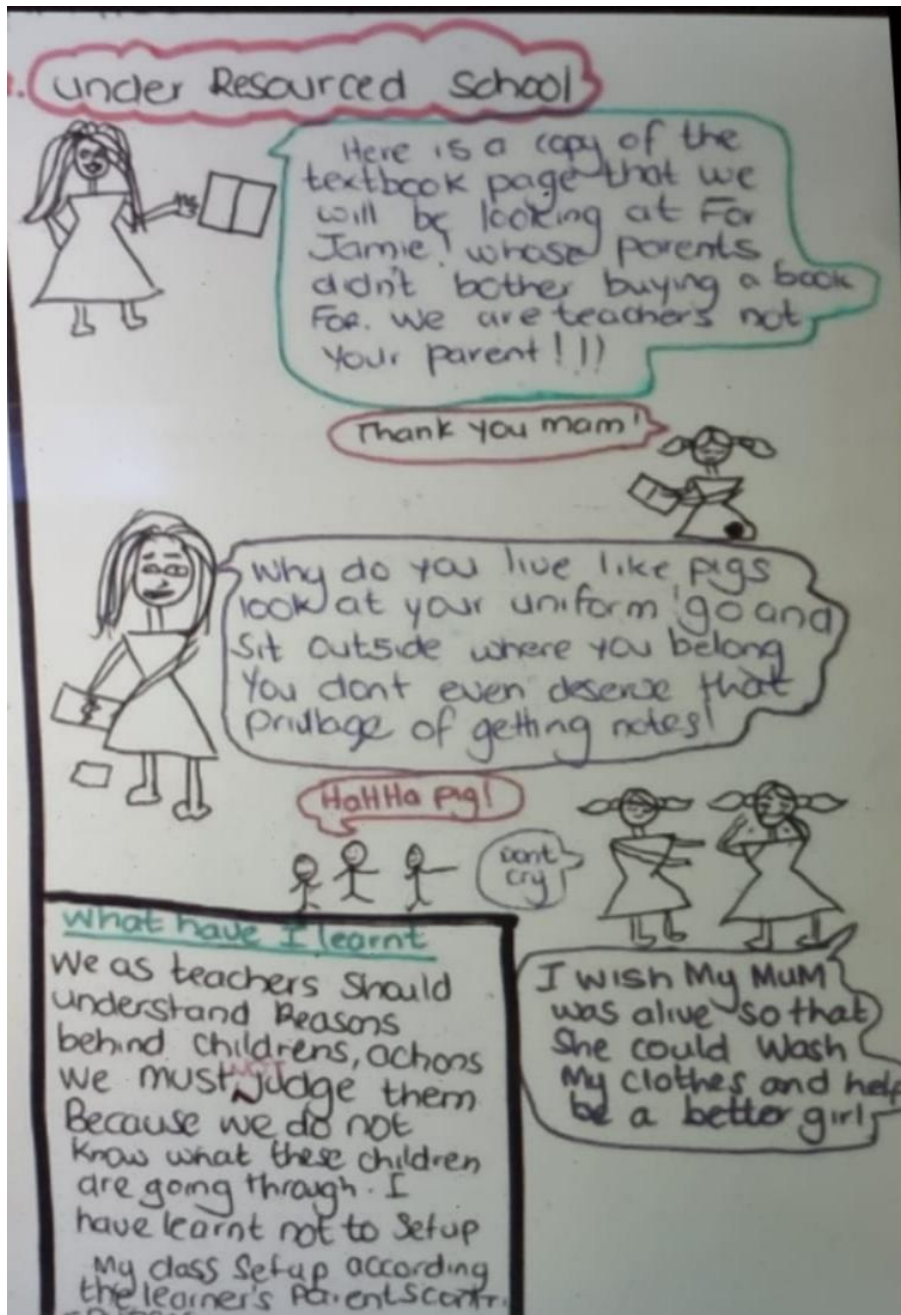
This chapter is organised by presenting one participant's story at a time, including each activity they engaged in. This organisational style was chosen to avoid confusion between the stories, focus on one participant at a time, represent each activity, and see the pattern and development of their early-career teacher identity. I wanted readers to go on the journey of one participant's story at a time, to fully grasp and enjoy what is presented. In addition, I wanted to allow readers to understand each participant and notice shifts in their identities through the influence of the events they experienced.

4.2. Kira's Data

4.2.1. Memory Drawings

Kira created a series of drawings based on events that she felt had the most significant impact on developing her early-career teacher identity. The first is titled 'Under-resourced School,' and describes her school and how she saw it as negatively impacting a close friend. The image that follows is titled 'A Lasting Print of Doubt,' which represents Kira watching her friend being doubted and mocked because her teacher made an inaccurate assumption. The final drawing is titled 'My First Teaching Practice' and presents an adverse event Kira experienced during her first teaching practice. Each illustration is followed by a description that I created to show my understanding of the occurrences depicted.

4.2.1.1. Under-resourced School



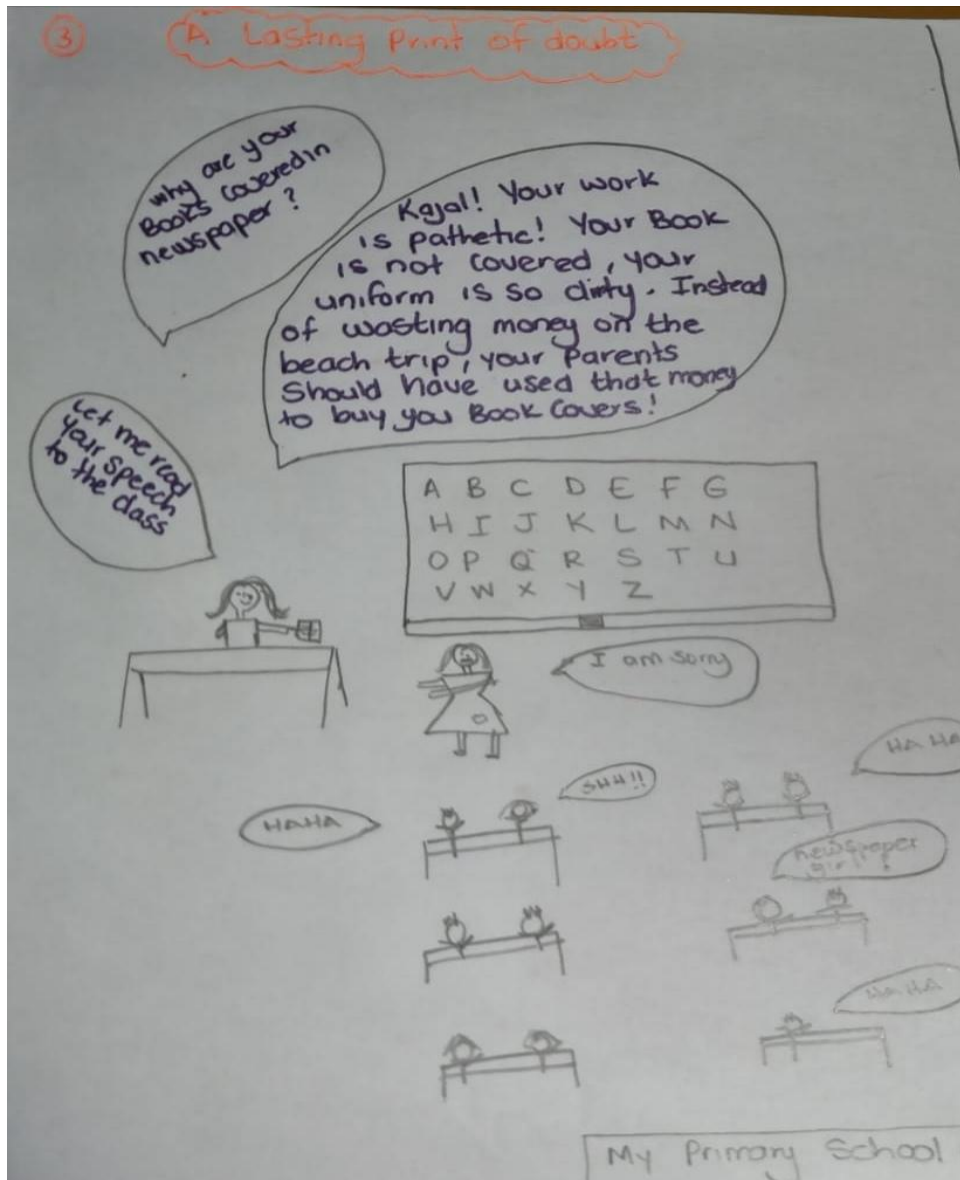
This girl is a friend I went to school with. Teachers would constantly make remarks about her because she could not afford to pay school fees. This specific teacher in the image would constantly complain because she had to go out of her way to accommodate for this learner, for instance making photocopies because this learner could not afford textbooks. This influenced the other learners in the class to treat this girl the same way. These events shattered the self-esteem of my friend.

Figure 4.1.

Memory drawing created by Kira to describe when she saw her friend being mocked and degraded by teachers because she was underprivileged.

Constantly belittled and made to feel as though she was inadequate, day after day, is what I watched one of my closest friends go through. It was unfortunate for me that I attended a school where money and status were everything. I had made friends with a girl from a low-income family; teachers would look down on her because of her background. She was often called a 'pig' and 'dirty' if her uniform was not spotless. Teachers would take out their frustrations on her, mainly because they had to accommodate the girl who 'couldn't afford textbooks'. This specific teacher would have to make photocopies for her, as she could not keep up with the rest of the class without her notes. This just infuriated the teacher even more and caused her to say hurtful things. I watched my friend sob in school frequently. She had lost her mother at a young age and repeatedly expressed that she wished her mother was here to make things okay. She often told me that maybe if her mother were still alive, she wouldn't look like a pig, and her clothes wouldn't be so dirty. I felt so sad. I watched my teachers break down my friend's self-esteem daily. I always wished there was something more that I could do for my friend. I felt helpless.

4.2.1.2. A Lasting Print of Doubt



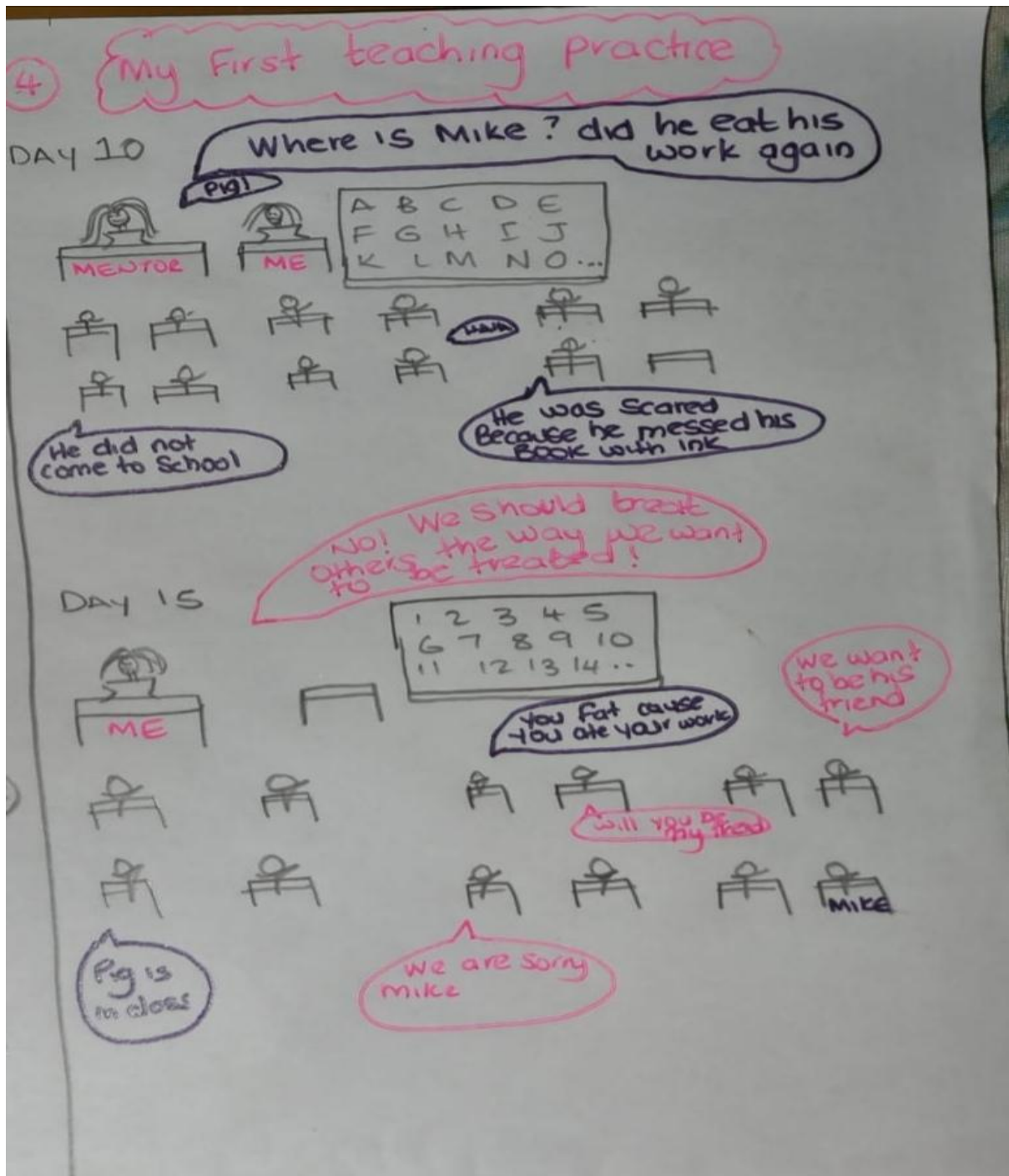
I was in grade 7 and I experienced the teacher calling one of my friends, who lacked confidence. She just assumed this girl did not do her work and immediately started degrading her and mocking her in front of the entire class. The entire class laughed. The teacher did not realise that this learner actually did do her work, but was just afraid to speak up because every time she tried to get something out, her teacher would put her down and make her feel inadequate.

Figure 4.2.

Kira's memory drawing, depicting a time she watched her friend being embarrassed by her teacher due to an untrue assumption.

It was like any other typical day in school. I was sitting in class, next to my best friend. We were presenting our speeches in front of our peers. I knew my friend was hesitant to go up in front of everyone and interact with this teacher, because of previous negative experiences. But I didn't pay too much attention to it, as I was busy focusing on presenting my speech. I know she had written about her mother, who had passed on, so it was close to her heart. I heard her name being called, and I did not even flinch. My eyes were glued to my own speech. I suddenly heard my teacher yelling loudly at her. Then I realised my friend had not even woken up; she was still sitting next to me, with her eyes glued to looking down at her desk. My teacher immediately started saying she knew my friend would not have done her work, and she is constantly the weak link in the class. She said she would expect nothing less from someone like her and questioned why my friend was even in this class when she was too 'dumb' and 'lazy' to do anything. My teacher did not realise that my friend was just afraid to go up in front of everyone, as she was constantly belittled and put down by teachers throughout her life. After years of this treatment, she did not even have the confidence to stand up in front of everyone and present her hard work. She did not have the courage and was afraid to go through the mocking, undermining of her worth and intelligence yet again. So, she just sat there quietly, taking it all in yet again. I knew there was nothing I could say to make her go up there. Too much damage had been done to how she viewed herself and how she thought others would perceive her if she stood up there. I just watched, anticipating when the yelling would end. It slowly subsided, and my teacher called the next person. I asked her why she did not just try. She said nothing. I knew there was nothing more I could tell her.

4.2.1.3. My First Teaching Practice



This was one of my first teaching practice experiences. My mentor teacher would pick on a learner for every small thing. An incident occurred and the teacher began screaming at him, calling him a pig, saying he is dirty. A few days later I noticed the student was not attending school as he was afraid of his teacher. When he did come back, everybody was teasing him and repeating the derogatory comments his teacher made. I saw him crying outside the class, so I called him in and the class began making their comments again. I knew I had to say something to break the cycle. I gave the learners a talk about this very topic. The learners said they were just repeating what the teacher said. It felt good to have this conversation, because at the end, everyone understood that the way they were thinking was wrong, and they all went to apologise to him and made friends with him. This experience reminded me of the same experiences that I had in the previous 2 drawings – except that now, I was the teacher who could make a difference.

Figure 4.3.

Memory drawing created by Kira, representing when she was at her teaching practice and experienced her mentor teacher unfairly picking on a learner.

This feels like déjà vu, I thought to myself. I was looking around at my classroom during one of my first teaching practices and thought this couldn't be real, could it? I was hearing the same degrading comments made to a friend of mine, except now I was a student teacher in the classroom. This boy's teacher and peers were picking on him because of his economic background. Even though I did not participate in the mocking, I did not stand up for him at the time – which I always felt incredibly guilty about. But how could I, at that time? I was in a new school, afraid that I would upset my mentor teacher. As the days and weeks went by, my mentor teacher began giving me more responsibility. I was teaching the classes on my own to ensure I had enough practice. She would often leave me alone with them to complete her preparations and work on her file. It was after that incident that I noticed the learner stopped coming into class. I questioned where he was until, one day, I saw him outside the classroom – he was sobbing. I called him to come in. As he walked in, I heard a roar and learners screaming mocking comments and laughing at him again. This time, I had to do something. I stopped them and asked why they thought this behaviour was okay. They said it was because they heard their teacher doing so, and if it was okay for their teacher to say these things, then why not them? I was utterly shocked! I stopped the lesson and felt I needed to address this. I spoke to the

learners and made them aware that these comments were hurting this young man, it was making him feel terrible, and he did not deserve to feel this way. We spent the rest of that period talking about respecting others and being considerate of their feelings. I somehow managed to get through to the learners, and they understood and changed their behaviour towards the learner. It was years later when I ran into him in a mall. I thought I would be long forgotten. To my surprise, he ran up to me. He told me that ever since that day, the other learners have been much nicer to him. Many of them have become his friends. He sincerely thanked me and said I changed others' perceptions of him. He was so grateful to me and informed me that now he loves going to school! At that moment, I felt delighted that, as a teacher, I could make such an impact on someone's life.

4.2.2. Kira's Collage

Kira's collage is divided into three stages: past, present, and future. Appropriate images and text were chosen to depict her history, present, and future teacher identity. In this way, Kira was able to formulate a story and express herself. The collage is followed by an explanatory description that I composed.



Figure 4.4.

Collage created by Kira to represent her past, present, and future teacher identity.

4.2.2.1. Past

The first image is of a young girl in front of a chalkboard, implying she is teaching. This was chosen because I remember pretending to be a teacher and teaching my grandparents when I reflected on my early childhood. We would sit in the dining room or the lounge, and I would take a telephone directory and pretend to teach them. At this point, I did not even know how to read. But I would pretend to be reading, and I would teach them. I would take marker pens and write on pages stuck on walls to act as if I was writing on the chalkboard. Image two, a young girl who is feeling very down, represents a very traumatic experience in my life. This was a death that I witnessed in my family. It was someone very close, and it was a big blow on my side. I had to go for counselling. This event happened when I was a teenager; I was about 13 years old. It's an experience that has changed who I was – from being an outspoken person to wanting to be alone and isolated. I just wanted to stick to myself, and I lost all confidence.

Image three is a girl who is concentrating on her work. I chose this because I feel that the incident experienced in image two pushed me to want to be alone. So I dived into my work. That helped me because I was spending a lot of time alone; I was in this shell, not feeling confident. For me, doing well at school and investing in my work was an escape from my thoughts and the 'dark place' I was in. This worked in my favour, because I did excel academically.

4.2.2.2. Present

Image four is of a girl made up of pieces, with some of these pieces flying away. This was chosen because it described how I felt – as if everything was falling apart. This time was at the beginning of my tertiary education, and my dad's loss put me in the space of feeling like all hope was lost. This image was also chosen to represent when I got up on my feet again. Image five, which states 'Dream Big, Set Goals, Take Action', was selected to represent a time after my degree and mainly my Honours application, where I felt like I needed to achieve more, set more goals, and reach for these goals, because no dream is too big! Visual six, which states 'I can/'t' – meaning doubt is removed, and I actually can – describes how I felt at many points throughout tertiary education. I felt like I couldn't. And I decided to change that mindset. I chose to believe that I could do it, and I think I find a lot of my motivation to succeed because my dad would be proud of everything I'm doing. Picture seven is the image of a woman 'watering herself' and growing; this points to a place in my life where I am now, at the Master's level, where I feel that I am on a self-development journey as a Teacher Development and Professional Learning student. I have come far on my path from Honours until now. So, I would say I'm on a journey towards growth. For my future to be the way I want it to be, I need to develop myself as an individual and then as a teacher to make sense of who I am and why I do the things I do as a person, and even in my practice. I feel that as a teacher, it is essential to develop oneself, grow, and find out who you are and why you do the things you do, so you can be the change you want to see in education.

4.2.2.3. Future

Image eight shows students hugging their teacher and feeling love for her; this was chosen because I want to be an approachable teacher. This is because I have seen unapproachable

teachers in my past experience of being a student in an under-resourced school. Many learners (including my friend in my memory drawing who struggled throughout school) do not have anyone to turn to. She would have approached her teacher if that teacher had a better relationship with her students. So, besides being a teacher who teaches content, it is essential to create that relationship with the students where there is love and care and an approachable relationship where they feel comfortable coming to you if they face a problem. I want to be a teacher who creates a relationship with a student that enables them to want to open up and feel loved and cared about, because not all kids receive that at home. As a teacher, you don't always know the background and experiences of your learners. A teacher is not always aware of the personal incidents that made the learner the way they are and what they are going through outside of the schooling environment. Sometimes a teacher can be the only hope for their learner. Image nine shows a teacher who is actively engaging with her learners in the classroom. This is the teacher I strive to be – I want to be a teacher that does not just pass on knowledge and stands in front and teaches from a textbook. I want to be a hands-on teacher, facilitating the learning process, not just regurgitating the text and saying, 'complete the activity'. I want us to work together to complete the activity, because I feel that is where most meaningful learning occurs. Image ten shows a well-decorated, colourful classroom with views. This is the vision I have for my classroom. This type of classroom creates and adds value to the school and how teaching and learning occurs. If the environment is welcoming and inviting, learners will want to be there. My vision is to potentially set a place in the classroom as motivation to perform well, by creating badges or putting their name on the wall for learners who are doing well.

4.2.3. Kira's Interview

The following section represents the interview that Kira and I engaged in. The purpose of the interview process was to reflect on previous activities, gain a deeper insight into her overall thoughts and feelings, and develop meanings and understandings of her experiences.

I made selections from the interview transcript that most appropriately fit the question that was posed. While arranging excerpts from the interview transcript according to the relevant question, thoughts flowed to me that I added, either within the response to the question or at the end, to enhance the clarity of the answers provided.

When asked to describe the schools that featured in her memory drawings, Kira answered:

Okay, the school is an urban school, it was my primary school, but it was very under-resourced. So, most of the learners that did go to the school came from an informal settlement near the area.

How many learners would you say were in a classroom?

I would say around 30.

So, they did have good facilities? [the school depicted in your teaching practice]

Actually, it was my primary school which I drew on for my experience. That school, we had like labs and stuff. And we had a library. But the school where I was doing my teaching practice, I would say that was worse off in terms of resources. Like that school did not have a lab, and I was teaching Natural Science during my teaching practice, so it was a bit difficult for me to now adapt to ensure that now, okay, other schools are using the labs to do experiments, etcetera, but I didn't have that. So, I had to think outside of the box to do the same lesson but also, at the same time, no learner should be excluded or disadvantaged because of the resources. So, there were no labs. There was no library as well. So, they used to have a period in which they would use one of the classrooms to project a book, a digital one, onto the board.

When asked how reflecting on past experiences through storytelling activities have influenced her, Kira answered:

Okay, so the reflection process helped me to, you know, like look back at the positive and negative experiences and learn from those. This was in the sense that, you know, okay, this is what I had experienced that had negatively impacted another person that was special to me, or even they could have not been 'special' to me. But in my identity, I try and look for that, you know, that caring, compassionate side to the learner. Before actually, you know, reacting. Thinking about the decisions that I make and what choices, my own perspectives and beliefs, and how these will influence my choices.

Kira has identified the benefits of the reflection process, as she is now more aware of her choices regarding the way she carries herself and how she responds to her learners and colleagues.

When asked how her professional identity, future, and current experiences, was being impacted through storytelling activities, Kira stated:

I would say that the entire experience where I looked at my past, and I saw it still being repeated. You know the incident about the classroom? So, it's like basically, I don't want to be a teacher where it's like copy and paste: 'I looked at what my teachers did previously, and I do it in my practice.' No. I want to change who I am and be a better teacher. It's important to actually reflect on your past experiences, like, in terms of your educational experience. To actually improve yourself.

When asked how reflecting on her story through storytelling activities impacted her passion and caused her to see the profession she is in differently, Kira answered:

Many teachers do not understand, and prior to this, I would have never understood the influence teachers have. Especially teachers that are teaching in a primary school setting as well. Because children watch you, imitate you, and see how you treat others. So even if I draw from my experience in the teaching practice, because the students watched how that teacher treated the other student, it seemed as if it was okay for them to do the same.

So, do you feel like it enhanced your passion for teaching?

I would say that you should have a passion for what you do, so you can do the best you can, because at this point, we notice and we witness that teachers can, you know, just ... They just do it for the sake of, because they're teachers. They repeat. You don't see anyone going the extra mile to ensure that the lessons are exciting. Or that concern and care? It's just about aye, I'm just here to do my work and go home.

So, you've always had the passion; do you still feel the same?

Yeah.

In terms of the statement ‘Now that you are aware of the story and the power it holds’,

Kira was asked what effect this has had on her, and in what way. She answered:

So, stories are very powerful. Way before these activities that we’ve engaged with, we always heard stories of the past. And that’s how we learn. And because of the experience of sharing my story, I feel like I can create awareness for other teachers who have not thought about things in that way. Like, you know, to think back and say, am I really doing this in my current practice? Am I the teacher I hated or disliked, or you know, when I was in school? So, stories are very powerful to help you reflect, learn, and improve yourself.

Kira has identified the power in the story she tells, and the stories she has been told, and how they impacted her. She highlighted that stories are how we make meaning of things in our world.

When asked what influence this has had on the story she told about her teacher identity, and how the story has changed now that she is self-aware, Kira said:

I think it hasn’t changed; it’s the same. Because, like I said, I did choose the profession because I have a passion for it. And that passion came from the teachers that positively, you know, influenced my life. So, maybe I can be that teacher who will positively influence another learner and grow a passion for the profession.

When asked how has/will the change in the story about her teacher identity impact the other identities that exist in her life, Kira said:

When you are in the profession of teaching, you know that so many people are watching you. It does affect your personal identity, who you are personally, how you carry yourself, how you behave, all of that. I mean, you can be a teacher in the classroom, and once you leave, you can’t be ... yes, you need to have a social life, but you need to understand, you never know who is watching you and watching how you are behaving.

It has impacted, or should I say, influenced how I react to situations, even personally now. Like, I wouldn’t just say things to someone, like on a personal level, that would hurt them. It shouldn’t be that you only give care, kindness, and love based on who you teach or when you

put on that professional cap, should I say. It should also be done personally as well. Your own perspectives and beliefs at home, your values, etcetera also contribute to how you act personally and professionally.

4.2.4. Kira's Reflective Journal

I made selections from Kira's journal to be presented in this section relative to each activity, and any additional ideas, beliefs, and thoughts she felt prepared and comfortable to share. Kira revealed her thoughts and feelings on the memory drawing process, the collage making activity, the interview, and the data generation process.

The excerpts are arranged according to the date the entry was made, to display the progression of thoughts and feelings. I also included thoughtful comments to provide further clarity and emphasis on my interpretation of Kira's reflections.

Kira's reflection on the memory drawing process identified repeating patterns. In her experience as a learner, she watched her friend being victimised; now that she is a teacher herself, she saw her mentor teacher enacting the same kind of behaviour [12 August 2021]

When I think about it now [the incident with my friend] and I reflect on the story and its power, not only on me but also on the person who had to experience the event, I feel sad. I feel hurt. It is said that many teachers abuse the fact that they have influence over a learner. Recalling these memories evoked negative feelings and emotions within me...

... I would personally take my past experiences, negative and positive so that I can change the approach that teachers previously had and have a different approach with my learners. I now think about how that learner would feel about what I am saying – is it adding to positive memories for this learner? So I keep these memories in the back of my mind. I constantly rethink my actions in and out of the classroom, with learners and colleagues. I also think about how my words and actions impact and influence others. Am I being kind, or am I being cruel?

... These events still have power over me, because although many years have passed, if I experience something similar, it takes me back to the experience I encountered. But in a positive sense. These and many other stories have shaped my early-career teacher identity, and I feel that it had a huge influence on how I do things, how I carry out and prepare lessons and

make an effort, how I treat people. Now I would choose a public school, because those learners deserve good-quality teachers even though they cannot afford it. They deserve a good-quality education as well.

Kira's reflection on the collage making process was that it gave her clarity on the type of teacher she wants to be and the patterns she never wants to repeat [23 August 2021]

As I did my collage, there were some physical sensations, and I felt a range of feelings as I chose each image. The images I chose caused me to feel a certain way because they weren't just images – they were selected because of what they represented, which are the experiences I had growing up. I had to sit and actually relive, think about, and reflect on these experiences...

... Creating this collage has helped me look back at my past events and has clarified even further the type of teacher I want to be. I want to be approachable; I want my students to open up to me, and feel comfortable, because you never know what your learner is experiencing once they leave the school grounds. There could be students acting out or even diving into their academics as I did when I was younger as a coping mechanism. Therefore, I am more aware and cautious of this...

... I have realised that the experiences I have gone through and the stories I was familiar with don't have power over me. Yes, they have influenced my early-career teacher identity, but in a sense where I respond and react to things differently. I am more mindful of what I say and my actions in and out of the professional environment.

Kira's reflection on the interview: Feeling nervous because she did not know what to expect, and the relief she experienced afterwards [29 August 2021]

Before the interview, there was a feeling of being overwhelmed. I felt that I had a lot on my plate with my current studies and work, so I was unsure what I was entering into. My mind eased a little more during the interview, and I felt comfortable speaking about my early-career teacher identity and sharing my thoughts and opinions. Once the interview was over, I actually felt a sense of relief, as if the spotlight had been taken off me. But also, once I was able to relive

the pivotal experiences, speak about them, and then heal from them, I felt much better about them. I felt better about my position in my career, as a teacher and as a researcher.

Kira's overall thoughts on the data generation activities: Able to make peace with her experiences and gained insight into how they influenced her early-career teacher identity
[29 August 2021]

I felt as though speaking about the outcomes of the memory drawings and collage making helped tie everything together, all thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and helped make peace with them.

My overall thoughts on the activities that we did are that they did help me gain insight into my own early-career teacher identity. I was able to give meaning to certain events and experiences, which gave me an understanding of why I react and respond in the way I do. In a sense, I feel enlightened and have a new awareness and appreciation for myself in my field. I also am excited about completing my Master's and entering the teaching and learning environment, so I can be the teacher who makes a difference – which is what I've always wanted to do.

Participating in this study has helped me relive stories that I was holding on to and clarified what I want for myself personally and professionally.

My final thoughts on being a participant in this study are that although I had a lot going on, I am glad I could be a part of this study because many teachers enter the field without realising what teaching entails. And I want more teachers to be aware of their identity, to find contentment in their careers as teachers, as they are influencing young minds.

To conclude, Kira's memory drawings surprised her when she realised that the patterns of her life were repeating themselves. She went from watching her friend being mistreated as a student by a teacher, to watching her mentor teacher mistreat a student. But this time was different – this time, she was able to make a change and make a positive difference, which reaffirmed that she was in the right profession and reignited her passion for teaching. The collage making process allowed Kira to remember her younger self, who was unfortunately exposed to life-changing events at a young age. She realised these had swayed her to dive into academics; she carries this with her as she pursues her Master's. In the interview, Kira stipulated how her past influenced her, because her experiences are unconsciously on her mind. She thinks back to

what she was exposed to, and now thinks twice about how what she says and does will impact others. Her reflections have affirmed her passion for the profession and the type of teacher she strives to be.

4.3. Serena's Data

4.3.1. Serena's Memory Drawings

Serena's first drawing is titled 'My Hatred for School' and describes an event that made her feel that she hated school. The illustration that follows is titled 'The First Step to Building My Confidence', which is an image Serena created to describe the encouragement from her teacher, which contributed to developing her confidence. The final image is titled 'The Joy of Helping'. It describes Serena's experience as a prefect in Matric (her last year of school), when she found herself enjoying helping younger learners from lower grades and being a role model to them. These images are followed by lived experience descriptions that I created.

4.3.1.1. My Hatred for School

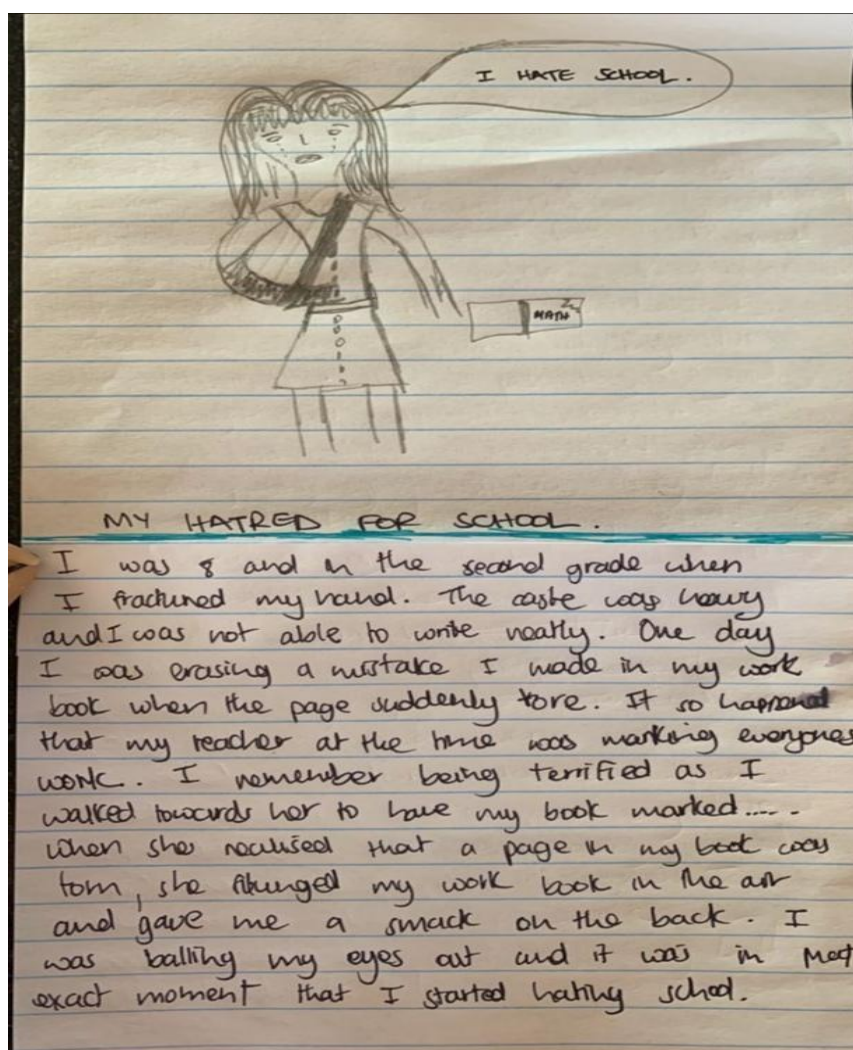


Figure 4.5.

Serena's memory drawing describes a negative experience in school, where her teacher embarrassed her in front of the entire class.

I was 8 and in the second grade when I fractured my hand. The cast was heavy and I was not able to write neatly. One day I was erasing a mistake I made in my work book when the page suddenly tore. It so happened that my teacher at the time was marking everyone's work. I remember being terrified as I walked towards her to have my book marked ... when she realised that a page in my book was torn, she flung my work book in the air and gave me a smack on the back. I was bawling my eyes out and it was in that exact moment that I started hating school.

[Excerpt from Serena's interpretive memory drawing seen above]

“But I don’t want to go!” I say to my dad. “Serena, you have to. School is important. There is just one more day until the weekend,” I hear my dad saying. I grip my little arm and sob a little on the way to school. I had fractured my hand and was in enough pain; I did not want to face the embarrassment of walking around with a cast on my hand. It was heavy, uncomfortable, and attracted attention, which I was dreading. I struggled throughout the day with the most mundane tasks, like writing and eating my lunch, all activities I previously took for granted. It was finally the last period of the day – Maths. I had made a mistake on my page, so I quickly searched for my eraser in my pencil case filled with colourful pens and crayons. I finally found it and began erasing as fast as possible before my teacher checked my work. I could see her from the corner of my eye; it was almost time for my row to go up. I found myself distracted as I was looking for my teacher, and then I heard the rip of my page. “Oh no!” I thought to myself and gave a little gasp. It was at that moment that I had to go up to my teacher. I approached her table and she saw the torn page. She responded with such fury, as if I had torn my page intentionally. My teacher picked up my book with the torn page and showed it to the class to make an example out of me. She then proceeded to fling it up in the air and smacked my back. My eyes immediately filled with tears. Thoughts began running through my mind. How could she be so inconsiderate and unsympathetic? Could she not see my cast? Or did she just not care? I feel so hurt. I don’t want my teacher to be mad at me. I did not do it on purpose. I never want to come back here again. I hate school!!!

4.3.1.2. The First Step to Building My Confidence

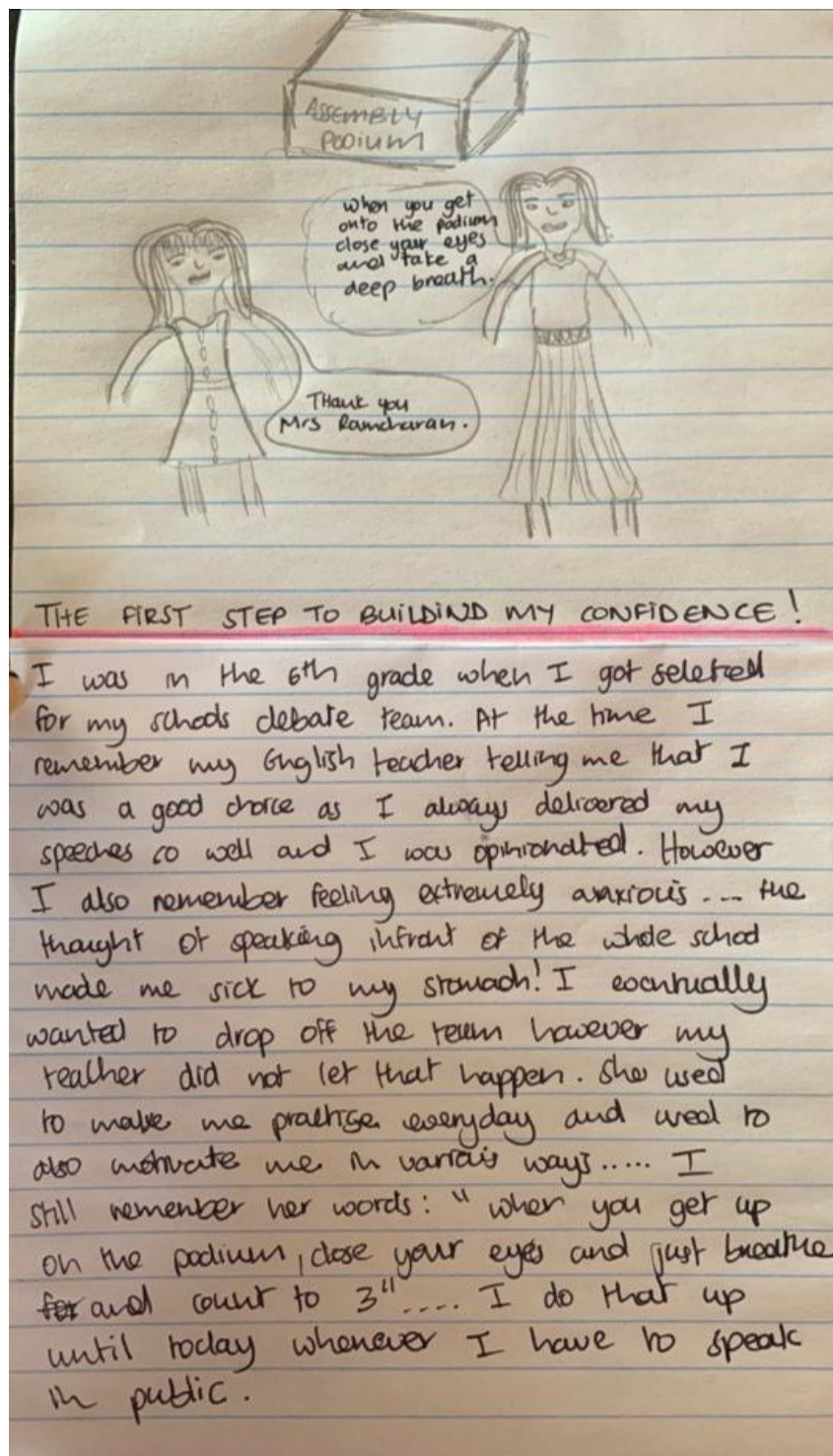


Figure 4.6.

Serena's memory drawing showing when she was in the 6th grade and her teacher encouraged and helped her build her confidence.

I was in the 6th grade when I got selected for my school's debate team. At the time I remember my English teacher telling me that I was a good choice, as I always delivered my speeches so well and I was opinionated. However, I also remember feeling extremely anxious ... the thought of speaking in front of the whole school made me sick to my stomach! I actually wanted to drop off the team. However, my teacher did not let that happen. She used to make me practice every day and used to also motivate me in various ways ... I still remember her words: "When you get up on the podium, close your eyes and just breathe and count to 3" ... I do that up until today whenever I have to speak in public.

[Excerpt from Serena's interpretive memory drawing seen above]

"And up next, the next debater is Miss Serena Singh." It was the 6th grade, and I had been selected for my school's debate team. Debating was one of my favourite activities. I loved speaking in front of the crowd; I loved having the opportunity to share my opinions and views with every person in the room. I loved the rush of adrenaline from being up there, with silence filling the room and my voice echoing. I also loved the focus I felt when I was in a debate. I had to pay careful attention to what my opponent was saying, to think of an intelligent response. I enjoyed the preparation that went into the debate team – researching topics, expanding my knowledge, and having access to issues I would not normally consider. I loved being a part of a team as well! I made new friends, went on tournaments to other schools, met new people there, and shared in our love for debate. My school won many times against other schools; I felt proud of myself for being a part of a winning team. But even when we lost, we were never shamed. We were applauded for our effort, for sharing valuable insights, and for being worthy opponents. Being chosen for the debate team was one of the most significant contributors to building my confidence. Just to know my teacher thought I had the knowledge and confidence to speak in front of strangers and to represent the school made me feel so good about myself! That was when I began to have faith in myself and my abilities. This experience also enabled me to build my confidence in public speaking. I am forever grateful to my teacher for believing in me and allowing me this opportunity to develop my confidence and discover my talents!

4.3.1.3. The Joy of Helping!

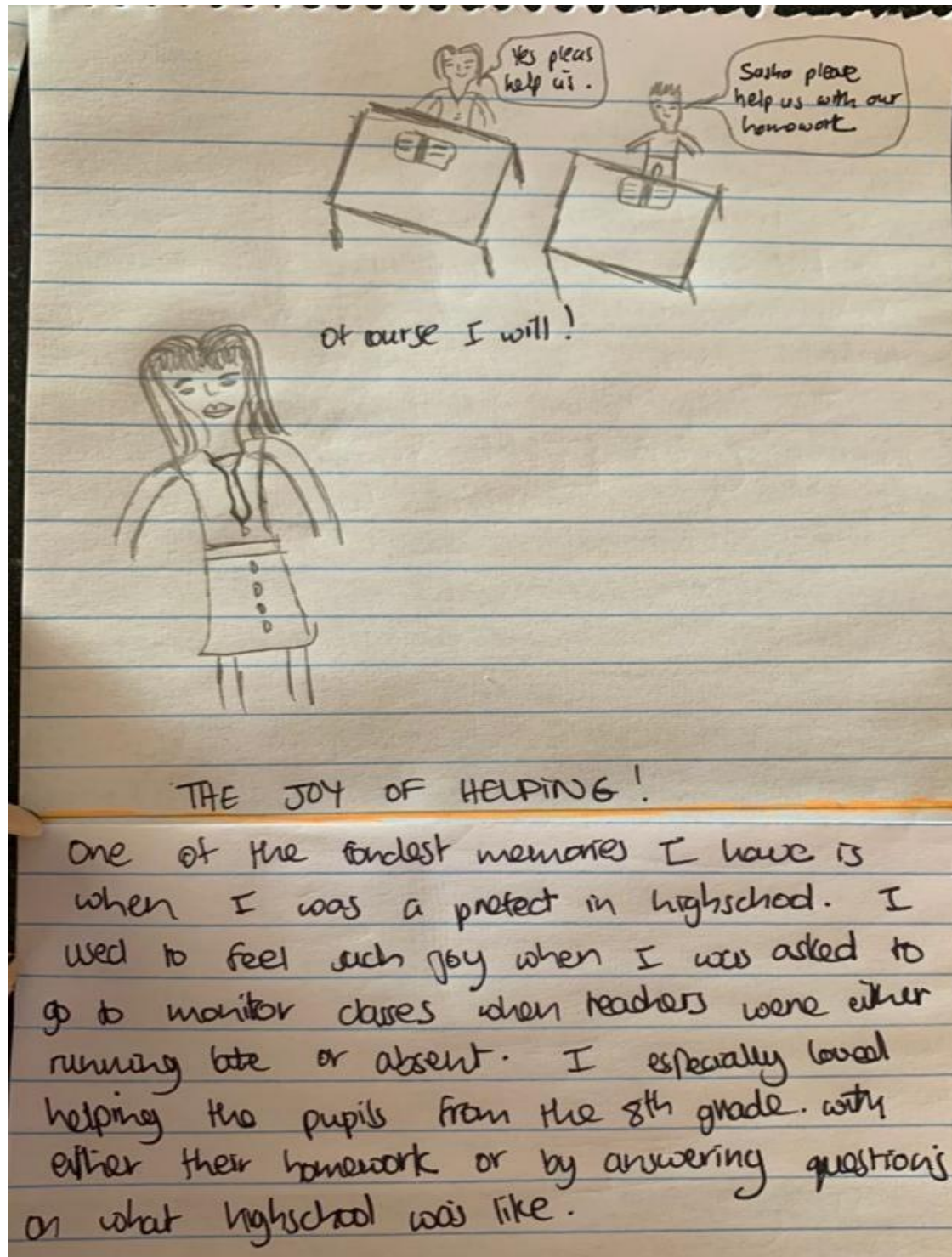


Figure 4.7.

Serena's memory drawing representing a time when she was chosen to be a prefect in matric, and how she enjoyed helping younger learners who looked up to her.

One of the fondest memories I have is when I was a prefect in high school. I used to feel such joy when I was asked to monitor classes when teachers were either running late or absent. I especially loved helping pupils from the 8th grade with either their homework or by answering questions on what high school was like.

[Excerpt from the interpretive memory drawing seen above]

“And next, we have Serena Singh. Congratulations Serena!” was what I heard the school’s deputy principal saying. I had been selected to be a prefect; I was so excited. I went up on stage and got my badge, showing it off to my friends, who also proudly carried theirs. I felt proud each morning when I put on my badge. I knew that the teachers in my school trusted me enough to carry out the duties of a prefect and hold the school’s name up high. I felt such joy, as I was often asked to help my teachers monitor their classes when they ran late or were absent. I especially loved it when I was in classes with the younger grades as they always had so many questions for me. They asked what high school was like and how I became a prefect. They commented that I must be very smart to be chosen, or the teachers like me a lot. This made me feel so good about myself. They looked at me with such admiration, as if they someday aspired to be a prefect like me. I especially liked it when the younger learners asked me for help with their school work. Being a prefect in matric, looking at work from Grades 8 and 9 seemed extremely easy. I was able to help them in no time. They were in awe of my knowledge. I felt amazing; this was a huge confidence boost. I loved helping, and performing my prefect duties felt like an honour. This was one of my most treasured high school moments.

4.3.2. Serena’s Collage

Serena’s collage is divided into three stages: past, present, and future. The collage is followed by an explanatory description that I wrote.



Figure 4.8.

Collage created by Serena to represent her past, present, and future teacher identity.

4.3.2.1. Past

The first image, stating 'Perfectionist', represents the struggle I faced during my first two years of being a student in the field of Education. I always strived to be a perfectionist and wanted to be the best student and eventually the best educator. The strive for perfectionism almost led to a mental breakdown. The second visual, 'Modern teaching method', shows my journey to finding my teaching style and the type of educator I wanted to become. I used to research (almost daily) the different teaching styles, aside from what I was being taught, determining what would best suit my personality. The third visual, which shows a woman standing at a crossroads, represents my past teacher identity, linked slightly with the first image. I found myself at a crossroads during my first year and a half of studying, where I questioned if the path of teaching was really for me. This was due to me trying to over-achieve and be too perfect. I put immense pressure on myself during this time.

4.3.2.2. Present

The fourth image, which shows the imbalance in employment, and people trying to cross the bridge to being employed, is where I feel I am currently. I have finished with my studies, and I am looking for employment. Finding a suitable role within my field is becoming harder than I expected; hence this image was chosen to represent my current struggle to find a job. Image five shows a woman standing in front of a chalkboard with the words 'I'm a new teacher', representing how I feel emotionally. Although I feel conflicted about being unemployed, it gives me joy knowing that I will be stepping into my classroom soon to do what I love. The final image I chose to represent my present teacher identity is of a teacher with the words, 'Teachers & COVID-19'. This was selected as a representation of the unknown, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed the way I had to think about my first teaching experience. I always thought I would be prepared; however, now it feels like stepping into the unknown.

4.3.2.3. Future

The first image chosen to represent my future teacher identity is of a man 'climbing' books to reach the top – which is how I imagine my pursuit of obtaining a PhD. This visual represents my future endeavours in the field of Education. My goal is to complete my PhD so that I can

impart more knowledge to my students. Image eight, showing diverse learners who are all happy, was chosen to represent the environment I desire for my future and the happiness I want my learners to feel. I want to look around and see the happy learning environment that I have created. I want to see my learners looking and feeling empowered, enriched, and joyful. The final two visuals, nine and ten, which include the words 'Safe Space', show a woman and a child sitting on a book; these images are linked and represent a safe space. I want my students to feel safe with me and know they can come to me with whatever issues they face. I want them to confide in me, so that I can help and guide them in the same way my 6th-grade teacher did for me through my schooling years.

4.3.3. Serena's Interview

This section is composed of excerpts from Serena's interview. I carefully chose specific pieces that were relevant to the posed question. Whilst arranging selections from the interview transcript relative to the question, ideas flowed to me, which were added throughout this section to enhance clarity and readability.

When asked to describe the schools that featured in her memory drawings, Serena answered:

Um, my school was in a sort of urban setting; it was a 'normal' classroom, I guess. Yeah, very typical for the community I grew up in – which is called Southgate in Durban. It wasn't a private school; it was a government school. It had all the proper and functioning facilities, working toilets, things like that. My school was definitely... My primary school was definitely well resourced, and also my high school was also well resourced. It was an average government school.

Can you differentiate between the different settings in the school in the various images, as I know you created drawings based on times in different grades?

Yes – two schools. I did drawings showing Grade 2, Grade 6, and Grade 11. Uhm... They were all similar, well resourced. Average classrooms. Nothing really too fancy, but it was equipped with everything we as learners needed.

In primary school, the learner-teacher ratio, if I remember correctly, was about 38-40 learners to one teacher, and in high school, there were around 32 learners in a classroom to one teacher.

When asked how reflecting on past experiences through storytelling activities have influenced her, Serena answered:

... I feel like these activities made me remember certain memories and certain points in my life. And it, it, made me even feel more empowered. Or rather, not empowered. It actually cements that I made the correct career choice, which I want to do. Teaching and helping kids are what I want to do, especially given the experiences I have been through

Many of my experiences were positive, but there were also the negative experiences, you know, and what I faced as a learner. So yeah, I would say it's been an overwhelming experience, but in a good way.

When asked how her professional identity, future, and current experiences were being impacted through storytelling activities, Serena stated:

... Reflecting on these childhood experiences makes you remember things you may have sometimes forgotten as an adult. For example, the time my teacher hit me on the back. I know that sounds so awful [laughs], but it's something that [was] common when I was growing up as a student, you know. It was common within the community. And I feel like as much as we have laws, it is still very common. But you forget that as an adult. When you actually go back and think through what you faced as a student growing up, it definitely kind of changes your perspective.

... So, I wouldn't say it changed my goals 100%, but it makes me believe more in my goals.

It has changed my goals to an extent; it also makes me want to empower my learners. Like studying for my PhD, getting my PhD is a goal. But reflecting now makes me want to do it more! Especially doing the collage. You know, it gives you hope. I want to be secure in my career. And given all the challenges I'm facing, like I don't have a job yet, it makes me want to get my PhD even more.

Serena was able to define her goals more clearly through these activities. Although she found the collage making to be the most challenging activity, it helped her clarify that she wants to obtain her PhD.

When asked how reflecting on her story through storytelling activities impacted her passion and how she sees the profession she is in, Serena said:

I'd say I'm even more passionate. I would say, when I was doing the collage, and I know I'm speaking a lot about my present, but this kind of made me feel like it did bring me down to an extent because I am unemployed currently. But it, like, I feel like my present circumstance doesn't define my future, because the future is ever-changing. When I was doing my 'future', I expressed that I want a safe space for learners, happy students, and I want my PhD to pass knowledge onto students. It's definitely made me more passionate about wanting to achieve my future goals as an educator.

Just to add... Since you reflected about the collage impacting your experience, have your memory drawings caused you to see the profession differently? You described that you had teachers who weren't good to you, but you also had teachers who uplifted you –have these images swayed the way you see the profession?

Um ... I would say ... give me a moment to think [laughs].

I do see it differently, because if I look at my memory drawings and just go back to the negative, for a long time when I was growing up, I thought teachers were not nice. I thought you always had to be afraid of your teacher. But I know that's not true, because when I was doing the memory drawings, there were positive experiences that came out, and my teacher helped me create these experiences and build my confidence. There have been so many other teachers that have done this as well. So, it has helped me see that not all teachers are the same. We have our own identity; we are unique, and what we choose to impart to our learners will affect them. And I would never want to be a teacher that affects students negatively. So, it definitely swayed me in the sense that I want to be the best for my students to have the best memories of me.

Now that she was aware of the story and the power it holds, I asked Serena what effect this has had on her, and in what way. Serena answered:

I think ... it affects me in the sense that ... I would definitely be more mindful on my end, for example, what I say. However, I also think it showed me the power of storytelling. Like I can be more open and honest with my students. I can share my experiences with them and my experiences as a student to relate to them more. 'Cause I think that telling a story or sharing your experience rather, opens up a world of possibility. It opens up so many dialogues. And it's definitely something I take into my classroom. I want to share this open and honest dialogue to help create a safe space with learners so that they can share with me and I can help them with what they're going through.

Serena is more aware now of the type of teacher she wants to be.

When asked what influence this has had on the story she tells about her teacher identity, and in what way the story has changed now that she is self-aware, Serena said:

I would say yes, the story has changed because sometimes, as I said, in the beginning, you choose a career path. I knew I wanted to be a teacher and help, but now I can elaborate on why I chose this career. And I feel like reflecting on my experiences helped me remember and reignite my passion for teaching, and showed me exactly why I chose this path in the first place. Like I wasn't forced into this career, it was a decision I made. It was based on experiences I went through that helped me ignite my passion for teaching. Now when someone asks why I chose teaching, my answer will be that I want to help people, and I want to help my students be better because of experiences I had and the different points in my life I went through, whether negative or positive, made me choose this path. So yeah, it definitely helped change the narrative of why I chose teaching. It brought back the deep reasons in terms of why I chose this path.

When asked how has/will the change in the story about her teacher identity impact the other identities that exist in her life, Serena said:

I think ... I would say I'm definitely more confident in the choice of my career path. These activities helped me reaffirm and cement my choice, if that makes sense. I better understand why I'm here now. I reflected. It's kind of like Psychology 101 in a sense [laughs]. It helped me cement my path in teaching. And I know it's 100%, like if I ever have a doubt – because I think we all have doubts about our careers when we go through hardships. Especially now, my

present circumstances, not being able to find employment – a recent graduate, on the job hunt, with everything happening like COVID-19. You question, am I really gonna find a job in this field? What should I have chosen? But again, these activities give me passion. They have reignited and solidified the decision I made. So, there's no doubt about it. If anyone asked if I'm sure, I'd say yes, 100% confident.

Okay ... but I mean, how does it affect your 'other' identities. Your personal identity, for instance, now that you are secure in your career?

I think it helps because, like, there are points, in terms of ... You worry, you know, in each phase stressed – will I have money to pay the bills, or whatever the case is. So, I think it definitely helps, like it's like one less burden to worry about, so the choice I made gives me confidence. It helps me as an overall individual. It's something I don't need to stress about, and it's something I don't need to worry about, and it helps me be a better person. Like I said, it also helps with my confidence, because personally, this is something I struggled with growing up [confidence]. Speaking in front of people, whether it's family functions, definitely helped me as a person.

4.3.4. Serena's Reflective Journal

This section consists of extracts from Serena's journal concerning the data generation activities, and includes the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs she shared throughout and in between the activities. Serena expressed her notions and feelings on the memory drawings, collage making, interview, and the study altogether.

These excerpts were arranged per the date of the entry. This was also done to portray how Serena's thoughts progressed and show any identity shifts. My reflective comments were added to emphasise Serena's reflections and provide clarity.

Serena's reflections on the memory drawing process: She had positive and negative experiences with her teachers, which influenced who she is as a teacher [12 August 2021]

During the memory drawing process, I did feel very overwhelmed, and I was almost brought to tears when I relived the painful memory of my teacher hitting me, as I felt what she did

during that point was not right. It made me feel pain, and it did make me feel a bit sick to my stomach. However, as I drew my last two memories, I did feel joy.

How I feel about the events now... I feel content; I think I needed to go through and relive those experiences to be where I am now. I still felt a bit dismayed when I relived my negative experience. But it motivates me, if anything, to rather be a better teacher for my students. So, I would say my memories still have power over me but power in a positive way. And it does influence me in my teacher identity. The negative and positive make me want to be the best teacher I can be. It makes me want to be a teacher who is open and honest and there for her students and whose students can come to her if anything is wrong. I never want my students to be afraid of me like I was afraid of my 2nd-grade teacher.

Serena's reflections on the collage making process: This activity was challenging for her
[22 August]

I definitely felt physical sensations when I did the past identity section, just because I had to relive my last years of studying, where I always strived to be a perfectionist. I always wanted to be the best that I could be, which led to me basically having a mental breakdown. And it made me question if teaching was really the path for me, and reliving that through collage making gave me shivers. It took me back to all those years ago, where I was so hellbent on being perfect that I lost my way...

... creating the collage has motivated me in the sense that I want to achieve my future goals; I want to get my PhD. I can't wait to have a room full of students and create a safe space for them to come to me, and I can help, guide, and mould them to be the best version of themselves! The collage making process has made me feel better about being unemployed currently, because I know there's so much more I am going to achieve and I am going to find a job, and I am going to be an amazing teacher. And I am going to help all of my students. It has definitely changed the way I see myself. It has given me a boost. Sort of an extra confidence boost in my current situation to just want to be better and strive to be better.

Serena's reflections on the interview: She was not sure what to expect and experienced difficulties when engaging with these activities [27 August 2021]

I think before my interview, I was nervous as I didn't know what to expect. However, my interview went very well. I felt at ease. I let myself open up and answer the questions honestly. I didn't clam up. It was comfortable and free-flowing. After the interview, I felt kind of happy in a weird way. I think talking about my experiences and reflecting on experiences helped me open up and helped me feel alive, if that makes sense. Overall, I thought the activities were great; however, they were hard.

Serena's reflections on her overall thoughts on the data generation activities: She was glad about engaging in these activities and expressed how they positively impacted her
[27 August 2021]

I found the collage making a bit difficult, because I had to reflect on my past and relive the mental breakdown when I was a student and studying towards my teaching degree.

Serena wrote this and informed me that she found collage making the most challenging activity throughout this process.

I found the whole experience, the memory drawing, the collage making, and the interview very positive. I think it had a positive impact on me. Yes, reliving some of the memories, like my teacher hitting me or my mental breakdown, was overwhelming, and I did tear up, and it was hard, but it was in a weird way therapeutic. Because that just made me more aware of the teacher I don't want to become and the qualities I don't want to have.

So, I think this experience was positive as it also made me aware of what I want to become in the future, the teacher I want to become. So, it definitely made me aware of my teacher identity. It helped me realise what I do and don't want for myself, and I know the type of teacher I want to be. I know I want that safe space for my students, and I want to help them and be the best for them. It has definitely been so positive and helped me so much, even reliving negative experiences because it helped me become aware of the teacher I want to be in the future.

My final thoughts on participating are that I am glad I did it, even though I was hesitant in the beginning as I wasn't sure what to expect, but I think it's been a good experience and helped me so much ... I can't even explain how much. It cemented my career and path in this field and helped me know exactly the type of teacher I want to become.

To conclude, Serena's memory drawings showed her the influence that her own teachers had on making her experience in school positive or negative. She recognised what a significant role and impact her teachers had on making her who she is, whether this was briefly disliking school or building her confidence. Her collage – which she often reiterated was her most challenging activity – brought about embarrassment when thinking about her past and newfound compassion for herself, since she also feels she is behind because she is unemployed. She also has more clarity on her academic goals. The interview process was enjoyable, as Serena was more vocal and expressive with her words. I understood better what has shaped Serena's early-career teacher identity, and she established what she was working towards. Through her reflective journal, she was able to resonate and find ease with the fact that her unemployed situation is just temporary, and she felt excitement that she would soon be in her own classroom. Serena found the light at the end of the tunnel.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter continued to address the first question guiding this research: *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked about their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?* The reasoning behind this question was to understand the teachers' stories when they were asked about past experiences and to witness what participants feel has shaped and contributed to their professional identities. It was also intended to encourage participants to reflect and become self-aware, in the hope of recognising and engaging with the stories they tell and their beliefs about themselves. The use of arts-based methods was intended to stimulate feelings, thoughts, and ideas and generate responses. In combination with the first research question, these methods were aimed at helping participants become aware of the stories they tell, provide clarity on their experiences, and discover the influence of these stories on their professional identities. They were also intended to give me as the researcher insights into the participants' thought processes.

This chapter includes various memory drawings that Kira and Serena developed and their collages, with excerpts from interviews engaged in and from their reflective journals. As their stories unfolded, Kira and Serena began realising the influence of particular events and people on their early-career teacher identity development. The chapter indicated how the creative activities assisted my participants in recognising the factors that contributed to their early-

career teacher identities and considering how they might wish to revise their identities in the future.

The key message that I take from this chapter is that in becoming self-aware as early-career teachers, we can begin to acknowledge what areas of our lives need our attention. This can be done by describing our experiences and reflecting using arts-based and reflective activities. We can then begin working towards making the change we desire for our contentment, and as teachers working closely with influential young minds.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data that exists in Chapters Three and Four and consolidates the findings of these chapters

CHAPTER FIVE

ZOOMING IN AND OUT

This chapter's title was chosen because it contains an analysis of the data represented in Chapters Three and Four and addresses my research questions. As explained in Chapter Two, the analysis process can be understood as connecting and fracturing and zooming in and out between art and science (Chang, 2008).

5.1. Introduction

This narrative inquiry aims to understand how lived experiences can influence the development of early-career teacher identities. This study explores the stories that early-career teachers tell when asked about their lived experiences, to comprehend the impact on their identity development and the link between them. Incidents have been shared by storytelling, using various creative data generation practices. The previous chapter represented the stories shared by participant three, Kira Omar, and participant four, Serena Singh. They expressed their experiences through a series of memory drawings, a collage, an interview, and reflective journal entries. This enabled the discovery of the types of stories we tell when asked about events that have impacted us as individuals and considering these stories' influence on our professional identities.

Now that all of the data have been generated and represented in Chapters Three and Four, this chapter responds to the main research question: *How can the power of storytelling influence the identity development of early-career teachers?*

It also responds to the two sub-questions:

1. What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked about their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?
2. How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?

Based on the series of memory drawings that the research participants individually created, I created an interpretive drawing to relay my understanding of the collection of pictures, followed by a brief description of what this image means. I also developed an interpretive

collage to make visible connections across the participants' collages. Following this is a collage description that I constructed to explain my understanding of the collage. Creating the interpretive drawing and collage enabled me to develop insight into participants' thoughts and feelings, make sense of their experiences, and identify similarities and differences. Through these visual and descriptive interpretations, I was able to develop themes.

I developed three themes that represent similarities and differences in the stories shared by the participants. The first theme is Stories of Hardships: participants have communicated times in their lives where they expressed difficulties. Theme two is Stories of Appreciation of Experiences and the Desire to Improve: participants shared experiences they are grateful to have had, as they contributed to who they are now and motivated them to improve. The third theme identified is Stories of Excitement and Clarity: participants shared their clear vision for their teacher identities, based on what they have experienced and their excitement about what lies ahead.

5.2. Interpretive Memory Drawing

Drawing is a beneficial tool that aided me in exploring and interpreting the data as represented in Chapters Three and Four. Participants were asked to create a series of drawings based on memories that impacted their early-teacher career identity (as shown in Chapters Three and Four). After that, I made an interpretive drawing to portray my understanding of the participants' drawings as a collection. Creating the interpretive drawing provided me with a different perspective and understanding. This creative practice gave me additional insight into participants' thoughts and feelings, allowing me to imaginatively make sense of the data (Richardson, 2000). Creative analytical practices were beneficial for me as the researcher in analysing and interpreting the information differently to enhance my study.



Figure 5.1.

An interpretation of the series of drawings submitted by all participants in this study.

When early-career teachers were asked to share stories about their lived experiences, it was evident that stories of hardships were shared. But these stories were the ‘fuel’ that led to motivation, change, clarity, appreciation, and successes. This image describes the hardships we experience as the motivation behind our success and the fuel to develop our early-career teacher identities.

[Excerpt from the interpretive memory drawing seen above]

5.3. Interpretive Collage

When utilising collage making as a data generation method, I asked each participant to create a collage (as shown in Chapters Three and Four). Once each participant had completed their collage, I developed an interpretive collage to make visible connections across all of the participants’ collages. I also recognised differences found in our stories, the challenges and tensions we have faced and are still facing, as well as the successes we have experienced and opportunities we are excited about. I was also able to identify common ideas. These discoveries helped me draw on the early-career teachers’ belief systems, tap into their professional identities’ vision, and make sense of their experiences (Richardson, 2000). This process enabled me to analyse and interpret the collages of my participants.



Figure 5.2.

Interpretation of the individual collages submitted by all participants in this study.

5.3.1. Past

The first image is of a person pushing a rock up a steep hill, and he appears to be struggling. This was chosen as it represents the initial stories told by myself and my participants. When we were asked to share our past experiences, we immediately decided to relay stories that exhibited difficult times in our lives. These stories may have represented difficulties in our studies, personal lives, or even our mental state, but they all illustrated challenging times. The second image is a person who is possibly overthinking or stressed, and their mind just explodes. This image was chosen as many of us have shared stories of a similar nature – when we felt as though we just could not take any more, as if our minds were going to explode because of the hardships we were experiencing. The third picture shows a hand reaching for another hand – that of a person who is drowning. This image represents the stories my participants and I communicated; many of us told the story of how we needed our teachers when we were younger, or how we saw a friend in need who could have used the help of our teacher. We needed that helping hand, and unfortunately, not many of us had access to a teacher who was willing to help us. This was a defining moment for each of us, because it was the beginning of shaping the type of teacher we wanted to embody. Because of these experiences, we knew what we would do differently.

5.3.2. Present

Picture four states ‘Work in Progress’ and was chosen because it represents the similarities we share; we are all still working on ourselves and our professional identities. The difference comes in when we have expressed what we are working towards, as we all have different goals and aspirations. This image also signifies the challenges that we face when we are not yet where we want to be. We still have to put in the work and keep developing ourselves. It also represents the challenges some of us face – working towards employment, challenges in studying, and the work-life balance we are adjusting to. This picture is especially relevant for the recently employed participant, Norah, who is currently facing teacher burnout and struggling to enforce COVID-19 protocols at school with her overcrowded class of Grade R learners, who do not precisely comprehend the importance of social distancing. Therefore, this illustration depicts that although we have progressed, there is still work ahead of us. Image five represents an enlightened person. This is where we are currently, in the state where we are growing and becoming aware; we are now the adults in the situation. We have transitioned

from past to present; we have transitioned from being the student to the teacher. We are in the enlightenment stage. Image six is an addition to image five, a picture of a butterfly. Again, this depicts transition, change, and growth in our identities. Like the butterfly, we are transforming and changing; this can be uncomfortable and challenging. We are all still on the path to developing.

5.3.3. Future

Image seven is a picture of glasses with a clear view of a tree. This signifies clarity, which I think we have all found after reflecting on what we want. We all have a newfound sense of clarity about where we are in our careers, the academic goals we want to achieve, and the type of teachers we want to be, forming our teaching styles. Those who are not yet teaching have even formulated the kind of classroom setup we want to have, and the strategies we could implement to motivate students and ensure effective classroom management. Image seven can be described as a girl facing different paths. This represents my participants and me and the differences in the stories we have shared. Some of us have endured more hardships than others – we have experienced challenges, but in different areas of our lives. We are all on different paths. We have different stories; we will face other challenges and opportunities, but we are on the path that is meant for us. The final image, number nine, shows a girl who is jumping up in excitement. This refers to another ‘story’ we all shared: even though we are on different journeys, seeking jobs, adjusting and enhancing our professional practice, or furthering our studies, we were all excited about the future and what lies ahead of us. We all realised how far we had come, and we were excited about the future. We expressed excitement to be in the teaching and learning environment, and shared how keen we were to engage with our students, make a difference, and continue working on and improving ourselves.

5.4. Themes

Based on the data represented in Chapters Three and Four, interpretations were developed, as shown above. Three themes were thoughtfully identified: Stories of Hardship; Stories of Transforming and Appreciation; and Stories of Excitement and Clarity.

5.4.1. Theme One: Stories of Hardships

Typical stories that we all told were Stories of Hardships. This was especially evident in the memory drawing and collage making process that my participants and I engaged in. For instance, in the memory drawing section, I shared the story of ‘The Day I Walked Out Crying,’ where I was not achieving academically, and my tutor had made me feel even worse about not grasping the content. I also shared a challenging moment for me titled ‘Heartbroken’, where I felt like a failure because I was rejected for every course I applied for at the only university I applied to. Norah’s memory drawings all consisted of negative pictures, in which she shared difficult times she had endured and is currently facing. For instance, in her memory drawing titled ‘My Monster Teacher’, she shared her struggles with her Grade 1 teacher, who enforced corporal punishment and belittled learners. She also shared the story of her aunt, who emotionally and physically abused her, titled ‘Evil Aunt’. Her final drawing, which represents a painful time in her life, was titled ‘Broken Dreams’, and describes her shattered family as her partner of 12 years left her and their son for another woman.

Stories of Hardships were also identified in the other two participants’ memory drawings. Kira had a different experience. Although the stories were not directly about herself, they were stories about adverse experiences that she had witnessed, which had a lasting impression on her. Kira shared ‘Under-resourced School’, which described when she saw her friend being victim to the lack of resources at their school, which negatively impacted her education. She conveyed a story titled ‘A Lasting Print of Doubt’, where she witnessed a teacher misinterpreting a situation, doubting a learner, and degrading her in front of the entire class. Kira also saw a similar event, titled ‘My First Teaching Practice’, where she was exposed to her mentor teacher belittling and bullying a learner, with the rest of the class emulating this behaviour.

Participant three, Serena, also revealed a time when she experienced difficulty in her life, titled ‘My Hatred for School’. This particular event describes an experience where her teacher physically abused her at school, which made her feel as if she hated school. The participants and I all drew and shared stories in which we experienced tragedies and misfortunes.

Stories of Hardships were also recognised in the collages created by the participants and me. My collage portrayed the struggles I faced when I transitioned from one field of study to

another. I was confused; I was fearful of how my family would react; I was afraid of whether and how to generate an income as a full-time student. In my collage, I also shared the challenge and tension I faced when imagining a teacher identity for myself. I wish to help, and I want to make a difference, but I fear the challenges of being a teacher responsible for influencing the youth. Participant Norah shared different Stories of Hardships in her collage. She revealed the story of her learning difficulties growing up, being a child of divorce, and not having a supportive teacher in her life. She shared the story of ‘burning the midnight oil’, where she had to work and study simultaneously to pay for her studies and support her infant child. Norah was working full-time and studying and taking public transportation to her different responsibilities. She was also raising her son and felt that she was missing out on valuable time with him. Norah disclosed that she felt as though life’s problems were never-ending for her.

Norah went on to share that she was facing challenges in her present reality as well. She is a newly employed Grade R teacher, exposed to the actuality of teaching for the first time. Norah has to deal with lesson planning, classroom management, marking, discipline, and administration, which she feels her teacher education programme did not prepare her for. Norah revealed the burnout she was feeling from trying to manage work and her personal responsibilities. She also communicated that she was having trouble with enforcing the COVID-19 protocols in her new post; which her Grade R learners were having difficulty sticking to. Something all my participants shared was enthusiasm for the future aspect of our teacher identities. Norah, however, compared her situation to currently being ‘broken’, and hoped that she would make it through this challenging time in her life.

Kira and Serena also depicted hard times in their collages. In Kira’s collage, she revealed a very traumatic experience when she was younger, which she feels changed who she is forever. Kira had to receive counselling as a result and started isolating herself. Kira lost all her confidence and buried herself in her academics – she was in a dark place in her life. She communicated about a time in her life when she felt as if everything was falling apart – when she had lost her father and when she was finding her way through her tertiary education. Kira also shared the change she wants to make in her future teacher identity, as she was exposed to numerous peers and learners being mistreated. Kira knew that she wanted to make a difference.

Serena also shared difficulties that she experienced, through images represented in her collage. She communicated the challenge she faced, especially in her first two years of teaching, when her desire to thrive academically led her to have a mental breakdown. Serena was putting immense pressure on herself and experiencing high volumes of stress during this time. Serena also stated that she struggled with her teaching style and questioned if teaching was really for her. She communicated another struggle that she was facing as a recent graduate who could not find work. With the COVID-19 pandemic in force, Serena is unsure when she will find a post as a teacher. Serena struggles with this, and it has lowered her self-esteem, since she is the only one of her friends who cannot find employment. She is unable to contribute financially at home and feels like a failure. Serena also struggles with the unsafe teaching and learning environments and desires to be a teacher and to make a difference. All participants shared stories of tragedies and struggles we faced, and how these experiences have contributed to developing our early-career teacher identity.

The Stories of Hardships shared by participants in this study resulted in many revelations. These stories have influenced the development of our early-career teacher identities. They have influenced how the participants respond to situations and people. This affects how we make meaning of our surroundings, how we make sense of the world, how we treat others, and how we interpret contexts. When participants relayed a story that negatively impacted them – for instance, a negative occurrence with a teacher – they stated that these very same experiences caused them to react differently now that they are teachers themselves. They realise that because they know what it is like to be in that situation, they would handle it differently – most likely in a manner opposite to how their teacher responded. This was a general finding regarding the tragedies we faced, both in and out of school.

The misfortunes which my participants and I have endured have affected who we are as teachers. Many of us have stated that we think twice before we say something to another, because we think of its impact. Because of these experiences, we have become more compassionate and understanding – although that is not the case for all teachers. Etelapelto et al. (2015) affirm that lived experiences influence teacher identities, and Gulla (2014) highlights the influence of interactions. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that it is how the individual has interpreted the event that was experienced, as some early-career teachers end up mimicking the behaviour of teachers who were not compassionate. Day (2011) concurs by stating that a

teacher's identity is created in relationships with others, through interactions, and involves emotions. Identities are provoked by emotions, circumstances and are experienced as a transformation of disposition to act. Emotional affairs are stimulated in the actor, which impacts the orienting of their conduct. This was especially evident when Kira voiced that because of the trauma she had experienced, she always considered the learners' home conditions; in her own case, nobody knew what she was going through and why she responded in that manner. Therefore, the influence of the heartbreaks that participants experienced was evident in developing our early-career teacher identities.

Taking a constructivist approach (as explained in Chapter One) helped me identify the link between identity and lived experiences. It also helped me recognise that our identities are constantly being formed and re-formed and that our interactions with others also impact identity development (Richardson, 1997). Taking these factors into consideration, I comprehended the effect of these hardships on identity development. I identified that the contexts we grew up in and the experiences we had (such as hardships) influenced the way we learn, approach situations, interact with people, and perceive our surroundings.

After the readings engaged with on teacher identities (as discussed in Chapter One), I was able to identify the connection between these shared stories and the development of our identities. Day (2011) describes teacher identities as making sense of ourselves as teachers and as early-career teachers. He explains how we renegotiate these ideals, especially in the first year of working in a school. Early-career teacher identities are developed by factors such as lived experiences of education (Eteläpelto et al., 2015), teacher education programmes (Ball, 2016), and reflection (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). I was able to associate the Stories of Hardships that the participants encountered with early-career teacher identity development.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) highlighted how past experiences impact early-career teachers' identity development, because knowing ourselves might allow us to make sense of our affairs and act according to context. Early-career teachers who have been through a harrowing experience would be more likely to interpret circumstances and make sense of the world based on what they have been through and the associated negativity. They may hold onto limiting beliefs or become afraid of the event recurring. By linking identity development to teacher identity readings, I understood the influence of these Stories of Hardships.

The most valuable discovery that I made is how much of an impact the role of hardships has had on who we are. Difficulties affect the direction of our development, in a sense that we choose between learning and growing from these or becoming bitter and resentful – it is our choice to learn from stories of the past (Masinga, 2012). I have realised the role that others and interactions with others play in our early-career teacher identity development. Rodgers and Scott (2008) affirm that identity is constructed by engaging in practices with others. Our Stories of Hardships and previous interactions with others have affected our current identities.

5.4.2. Theme Two: Stories of Appreciation for Experiences and the Desire to Improve

The three participants and I shared stories of appreciation for the experiences we had been through, and the desire to improve because of these experiences. We expressed our gratitude, as these events have taught us many lessons, and contributed to our growth on an individual and professional level. They have enhanced our desire to improve. This theme was evident in stories shared in our memory drawings and collages. For instance, this was shared in my memory drawing titled ‘The Moment I Felt Like I Belonged’. This story represented the different courses I had studied, and how I was now in a profession that felt right to me. I was so appreciative of where I was in my life and my career. Serena told a memory drawing of a similar nature, titled ‘The First Step to Building My Confidence’. She felt gratitude and appreciation for her teacher, who helped build her confidence by encouraging her to participate in the debate team.

Stories of Appreciation for Experiences and the Desire to Improve were also evident through our collages. For instance, when I told my family I wanted to be a teacher and pursue my PGCE, they accepted me furthering my studies. I was so grateful and appreciative of them supporting me while I pursued my passion. My improvement was conspicuous as I entered the Master’s programme; I began enhancing my knowledge and preparing myself to be an effective teacher in various contexts; my research was equipping me with the tools to improve my professional practice. When I depicted the vision I have for my future teacher identity, this described the desire to improve, to be able to help learners in need and to be the teacher that learners need.

Norah also shared stories of desiring to improve and appreciating her experiences. She stated that although she faced one challenge after another, she was grateful to obtain her degree. She also expressed her gratitude for her career; Norah said that through her hard times, her job was the motivating factor getting her out of bed every day because she had to show up to work. Norah shared that her career had given her direction in life, and she was appreciative of her new job, which exposed her to aspects of the profession that she had never seen before. She was learning various new techniques, teaching strategies, and even ways to balance the excessive workload of being a teacher. Norah is being exposed to diverse learners and is constantly learning and growing. She shared her gratitude that she has managed to overcome all the negatives in her life, and feels as if she has ‘made it’.

Kira’s stories also express her desire to improve as she pursues her Master’s degree. Kira shared an account of the trauma she faced when she was younger. She declared that she often wanted to be alone and used her academics to escape, which led her to thrive academically. Kira was appreciative that she had her academics to use as a distraction. Kira’s excitement was illustrated in her collage when she chose the images stating, ‘Dream Big. Set Goals. Take Action’ and ‘I Can/’t,’ which is a play on words that means ‘I can’. She had a strong desire to reach her goals and was motivated by wanting to make her father proud. Kira also included a story of ‘watering herself’, meaning she was using this time in her life to work on herself and improve. She shared that she wanted to be a better version of herself to be a better teacher for her learners. She is developing herself and her practice to embody the change she wants to see in the educational field. Kira added that she wanted to improve herself to ensure that her learners had someone to turn to and lean on.

Serena shared the desire to improve as well. This desire was expressed in her collage, when she was striving for perfectionism in her academics. Serena added that she was working and experimenting with her teaching style and modern teaching techniques. Although Serena expressed her dissatisfaction with still being unemployed, she was appreciative of accomplishing her degree. She has a strong desire to improve and obtain her Honours, Master’s, and eventually her PhD. Serena has the desire to be a teacher who improves the lives of her learners – she wants to make a difference and be the teacher she never had.

All participants shared stories of being grateful for their experiences and the desire to improve both individually and professionally. The Stories of Appreciation for Experiences and the Desire to Improve have given me clarity on how these stories have influenced early-career teacher identities. I have found that through the experience of storytelling, whether the story disclosed was positive or negative, participants found they had made peace or were starting to make peace with the experience. Participants were releasing the power that these memories had over them. By sharing stories connected with this theme, participants found that it created a desire for change and improvement. If we had gone through something challenging, we knew what to do next time to avoid or lessen the harmful impact of the circumstances. We learned and were motivated to do better next time.

An insight that I gained about these stories was the surprise that many of my participants felt during my research process, as they realised what experiences they had been through, or came to the realisation that this is their current situation. A takeaway from this is that participants became aware that they could make it through such circumstances and ascertained through these stories that they had strength. They found appreciation for the events that took place, as they made them stronger, built their character in a sense, and helped all participants to recognise the gap between where they are and where they want to be. Looking at the stories shared, we all had a drive within us to change and improve.

The most valuable discovery for me was that it was the events of the complex stories that we conveyed that we appreciated most. This appreciation is because we became aware that we survived those challenging experiences. I have shared memories that I wanted to forget, but when I realised that I had made it to the other side, I found appreciation for my younger self. If I had never gone through having bad matric results, I never would have found my motivation to pursue my studies; I would have never expressed the gratitude I did when I finally entered a university. I would never have worked so hard. So, these stories play a role and have impacted me. I unconsciously carry this story with me, and it pushes me to keep working hard, even in my studies now. That is why I work harder and devote a lot of my time to my education, because I never want to be in a position where I become ‘that’ person again. It has pushed me to improve and work on myself. The same is evident for my participants who have had negative experiences with teachers. This caused them to shift their teaching style, and I see these events unconsciously expressed even in their personal identities.

After hearing these stories from participants, I have seen the impact of these stories, and there are thoughts that I ponder. As most of us have found appreciation in painful memories, I wonder how these have negatively impacted us. How did the experiences told in these stories demotivate us? I question if these stories have stunted our growth, and if we could have been further along in our lives and careers if these things had never happened. Examining these thoughts has shown me that we are always a decision away from having a different outcome.

Through the stories of other teachers, I am opening up professionally because the stories they shared resonated with me. I now realise the extent of the impact of my lived experiences on my professional identity. I am also more aware and sensitive to my possible influence on learners. I recognise that I have the power to leave lifelong impressions on my future learners, and it is, to some extent at least, my choice whether they are positive or negative. I also now perceive my future learners the way I perceive my participants; we all have different stories and beliefs that impact us. This will allow me to see each learner as an individual and be more open-minded to their unique characteristics and needs.

My constructivist theoretical perspective is based on the premise that early-career teachers were actively constructing their own identities. Their knowledge gained through lived experiences allowed them to combine these different aspects to form and re-form their identity (Steenekamp et al., 2018). Storytelling allowed us to relive memories, and interactions with others, which provoked emotions; these experiences developed our early-career identities. Adichie (2009) added that identities are formed through the places we visit and the people we meet. This approach helped me understand these events' contribution and how the participants interpreted them to develop their early-career teacher identities. This approach shows me the influence of these events and how we story them, making us who we are.

My readings on teacher identities and storytelling have shown me that it is a complex concept and that identities are constantly shifting. This phenomenon was explained by Akkerman and Meijer (2011). They stated that identity alters based on the context and provokes different parts of self. At the same time, Rodgers and Scott (2008) concur that identity is shifting, unstable and multiple, involving constant construction and reconstruction. Identity development is based on events and experiences we have had and the challenges we have faced. Hamman et

al. (2010) added that in addition to this, other factors contributing to identity include the teacher's beliefs, relationships, life history, goals, and personal narratives. Considering the aforementioned aspects of one's life, I understood how the participants would come to appreciate their experiences and desire to improve. Recognising the link between our stories and identity development has helped me understand my participants' professional identities.

Because these stories have created awareness and made an impression on the participants, our identities have potentially shifted. The people, places, and circumstances we were exposed to in our lives (Hamman et al., 2010) contribute to who we are and how we interact within the classroom. Because of these stories, we can communicate with learners and colleagues in a certain way, and we can respond and react in the way that we do because we interpret things and make sense of the world in specific ways relative to our lived experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The readings suggest that teacher identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), so I see the influence of these stories on the development of early-career teacher identity. Teacher identities are how we make sense of ourselves and present ourselves to the world (Li & Craig, 2019). These identities have been developed through our experiences, contributing to who we are and why we want more (to improve).

5.4.3. Theme Three: Stories of Excitement and Clarity

The third genre of stories that participants shared were stories of clarity in their teacher identities and excitement for the future. For instance, in my collage I shared the story of knowing that I wanted to become a teacher, and I changed my entire career path – I was excited to embark on this new journey. In the 'present' section of my collage I chose to include 'Clarity' as one of my images, because it allowed me to express how I felt about my current position. I am pursuing my Master's degree, and I am clear about the reasons behind doing so. I communicated that the knowledge generated in my study would help me in professional practice and might enhance the profession for other educators. I also depicted excitement and clarity when I described my 'future' teacher identity, as I shared my clear vision of the type of teacher I want to be – one who is there for her students and helps create a better future for them.

Stories of clarity and excitement for the future were especially evident in Norah's collage. Through the struggles in her past, it became clear to her that she wanted to be a teacher. She also expressed the excitement she felt as she got her first job in a teaching position. But stories of clarity and excitement were mainly found in the 'future' section of her collage. Norah is clear on the identity she wants to embody and how she wants to make her learners feel. She knows she wants to create a classroom where learners are enthusiastic about learning, and she wants to ignite her learners' passion for knowledge. Norah added that although she has been facing struggles in her personal life recently, she knows she will overcome this and confidently expresses her exhilaration and excitement about the version of herself that is being created.

Kira, too, relayed stories of clarity in her identity and narratives of enthusiasm for the future. For instance, she said she had always known that she wanted to be a teacher; this was evident in her youth when she was 'teaching' her grandparents on a chalkboard. Kira added that she is elated about where she is currently on what she calls her self-development journey. Kira is furthering her studies; she is learning, growing, and finding clarity about who she is and why she acts as she does. Kira also feels exhilarated because she knows she is making her father proud. The experiences she has been exposed to throughout her life created immense certainty in her about what type of teacher she wants to be: she wants to be approachable, have a good relationship with her learners, and help learners. This stems from her experiences, where Kira saw many of her peers struggling in their personal lives with no adult support when they needed it. She added that as teachers, we never know what the student is experiencing at home. Kira voiced her excitement about the clear vision she has of her future classroom and the strategies she wants to implement to motivate her students and increase their enthusiasm for learning.

Serena shared her clearness on what she wants to achieve academically and the type of teacher she wants to be, as well. This was communicated through her collage when she stated that she was experimenting with teaching styles; she was already trying to realise the teaching style she will embrace when she finally becomes a teacher. Serena also shared stories of elation about the fact that she has graduated and is searching for a job. Although she has not yet found a teaching position, she remains hopeful and excited about her unfolding path. She has vast ideas and is precise about the teacher she wants to be when she does find a job. Serene shared that she wants to create a happy learning environment and wants her learners to feel and be empowered. Because of her past experiences, she has found clarity in wanting to be a teacher

who creates a safe space for her learners, and who her learners can confide in. Serena also expressed her eagerness to further her studies and eventually obtain her PhD.

The participants and I shared stories of having a clear vision for our teacher identities because of what we have encountered. We communicated our excitement for where we are currently and what we hope to achieve in the future. I discovered that the participants shared stories about having clarity on what they want in their lives and being excited about what is ahead has affected their early-career identities. They expressed clarity on what they want; they know what they are working towards. The participants have envisaged their vision for their future and the type of teacher they want to be and don't want to be. Because of this, they might adjust accordingly. They can see how they and their identity might align with what it is that they want. Their desires and what they want in their future – their shift – is what drives them to act and behave in the way they do.

The insights I gained about Stories of Excitement and Clarity are that when early-career teachers come to know what they want, the future they want to have, and the teacher they want to be, this can shift their identity. This awareness and knowledge can cause them to respond differently and behave differently in contexts. They might adjust according to their goals, what they are working towards, and future aspirations they are excited about. By sharing my own story and being told my participants' stories, I have a greater understanding of the influence of these stories on the development of our early-career teacher identities.

The most valuable discovery I have made from these Stories of Excitement and Clarity is that this clarity stems from the experiences and stories participants have relayed. The events from their past have influenced the type of teacher they want to be, how they want their classrooms to look, and the strategies they would implement. This stems from seeing their teachers doing certain things; the participants have found methods they wish to imitate - which are described in the stories they have revealed about being excited for the future, and techniques they discovered does work for them.

Taking a constructivist theoretical stance has helped me identify how Stories of Excitement and Clarity can affect the development of early-career teacher identities. The construction of early-career teacher identity is influenced by associations and connections with others (Richardson, 1997). Through storytelling and identifying what we want in our future,

individuals can get to the root of their identities and construct versions of their identities aligned with their paths (Noonan, 2018). This ties into early-career teacher identity development. Through exposure to the actions of others and interactions with them, we can gain clarity as teachers on what we want and how we want to be. This approach has shown me that the associations with others contribute to clarifying who we are and the type of teacher we want to be.

Early-career teacher identities are described as renegotiating their ideals, especially in the first year of working in a school (Day, 2011). And some factors contribute to the development of early-career teachers' identities, such as university education, practical experience, lived experiences and assessing professional ideas (Eteläpelto et al., 2015). Other factors include identity work, such as reflection and storytelling, contributing to developing an early-career teachers' identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In combination with my reading on teacher identities, the stories shared by participants have helped me understand the development of our early-career teacher identities. I comprehend the reasoning behind their clarity. I am now aware of how participants came to conclusions about what they want and are working toward achieving. Reflecting (a contributing factor to how identities are developed) has helped participants understand our visions and exhilaration for the future. This clarity impacts the development of early-career teacher identities.

5.5. How the Themes are Relevant to the Research Questions

5.5.1. Sub-Question One: What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?

By analysing and interpreting the data, my understanding of stories that early-career teachers tell when asked about their past experiences, my comprehension of what has shaped their professional identities, has expanded. It is evident that when sharing stories, my participants and I immediately told stories about hardships. We voiced stories that told of our difficulties, our tragedies, and our pain. We instinctively expressed stories of struggle because these have made the most significant impact on us. Even though these stories of hardships occurred many years ago, I recognised that we could clearly recall events in which we experienced trauma and intense emotion, as if they were happening in the present moment. We shared stories that still

affected us to some degree. The stories we told of hardships were stories that changed us in some way.

The participants in this study also found it gratifying to communicate stories that we were grateful had occurred, which promoted our desire to improve. I discovered that we broadcast positive memories that we were proud of and found a great appreciation for. We also found aspects to appreciate in negative memories that we shared, reasoning that if these experiences did not happen, we would not be the versions of ourselves that we are today. Whether the memory was positive or negative, we found inspiration within these stories and how they had motivated us to improve. In this way, many of us found peace and relief.

Participants instinctively disclosed stories of their clear vision for their future selves and what they were most excited about. Once we had all moved past telling stories of times that hurt us, we seemed to feel as if the storm had finally passed, and we could see the silver lining in the clouds. We began telling stories of what and how we want to make a positive change, how we want to avoid repeating negative patterns, and the difference we want to make. By sharing these stories, I felt all participants' beams shine just a little brighter when they spoke about their passion and how they want to impact their students positively. I could feel the energy in the stories they shared of their clear visions, the teaching techniques they wished to implement, and the academic aspirations they had set out for themselves. Many of us often envision these desired futures; therefore, it came naturally to speak about our future aspirations and excitement for what was yet to come.

5.5.2. Sub-Question Two: How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?

It was evident that early-career teachers' understandings of their identities had shifted after sharing their past experiences through storytelling. For instance, when voicing stories of hardships, many of us reflected on and realised how strong we are to have endured those experiences. When sharing ways in which we want to improve, it was as if we were reminded of our aspirations and passions. When we expressed stories of clarification and excitement, we became clear on what we wanted to achieve and aligned ourselves with these goals. Therefore, I would say the understanding of our identities altered, because we felt appreciation for ourselves, realised our strengths, and gained confidence within ourselves and about our

abilities. Our interpretations of our professional identities were amended, as we were more compassionate with our learners because we were reminded of our own struggles. We have been reminded what it is like to be a learner, and we are more understanding, compassionate and empathetic.

Many of us were exposed to the adverse effects of reliving memories. In those moments that we conveyed our misfortunes and tragic moments, we felt resentment and bitterness. However, I think it was evident with my participants and myself that we all concluded that we had to make peace with these past events, and that holding on to these challenging times would do more harm than good. Overall, I would say we are more empowered, more self-aware, and more mindful of the stories we tell about ourselves, and have revised these stories for our benefit and personal happiness.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to analyse and interpret the data represented in Chapters Three and Four. These data have now been used to respond to my main research question: **How can the power of storytelling influence the identity development of early-career teachers?**

And my two sub-questions:

1. What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?
2. How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?

This chapter included an interpretive memory drawing that relays my understanding of the collection of drawings submitted by participants, and an interpretive collage that displays an interpretation of the collages constructed and presented by participants. I developed three themes that addressed the types of stories the participants shared: Stories of Hardships, Stories of Appreciation of Experiences and the Desire to Improve, and Stories of Excitement and Clarity.

As I developed this chapter and presented the sections mentioned above, I made sense of the stories shared. I found similarities and differences in the stories and recognised common themes connecting participants' accounts.

I also identified the types of stories early-career teachers told about their lived experiences and how these have shaped their professional identities. I recognised the shifts in early-career teachers' understanding of their identities after re-telling and reliving their past experiences through the various creative data generation practices.

We all have different stories, and through recalling, depicting, sharing, and reflecting on these stories, we can make sense of what we are exposed to in life. As shown in Chapters Three and Four, creative storytelling practices such as drawing and collage making proved influential in the research process. They assisted participants in portraying, sharing, and reflecting on these stories. The memory drawing and collage making activities facilitated discussions about the stories between myself and other participants. The interview process also served to be advantageous as it stimulated thoughts and conversation; it provided insights into participants' feelings and emotions. It gave me as the researcher a first-hand version of the stories directly from the source, who I could refer to for further comprehension of the stories. The reflective journals gave me a new perception of how the participants interpreted the stories and an account of how they were genuinely feeling about the event. Using creative storytelling practices added accuracy, authenticity, and realism to this research.

Individuals have multiple stories that influence who they are becoming. Even contrasting stories are significant, depending on the context in which they are told. I want readers to have insight into the participants' stories and remember that such stories do not constrain who they are, but add other dimensions. I want readers to keep in mind that the chronicle of an early-career teacher's identity can be changed through reflecting, revising, and finding ways to improve. As teachers, it is pivotal to reflect and ensure that we are happy with our versions of ourselves, as we influence the lives of many and the outcome of their futures.

Storytelling influenced the participants' understanding of themselves because by recounting and reflecting on the past, they could uncover more about why they respond and react the way they do. Participants became aware that they often perceive aspects of their life in specific ways because of their past experiences. This also played a role in their visions of the future and their expected personal and professional outcomes. For instance, Norah was told she would not be successful in life; in the end, this motivated her to pursue a degree. Storytelling gave

participants insights into the motivations behind their desired futures. Overall, through engaging in this study and in the storytelling activities, participants expressed that they now had a better understanding of themselves, the influences of the past, and their anticipated futures. Overall, I want readers to understand the power that a story can hold, to either serve or destabilise us. I want early-career teachers to use this power for wellbeing and happiness in life and in our careers.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

This chapter's title describes moving from the unknown to the known and represents early-career teachers becoming self-aware.

6.1. Introduction

The focus of this study has been on understanding how past experiences influence the development of early-career teacher identities, through storytelling. I wanted to witness the stories that early-career teachers tell when asked about past experiences that might have influenced their professional identities. Additionally, I sought to appreciate how early-career teacher identities might shift when they are invited to tell stories of their past and consider future stories. In this way, I hoped to better understand the power of stories and their impact on early-career teachers' personal and professional identities.

The previous chapter addressed the research questions based on the data represented in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Five provides an interpretive drawing and description to explain the image based on the participants' memory drawings. It also includes an interpretive collage and collage description that I wrote. In addition, themes were developed based on the data portrayed in the previous two chapters. Three themes were designed to depict the stories shared by participants. The first is Stories of Hardships, where participants shared the adversities and heartbreaks experienced in their lives. Second is Stories of Appreciation of Experiences and the Desire to Improve, where participants share what has caused them to feel gratitude and motivated them to progress. Last is Stories of Excitement and Clarity, where participants express enthusiasm for the future and confidence in the vision they want for themselves.

This chapter begins with a review of the dissertation, comprising an overall appraisal of the previous chapters. This is followed by my personal-professional learning, providing insight into how this research affected and influenced me. Next is an outline of the methodological understanding, which is a reflection on my chosen methodology and research practices. Lastly,

a section titled ‘Moving forward’ explains what I would like to explore further in future research and the new questions I would like to probe.

6.2. Review of the dissertation

The following paragraphs provide an overall review of the dissertation, referring back to each of the previous chapters, explaining what was covered and highlighting the key messages. Readers can also expect to find connections between the chapters and how each inspired the development of the next.

Chapter One: Exploring the influence of storytelling on early-career teachers’ identity development

Chapter One introduces the research. It provides the focus and purpose of the study and insight into my background, which was necessary for understanding my personal and professional rationale behind this study. I wanted readers to know my reasoning because I, too, am an early-career teacher, and this study affects me personally and professionally. The chapter includes an in-depth explanation of who early-career teachers are and how their identities form. I then shared the aim and research questions because I wanted readers to keep these in mind while reading the dissertation. This is followed by a review of the literature in which I shared my understanding of possible links between teacher identity and storytelling about lived experiences. I explained my theoretical perspective, a constructivist approach, which enabled me to identify the contextual nature of identity. This perspective facilitated the recognition of the link between our surroundings, the people around us, and how we learn (Richardson, 1997). Furthermore, it empowered my understanding that our lived experiences formed and re-formed our identities by associating and connecting with others (Richardson, 1997). This perspective also encouraged the notion that previous insights and knowledge are the foundation for expanding one’s knowledge (Steenekamp et al., 2018). In addition, I briefly introduced my narrative inquiry methodological approach, because I wanted readers to understand how I would elicit and share the early-career teachers’ stories and why I felt this approach was suitable for my study.

A key message from Chapter One is that I focused specifically on understanding the identity development of early-career teachers in relation to storytelling. The value of this chapter is that it exposes readers to my interest, passion, and driving force to pursue the research topic.

Overall, Chapter One provides the reader with helpful insights and sets the scene for the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two: Approaching the inquiry

Chapter Two gives readers insight into my understanding of the narrative inquiry methodological approach. I explained why this was most suitable for my area of interest and beneficial to my study. The chapter also introduces the early-career teachers, including myself, a 24-year-old Indian Master's candidate, in a dual role as researcher and participant. The other participants included a 28-year-old coloured foundation phase teacher (Norah Shaik), a 23-year-old Indian intermediate phase educator (Serena Singh), and a 28-year-old Indian Master's candidate (Kira Omar). After that, I introduced readers to my data generation strategies, and the activities we would engage in: memory drawing, collage making, an interview, and journal writing. I explained that data were generated through online platforms due to COVID-19. I described how I drew on the generated data to compose creative nonfiction pieces presented in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. I explained how I analysed and interpreted the data using creative analytical techniques. Furthermore, I discussed how I addressed issues of trustworthiness and ethical integrity. The chapter also provided an awareness of the challenges I faced within this study and how they were overcome.

Chapter Two is distinctive because it takes readers on the research journey and through my thought processes as a researcher and participant. Readers are presented with my vision and planning for this study, including the careful selections and choices regarding various aspects, such as my participants, the data generation activities, and representation and analytical methods.

Chapter Three: Putting together the pieces of the puzzle

Chapter Three displays selected data generated by two participants in this study. This chapter represents the data from me and participant Norah Shaik. It consists of our memory drawings and the lived experience descriptions that I created, our collages and the collage descriptions I developed, a selection of excerpts from my self-interview, and the interview conducted with Norah, with my thoughtful comments. Last is a selection of extracts from each participant's journal, also with my reflective comments.

The chapter shares stories that we, as early-career teachers, told when asked how lived experiences might have affected our identities. I wanted readers to experience the stories with us. I attempted to do this by appealing to the sense of sight by including the visual materials produced through memory drawing and collage making. I wanted to invite readers into participants' thoughts and experiences by presenting first-hand accounts in excerpts from their interviews and personal journal entries. I also offered evocative descriptions of the memory drawings using van Manen's (1990) guidelines for writing lived experience descriptions. In addition, I presented detailed collage descriptions whereby I considered the meanings of the images and words displayed in the collages. And I wove my reflective comments throughout the interview and journal entry sections. The images, excerpts, descriptions, and reflective comments were all included to amplify the chapter's readability and ensure it was enjoyable, captivating, and exciting. Additionally, they were included for clarity and emphasis, which was pivotal for the following chapters.

What I find to be valuable from this chapter is that it is the first encounter readers have with the data generated by participants. It is also interesting to recognise how participants' past experiences (depicted mainly in the memory drawings and collages) have influenced their present and might influence the future, as seen in their responses in the interview section and the expression of their inner thoughts, presented in their journal entries. This chapter links to Chapter Four, which displays data generated by the other two participants. It also connects to Chapter Five, where the data are analysed and interpreted.

Chapter Four: Putting together more pieces of the puzzle

Chapter Four is a continuation of Chapter Three and represents the data generated by the remaining two participants, Kira Omar and Serena Singh. It covers the memory drawings created by these two participants and the lived experience descriptions I created. It consists of the collages they developed and the collage description that I constructed, a selection of excerpts from the interview we engaged in, and a selection of quotes from their journal entries, with my thoughtful comments to enhance readers' understanding. The data generated are closely analysed and interpreted in the following chapter, to fully understand the power of these stories and give my readers and me a better understanding of the impact of the stories shared by participants.

An aspect of this chapter that stands out for me, and that I would like readers to recall, is how patterns in our life tend to repeat themselves. This is evident when participant Kira encountered an experience as a child, and again as an adult. This is crucial to bear in mind, as it highlights that we become aware of and reflecting on such patterns can prompt us to consider addressing them. I also want readers to feel the power teachers have, especially in Serena's stories, where her love and hate for school fluctuated as she interacted with different teachers. The chapter shows how our teachers leave a lasting impression on us.

Chapter Five: Zooming in and out

Chapter Five provides a creative analysis and interpretation of the data represented in Chapters Three and Four. This chapter responds to my main research question: *How can the power of storytelling influence the identity development of early-career teachers?* It also responds to the two sub-questions:

1. *What stories do early-career teachers draw on and tell when asked how their past experiences, to identify what might have shaped their professional identities?*
2. *How do early-career teachers' identities shift when they are invited to re-tell their past experiences through storytelling?*

Chapter Five includes an interpretive memory drawing with a description, based on the series of drawings submitted by each participant, followed by an interpretive collage and collage description that I constructed; these depict my interpretation of participants' collages and memory drawings. They also explain how I made sense of participants' experiences and perceived their thoughts and feelings, and show how I identified connections in the form of similarities and differences in participants' stories. Through the visual interpretations and descriptions, I created three themes that were embodied across participants' stories. Theme one is Stories of Hardships, where participants shared difficult times in their lives. The second is Stories of Appreciation and the Desire to Improve, where participants shared their gratitude for their experiences and how these motivated them. The last theme is Stories of Excitement and Clarity, where participants told stories about being excited for their future and the clear vision they have for going forward. These themes helped me understand the type of stories shared by early-career teachers when asked about their lived experiences, to grasp how their identity development was influenced through storytelling. It also enabled me to discern how their early-

career teacher identities shifted when they were invited to share their past experiences through storytelling.

This chapter is especially notable as it consolidates and presents my research findings. It highlights the links between our stories and associates our current and future identities with our past experiences. The chapter shows how we became enlightened about how our past experiences have subtly influenced us. Lastly, although I have identified common and recurring themes, I want readers to remember that we have the power to grow and expand in new directions.

6.3. Personal-Professional Learning

This section explains how conducting this research has affected and influenced me as a researcher and educational practitioner. I start by reminding the reader of my personal and professional rationale behind engaging in this particular area of study. I then explain what I now know about my research topic that I did not know before. I describe how this research changed my educational outlook and could affect my educational practice. Lastly, I report on what I know about myself and others I did not know before, and how I have changed.

I had both professional and personal rationales behind engaging in research of this nature. Professionally, I felt that this study would be beneficial to me as a newly qualified teacher. I am aware of teachers' influence and impact on learners; therefore, I felt it necessary to reflect on my past experiences and stories to present the best version of myself to my impressionable learners. In addition, as a teacher, a variety of challenges exist within this profession; for instance, learners with different backgrounds and needs, challenges in the schooling environment, dealing with parents, and administrative work on top of updating files and marking. Therefore, I felt that this kind of research was necessary to explore how my colleagues and I could learn more about ourselves to help handle these challenges and take care of our well-being and satisfaction. The news tells of an alarming rate of teachers leaving the profession, which triggered my interest in this topic. Professionally, I hoped that this research would assist early-career teachers in becoming more committed to the profession and ignite their passion for teaching by remembering why they chose this profession.

I also had personal rationales behind engaging in this type of research, because I wanted to explore connections between my identity and my lived experiences. I wanted to understand how my experiences might have influenced my identity as an early-career teacher. I wanted to fully grasp and become aware of my stories and explore the power of storytelling. I chose to work with participants to expose myself to various stories and explore how others' experiences have impacted them. I felt excited about the nature of this research, and it was something I wanted to explore for personal and professional reasons.

There are various things I now know about this research topic that I did not know before. For instance, I am now more fully aware of past experiences' power over early-career teachers and how these can affect our thinking about our selves and our profession. I am mindful of the importance of choices in life – how we perceive an experience can have significant consequences for ourselves and those we interact with. I have realised that we can change our view of a story of lived experience, through reflecting and revising.

As an educational practitioner, I have been affected by learning about the trauma and adversities that my participants experienced during their schooldays. I have been exposed to how early-career teachers all carry positive and negative memories from school. We can recall these childhood memories as if they were occurring right now. This has affirmed how important it is as a teacher to be understanding, compassionate and kind, and flexible, because we never know what a learner is experiencing at home. As teachers, we do not get the whole story, so it is important not to label learners and instinctively assume the worst, because these children are highly impressionable. We can easily damage their self-esteem and confidence. Thus, engaging in this research has changed my educational outlook regarding responding to other people and situations. Like, for example, Kira who stated, *“Before actually, you know, reacting. Thinking about the decisions that I make and what choices, my own perspectives and beliefs, and how these will influence my choices”*. In my future practice as a teacher, I will try and think twice before responding and reacting, because I wonder how it will impact my students. I will ponder if this interaction will be one of their best or worst school memories.

This research has affected my professional identity because I am more confident in my decision to be a teacher; I am more content. I think this satisfaction within my professional identity has made me feel more positive about being a teacher. I am also more open to exploring different

teaching styles and techniques, as my awareness of the diverse needs of learners has expanded. I am keen to create a classroom that is a happy environment for my learners, and to be the teacher that my participants and I did not always have access to.

I have discovered many things about others and myself through this process. I have found that we are affected by our past and what we have experienced. However, this can shift based on what we are exposed to; how we react and respond also plays a significant role. I have seen the effect and importance of the patterns we have created, and until we become aware of this, we might continue repeating them. Until we reflect, we are unlikely to revise and improve. I have seen how every story has influenced us, and I know how the big stories have such a powerful impact on us that we can recall them as if they are happening right now. I wonder how often many of us replay these stories in our minds, and how we would be different if that one thing had not happened and did not affect us.

Through this research, I would say that I have changed. It has not been easy to sit and think about memories that have hurt me and that I feel ashamed of. It was not easy to be vulnerable and share these stories. Having to relive them and witnessing the stories of others, I realise that we are all going through something. I have identified the benefits of this research, such as becoming aware and using this to improve. I have also had to face the reality that I had certain experiences and their impact on me. I am facing the realisation that I have limiting beliefs, and that there are still negative experiences that I hold on to and sometimes use, which do not always serve me. My excuses for responses and actions could sometimes be deemed inappropriate for the context. This research has been a reality check, and although I can be proud of myself, I am also fearful for the future and afraid to repeat old patterns.

One of the biggest takeaways from my research that I have realised and that sticks with me is that I understand that people react from their point of view; they respond from their beliefs, experiences, contexts, etcetera. Therefore, it was liberating for me to know that the rude and harmful things done by others were not about them, and really did not have much to do with the victims. For example, in Chapter Three when we were introduced to Norah's 'Evil Aunt'. It was evident Norah's aunt was facing her own internal battles and took out her frustrations on innocent little Norah by degrading and mocking her. Becoming aware of this helps me slightly release the resistance from negative experiences that I have had with others. I know

that the only thing I can control is myself, so now I put most of my effort and energy into what I can control.

Overall, there are many ways that this research has affected and influenced me. It has changed my perspective forever; now, when I interact with anyone, I will keep in mind that the stories of my past experiences that are helping me make sense of the world are part of the same system that helps others make sense of their experiences. As a researcher, I am more knowledgeable than I ever was when I started. As an educational practitioner, I have found room to improve and appreciate myself and how far I have come in this field.

6.4. Methodological Learning

This section reflects my chosen methodology of narrative inquiry, and research practices: memory drawings, collage making, interviewing, and reflective journaling. I explain how I addressed each of the guidelines for quality in narrative inquiry, and I share my learnings about narrative inquiry and my research practices. I also outline the aspects of the research process that did not go as planned, the most challenging parts of dealing with these, and my reasoning for this. I then express what I wish I had known before I started and what I would do differently if I did this kind of research again. I also share my advice to other students interested in using a similar methodology or research practices.

Influenced by my reading of Clandinin (2013), I addressed guidelines for quality in my narrative inquiry in several ways. Most importantly, I attended closely to participants' verbal and visual expressions. I formulated and asked questions and designed creative activities aligned with the research to generate valuable verbal and visual information. I prepared the questions in advance and attempted all the creative data generation activities beforehand, to advise and assist my participants if necessary. I also went through all the data and explored anything that needed clarification or to be revisited.

I intended to write authentically about the participants' experiences, in the form of the lived experience descriptions and collage descriptions, which I ensured were filled with rich detail. I confirmed enough data had been generated to tell the stories in-depth, considering each story's time, place, and context. Because I aimed to understand participants' stories on a deeper level,

I reflected on the people and places they have encountered, to appreciate how they have influenced their early-career teacher identity development. Furthermore, I was open and self-reflexive about my own and my participants' perceptions and perspectives of the research, and I acknowledged our subjectivities. I made my voice as the researcher evident by providing thoughtful comments to show my responses to the interview and journal entry excerpts.

I also applied Clandinin's (2013) guidelines by extending sensitivity towards my participants and the happenings of their life, as I understood that disclosing stories stirred up emotions within them. The engagements with participants were conducted respectfully and relationally. I was careful when I made distinctions and used terms, as I was sharing events that occurred in the lives of my participants; therefore, I paid meticulous attention to this. Overall, I strove to represent their reflections and memories considerately and accurately.

I made many discoveries about my research methodology. For instance, I have discovered the characteristics of narrative inquiry and how it was beneficial in my study. I found that narrative inquiry allowed me to exhibit my stories and my participants' stories in a way that gave meaning to our experiences and lives. Telling the stories allowed me to be creative and work with participants, which I enjoyed. I was able to understand and gain new perspectives on early-career teacher identity development through storytelling. Through narrative inquiry, I turned inwards, analysed the stories, and interpreted them. Now I can revisit these for my growth, benefit, and development. I also discovered that narrative inquiry led to triggering other memories; it has helped me make sense of my identity by putting the stories I live by into context through a safe and ethical platform. Lastly, narrative inquiry provided a pathway for me to become an educational researcher and explore other avenues to become a better educator and improve my research practice.

I also made discoveries about my research practices. For example, I now comprehend that all the tools I chose can be helpful for research purposes. I was sometimes sceptical about using arts-based research practices myself, as I considered myself less creative. However, I found that each research tool generated a different set of data, which were all useful in forming and sharing stories. I also found that the creative activities especially were enjoyable for me and the participants to engage in. I also realised that some activities are more challenging for participants than others, and it is sometimes best to choose a challenging creative practice to

stimulate a different outcome. All my creative data generation practices were extremely helpful in eliciting and relaying stories and getting to the roots of identity development.

I felt as though my research process went much smoother than I expected. I was equipped by my supervisor, who guided me along the way and assisted me with what to expect. I had designed the data generation activities carefully and knew what they entailed. I had an idea of who I could ask to participate in my study in advance, and I chose willing participants I had access to. The data generation process felt like the most time-consuming aspect because I had to wait for others, which made me feel stressed and anxious. I had to remind myself to stay patient, because I felt as though they might want to drop out if I had pushed them. But once the data generation process was complete, I was much calmer. I enjoyed using creative analytical practices to make meaning from the data. I was highly familiar with the data, easily recalling participants' submissions to discover similarities, differences, and themes. I am grateful to have had a supervisor who thoroughly prepared and guided me through the research process.

Aspects of the research that were challenging to deal with were getting familiar with the literature, and the amount of content I had to go through to understand teacher identities and storytelling before exploring the phenomena fully. Another problematic aspect of this research process was generating data with my participants. Although there were not many speed bumps in the process, and my participants were cooperative, it was challenging, as participants had to take the time to attempt the activities on top of their work and studies. I often felt like a burden because participants took time out of their own lives to do this for me, and no incentives were provided. Working with participants with different schedules was difficult, as they could not always complete the activity within the stipulated period, and the process was sometimes delayed.

What I wish I had known from the start is that this process cannot be rushed. Doing research is a process that has its highs and lows. Sometimes I had all the motivation, and was working from 6 a.m., and other times I felt overwhelmed and could not get any work done. I wish I had known that I would experience burnout from time to time, but taking a break and having a supportive and knowledgeable supervisor helped me out of my slump on numerous occasions, and gave me the motivation I needed.

If I were doing this kind of research again, I would be more open-minded and vulnerable in my data generation activities. I feel as though I did hold back in the beginning, especially with my memory drawings. I wish I had taken more time to reflect on more personal issues, so I fully understand the impact of why I am the way I am. Although all the memories I had chosen were powerful and impactful, they were primarily school-related. Once I started generating data with my participants, I saw the benefit of being more personal in my research.

The advice I would give to any other student using a similar methodology would be to do it! I enjoyed using a narrative inquiry methodological approach. I shared my story and my participants' stories, representing our knowledge and insights for readers. I also feel that through narrative inquiry, I had a unique experience with my participants. I was able to have one-on-one discussions and pose open-ended questions, which allowed me to obtain in-depth information and stimulate the data generation process. I feel as though I grew and developed personally and as a researcher through narrative inquiry.

I would also encourage any other students interested in using memory drawings to engage in this technique. I would inform them that memory drawing is a valuable storytelling tool used to remember and generate constructive learning (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019b). Memory drawing can put participants face to face with their internal feelings, lived experiences, and events that have moulded and contributed to the story's development, to realise their early-career teacher identity. Memory drawing presents participants with a freedom-oriented creative platform that allows them to express and explore their inner thoughts and feelings (CohenMiller, 2018). Memory drawing allows for sharing stories, making lived experiences visible and highlighting events' critical contributions to identity development (CohenMiller, 2018). My memory drawing experience has helped me uncover past stories that influenced my behaviour and that I was holding on to. Allowing myself to become aware has helped me revise my perception of these events for my growth. The use of memory drawing can be helpful for creative expression, and to obtain different outcomes that help individuals understand the impact of their past experiences on the development of their early-career identity and professional growth.

I would advise and encourage students looking to organise their ideas and thoughts visually to use collage making. Through the use of collages, individuals can become enlightened, expand

their knowledge, and increase their commitments (Hiralaal, 2018) Collage making puts together a diverse range of seemingly unrelated pieces of text and images into a new whole (Charlie, 2016). Combined with the re-telling of stories, this can allow a rich, deep, and clear understanding of their early-career teacher identities (Hiralaal et al., 2018). For me, collage making helped me organise my thoughts and construct a clarified vision for my future self. It allowed me to be creative and have fun with the process.

I would advise any student interested in stimulating thoughts and conversations to engage in an interview process. Interviewing enabled me to gain insights, understand significant issues, facilitate discussions (Packard et al., 2004), and elicit detailed accounts of lived experiences (Pezalla et al., 2012). The interviews provided rich, first-hand insider perspectives and information (Packard et al., 2004). At first, I felt nervous about engaging in the self-interview process, but I expressed my inner thoughts and feelings once I became comfortable. I answered questions ‘on the spot’, which eliminated my need to provide the perfect answer and allowed me to be genuine, open, and honest. Interviewing provided a conversation space for participants and me to share our experiences and views.

I would suggest reflective journalling to any student looking to share their thoughts and feelings for professional research and growth (Scott Shields, 2016). Journalling enabled me to express my thoughts and feelings and put them into perspective. My journal was a space to share freely and identify what was going through my mind. This was especially beneficial after engaging in arts-based exercises that stimulated emotions. My experience using journalling as a participant enabled me to express my thoughts and feelings about the activities I was engaging in. As a researcher, I kept track of the research process, referred back to the journal, and identified patterns and themes. Journalling helped me to reflect and decipher how to proceed. As a researcher and participant, journalling was highly beneficial and served as a platform I could refer to throughout the process.

6.5. Moving Forward

Because of this study, there are things that I will do differently in the future. For instance, I feel as though I am more conscious of my thoughts and actions. I am more informed about the role that the stories I tell play in defining who I am. I am also more acquainted with different influences on and aspects of my identity and how I adapt to different contexts and influence

them. I am different because I will now choose to tell stories in ways that will benefit me and help me improve. As a teacher, I will be more open-minded and mindful, because I know how impressionable learners are. I feel as though my consciousness has been raised to everyone around me; I perceive people as having complex identities and comprehend how they adapt and how their stories differ based on a change in the surroundings. I feel my entire perception has changed, and the way I perceive things, people, and places has forever shifted.

This research has inspired me to explore areas of research further and to examine other questions. First, I would be curious to look at how the new knowledge that the participants and I have obtained might affect us in the future. I would also like to explore teacher identities further, such as why we interpret situations the way we do, and our behaviours, but through different avenues. I would like to get to the roots of our beliefs – what makes us do the things we do? There are many things I would like to explore further and questions I want to investigate and address that have been sparked because of this research.

6.7. Conclusion

From this dissertation, I want readers to recognise the power of storytelling. I want readers to become aware of their stories and how these stories influence their lives and identities. I want readers to become conscious of their past experiences and how they have impacted their identity development and decipher who they genuinely want to be. I want readers to be open to the idea of reflecting on their lived experiences, as this can serve them well both professionally and personally.

When invited to share stories of their past, early-career teachers chose to tell stories that had the most significant impact on their identity development. These included both encouraging and heart-breaking stories. We were ultimately grateful for learning from recalling and reflecting on these events, which inspired us to improve. We shared stories of our visions for the future and the areas where we have identified room for improvement. It was also evident that our identities had shifted, as we realised our strengths and were reminded of our aspirations and what we wanted to achieve through storytelling. We gained confidence and found appreciation for ourselves and all that we had overcome to get to where we are currently.

This research could have an impact on many people. It has affected my participants and me because we are more self-aware; our perspectives have shifted and expanded. I think this will also affect our current and future learners. These learners will have teachers entering the profession who are more understanding and compassionate, conscious of their impact, and reminded of why they are in the profession and want to be there. I would say anyone else exposed to the research would also be impacted, as they would realise that stories they have been telling and previous events have been influencing the direction of their lives. They will be likely to reflect and want to revise for their own improvement and align with their desires and aspirations in life. I would say that the participants in this study now understand the power of storytelling on our early-career teacher identities – and because of this awareness, we have stepped out of the darkness and into the light.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate



27 July 2021

Miss Sonam Maharaj (215078830)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Maharaj,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003088/2021

Project title: A Narrative Inquiry into the Power of Storytelling About Past Experiences in Early Career Teachers' Identity Development

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 July 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 27 July 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B: Template of a Consent Form

Informed Consent Letter for Participants (Unsigned)

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

111 Palmiet Road

Clare Estate

Durban

4091

Date:

Dear Early Career Teacher

My name is Sonam Maharaj. I am currently registered as a Master's degree student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Edgewood Campus. I am specialising in Teacher Development Studies. My contact details are as follows: Phone - 074 303 1777, or via email – sonammaharaj16@gmail.com / 215078830@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves researching your early-career teacher identity development. It is entitled 'A Narrative Inquiry into the Power of Storytelling about Past Experiences in Early Career Teachers' Identity Development.' The aim and purpose of this research are to inquire into early career teachers' past experiences through Storytelling. The study is expected to enroll four participants in total and will be conducted via online platforms. It will involve the following procedures: memory-drawings, collage-making, reflective journalling, and several semi-structured interviews with each participant. If you choose to enroll and remain in the study, the duration of your participation is expected to be two months. All online meetings and data generation activities will be completed outside of working hours. The data generation process will not interrupt your day-to-day activities as a teacher or postgraduate student.

The study will involve inquiring into past memories and sharing this with me as the researcher. I hope that the study will create the following benefit: understanding how your lived experiences have contributed to your early-career teacher identity development. Other potential and hoped-for benefits that may occur from this study are learning from past experiences,

revising and improving your current professional identity, and enhancing your professional practice. However, there are no incentives or reimbursements offered for participating in this study.

Suppose you, as the participant, begin to feel as though discussing certain events or experiences have become too difficult and might cause discomfort. In that case, you do have the option to share only what you feel comfortable and willing to share.

Participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur a penalty or discrimination. If you choose to withdraw, you may do so by informing me via telephone or email. Participants will be asked to withdraw from the study if they are not responsive and willing to participate when efforts to communicate and generate data are made.

To protect the confidentiality of personal information, I will only share in my study what you as the participant have given consent to. Please note that the information you provide is strictly confidential and will only be used to meet the requirements of the Master's degree in Education and resultant academic presentations and publications. Additionally, all names of participants will be replaced with pseudonyms. You will be provided with a copy of any data I am preparing to use in my study. Throughout the stages of study, I will also ensure your comfort and cooperation. The findings of the study will be shared with you via an online meeting.

Please take the time to think about your willingness to participate in this study.

Thank you.

Ms Sonam Maharaj (M Ed Student)

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

Should there be any questions/queries, please feel free to contact me, the researcher, at:

Cell: 074 303 1777; email: 215078830@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Cell: 084 027 5991; email: Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za

Or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 – Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT

I (name and surname) have been informed about the study entitled ‘A Narrative In Inquiry into the Power of Storytelling about Past Experiences in Early Career Teachers’ Identity Development.’ by Ms Sonam Maharaj .

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. I have been allowed to answer questions about the research and have had answers to my satisfaction. I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at: Cell: 074 303 1777; email: 215078830@stu.ukzn.ac.za or the supervisor Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Cell: 084 027 5991; email: Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher, then I may contact:

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 – Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent.

I hereby provide consent to:

| | |
|---|----------|
| Audio-record my online interviews for research purposes | YES / NO |
|---|----------|

| | |
|---|----------|
| Use of my memory drawings for research purposes | YES / NO |
|---|----------|

| | |
|---|----------|
| Use of my collage for research purposes | YES / NO |
|---|----------|

| | |
|---|----------|
| Use of my journal entries for research purposes | YES / NO |
|---|----------|

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix C: TurnItIn Report



Turnitin Originality Report

Full dissertation 6 October 2021 by Sonam Maharaj

From Coursework and dissertation (MEd self-study)

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CHAPTER ONE EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF STORYTELLING ON EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT 1.1. Introduction This narrative inquiry study is aimed at exploring the influence of storytelling about lived-experiences on the

2development of early-career teachers' identities. The purpose of

this study is to understand the influence on professional identities when early-career teachers are given a platform to tell stories about their past experiences. Chapter One provides the focus and purpose of the research, my background; to understand my rationale behind this research topic, as well as an explanation of who exactly early-career teachers are. This chapter also includes the objective of the research, and the research questions. The research questions are followed by a review of the literature, and a theoretical perspective, to provide an understanding of the phenomena being researched and the theoretical perspective utilized. Thereafter, there is also a brief introduction to the methodological approach, for the purpose of understanding how it was appropriately chosen for this study. 1.2. Focus and Purpose This research focused on the influence that storytelling about past experiences on the development of teachers' identities in the early career phase. The phenomenon being explored was storytelling about the lived experiences and the power this might have over one's current and future experiences, both personal and professional. Storytelling about lived experiences included the power of the story itself and the impact of components involved in telling and re-telling a story. The purpose of this research was to understand what could happen when early-career teachers told stories about how their past experiences might have shaped their professional identities. Furthermore, the aim was to understand what could happen when teachers were invited to become aware that a particular experience does not necessarily define them; they have the power to re-tell their stories in their way. 1.3. Early-Career Teachers 1.3.1. Who Are Early-Career Teachers? The term early-career teacher can contain multiple interpretations and definitions. Early-career teachers are defined as teachers starting out in the profession, between 3-5 years out of initial teacher education (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Day (2011) describes teacher identities as the way in which we make sense of ourselves as teachers; and as an early-career teacher it is defined as the renegotiating of this ideals, especially in the first year of working in a school. The idealisms of who an individual is prior to entering the

Appendix D: Editing Certificate

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2 November 2021

Declaration of editing of an M.Ed. thesis for UKZN

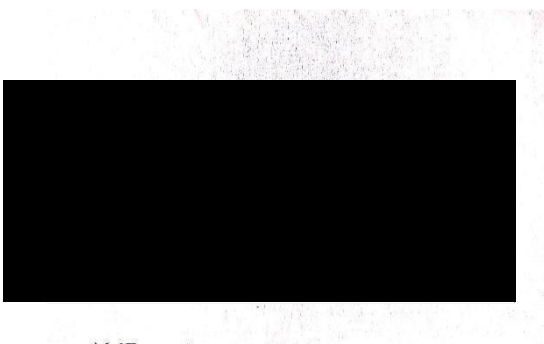
**TITLE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE POWER OF STORYTELLING
ABOUT PAST EXPERIENCES IN EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS' IDENTITY
DEVELOPMENT**

I hereby declare that I carried out language editing of the above thesis on behalf of Sonam Maharaj.

I am a professional writer and editor with many years of experience (e.g. 5 years on *SA Medical Journal*, 10 years heading the corporate communication division at the SA Medical Research Council), who specialises in Science and Technology editing - but am adept at editing in many different subject areas. I have edited a great deal of work for various academic journals, universities and publishers.

I am a full member of the South African Freelancers' Association as well as of the Professional Editors' Association.

Yours sincerely



LEVERNE GETHING

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Appendix E: Additional Appendices Included in the Dissertation

Guidelines/Prompts/Questions for each Data Generation Activity

Memory Drawing

Participants will be asked to create and share a series of drawings based on events which they feel have had the biggest impact on the development of their early-career teacher identity; potentially between 3-5 drawings. I will make my own memory drawing as an example and a guideline.

Furthermore, once the drawings have been created, participants will be asked to include a title as well as a caption. This caption will be a short-written description of the events occurring and the context within the image.

The participant should think as far back as possible to memories within their lived experience to explore memories that have impacted their identity development, and provide a drawing based on this. This drawing will represent the way in which they perceived the event. Thereafter, participants will be asked to reflect on this event while the memory is still current and causing emotions and feelings.

Collage

The collage is going to be an exciting activity that will be conducted throughout this research process. This is because participants can pick a series of texts and images of their choosing and construct a collage. I will be creating my own collage as an example.

The guidelines of this activity will be for the participant to firstly choose images and texts which represent their past (such as lived experiences and educational background). Secondly that represent their current selves as teachers, teaching styles, technique, and attitudes toward the profession. Lastly, they should choose images and texts to represent where and who they aspire to be in the future as educators.

This technique is powerful as it enables participants to see who and where they were and how far they have come as educators. It will show them the kind of teacher they see themselves as now, as well as potentially motivate them to their desired selves as educators. This reflection tool is aimed at providing participants with a sense of what they would aspire to change about

their current state, in order to develop their professional identity as well as become greater educators for their students.

Interview

The interview session will be conducted via online platforms such as Zoom for safety, and will be one on one to protect the privacy of the participant. The session will be recorded with consent from the participant in order to ensure the discussions are saved and all information generated via this method will be accessible at any point. For my participation in this process, as the researcher and participant, I will be conducting a self-interview. This will entail answering the same questions I pose for my participants, but in a written form. The questions posed during the interview will be related to the research topic; specifically, on storytelling about past experiences, and how it has impacted identity development and early-career teacher identities. There will be flexibility and freedom within the discussion. However, the posed questions will be utilised as a guide and will give a sense of direction to the conversation, as well as give the participants a background of the type of information I as the researcher would like to understand from them, and know more about.

Questions to be Asked in Interview Process

1. *Can you describe the setting of the school in your memory drawings?*
2. *How has reflecting on past experiences through storytelling utilising memory-drawing, reflective-journalling and collage-making, influenced your early-career teachers' identity?*
3. *How is the development of your professional identity through storytelling activities impacting current and future experience?*
4. *How reflecting on your story through storytelling activities such as memory drawing, reflective journalling, and collage making, caused you to see the profession you are in differently? Do you feel more or less passionate about being a teacher?*
5. *Now that you are aware of the story and the power it holds,*
 - 5.1. *What effect has this had on you? And in what way?*
 - 5.2. *By becoming self-aware, what influence has this had on the story you tell about the type of teacher you are, and what has, and in what way has the story changed?*
6. *Through storytelling, how will/has the change in story about your professional identity, change and impact the other aspects/identities that exist in your life?*

Reflective Journal

This data generative method will be a private space for the participant to share their thoughts and feelings after engaging in the data generation activities such as memory drawings, collage making, and interview.

I would like the participant to share the thoughts, feelings and emotions that were experienced after the activity. For the memory drawing and collage making, I stipulated guidelines such as *Were there any physical sensations when you relived the memory through storytelling in the memory drawing and collage making process?*

How do you feel about the event now?

Does this 'story' still affect you and have power over you?

Has this 'story' shaped/influenced your early-career teacher identity?

As you created your collage, and combined past, present and future, how has your vision for your identity as a teacher developed or changed?

Now that you have reflected and been able to express through storytelling, are you able to utilise this memory to improve and release?

For participants to express their thoughts and feelings about the final activity (the interview), and their overall thoughts on being a participant in this study, I stipulated guidelines such as:

What were the thoughts and feelings you felt before, during and after the interview?

What are your overall thoughts about the activities that we did?

How did participating in the study affect you; did you find relief, healing, or has reliving these memories negatively impacted you?

What have you noticed or become aware of about your early-career teacher identity?

What are your final thoughts after being a participant in this study?