Exploring the personal and professional identities of special education

teachers through small stories

by

FADEKEMI OLAMIDE BANKOLE

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ABSTRACT

There have been numerous studies internationally and in South Africa that have explored the identities of teachers in ordinary schools. However, research on the identities of special education teachers is very limited. Through narrative inquiry, this study explored the personal and professional identities of special education teachers at a school in KwaZulu-Natal.

The key research question was: How do these special education teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities? Six teachers on the staff of a special school for learners with mild to moderate intellectual disability were participants in the study. The narrative interview was used as the means of data generation.

The findings revealed that there is a strong intersection between the personal and professional identities of the six special education teachers. Further, their cultural backgrounds and emotionality play a pivotal role in the lives of these special education teachers, and shape how they negotiate their identities and the subject positions they take in the special school context. The study suggests that the self-identity of a teacher needs to be seen in terms of the personal and professional, as there is a personal dimension to much of a teacher's work.

The teachers' personal beliefs and values nurtured within their cultural backgrounds influence their teaching experiences, teaching philosophy, teaching practice and teacher identity. There is little doubt that the identities of the six teachers are embedded in their personal biographies. The study shows that that professional identity is multifaceted and multi-layered. Further, the teacher narratives in this study revealed that emotions are a critical facet of professional identity formation. Narrative inquiry proved to be a valuable method through which the teachers made sense of themselves and their practices.

DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I, Fadekemi Olamide Bankole, declare that this dissertation, entitled

'Exploration of personal and professional identities of special education teachers through small stories' is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and citations. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Fadekemi Olamide Bankole

Student Number: 210553647

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Professor Anbanithi Muthukrishna (Supervisor)

December 2013

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Research Office, Govan Mbeki Centre
Westville Campus
Private Bag x54001
DURBAN, 4000
Tel No: +27 31 260 3587
Fax No: +27 31 260 4609
ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

20 April 2012

Mrs FO Bankole (210553647)
School of Education and Management
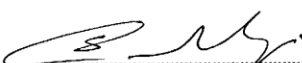
Dear Mrs Bankole

Protocol reference number: HSS/0122/012M
Project title: Exploring the personal and professional identities of special school teachers through small stories.

In response to your application dated 18 April 2012, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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 school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee

cc Supervisor Professor Nithi Muthukrishna
cc Dr D Davids
cc Mrs S Naicker/Mr N Memela

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I absolutely dedicate this thesis to GOD ALMIGHTY, who has been my source and pillar of strength. I wouldn't have been able to do this without His unflinching support and also His love and protection over my family. I will forever love you, my Lord and my saviour.

My sincere appreciation also goes to all these wonderful people that have supported me in one way or another:

- My loving husband, Adebambo, for always believing in me. May the Lord continue to bind us together with His love.
- My adorable children, Boluwatife and Kanyinsola, for your understanding when I needed time to be alone in order to study.
- My parents, the Late Prince & Mrs J.O.B. Adebambo for living a life worthy of emulation, I am honoured to be your child.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMT   Senior Management Team

CAPS   Curriculum And Assessment Policy Statement

NCS   National Curriculum Statement

SEP   Supported Employment Programme

NCSNET   National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training

NCESS   National Committee on Education Support Services

DoE   Department of Education

EFA   Education For All

HIV   Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

AIDS   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

SIAS   National Strategy on Screening , Identification, Assessment and Support.

SSRC   Special School as Resource Centre

SGB   School Governing Body

IQMS   Integrated Quality Management System

HOD   Head of Department

LTSM   Learning Teaching Support Material

SCOPE   South African-Finnish Co-operation Programme in the Education Sector.

UNESCO   United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Appendix 8: Turnitin report

Appendix 9: Letter from language editor

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The buzzword 'identity' has come under spotlight in educational discourses and research over the years. There are various ways in which the concept 'identity' is constructed, and these are embedded in particular paradigms and discourses.

In this study, I take the view that identities are intensely complex and multifaceted, they are not stable or coherent but are dynamic (Reissman, 1993). Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell (2010) have argued that identity can be fluid, situated and multidimensional and involves an interaction between the individual consciousness and social structure (Gilchrist, Bowles & Wetherell, 2010). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) state that through their identities teachers are able to explain their personal and professional lives. The aim of my study was to explore the personal and professional identities of special education teachers through the use of 'small stories' as a research method. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, (1998) explain that as individuals we lead storied lives. We actively construct and reconstruct our identities in the form of stories related to particular contexts and situations which we convey to others (Polkinghorne, 1988).

1.2 Aims and rationale of the study

How special education teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities is an area that has had little attention in educational research. There have been numerous studies internationally and in South Africa that have explored the identities of teachers in ordinary schools, for example, Pearce (2011), Cardelle -Elawar (2010) and Alsup (2006). However, the stories about the identities of special education teachers are largely untold. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) explain that teachers use narratives 'to make sense of themselves and their practice' (p.121). Lawler (2003) asserts that 'if we want to find out how people make identities , make sense of the world and their place within it, if we want to find out how they interpret the world and themselves – we will have to attend to the stories they tell' (p. 243).

The issue is how the personal lives of special education teachers influence their professional lives or vice-versa; the inter-relationships between these two facets of teachers' lives were examined. The underlying focus was how special education teachers negotiate their personal

and professional identities as evident in the small stories they narrated. The choice of 'small stories' as my research helped me obtain insight into the teachers' lives, and into how the stories they tell are central to the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994) posit that 'the self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves construe the nature of their job' (p.47). This corroborates the interrelationship between 'the self' and 'the job', in other words, the personal identity and professional identity.

This study helps to unravel the interplay between 'the self' and 'the job'. I envisage that the findings of this study will be valuable to teacher professional development initiatives and to policy makers. Glover and Law (1996) assert that the role of professional development does not become just that of nourishing the growth of educators but also that of assisting teachers to reflect on their varied identities and roles, and to transform their practice based on these reflections. These views are also expressed by Guskey (2000) and Lesley, Siedentop and Yinger (2006), cited in Langa (2007).

1.3 Research questions

This study was guided by three key research questions:

1. How do the teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities within a special school setting?
2. What can teacher stories as a research method tell us about their personal and professional identities?
3. How does the intersection of culture, emotionality and identity play out in the lives of the special education teachers?

1.4 Background to the study

I engaged the use of purposive sampling for my study. Six special school educators teaching in a school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal were purposively selected for this study. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), purposive sampling means participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make up holders of the data needed for the study. The participants fulfilled these criteria which are: they had been teaching in a special school for intellectually disabled learners (mild to moderate category) consistently for a

minimum of five years, and they agreed to participate in the study and to having their interviews digitally recorded.

I used the narrative interview as a means of data generation. The interview was conducted with the main interview question 'Tell me your experiences of teaching at a special school from your first day in the setting'. As the interview progressed, probing questions were asked where necessary.

I used narrative analysis as my data analysis tool. According to Maree (2007) narrative analysis uses a variety of procedures for interpretation of texts and involves both informal and structured methods of interpretation of texts. The transcripts were taken to the participants to validate that the interview was conducted in an ethical manner, that no information has been altered, excluded or added. In order to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were used.

1.5 Significance of the study

The findings revealed that the personal and professional identities of teachers intersect in various ways. The special education teachers are able to perform their primary duties in class, (that is, managing the teaching and learning process) through a negotiation between their personal and professional identities. The study also revealed how teacher emotionality and their cultural identities intersect as teachers do their work.

Zion, Kozleski and Fulton (2005) suggest that 'cultural identities are a complex weave of all the cultural groups we belong to that influence our values, beliefs and behaviours' (p.4). Baxen (2006) argues that teachers bring themselves, their life experiences, histories and cultures into the classroom. The choices and decisions teachers make are grounded more often in their cultural backgrounds than in their individual beliefs (White, Zion & Kozleski, 2005). These scholars explain that it is important to understand the ways in which teacher beliefs, experiences, values and assumptions are linked to their social and cultural backgrounds.

The emotional aspect of teacher identity refers to the way teachers handle the emotional needs and demands made on them. The study shows how emotion can influence one's professional work, and in turn, professional work influences one's emotion. Teachers' emotions are inextricably connected with their reflective selves and to teacher identity

(O'Connor, 2008). Zembylas (2003b) argues that emotions that are voiced provide a powerful lens into the meanings of identity. Hargreaves (2001) is of the opinion that emotion is an influential factor in teachers' approaches to their professional lives and in how they negotiate their identities. Zembylas (2003) argues that the emotions teachers experience and in some cases are encouraged or forbidden to experience in particular contexts, may 'expand or limit possibilities' in teaching (p.112). While there has been some research on emotionality and teacher education, I have not located a study undertaken in the South Africa context addressing the emotionality of special education teachers. My study contributes to this gap.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 1: This chapter provides a synopsis of the study. It gives the aims and rationale behind the study, background to the study and also the critical research questions.

Chapter 2: This chapter looks into my world or story as a special education teacher. I share my personal and professional experiences and how they both play out in my career. I do this to make overt the subject nature of my research. My research in many ways is a narrative constructed by me, the researcher. Being reflexive about myself and my own life story is intended to foreground that that my position, life experiences and interests as a researcher will affect all stages of the research process.

Chapter 3: This chapter deals with the review of literature relevant to the study. A literature review helps one to look into the work scholars have done on a particular topic being studied. It also serves to locate my study in current debates around my topic and to explore the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study. The focus of my literature review is on examining firstly, the notion of 'identity' and 'teacher identity'. I also reviewed key empirical studies on teacher identity. Secondly, I explain that I use small stories to understand personal and professional identity.

Chapter 4: This chapter deals with research methodology and design issues. It presents the data generation methods, the research context, sampling, the process of data analysis and interpretation. I also deal with issues of trustworthiness, key ethical considerations and the limitations to the study.

Chapter 5: This deals with the findings of the study.

Chapter 6: This is the concluding chapter which present the implications of this study for research and education. I also share my reflections as a researcher.

2 MY STORY – A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

2.1 My profile

I am Fadekemi Olamide Bankole. I am a West African, Nigerian to be precise. I come from the Yoruba tribe which is one of the three major tribes in Nigeria. I have a solid Christian background and religious training which has rubbed off on everything I do. I put the Lord first which has really been beneficial to me in every step I have taken in my life. He has been my rock and source of strength. I am the fifth of six children. I have been in the teaching profession for twelve years. I have taught in various levels of education ranging from pre-school to high school. It has been a fulfilling experience because I love my job. I have always believed that I was endowed with some innate qualities that drew me to the teaching profession. I believe that this helps me execute my duties so *naturally*. It is said 'do what you love and you wouldn't have to work a day!'

2.2 My inspiration

I can say teaching is in my blood because my parents were both teachers. My father started as a classroom teacher, became a principal and later rose to the position of a Vice-Chancellor of a renowned University of Education in my province. My mother too started as a classroom teacher. She also was able to rise in the profession to become a head-teacher. She served as the head of many schools before her retirement.

My parents were passionate about their work and gave their all to see their children succeed. My father established a continuing education centre using seasoned teachers to give learners private lessons after school. The centre catered for Grades 8 -12. The centre also exposed me to teaching because whenever the Grades 8 and 9 English teachers were absent, I taught the learners as a relief teacher. Instead of leaving them unattended and getting up to mischief, I occupied them with work I could teach from their curriculum. My dad one day went around classes for his routine supervision of teaching in classes, he saw me teaching!! He was SO impressed! He applauded my effort and he supported me in nurturing my dream to become a teacher. At that time, I had completed my Matriculation and was waiting for my admission into the University to study education.

2.3   Growing up

While growing up, I loved being around children and taking care of them. This has also been of immense benefit to me since teaching entails working with children. While I was growing, I loved little children and babies. Whenever a baby was born by our family friends, I would go to the house of the newly born to help the mother out. I would assist by carrying and feeding the baby after school, especially during holidays when I had more time to spend with the baby. The majority of these then babies are grown-ups now and successful, responsible adults. In fact, many of them supported me during my wedding. The females were part of my maids of honour.

I am a patient, nurturing, tolerant and accommodating person. I believe these are the qualities of a good teacher, and these qualities in me have really helped me to perform my duties effortlessly and with love. I can say I am a good teacher because I execute my primary duties, that is teaching the learners diligently and with deep commitment. I want my learners to succeed and take a place in society as independent citizens. I not only act as a teacher to them, I also act as a mother, counsellor, and friend to them. I love the job I do because I have what it takes to excel in it and I am never ever frustrated. My personal identity – questions such as: Who am I? Where do I come from? How was I nurtured and shaped as a child and young woman? – intersects with my professional identity.

2.4   What you sow is what you reap!

Being a woman has greatly helped me in this profession because women are generally known to have the motherly instinct and love for children. I treat my learners almost like my biological children.

My parents actually inspired me to become a teacher. Throughout my early life, I observed them and admired their deep, unshakeable commitment to education. They were so very successful in all their efforts! I still see products of their initiatives in their ex-students – many of whom have excelled in life. I am filled with a deep pride when I think of my parents – I am proud to be their daughter! So many times, I had been with my parents when people walked up to them introducing themselves as their former students. I was always observing my parents' faces light up in fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness on hearing that their former learners have achieved so much.

I remember my dad's 80th birthday! Former learners gave him many gifts and even sums of money. I was thrilled – it was such a beautiful day! I just concluded that it is good to be good. The same sentiments and gestures were repeated at his funeral a few years later. The support from friends and former students of my father was overwhelming.! We children did not stress too much over funeral arrangements as former students took over all key responsibilities – giving us space to grieve and say goodbye.

The moral I learnt from that is 'what you sow is what you reap'. My dad dedicated his life and sacrificed so much for people while in service, especially as a principal. Many indigent learners lived in our home. They were fed, clothed and sent to school, by my parents. Thus, it is little wonder these ex-students always grabbed any opportunity to show their appreciation. My dad left a positive and indelible mark on their lives. His name and legacy forever lives in their hearts.

2.5   My journey as a teacher: critical influences and enactments

2.5.1   I am carer and counsellor
As a teacher, I have worked in a crèche, pre-primary, junior primary, senior primary and high schools. Teaching in the different phases or levels of education has exposed me to the full range of education at school level. I learned so much through the years and I feel that I progressed as a teacher with the learners.

It gladdens my heart when I watch learners grow, watching them every step of the way growing physically, academically, socially, emotionally, etc. I love having a positive impact in learner's lives, guiding and counselling them – telling them it is okay to make mistakes – as long as we learn from them. It is very fulfilling to see your learners excel in life.

I entered into special education voluntarily. I saw it as an opportunity to impact the lives of children who are often marginalised and excluded. I think my parents' care of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their commitment to educating them had a great impact in my life. When I was interviewed for the post in this special school, I knew it was a way for me to show the children love and care as well as teaching them to reach their full potential. I believe that all children can learn if given the opportunity, support and love.

As a Christian, I saw it as a way to show them the love of God. I wanted to give them love and to feel valued; often learners in special schools face rejection and low expectations which lead to low self-esteem. I have in my own way counselled learners to focus more and build on their

strengths instead of focusing on their weaknesses. I have told them that they should not be influenced by the societal stigma that constructs them as less abled. I constantly urge them to believe in themselves and that they can achieve a productive place in society and become independent citizens.

All through my 12 years of teaching, I have learnt that there are inequalities in society which shape children's lives. Our role as teachers is to mitigate these inequalities and exclusionary pressures and support children to reach their full potential.

I cannot say my experiences in the special school have been without struggles. There have been tensions and complexities! I have many small stories that I can tell – stories that will live with me forever and which shaped my professional development.

I have had experiences that almost destroyed my love for the profession and made me want to quit teaching in a special school. The worst incident was rejection by my learners in my early months at the school. Discipline was a problem at the school – and when I tried to initiate rules and responsibilities, learners objected. I recall the day when they refused to engage with work and chose to be disruptive - banging on their desks, drumming and singing 'Kwerekwere (foreigner), go back to your country'. It was so very hurtful. The Senior Management Team (SMT) did not tolerate this behaviour and addressed the issue with learners. Learners were requested to apologise to me, which they did.

There was another story I will never forget! A teasing and bullying incident led to a full blown fight in the classroom. I waded into the fight to separate the boys. As I was trying to separate them, one of the boys fighting pushed me; I staggered and almost fell down. The bystanders, in almost a mob mentality – began cheering the boys to continue fighting. I was jeered and laughed at as I tried to prevent myself from falling over. I was somehow able to restore order!

It was a very humiliating incident for me but I knew I had to stay focused, because each profession has its hazards. I firmly believe I am a strong person. I also believe that every child is inherently good – and as teachers we need to bring out the best in them. I constantly questioned my actions and my values. Can I do things a different way? How can I win over my learners? How can I help them deal with their own histories, exclusionary experiences and poor self-esteem? How can I build their confidence in themselves? How can I get them to hold on to a set of personal goals? I have stayed on at the school, and as the years passed, I have gained the trust of learners and developed a strong bond with them.

My learners are intellectually impaired. A few of them are both physically and intellectually challenged. Despite these challenges, they are caring and loving, I remember one day, I was yawning and water was dripping from my eyes(this happens when I yawn), my learners did not understand, so they came to me, concerned, and full of emotions saying, 'Ma'am, are you okay?; Why are you crying?, Are you sick?, Is it us? Are we stressing you out? We will go to the office to report you are not feeling okay'. All these questions and suggestions came pouring in within 20 seconds before I could answer them and place them at ease..

I was so touched and moved. This is what makes my work worthwhile! Building on these caring, loving qualities of humanity is the key to creating good citizens, I think!

They see me as someone that shows them love, listens to them, doesn't shut them out and plays with them. For many, this kind of attention is lacking in the family and community. The social stigma of being a child with a disability still circulates within communities.

They are so eager to come to school to someone that gives and shows them love and believes in their potential. Whenever I am absent, and return to school, they rush up to me to inquire if I have recovered. I also play the role as counsellor. I advise the girls as they are now teenagers. I talk to them about how to be able to maintain their dignity as girls. Whenever they are puzzled or overwhelmed about any personal issues, they come to me for advice. In many ways, I am their confidant. I do worry about the fact that they may be at risk of sexual abuse – they are so vulnerable! My heart bleeds whenever I see any of the learners pregnant, it breaks my heart!!

2.5.2 The curriculum enactor

In this special school, we operate within the national curriculum as laid down in Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). The Department of Education (2011) in the document *Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom Through Curriculum And Assessment Policy Statements* (CAPS) states that all schools including special schools must accommodate the full range of learning needs, with particular attention to strategies for instructional and curriculum change. It also argues that one of the most pervasive barriers to learning is the design and implementation of the curriculum, including its philosophy, values, content, pedagogy, assessment approaches etc.

My view is that a 'One Size Fits All' curriculum does not apply to our school - across and within each class group we have a diversity of learning needs. I also believe that all my learners have the capabilities to learn and grow academically, socially and emotionally. That is my philosophy – I have high expectations for them.

We as special education teachers are guided by inclusive education policies (Department of Education, 2001) which serve as a platform on which we operate. I have developed individualised education plans for each of my learners, and have a deep understanding of where they are in their programmes. I assess and monitor progress on an ongoing way, and base my teaching on my findings. I try my best to find innovative and creative ways to teach them – to make learning exciting and fun. My children enjoy my lessons. I try to align my teaching with the learning outcomes in the various Learning Areas of CAPS. I have found constant curriculum change over the years in South Africa a struggle. I have faced my tensions and dilemmas, I must admit.

But I must admit that the CAPS document is easier to understand compared to the NCS (National Curriculum Statement). This makes it easy for me to translate into my classroom practice. Although I have received some training, much of my professional development has been self-generated. I am a person who wants to learn and develop as a teacher so I can give my BEST to my learners!

Our school focuses on preparing learners for life – to me that has to be the final goal of education. I believe that we fail our learners if they do not become independent and productive citizens one day. In a bid to realise this, the school has set up SEP, the Supported Employment Programme for adolescent learners, where they are assisted to secure employment eventually. We have links with the private sector and companies that agree to place our learners in work situations. We closely monitor their progress at the work place. It is heartening to see learners gain in independence and self-confidence within a few months. The programme has proven to be very successful, with many able to gain employment after schooling.

2.5.3 The teacher: An emotional being

I am a very emotional person but I have tried to separate my emotion from my work to a great extent. I know that one cannot really achieve that! We are all human, there are some times the emotions sometimes creep in, but the ability to be able to be on top of the situation is what makes one a professional.

One of the issues that trigger deep emotions in me is the poor socio-economic background of the majority of our learners. This breaks my heart! In addition, some are orphans living in children's homes, some live in drug-ridden homes ,which makes them vulnerable to all kinds of harm. I find it so hard to listen to their stories of abuse, neglect and deprivation!

The government's feeding scheme at our school is such a blessing and helps enormously. Our school is helping indigent families by sending products from the school farm home to parents through the learners. We are trying to make a positive influence in the learners' lives and families - we focus on the whole child.

2.5.4 I am also a cultural being

I am a Nigerian, from Yoruba tribe which is one of the three main tribes in Nigeria. I have been brought up to be a respectful and responsible person. There are many rules in my tribe ranging from being respectful to being responsible for one's actions. We are notable for our high moral values and standards.

What struck me most in my teaching profession in the South African context is the low rate of respect learners have for their teachers. While I was in high school, teachers were always respected; when a teacher reprimanded a child, he or she would not backchat the teacher or be rude! Teachers were treated with high regard and respect. We did have problem students such as truants who did not respect teachers, but they were few. To a very high degree, teachers were always accorded their due respect and were respected members of the society.

Another complex issue for me is pregnancy - especially the policy of pregnant girls attending school. In my country and culture, this is not allowed. You choose between your education and pregnancy. Immediately the school authority knows that you are pregnant, you will be suspended from school. You can return to school a few months or years after the baby is born. Some girls will not go back to their former school because of the stigma and shame; they prefer to seek a place in another school. I believe that a school is expected to nurture learners academically and *morally,* education should be a full package, not producing half-educated learners, that is, learners academically sound but without morals.

However, against this backdrop, here in South Africa – I have become more open minded and ready to learn from other people's culture and not imposing mine on them. But the issue of pregnancy remains a tension for me emotionally. There is a saying that 'when you are in Rome, you do as the Romans'.

3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

A literature review helps look into the work scholars and researchers who have done on a particular topic internationally. Henning (2005) states that a literature review helps to contextualise one's study and to provide a niche from which to argue for the relevance of one's study. Numerous studies have been conducted on the issue of teachers' professional identities (Geysel & Meijers, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Soreide, 2006) but there is paucity on research on the identities of teachers working in special schools. This is the focus of my study. As stated in Chapter 1, my research questions are: How do special needs education teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities within a special school setting? What can teacher stories as a research method tell us about their personal and professional identities? How does the intersection of culture, emotionality and identity play out in the lives of the special education teachers?

In this chapter, I firstly review literature on the notions of 'identity' and 'teacher identity' which form the conceptual framework for the study. In this discussion, I will also examine what research illuminates about the intersection between teachers' personal and professional identities. Secondly, I will locate my study in the context of education in South Africa by examining the history of special needs education in South Africa and policy changes that have occurred since 1994 when the democratic government came into power. This provides insight into the contextual factors that impact the work of special needs education teachers.

3.2   An analysis of the concept 'identity'

3.2.1   Introduction

The buzzword 'identity' has been a concept attracting much interest in educational research in the past three decades or so. It comes from the Latin root word 'idem' which means 'the same'. The notion of identity is very challenging to define and conceptualize. It is often seen as a social category we use to define or make meaning of ourselves. It has been theorized from interdisciplinary perspectives including psychology, sociology and philosophy (for example, Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Erikson, 1959).

In my study, I wish to examine the concept 'identity' from a social constructionist perspective, located in the discipline of sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1996).

3.2.2   Socio-constructionism as a theory

The main idea of socio-constructionism is to reveal ways by which individual and groups relate with their social setting. Berger and Luckmann (1996) examined how knowledge works in the society. These theorists posit that human meaning making cannot be separated from social institutions, as the social makes us who we are, and expands and improves our knowledge in our day to day activities. The main idea of socio-constructionism is to explain the ways by which individual and groups relate with the social setting they find themselves in. According to Berger and Luckmann (1996) all knowledge, including common sense knowledge of everyday life, is constructed by and through social interactions. Individuals play a pivotal role in the process of constructing knowledge.

Gergen (2000) argues that, from this social constructivism perspective, identity is socially, historically, politically and culturally constructed. He further elaborates that identity roles and knowledge are created and maintained in socio-historical contexts. The word 'self' has often been used in literature as an alternative meaning to 'identity' (Mead, 1934; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain; 1998). Mead (1934) postulates that the self is developed through transactions with the environment. The self cannot be dissociated from the social structure. Self cannot independently exist aside of society or the social structure. The self and society are interwoven. The self influences the society while the society also influences self. Self is a reflection of the society one lives in. The self relates and flourishes in society; without society there cannot be a self because self cannot exist in isolation (Mead, 1934).

In examining the difference between identity and self, Mead (1934) explains identity as a sense a person has of the self in the context of social roles, positions and social activities. Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) explain that ''people tell others who they are, but more importantly they tell themselves who they are, and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities' (p. 3). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) explain that the construction of an identity is socially located in that the self, and is defined by its membership of particular groups and allegiance to certain ideologies. In other words, an individual's identity is formed as he or she interacts with social processes in different socio-historical contexts. The social structure is complex and multi-layered. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) further posit that we use identities strategically to develop liveable lives in changing circumstances. They argue that identity evolves, and is expressed according to the changing needs and opportunities facing individuals and communities.

Stets and Burke (2003) explain that we create, maintain and revise the story of who we are, and how we came to be who are now. Stories of our social interactions are told in order to make meanings of our lives. In other words, identity is created, re-created and maintained by an individual's engagement with social structures, for example, the family and its characteristics (Gilchrist, Bowles & Wetherell, 2010).

Wenger (1998) states that identities are shaped by the history and cultural practices of communities in which we live, engage and interact. Human beings cannot be isolated from their history and cultural practices because these serve as their basis, which are always negotiated from time to time when situation demands. Similarly, Taylor (1989) emphasizes the importance of a defining community in forming identity. He is of the opinion that individuals define themselves through conversations with people in communities. He further explains identity as a moral space in which questions arise about what is acceptable and unacceptable in the community, what has meaning and lacks meaning, what is important or unimportant.

Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell (2010) state that identity can be fluid, situated, and multidimensional. It involves an interaction between the individual consciousness and social structure. The identity of a particular person changes when he or she is confronted with a different situation. People navigate their identities considering the role or roles they are expected to play at a particular instance, for example, the same person plays the role of a teacher at school, a mother or father at home, a son or daughter to the parents, a pastor at church etc. An individual's identity construction is an on-going process (Stets & Burke, 2003). It can be said to be dynamic and not stable. Holland (2001) cited in Battey and Franke (2008) explain that 'we take identity to be a central means by which selves and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectives' (p.127). Identity is thus dependent on social meanings and interpretations. Battey and Franke (2008) contend that the knowledge and skills we acquire impact our identity formation (for example, our personal and professional identities).

Identity can be understood in response to these questions: Who am I? Where or with whom do I belong? Am I acceptable as a person? Am I true to myself whatever the situation? These are some of the questions individuals, for example, teachers ponder on. These questions make them take a critical look inwards, and the answers to these questions affect their actions, the way they look at themselves and the society they live in.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) explain that identities are narratives that teachers create to make sense of lives as people and as teachers. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) agree that identity is not a fixed entity but 'storied'. They further posit that identities are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds. They are multiple, depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. Furthermore, Burns and Richards (2009) explain that identity 'reflects how individuals see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings' (p. 5).

In another vein, MacLure (1993) assert that identity is a 'resource that people use to explain, justify, and make sense of themselves in relation to others and the world at large' (pp. 311). In essence, identity can be seen as a way teachers organize their professional and personal lives which is a dimension I explored in my study.

3.2.3 Summary

The concept 'identity' has been given various definitions in research. In my study, I acknowledge that identity is constructed in relation to history and socio-cultural practices (Wenger, 1998), that it is fluid, situated and multi-dimensional (Gilchrist, Bowles & Wetherell, 2010), and that identity construction is an on-going process (Stets & Burke, 2003). Mitchell and Weber (1999) explain that there is a constant 're-inventing' of themselves that teachers undergo. In the next section, in order to contextualize my study, I provide a brief overview of special needs education in South Africa.

3.3 Special needs education in South Africa: Brief history, policy context and educational provision

This section firstly examines the history of special needs education provision, the nature of special needs education provision, and policy shifts in this sector of education in South Africa in the last two decades. Secondly, I review empirical studies in South Africa that explore teacher lives and work in the special needs education sector in South Africa.

3.3.1 Brief history of special needs education provision in South Africa

The origin of special needs education in South Africa date as far back as 1863 when the six Dominican sisters established the first school for the visually and hearing impaired learners in Cape Town (Nkabinde,1997). The school was divided into two sections by race group, one for the white learners, and the other for the 'coloured' or mixed race learners. Churches also assisted to create special needs provision for a minority of African learners in certain contexts (Nkabinde & Ngwenya, 1996). It was not until one hundred years later that nine special schools were established to cater for African children, including those with visual and hearing impairment and cerebral palsy. These first special schools were founded on charitable grounds in order to help

children with disabilities who receive no support from the State. The schools were managed by Christian missions.

As the years passed, certain special schools started receiving subsidies from the State (Nkabinde, 1997). Engelbrecht (2006) explains that when South Africa's democratic government came into power, educational provision was fragmented based on racial segregation and discrimination. There is little doubt that special needs education as a sector was impacted by the apartheid policies. *Education White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (Department of Education, July 2001) states that 'apartheid special schools were organized according to two segregating criteria, race and disability. In accordance with apartheid policy, schools that accommodated disabled learners from the white race group were extremely well resourced whilst the few schools for black African disabled learners were systematically under resourced' (p. 9). Similarly, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) (Department of Education, 1977), in their report on the state of special needs education and support in South Africa, explain that historically special needs education and related support services have reflected the general inequalities within the country.

The apartheid policies continue to impact the special needs education system negatively. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) state that most learners with disabilities have limited access to schooling or have been 'mainstreamed by default'. They further contend that the curriculum and education system as a whole has generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in learners dropping out of schooling.

3.3.2   Policy shifts in special needs education in the last two decades

After its first democratic election in 1994, South Africa was invited to participate in the Education for All (EFA) process, and adopted the EFA principles, goals, targets and guidelines contained in both the Declaration and the Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). In line with the international trend of ensuring the provision of quality education within the mainstream of education, South Africa committed to the realization of this goal. South Africa ratified a number of international instruments that directly and/or indirectly protect the rights of children, including the disabled child, for instance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs (UNESCO, 2000), Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) and the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 1993). The

ongoing transformation in South Africa has brought about numerous educational issues into focus including the special needs education sector, resulting in the development of many new laws, policies and practices.

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996* (Republic of South Africa, 1996) stresses the right of all learners, irrespective of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth, to basic education and equal access to educational institutions (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Bill of Rights highlights equality as a crucial right, together with principles of human dignity and freedom. Since 1996 all education legislation and policies have been founded on the Constitution, and thus foreground the need for the education system to recognize diversity and provide quality education for all learners within a non-segregated education system, for example, the *White Paper on Education and Training of 1995* (Department of Education, 1995) and the *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996* (Department of Education, 1996). The South African Schools Act commits to the provision of quality education for all learners regardless of their difference: 'a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way' (Department of Education, 1996). A key policy instrument that emerged related to the disability sector is the *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy of 1997* (Office of the Deputy President, 1997) which commits to a shift from disability as solely a health and welfare issue to a rights-based integrated approach.

A landmark policy that emerged is the *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of Education, July 2001). Embedded in this policy is the thinking that there has to be a shift from the narrow, medical discourse of special needs education and disability to the view that disability debates must be located alongside all forms of oppression within a human rights framework. Inclusion is conceptualised as an 'agenda' that reflects the cornerstone of an equitable and just society. *Education White Paper 6* (Department of Education, 2001) largely reflects this paradigm shift to a broad version on inclusion. In its conceptualisation of inclusion, the *Education White Paper* uses the term 'barriers to learning and participation' – and stresses the need for the education system to minimise barriers and maximise participation of all learners. Key barriers in the South African context that render a large number of children and adults vulnerable to learning breakdown and sustained exclusion include: problems in the provision and organisation of education; socio-economic barriers; factors that place learners at risk, such as high levels of poverty; violence and crime; HIV/AIDS epidemic; substance abuse; attitudes; an inflexible curriculum; problems with language and communication;

inaccessible and unsafe built environment; inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services to schools, parents, care-givers, families and communities; lack of enabling and protective legislation; disability; lack of human resource development; and lack of parental recognition and involvement (Department of Education, 2001). .

The key guiding principles for achieving an inclusive education and training system, according to *Education White Paper 6* (2001) are: human rights and social justice for all learners; participation and social integration; equity and redress; access to a single inclusive education system; access to the curriculum and community responsiveness. This view of inclusion stresses a shift of emphasis away from the assessment, categorisation and educational placement of learners according to their disabilities towards an engagement with how the system and all schools can be responsive to educational difficulties (Department of Education, 2001). This places a commitment on special schools as well as mainstream schools to meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities and ensure quality education. In other words, special schools would have to work to transform to more inclusive institutions in terms of the ethos, cultures, curriculum access, levels of support available to learners etc.

Education White Paper 6 also spells out a new categorizing principle: that of categorizing using the level of support required rather than by a form of disability (Department of Education, 2001). A restructuring of education provision for children with disabilities is the cornerstone of *Education White Paper 6*, making open a range of learning sites. This will be discussed in the next section.

However, South Africa still faces difficulties in making a shift from the legacy of the apartheid past. Although South Africa has taken giant strides towards the development of inclusive schools and an integrated system of provision for learners with disabilities, the remnants of the previous system are still prevalent, in that special needs education still exists as an elaborate second system of special schools and support services which serves a small minority of learners. There are large numbers of out of school children with disabilities who have no access to education. Moketsi (2012) stated that 467,000 disabled children were not attending school. Provision is grossly inadequate for black African disabled children particularly in rural areas (Ngcobo, 2006; Perumal, 2005). There have been problems with implementation of the policy proposals in *Education White Paper 6*. This has been documented in studies, and include funding pressures; inadequate teacher development and support; poor management of change at the district level; inadequate knowledge about inclusive education policy and its implementation; exclusionary school cultures

and practices; systemic inequalities; and inadequate school leadership to support policy implementation (see for example, Eloff & Kqwete 2007**;** Ngcobo 2006; Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011; Wildeman & Nomdo 2007).

3.3.3   Special needs education provision post *Education White Paper 6*

According to the National List of Special Schools, September 2010 (Department of Education, 2010), there are 418 special schools in South Africa, catering for children for various categories of disability, including moderate intellectual disability; severe intellectual disability; hearing impairment (including deaf and hard of hearing); visual impairment (including blind and low vision/partial sightedness; physical disability; autistic spectrum disorder; communications disorders; specific learning disabilities and epilepsy. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, there are 71 special schools. Thus, post *White Paper 6,* special schools continue to be defined by the category of disability.

However, it is well documented that in many mainstream schools in South Africa children with disabilities have been included by default, and in some schools inclusion has progressively happened due to individual school initiatives and responses to the policy imperative of *Education White Paper 6* (for example, Ngcobo, 2006; Pather, 2008).

Education White Paper 6 called for major philosophical shifts and a departure from a medical deficit view of disability to one based on a social rights model. The key principle is that the system has to change to accommodate a range of diversity in the learner population, including within special school contexts (Department of Education, 2001; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). There have also been various *Education White Paper 6* implementation strategies and strategy documents that school management and teachers at special schools had to engage with, for example, National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) – Operational Guidelines (Department of Education, 2008a); Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (Department of Education, 2008b); Guidelines to Ensure Quality Education and Support in Special Schools and Special School Resource Centres (Department of Education, 2008c); Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: District Support Teams ((Department of Education, 2007a); Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: Full Service Schools (Department of Education, 2007b).

A key transformation strategy is that special schools would have to convert to resource centres, and serve as a support structure to mainstream schools. The following are key components of support. The role of the *Special School as Resource Centre (SSRC)* is designated as providing high level support for students who experience severe barriers to learning and need high levels of support. This includes those with physical or mental disabilities, with behavioural problems, and with visual or hearing impairments. The argument is that full inclusion in mainstream settings is not feasible for learners with severe barriers because of the limited resources. A Special School as Resource Centre (SSRC) has to provide on-site support for students with high level learning needs, as well as providing support to neighbouring schools and communities. Thus, the Resource Centre component of the Special School serves as a way of providing care and support to a large number of students in the district (Department of Education, 2001).

There have been various pilot research projects in various parts of the country funded by national and international funding agencies involved in policy implementation in regular schools and special schools, for example, the SCOPE project undertaken in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga Provinces (see project report, Department of Education, 2003*)*. See also *Implementing Inclusive Education in South Africa: Stories we can learn from;* Department of Education (2002a*). Final report: of the Resource and Training Programme for Educator Development: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System)*; and the *Report of the Resource and Training Programme for Educator Development: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*, Department of Education, 2002b).

However, this training for the new inclusive education and training system has been poor (Timmons & Muthukrishna, 2007; Pather, 2008). Research has shown that most teachers do not understand or poorly interpret the philosophical nature of the change and its practical implications (Timmons & Muthukrishna, 2007; Pather, 2008). Naidoo (2012) and Engelbrecht (2006) allude to the fact that the impact of policy implementation strategies and ineffective training on the part of the Education Department have negatively affected teacher motivation and wellbeing at schools, including special schools.

Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011) conducted a study in a school situated in a densely populated semi-rural township in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal Province involving the school principal and five teachers teaching disabled learners. They found some problems educators experience while teaching disabled learners. These are: inability to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate disabled learners; teaching in conservative ways; holding on to pre-conceived ideas

that disabled children are expected to adjust to the mainstream school instead of school becoming responsive to the needs of the disabled learners; discourses of differences as deficit persist; and lack of training on the curriculum and assessment practices for diversity in the classroom.

Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart and Eloff (2003) examined the stress levels of teachers who had children with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms. The findings indicated that most stressful issues were: administrative duties, lack of support and professional development, children with behaviour problems, teachers' faulty views of their own competence and lack of openness to further professional development as well as inadequate involvement of parents. The findings highlight the need for on-going teacher development to accommodate special educational needs of learners – an issue that is crucial in special school contexts as well. The reason is that although a special school enrols students from a defined category of disability, for example, deaf learners, there is a great deal of diversity in any learner population. How teachers deal with diversity and attune themselves to the individual needs of learners and the levels of support they require is critical for the development of more inclusive educational contexts and curriculum access.

Looking at policy shifts in South Africa formed an important background to my study. I envisaged that policy change and the negotiation of policy shifts would be a key factor that influences the personal and professional identities of teachers.

3.4   Perspectives on teacher identity

Teacher identity is the key focus of my study. I have discussed the socio-constructionist perspective on identity and identity construction. In this section I focus on key debates on teacher identity.

I wish to highlight that an individual's identity construction and identity making is not stable; rather it is dynamic. Thus, teacher identity involves a constantb're-inventing' of themselves (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 14). Studying teacher narratives is a powerful approach to the study of identity. Such narratives have the potential to provide insight into how teachers enact their lives (professionally and personally).

3.4.1 Teacher identity and emotions

In this sub-section, I examine the issue of teacher identity and emotionality. Zembylas (2003) argues emotions are voiced and are a powerful lens into the meaning of identity. Emotions can

provide a lens into how the teacher self is shaped and re-shaped in particular socio-cultural, historical and institutional contexts. Teaching is a profession which involves interaction amongst people. Most of their professional lives are spent in close contact with others, in the context of a school and its community. Teachers are often responsible to and for other individuals.

Nias (1996) asserts that affectivity is very important in the lives of teachers. He supports this view with three reasons. Firstly, teachers are often passionate about their work, skills and capabilities, students, their colleagues, and other significant adults such as parents. Secondly, teachers' emotions are embedded in their thoughts, their judgements and decisions. Thirdly, cognition and emotions cannot be separated from the social and cultural forces which form and shape them. Another important issue is that the emotions of a teacher are intimately connected to what they think of themselves and others. Thus, one can argue that cognition, feelings, judgement, choice, and emotions are interconnected, and shape the lives of teachers. For example, Zembylas (2003) states 'reason and emotion are interdependent because our reasoning depends on emotional choices.' (p. 223).

Emotion can influence one's professional work, and in turn, professional work influences one's emotion. Hargreaves (2001) is of the opinion that emotions influence how teachers approach their professional lives and how they navigate their varied identities. Therefore, examining the role of emotions in the development of professional identity has the potential to provide a more in-depth understanding of teacher's work.

To examine how teachers perform their teaching, their emotional lives in different settings must be recognized (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kingston & Gu (2007). For me to understand the lives of special needs educators in my study, I envisaged I would need to examine and make sense of how emotions intersect with teachers' professional reasoning, choices and decisions.

3.4.2   Teacher identity and culture

Culture includes the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values, and behaviour patterns that are shared by groups of people (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). In the same vein, Zion, Kozleski and Fulton (2005) explain that culture is the combination of our histories, experiences and personalities. An individual's cultural identity incorporates social categories such as race, gender, language group, religious orientation, ethnicity, nationality etc. (Prevos, 2004). Social categories are groupings of people that can be distinguished by, firstly, the rules of membership - that is, rules that decide on who is in and who is out – secondly, the characteristics of the groupings – such as beliefs, ideologies, desires, moral commitments, behaviour etc. (Zion, Kozleski & Fulton, 2005).

Cultural identity construction is an on-going process. Throughout life individuals interact with varied sets of beliefs, values and behaviour. One's cultural identity can never be static. It is dynamic and changing as individuals shift between cultures and cultural contexts (White, Zion & Kozleski, 2005; Zion, Kozleski & Fulton, 2005). Zion, Kozleski and Fulton (2005) argue that defining a person according to one social group 'does not account for within group differences, the fluid nature of identity development, or multiple contributing factors that make up an individual's cultural identity' (p.5). Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell (2010) argue that identity construction evolves and is influenced by the changing needs and opportunities facing individuals and communities. They explain that 'as we journey through life our place in the family changes as does our status in the society' (p. 8). Culture cannot be separated from people because it is the platform by which they interact and relate with one another. It also serves as a way through which people understand and find meaning of themselves and their behaviours.

Zion et al. (2005) contend that teachers bring into the classroom their life experiences, histories and cultures. In addition, they come with particular assumptions and beliefs about what a good teacher is and what a good teacher does. Teachers also bring to the classroom their theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning. Wenger (1998) argues that 'the concept identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual so that each can be talked about in terms of the other' (p.145). To understand personal identity development, we need to examine the social links between the individual and the social setting. Thus, to understand fully how people negotiate their professional lives, their personal lives and personal identities must be examined and understood.

In respect of my study, I held the view that special school teachers bring into the classroom diverse histories, social and cultural beliefs that influence their work. For example, Rieser (2008) explains that various cultural beliefs or myths about children with disabilities held by individuals in society have been documented in Southern Africa. Some of these include: children with disabilities are useless to the society; government has other priorities than spending or wasting money on disability; the mother blamed for having a disabled child such as she has been unfaithful to her husband; children with disabilities are a punishment from God for evil deeds; children with disabilities are objects of pity; parents have sinned; disability is contagious; they are a burden to the society; they have low intelligence and will remain at the child stage of development. These are some of myths that individuals may hold in different cultures.

Baxen (2006) argues that teachers take into the classrooms their life experiences. Teachers cannot separate their actions and teaching lives from their historical, social and cultural

backgrounds. Therefore, in my research, studying the histories and cultural backgrounds of the special education teachers - for example, how these may influence teachers' constructions of disability - I saw as important.

3.4.3   Relationship between personal and professional identities

Sachs (2005) cited in Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) contends that teacher professional identity is central to the teaching profession. Scholars have examined identity in terms of the professional knowledge teachers possess and act on, that is, subject matter or content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Clandinin, Downey & Huberb, 2009). It provides a framework for teachers to shape their own ideas about how they play their roles as teachers, the actions they perform, and how they understand and justify their work, and how they are perceived in society. Identity is shaped by and through a teachers' knowledge and skills. In the same vein, lack of or inadequate knowledge and skills diminishes an individual's professional identity (O'Connor & Scanlon, 2006).

However, teacher's personal identity has a way of connecting with the professional identity. This interplay of personal and professional identities cannot be over-emphasized - these two are complimentary. The professional knowledge a teacher acquires shapes the identity of the individual. When knowledge is acquired, it changes the perception and the attitude of the person who acquired the knowledge which automatically affects the identity of that person. Day, Kingston, Stobart and Sammons (2006) further explain that teacher identity is central to the personal beliefs, values and practices that guide their engagement, commitment and actions in and out of the classroom. Teachers cannot be separated from their beliefs and values.

The personal and professional identities cannot be divorced from each other. Wenger (1998) in his work highlighted the relationship between personal and professional identities as 'mirror images of one another' (p.149). The personal and professional selves are the core of any individual. Each person has these two sides of self which must work hand in hand to achieve a 'fulfilled self'. In my study, in order to properly understand the identity of special needs teachers, I wanted to focus on their personal and professional selves and the complex ways in which these intersect.

Kelchtermans (1993) explains that the professional self like the personal self evolves over time. It consists of five related parts:

- self image: how teachers makes sense of themselves through their career stories.

- self esteem: conceptions of how proficient and or not one is – as evaluated by self or others.

- job motivation: linked to what factors make teachers select teaching as a career, remain committed to teaching or change professions.

- task perception: relates to how teachers define their jobs; and

- future perspectives: relate to what teachers consider important for their future development.

This analysis by Kelchtermans (1993) shows that teacher identities are closely interwoven with personal and professional selves.

Clandinin & Connelly (1998) fore-grounded how powerful narrative research or teacher stories are to gain an understanding of teacher identity. Teachers are key knowers of themselves, their situations, learners and subject matter. Teacher' personal narratives become particularly relevant for understanding their personal and professional identity. Narratives provide a lens into not only individual or personal character but also professional character. Hence the use of narrative inquiry in my study.

3.5   Research on Teacher Identity

In this section, I will be looking at selected studies on teacher identity internationally and in Africa. Teacher identity is a universal research concept that has been generating numerous studies locally and internationally.

3.5.1   International empirical studies on teacher identity

There is a large body of research on teacher identity internationally in diverse contexts. However, the majority of studies focus on teachers in ordinary schools. There is a relatively small body of research examining the identities of teachers in the special needs education sector

Merseth, Sommer and Dickson (2008) conducted their study with a group of 65 graduate students, registered in a teacher education programme at an Ivy League University in the United States, who chose to teach in urban schools. The study examined how the teachers engage with learning to teach and the way their identities were negotiated during the 12 week urban practicum. The findings revealed that both the personal and professional identities of the teachers were impacted by the situated context of the 12 week practicum. They were able to find out more about themselves and their chosen career, they found out that at the end of the practicum, both their personal and professional identities had received a boost and enhancement.

Vahasantanen, Hokka, Etelapelto, Rasku-Puttonen and Littleton (2008) conducted their research in Finland with 24 Finnish teachers. The study examined the teachers' subjective experiences of teaching and how support from resource and training organizations impacted how teachers negotiated their identities. It was found that teachers' individual agency and social support are intertwined. Teachers need the support of the people in their social setting (for example, colleagues, principal, parents, SGB members, social workers, community members etc.) in order to function effectively. The teachers experienced varied levels of commitment depending on the nature of the organisation with which they twinned. On the one hand, teachers showed commitment to the organization because they were given a sense of belonging which helped them negotiate their work. On the other hand, teachers found that they were always given rigid or stringent measures to implement thereby not being able to negotiate an ideal professional identity in a safe manner and take risks. This seems to point to limitations in the school culture and leadership.

Soreide (2006), in her study of five Norwegian female elementary school teachers, aimed to show how teachers' identities can be narratively constructed through the way teachers position themselves within the cultures of schools and classrooms. She describes how the women actively used available spaces as narrative resources to position themselves as teachers. In the analysis of the five interviews, four major constructions of teacher identity emerged: 'the caring and kind teacher'; 'the creative and innovative teacher'; 'the professional teacher;' 'the typical teacher'. The study found that these identity constructions are not fixed or stable, they emerge from the relevant subject positions of teachers in particular contexts.

Elawar, Sanz and Luisa (2010) undertook a study on teacher identity in Spain. They designed a model of self-regulatory inquiry which 'connected theory to practice' and helped teachers to adequately understand the experiences that shape their professional identity. Drawing on their research, they explained teacher identity, both personal and professional, from a cognitive motivational perspective – as a psychological attachment to the profession. It is the inner-self linked to self-regulation which affects everything a teacher does in the classroom. The researchers asserted that in order to study teacher identity through self-regulation, researchers should focus on four processes, (a) self-observation, (b) self-monitoring, (c) self-judgement, and (d) self-reaction. Self-observation refers to deliberate focus on aspects of a teacher's own behaviour. Self-monitoring can result in enhanced motivation because when teachers examine and reflect on what they do, they may react to this knowledge and alter or upgrade their skills and teaching behaviours. Self-judgement compares their current performance levels with their

expected goals. The teachers' self-judgement produces self-reactions. In other words, self-reactions are behavioural, cognitive and affective responses to self-judgement, and can be sources of teacher motivation. When teachers look critically at themselves, monitor their activities professionally and personally, they are able to evaluate themselves. The importance of self-reflection is a key finding in this study as it ultimately helps teachers develop their personal and professional identities.

Shea (2010) conducted her study with 14 Colorado special educators who had been committed to teaching for four or more years. Her participants were educators who entered special needs education by chance and those that entered special needs education intentionally. Thirteen of the participants had considered leaving the career at some point in time, but none had actually left as at the time of the study. Only one participant had never felt the urge to leave. She entered special needs education by chance but later got fascinated by the love for her students and did not want to leave. All the participants stated they stay in their jobs in part because they had chosen to take responsibility for the growth and the well-being of their students. This study shows that teacher identity is fluid, teachers professional identity is linked to personal identity and vice – versa.

All these empirical studies examined show that the complex intersection of personal and professional identities of teachers cannot be over-emphasized. Further, that teacher identity evolves and is negotiated over time and context.

3.5.2   Empirical studies on teacher identity undertaken in the African context
There is a small body of empirical research on the issue of teacher identity emanating from the African continent. These studies focus on teacher identity and how teachers negotiate their identities in various circumstances. The studies also highlight the relationship between personal and professional identities.

Smit & Fritz (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of two teachers in South Africa. They argue for the use of three frames of reference: situational, personal and social narratives to understand teachers and teacher work. Each narrative informs, shapes and influences the others and can contribute towards an understanding of a teacher's identity. The researchers argue that as teachers interpret the actions of others, they adjust their own actions and behaviour. Teachers have agency, are active human beings and not passive objects. Their identities are also shaped by external contextual pressures such as daily problems and challenges they face. They conclude that teachers' identities reflect the context of their work more than their professional qualifications or educational levels (which are related to their personal identity).

Jita (2004) examined the link between teacher identity and classroom practices in a South African case study on the identities of Black African science teachers. Jita (2004) argued that a teacher's classroom practice is influenced by more than what they know or understand about teaching and learning. It is also influenced by the teachers' sense of self and how they understand themselves in relation to their learners, colleagues and the subject matter. How teachers give meaning to their practice of teaching is closely related to who they are at personal and professional levels. Teachers need to 'know' or understand themselves before they can understand others they work with, and the profession they engage in because the personal life connects with the professional life.

Nduna (2008) conducted a study on teacher identity and the culture of schooling. The participant was a white, female, middle class teacher in a sub-urban primary school in South Africa. Her narrative reflected her disillusionment with changes in educational policy in South Africa since 1994, and her inability to engage with students and parents from the broader social, ethnic and cultural groupings. She also lamented the lack of order and discipline of learners to which she was once accustomed. In her narrative, she tells of her previous position of a confident teacher as opposed to her now fragile and insecure professional self. Nduna (2008) argues that who teachers are as professionals is so inextricably linked to who they are as persons. If we as researchers try to separate teachers' professional values and beliefs from their personal values and beliefs, we run into the danger of essentializing the role of the teacher and denying the subjectivity of the teacher.

Agbenyeka & Deku (2011) undertook a study in Ghana which explored teacher implementation of inclusive education policy in Ghana. In Ghana, inclusive education policy commits to increased educational access and support for all children including children with special needs and disabilities. In the study by Agbenyeka & Deku, twenty one pre-service teachers were participants. The study highlighted the tensions and contradictions inherent in the implementation of inclusive education policy. Teachers still practiced traditional teaching approaches they received in their initial teacher education programme, particularly an 'imposed' or 'dominating' pedagogy. Learners with diverse needs were constructed by teachers in normative and deficit ways despite the fact that Ghana's inclusive education policy is located in a rights discourse. This shows that teachers find it challenging to change or adapt whenever a new policy is introduced. Some teachers adopted teaching approaches and classroom cultures that they had experienced as learners. This study shows the attitude or disposition of teachers to educational reforms and teaching technique which can also be determined by their background

and their earlier experiences as learners, all these experiences creep into how teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities.

3.6 Summary

This review illuminated the history, policy context and provision of special needs education in South Africa. It also presented the concept of 'teacher identity' from a socio-constructionist perspective. Finally, key debates on teacher identity are discussed. Research emanating from Africa and internationally all attest to the significance of the identity of teachers to understanding teachers' professional practice.

I have not been able to locate any studies on the identities of special education teachers in the African context, thus the importance of my study to current scholarship.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology and design of my study.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how I went about exploring the three key questions in this study, which are: How do the teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities within a special school setting? What can teacher stories as a research method tell us about their personal and professional identities? How does the intersection of culture, emotionality and identity play out in the lives of the education teachers?

In my study, being qualitative in nature, I used narrative inquiry as a research method. My focus was on teacher narratives (in particular, small stories). Qualitative research 'collects rich descriptive data in respect of the phenomenon with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being studied' (Nieuwenhuis , 2007). In the sections below, I outline the key methodological issues and design choices I made in my study.

4.2   Methodological issues

The study was qualitative in nature. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach, and it focuses on understanding the subject being studied. Phenomena are studies in their natural settings, and the aim is to examine the meanings people bring to and make of them. Merriam (2009) states that qualitative researchers focus on understanding how people make sense of their world and their experiences of the world (Merriam, 2009). I chose a qualitative research approach in order to richly explore how special school teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities in the special school setting.

My study was a narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain narrative inquiry as a way of inquiring into experiences through 'collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus' (p.20). Humaira and Rarieya (2008) suggest that narrative inquiry involves reflective conversations, which involve verbally sharing, discussing, questioning and reasoning surrounding their experiences and events. Narratives helps give the participants an assurance that they are important and their voices need to be heard.

Narrative inquiry helps to study people's experience as story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). According to Bell (2002) stories are a bridge between the lived experiences of individuals and the social realities that shape their lives. In other words, people understand their past experiences through stories, and these understandings help shape their future experiences. For example,

experiences that have occurred in an individual's life or the lives of other people he or she interacts with can be used to shape the individual's future. Bell (2002) states that narrative inquiry enables researchers to examine experience in all its complexity and richness. It rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make meanings of events in our lives and our actions by creating story structures related to them. Beattie (2000) argues that every person has a story to tell, and our everyday experiences become stories that we tell.

Beattie (2000) explains that the assumption underlying narrative inquiry is that knowledge-making is an active, creative and interpretative process. For example, in the case of a teacher, stories help the storyteller construct and re-construct his or her professional knowledge. Drawing on findings from their study, Graham and Phelps (2003) refer to narrative as reflection directed at the self and argue that it is crucial to understanding professional practice. An important point made by de Marrais and Lapan (2004) is that creating narratives is a continual process. Individuals live and re-live their stories, including during the process of telling.

In my study, I was particularly interested in the 'small stories' that teachers tell. Small stories are brief narratives related to specific events or issues. Bamberg (2006) and Georgakopoulou (2006) argue that the 'small story' approach enhances traditional narrative methods. Small stories can be about very latest events ('this morning', 'last night') or events that are still emerging. It is brought about by the need to share latest news or events that has just occurred – or in sharing a bit of experience in the context of participants lives.

Bell (2003) states that the analysis of stories can be a useful way to critically analyse and understand social relations in our society. As stated earlier, stories help to bring back and relive the past, and understand how our past influences or affects our current experiences. Bell (2003) further states that 'stories are not simply individual productions but are cultural and ideological as well' (p.4) In other words, as individuals we are embedded in a particular context, a particular history, ideologies, social setting and culture.

4.3   Conceptual framework

As explained in chapter two, the conceptual framework for this study relies on the concepts 'identity' and 'teacher identity'. In this study, I examine the concept 'identity' from a social constructionist perspective, located in sociology. Danielewicz (2001) expressed the view that teaching is an identity forming process through which people define themselves and are being viewed by others as teachers. Identity has increasingly been viewed as an important component

by which teaching and learning are negotiated in and out of classroom, thus the need to look into and understand the concepts.

4.4 Research design

Research designs are the features used to collect, analyse and interpret data in a study. We can use various types of research designs for a qualitative research, such as grounded theory design, ethnographic design and narrative research design (Creswell , 2002). Narrative research design is used when you have people who are ready to tell their experiences as stories and the researcher wants to examine the story (Creswell, 2002). For researchers who want to know more about personal experiences of people in various settings, narrative research gives insights into such. Narrative research makes the participants feel their stories and experiences are important and they feel comfortable and elated that their voices are being heard. I employed a narrative research design in this study as I wanted to give voice to the special education teachers.

4.4.1 Research context and participants

The research context is a special school in the city of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. The special school caters for intellectually challenged learners from mild to moderate category. It also caters for learners with behavioural problems. The school has a population of over 500 learners, over 50 teaching staff and more than 30 non-teaching staff.

I sought the voluntary participation of the participants who are special education teachers at the special school. I engaged the use of purposive sampling for this study. Purposive sampling means participants are selected 'through possessing some certain defining characteristics that are needed or essential for the study' (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Six participants were purposively selected for this study. I was guided by the criteria suggested by Cresswell (2007): they were available, willing to offer information, experienced in their field of expertise, and able to shed or provide data on the issues or phenomena under study. In addition, I chose teachers who had been working at the school for at least five years.

4.4.2 Data generation

A narrative interview is guided by a self-generating schema; stories helps in unfolding the perspective of the interviewee in the act of events narration (Bauer, 1996).

I used the narrative interview as my key data generation tool. The main question was: 'Tell me about your experiences as a teacher in a special school starting with your first day in a special school setting'. Probing questions were later asked where and when necessary in the bid to elicit rich data. According to Clandinin (1992) narratives are meaningful utterances put together in a

sequence in order to make a meaning out of the event or experience. These utterances are personal, practical knowledge and experiences in form of stories and narratives. It is a kind of knowledge shaped by situations. In other words, it is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories, and 'retell and relive them through processes of reflection' (Clandinin, 1992, p.125).

My first stage of data collection began with an interview with each participant during which I explained the aim, importance and relevance of the study to the educational field. I obtained personal information about the participants. Biographical data was captured through a questionnaire (refer to Appendix 4).

During the second interview, I accessed data on their experiences as teachers at the special school. The main interview question was: Tell me your experiences of teaching at a special school from your first day in the setting. I then asked probing questions as the interview proceeded. I did have some questions to guide me in the interview process, as I felt that this would help me ensure that I did not miss out important issues (refer to Appendix 5).

All participants were interviewed at venues and times that were convenient for them. Interviews were audio-taped. Sound check was conducted on the venue before the interview to ensure there is no distortion and to make sure the equipment was in perfect condition. Interviews were conducted in English, and took an average of 90 minutes. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were given to participants in order to verify the validity of the interviews, that is, to ensure that there was no evidence of alteration, omission or addition to their stories. This ensured the trustworthiness of the transcribed data.

4.4.3   The pilot study
I conducted a pilot study which helped me to familiarise myself with the interview procedure and to assess the effectiveness of my probing questions. I interviewed a volunteer participant from the school who was not in my sample. The pilot study helped make adjustments to my interview process, and to further develop my skills and competence for the real interview process. For example, I found I missed opportunities for elaboration by the participant which would have yielded more in-depth and rich data. I also failed to allow the participant to provide a detailed account of the 'small stories' she shared with me.

4.4.4   Data analysis
I utilized narrative analysis as my data analysis tool. Firstly, I analysed the biographical details of the participants to make sure they meet the criteria for selection as the participants. After the

interviews were conducted, I transcribed the data. I read and re-read the transcribed data looking for similarities in the narratives and the themes emerging from the narratives. I also concentrated on and brought out all the small stories of the special education teachers.

I wrote out each participant's story, and I took care to use their own language (refer to Appendix 7). Narratives on their own might not make any sense or have any value until they are analysed and interpreted. Denzin & Lincoln (2002) explain that 'a researcher has to put together a portrait from the narratives through the data analysis process, and has to excavate below the surface'. Garson (2012) argues that 'narrative analysis is analysis of a chronologically told story with a focus on how elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently from others, how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past and how both shape perceptions of the future' (p. 4).

Narrative analysis is a type of qualitative analysis in which the researcher pays attention to how participants arrange their experiences in order to make sense of the experiences they have participated in (Check & Schutt, 2012). They further state that narrative analysis discovers the 'big picture' about the events and experiences of respondents and how the experiences are understood. The coding is on narratives or story in general and not on the elements (Check & Schutt, 2012). The coding helps to read and understand the stories and detect patterns in the data.

For me, narrative analysis meant the following, engaging with questions such as: what is the meaning within the story? What is plot of the story? Who are the actors? Where is the context, and what is the context? What shapes the stories? The process required constant reflection. (Bleakley, 2005).

In my narrative analysis process, I found that each stage required time and effort. I started with my research questions; I read and as I read I listened to the stories. I sought for emergent categories as they unfolded from the data, in addition to the pre-set categories, keeping in mind my critical research questions.

I searched for topics within the stories, and placed these topics into categories of meaning. Finally, I identified themes across the categories. I lifted appropriate words and phrases of the narrator from the text that reflected a particular theme. I also searched for metaphors in the data that point to a particular image (e.g. a carer) that shapes each participant's particular experience as told in each one's story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Soreide, 2006).

4.4.5 Trustworthiness

In establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study, four factors are taken into account: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility relates to how confident the researcher is about the truth of the findings. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be replicated by other researchers. Dependability refers to the quality of the entire processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Confirmability is the measure of how well the researcher's findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Trustworthiness in this study was achieved by giving the opportunity to participants to validate the transcribed data. This is referred to as member check. I had prolonged engagement with participants in the study to enable in-depth data, and developed a trusting relationship with them. I have included thick descriptive data to reflect complexities in the data. My supervisor assessed the reliability of my data analysis process, particularly in the identification of topics, categories and themes.

A critique in my study maybe the issue of researcher bias as I am a special education teacher at the study school. However, I argue that my aim was not to produce value-free knowledge that can be generalised to all people, contexts and times. My view is that it is impossible to detach oneself completely from the situation which is being researched and to see it from a completely *outsider* position. I argue that research is a human activity. I believe that all qualitative research, in particular, is shaped by the cultural, social and political position of the researcher, making this position clear is one way of avoiding bias. I attempt do this in chapter 2. Further, I argue that bias comes from not acknowledging my positions as a researcher.

Having made the above point, I wish to state that my supervisor played a valuable role at all stages of this research as my critical friend. She constantly made me self-consciousness about my social, cultural, political and value positions, and how these can potentially influence the interpretation of the theory, data and conclusions. The reflexive engagements with my supervisor helped me to bracket out my biases, and engage in an introspective process that made me conscious of my personal feelings, perceptions and experiences as a special educator teacher.

4.4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics is the general term used for the rules a researcher needs to observe when planning and undertaking a study (Walliman, 2006). Conducting research involves not violating the trust of the

participants and conducting the study in an upright and ethical manner. Ethical considerations are needed at all stages of the research.

Ethics ensure that the researcher does not do anything to harm the participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity to protect the identity of the participants and research site. Following ethical guidelines gives a study integrity and credibility (Walliman, 2006).

Prior to the commencement of this study, I obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I also sought permission from the provincial Department of Education (DoE) to use one of their schools. I later obtained informed consent from the Principal of the school (Appendix 2). All participants in this study signed the informed consent forms (Appendix 3). The aims and nature of this study were explained to participants and the principal of the school. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To achieve this, pseudonyms were used for the participants in the study (Jennifer, Aneesha, Nonjabulo, Inga, Marilyn and Tanesh). All the guidelines of ethical considerations have been duly considered and upheld.

4.5   Limitations of the study

When I embarked on the study, my concern was that I am a teacher at the study site and the participants are my colleagues. It is likely that our relationship may have affected the nature of the data yielded. It is possible that they did not provide the whole picture as they may not have wanted to share experiences of a personal nature. I did try my best to build their trust and assured them of my commitment to confidentiality.

The majority of my participants were female. Only one male special education teacher met the criteria for inclusion in the study. It may be argued that male special education teachers' views and narratives were not fully elicited.

4.6   Conclusion

My discussion of the research methodology and design in this chapter is intended to show fitness of purpose and design coherence. I justify why I have used narrative for this study, how data was generated, the selection of the context and sampling, and data analysis. In addition, I have outlined ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness. In the next chapter I discuss the findings of the study.

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results and discussion of the findings from the study, in relation to the critical key questions. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) explain that identities embedded in the narratives teachers create to explain themselves and their teaching lives. The special school educators in the study were able to share their stories which reflect their professional and personal identities and how these plays out in their work.

The analysis is channelled through the critical research questions:

- How do the teachers make sense of and negotiate their personal and professional identities within a special school setting?
- What can teacher narratives as a research method tell us about their personal and professional identities?
- How does the intersection of culture, emotionality and identity play out in the lives of the special school teachers?

While engaging in the analysis of this data, I laid emphasis on the content of the narrative that brought out how the special education teachers negotiate their personal and professional lives. I read the transcribed interview many times, bringing out the themes and subject positions that emerged.

5.2 Profile of teachers

Six special education teachers were participants in this study. For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms were used. Jennifer, Aneesha, Nonjabulo, Inga, Marilyn and Tanesh are the names used for the participants in this study.

Jennifer: The participant is a female; she is 58 years of age. She is a white[1] South African. Her formal qualification is M+4 years (matric plus four years tertiary study). She has taught in special schools for 20 years but has been teaching at the study site for the past nine years. She is permanently employed by the provincial Department of Education (DoE).She is enthusiastic about her work. She teaches English Language, Music, and Arts and Culture. She is a mother of

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[1] The racial categories used in this dissertation: African, coloured, White and Indian, are social constructions. They have their origin in apartheid system. However, they still appear in South African legislation and policy today but mainly in relation to redress strategies. These categories still impact the lives of people in South Africa.

six. She shared with me that a few of her own children have experienced learning difficulties in school.

Jennifer explained that she entered special education by chance.

> *It was first of all per chance, eh,eh, my reason being that my son(my middle son) has barriers to learning and he had an interview because he was going to attend school the following year at this school, so I came along, you know, brought him to the interview. I mentioned to the principal then about the music I was teaching at another school, and then he in return asked me whether I would, eh,eh, apply for an English post at the school. I said 'gosh, I never thought of that!' and that if there was a vacancy I would certainly do that, that was how that came about.*

Aneesha: is a female. She is 52 years old. She is a South African Indian. Her formal qualification is M+3 years. She has been teaching at the study site for 6 years, and is permanently employed by the Department of Education. She is a friendly woman who is passionate about her learners. She teaches English and Natural Science. She is married with 4 children. Aneesha explains how circumstances led her to special education,

> *I voluntarily came in because I had studied, you know special needs course and at that time, I was doing my assignment, so I needed to have been in a special school that is why I came in, to get my assignment done.*

Nonjabulo: is a female. She is 46 years old. She is African. Her formal qualification is M+3 years. She has been working at the school for six years, and is permanently employed. She is single. She is a devout Christian and enjoys teaching learners about God and spirituality. She has organised a Christian club at the school. She is very dedicated to her profession. Nonjabulo explains that she entered special education by choice,

> *I had a choice, because I applied, there was a post and I had to apply. One has to change the environment; you know previously, I was teaching at a high school level, grades 11 and 12. So now, it was my option, I wanted to do it, it was voluntary.*

Inga: is a female. She is 48 years old. She is an African, and her formal qualification is M+3 years. She has six years teaching experience at this special school, and is permanently employed. She is a warm hearted woman, and is always looking for ways to enhance the wellbeing of

learners. She is married with three children. Inga explains that she entered special education by default as she had no qualifications, nor experience in special education,

> *I didn't think about teaching in a special school since I was in Eastern Cape, I wanted to come to KwaZulu-Natal, I thought I would get a normal school but unfortunately, I got a special school, so I came in per chance.*

Marilyn: is female. She is 60 years old. She is white. Her formal qualification is M+5 years. She has been teaching at the study site for 24 years and 5 months, and is a permanent member of staff. She was getting due to retire at the time of this study. She is a very hardworking woman, always prepared to take up challenges. She is married with three children. Marilyn stated that her entry into special education was not planned.

> *It was pure chance, those days I was looking for a post and I couldn't get a post and I was told there was a vacancy - just as a temporary as one of my colleagues went on long leave, by pure chance I got a permanent post here.*

Tanesh: is a male. He is 49 years old. He is a South African Indian. His formal qualification is M+4 years. He has been permanently employed at the school for nine years. He has a very friendly, warm personality and committed to his profession. He is married with a child. Tanesh came into special education voluntarily.

> *I was qualified as a mainstream educator. Whilst at the mainstream school, I realized that there are different learners with different educational disabilities. I saw the need to further equip myself as a special education teacher, then I pursued a degree in special education, that is why I ended up in a special school.*

5.3   Discussion of findings

5.3.1   Introduction

In this section, I discuss who the teachers are and how they understand themselves, as reflected in their stories they told.

Lawler (2003) explains that ' If we want to find out how people make identities, make sense of the world and their place within it, if we want to find out how they interpret the world and themselves – we will have to attend to the stories they tell'(p. 243)

As I analysed the data qualitatively into topics and categories, I noted that I could thematically identify the positions teachers took as they played out their multiple identities. The subject positions highlight the different ways in which they understand themselves and their work as

special education teachers. I then examined what were the different identities that emerged across the subject positioning process that were evident. Most often there was an intersection of the personal and professional within the different identities. My analysis of the narratives showed that teachers took various subject positions as they do their teacher work.

5.3.2   A glimpse into the subject positions of the teachers

The narratives showed the different subject positions teachers used to describe who they are as teachers and their understanding of their work. I highlight them below:

The teacher is someone who is concerned for learners' wellbeing: Most teachers positioned themselves as people concerned about the learners' health and social, psychological and emotional wellbeing. (Inga: *Some of those learners they need love, so you have to give them the love that you give your children because they have problems).*

A teacher is someone who has empathy: There were teachers who positioned themselves as having a fervent love of their work. (Marilyn**:** *Yes, you know, I find myself, am an extremely passionate teacher. I love the subject I teach, I put my passion and emotion into teaching.... I just have a connection with these learners.*)

A teacher is someone who is passionate: Teachers are responsive to learners' needs and wants, and have patience and understanding. (Aneesha: *You know naturally I am a very timid person but am also, am an empathetic person, So in my teaching the children that needed help here, I knew I could help them and yes, I do have a lot of patience with these learners… I have empathy for these children. I love doing what I am doing).*

A teacher is a parent to learners: In many of the narratives, the teachers positioned themselves as second parents, who support learners personally, socially and emotionally. (Jennifer: *A good teacher must act as 'parents at school' for the learners).*

A teacher collaborates with colleagues and others in the school community: Most teachers raised their as positioning as collaborators and team workers, and saw this positioning as a way to build competences and support. *(Inga: I also collaborate with other teachers, sharing our experiences in order to develop ourselves, em, this goes a long way in helping me, at least, I know am not the only one facing those challenges.   Nonjabulo: I would say that the most important thing for me is to see the parents also get involved in the education of their kids, because at the present moment, I feel they just don't care, they don't want to get involved. That will really make my day, to see them that we have connection, to see that we are helping each other in the education of the child.).*

45

The work of the teacher is demanding: The narratives revealed that teacher work is demanding, frustrating and difficult at times. Some of the issues that make their work difficult are: lack of resources, large classes, too many new policies, no teaching assistants. (Aneesha: *When there is too many of these children in one class, then we can't really cope with them, we feel. We feel we really do need a helper or teacher assistant in the classroom. The Department of Education could pay for that you know. We also need more aids/resources, models and things like that.*).

A teacher is dedicated to professional development: Ongoing professional development is the key to being a good teacher. *(Marilyn: I changed a lot in my ways of teaching, when I started off, I thought my opinion was the only opinion. My teaching has changed from when I first started. I have learnt a lot, I was very fortunate, my whole life – I have been open to learning and developing).*

A teacher has special competences and knowledge: The participants positioned the special education teaching as having specialised skills and knowledge, particularly in responding to diversity, differentiating the curriculum, devising individual education plans, and assessing and monitoring learner progress. (Marilyn: *I do have a lot of patience with these learners, and I find I can actually design lesson plans to suit the child's needs – that is my aim. I find that it's em I'm blessed with that skill. I can almost identify the child's problems very quickly - and design a programme to meet that learner's challenges).*

The above subject positions emerged in my analysis of all the narratives of the teachers. These subject positionings are, in a way, resources through which teachers make sense of themselves as people and their work. By articulating these subject positions they were constructing their identities, both personal and professional.

5.3.3   Negotiating multiple identities

The study revealed that with the help of the subject positions they articulated above, teachers in fact constructed various teacher identities. From a social constructivism perspective, Gergen (2000) argues that identity is socially, historically, politically and culturally constructed. He further elaborates that identity roles and knowledge are created and maintained in particular socio-historical contexts. Thus the teacher self is developed through transactions with the educational and schooling context in which they work. The discussion below shows how teacher self and context are interwoven, and how the self evolves through contextual influences.

I was able to identify six major identity constructions in the six interviews:

- The caring, kind parent image;

- The spiritual being;
- The creative innovator;
- The counsellor;
- The curriculum policy enactor;
- The life-long learner.

As found in the study of teacher identity by Soreide (2006), I wish to stress that these are not discrete, clearly demarcated categories and that they may be flexible and overlap in complex ways. In the sub-sections below I discuss the various identity constructions.

5.3.3.1 The caring, kind parent image

Many teachers voiced the view that being kind and caring is expected to be part of the disposition of a teacher. This seems to emerge from their past personal and professional histories, and their socialisation into the role of the teacher. They explained that the teachers are expected to act in loco- parentis to the learners in place of their biological parent. A teacher is supposed to show kindness and care for the learners put under their tutorship. Many learners see the kind, caring and parent image teachers as their role models; they respect them and want to be like them.

The participants suggested that learners look up to them as parent role models. Some of the participants expressed that they are living up to this task, showing the learners kindness and love which many learners lack in their home. A few participants intimated that learners are always eager to come to school to learn because it is a loving and conducive atmosphere for them.

Tanesh relates that he plays the role of a parent to these learners, and brings to the school context as a resource his own personal identity as a parent,

> *Well, you must understand that being a parent, I firstly try to look at these children as my children, so when they feel pain, I sort of to a certain degree feel the pain with them, when they are angry, I get emotionally upset as with any other parent.*

Jennifer portrays herself as an understanding teacher, and draws from her personal identity as a mother to support her position,

> *Err, I feel I understand these children, what their frustrations are, their frustrations are similar to what my children experience.*

47

Nonjabulo similarly stated that she shows kindness, love and care to the children she teaches.

> *I love the kids and I'm also willing to listen to them. As they see me they want to hug me, they want to tell me how their day was, you know all those things. Yeah, and that is one reason I want to work in the school hostel, you know, to continue being a mother to them.*

Marilyn explains her experience,

> *Over the years, some learners come to me to thank me for what I've done for them and I've also got, I have made a booklet of over the years, there will always be 4, 5 to 10 learners who come to me to thank me and write the most beautiful letters just for my understanding with them and being there for them. I was privileged to be in charge of the girls' hostel for 5 years. I had the most wonderful experiences there with the girls - they really saw me as their mother. I did things like remembering birthdays and things like that, so yes, at their speech at the end of the year, they will come and say, you were like a real mother to us.*

5.3.3.2 The spiritual being

There were teachers in the study who portrayed themselves strongly as spiritual beings. In the context of this personal identity, they see the learners with disabilities as creations or gifts from God, that therefore have to be treated justly, fairly and with respect. Nonjabulo respects the uniqueness in the children and accepts them the way they are as it is God's will.

> *Yeah, I would say that I grew up in a Christian family and eh, you know, you have to realise that everyone is made of God and that God wants us to be who we are and so we have to accept people in their differences or how they are, so yeah, I accept them how they are.*

Similarly, Marilyn portrayed herself as a spiritual teacher. It is her spirituality that influences her role as a teacher and her commitment to her learners. She also implied that God endowed her with knowledge as a teacher. She is humbled that she has been chosen to transfer this knowledge to her learners to help them grow. She does not see herself as someone to be rated higher than the learners as a human being because God has created everyone equal. Marilyn is about to retire, and sees the years she spent in special education as a calling from God.

> *I think am open minded, you know God created us all and the humbleness, I know the Bible teaches me to be humble, I'm not better than you, okay, I've only got the knowledge. God gave me the opportunity to work with learners and to share myself with them. Now when I retire I want to give back to my family.*

5.3.3.3 The counsellor

A few teachers saw her role as a teacher as aligned to that of a counsellor. Nonjabulo explained her role as a counsellor to her learners, providing them with social and emotional support. Her pastoral role is just as valuable as the academic one.

> *I spend time with them listening to their problems and I realise that I am really making a difference in their lives. It is really good for me to see another side of them. I will like to be a qualified counsellor to these learners one day. I can see they trust me, they come to me with their problems and I advise them appropriately. I want to be able to do this later in my life.*

Aneesha shared one of her critical incident that related to counselling a child from a poor socio-economic background on issues of health and wellbeing,

> *One incident is a child that had a lot of sores on her hand and I found out that she was not washing herself properly. So I approached her and asked how is she washing her body and she told me. She put a little water in a dish and she just used the same water to wash herself all the time - so it's like she was rearranging the dirt on her body. Then afterwards, I taught her how to wash and clean herself. She was out in the rural areas.*

5.3.3.4 The creative innovator

The study showed evidence that teachers were constructing themselves as enabling innovation and pursuing creative and exciting learning activities for learners. These teachers were keen to use their skills and competences to create opportunities for learners to showcase their own capabilities and potential. These innovative teachers did not shy away from hard work and commitment, and remained enthusiastic and sustained in their involvement despite setbacks.

Jennifer recounted an innovative initiative she engaged children in with much success:

> *Mrs A. and I were with the music. So we decided to put on a show, 'Joseph with many colours'. It required that I had to rewrite about 32 pieces into a literature that was comfortable for the children. It took us 3 terms to prepare the learners for the musical. It was hard work because you know, we practised twice in a week and you know the children had mastered the words. They couldn't read the songs, they had to learn from memory and from singing it over and over again. And then acting had to take place and it was challenging because then the children would dropout. Then we had to retrain another learner and so it went on. But when it came to the cultural performance, it was absolutely stunning. The children*

learnt all those 32 songs and I think it was an achievement. The people from outside were invited to come and attend the function. It was in the evening and it was so well enjoyed. So it was really an achievement.

Tanesh also shared positive experiences of innovation in his teaching practices,

At the technical centre, we always compete at the Royal Show. We compete with not only learners with special needs but learners across the board, including those working in factories. And in three consecutive years, my boys got not only first prize but only, the only highly recommended prize - and they achieved this in the society with preconceived ideas that special learners cannot do this and are not capable. Three consecutive years, we brought back to the school the biggest and most prestigious trophy.

5.3.3.5 The curriculum policy enactor

Ball, Braun, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) state that 'policy provides a vocabulary for thinking about practice, reflecting on it and evaluating it, and for estimating one's own self-worth as a teacher' (p.622). A number of participants mentioned their roles as policy actors.

There have been numerous new policies released by the national and provincial departments of education in the last decade or so, which the teachers have had to study and implement. They indicated that their work is guided by policy.

As special education teachers, we are guided by the White Paper 6. I as a special education teacher have been doing my possible best to be guided by the WP6 in my classroom. (Aneesha)

Yeah, the policy is there, em as a special education teacher, I know what is required of me, the White Paper 6 acts as a guide and I am doing what I can do to make sure I carry out my duties professionally. (Marilyn)

Special mention was made of *Education White Paper 6* (Department of Education, 2001), and its policy proposals.

These special education teachers in the study have seen themselves as curriculum policy enactors. Curriculum plays pivotal role in any educational institution. In South Africa, it is stipulated that special schools must access the mainstream curriculum. This curriculum has to be adapted to suit learner needs, levels of functioning and goals. Teachers have to use their expertise to make sure they deliver the content as meaningfully as possible to the learners, drawing on innovative teaching strategies and pedagogies and learning materials. Aneesha states,

I give my everything, like in the afternoon, I can sit down and spend extra time planning and designing the curriculum. Do not think it is a hindrance. I love to do that. I love to design work for the children

and go and look out for new books. Constantly I am on the internet trying to find out why this particular child has this problem and what can be done to help the child.

As stipulated in *Education White paper 6,* learners work on the same topic but at different levels of task complexity according to their abilities. The participants in the study shared their experiences on how they have been enacting the curriculum as special education teachers, including the complexities.

> *We adapt the mainstream curriculum for these learners, they work on curriculum for lower grades to which they normally will be, then we differentiate it down for them to cater for the different levels of challenges in class. (Paused) as we know that all fingers are not equal, we don't practise all sizes fit all, we adapt to meet each learner's need. We also put them in groups (green, yellow, red) according to their abilities. This helps us teachers to effectively manage their various challenges.* (Marilyn)

Inga explains,

> *Right now, we use the mainstream curriculum, we then modify or adapt it to the level of the learners we teach. We had a workshop/in- service training on adapting the lessons and curriculum. So I, I am able to do this without problems, um, The new Department of Education, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) are easier to understand and work with. But I think there should be a structured curriculum for our learners, because for a teacher that finds this difficult to adapt, the learners will be disadvantaged.*

Teachers narrated the complexities and tensions with curriculum policy implementation in the last few years in South Africa.

> *In South African education system, there has been some changes which destabilizes us as teachers, (paused) we are settling in on a policy then another one will be introduced, this is not on, yeah, in spite of all these, I am striving to do my best under every circumstance. We are on CAPS now – too many changes - and I am doing my best possible to act out the policy. In class, we practice inclusive teaching. Being a special school, we have learners with various needs and challenges. I as a teacher have to diversify my teaching to suit learners' individual needs. (Inga)*

5.3.3.6 The self-initiated, lifelong learner.

Teachers see themselves as life-long learners. Many of the participants indicated that they continuously learn on the job and grow and develop with every passing day. Marilyn had this to say,

'I changed a lot in my ways of teaching, when I started off, I thought my opinion was the only opinion. My teaching has changed from when I first started. I have learnt a lot, I was very fortunate, my whole life – I have been open to learning.

Inga also shared her experience,

When I started at this special school, I battled with being patient with these learners. They teased and disrupted classes and even swore at themselves and teachers regularly. They stressed me, but over the years I have seen my patience and endurance level increase and also my teaching techniques and methods improved a lot. Also we as teachers cooperate and collaborate. We share our experiences both in class and outside which has also helped me in coping with these learners. We as teachers share various coping strategies that work for each person, these others learn from.

After joining the school, Jennifer later went to complete a degree in special education. She explained that she did this in order to develop herself professionally. Further, she needed to upgrade her skills and knowledge to help her biological children who had special educational needs, showing the intersection between personal and professional identity.

Two of the participants have no special education qualifications, but over the years have engaged in various workshops and in-service training activities to develop professionally. All the teachers alluded to the fact that their identity as lifelong learner evolved over time. Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell (2010) contended that identity is constructed and re-constructed in relation to the changing needs and opportunities individuals are confronted with. Tanesh had this to say, '

I am quite positive; I take part in professional development if it's going to be beneficial to me. I have just completed my Masters Degree in Education, so yeah, I am learning progressively. I will be starting my Doctorate soon.

Jennifer explained her commitment to lifelong learning,

I am a life-long learner, I take part in in-service training that, that is provided by the school or my employer. I make sure I stay abreast of developments in my profession. I have improved myself a lot professionally with various certificates and degrees to show. We as teachers also get together to discuss various challenges faced in our various classes and we deliberate on ways of surmounting these challenges, yeah we learn from ourselves in order to develop professionally. Professional development is the way to go.

Nonjabulo stated,

'I am very open, very open to professional development. I take part in workshops seminars organised for teachers by DoE, school, unions etc. Engaging in IQMS is also a means of professional development, with the assistance of my peer and mentor. We also share experiences with ourselves on how to be better teachers, it helps you know, to know that there is support amongst ourselves. I also intend to further my education soon, I don't want to be stagnant. So, yeah, I am very open to professional development, it helps a lot. I'll like to believe I have accomplished many of my dreams, in the sense of being at a special school for such a long time, I've never stagnated, every year I was enthusiastic. Every year was a new challenge because you get new learners because things happened very fast because of the curriculum changes etc., there was no time for me to stagnate.

5.3.3.7 Summary.

The multiple identities presented above highlight that identity is fluid, situated and multidimensional depending on the circumstance or situation the person is in. The various identities intersect and overlap in different situations. Nonjabulo takes on the identity of a caring, kind parent, yet she also takes on the identity of a spiritual teacher, and a counsellor. The special education teachers adjust their work and subject positions according to the demands placed on them. These teachers negotiate multiple identities; they take on different roles in different circumstances or situations, for example, curriculum actor in the face of new policies.

Soreide (2006) contends that to understand teachers and their work, it is important to make sense of how they construct their narratives/stories and the multiple identities that emerge in their narratives. These insights can have valuable implications for teacher professional development.

5.3.4   The intersection of emotionality and identity

The teacher narratives in this study reveal that emotions are a critical facet of professional identity formation. Hargreaves (2001) is of the opinion that emotion is an important factor in teachers' attitude to their professional lives and how they negotiate their identities. Zembylas (2003) explains that teachers experience emotions that may 'expand or limit possibilities' in teaching. (p.112). Zembylas (2003b) explained that emotion is a valuable lens into the meaning of identity. Embedded in the identity constructions in the previous sections is strong evidence of teacher emotionality. A range of competing emotions play out and are negotiated in the special education teachers' lives, including sadness, caring, empathy, love, frustration, disappointment.

Nonjabulo shares difficult aspects of her work and the emotions they generate in her. Although she works hard to be understanding and patient, she is saddened and disappointed when working with children who are difficult to teach, and when children who try hard cannot retain work taught.

> *Some of the learners, as much as they want to know, you will find that the next day, they come in, they have forgotten what you have taught them the previous day. It becomes really a disaster to have to re-teach those things again. I feel sad and at times disappointed because it's like you have done nothing. But I have stayed in the school because I have actually connected with these learners.*

Marilyn's narrative reveals the competing emotions she tries to navigate in her work,

> *When I would think learners disappoint you--- because… I teach them, I give them so much and yet they will come back and they will disappoint you. The good thing about that is I learn that learners are learners, children are children, and to be forgiving and to understand them,'*

Tanesh recalls an incident involving one of his students that devastated him emotionally,

> *What really broke me down was I worked closely with a particular boy in woodwork workshop. Him and I got along very well. He came from a really distraught family. But the most disappointing part was the day we had closed school for the December holidays. He had completed his 4th year. It was the week that followed, I read an article that he was involved in a serious malicious crime. That was really a down moment for me because I know his background, and I know while at school how often I helped him come out of difficult situation. I always felt if I were there may be it wouldn't have happened.*

Many teachers' narratives reflected frustrations regarding lack of resources, lack of consultation in policy development processes, and inadequate curriculum support from the Department of Education which negatively impact their professional lives. Jennifer explains,

> *Yes, I can say I am a good teacher, I am trying my best to make sure I do what is expected of me. Some of the barriers to my effective teaching are, unavailability of LTSM, that is Learning Teaching Support Materials, disruptive behaviour of learners and their lack of motivation, etc. Despite all this I am a professional, I work my way around it to make sure my work is effectively done'.*

> *We as teachers are not consulted before the policies are drafted, so, so we work on whatever is given to us. We practise inclusive teaching here, the school had a workshop on how to teach learners with various challenges in one class. This has helped me tremendously to cope with writing lesson plans and teaching techniques employed in my class, bearing in mind the peculiarity of each learner. Yeah, I diversify my lessons and act according to the Inclusive Education policy. (Marilyn)*

'There is no structured curriculum for these learners and sometimes what they are taught is subjective, it's what the educator will perceive to be relevant. That's what brings me down often and I, to a certain extent within my mind, blame the Department of Education. (Tanesh)

Hargreaves (1998, p. 838) explains that teachers have a 'heavy emotional investment' in their work and their relationships education authorities, learners, parents and their colleagues in their teaching contexts. This emotionality inherent in the role of teacher intersects with and shapes identity formation, for example, whether a teacher views himself or herself as a good or bad teacher. Zembylas (2003) states that in the classroom and in specific school settings teachers are *emotionally* engaged in forming their identities, exploring the personal, social, and cultural/ historical aspects for their identity formation.

5.3.5 Teacher identity and culture

Riely (2007) states that 'culture is knowledge, in the widest possible sense, including the traditions and history of the group, its common sense, beliefs, values, attitudes and language (p.36). It is the knowledge members of a society need if they are to participate in social situations and activities in life. Zion, Kozleski and Fulton (2005) explain that culture is the combination of our histories, early socialisation, experiences as well as our personalities.

Some of these special school educators shared their experiences on how their culture and early socialisation has impacted their work as teachers. Many of the teacher narratives reveal a connection between identities as teachers and cultures and values instilled in them. The findings suggest that teachers' professional identities are shaped by their own personal cultural norms and values and by social and cultural norms within their teaching contexts. Jennifer explained why she easily adjusted to and finds fulfilment in teaching in a school for children with special needs – she grew up appreciating difference and diversity. Her personal identity and the cultural influences that shaped it influenced her professional identity.

My father went into lecturing at Sizwe College which is for adult learners, they were studying to become educators. My father taught maths and I was used to the students coming to the home – from various culture groups. My father raised us in a home where we accepted people irrespective of their cultural background. So I have no problems, I don't see people in colour or they are a different culture, it's just that's (paused) how I was raised.

Aneesha had this to say about how her culture affects the way she teaches and relate with learners in her class. She explains that she was socialised through her cultural values to care for those less fortunate and vulnerable.

> *Now in our culture, I am Indian, we have to care for our own parents and disabled children and we are not, I wouldn't say allowed to exclude them. It is … it's like a stigma to your family, if you put your child in a home for disabled children. We take care of them. No, I wouldn't say some Indians don't attach stigma to disabilities no, some do. But the way I was brought up we do take care of our disabled children and parents and this has helped me a lot in this my profession.*

Tanesh shared her views on the intersection between her cultural background and her personal and professional identities. Respect for teachers is a strong cultural value instilled with him, and he demands this from his learners and conducts himself in a way to earn that respect.

> *Being Indian, I must tell you that from a small child, our parents in particular always stressed the importance of the educator. The Indian culture stresses that teachers guide you to your future and equip you for your development and profession. We hold teachers in high regard. With this backdrop, I to a large extent expect the learners to respect me because that is how I was brought up. Sometimes I may be a little demanding but I demand them to greet me, I demand them to listen to me and that's how my culture has imparted my teaching.*

Tanesh's narrative above aligns with Roberts (1998) who stated that 'a teaching identity develops through exchange between our personal theories, on one hand, and the demands of our social and occupational context on the other' (p. 22). Tanesh's personal theory about who is a teacher is rooted in his socio-cultural background.

White, Zion and Kozleski (2005) contend that the choices, decisions and subject positions that teachers make are embedded more often in their cultural beliefs and backgrounds. Culture plays a significant part in the lives of people as it is their social group belonging and identification. Individuals cannot be dissociated from their culture because it serves as their resource which they tap into every day. Zion, Kozleski & Fulton (2005) argue that it is the bedrock of their identity.

5.4   Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the three research questions, and highlighted the multifaceted nature of the intersection of personal and professional identities of the special education teachers

in the study. The self-identity of a teacher needs to be seen in terms of the personal and professional, as there is personal dimension to much of teacher work. The teachers' personal beliefs and values nurtured within their cultural backgrounds influence their teaching experiences, teaching philosophy, teaching practice and teacher identity. There is little doubt that the teachers' identities are embedded in their personal biographies. Cooper and Olson (1996) explain that professional identity is multifaceted, multidimensional, dynamic and multi-layered.

However, it must be noted that professional identity is changing and evolves. The above analysis of the teacher narratives in this study may give the impression that teacher professional identity is static in nature. MacLure (1993) argues that 'identity is a continuing site of struggle for teachers, and … it should not be seen as a stable entity'" (p. 312). Smith (2007) also draws attention to the fragmented nature of identity in that it evolves and changes as it is shaped by context, and is never static. Zembylas (2003) adds another dimension to constructions of professional identity when he refers to that, 'the self, never completed' (p. 113). He highlights the fluidity of the professional self.

The study shows that teachers are 'emotional passionate beings who connect with their students' (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835) and therefore by considering their emotions will provide a more complex understanding of their identities. Teachers' work is filled with diverse emotions which they navigate such as frustration, disappointment, sadness, pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

This chapter also provided insight into the emotional facet of the role of special education teacher and teacher identity.

The final chapter to follow presents the conclusion and implications of the study.

6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1Introduction

This chapter explores the brief overview of this study. It looks into the crucial issues raised in the study, discusses the implications of this study, the reflections of the researcher are brought to the fore, and further areas for research are illuminated.

The aim of the study in this thesis was to explore the personal and professional identities of special education teachers through the use of narrative inquiry as a research method. An important facet of the research method was the focus on 'small' stories that teachers had to tell. The study has shown that teachers' narratives can provide a lens into the lives of teachers and how they construe themselves and the subject positions they take, and how their personal and professional identities play out in their engagements or what they do in and out of the classroom.

Various studies have been done on teachers in mainstream schools but there is limited research from the African context that has examined the voices or stories of special education teachers. This study has been able to fill this gap by making the stories of special school educators heard.

6.2   Implications of this study

In this study, I looked into the personal and professional identities of special education teachers and how they negotiate these identities as they do teacher work. Lipka and Brinthaupt (1999), cited in Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), argue that both ways of looking at identity, through the self and through the profession, can help us to think more clearly about identity (p. 179) and its implications for teacher development. My study shows that the personal and professional identities of the special education teachers intersect and shape how they navigate their work in a special school, for example, many teachers see teaching children with disabilities as a calling and this construction emerges from their personal histories, cultures and social backgrounds, and the embedded norms and values.

Similarly, Day, Kingston, Stobart and Sammons (2006) support the idea of looking into the personal and professional identities together because teaching as a profession entails personal involvement which brings about 'the unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities' p.602. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that 'the inextricable link between the personal and professional selves of a teacher must be taken into account in understanding teacher identity.'

The study opened a multifaceted understanding of teacher identity as evident in the six constructions of teacher identity that emerged in the narratives. The study shows that within any institution, including a special school, there are always systems of meanings that operate which are evident in the six identity constructions. These identity constructions help teachers make sense of who they are in relation to their own practices. As teachers negotiate and navigate between different identity constructions they are able to shape and construct identities that feel comfortable to them. Soreide (2006) states that 'this might have an empowering force for the individual teacher, because it makes teacher identity flexible and adaptive to the context and the relations each teacher is a part of.'(p. 543).

The use of narrative inquiry as a method was valuable in a study of teacher identity and identity constructions. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) explain that teachers use narratives 'to make sense of themselves and their practice' (p.121). Lawler (2003) asserts that 'if we want to find out how people make identities, make sense of the world and their place within it, if we want to find out how they interpret the world and themselves - we will have to attend to the stories they tell.' (p. 243)

6.3   Limitations of this study

The study involved a small sample of teachers at one special school that caters for learners with one category of disability, that is, mild to moderate intellectual impairment. The sample was also limited in terms of gender representation as I was able to source one male teacher only. Further research in other special school contexts may provide interesting findings to inform the debates raised in my study.

6.4   Researcher Reflections

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) express the view that a teacher's identity is shaped and re-shaped by his or her relationship with people in the profession. As I undertook this study, as I listened to the stories of my participants, I was able to delve into my own life as a special education teacher, the subject positions I take, and what shapes my identity constructions. I found this an empowering experience.

I found engaging with a narrative approach in studying teacher identity and emotionality was very insightful. The stories teachers told were rich, fascinated me and compelled me to listen attentively to the critical incidents they related about their complex, multifaceted lives. Narrative data has the potential to illuminate significant information about teachers' personal experiences, teaching practices, religious and cultural beliefs and emotions. I think a narrative approach is

useful if integrated into teacher development programmes. It allows teachers a space to reflect upon their complex personal and professional lives, and make sense of the subject positions they take and the influences that shape their identities and their practices.

I end with this quote that has a special meaning for me - a special education teacher:

A hundred years from now, it will not matter,

What my bank account was,

The sort of house I lived in,

Or the kind of car I drove,

But, the world may be different because

I was important in the life of a child.

(Anonymous).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consent letter for District Office: KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Education Department

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Pietermaritzburg Campus

193 Woodhouse Road

Scottsville

Pietermaritzburg

19 January 2012

To whom it may concern:

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at schools

Sir/Ma'am,

I am a Masters in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, conducting a research project titled: **'Exploring personal and professional identities of special education teachers through small stories'** I want to learn about special education teachers' personal and professional identities and how it relates to their classroom experiences, through the use of small stories.

I humbly request your assistance in this research project by being granted permission to conduct my study at schools in your district. The participants in my study will be special school teachers from schools in the district. They will be required to participate in individual interviews that are expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

Please note that

- The schools and participants will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- The teachers will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- The schools' or the participant's identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All teachers' responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.

- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- The participants will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
- Digital recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by means they deem fit.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

_____   _____

F.O Bankole

0780862466   Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna

fabambolu2008@yahoo.com   031 260 2494

                                                                muthukri@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT FORM:

If permission is granted to conduct the research in the District schools, please fill in and sign the form below.

I,…………………………………………………………………………….., (Full Name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby grant permission for the researcher to conduct the research project within the schools in the Pietermaritzburg District. I understand that teachers are free to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____/_____/2012

Appendix 2: Consent form for school principal

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Pietermaritzburg Campus

193 Woodhouse Road

Scottsville

Pietermaritzburg

19 January 2012

Dear Principal,

Re: Request for permission to conduct research in your school.

I am a Masters in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, conducting a research project titled: **'Exploring personal and professional identities of special education teachers through small stories'** I want to learn about special education teachers' personal and professional identities and how it relates to their classroom experiences, through the use of small stories.

I humbly request your assistance in this research project by being granted permission to conduct my study in your school. The participants in my study will be special school teachers from your school. They will be required to participate in individual interviews that are expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

Please note that

- The schools and participants will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- The teachers will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- The schools' or the participant's identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All teachers' responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- The participants will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.

- Digital recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by means they deem fit.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

_____   _____

F.O Bankole

0780862466   Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna

fabambolu2008@yahoo.com   031 260 2494

                                                   muthukri@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT FORM:

If permission is granted to conduct my study at your school, please fill the form below.

I,…………………………………………………………………………, (Full Name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby grant permission for the researcher to conduct the research project at my school. I understand that teachers are free to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____/_____/2012

Appendix 3: Informed consent for teachers.

<div align="right">

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Pietermaritzburg Campus

193 Woodhouse Road

Scottsville

Pietermaritzburg.

19 January 2012.

</div>

Dear Teacher,

I am a Masters in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, conducting a research project titled: **'Exploring personal and professional identities of special education teachers through small stories'** I want to learn about special education teachers' personal and professional identities and how it relates to their classroom experiences, through the use of small stories.

I humbly request your assistance in this research project by being a participant in this study. The interview will be conducted in your school premises. You will be required to participate in individual interviews that are expected to last between 45 to 60 minutes.

Please note that

- The schools and participants will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- The teachers will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- The schools' or the participant's identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All teachers' responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- The participants will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
- Digital recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained.

- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by means they deem fit.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

_____   _____

F.O Bankole

0780862466   Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna

fabambolu2008@yahoo.com   031 260 2494

muthukri@ukzn.ac.za

If you agree to participate, please fill in and sign the declaration form.

CONSENT FORM

I,……………………………………………………………….., (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at anytime, should I so desire.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____/_____/2012

Appendix 4: Biographical Data Capture Form for Participants

Please tick the appropriate blocks below. All the information contained below will be treated with absolute confidentiality. You are also assured of complete anonymity as a participant in this study.

1. **GENDER**

   Male /   /   Female /   /

2. **AGE**

   35-39 /   /   40-49 /   /   50-59 /   /   60+ /   /

3. **RACE**

   African /   / Coloured /   / Indian /   / White /   / Other /   /

4. **YOUR FORMAL QUALIFICATION**

   BELOW M+3 /   / M+3 /   / M+4 /   / M+5 /   / M+6> /   /

5. **NO. OF YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

   /   / Years

6. **EMPLOYER**

   State /   / SGB Post /   /

7. **NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT**

   Permanent /   / Temporary /   / Contract /   /

   Thank You Once Again For Your Valued Participation.

Appendix 5: Interview guide

The Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Key question:

Tell me about your experiences as a teacher at a special school, starting with your first day in a special school setting.

Probing questions:

Probing questions will be asked during the course of the interview, to gain in -depth information and understanding.

- o Describe a memory from your years as a special school teacher at this school that stand out in your mind as especially important or significant in terms of your career.

- o Recount a peak experience or a high point in career as a special education teacher?

- o Discuss a low point in your experiences as a special school teacher.

- o In looking back on one's life, it is often possible to identify certain key "turning points" – episodes through which a person undergoes substantial change. What were these for you?

- o Now that you have told me a little bit about your past, I would like you to consider the future. I would like you to imagine two different futures for your story. First, please describe a positive future. Please describe what you would like to happen in the future with regards to your career as a teacher, including what goals and dreams you might accomplish or realize in the future.

- o Now describe a negative future. That is, please describe a highly undesirable future for yourself with regards to your career that you fear could happen to you but that you hope does not happen.

(adapted from McAdams, 1995).

Appendix 6: Summary of teachers' biographical/professional data

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Qualification Level	Teaching Experience at study site	Employer	Nature of Employment
1	F	50-59	W	M +4	9 years	State	Permanent
2	F	50-59	I	M +3	6 years	State	Permanent
3	F	40-49	A	M +3	6 years	State	Permanent
4	F	40-49	A	M +3	6 years	State	Permanent
5	F	40-49	W	M +5	24 years	State	Permanent
6	M	60+	I	M +4	9 years	State	Permanent

1. Jennifer

My first day at School Z was a very memorable and intimidating day. The reason being that I was used to working with children doing their intermediate phase …. with barriers to learning and ….. suddenly, I was confronted with teenagers and some …. Some ….. of the learners are even in their early twenties. They were like men (sighs) young men and women …. and they were loud and boisterous and undisciplined. That was quite a shock for the first day but fortunately the mmm…. the routine was very structured at the school, so, you know, it made my work much easier, and there is a tremendous support system …. from the managerial side of the school too. So the children knew that … that if they overstep the mark, they would have to take responsibilities for their poor choices or behaviour.

I took up a post here ….. it was first of all per chance … eh, eh …..my reason being that my son (my middle son) (pause) … he has barriers to learning and he had an interview because he was going to attend school the following year at Z school. So I came along, you know, brought him to the interview and I mentioned to the principal about the music I was teaching at another school. And then he in return asked me whether I would eh… eh… apply for an English post. I said 'gosh' I never thought of that? And said that you know if there was a vacancy, I would certainly do that - that was how that came about.

I have a qualification in special education, I had this through UNISA because of my children especially my son, B. - he has experienced barriers to learning.

Alright, I, I feel that as a mother, as a parent, six children who had barriers to learning that I understand … you know…. what regards being a parent also from a teaching experience, helping my own children in a home situation. Homework is always a challenge to the children so I had to constantly help them with their homework. So I feel that that I understand children, what their frustrations are, their frustrations are similar to what my children experienced. There were times I found you know it different working with the children on a one on one basis and then are confronted with a large group and after one or two children who are extremely demanding and these are times when we become tired, exhausted from the emotional stress.

Okay, first to mention that I come from a very academic background, that my father was also a teacher and he was also a teacher in special education and that was a difficult school with only

boys it was called Y school, extremely difficult. From Y school, my father went into lecturing at S. College which is for adult learners. They were studying to become educators. It was for a different race groups not for white race group. My father taught Maths and I was used to the students coming to the home from various culture groups and so my father raised us in a home where we accepted people irrespective of their cultural background. So I have no problems, I don't see people in colour or they are a different culture, it's just that's….. how I was raised.

Yes, one of highlights I will never forget. It was difficult that Mrs Stafford and I were with the music. We decided to put on a show, Joseph with many colours. It required that I had to rewrite about 32 pieces into a literature that was comfortable for the children, and it took us 3 terms to prepare the learners. It was hard work because you know, we practiced twice in a week and you know the children had mastered the sayings. They couldn't read the songs, they had to learn from memory and from singing it over and over again, and then acting had to take place. It was challenging because then the children would drop out then we had to retain another learner and so, it went on. But when it came to the cultural performance, it was absolutely stunning. The children learnt all those 32 songs and I think that was an achievement. The people from outside… were invited to come and attend the function. It was in the evening and it was so well enjoyed, a number of people asked if we would stage it again the following day, so it was really an achievement.

I would say that there were low points….when I taught at the ABC school, the learners are very sweet but are mentally challenged. I had an intermediate group and the, the amount of work you can do with the learners was little. You know, it was basically teaching them how to hold the fork and a knife and training them to use the toilet, and training them to be independent in going to bathroom. I felt I wanted to do more, to do something more academi… I think that to me was a low point in my teaching career , it wasn't so much about the children because they really charming children but I wanted something more rewarding academically.

You know one's personality comes into play in that my experiences and my upbringing and everything influences the way that one approaches the learners, deals with certain challenges, even one's preparing of worksheets, one may have… have a better understanding of the learners too. And yeah, I enjoy eh, eh you know the challenge of learning different areas, so I think that my personality plays a good role.

Right, I do intend in the next year to do my honours and go ahead to do my masters, also in barriers to learning. Once I have the qualification, even before that time, I do have a dream of

having my own school, running my own school with children who experience barriers to learning or may be children who just don't fit into the mainstream school, kind of fall between the cracks and opening a small school, start on a small basis first and then may be include other educators who are also interested in this field. This is my dream.

I am a life -long learner, I take part in in-service training that, that is provided by the school or my employer. I make sure I stay abreast of developments in my profession. I have improved myself a lot professionally with various certificates and degrees to show. We as teachers also get together to discuss various challenges faced in our various classes and we deliberate on ways of surmounting these challenges.

Yes, I can say I am a good teacher, I am trying my best to make sure I do what is expected of me. Some of the barriers to my effective teaching are, unavailability of LTSM, that is Learning Teaching Support Materials, disruptive behaviour of learners and their lack of motivation, etc. Despite all this, I am a professional, I work my way around it to make sure my work is effectively done'.

Yeah we learn from ourselves in order to develop professionally. Professional Development is the way to go. A good teacher must act as 'parents at school' for the learners.

2. Aneesha

Okay, in this school, this particular school that am in, at first, it was very intimidating. We actually had locked gates here and there were guards out here and eh … when I first came in from a mainstream school, coming to teach here, I found this really intimidating for me. The children were like mm ….. very rough and mmm….. there was no , absolutely no order here. When I first came… and anyways as the years went on, the gates were opened, fewer guards, and we found that children that were in a higher age brackets were now coming down … like the age groups were coming down. Previously when I came in here…. there were boys that were about like 19 years, 18, 19 20 years of age, older boys, so eh… and yes, teaching was tough because I found out that there was not any order, discipline was very out. We found you know at one stage children were very disruptive, they would like…. lock their doors. I had one incident I can remember when a child was locked in and he was actually wanted to jump through the window, you know that was very intimidating and we are on the second floor, so that was one of my experiences.

Well, I voluntarily came in because I had studied, you know, a special needs course and at that time, I was doing an assignment, so I needed to have been in a special school. That is why I came in to get my assignment done.

You know naturally am a very timid person but am also am an empathetic person so in my teaching the children that needed help here ….I could help them and yes, I do have a lot of patience with these learners and I find I can actually design lesson plans to suit the child's needs. I find that it's very …. I'm blessed with that … that I can almost identify the child's problems very quickly and design a plan for that child to suit the learner's challenge

Now in our culture, I am Indian, mmmm…. we have to care for our own parents and disabled children and we are not, I wouldn't say allowed to….. it is (pause) it's like a stigma to your family, if you put your child in a caregiver's …… you know what I mean….. or school for disabled children and send them to these school but to stay like overnight or in an hostel or whatever it is. So we do take care of these children, yeah and we don't put them in places of safety, we take care of them.So this helps me, we have like our grandma that help and cook and also family members help cook for that child, may be the child is epileptic or may be a cerebral palsy child. Then I also have a brother who has a cerebral palsy but not… like borderline, so that is where my empathy comes from. Also that is why I studied that course because of my brother. Because there wasn't a special school as such to put these children in, they have special classes in the school. And I felt I needed to because my brother was so much older and he didn't have that background knowledge that somebody needed to teach him then so I felt I needed to do for somebody else …… to help others.

I don't really know of a very high moment in my life but I will tell you what satisfies me teaching these learners was that when the 17 and 18 year olds ….. if they want to write letters to their boyfriends and girlfriends, they will come to me, they will say it in words and I will actually write it out for them and or if they got a love letter or whatever it is, they wouldn't just go to any teacher but they will come to me and I will read it to them. Also, another incident, in fact I can talk about many incidents whereby the children, in fact I felt very warm in my heart that I did help them out. It was once we were doing E.M.S and we asked their needs and wants and one of the children said that his need was he wanted a fence, and that was his answer. The teacher marked it wrong, so when I moderated the paper. I wanted to find out why he wanted a fence, now we know that this particular child came dirty to school, always would sleep in class and what not. I didn't know that at that time so I approached him to ask why he wanted a fence as a need. So he explained that he was looking after cattle and in the evenings, the cattle will run away all

over, he needed a fence. So I thank God that He gave me the wisdom to look deeper into all these things and that is why he came dirty to school, why he was sleepy, you know we understood more about the child and helped the child by going to his grandfather. This child didn't have parents, he lived with his grandfather - so we helped him and we could get him to sleep properly and you know, gave him soap or someone to wash his clothes in school and stuff like that. Another little incident is a child that had a lot of sores on her hand and I found out that she was not washing herself properly. So we… mmmm…..I approached her and asked how is she washing her body and she told me, she put a little dish and she just used the same water to wash herself all the time. It's like rearranging the dirt on her body. Then afterwards, we taught her how to wash and she was out in the rural areas and we also gave her tips on her how to change her diet and that also helped.

I feel …. that you know when school management doesn't help you enough, you know and … I feel parents send their children out here so that we could actually help that child and then we don't get enough help from management ….you know that sort of thing …to help those particular children, may be sometimes, they are just overlooked. I feel that maybe society could do more for the children, for the learners … so that is where I feel very down.. You can't just eh, eh, let the child go by. Another thing is that when there are too many of these children in one class, then, we can't really cope with them. We feel…. I feel that we need a helper, we really do need a helper or teacher assistant in the classroom, you know may be voluntarily or the Department of Education could pay for that you know. The assistant could just help with reading part of it ….sometimes to help… and the Department needs to also give us more aids, models and things like that.

I can give my everything, like in the afternoons I can sit down and spend extra time designing and what not? I do not see that it is a hindrance. I love to do that, I love to design work for the children and go and look out for new books and constantly I am on the internet trying to find out why this particular child has this problem and what not. Okay, but may be not too much at the moment, because I have ….I have a little bit … problems at home. I can't dedicate too much of time there, if like my husband is sick or if like my daughter went overseas, I just have to help in the few weeks then I neglect that but otherwise I do and my children help me, my daughter helps me, she gets information from other, you know, centres or whatever. I have empathy for the children, I love doing what I am doing, I really do because as you know of my son (ouch, my brother) yeah…. that is giving me a lot of encouragement and I just love it, I love my profession.

O.k. I would eventually like to become ….. you know a psychologist for the special learners, the special children ….. this particular lot of children. I think yeah that is eventually what I will like to do. I will like to counsel the children one on one and get help for them and work with the Occupational Therapists and you know one on one, I will know how to deal with each child, help them to overcome their problems to try to put them back in into the society and live normally…… get in tune with the society and not to feel like outcasts, you know.

As special education teachers, we are guided by the White Paper 6. I as a special education teacher have been doing my possible best to be guided by the WP6 in my classroom.

3. **Nonjabulo**

I would say it was a bit hard because I've never been to a special school before and for myself as well, I had to teach Afrikaans learners, teach them isiZulu and they have to be in the same class with those that are isiZulu speakers, so that was tough and many of those Afrikaans learners did not want ….to learn isiZulu, I had to convince them that it is important to learn isiZulu.

I had a choice because I applied for my post …. there was a post and I had to apply. One has to change the environment you know because previously, I was teaching at a high school level, grades 11 and 12, so now, it was my option, I wanted to do it, it was voluntary.

Yeah, at first, it was affecting me until I came to a point where I had to accept these learners and then more time I spent with them listening to their problems and I realised that I was really making a difference in their lives, it was really good for me to see another side of them. I would say that I grew up in a Christian family and you know, you have to realise that everyone is made of God and that God wants us to be who we are and so we have to accept people in their differences or how they are, so yeah, I accept them how they are.

Many of these learners now are coming into special schools are blacks and many of them can't even speak English. Most of the educators speak English, and you know, they – the learners - always feel inferior and they can't express themselves so for me to be there, they can rely on me, they even share theirtheir problems. I encourage them, you know, to step out and be themselves.

I'll say that not knowing where they will be afterwards …. because some of them as much as they want to know, you find that you have to repeat now and then, then the next day, they come in, they have forgotten what you have taught them the previous day. It becomes really a disaster to have to say those things again.

I love kids and I'm also willing to listen to them. As they see me they want to hug me, they want to tell me how their day was, you know, all those things. Yeah, and that is one thing that wants me to work at the hostel, you know, to continue being a mother to them.

Ah, I would say that …mmmmm… the most important thing for me is to see that the parents also get involved in the education of their kids - because at the present moment, I feel they just don't care, they don't want to get involved! They let their kids do their own thing, some of them even shout at them as if they are a burden. Maybe if I can see them you know getting more involved in the education of their children, that will really make my day, to see them that we have connection, we are helping each other in the education of the child.

I am very open, very open to professional development. I take part in workshops seminars organised for teachers by DoE, school, unions etc. Engaging in IQMS is also a means of professional development, with the assistance of my peer and mentor. We also share experiences with ourselves on how to be better teachers. It helps, you know, to know that there is support amongst ourselves. I also intend to further my education soon. I don't want to be stagnant. So, yeah, I am very open to professional development, it helps a lot. I'll like to believe I have accomplished many of my dreams, in the sense of being at a special school for such a long time, I've never stagnated, every year I was enthusiastic. Every year was a new challenge because you get new learners because things happened very fast because of the curriculum changes etc., there was no time for me to stagnate.

4. Inga

I was from the 'normal' school then I got a transfer to the special school. It was difficult especially for the first time because when I saw slow learners, that the special school was for multiple disabilities, so I went there, I saw these learners, I was so worried but ….when I got into the class, I said am here now. My first day experience was bad because I couldn't even start my lesson. There were learners who were not concentrating, others were going out while you were in the class, so I didn't know how to handle them on the first day because we were just…. mmmm… introducing ourselves.

I didn't think about working in a special school since I was from Eastern Cape but I wanted to come to Kwazulu Natal, I thought I would get a 'normal' school but unfortunately, I got a special school, so I came in per chance.

I am a soft voiced lady …when you meet these learners, you know, sometimes you become angry and you don't even continue with your lesson because you don't know how to handle them….. but as the time goes on you will know how to handle them.

I am a Xhosa, it is difficult for me especially with those who don't understand English. I have to explain to them in isiZulu even myself I don't understand isiZulu. Now here in Z school, I am teaching Arts and Culture of which I have to know all their cultural events, it is very difficult for me but am trying to learn other cultures and language. My culture embraces children with disabilities because in the Xhosa community we have children with these disabilities that I met here.

You know, in a special school, you meet … the learners with problems, so when you have a chance to, to speak to those learners, some of those learners…. some of those learners they need love. So you have to give them the love that you give your children because they have problems. Yes, especially those thatare in the tertiary …. , they are doing beadwork and the teacher who is teaching there - said your children are doing well.

As I said to you , these learners have different behaviour, some are rude sometimes they don't even think about you, who you are and they are undermining you….. that makes me feel sad and sometimes I have wanted to quit. When I was a child, I liked to collect all the children especially those that were smaller than me and teach them so. I actually liked teaching when I was small. Even now, I love children very much, you know, I love them. I love teaching, I don't, I don't ….say why am I here?.I won't ask that question because I like teaching. Aah… I thought I'll be a social worker to work with children but ….. I am still thinking about it because if I was still young, I would change my career to be a social worker.

 In South African education system, there have been some changes which destabilizes us as teachers. We are settling in on a policy then another one will be introduced. This is not on! Yeah, in spite of all this, I am striving to do my best under every circumstance. We are on Curriculum and Assessment Statements (CAPS) now – too many changes - and I am doing my best possible to act out the policy. In class we practice inclusive teaching. Being a special school, we have learners with various needs and challenges. I as a teacher have to diversify my teaching to suit learner's individual needs.

When I started at this special school, I battled with being patient with these learners. They teased and disrupted classes and even swore at themselves and teachers regularly. They stressed me, but over the years I have seen my patience and endurance levels increase and also my teaching

techniques and methods improved a lot. Also we as teachers cooperate and collaborate. We share our experiences both in class and outside which has also helped me in coping with these learners. We as teachers share various coping strategies that work for one person, and these others learn from. I also collaborate with other teachers, sharing our experiences in order to develop ourselves …. this goes a long way in helping me, at least, I know am not the only one facing those challenges.

5. Marilyn

I would just like to say that I've been in Special education now for 24 years and 5 months. I had no specific special education training but the first day I walked into school Z, I found myself being extremely emotional with the 1st ,2nd ,3rd , to 4th years. I got very emotional to see their sadness and their heart sore. The reason for that, I think is because I am at that stage, my two children were much younger and I would think goodness, I am so privileged to have normal children. I am working with these learners that battle. Way back in the years then, special education ….. at school Z was much different to now. The learners we got then were really for special needs … they couldn't read, they really, really battled. But nowadays I find that more disciplinary problems are coming in with that. The learners were much more disciplined, our classes were extremely small,. So, yes, I often went home and I think back at some learners' circumstances and I think should I adopt any of them? My husband gives me that reality … he says try to split your emotions from your teaching which ….. was extremely difficult till today. I battle to do that… the emotions were high but I have learnt throughout the years to split emotions from reality. Unfortunately, some learners have bad circumstances. I think I feel you don't need book knowledge to help these learners …. may its be within myself…. that's what I do, I like to help them, I do get involved with them.

It was pure chance that I came to this school. Those days, I was looking for a post and I couldn't get a post and I was told there was a vacancy just as a temporary one. One of my colleagues went on long leave, by pure chance, I got a permanent post here. I have not gone for any formal training in special education but I have done in-service training on special education.

Yes, you know, I find myself am an extremely passionate teacher. I love the subject I teach. I put my passion and emotion into teaching. Maybe over the years, I prefer teaching the senior learners. I just have a connection with them, emotionally. I have learnt extremely a lot, you know teaching Life Orientation, the sexual things and the cultural things. It is very sensitive but I have

managed to overcome that. I think the big warning for me is I think loving the subject, loving the learners, I have overcome so many barriers of shyness. I… maybe.. I've matured a lot, they know I am open. I apologise, they know it's not wrong to say sorry, it's not wrong to ask. I bring in a lot of my personal things and also learnt throughout the years, when I talk about personal things, it's not really 100% true about me but I've found that if I bring myself personally to the learners, they are sort of at ease and they sort of like….. wow! Ma'am also has problems not only them. I think maybe humbleness, that their humble … Mma'am is coming through. We have learners that are mmm…undisciplined in some ways, disrespectful but I can vouch 99% of my learners of my learners are very respectful towards me and they know where they stand with me. We discuss so many issues, I tell them beforehand, listen! *this is the way it's going to be* and they respect me for that. I have overcome many, many emotional barriers. I don't think it's wrong to be emotional, my emotions can be extremely passionate, I am extremely passionate, sometimes, it looks like I am emotional. I can have a tear in my eye with the girls or something like that.

you know my upbringing, I come from a very extreme Afrikaans family, where in those days children were just seen, they were not heard, sort of oppressed in a way because we were never given the opportunity to really express feelings. We always had to like '*mum said this'* and that's what we do that sort of thing. I have many English friends and you could see the difference because they are more like laid back. The way it affects my teaching, you know, …. respect, respect for all people, you respect elders, you don't joke when people talk, which has influenced discipline in my classroom but also because I am such an open person…. to new ideas and to help people that advise me. I have also learnt through the years that children have changed. I cannot enforce my upbringing unto them. I think that has helped me in many ways as well but yes discipline and it took me a long time to really realise that you what, this class does not have to be absolutely quiet because I say so. So I changed a lot on the ways I see teaching and learning.

When I started off, I thought my opinion was the only opinion. You learn to do this and that's a good way of communicating to the learners. My teaching has changed to when I first started, I was very fortunate, my whole life, I have been open to learning and developing. We had the greatest of ladies working for us…. even at home … we respected one another and they were open in the house. I used to visit them in their little house. We never ever had that problem. Even when I was in the hostel, it was right in 1994 with the change of government, we had our first black girl coming in, such that a shy girl and honestly, I still have a message she sent me. She is 30 years already, she came to visit me the other day, she is fantastic, she has got so high in life

and she just said all because of the help. And once again, I learnt, I felt so sorry for her because they were 52 girls and she was the only little black girl. She has come out beautifully, she became the head boy … eh …. head girl. She became the boarder master. She has got a fantastic job. She is at the SAPS in Durban that I could put under my highlights as well (laughs), the cultural thing. I think I'm too open minded, you know, God created us all and the humbleness, I know the Bible teaches me to be humble. I'm not better than anybody, I tell my learners as well, '*I'm a teacher but I'm not better than you, okay*. I've got knowledge and blah, blah, blah.

You know, I have had so many peak experiences. It's hard for me to recall them all but the best, best is the highest reward I can get is when learners come to me and thank me for what I've done for them. I've also got …. I have made a booklet over the years, there will always be 4, 5 to 10 learners who come to me and thank me and write the most beautiful letters just for my understanding with them and being there for them. I was privileged to be in charge of the girls hostel for 5 years. I had the most wonderful experiences there with the girls. We also had sadness …. we had matrons who committed suicide… and death…. and we walked through all that. It was wonderful they really saw me as their mother. They phone me and say Ma'am please come, I used to visit them often at school … exactly the same things, little things …. that I did for them and they did for me ….. like remembering a birthday and things like that, so yes, the speech at the end of the year, they will come and say you were like a real mother to us that ….. that is the highest peak of being appreciated.

My low point is when I would think learners disappoint you because….. I teach them, I give them so much and yet they will come back and they will disappoint you. The good thing about that is I learn that learners are learners, children are children, and to be forgiving and to understand them. So I'll say that will be some of my low points. Honestly in all the years, I have been here the high points are by far higher than low points, little general things.

Who I am, obviously at home in my personal life, I'm not a teacher, I try very hard, my husband tells me on numerous occasion 'you are not at school now' then I realise am not at school but yes…. I am a passionate person. I love, I fulfil my dream, I think back … I was 7 years old when I said I wanted to be a teacher and I was very fortunate that I became a teacher, I like giving to people, my right doesn't have to know what my left hand does, so definitely.

To answer you on my dreams, I think I'll like to believe I have accomplished many of my dreams, in the sense of being at a special school for such a long time. I've never stagnated, every year I was enthusiastic, every year was a new challenge because you get new learners because

things happened very fast because of the curriculum changes, there was no time for me to stagnate. Although I sometimes, our principal likes talking about dinosaurs ….I'm not into technology, regarding my accomplishment, I am very happy. I'm going to retire from here knowing very well I gave of my best. My future dream is that God gave me the opportunity to work with learners and to share myself with them and to give back to my family. I think I need to …. I owe my family a lot , that is what I'm hoping, who knows maybe I might venture back into, not at school, private lessons but not quickly. I'm not going home to relax, I am going to help my daughter in the office but yes ….am giving back to my family.

Yeah, the policy is there, as a special education teacher, I know what is required of me, the White Paper 6 acts as a guide and I am doing what I can do to make sure I carry out my duties professionally. We adapt the mainstream curriculum for these learners, they work on curriculum for lower grades to which they normally will be, then we differentiate it down for them to cater for the different levels of challenges in class. As we know that all fingers are not equal, we don't practise all sizes fit all, we adapt to meet each learner's need. We also put them in groups - green, yellow, red - according to their abilities. This helps us teachers to effectively manage their various challenges.

We as teachers are not consulted before the policies are drafted, so…. we work on whatever is given to us. We practice inclusive teaching here, the school had a workshop on how to teach learners with various challenges in one class. This has helped me tremendously to cope with writing lesson plans and teaching techniques employed in my class bearing in mind the peculiarity of each learner. Yeah, I diversify my lessons and act according to the Inclusive Education policy.

6. Tanesh

My experiences at a special school are far ranging. I have spent many years at a special school and I can recall every day as a teacher at a special school, starting with the very first day. My welcome was a warm welcome especially on the part of the staff and of course on the learners.

Over the years, it does have its challenges and of course it's expected and because I studied exceptional learners, learners with barriers, so these challenges are expected.Learners always try to size you up, so that creates a bit of problem, it makes your teaching experience a little challenging ….to a certain extent, it has been difficult. Learners are prone to give you a hard time - however as I mentioned, if you know exactly how to deal with them, it does not become a real challenge. There are better ways of dealing with it.

However, my coursework had to be guided ….. as one that deals with different situations especially learners with different I.Q levels. There again that impacts on the experiences that I have as a teacher. It was difficult…. the theory I dealt with especially in the academic centres …. moreover that I taught at the technical centre, I had a bit of a change, so my experiences changed. It's very much different from mainstream learners …. so the experience one has as a teacher in a special school varies from the one of mainstream school. And to sum it up, if one could teach in a special school, one could teach anywhere.

I came to this school ….I wouldn't say it was by chance, it was to an extent voluntarily. Initially, I started my qualification as a mainstream educator whilst at the mainstream school. I realized that there are different learners with different educational disabilities, I saw the need to further equip myself as a special education teacher, then I pursued a degree in special education, that is why I ended up in a special school.

Well, you must understand that being a parent, I firstly try to look at these children as my children…. so when they feel pain …. I sort of to a certain degree feel the pain with them. When they are angry … I get emotionally upset as with any other parent or adult. But there again…. my emotions, I have to be guarded against my emotions. I must not let my emotions come in the way of bringing them up correctly, the adage of 'spare the rod and spoil the child' although I don't engage in corporal punishment … but I have to be firm and sometimes by being firm, it goes with or contradicts my emotions.When these kids understand that or see they are getting you or they are playing on your emotion, they tend to capitalise on the situations and sometimes to their own detriment. So whilst I am a very emotional person, I do feel for these learners, I try to keep my emotions out of the problems and the experiences of these learners and try to be as diplomatic as possible.

Being an Indian, I must tell you that from a small child, our parents, in particular, always stressed the importance of an educator. They strongly believed that if you go to school, you actually spend more time with your teacher than your parents, if you work out the time, obviously you do spend more time with an educator. Another thing is that the Indian culture stresses that teacher guides you to your future and equips you for your employment and profession, and ultimately, put very simply, put a shelter on your head and food on the table because of the work you engage in. We hold teachers in high regard. With this backdrop, I to a large extent expect the learners to respect me because that was how I was brought up. Sometimes I may be a little demanding….. I demand them to greet me, I demand them to listen to me and that's how my culture has imparted my teaching skills and teaching styles

Like I said, working with these learners, I've had so many high moments. In fact, I can take the entire day talking about high moments. What comes to mind is when we competed while at the technical centre, we always compete with….. projects at the Royal Show … we compete with not only LSEN learners but special learners across the board, including those working in factories. And in three consecutive years, my boys got not only the first prize but the only highly recommended prize. Especially in the society due to the preconceived ideas that special learners cannot do this and incapable ….. three consecutive years we brought back to the school … the biggest and most prestigious trophy.

The actual teaching and interactions with the learners does not bring me down as such. When they swear at you, they are rude to you, they backchat you, doesn't really make me feel down. However if I can say two things make me feel down. Firstly, the demands placed on these learners by maybe administration or Department of Education … and … the fact that there is no structured curriculum for these learners. Sometimes what they are taught is subjective, it's what the educator will perceive to be relevant and that's what brings me down often. I, to a certain extent, within my mind, blame the Department of Education

Let me look at a particular incident, what really broke me down was I worked closely with a particular boy in Wood Work workshop and him and I got along very well. He came from a really distraught family, the most disappointing part was the day we had closed school for the December holidays and he had finished his 4th year, beg your pardon, not that day, it was the week that followed, I read an article that he was involved in a serious malicious crime. Actually I followed the story through …. that was really a down moment for me because I know his background, and I know while at school how often I helped him come out of difficult situation. I always felt if I was there may be it wouldn't have happened.

I'm a very talkative person and am a social person and I find that my lesson is part of my social circuit, whenever I start a lesson, I never start without a joke. I include them in the lesson, I include them in the joke and I always like to make them laugh, that's a clear expression of my personality. I'm a person that likes jokes, to laugh and, of course, get angry, so that's how I have managed to deal with these learners and their demeanours and behavioural problems.

My personal goal is to assist the learners not necessarily in the classroom. I want to get to a point where I will assist the learners indirectly by assisting the educators, basically, I want to go to the planning domain for special education.

I feel that I can see where their needs are and we could channel their education to equip them for the world of work and socialization for adulthood. I would like to get beyond the school situation and obviously get into planning capacity…. and in so doing the benefit should brush up to the learners. I am quite positive. I take part in professional development if it's going to be beneficial to me. I have just completed my Masters degree in Education, so yeah, I am learning progressively. I will be starting my Doctorate soon.

Appendix 8: TURNITIN Report

Turnitin Originality Report

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Appendix 9: Letter from Language Editor

 Crispin Hemson

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Durban

South Africa 4001

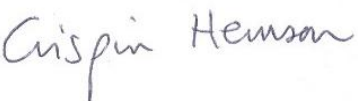hemson@ukzn.ac.za

    C: 082 926 5333
    H: 031 206 1738

23rd November 2013

<center>**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**</center>

This is to record that I have carried out a language editing on the dissertation **Exploring the personal and professional identities of special education teachers through small stories, by Fadekemi Olamide Bankole.**

Crispin Hemson