



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
—
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

**Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement
and Their Personal and Professional Identities**

by

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Teacher Development Studies

School of Education: College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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2025

Supervisor's Authorisation

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis.

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Signed:

Date:

Declaration

I, Khadija Vorajee (student number 202515791), declare:

1. This dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This dissertation has not been submitted for degree purposes or examination here at the University of KwaZulu-Natal or any other tertiary institution.
3. All the sources consulted have been duly indicated and acknowledged through the in-text referencing and in the reference list.
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Signed: Khadija Vorajee

Date: 15 June 2025

Acknowledgements

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds, without Whom this effort would not have begun, nor would it have reached completion. Throughout my master's journey, this verse of the Qur'an was my comfort: "Do not grieve nor be sad, surely Allah is with us" (Qur'an 9:40).

A heartfelt thank you:

To my parents, Goolam Mohamed and Ameena Atcha, whose constant daily prayers during my studies kept me buoyed through the darkest moments of despair.

To my husband, Abubakr, thank you for constantly asking me what my topic was throughout this study; how else would it have so easily rolled off my tongue each time I needed to mention it? Thank you for inducing several silent seizures each time you checked in to ask, "Are you winning?" Thank you for constantly saying, "You're almost done now, a little more," even when I had only just begun. On a serious note, I thank you for putting up with my never-ending whining of "I can't do this anymore" and for many hours of study time away from you. I know you can't wait for me to be with you 24/7 again [insert evil laugh].

To Juwairiya, my daughter, who became my personal chef and my companion until the early hours of the morning. Your words, "You can do this, mom...lock in!" have come true.

To my sons, Ismaeel and Muhammad, I hope you have not outgrown the request to play board games or the constant weekend question of "Where are we going?" met with my standard response, "Nowhere, I have studying."

To my siblings, who never really knew what I was studying but cheered me on anyway. And especially to Kiddo, I am now game to "pull in" and "watch moodies" with you.

To Bibi, for being the breath of fresh air that I needed in my life.

To my aunt, Rookaiya, whose constant question of "How's the thesis going?" made me have several mini strokes to actually get going.

To my many study friends and colleagues along the way: Trisha, Nomusa, Tutu, Unathi, Nikita, Nalini, Leroo, Shireen, Ateeya, and especially Marilyn - thank you for sharing this journey with me.

To my UP friends, Viola, Nonhle and Annemie, for always checking in on me.

To Tohida and Indrin for your guidance and academic support.

To Prof. Daisy Pillay, for all your valuable input towards getting this study started and up to the proposal stage.

To Prof. Labby, my supervisor, for the guidance, support, gentle coaxing, kindness and understanding. Thank you for believing in me. And allowing me the opportunity to constantly 'nag' and never making me feel 'less than'. Fate chose for me an excellent supervisor in you.

To Azeeza, for being my personal long-distance 'therapist', sending your wise and soft advices all the way from Canada.

To my participants for uninhibitedly sharing their stories of acknowledgement, opening a window to their world and for making this a possibility that turned into a reality. The canvas of this study would remain blank without your enriching words.

To Pre and Tania, whose friendship and support became my lifeboat on this study journey.

To many friends and family, who messaged or whispered words of encouragement and prayer.

To Mary, my helper, who patiently endured all my moods, including the laughter and tears and for adeptly adapting to washing dishes quietly so as not to disturb Missus.

Dedication

For my father, the academic and my mother, the kitchen Queen, I have the best of both genes in having parents like you. With a combination of academia from Dad and a splash of creativity from Mum, this writing piece is an indelible print of both of your minds working together through mine.

For my husband and best friend, Abubakr, whose unending support knows no bounds.

For my children, whose sacrifice and support meant the world to me. I hope through this academic pursuit of mine, I inspire you to chase your dreams and choose yourself, always.

Finally, for me, for seeing this thesis from its initial seedling stage to its fruition, and showing resilience unbeknown until now.



Abstract

This study on *Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and Their Personal and Professional Identities* explores the narratives of primary school teachers in relation to their lived experiences of Teacher Acknowledgement and the way in which it shapes their personal and professional selves. This leads to the underpinning research question: *What are teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement in primary schools?*

Set against the backdrop of a narrative inquiry approach, the study is framed by Axel Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, and is further supported by discourse analysis and semiotics as theories to understand how recognition or the lack thereof is ensconced within everyday school contexts. The South African primary school setting, where various structural and social factors influence the teachers' experiences of recognition and identity, provides the location within which the study is based. Employing a qualitative approach and an interpretivist paradigm, a purposive sample of four level one teachers from the greater Durban area of Verulam and Ottawa, engaged, via online and in-person interactions in arts-based activities, selecting either letter-writing, collage inquiry or object inquiry, followed by unstructured interviews to uncover their narrative realities about Teacher Acknowledgement. Narrative analysis, followed by analysis of the narratives itself served as the data analysis method employed. The stories revealed that acknowledgement, or its absence, significantly shaped their personal and teacher self, their ideas of belonging and their proficiency in work practices. Recognition by various stakeholders such as teachers, learners, management and within broader community circles manifested as integral to teachers' sense of self. In contrast, stories of misrecognition gave way to emotional instability, feelings of low self-worth, and an erosion of the teacher's professional roles.

The study reveals that teachers' identities are not fixed, but fluid-like and constantly evolving and moulded by relational and discursive engagements. It also focuses on emotional investments that mirror the yearning for recognition in sites wherein acknowledgement is largely unreliable or non-existent. In highlighting the teacher's voice and their storied experiences of acknowledgement, the study paves the way for continuous discussions on the formation of teacher personal and professional identity, teacher well-being and the inferences surrounding recognition in schools. The findings argue towards systemic movements about how recognition is engaged within the school context, implying that authentic acknowledgement is not merely an ethical essentiality but a formal imperative for teacher retention and a call for a complete educational overhaul.

Key words: Teacher acknowledgement, recognition, stories, personal identity, professional identity, primary school teachers, narrative inquiry, teacher well-being.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

TA	Teacher Acknowledgement
TE	Teacher Emotion
RA	Radiyallahu ‘Anha – May Allah be pleased with her
SAW	Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wassallam – Peace and blessings be upon him
n.d	no date
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SMT	School Management Team
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
RQ	Research Question
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
DoE	Department of Education

Note: Islamic honorifics are included in this list as a mark of respect when referring to significant figures in Islamic tradition

The 1st Chapter: Introduction:

Sowing the Seeds for Stories of Acknowledgement

1.1 Chapter Prologue

Ode to Khadija

Khadija al Kubra, Khadija the Great

In Muhammad the last, you were afforded the greatest soul mate

It is Muhammad you stood by and Muhammad you affirmed

Hence, Khadija al Kubra you were termed

A woman of honour, a woman of grace

Your standards and morals firmly in place

Khadija, your self-awareness so profound

Solid in character as you were in business, intact and sound

Ode to Khadija whose soul eagerly knew,

Acknowledgement's might in the Prophets' view

Your recognition of him and his cause meant so much,

Upon your demise, of your memory he never lost touch

He would cry when much later he found your prized chain,

The memory of your unending support reviving his pain

He would recall how he first found solace in your warm embrace

As he ran down from the cave, confused until he saw your smiling face

Oh mother of the believers, Khuwaylid's daughter

Nurturer, caregiver, a leader by example, whose own needs you would put to slaughter

Wellness of others meant more than your own

You didn't care for any special crown or throne

Yet your sacrifices and salient support never went in vain

A house in paradise, your ultimate win, you would gain

For in acknowledging the Prophet and upholding his honour

You enriched yourself with a beautiful fate like no other

Oh Khadija, a true reflection of courage from within

Your narrative, a melancholy of strength and resilience in a timeless rhythm

@katie_s_rekindled

Figure 1.1: Introductory poem - Ode to Khadija

1.1.1 The Ode

1.1.1.1 Prefatory Comments to the Discussion of the Ode

The beginning of any major task, more over an academic one such as a master's study, may seem a daunting one at the outset. The pressure of creating and setting a scene that would capture and maintain the interest of my audience throughout the study, is one that weighed me down heavily. I wanted people's belief and passion in my topic of study to mirror

my own. I pondered on how to capture the essence of my study on Teacher Acknowledgement (TA) right from the word 'go'. After poring through a plethora of scholarly literature, such as, Movsessian's, (2018) and Nayak and Ashok's, (2022) study, to name but two, on the phenomenon of Teacher Acknowledgement and its relation to personal and professional identities, the concept of acknowledgement itself and several synonyms stood out significantly, yet it seemed inadequate to merely define terminology related to my study as an impactful starting point.

To unpack the term acknowledgement, I turned inward, with the insight that commencing with my own narrative may enable me to gain understanding of the narratives of others (Carter et al., 2014). This kind of emotional maturity is necessary for interactions with the participant, to competently glean from interviews with them with attentive insight and to interpret more precisely the lived experiences participants communicate (Collins & Cooper, 2014). *Ode to Khadija* was a point of departure for this. Thus, although I am not a participant in my study, zooming into my own story through writing the ode, meant tapping into my insights, introspections and interpretations of the concepts and ideas within the study to gain a deeper, richer perspective of the overarching phenomenon of teacher acknowledgement and to enable me to connect closely with my participants when they shared their narratives. Doing this served as a springboard from which I leveraged into my study.

1.1.1.2 The Ode and its Place Value in this Study

In a quest to understand and portray what conceptualisations about teacher acknowledgement entailed, I looked to myself. Self-aimed questions such as 'Who is Khadija and how does acknowledgement feature in her life?' directed my thoughts to my namesake and whether she and I shared any concurring ideas on this study's buzzword of *acknowledgement*. I had always been extremely proud of my name and its significance in terms of who I was named after. Hence, with much contemplation and self-reflection on what the phenomenon of TA and the word acknowledgement itself meant to me, I embarked on the very first chapter of this thesis, with an ode to my namesake, Khadija bint Khuwaylid (RA)¹.

An ode, the origins of which date back to ancient Greece, is a type of poem, written in a lyrical fashion, and of varying lengths, in expression of a person or occurrence (Udhayakumar, 2021). In writing *Ode to Khadija*, it became apparent that the concept of acknowledgement in transcending beyond the teaching field was also embodied in several ways by this great

¹ RA stands for Radiyallahu 'Anha (may Allah be pleased with her), an Islamic honorific used after the names of female companions of the Prophet (SAW)

historical female figure. Khadija bint Khuwaylid (RA), this historical personality of note, was a great exemplar and personification of the meaning behind *acknowledgement*. She was known to have played a pivotal role in regards to how she displayed support and recognition, comfort and acknowledgement to her husband, the final messenger of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (SAW²). She was not merely his most trustworthy confidant, providing unyielding support, but she also provided comfort and strength as recognition during his most dire times (Olushola, 2024). The poem, in speaking through her enactment of acknowledgement, engages my conceptions of this phenomenon and its relevance to the teaching profession. It also links distinctly with the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, particularly Honneth's theory of recognition, and supports the narrative inquiry approach of this study. The discussion that follows explains how.

Khadija's (RA) story, drawing from the tributary poem, reveals how recognition enveloped within human connection (in the form of a spouse or significant other) plays an important role towards identity formation, a concept later discussed in this study, as a co-construction of reality. Furthermore, within the narrative inquiry approach, this experiential co-construction is also seen as key to the formation of the self, as is revealed in the analysis and findings, when the teachers related their narrative stories thus in itself being a co-construction of their own reality. In addition, in standing by and affirming her spouse, that is, providing support and recognition, Khadija (RA) earned her own title (Khadija al Kubra, Khadija the Great), without having to call it upon herself, thus portraying that acknowledgement speaks for itself and does not require 'a loud voice' for it to yield positive results, a later revelation in this study, during my engagement with the narratives in chapter 5 and data analysis in chapter 6. The poem further delves into showing individuals how to show affirmation towards others according to how they require it (a later learning relating to the forms of TA). Recognition in this poem also teaches of its lingering impact (signified as long-term and short-term impacts of certain forms of TA - see theme 2: data analysis chapter). Described as a long-term commitment and not merely a once-off occurrence, indicated by the words '*unending support*' in the poem, recognition thus indicates a sense of consistency and renewal in its engagement. Furthermore, recognition serves as a form of solace, both physical (*embrace* in the poem) and emotional (*smiling face*, in the poem), further alluding to the forms of TA, marked as a theme and also alluded to under semiotics (meanings behind signs and symbols) as a theoretical framing within this study.

² SAW stands for Sallallahu 'Alayhi Wasallam, an Islamic phrase meaning "peace and blessings be upon him," used out of respect when mentioning the Prophet Muhammad.

Furthermore, her complete acknowledgement of the Prophet's (SAW) cause enabled him to excel in his work and daily practices, thus cementing the idea that when one's well-being is taken care of, one begins to revel in one's work performance. This latter claim becomes evident later, in Chapter 6 (analysis and discussion of findings), in regards to the effects and learnings of TA on the teachers' daily work practices and in response to RQ3: *How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?*

Not only did she acknowledge and aid him in his mission and work from its early beginnings (Walusimbi, 2023), but she was also known as the mother of the believers, *ummul mu'minin* (Walusimbi, 2023), for her nurturing and comforting role to the early Muslims. In other words, her magnanimity and loving support extended to the underprivileged, sometimes at a cost of her own comfort and wealth (Walusimbi, 2023). Recognition, as extracted from the ode, may therefore involve an element of self-sacrifice and selflessness and may seem fruitless, yet the rewards are subtle and not always apparent (in the course of this study, teachers narrate conceptions of similar note, indicated by teachers reference to a sense of self-fulfilment rather than recognition for outward gain). In return, recognition alluded to in the ode may be inherently reciprocal (a concept espoused in Honneth's theory of recognition and mentioned as part of level 3 in chapter 3); it is returned even without expectation and rebounds onto the self without obvious intent. As Khadija (RA) gave without recourse, the Prophet (SAW) reciprocated by not only looking to her for advice and opinions on matters, but with deep reverence and mutual love (Olushola, 2024), so much so that he remembered her affirmation and acknowledgements long after she had passed on, sobbing upon finding a possession of hers as mentioned in the ode.

Further espoused in the poem is self-awareness (recognising oneself and gaining self-knowledge, an important concept within the context of this study) and how this exemplifies itself outwardly. Khadija (RA) seemed to possess an inner strength and resilience which can be compared to a kind of internal acknowledgement. Moreover, she was a self-accomplished woman in her own right. She was an astute businesswoman of note and an upright member of society (Walusimbi, 2023) who never succumbed to societal pressures and norms. Confident and resolute in her business dealings with tradesmen of her time earned her societal affirmation and recognition, whilst her exemplary moral behaviour carved out her acknowledgement thereof as a pure and wholesome being (Walusimbi, 2023). That is, her personal identity was firm and solid; she knew who she was, and this traversed into her professional life as well, forming a professional identity in her line of work as a tradeswoman of mark. Hence, her personal and professional self was intertwined and inextricably bound, each one having an influence on the other. This type of self-assurance and reverence by

colleagues is later linked to Honneth's theory of recognition, in terms of the self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem aspects (see Chapter 3: theoretical framing).

Thus, in exploring the patterns of teacher recognition and its moulding of the personal and teacher self, the story of Khadija (RA) personifies recognition at its highest – incorporating the giving and receipt thereof, and emphasises inherent strength of one whose identity showcased inner and outer characteristics of recognition and its impact on others. This poetic honorary affirmation sowed the seeds for a study that explored how acknowledgement, or its lack thereof, influenced primary school teachers' lived experiences and their identities. Thus, likened to Khadija's (RA) historical footprint, the teacher stories shared in this study combined resilience, emotional vigour, and silent influences under the cloak of recognition. From this standpoint, the study called for deep thinking into how this phenomenon proved not merely as an integral way of shaping but also as a fundamental pillar of identity formation itself.

1.2 Behind the Scenes of Chapter 1

In planning and designing the layout and content for this chapter, there was a significant amount of pen-to-paper groundwork that surmounted to the actual write-up of the chapter itself.

To cover all my bases adequately, I used the following two images, one handwritten and one typed, to center and organise my thoughts on what to portray and engage with, which would bring the study on primary school teacher acknowledgement stories and their personal and professional identities to the fore. Both images express in writing and with the use of the concept of mind mapping, a visual strategy for transmitting conceptualisations and thoughts in the mind's eye (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010), the key headings, ideas and scholarly pointers pivotal to this study on TA and its identity-shaping domain. The handwritten copy shows the researcher's raw and unrefined thoughts and initial ideas of planning (thus it is more comprehensive and detailed) whilst the typed version shows how these fledgling ways of thinking transitioned into a more refined form of conceptualisation (with only the main concepts and headings included) for mapping out this chapter. The images are shown below:

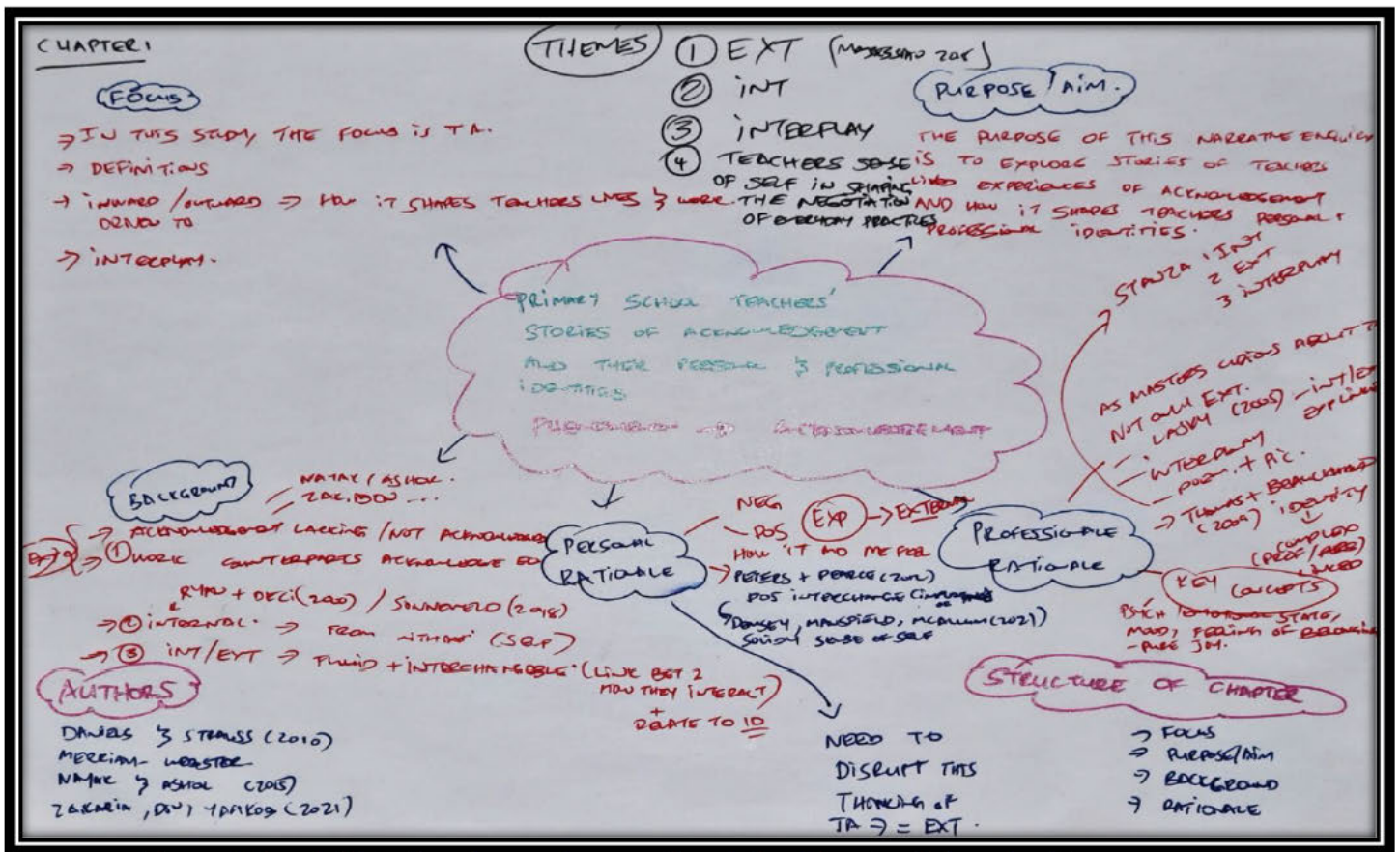


Figure 1.2 a: Initial planning and groundwork for Chapter 1- handwritten copy

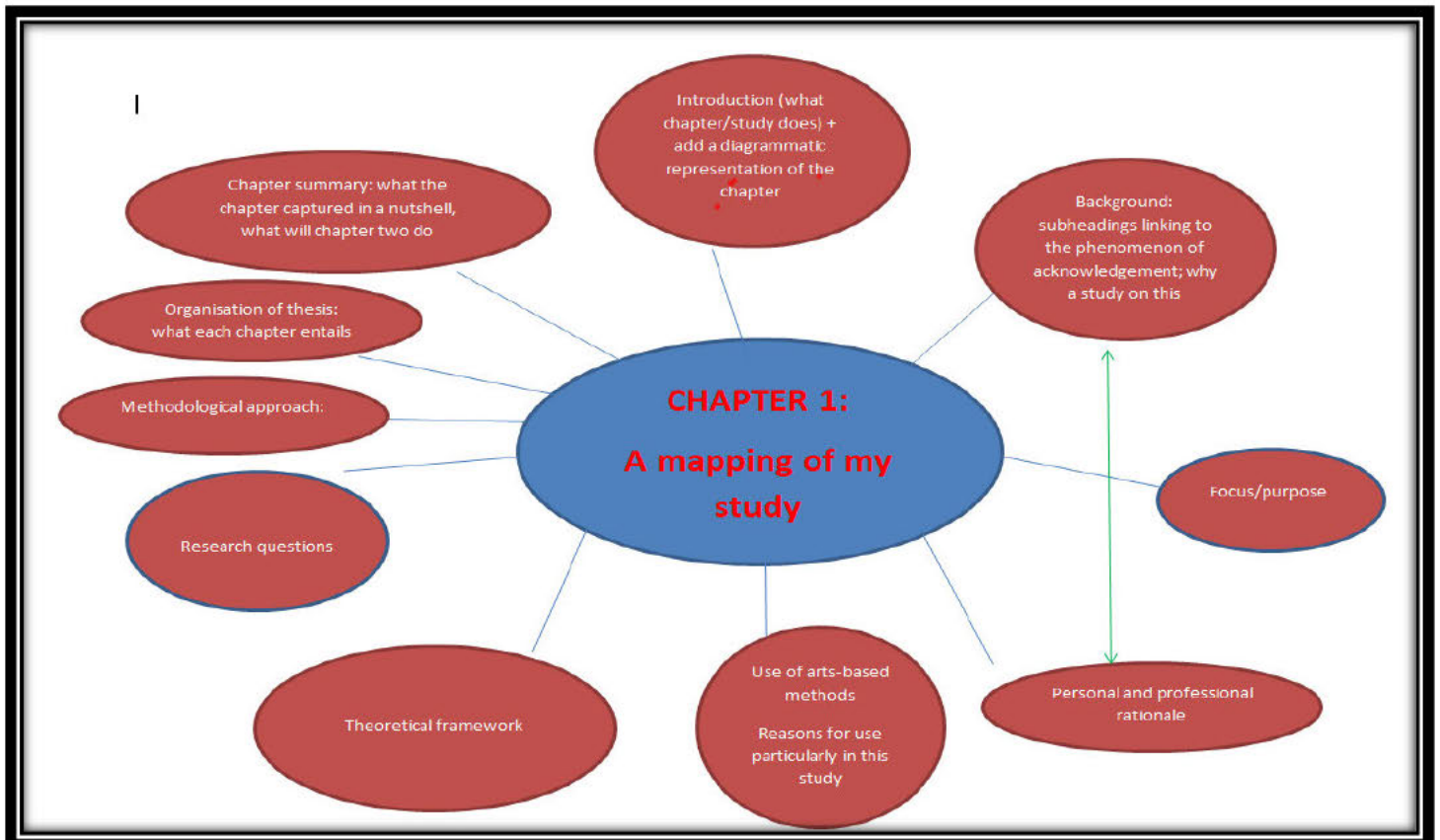


Figure 1.2 b: Initial planning and groundwork for Chapter 1 – typed copy

1.3 The Road Ahead

This chapter charts the beginnings of the study on *Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities*. The chapter begins with an ode, a tributary poem written in honour of my namesake, Khadija (RA), outlining how the concept of acknowledgement was embodied by her and how I perceive myself to share similar conceptions and ideas centering on recognition and its shaping of the personal and professional self, within the teaching field. The chapter progresses with a background to the study, illuminating issues around TA and teacher well-being and what necessitates such a study. Thereafter, the focus, purpose, research questions, and personal and professional rationale follow in sequence, providing further details for why the study was conducted. Concepts and terms used within the study, and a brief summary of the research design and the theoretical framework employed, were also delineated. The chapter ends with an overview of the organisation of the thesis (summation of chapters), and a synthesis of the discussions within this chapter and what to expect in the next chapter, Chapter 2. An overview of the headings for Chapter 1 follows.

1.4 Chapter at A Glance

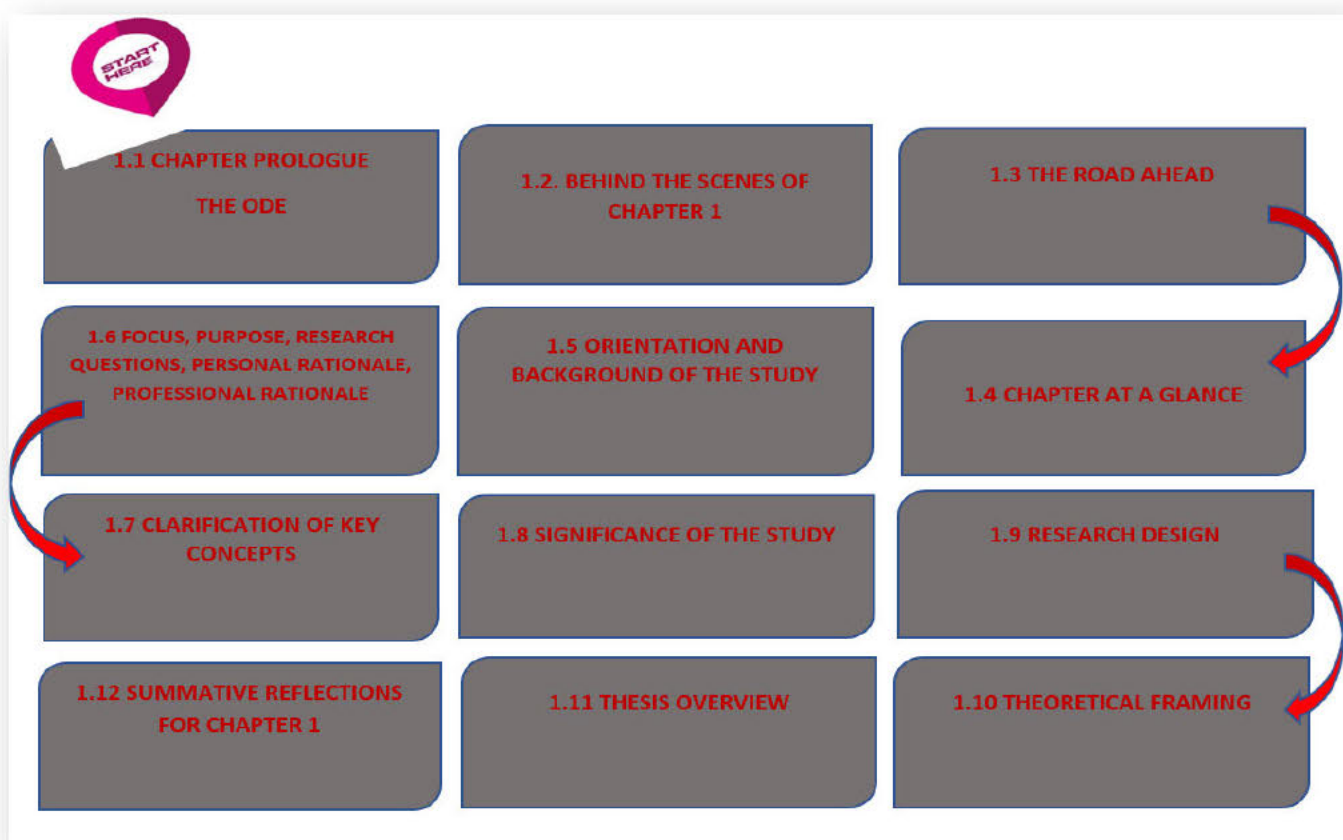


Figure 1.3: An overview of Chapter 1

1.5 Orientation and Background of the Study

Nayak and Ashok (2022) assert that teacher acknowledgement seems to be lacking in educational institutions. They further advance that the teacher, although the most worthy human asset, is sadly not adequately cherished (Nayak & Ashok, 2022). In the same vein, they mention that institutions of teaching and learning have failed in recognising the insurmountable value that a teacher adds to a school (Nayak & Ashok, 2022). Furthermore, facets of acknowledgement and praise received from work counterparts and leaders should be consistently implemented to enhance teachers' self-confidence and worth (Zakaria et al., 2021). In other words, a positive sense of self and the overall well-being of the self should be an integral aspect to promote teachers' professional well-being and what they do (Roy, 2018). The scholars mentioned in this paragraph indicate that praise from different stakeholders is externally driven and that there is a lack of it. Whilst these scholars highlight TA as extrinsically motivated, some scholars posit TA as an internally driven phenomenon. Such studies posit that internal acknowledgement, such as a personal sense of achievement or success in terms of their professional self, correlates significantly with the teacher's sense of independence and proficiency (Derakhshan, 2020). Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2000) advance that workers are more dedicated when they feel competency in their own work abilities, self-governance in their work choices, and a sense of connectedness with their co-workers. According to these scholars, praise and acknowledgement may also be an intrinsically driven process whereby the teacher's own feelings of self-worth may influence their sense of self.

Human patterns of behaviour are shaped by an intricate interaction of several elements, some of which are psychological and physiological, sociocultural and socioeconomic, and externally based factors that determine how individuals communicate and react to their realities (Bandhu et al., 2024). From the scholars surveyed thus far, there appear to be two perspectives on TA, one with an external dimension and the other with an internal dimension. However, there seems to be a third perspective emerging on TA experiences that focuses not only on the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects but on the interplay between the two, which this study also seeks to explore.

1.6 Focus, Purpose, Research Questions, Personal Rationale, Professional Rationale

In this section, I discussed the focus and purpose of the study. I further discussed the personal and professional rationale for the study.

1.6.1 Focus

In this study, the phenomenon is Teacher Acknowledgement (TA). From the various etymological definitions, I understand *acknowledgement* to be synonymous with words such as recognition, commendation, praise, thanks, declaration, honour, affirmation, gratitude and appreciation amongst several more. Two succinct definitions of the word acknowledgement are “*recognising the rights, status and position of control of an individual*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and “*to pronounce one’s thanks and appreciation for an act or gesture*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Such synonyms and definitions of the word acknowledgement help to create a basic understanding of the phenomenon of TA, alluding to both the teacher as a site for recognising the self as well as an external experience recognising the teacher for who they are and what they do.

Through this study, I explored and interpreted how both inward and outward-driven TA shaped the various facets of teachers’ lives and work. These facets related to the teacher’s well-being, experiences of teamwork and collaboration, and school climate, amongst others. In this regard, how teachers are treated by the different educational stakeholders was seen to shape a teacher’s self-esteem and mental and emotional well-being, affect the standard of work produced and mould the teacher’s etiquette within the workplace (Daniels & Strauss, 2010). Hence, critical experiences and the meanings these have for teachers personally, as acknowledgement, were viewed as affecting the teacher’s sense of personal and professional self.

Using narrative inquiry, I listened to teachers’ stories of lived experiences and the meanings they take up of acknowledgement in the context of their work and lives. Through the employment of teacher stories, I first wanted to explore the personal lens that shapes meanings that teachers attach to acknowledgement. Furthermore, teachers’ experiences of acknowledgement assume an essential role in moulding their identity as teachers (Dobson & Rowsell, 2015). Therefore, I wanted to learn how this interplay between the personal perspectives is relational to teachers’ personal and professional identities in terms of what they think they are (psychologically), how they feel (emotionally), and why they act the way they do.

1.6.2 Problem Statement

1.6.2.1 Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore stories of teachers’ lived experiences of acknowledgement from the self and others and how it shaped primary school teachers’ personal and professional identities. Furthermore, the study delved into teachers’

experiences of TA and understood how it shapes what teachers think and do when they receive or do not receive acknowledgement in the workplace.

This study aimed to contribute to the field of teacher identity research. Teacher identity is a concept that is “negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). It is “a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Hence, exploring the experiences of TA as storied by teachers enabled me to understand the meanings they attached to particular experiences and their sense of self as teachers.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) explained that the concept of identity has several facets and incorporates professional as well as personal dimensions. In the same vein, teacher professional identity is described as a pivotal element that guides the teacher’s ambition, personal efficacy, enthusiasm and drive, dedication and productivity (Anspal et al., 2019). This implied that teacher professional identity and teacher personal identity are inextricably connected (Richie & Wilson, 2000; Pillay, 2020). Using these notions of teacher identity as a premise, I wanted to deepen my understanding of TA and how, the way it is enacted and experienced, may affect who teachers are personally and professionally.

1.6.3 Research Questions

The research questions that follow were derived from the topic of the research study, which is *Primary school teachers’ stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities*

There is one main research question that has been developed to inform this research study. Three key sub-questions have been drawn up to address the main research question. I answered these *what* and *how* sub-questions in the section below:

The proposed research study was directed by the following main research question:

What are teachers’ lived experiences of acknowledgement in primary schools?

The sub-questions that appear hereunder were formulated to answer the main research question:

1. What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?
2. How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?

3. How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?

1.6.3.1 What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?

The main phenomenon in question one is the stories of acknowledgement experiences teachers share (orally, visually and written) of their lives and work in primary schools. Under the umbrella of the main research question, this question sought to delve into the real-life experiences or lived experiences that teachers have been through in relation to TA. In this regard, Clandinin et al. (2007) describe *lived experience* as individuals' lives and the way in which they are lived. Sharing stories allowed me access as the researcher into a rich and deep understanding of the meanings and understandings teachers have and use in making sense of the self, as teacher stories people live by are ever-evolving (Guthrie, 2022) in the continuum of life. Hence, this question required me to listen to teachers' voice their own lived-through stories and experiences relational to the social context of their respective schools. This centering the voice of the storyteller (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022) is key to a narrative study such as this.

1.6.3.2 How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?

The main phenomenon under question two is teacher acknowledgement experiences and how they shaped teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers. Another term for *teachers' meanings of self* is *teacher identity*. Teacher identity serves as an orchestrating element in the professional lives of teachers (Mellon, 2022). According to Mellon (2022), it is a dynamic tool that teachers can employ to describe, explain and understand who they are in regard to others. Therefore, in addressing the main research question, this question aimed to gain insight into how TA experiences moulded teachers' sense of who they are as individuals and in relation to others. Teacher identity and professional settings continually evolve (Mellon, 2022). Hence, this sense of self or identity is formed together with interpersonal relationships and correspondence and is a complex and ever-changing concept (Mellon, 2022). In other words, this research question suggested that I hone in on how TA experiences shape teachers' sense of self and their personal and professional identities.

1.6.3.3 How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?

The main phenomenon in question three is the teacher's sense of self and how this shapes teachers' everyday practice. Under this research question, I searched for the teachers'

experiences of TA in relation to their sense of self and how they carry out their daily tasks and behavioural practices. According to Zakaria et al. (2021), if teachers' well-being is attended to, then they will feel pleased and relaxed, and they will revel in their work practices at school. This, in turn, will generate a high standard of education for learners and enhance teachers' wellness further (Zakaria et al., 2021). This means that the teacher's sense of self or identity, feelings and emotions may hold a lot of weight in determining how a teacher performs in terms of their everyday practices in the workplace.

1.6.4 Personal Rationale

Teacher Acknowledgement struck a very personal chord with me.

I recall working under a principal as a beginner teacher at a primary school in 2010. During a meeting in his office, he became angry when I spoke up about the disrespectful manner in which he was addressing me. Consequently, I was told that no teacher is indispensable and that if I was unhappy with his rules and ways (pointing to the door), then I could leave and find another school. I felt gutted and completely in shock that I could be admonished by a leader in such a manner, a person who is supposed to uplift rather than degrade his staff. I felt violated, and this dampened my feeling of belonging and my will to excel at my job [as a teacher]. 18 years later, his words still haunt me.

On reflection, I realised that my sense of value for what I could be and do as a novice teacher was externally motivated. Thus, the lack of validation from the principal caused me to feel unheard, unacknowledged and as if I did not belong. The idea of a sense of belonging alluded to the level of respect and support teachers experience from their co-workers (Pesonen et al., 2021). This respect and support were lacking in the incident related above. Hence, the excerpt emphasised how my sense of self as the teacher was affected by receiving external negative acknowledgement.

In contrast, my memories of being a novice teacher under the leadership of a principal in the same primary school two years prior were completely different.

I recall her passing by my class, her hands clasped behind her back, smiling to herself, as she unobtrusively listened to me teaching. I remember feeling content just by that nonverbal acknowledgement, knowing that it meant that I was doing well.

The excerpt above highlights the phenomenon of TA with a focus on how the teacher's sense of self was affected by receiving external positive acknowledgement. Peters and Pearce (2012) emphasise the significance of positive interchange and communication of school

managers on the strength and well-being of the staff. Hence, it was the principal's silent approval that served as a way of communicating to me that I was worthy and valued. Through her positive nonverbal interaction, she nurtured in me a sense of belonging. When this sense of belonging is created and the teacher feels valued by co-workers, it can lead to better work performance and help solidify the teacher's sense of self (Dempsey et al., 2021). This means that the teacher, in engaging in such positive interactions, functions more efficiently psychologically and in terms of work practices (Pesonen et al., 2021). Hence, from this scenario, the importance of the school manager's role in enhancing a sense of belonging is reiterated and consequently its relation to personal and professional identity.

In both stories, it is noteworthy that the focus was on external acknowledgement that teachers may or may not have received in the form of support from principals through being valued, respected, believed in and knowing that their matters are being heard (Pesonen et al., 2021). When I received positive acknowledgement, it made me feel as if I was a good teacher. In contrast, when I received negative acknowledgement, I felt as if I was a bad teacher. In both these incidences, the external acknowledgement and the emotions I experienced thereof were shaping how I saw myself as a teacher, thus influencing my teacher identity. Hence, in this master's study, I felt the need to disrupt my own superficial understanding of TA being solely an external force.

1.6.5 Professional Rationale

As a master's student, I was curious about exploring the phenomenon of TA not only as an externally driven experience but, as stemming from an internal point of view. My interest extended toward examining the interplay between the intrinsic and extrinsic TA experiences in relation to who the teacher is and how they see themselves. This means that such interactions between the internal and external experiences may be relational to the teachers' identity (Lasky, 2005).

Using an object narrative activity, I developed a pantoum poem. A pantoum poem can serve as a means of research that can fortify creative power and contemplation (Pillay et al., 2017). Thus, writing this poem helped me highlight key concepts and ideas to crystallise my researcher stance regarding exploring the interconnectedness of internal and external TA experiences from an identity perspective. Identity in itself must be perceived with a view to the inextricable link between its personal and professional aspects (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Hence, the unpacking of my poem, together with a sketch I drew, showed how these links between the personal and professional self are formed. Below are the pantoum poem and the sketch.

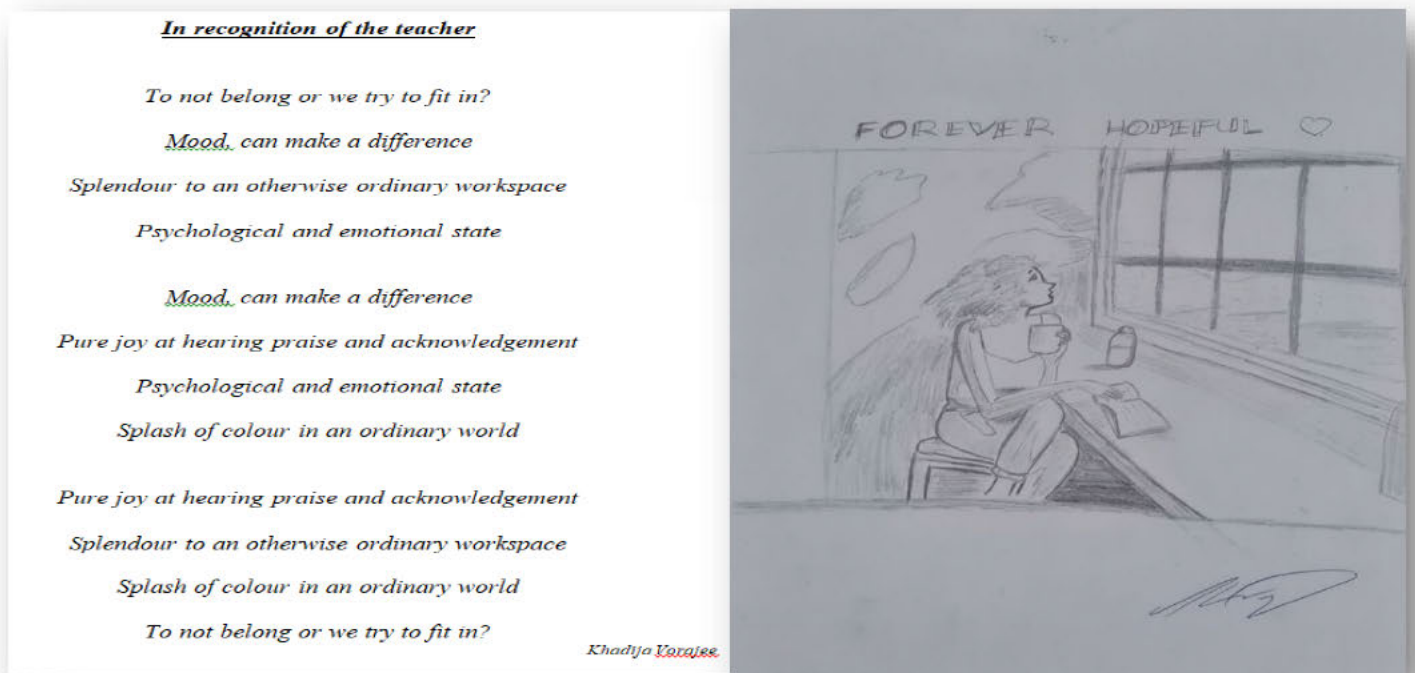


Figure 1.4: Pantoum poem and related sketch

Several key concepts emerged from this poem, some of which are: *Psychological and emotional state*, *mood*, *feeling of belonging* and *pure joy at hearing praise and acknowledgement*. These concepts are linked in that they deal with our affective states of being and our sense of self. In other words, they focus on our feelings and how they may shape our identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Stanza 1 focuses more on the internal dimensions of one's psychological and emotional state and relates to feelings of hope, as the girl with her face tilted upwards depicts. Stanza 2 seems to emphasise the interplay between mood and emotion (intrinsic dimension) and receiving praise and acknowledgement (extrinsic dimension). In the drawing, this may be represented by the light from the *outside* coming through *into* the room. The last stanza refers to how the link between the sense of self and

choice or agency (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) may ultimately lie with the teacher in deciding to what extent to 'not belong' (internal force) or 'to try to fit in' (external force). In the picture, this sense of self is represented by the girl sitting alone, perhaps 'belonging' to herself.

The discussion above on TA and its relation to teacher identity suggests that acknowledgement, though having an internal and external dimension, also relies on an area of in-betweenness. Hence, I wanted to understand this interplay between the intrinsic and extrinsic TA experiences and research it from a teacher identity perspective, both personal and professional. The concepts identified in the poem grounded me in my researcher stance and helped steer me away from falling back on my taken-for-granted perspective of TA being mainly an external force.

1.7 Clarification Of Key Concepts

1.7.1 Primary School

A school is defined as a learning institute which admits students in singular or multiple grades, commencing with grade R up until the twelfth grade (SACE: 2021). For the purposes of this study, the use of the term 'primary school' refers to an institution registering learners starting at grade R up to and including grade 7, within the ages of five to eleven years old. Yet, more specifically, this study makes reference to the *teacher* within this primary school context.

1.7.2 Teacher

According to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, a teacher is defined, amongst other things, as "any person who teaches, educates or trains other persons or who provides professional educational services" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 2) in an educational facility such as a school. In this study, a teacher, in addition to being defined by this role within a professional capacity, is also an individual with a complex psychological and emotional makeup within a personal realm. In other words, 'teacher' in this study, more than being defined as a professional entity, in terms of the roles and duties they must fulfil in order to be called a teacher, also has a personal dimension attached to this title, both of which are shaped by the lived experiences and stories shared in the context of this TA study.

1.7.3. Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement

In the context of this study, teachers' stories refer to the narratives of the participants within this study. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narratives are a study of the manner in which individuals experience their societal contexts. Thus, teachers' stories, a term used in this study, translate into the lived experiences and co-constructed realities of TA,

represented by the narratives shared and examined in the data collection and analysis stages of this study. These narrative accounts extend to both who they are as a person and who they become as a teacher, which are shaped in itself by the stories of recognition, or lack thereof and interactions with learners and colleagues alike.

1.7.4 Recognition

Various definitions of the word recognition exist in everyday contexts, namely recognition meaning a form of identification, recognition meaning affirmation of one's erring, and recognition meaning acknowledging and upholding the position of another (Ikäheimo, 2002 & Heikkinen, 2003, cited in Felix, 2019). In examining these three definitions of recognition, it seems that the first and the third explanations are most closely appropriated to this study on TA. The first understanding of recognition as a concept bears reference to how one perceives and comes to know a thing or idea (Felix, 2019), to *recognise something as something* (Honneth, 1995), for example, for a teacher to be *identified* as a teacher (Felix, 2019). With reference to the third understanding of recognition, it is the sense of affirming the value or worth, as well as respecting the dignity and status of another, in this instance, a teacher (Felix, 2019). These two perceptions of recognition, feature concurrently in this study to create an interrelated meaning that recognition of teachers refers to both the knowledge and ability to define an individual as a teacher (as espoused in the first definition) and to pay them due honour in fulfilling the role of teacher (contained within the description of recognition in the second definition).

1.7.5 Teacher Well-being

The concept of teacher well-being is a multifaceted one (Dreer, 2023). According to Hascher et al. (2021), various constructs of perception for teacher well-being occur, such as overall wellness constituent of a sense of contentment, and favourable and unfavourable emotional states, well-being as psychological wellness, and well-being as the correlation between eagerness for work and affective fatigue or burnout (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Capone & Petrillo, 2018; Aldrup et al., 2018, cited in Hascher et al., 2021). Thus, there is no singular conceptualisation of teacher well-being. Rather, teacher well-being is surmised as one's multi-tiered and personal analysis of one's existence, which culminates in constructive appraisal or recognition (Hascher et al., 2021). In this study, teacher well-being relates to all of these definitions, particularly in relation to conceptualisations of teacher acknowledgement and recognition. This sense of wellness which is an outcome of an assessment of a teacher's work life can further be interpreted to mean that positive and negative dimensions occur concurrently, with the positive elements being more prominent than the negative, whereby, the teacher's lived experiences and interrelations with learners, co-workers or parents, if more

favourable than the opposite thereof, results in a more intense sense of occupational fulfilment (Hascher et al., 2021). Therefore, in the context of this study, 'well-being' of teachers, with its affirmative and non-affirmative aspects, includes both personal and professional spheres of self within the teaching field.

1.7.6. Personal and Professional Identities

Identity refers to the ways in which we perceive and articulate who we are, how we place ourselves in relation to others within varying contexts, and the parts of our self that we select to showcase when engaged with others (Richards, 2023). Furthermore, identity is defined by fluidity and is influenced by situational aspects of interpersonal exchange, is articulated within a linguistic domain, and is multi-dimensional, framed by personal life encounters, ideas and characteristics (Richards, 2023). Cheng (2021) affirms that identity development involves non-static, dynamic and evolving elements and further mentions that teachers form their identities in a continuous thread of communication, deliberation and arbitration which incorporates both their personal and professional beings. Furthermore, professional identity described as one's self-perception within a society of professionals (Ibarra, 1999, cited in Richter et al., 2021), incorporates conceptual ideas regarding one's job and is set in its behavioural practices, morals, intent and occurrences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Ibarra, 1999, cited in Richter et al., 2021), as a diverse and nuanced concept (Richter et al., 2021). The professional identity of a teacher is further purported as not entirely distinctive in that the teacher's cognitive and behavioural conceptions transcend into their personal and contextual attributes within daily deliberations, relying on the personal worth they apportion to these conceptions (Cheng, 2021). Personal identity, then, is defined as distinctive and inherent attributes of one's internal state expressed outwardly in interpersonal contact with other individuals and consisting of various aspects, including lived experiences (Richards, 2023). Personal identity actualised through written, spoken, semiotic and linguistic aids also changes according to the setting of discourse taking place (Richards, 2023). From this discussion, one gathers that the explanations of teachers' personal and professional identities complement each other, inasmuch as they may be individually defined within this discussion.

The conceptualisations of identity, including personal and professional identity, as described by the scholars in this discussion, shares meaning with this study on TA, whereby, teachers' identities are context-driven, socially constructed and constantly being invented and re-invented through their storied experiences revealed in the letter-writing, object inquiry and unstructured interview stages of this study. There is also the inclination of the personal and professional identity being intertwined in the discussions within the previous paragraph, and this relates to the study at hand, in that throughout the course of this study, the two facets are

discussed simultaneously, the one interacting and working with the other inextricably. Furthermore, the study uses discourse analysis and semiotics as supporting theoretical framings, which have been stated in the preceding discussion as forming part of the personal identity of the teacher and therefore have a direct bearing on the study's thinking about personal identity and how it is used within this study.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Teacher acknowledgement is a phenomenon that is not explicitly found in research; that is, there is minimal information available, as is evident through extensive Google Scholar and other research site searches. The extant literature on the topic used synonymous terminology such as recognition and well-being, and was thus used to sculpt this study. Hence, this study *on primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities* can be flagged as a fairly novice area of study, which may possibly be of value to the teaching profession and its different stakeholders. This means that, amongst others, teachers will benefit from knowing and understanding the different kinds of acknowledgement (recognition) so as to discern it when they encounter or do not encounter it, and also learn of its position in relation to themselves and their colleagues. Management will also glean from this study on TA about how teachers perceive this phenomenon and their place within its conceptualisation, towards better understanding their subordinates. Other significant parties will be able to interpret the value of this study on TA and its potential contribution to how teachers perceive TA and how it moulds who they are and become as teachers in their daily practice. Since teacher attrition is a constantly increasing in the teaching field (Tompkins, 2023), the study by bringing to light TA narratives and its identity-shaping probabilities, may possibly, serve as way to allay this growing trend leading to retention, the favourable contrast (Miller & Chait, 2008 cited in Tompkins, 2023) to attrition, of teachers for longer, which would be favourable for the education sector in South Africa and globally.

1.9 Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach embedded within an interpretivist paradigm. In exploring primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities, this study yielded insightful, nuanced stories of four primary school teachers' TA experiences and how these shaped who they are as individuals and as teachers. I utilised the narrative inquiry approach for my methodological stance as this enabled me to uncover real stories of teachers' lived TA experiences. Narrative inquiry's main purpose is to work closely with lived experiences of participants to gain an in-depth perception of their stories shared within specific contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Hence this study, zoned in to the shared stories of the four primary school teachers within the greater Durban area of

Ottawa and Verulam, within KwaZulu-Natal. The field work involved collecting data from each participant using several different research methods and tools, including unstructured interviews. The interview texts were analysed to form cohesive narratives, and I further rearranged these narratives into storied experiences. This rearrangement of the stories was followed by an analytical summary for each participant. The analysing of the data ensured a comprehensive understanding and meaning-making of TA and the TA experiences within various contexts. Chapter four discussed the methodological approach in greater detail.

1.10 Theoretical Framing

The theoretical framework for a research study is the scaffolding around which the study is built. Thus, it is the support structure upon which the research problem, purpose, rationale, research questions, and significance of the study is set. Grant and Osanloo (2014) describe the theoretical framework of a study as the grounding platform, or the foundational footing on which the literature review and more poignantly, the data methods and data analysis take off. When selecting a theoretical framework, the researcher must ensure that the theory correlates with what the researcher wants to explore (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the theoretical framings selected match with my yearning to explore TA as a phenomenon and how it influences the teachers' personal and work self.

The use of several theories to study a concept (such as TA) is known as theoretical triangulation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). On this journey of my study, I was wary of the decision to use multiple theories to frame my study, for fear of being unable to convey their individual and collective value, even though the use of such theoretical triangulation is beneficial when studying a complex concept such as TA. These benefits of using several framing theories, include adding depth to the study, allowing theoretical triangulation by increasing the study's credibility and reducing biasness that often comes with a singular theoretical lens, and lastly, enabling flexibility in perceptions by offering varying discourse and understandings of the data collected (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Thus, using a multi-focal lens is especially advantageous in examining topics of a nuanced nature, such as TA, synced with identity and social constructs, all engaging together with fluidity.

The advantages far outweighed the fears I had; thus, I selected a three-stance theoretical framework. Honneth's theory of recognition, supported by discourse analysis and semiotics, were selected as the three framing perspectives for this study. Honneth's theory of recognition with its three levels of recognition tied in with the stories about the receipt of TA and how this affects the formation of the teachers' self, discourse analysis which delved into the meanings behind words within the narrative experiences, contributed to a clearer understanding of TA,

and semiotics, the reading of signs and symbols that conveyed the meanings as narrated within an educational setting.

1.11 Thesis Overview

Chapter one's beginning in tribute to my namesake, Khadija (RA), as a starting point, set the tone for this study on TA and its effect on the teachers' personal and professional self. The background, synopsis of literary voices, research questions, overview of the research methodology and theoretical background, and the inclusion of my personal and professional rationale for the study moulded the beginnings of the journey into the world of TA and its conceptualisations. Additionally, concepts used in the study, such as primary school, teacher, recognition, professional and personal identities, teachers' stories of acknowledgement and teacher well-being were defined within the context of this study.

Chapter two, literature review, provides a comprehensive literary overview of TA and its accompanying conceptualisations. The scholarly conversations within this chapter, which drew from both national and international research, illuminated my engagement with different ideas, sorted into broad categories such as what is teacher acknowledgement, its forms, its effects - both positive and negative, internal and external, personal and professional TA, and their interactions with the teacher personal and professional self.

Chapter three focuses on the theoretical frameworks scaffolding the study and sets the stage for deepening the reader's understanding into the theoretical choices that served as a backdrop against which this study leaned. I elucidate the rationale for selecting Honneth's theory of recognition as a main theoretical framing, flanked by discourse analysis and semiotics as supporting theoretical bases, to back up and provide a joint matrix of theoretical structures for TA interpretations and perceptions and discussions surrounding how these lead to the formation of teacher self.

Chapter four metes out the study's methodological stance in terms of the research design selected for this study. In this study, I use qualitative methodology operating from an interpretivist paradigm and within a narrative inquiry approach. The study location, participant selection, data presentation and the methods used for the collection of data are all explained in detail within this chapter. Furthermore, factors such as trustworthiness, validity and issues of ethics are discussed. Limitations and delimitations of the study are also found in chapter four. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the chapter's discussions and a foreword to the next chapter.

Chapter five presents the narratives of the participants – Celine, Shania, Viv and Alexis

(pseudonyms used to protect their real identities) separately and under specific headings guiding their ideologies about TA and how it features through their lived experiences, followed by an analytical summary of each narrative presented. The emerging conceptions and ideas arising from the narratives and the subsequent analysis of narratives provided the impetus for the development of the next chapter on the discussion of findings.

Chapter six deals with the discussion of the findings leading from the data presentation chapter, in which the participants' selected written or visual activities and their subsequent unstructured interview narratives were presented. That is, the narratives shared together with the analytical summaries gave way to the formation of themes and sub-themes of the study, namely, conceptualisations of TA, forms of TA and the learnings of TA. These themes and sub-themes helped organise the chapter towards understanding these aspects of TA.

Chapter seven, my concluding chapter, sums up my research study and maps out future recommendations for this field of study on TA.

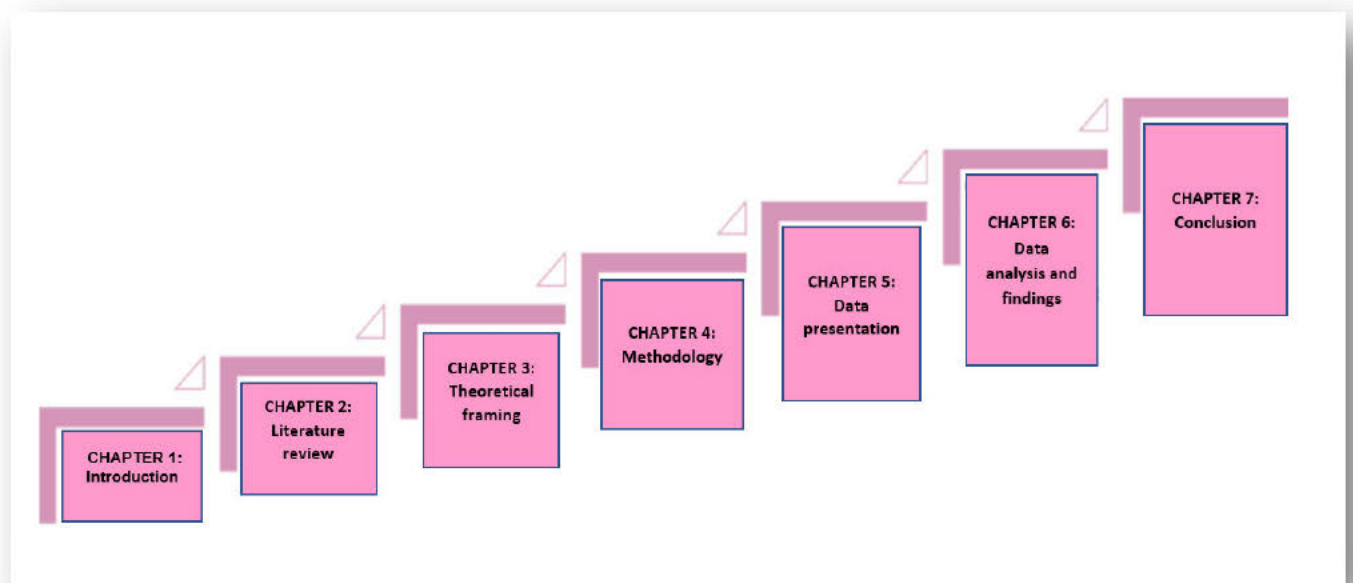


Figure 1.5: Visual plot of thesis

1.12 Summative Reflections for Chapter 1

This chapter began with an ode to my namesake, Khadija (RA), in an attempt to elucidate my inward focus towards conceptualising and interpreting what TA entailed and how to clearly convey this to the reader. The orientation and background to the study followed,

wherein TA and its relevant issues were discussed, placing the study into perspective and rationalising its focus and purpose. The research questions underpinning the study were further stated, together with a rationale for each one. I further clarified the use of concepts and terminology relevant to this study. Additionally, the research design and theoretical framing applied in this study were briefly highlighted. A written mapping out of the organisation of the thesis and summary of contents per chapter as a window through which to view the thesis as a whole, followed.

Chapter two, the literature review chapter, which follows, offers a network of scholarly ideas and discussions around the phenomenon of TA and its influence on teachers' personal and professional identities.

The 2nd Chapter: Literature Review

Weaving Through a Web of Literary Works

2.1 Chapter Prologue

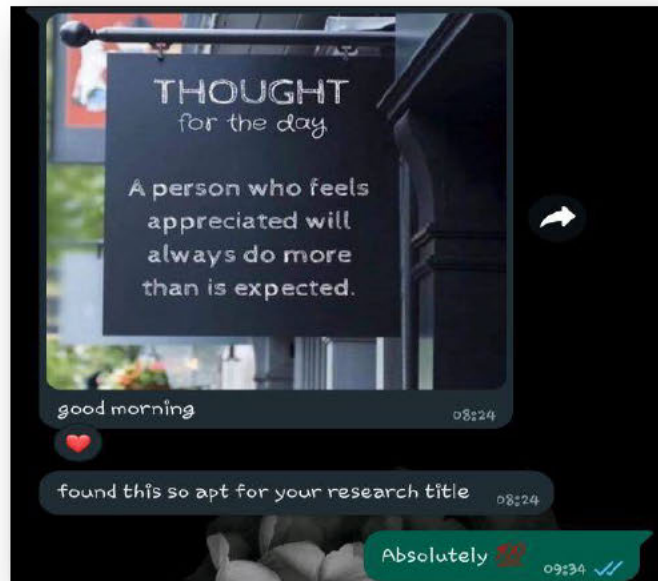


Figure 2.1: An example of a conceptualisation of TA

Note: Image from the researcher's diary, shared by a critical friend via WhatsApp, 16 January 2024. This quote is attributed as anonymous on Quotespedia.org

2.1.1 *What's in an Image?*

This image captures the essence of an interpretation of a TA conceptualisation. It refers to the influence of appreciation and acknowledgement on an individual. In this instance and concerning this study on TA, the reference made is to positive TA resulting in a positive effect on a teacher's professional identity, and thus, how this recognition affects their daily work performances. This chapter elaborates on scholarly views about TA and the effects on teachers' selves, both personal and professional.

2.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

Chapter one provided an overview of this thesis. In setting the scene for this study on TA, the reader was oriented in regards to the focus, rationale, research questions, theoretical framing, methodology and key concepts of the study. The chapter ended with an overview of the thesis as a whole. In chapter 2, academic viewpoints from those who have previously written on teacher acknowledgement, using synonyms such as recognition and praise, will be discussed. Furthermore, the discussion will extend to the shaping of teachers' individual and

teacher selves through literature's eye on the phenomenon of TA. These discussions are steered by the three RQs mentioned in chapter one.

2.3 Chapter at a Glance

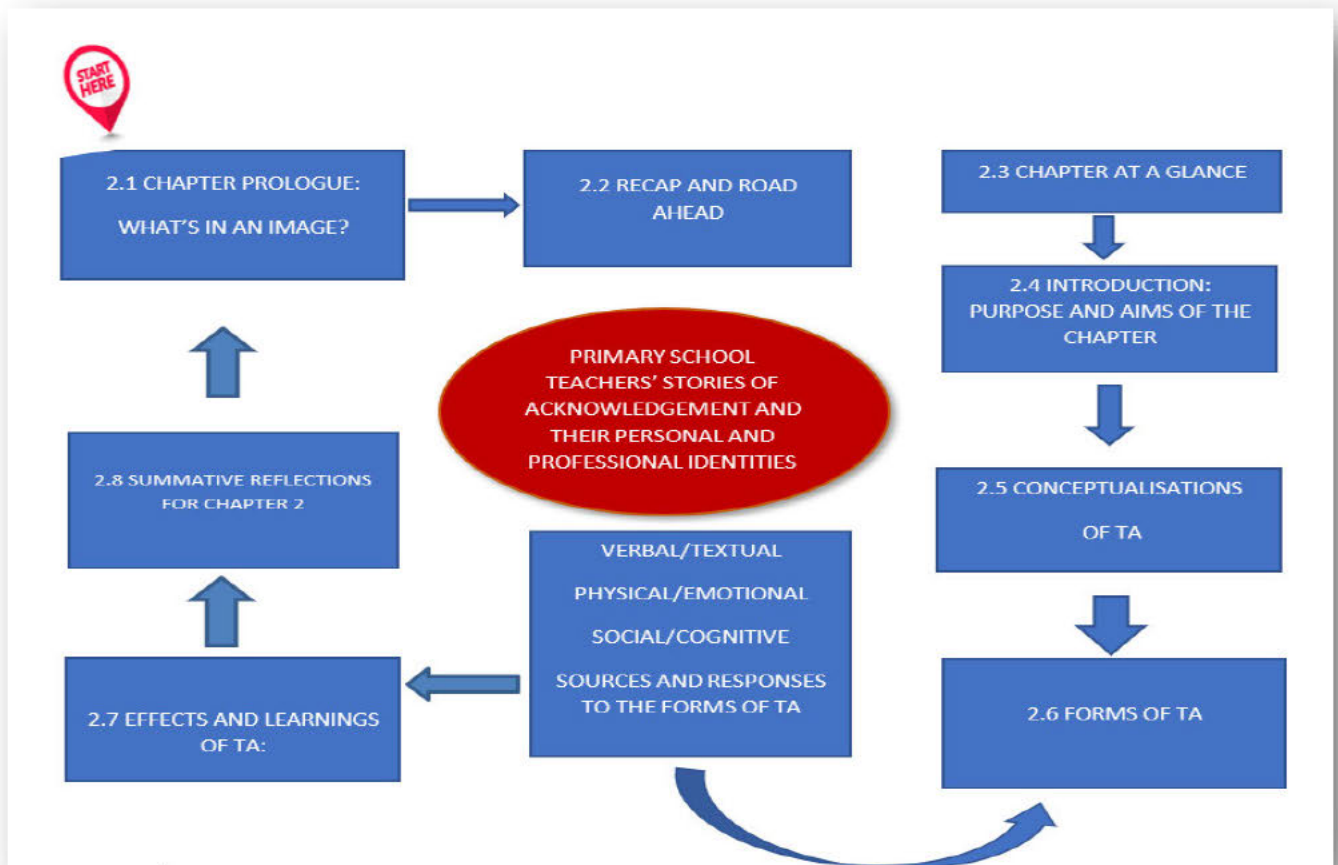


Figure 2.2: An overview of Chapter 2

2.4 Introduction: Purpose and Aims of the Chapter

January 2025 brought with it the release of the most recent National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results for the class of 2024, and the school education system had received widespread praise for achieving a historic pass rate of 87.3%. In celebrating this significant achievement, within the public schooling system, acknowledgements of teachers' contributions, amongst others, towards achieving this pass rate were abundant. In the same vein, concerns were raised about the quality of teaching and teachers' competences in times when the NSC pass rates were below par, suggesting that teachers are both recognised and blamed for the performance levels of learners. This is in line with Spruyt et al.'s (2021) claim that teachers are evaluated by multiple actors, including the public at large, not all of the evaluations being positive. In this chapter, I present an engagement on teacher acknowledgement, commencing with a conceptual understanding.

While noting that there is little literature on teacher acknowledgement published recently, as searched through Google Scholar, using a range of keywords that include teacher acknowledgement, teacher appreciation and teacher recognition, the broader literature base for this chapter will include a focus on teacher well-being wherein teacher recognition would feature substantively. Hence, teacher well-being will form a major contextualising literature frame for this study, as noted in some of the findings of this study. Literature on teacher appreciation and teacher recognition will also be reviewed to illuminate a broader conceptualisation of teacher acknowledgement and its influence on teachers and their well-being.

Ahmed (2020) and Struwig and Stead (2001) describe a literature review as the identification, unearthing and analysis of documents wherein information is contained in relation to a specific study. The literature review serves to allow a potential researcher to engage with literature to ascertain what studies have already been researched in a specific field and assists the researcher to determine the weaknesses and strengths concerning the topic being reviewed. According to Mouton (2001), it is considered unwise to interact with research without possessing a sound overview of the extant literature concerned with the subject under exploration.

This literature review highlights several topics that relate to the aims of this study, making connections and comparisons with prior research and studies made by other researchers in the area of teacher acknowledgement. This study focuses on exploring primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement as a shifting interplay between the personal self and the teacher self.

Framing the study from a teacher identity lens aims at opening up ways to understand TA as a continually shifting experience and deepen understanding of the teacher's capacity to see the self as a potent space for negotiating meanings of what one is and wants to be, feel and do in the position of teacher. Such meanings are explored further as the literature unpacks what acknowledgement implies through real-life experiences or lived experiences that teachers have been through in relation to TA. Such meanings are further seated within a paradigm of teacher well-being.

The themes highlighted in this section are *Conceptualisations of TA* which highlights teacher acknowledgement as a personal and internally driven force shaping experiences in primary schools and teacher acknowledgement as an externally driven force shaping experiences in primary schools; *Forms of TA* wherein the focus is on verbal and nonverbal, physical and emotional and social and cognitive forms as examples of TA and; *Effects and Learnings from*

TA which discusses teacher acknowledgement as an interplay of the internal and external, positive and negative and dynamically relational to what one is and wants to be, personally and professionally in the position of teacher and Teachers' sense of self in shaping the negotiation of everyday practices.

Thus, this chapter will attempt to unpack the term TA and other related concepts such as teacher recognition, teacher appreciation, teacher value and teacher affirmation, through the various discourses underpinning the phenomenon of TA. Other terms, such as personal and professional identities, will also be explored within the context of teachers' lived experiences and narratives under the umbrella of the main phenomenon of Teacher Acknowledgement. Before unpacking these topics and the discourses surrounding them, it is imperative to begin with the question of: What is Teacher Acknowledgement?

2.4.1 Behind the Scenes of the Literature Review Chapter

The following image is a handwritten design used to guide the scholarly discussions on TA, which follow. It forms the groundwork for the subtopics, under the umbrella of the main title of the study, Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities.

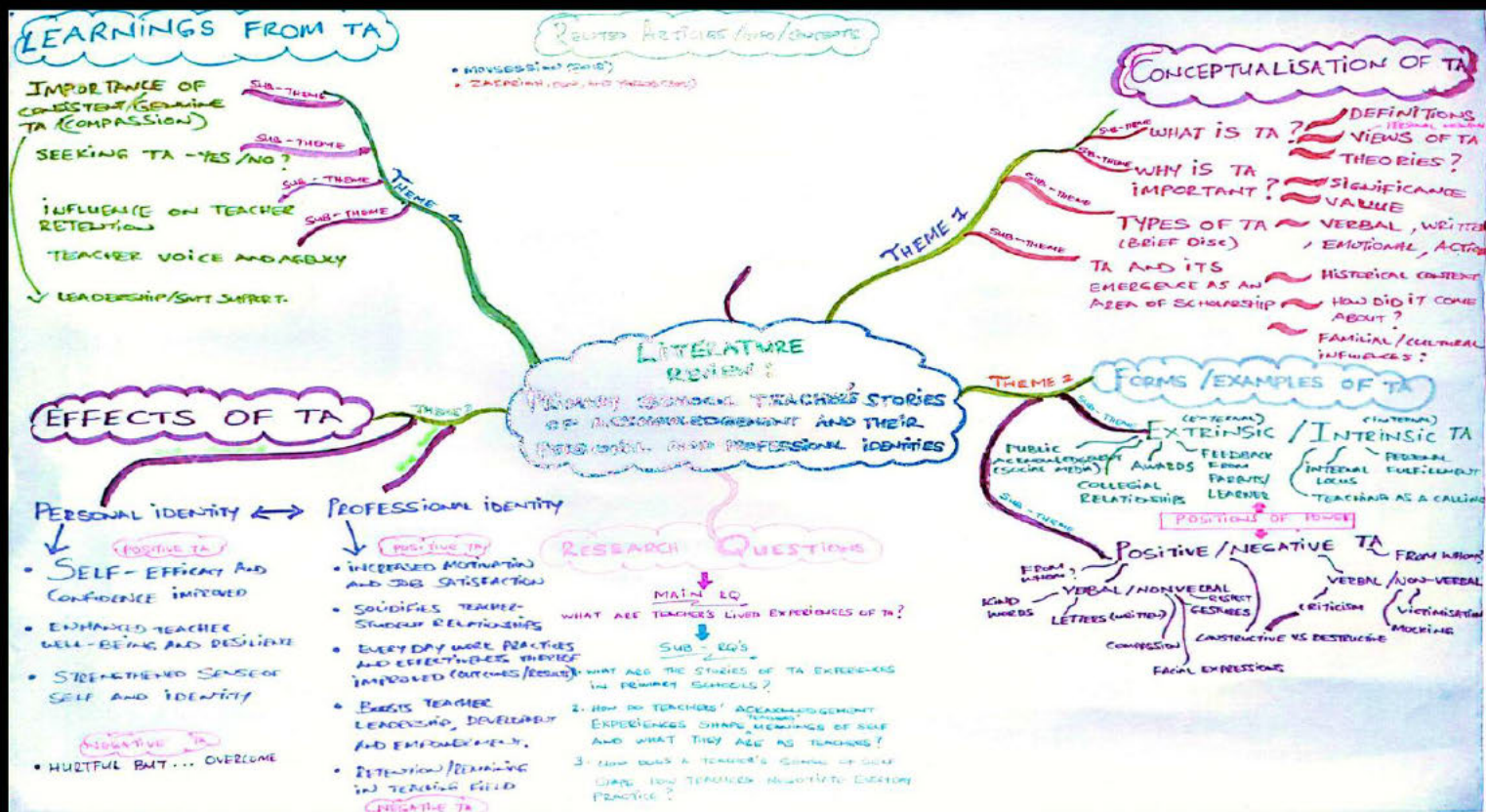


Figure 2.3: Handwritten mapping to guide literature review discussion

2.4.2 Teacher Acknowledgement: What is it?

The main phenomenon in this study is Teacher Acknowledgement (TA). Various etymological definitions presented in Chapter 1 describe *acknowledgement* as synonymous with words such as recognition (Movsessian, 2018), affirmation, gratitude and appreciation (Fagley, 2018), amongst several more. Furthermore, two succinct definitions of the word acknowledgement were described as, the affirmation of the rights, status and position of control of a person, and secondly, to express one's gratefulness and appreciation for an action performed (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Such synonyms and definitions of the word acknowledgement were reiterated as forming a basic conception of the phenomenon of TA, whereby the teacher is both a space for recognising the self and becomes part of an externally based sphere of recognising the teacher for who they are and how they behave.

There exists a plethora of discourses on acknowledgement in the form of its synonyms mentioned in the above paragraph, such as recognition and appreciation. For example, Fagley's (2018) use of the word appreciation defines the concept of acknowledgement as affirming the worth and perception of a thing, such as an individual, an occurrence, a behavioural disposition, an entity; including a sense of positive empathic relation to it, without directly using the term acknowledgement. Thus, few studies employ the actual term acknowledgement as alluded to in the context of this study. Hence, to get a true picture of what this phenomenon is about and the implications for this study, studies using such synonymous terminology are drawn upon and utilised to facilitate and steer the discourse forward towards a critical evaluation of TA as a phenomenon in itself.

2.5 Conceptualisations of TA

In this section, the conceptions and perceptions of TA will be discussed. Drawing on literature, the term TA will be unpacked to form an understanding of TA and its place value and significance in the lives of teachers. Thus, the viewpoints of teachers about TA will be delved into, from a research-focused lens to glean what scholars propose in regards to the conceptualising of TA and how it relates to this study.

2.5.1 Conceptions of TA as a form of Recognition

Teachers perceive TA to be a kind of recognition in relation to the work they perform (Movsessian, 2018). That is, TA, according to Movsessian (2018), is described as a concept that aligns with affirmation in lieu of activities the teacher may conduct. Movsessian (2018) further mentions that receiving acknowledgement for tasks performed creates a sense of worth for people. This means that they enjoy a feeling of accomplishment when they discern that the work they do yields a sense of reward. Furthermore, it is this feeling of worthiness for the

exertions they invest into their job, which yields a sense of purpose and belonging, the latter being a term referring to the level to which teachers feel accepted and revered by their work counterparts (Pesonen et al., 2021). Cementing the idea of belonging in relation to recognition as a conception of TA, Ryan and Deci (2020) mention three needs, one of which is interconnection, which deals with a feeling of relatedness, and a sense of inclusion and acceptance, which is enabled by expressions of honour and concern. These expressions of honour and concern (Ryan & Deci, 2020) can be deemed to be recognition that they receive from their colleagues and significant others via the scope of respect and within the context of facilitating relevant affirmation for teacher dedication, efficiency and compromises in terms of the work they do (Lambersky, 2016).

From these literary sources, it can be discerned that TA for teachers is rooted in a deep personal sphere of usefulness and merit for work tasks performed, which consequently fosters feelings of belonging and connection. Thus, this perception of TA stems from an outward recognition of efforts that teachers put into their work, resulting in feelings of relatedness. However, the words 'personal sphere' mentioned in the previous statement hint at TA having a possible inward element to it, meaning that whilst the literature discussed thus far alludes to TA being viewed from a largely external vantage point, the feelings of worthiness for tasks performed may also come from intrinsic sources.

Rocque et al. (2024) posit that a working schooling program is reliant on the recognition and affirmation of teachers. This means that TA is crucial to facilitate a productive and operative educational environment. Thus, teachers' sense of worth and value and how the two phenomena operate within the TA realm, both internally based and externally based, could be considered a poignant feature here. Similarly, the value and significance teachers attribute to TA relates to their intrinsic or extrinsic valuations and whether they operate from an internal lens or an external area of focus.

In the ensuing sections, the literature tells the tale of TA falling into three different yet interlinking domains, namely, the internal domain, the external domain and the evaluative (formal) domain.

2.5.1.1 Internal domain: Teacher Acknowledgement as a personal force shaping experiences in primary schools

Personal meanings attached to TA

This research study aims to highlight the personal meanings of TA that teachers attach to their lived experiences. This perspective highlights the emotional and psychological feelings

teachers experience to recognise themselves as thinking and feeling human beings with dynamic identities (Ros i Solé et al., 2020), open to revising and recreating themselves.

Whilst scholars emphasise that external forms of recognition as acknowledgement, are of great importance to the teacher's sense of self (Movsessian, 2018), few studies consider the internal or personally driven meanings that shape perspective on teacher acknowledgement (Cavanagh & Prescott, 2015). To this end, Oruc (2013) mentions that teachers' stories of lived experiences or teacher narratives are imperative in gaining an understanding of how teachers think, feel and act in schooling contexts and cultures they find themselves working in. This implies that teachers themselves have the choice to negotiate ways of knowing who they are, what they are and how they think and feel about their selves – personally and as teachers working in primary schools (Oruc, 2013). The latter statement regarding teacher agency and their personal and professional self-knowledge serves as an invaluable research tool for this study on stories of acknowledgement as an internal driver and impetus for teachers.

In addition, the school environment is encountered uniquely by the different role-players within the school, and is also influenced by various insights, mannerisms and sociocultural identities (Van Jaarsveld & Mentz, 2021). In other words, how teachers view TA within the school context may differ based on personal perceptions, which Van Jaarsveld and Mentz (2021) define as the process of meaning-making of what one experiences sensorially to interpret one's surroundings and contexts. Literature (Van Jaarsveld & Mentz, 2021) reviewed therefore implies that perceptions of TA are possibly viewed from the lens of the individual teacher and their own experiences of TA. Thus, this meaning of perception which involves three parts, namely, the interpreter (e.g. the teacher viewing TA), the aim (e.g. the learner) and the situation in which the perception is occurring (e.g. the results on test within the school) (Van Jaarsveld & Mentz, 2021), may hint at TA operating from an internal bias. This kind of inward-focused lens to TA translates into an ideal self-governing mannerism, wherein a task is directed by free will, instinctiveness and a sense of intrigue (Santos et al., 2016). The work invested towards the fruition of tasks, rather than being linked to external forces, is connected to ingrained features within the person towards the task (Santos et al., 2016). Hence, an individual whose perception of TA stems from an internal area of focus involves himself or herself in tasks about which they are passionate, sans external concrete rewards and consisting of an authentic feeling of agency (Odhiambo et al., 2023). In other words, such persons view TA as a self-relying concept and a feeling of accomplishment.

2.5.1.2 External domain: Teacher Acknowledgement as an externally driven force shaping experiences in primary schools

Extrinsic acknowledgement alludes to conduct that relies on external forms of recognition such as awards or praise (Scott & Schools, 2017). Hence, external acknowledgement in this sense refers to a type of outward gesture, such as a compliment from colleagues or learners or the receipt of an award.

Daniels and Strauss (2010) emphasise in their study the importance of acknowledgement for the actions of teachers and its role in enhancing the well-being of teachers. The implication here is that external forms of acknowledgement are imperative for teachers' optimum wellness to prevail. It is further mentioned that praise and recognition are seldom received by teachers, which then results in low teacher morale (Daniels & Strauss, 2010). Hence, if positive acknowledgement is not received, then the teacher's sense of self is negatively affected. In employing words describing TA such as '*recognition received*' or '*recognition can come in the form of...*' Movsessian (2018; p5) further cements the idea relayed by Daniels and Strauss, (2010) in this discussion, that the teacher is a passive receiver of external circumstances and that events and experiences happen *to* the teacher.

The external domain of TA is not limited to receipt of TA from colleagues, but also from the affirmation and recognition from learners. The discussion on this stance of TA, that is, the receipt of TA from learners, will be engaged with in detail within theme 2 of this chapter.

Having delved into broad bands of literature in regards to internal and external dimensions of TA, there exists a third domain through which teachers perceive TA. That is, TA can also be of a more evaluative nature, within which professional support systems, which serve to score teachers' job performance, play a key role. The next part of this literature review discusses the Evaluative domain of TA.

2.5.1.3 Evaluative Domain: Teacher Acknowledgement as an evaluative force shaping experiences in primary schools

The evaluative dimension of TA deals with the application of reward points based on benchmarks and evaluation criteria in a teacher's field of work. In this domain, teachers are measured in different areas to increase and enhance behavioural growth towards better work performance (Odhiambo et al., 2023). Such a rewards system may serve as a means of amping up teachers' internal and external modes of TA awareness by supplying catalysts in the form of pay progressions, promotion posts and professional commendations (Odhiambo et al., 2023). Thus, conceptualisations of TA framed within the evaluative domain hone in on how teachers feel acknowledged through such reward systems, often referred to in the

literature as teacher recognition (Movsessian, 2018) and how this may influence their thinking in relation to the external aspect of TA and the internal aspect of TA.

Appreciation through awards, whilst serving as a social symbol of recognition (Mbukanma, 2022) may also serve as an evaluative representation of acknowledgement. Such awards manifest in the form of accolades, trophies and honorary titles in the school sphere and are tailored to suit people's aspirations for societal commendation and dignity within a work field (Mbukanma, 2022). Such teacher recognition awards enhance teachers' self-esteem, boost confidence in their work, motivate them to perform better and give them a sense of feeling that what they are doing for their learners is 'right', alluding to the intrinsic effects of receiving the extrinsic teacher recognition award (Mbukanma,2022).

In addition, Mbukanma's (2022) study notes that awards are distributed based on commendations without considering their impact on the recipient's present cognitive state and prospective performances. Mbukanma (2022) sampled primary schools in Delta State, Nigeria, to determine how tangible TA, such as awards, motivated teachers towards a heightened level of excellence. The findings of his study showed that awards, though significant towards the appreciation and consequent ambition of teachers as in Odhiambo et al.'s, (2023) study, may be better supported by motivation and upliftment by the manager, learner results and learner interaction, affirmation and recognition of efforts, whilst also including salary and non-salary benefits. Hence, Odhiambo et al.'s, (2022) finding about evaluative forms of recognition such as teacher awards, though being prestigious in its own right, should be accompanied by the 'human' aspect of support and care (Mbukanma, 2022) for optimal benefit to the teacher and their TA experiences in school.

2.5.2 TA and the Teacher Personal and Professional Self: Understanding TA through an Emotional Realm

2.5.2.1 Emotion and Teacher Self

According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), the teacher's sense of self and teacher identity are inextricably linked. The concept of identity and self is also closely aligned with emotion (inner feelings), and how it shapes a person's self and how one chooses to know oneself, that is, one's identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Together with emotion, the vigour that stories and dialogue enable in the comprehension of identity and the purpose of introspection add to the shaping of this identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The implication for this study on teacher acknowledgement is that the acknowledgement experiences shared by the teachers will contain emotion, stories and discourse as well as reflection, hence

contributing to the shaping of the teacher's sense of self. In essence, it means that TA and teacher emotion (TE) complement each other and contribute towards the teacher's well-being. The discussion that follows demonstrates how emotion and the teacher self and identity are interwoven with TA, both internal and external.

Identity, or the sense of self, is a complex phenomenon. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) point out that the teacher's sense of self evolves continuously and is relational to both internal and external influences, such as emotions and life experiences, respectively. This statement about the changing and relational nature of the teacher self, indicates that what a teacher narrates in this study on TA, concerning their lived experiences of teacher acknowledgement may be dependent on their dynamic and constantly shifting identities based on how they feel, emotionally and psychologically (internal forces) relational to their life circumstances (external forces) (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Hence, the complex nature of the teacher self is such that it is ever-changing and moves constantly between the internal and external elements thereof in a fluid-like and interchangeable manner whilst caught in a delicate dance of emotion and inner-being, yet simultaneously waltzing with outside environmental influences. Sachs (2005) further affirms this idea of fluidity of the self by stating that the teacher's sense of self is neither something rigid nor static. The self may be revised and recreated through experience, and what understanding and meanings of recognition and respect are taken up from that experience (Sachs, 2005). Hence, the teacher's identity may be shaped by critical experiences in the workplace through external forces, and how teachers view that experience through their own internal lens. This internal lens shaping teachers' workplace experiences is central to this study of Teacher Acknowledgement. The focus is on the interplay between the internal lens and teachers' identity and what and how they think and feel about the experiences (emotional and psychological) and how these dynamically shape their responsibility in particular social contexts as teachers.

2.6 Forms of TA

2.6.1 Introduction

In this section, the nature and the forms of TA are discussed. Studies (Movsessian, 2018; Leow, Lee & Leow, 2020) on the nature and forms of TA suggest that these forms of TA may be identified as: *Verbal and textual forms of TA; Physical and emotional forms of TA and Social and Cognitive forms of TA.*

How teachers categorise the different forms of TA is complex and intricately interwoven with their interpretations and the value they attach to these forms of TA. Sections 2.6.2 to 2.6.6

engage in a discussion on the forms of TA and consequently the categorisation, complexities and values in relation to the forms of TA.

2.6.2 What are the various Forms of TA?

Several forms of TA manifest in the school sphere. For example, Movsessian's (2018) study poses a question of whether teachers prefer the proverbial '*pat on the back*' as opposed to the expression of appreciation in a more verbal sense from SMT or the receipt of formal commendation, such as acknowledgement at school events or staff meetings, amongst their colleagues. Movsessian (2018) recognised three forms of TA. These included physical forms of TA (e.g. a pat on the back), verbal forms of TA (e.g. expressions of appreciation) and social forms of TA (e.g. commendations given to a teacher in the company of others). Furthermore, Movsessian (2018) advocates that such forms of recognition can manifest by way of spoken tributes, accolades and incentives, further alluding to the verbal, social and physical forms of TA, with incentives as being a more formalised outcome of such TA. To expand on physical and formal manifestations of TA, Hamrick and White (2020) explain actions of assistance, such as pragmatic services to assist a work partner, hand gestures such as a thumbs-up or fist-bump or the act of gift-giving as a form of reward. In this instance, any gesture performed actively may be classified as a physical form of TA, and any reward for tasks done may be classified as incentivising teachers, while TA that is given to a teacher in the presence of others constitutes a social form of TA.

Textual, emotional and cognitive forms of TA also occur under the umbrella of the various forms of TA within this chapter. Whilst textual forms of TA relate closely to verbal forms of TA, as will be discussed below, the discourse concerning emotional and cognitive forms of TA can be found within the realm of physical and social forms of TA, respectively. The pairings for engagement of these forms of TA are revealed in the ensuing sections.

2.6.3 Verbal and Textual Forms of TA

Verbal forms of TA may be perceived as recognition that is of an auditory nature, whilst textual forms, in contrast, signify acknowledgements in written or visual form, both exacting feelings of praise and worth and both recognising a personality trait or accomplished task of noteworthiness or merit (Movsessian, 2018). Both verbal and written forms of TA may be classified as a private form of recognition, such as when appreciation is received by co-workers or managers in person and aside from other teachers and educational role-players being present (Movsessian, 2018).

The teaching profession emphasises teacher-learner communication (bin Kasim & De Joseph, 2022). Hence, within the sphere of verbal and textual forms of TA, whereby teachers and learners serve as interactors sharing their insights and emotions (bin Kasim & De Joseph, 2022), TA may be expressed in varying contexts and by different stakeholders, including the learner. An example of such an expression of TA is when some learners may say something to a teacher that acknowledges their teaching or actions, whilst others may produce a written expression of their appreciation in their books or in the form of notes. As such, the intentions, rather than the means of expression, are preferred by teachers. In addition, Sikira et al. (2024) argue that verbal forms of TA serve as an immediate and individualistic way of expressing appreciation, whilst textual forms of TA, such as a recognition certificate or letter, serve as a more formal and lasting record of displaying recognition. Ahmad et al. (2019) concur by saying that learner praise, collegial, managerial and parental affirmation give character to verbal forms of TA, while letters, notes, social media messages and written evaluations serve as examples of textual forms of TA. Ahmad et al. (2019) also argue that such concrete forms of TA (handwritten notes, gifts or tokens of appreciation, written commendations) are more enduring and serve as ongoing artefacts of TA for teachers. In the same vein, Movsessian (2018) suggests that verbal acknowledgements, such as learners' expression of valuing the teacher, serve as ongoing motivation for teachers to continue doing what they are doing that is making a difference in learners, academically, emotionally and otherwise. Teachers tend to place importance on these types of recognition when they are interpreted as authentic and mirror the learners' or parents' genuine praise and affirmation (Johnson, 2021). The instantaneity of verbal forms of TA may enhance a feeling of being noticed and perceived well, to strengthen the teacher-learner bond (Murray & Osterhage, 2024). How each form of TA is valued and how it influences teachers is an ongoing discourse, but there seems to be some consensus that the positive acknowledgement has both an emotional as well as a motivational influence on teachers (Sikira et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2019; Packheiser et al., 2024).

Drawing from the literature in this section on verbal and textual forms of TA (Movsessian, 2018; bin Kasim & DeJoseph, 2022; Sikira et. al, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2019), it can be inferred that these forms of TA exist in a complementary relationship with each other. That is, both verbal and textual forms of TA employ aspects of language and semantics in regard to the meanings of words and phrases manipulated within the two forms, thus making them share

similar semiotic traits, yet each being uniquely conceptualised in the manner in which they are affected. Hence, these forms of TA may be multimodal, consisting of several variant forms of interaction, such as verbal intertwined with gestural or written with pictorial, all of which blend into a seamless semiotic sphere of perception and understanding (Prinsloo, 2025).

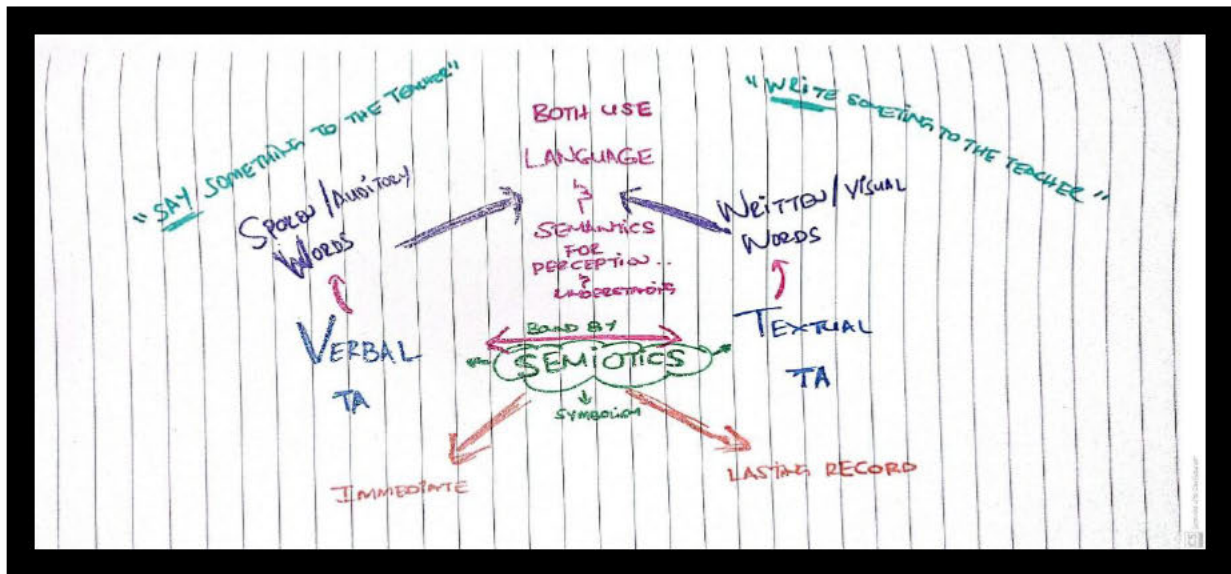


Figure 2.4: Understanding the complementary relationship between verbal and textual forms of TA

2.6.4 Physical and Emotional Forms of TA

The power of physical touch cannot be overemphasised. Packheiser et al. (2024) mention that the receipt of touch is of paramount importance and is known to enhance mental and physical wellness. In addition, psychologists Sin and Koole (2013) advocate that a simple hug releases oxytocin, which is the love hormone, relieving stress, promoting bonding and leaving one with an overall feeling of wellness. This oxytocin release may have a ripple effect on the production of serotonin, the happy hormone, which regulates feelings of contentment, mood and behaviour towards optimal emotional balance (Bamalan, 2023). Keywords drawn from these statements, namely, stress relief, bonding, wellness and a sense of emotional equilibrium, lean towards concepts which describe an ideal state of being for teachers to thrive in. Drawing from the nascent literature in the psychological field, cited in this section (Packheiser et al., 2024; Sin & Koole, 2013; Bamalan, 2023), the discussion relates to how physical forms of TA may interact and feed directly into the emotional dimension of TA. Zhang et al. (2020) argue that the emotional domain of TA, in turn, enhances the physiological and motor activity aspects of being, thus forming a cyclical process by way of creating a positive feedback loop with each form of TA affecting and enhancing the other continuously. This positive feedback loop has the potential to sustain the motivation in teachers to continue to do

what they are doing well. Hence, it can be understood within this discussion that TA in the physical sense impacts the way teachers interpret and internalise it on an emotional level, and this sets the tone for how such emotional perceptions of TA influence their understanding of future physical forms of TA.

In the teaching profession, where teachers are perceived as the suppliers of wellbeing and not the receivers (Daniels & Strauss, 2010), physical forms of affection serve as simple acts of TA that can become the emotional buffer needed in an otherwise stressful job. Examples of physical forms of TA range from the simple 'pat on the back' (Movsessian, 2018) or 'thumbs-up' to a handshake, a hug from colleagues or learners, a slight nod of affirmation or even a smile in approval or encouragement. These physical forms of TA intertwined with the emotional realm, wherein teachers continuously meet pressures from managers, colleagues, learners, the parent community and their own selves (Cross & Hong, 2012), in turn translate into feelings or emotions that teachers may experience in a positive way, the latter claim being of particular importance since teachers' perception of emotional experiences has been largely downplayed (Chen, 2019). This emotional perception will enable teachers to interpret their own and others' emotional reactions, leading to positive interpersonal relations amongst educational role-players towards enhanced performance in their field of work (Chen, 2019). In short, both physical and emotional forms of TA impact and shape each other in a joint manner, one not separated from the other.

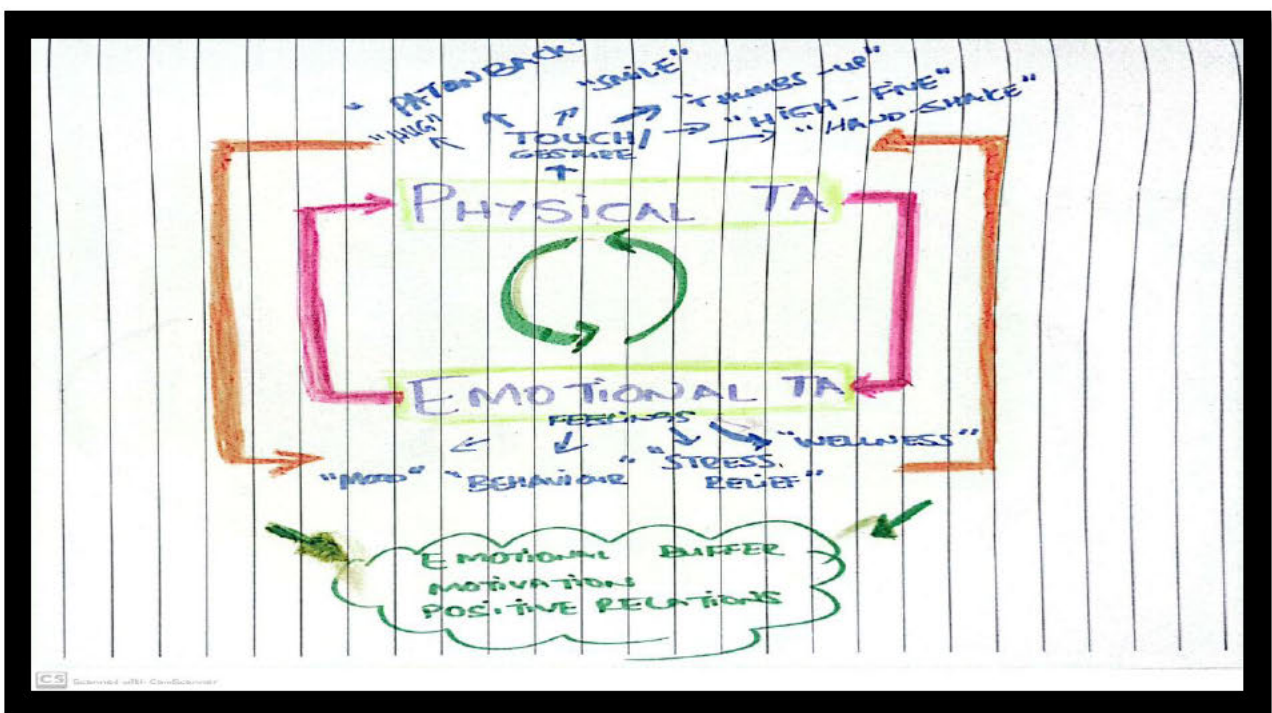


Figure 2.5: Diagram showing the cyclical nature of physical TA and emotional TA interacting within a positive feedback loop

2.6.5 Social and Cognitive Forms of TA

Social forms of TA deal with how TA, in a collective acknowledgement of teachers' dedication and concessions (Ismail et al., 2022), is received or given by a group of people. It is when a network of people encourages, praises and commends one's work performance in unison, thus referring to the work teachers do that falls under the microscope of a range of stakeholders (Spruyt et al., 2021). Hence, social forms of TA extend beyond the concept of group cohesion into a collective reverence for who one is as a teacher, in that it can be described as a perception that one's profession is esteemed in the greater public eye of social honour and veneration (Spruyt et al., 2021). Muhammad et al. (2022) in their study found that social forms of TA often lead to a recognition of and celebration of teachers' capabilities, characteristics, and accomplishments and that such recognitions occur at social gatherings, like awards functions, often reinforced by some sort of recognition certification.

Muhammad et al., (2022) further allude to some certifications as being a way of recognising cognitive forms of TA which may include problem solving and critical thinking that teachers may display in their work environment and which may have been recognised by school leaders, colleagues, learners, parents and significant others related to school educational issues. Teachers, themselves, may also self-introspect (cognition) about their impact that they may have had in the school (including on learners) and why they were recognised. These kinds of introspection, as Muhammad et al. (2022) argue, include teachers recognising their own abilities (e.g. ability to take on high-end tasks in school). Hence, such social recognitions may lead to greater self-esteem, teacher work-fulfilment and a positive attitude to contribute further to the well-being of the school, including that of the learners (Kettle et al., 2023; Mbukanma, 2022; Spruyt et al., 2021; Dolton et al., 2018).

2.6.6 Sources and Responses to the Forms of TA

Tackling each form of TA reveals the complexity associated with them. Movsessian's (2018) study highlights the complex nature of formal and verbal forms of TA. The complexity emerges in that the reason behind the award handing out or recognition is crucial to perceiving the kind of recognition required (Movsessian, 2018), implying that interpreting the 'why' of the praise or acknowledgement given prompts the recognition that is needed by teachers. In other words, teachers' preferences for the form of TA they want and need are determined, in essence, by the motive and source behind the given TA. Leow et al. (2020) argue that, irrespective of the forms of TA one receives, why they receive such acknowledgement is more important to teachers as it determines the level of teacher well-being in a school. They further argue that the nature of the forms of TA emerges from the complexities of the 'who' that is

pre-empting the actual acknowledgement (Leow et al., 2020). Simply put, it matters to the teacher who the giver of the different forms of TA is.

The complex nature of the forms of TA further hints that not everyone likes to receive TA in the same way (Chapman & White, 2019). Whilst a pat on the back might be a welcome form of TA for one individual, Hamrick and White (2020) argue that some might find it inappropriate or invasive. This means that the forms of TA are not a standard fit for all, but are experienced in an individualistic and unique way by teachers. In addition, if acknowledgement is not interacted in a manner that holds value to the receiver, the risk is not merely loss of dedication and diligence, but further, the objective of motivating one's work counterpart remains unachieved, and the outcome may be discontent and disgruntlement (Hamrick & White, 2020).

2.7 Learnings from TA

2.7.1 Positive and Negative TA Experiences in Shaping the Teacher's Sense of Self

Andrews (2011) highlights that positive TA experiences may shape the teachers' sense of self by promoting a boost in self-esteem, promoting a boost in confidence, inspiring them to work harder, and validating their ideas. According to Moodley (2018, p. 150), "The recognition and acknowledgement of teachers' efforts give them a sense of being valued and of being worthwhile members of the institution." This feeling of worth results in an increment in positive feelings and emotions, which leads to an increment in the psychological well-being of the teacher (Zee & Koomen, 2016). This emotional and psychological connectedness increases self-efficacy, which is how teachers come to be known by others and by themselves. Teacher identity is fluid and open to reconstruction; thus, it is a space for individuals to navigate daily issues and situations with more control (Cansoy et al., 2020). However, envy and tension are some negative effects related to positive experiences of recognition (Movsessian, 2018), whereby teachers face the resentment of colleagues when they receive praise or acknowledgement. This perspective of acknowledgement may lead to stress, which is detrimental to the teacher's sense of self and how they perform as teachers in their everyday lives.

On the other hand, negative TA experiences received may also arouse feelings of being incompetent, becoming resentful and defeated as teachers. According to Daniels and Strauss (2010), this understanding of praise and recognition causes emotional instability and feelings of being undervalued and unappreciated. This one-dimensional understanding of negative TA experiences may cause emotional and psychological tensions resulting in teachers losing confidence, passion, enthusiasm, commitment and work functionality, and who and what they are as teachers (Anspal et al., 2019). Understanding the interplay between the inner and outer

self that shapes teachers' professional identity is central to the studying of teachers' lived experiences.

Extrinsic acknowledgement alludes to conduct that relies on external forms of recognition such as awards or praise (Scott & Schools, 2017). Intrinsic acknowledgement refers to the performance of a task whereby the incentive is derived internally and the sense of accomplishment is self-directed (Scott & Schools, 2017). In this section, knowledge on teacher identity and how teacher acknowledgement experiences may shape the teacher's sense of self in both positive and negative ways was reviewed. The literature reviewed in this section creates a deepening in the understanding of the position of the teacher as a potent space for resisting fixed and narrow ways of negotiating professional experiences and the stories of self they construct. Furthermore, extrinsic TA experiences can affect intrinsic acknowledgement experiences and vice versa. Research regarding TA experiences may be growing, yet there exists a gap in this research concerning the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic acknowledgement experiences. Thus, while some studies have focused separately on these two perspectives of TA experiences, not many examine how they may interact with each other. Klaasen and Chiu (2010), for example, studied the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of acknowledgement on teacher burnout, yet omitted to explore how the two dimensions may relate and connect to each other. Hence, this study focuses on the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic acknowledgement and further views the interconnectedness between the two perspectives from a teacher identity lens.

2.7.2 Teachers' Sense of Self in Shaping the Negotiation of Everyday Practices

To facilitate deeper insight into the influences of TA experiences from an identity perspective, on everyday work practice, it is imperative to question: 'In what ways do TA experiences enhance the teacher's daily practices? (Movsessian, 2018)

i. Performance, productivity and longevity in the profession

Deci and Ryan (1985) posit that the receipt of recognition for an individual's expected tasks naturally enhances performance and that extrinsic praise and reward for initiated tasks may also be an impetus for staff to be more productive. Inevitably, the teacher who feels valued embodies productivity and increased involvement in their work (Movsessian, 2018). They also presumably will remain longer at their own educational institution (Movsessian, 2018). The above scholar implies that the sense of self and how the teacher feels emotionally and psychologically may influence how they negotiate their everyday practices.

ii. Students and school climate

Movsessian (2018) highlights the significance that teacher recognition, praise and acknowledgement may have on teacher dedication and the school climate. According to Andrews (2011), when a teacher is encouraged and supported, there is a probability of positive effects on the learner. Teachers who experience positive feelings are more inclined to respond to student needs (Jeon et al., 2018). However, when negative feelings are experienced, teachers struggle to sustain healthy interactions with learners (Cansoy et al., 2020). The teacher also experiences challenges in effectively managing classrooms and facilitating learning for the student (Cansoy et al., 2020). This suggests that teachers' negative emotional and psychological experiences harm the learner and the school climate. These scholars imply that both positive and negative feelings experienced by teachers may play a role in how their sense of self shapes how they negotiate their daily practices.

iii. Relationship with colleagues, teamwork and collaboration

Well-being of teachers in relation to their social needs is crucial for educational institutions (Zakaria et al., 2021). This is relevant in terms of the social interactions between teachers and their co-workers as well as the social commitment of the teacher (Zakaria et al., 2021). Zakaria et al. (2021) further implicate that when teachers enjoy a collegial relationship with their colleagues and when positive emotions override negative feelings, it leads to an increase in efficiency and work performance. Hence, the review of this literature helps us deduce that acknowledgement amongst work peers may be fundamental to the teachers' sense of self and how this shapes daily behaviour and practices in the workplace.

iv. Ability to deal with the stresses and demands of the job

Whilst several studies focus on the importance of TA in order to develop a strong sense of self and to enable the teacher to function optimally in their daily practices, there seems to be a dearth of research on *how* TA experiences may influence how teachers cope with daily stresses and demands related to the teaching profession. Lucas-Mangas et al. (2022) found that the psychological well-being, as well as the emotional intelligence (EI) of a teacher, contributed favourably towards the eagerness for tasks executed in the workplace. Additionally, these two factors were proven to drastically reduce burnout levels (Lucas-Mangas et al., 2022). Taking this into account, this study on Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities, delves deeper into TA experiences to explore how the teachers' experiences of acknowledgement (extrinsic and intrinsic) is a complex and dynamic process and relational to teachers' construction and reconstruction of self and their identity - who they are in the workplace with learners, with their

colleagues, as team members and how they negotiate their everyday situations and the choices they make.

2.8 Summative Reflections for Chapter 2

This literature review chapter critically explored existing literary works related to the topic under study: Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities. The chapter began with a discussion on what TA is and the conceptualisations surrounding this phenomenon. Recognition and well-being formed a key part of the discussions on TA. The discussions also included the personal meanings attached to TA, the internal, external and evaluative domains related to TA. TA, in terms of its emotional elements, was also delved into. In the subsequent discussions, the forms of TA were elaborated on, followed by the effects and learnings from TA.

A key insight gained through the review of the literature in this chapter relates centrally to the concept of recognition. This concept, further delved into in Chapter 3 through Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, proffers a guiding lens to interpret the literature discussed in this chapter, on emotional well-being, aspects of professional respect and the recognition of teacher competencies and its effects on the teacher's self. This theory, and other supporting theories underpinning this study, are explained in detail in the next chapter, which is Chapter 3, Theoretical Framing.

The 3rd chapter: Theoretical Framework

Treading Theoretical Tides: Semiotic and Discursive Trends in Teacher Tales of Tribute

3.1 Chapter Prologue

Theoretical tirades...

What's in a theory

Seems a bit bleary

It's a backdrop to the TA story

Giving voice to its message, a missionary

Discovering the unknown, exploratory

Peering through those lenses, it gets teary

Selecting three, I'm worn-out and weary

No superficial meanings, not dreary

Keep choices open - explorative, a prairie

Uncertain terrain - investigative, scary

Getting into Honneth's mind, ooh...eerie

Who, what and why...about it, I query

Discourse, semiotics... in-depth, not "merely"

Signs behind words, sometimes contrary

All enmeshed, working jointly...its fiery

Scaffolding the study, shifting from the arbitrary

Limitations, mediations spelled out clearly

Recognition-related, identity-ignited, necessary

My chosen frameworks.....indeed, visionary!

@katie_rekindled

Figure 3.1: Introductory poem - Theoretical tirades

3.1.1 What's in a Theory?

The poem Theoretical Tirades, is a reflection, of my inner conversations and frustrations about the theory choices for this chapter. It encapsulates the emotional and scholarly landscape I manoeuvred, within the theoretical framework choices for this study. The

poem helped to order my conceptualisations about what theoretical framing is and to refine the many theories on recognition and identity development, towards selecting the most appropriate theories for my study. It speaks of the initial questioning (*what's in a theory*) and confusion (*seems a bit bleary*) and the realisation that a theoretical framework, is the background voice echoing throughout the study. Furthermore, it mentions how, in using a theory, one must treat it like an unknown terrain, where learnings happen to allow you to discover, explore, and pierce through the surface meanings into the underlying assumptions, towards sound opinions and understandings behind the theorists' theorising about the phenomenon under study. Words such as *peering* and *teary* carry the depth of working with the thinking of others' works and the unsureness and exhaustion faced in getting down to three apt theories. The latter part of the poem reveals the three theoretical choices, namely, Honneth's theory of recognition and the supporting frameworks – discourse analysis and semiotics with a preview of what they entail. Finally, the poem also hints at how the three theoretical framings work together in relating to recognition and identity as the core of this study, its purpose in scaffolding the study and opening a portal of understanding, insight and inspiration for future foresight of the study's development. In short, the poem embodies the three theoretical framings as a mirroring of the workings and engagement of myself, as the researcher, permitting me to use them, within the study at hand (Varpio et al., 2020).

3.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

In the previous literature review chapter, several sources of information brought together ideas on TA and its conceptualisations, further weaving in the idea of teachers' personal and professional identity in relation to recognition. The discussion that ensued centered around the three RQS namely: *What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools? How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers? and How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?* Learnings from the literature review chapter guided the treading through several complex theoretical tides whilst crashing into and landing upon the shores of Honneth's theory of recognition, discourse analysis and semiotics as a multi-tiered manner of discerning how teachers tell the tales of their teacher tributary experiences and how these stories construct their personal and professional selves. Thus, these three theoretical lenses provided a three-way backdrop for interpreting the phenomenon of teacher acknowledgement not solely as a theme, but as a theoretical thread woven through identity shaping, language and construction of meaning within educational spheres. The chapter delves further into the three framing lenses under several relevant headings [see Figure 3.2]

3.3 Chapter at a Glance:



Figure 3.2: An overview of Chapter 3

3.4 Introduction

3.4.1 *Understanding Theoretical Framing*

A theoretical framework is a systematically formulated and related collection of ideas and propositions, designed from a single or several theories, which researchers develop as a support structure for a study (Varpio et al., 2020). To connect relevant theories as a collective framework for underpinning a study, a researcher should focus on definitions of any conceptual ideas that serve as a foundation for the current research and weave them together through coherent links showing how they apply to the study at hand (Varpio et al., 2020). In essence, a given study's theoretical framework is an expression of the engagement between the researcher and his or her efforts to employ a particular theory or theories (Varpio et al., 2020) further described by Kivunja (2018, p 46) for use as a "theoretical coat hanger for your data analysis and interpretation of results." To coin it differently, the theoretical framing within a study is the scaffolding that collates theoretical conceptualisations, drawn from prior proven and presented knowledge constructs, which the researcher then consolidates into a theoretical support structure or background for the analysis of data and meaning-making found

within the thicket of data collected (Kivunja, 2018). Thus, theoretical frameworks are not a subjective summary of one's own concepts about one's research but moreover a merging of the ideas of theoretical giants in one's arena of study in relation to one's research topic, one's perceptions of the theories, and one's employment of the theories in comprehending study findings (Kivunja, 2018). Leaning on these leaders translates into the development of an educated and focused lens through which to study, analyse, understand and effectively communicate data and findings in the research (Kivunja, 2018). In short, theoretical frameworks are the spectacles used to view the existing knowledge on the topic under study, toward understanding the data collected in one's own study.

3.4.2 *Why is it an Important Component of a Thesis?*

Theoretical framing provides a research study with a scholarly base with which to understand one's data (Neuman, 1997). In other words, it connects the proverbial dots of one's searching, thinking and discussion of one's findings, against the backdrop of what other theories espouse (Kivunja, 2018). Furthermore, theoretical frameworks link tangible and intangible aspects within data and cements the substantiation of its use in the study for discussions of how others perceive one's research question, also building on existing theoretical concepts for understanding one's problem statement and directs one towards what to search for within the data sets to adequately answer research questions (Kivunja, 2018). In using a theoretical framework as a grounding platform, one's study showcases depth owing to the support and references of theoretical experts whose stance on your topic is, in many cases, longstanding and substantive. Hence, the meaning within the data becomes in-depth rather than superficial (Kivunja, 2018). Drawing on Guba's (1981) standards for good research, it can be ascertained then, that having a theoretical framework can assist in meeting research standards by improving credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of research findings (Kivunja, 2018). Another integral consideration for including theoretical framing in one's study is that it clarifies one's theoretical assumptions and enables the audience to understand what directed one's analysis and interpretation of data. Hence, theoretical framing displays one's theoretical literacy and expresses a shift from simply describing data to a higher level of synthesising the workings with data towards future propositions and recommendations for future research in the field.

3.4.3 Behind the Scenes: Snapshot of my working with the Three Selected Theoretical Framings

The following diagram shows my workings with the three theoretical frameworks and the headings I used to organise my ideas and information about each one. Each heading on the diagram opened a folded page of notes, leading to the write-up on the framings in this chapter.

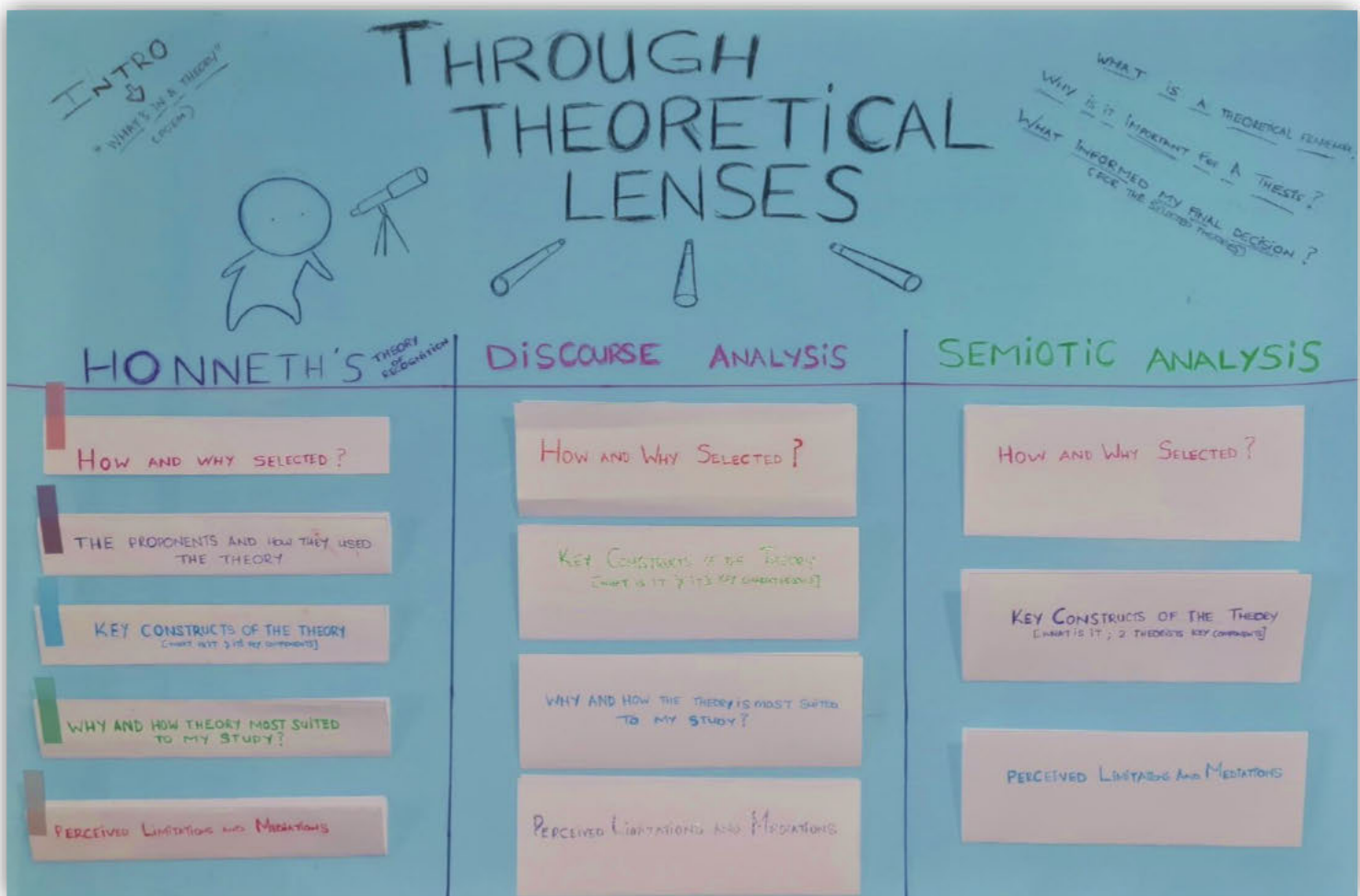


Figure 3.3: Background planning for theoretical choices made

3.5 Honneth's Theory of Recognition

3.5.1 Arriving at the Honneth's Nest – Rationale for selecting Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition as a Framework

This study was based on the phenomenon of Teacher Acknowledgement, largely described in literature (Movsessian, 2018; Zhang, Aramburo & Tsang, 2023; Rocque et al., 2024) using the term 'recognition'. In researching theoretical frameworks surrounding this concept, several theories emerged, such as Keltcherman's (1993) personal interpretive

framework, Huttunen and Heikkinen's (2003) circles of recognition and Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, as discussed in Felix (2019). I explored each in turn before deeming Axel Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition as the most apt underpinning theory for my study.

Whilst Keltcherman's (1993) theory held value in that it was based on the premise leaning toward the exploration of co-constructed meanings of the teacher's professional sense of self (Felix, 2019) and how their own knowledge constructs are closely enmeshed into their self-interpretive perspective (Felix, 2019), the focus as I continued my reading, seemed more projected towards experiences influencing the professional self of the teacher alone rather than the experiences shaping the teacher as both, a personal and professional entity that I intended to investigate. Hence, it was discarded as a framework consideration for my study.

Huttunen and Heikkinen's (2003) circles of recognition, whilst noting the value of recognition in social situations and self-development alike, honed in intensely on the positives and negatives of reciprocity in terms of recognition and how this is associated with the teacher's professional identity (Felix, 2019). This narrow-lens focus on acknowledgement being mainly viewed in a reciprocal sense and particularly affecting the professional identity, makes minimal to no mention of any relation to the teacher's personal identity as a possibility within social interactions. This was a feature that dissuaded me from employing it as a theory within my study. I instead searched for one that held more comprehensive conceptions supporting teacher acknowledgement and its influence towards both the personal and professional elements of the teacher self.

In further surveying the theoretical landscape, I encountered Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition. In his theory, Honneth (1995) foregrounds intersubjective forms of recognition across three levels, namely love, rights and social esteem in moulding the teacher's personal and professional identities. His (1995) theory of recognition displays a more vigorous, interpersonal framework positioning itself well with my aim of exploring and understanding teacher acknowledgement experiences, both positive and negative and how recognition or lack thereof, influences the formation of the teacher's personal and professional selves.

In summary, I selected Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition as the most fitting foundational theory for this narrative study, in that it proffered an all-encompassing theoretical framework for interpreting the function of acknowledgement in shaping teachers' personal and professional identities.

3.5.2 *Honneth's Theory: Proponents and Contextualisations*

3.5.2 1 Rationale for Honneth's developing his Theory of Recognition and what it meant for him

Resting upon the works of Hegel, Honneth's theory of recognition emerged in the period of the 1900s, borne of a close-knit scholarly interaction between himself and Hegel (Aritürk, 2021). Therefore, Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition is a continuation of Hegel's writings, whereby Honneth views recognition as not merely a pragmatic fixture for describing how individuals are conditioned, but as an ethical maturation within ideological conflicts (Aritürk, 2021). Honneth also drew from Hegel that an individual's prosperity was reliant on social interactions (based on love, justice and moral life), and that one must endure a struggle for social acknowledgement (Honneth, 1995). He further leaned towards Mead's efforts in confirming that one's true potential can only be reached if recognition and value are received from others and are relational in nature (Honneth, 1995). Thus, Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition was for him not so much a focus on a struggle for preservation of the self, but rather it dealt with a battle to form interactions of reciprocal recognition towards self-actualisation (Honneth, 1995). Hence, the development of a sound sense of self in Honneth's view is identified by the three core levels of recognition being love (from close interactions) towards self-confidence, legal aspects towards self-respect (from collegial interactions) and social honour (through community acknowledgement) towards self-value. Thus, the focus on social bonds to the formation and sustenance of an individual's sense of self is a common thread of earlier recognition theorists, which Honneth built on in the development of his theory of recognition.

3.5.3 *Key Constructs of Honneth's Theory of Recognition*

3.5.3.1 Setting the Scene for Understanding Honneth's Theory of Recognition: What Is It?

The core of Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition is based on the assertion that actual identity development requires social recognition (Honneth, 1995). Honneth (1995), within his theory, advocates that recognition is an inherent and basic individual need that shapes one's sense of self. He further describes recognition as an ethical and psychological imperative (Honneth, 1995) vital for human survival (Honneth, 1995; Felix, 2019). Furthermore, the nature of the recognition is shared or mutual in that it must be meted out and received in social interactions, for it to be meaningful and effective. The element of misrecognition also features strongly as a contrast within this theory, explaining what the consequences of not receiving recognition are in a social relationship. In short, Honneth's theory purports that it is favourable

for an individual to be affirmed by other individuals as this enables them to reach the highest level of self, whilst the opposite, disaffirmation by other persons, leads to the individual's detriment (Lepold, 2019). In the following section, the three levels of recognition as the key components of Honneth's theory of recognition, including its contrasting features of disrespect, are discussed.

3.5.3.2 Honneth's Levels of Recognition – The Three Zones

Within the structure of Honneth's (1995) theory lie three levels or stages of recognition, all being integral to the formation of identity and self-awareness (Murphy, 2010). An individual advances hierarchically from the first stage onto the higher stages (Felix, 2019). These three levels of recognition are described below, together with their normative expectations, that is, the societal ideals whereby the forms of recognition allow for complete identity development (Honneth, 1995).

I, as a researcher, perceive the three levels in Honneth's theory of recognition to fall, metaphorically, into three main domains. Hence, for the purpose of my study, I have termed the levels or stages as 'zones'. Henceforth, the three levels will be referred to as Zone 1, Zone 2 and Zone 3.

Zone 1: The Private Zone. The most primal of Honneth's levels of recognition is the formation of self-confidence, which generally involves childhood and primary relationships of empathy and love with meaningful others. Hence, this level functions through an intimate and personal arena whereby the formation of friendships and affection form the grounding for relationships with significant others (Honneth, 1995). If the basis of recognition is formed within this sphere, then the young individual attains a sense of trust and faith in their surroundings and in their selves as authentic origins of signs relating to their individual needs. Thus, in this zone, a person learns of their own individuality, mainly through forming special bonds with others, thus leading to a positive self-image (Fleming, 2017). Although Honneth stresses on the love and care in this zone being primarily important for children and their identity development, the idea transcends to all individuals, including adults (Felix, 2019) towards self-realisation.

Zone 2: The Legal Zone. The second level of Honneth's theory of recognition is self-respect, wherein one's professional rights are acknowledged and the individual is seen as entrusted with the autonomy of a legal, practising professional (Felix, 2019; Honneth, 1995). An expression of this may be in the form of a teaching degree, which allows the graduate practicing rights as a teacher in the community (Felix, 2019). In this zone, a person possesses full accountability for their actions and is affirmed with institutional recognition as a moral agent. The emphasis on an individual's rights and self-respecting independence can only be

actualised when one is in reality, acknowledged as such, that is a morally responsible, legal person (Honneth, 2005).

Zone 3: The Solidarity Zone. Honneth's recognition theory's third and uppermost level is self-esteem, the basis of which is the individual's sense of worth and acknowledgement for one's competencies and achievements in their daily work practices (Murphy, 2010; Felix, 2019). Within this zone, as in the others, recognition needs to be reciprocal, with this reciprocity creating a sense of solidarity in societal circles (Felix, 2019). The result of this mutual orientation is that individuals feel encouraged and joyous in what they do (Felix, 2019). However, this domain of recognition, the self-esteem zone as opposed to level 2 (where self-respect is based on equal honour as all other persons), focuses on recognising the individual abilities of a person and how it sets them apart from others (Honneth, 1995) still within the realm of reciprocity.

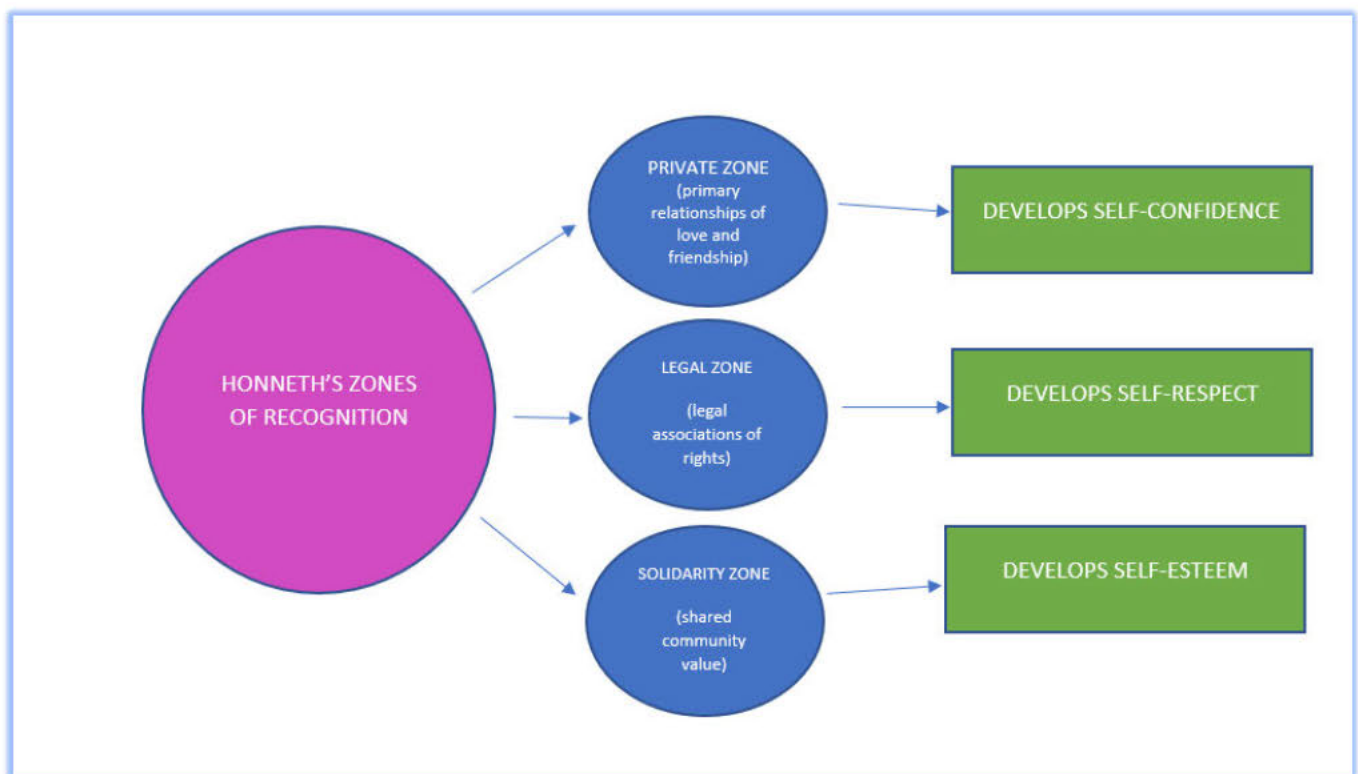


Figure 3.4: Honneth's (1995) three levels of recognition referred to as 'zones' in this study

Source: (adapted from Felix, 2019)

3.5.4 The Three Zones and the Element of Disrespect or Misrecognition

The discussion on the levels or zones of recognition would not be complete without factoring in what Honneth (1995) refers to as misrecognition. Misrecognition refers to types of rejection, disrespect and dishonour which encroach upon self-actualisation relating to self-

confidence, self-respect and self-esteem (Honneth,1995), mentioned in each of the three zones. According to Lepold (2019), there are two types of misrecognition, one referring to recognition being completely withheld, and the other whereby recognition is non-existent. In zone 1, the disrespect is regarded as an attack on a person's physical honour, in zone 2, it is the withdrawal of social honour and in zone 3, it is based on one's honour related to work-worthiness (Felix, 2019).

3.5.5 From Theory to Practice

3.5.5.1 Why and How Honneth's Theory Was Most Appropriate for My Study

From the above discussions, it is evident that Honneth's framework of recognition lends itself in several aspects to this study on TA experiences and its relation to teachers' personal and professional identity. The three levels of recognition cast a direct reference to what teacher experiences of TA, in this study, entailed. These levels encompass how individuals (teachers) should be engaged with in terms of emotional needs, legal rights, and social honour relating to their accomplishments (Zhang et al., 2023). Teacher recognition, drawing from Honneth's theory, is built upon the necessity of teachers moving toward the development of their highest self as self-reliant agents through three separate yet interconnected zones of recognition: the private zone which deals with the affective states of teachers, including their well-being and basic requirements of love and care; the legal zone which gives attention to affirmation of teachers professional rights and honour; and the solidarity zone whereby teachers achievements and efforts are recognised (Zhang et al., 2023).

In addition, Honneth's recognition theory relates to the previously-mentioned three zones of recognition, in relation to the teacher being loved and cared for as is explained in zone 1 and the development of teacher identity with regards to zone 2, in which the question *Who Am I* features within self-respect. Zone 3 correlated to TA in regards to what they do daily and how they negotiate relationships, tensions related to work and their identity as a teacher. This extrinsic and self-recognition formed the basis of the research study on TA. The third level further explained their choices about who to be and to become in the workplace and as teachers in their daily practice.

Zone 1, which emphasises the aspects of love and care formed during primary relationships, ties in with the findings of theme 1 (Conceptualisations of TA) of this study, whereby teachers' perceptions of TA involve basic love and care from colleagues and their inclinations about how this recognition shapes their personal and professional selves. Zone 1 also relates to theme 1 in that teacher recognition represents the value and significance attached to TA, considering

the emotional realm of TA experiences, whilst relating to what measure a teacher is accepted and has a sense of security with their colleagues. This is a feature that is imperative for their internal wellness, which leads to the attainment of self-confidence (Zhang et al., 2023). This self-confidence is seen as the highest form of self-realisation according to Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, within this zone.

With regards to zone 2 and zone 3, Mertler (2016), cited in Zhang et al. (2023), purports that recognition goes beyond receipt of awards based on achievements towards the development of the teacher as a professional. That is, avenues for being recognised as a competent teacher transcend social esteem goals and serve as a form of professional development and the attainment of self-respect. Furthermore, recognition related to social esteem supports the acknowledgement of such professional competencies and leads to enhancement of the self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2023). In this way, the elements discussed in this paragraph about recognition of the teacher as a professional and its effects tie in with theme 2 (Forms of TA) and theme 3 (Learnings of TA).

3.5.6 Honneth's Theory: Perceived Limitations and Mediations

A major critique of Honneth's theory of recognition is that it puts the individual in a position of vulnerability and dependence on others for the attainment of self-realisation. In other words, by reference to Honneth's (1995) idea that individuals can create and sustain favourable self-perceptions only through assistance and positive reactions of other individuals (Giles, 2017), individuals become reliant on the 'acknowledger' in order to reach their best self. Furthermore, this dependence on others is the rationale for ethical harm being caused to a person when reciprocal recognition (I validate you and you validate me in return) and its rules are severed (when recognition is not reciprocated) (Giles, 2017). This limitation of Honneth's theory does not account for the concept of self-acknowledgement (recognising one's self), which is also a means of self-actualisation. To this end, Mogomotsi (2024) suggests that we step back from Honneth's persistence on a normative expectation of recognition, which, once achieved, determines one's self-fulfilment, towards a stringent perception of recognition as a concept that is purposeful and conscious in nature. That is, individuals' recognition should serve as a conduit for reaching self-actuality, not merely relying on Honneth's idea of recognition in the normative sense. Thus, the person themselves, whilst still capable of attaining self-realisation through others, may also do so by acknowledgement of their own selves. In relation to this study on TA stories and the shaping of one's personal and professional self, participants responses in regards to acknowledgement from others versus acknowledgement from themselves (a probing that in itself considered the individuals' operational role in reaching self-realisation), indicated that whilst recognition from others was

necessary towards a positive sense of self, they understood that acknowledgement of the self, by the self, was a necessary tool for their attainment of actuality.

3.6 Discourse and the Development of the Self

3.6.1 *Discourse Dissected*

Before delving into key constructs of discourse analysis per se, it is important to understand what the term 'discourse' itself means. Discourse refers to the manner in which language is perceived and is included within the context of social settings (Fairclough, 1989). Discourse is not merely linguistics; it involves sense-making and the materials employed within its realm (Fairclough, 1989). Discourse analysis derived from this perspective, can thus be used to describe an approach within qualitative studies whereby the emphasis is on the analysis of discursive practices, the focus of tasks, language-related or symbolic in nature, that describe social conventions in the scientific, political, religious and other such fields (Matta, 2024). For the purposes of this study on TA, discourse analysis was used as a tool to analyse what has been said by the teacher in the context of it being said, for example, in studying teachers' narratives of TA, reading a text (interview transcript, against another text (letter-writing activity), rather than reading it at face value was employed.

Two main perspectives in discourse analysis, namely "language-in-use and socio-political, occur (McLeod, 2024), with the former being relevant to the study at hand. This language-in-use perspective emphasises the functional components of language, meaning the way in which language structures and conventions, including phonemic structures, shape meaning (McLeod, 2024).

3.6.2 *Key Characteristics of Discourse Analysis*

McLeod (2024) describes the key characteristics of discourse analysis (applicable for this study on TA) as follows:

1. Setting – which refers to contextual influences from society, culture and history that shape the communication and meaning of language, for example, a conversation that a teacher has with a principal will differ greatly from a chat with a colleague sharing the same post level.
2. Format – how language is set out to translate understanding, such as teachers taking turns to speak while in conversation
3. Expressions – breaking down sentences or expressions within written texts, which helps to understand how linguistic selections convey meaning. Researchers use several approaches to study such expressions to reveal the way language transmits, influences and builds meaning.

4. Reality Constructs - a key interpretation within discourse analysis is the non-impartiality of language use, that is, language plays an active role in influencing how we perceive our society and further shapes socially constructed reality (referring, for example to how teachers build their personal and professional selves, collegial and learner-teacher relationships, and belief systems within).
5. Power relations – discourse analysis is employed to expose the way in which language mirrors and reinforces power inequities. This is most relevant in critical discourse analysis (CDA), not employed for the purposes of this study.

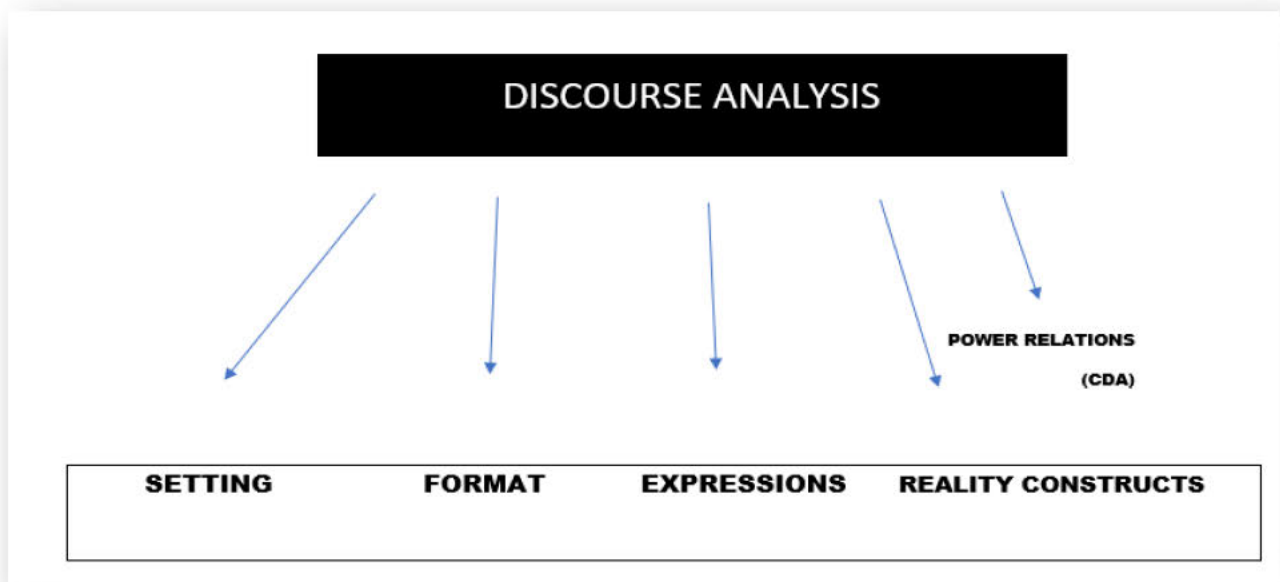


Figure 3.5: Summary of key characteristics of discourse analysis

3.6.3 Discourse Analysis in the Context of this Study

3.6.3.1 How and Why Discourse Analysis was Selected

In this study about primary school TA stories and how these stories shape the teacher's sense of self, a narrative inquiry approach was adopted. The language-in-use approach within discourse analysis studies how people build their sense of self and their interactions through narrative stories (McLeod, 2024). Hence, selecting discourse analysis as an analytical theory framing this study allowed me, as the researcher, to analyse personal stories of teachers about their TA experiences to perceive how these teachers incorporated their narrative experiences within societal discourses. Another main motivation for using discourse analysis as a supporting theory was to explore how groups of people (teachers) employ language as a way of meaning-making about social constructs that are not explicitly linguistic (Matta, 2024).

3.6.3.2 Appropriateness for Study on TA

This study contrary to using discourse analysis as a deep, theoretical perception, recognised Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) concept of discourse manifesting as a social behaviour, shaped through language practices, and embedded within dynamic interrelations between specific discursive occurrences and the contextual, institutional and historical situations which define it (Ramrathan, 2002). Thus, discourse analysis within the context of this study, and serving as a supporting framework for Honneth's theory of recognition discussed earlier, studied behavioural patterns, embedded in linguistic clues, and the meanings behind them within the contexts of TA experiences and in terms of receipt of recognition or lack thereof. Using discourse as a socially formed stance, moulded by and moulding, maintaining and reinforcing existing social norms (Ramrathan, 2002) of recognition and identity, proved appropriate for the study at hand.

3.6.4 Perceived Limitations and Mediations of Discourse Analysis

As with any theory used in a study, discourse analysis comes with its own limitations. In this section, these limitations and possible ways to mitigate them will be discussed.

Subjectivity, within discourse analysis, rests on perception as a major component; hence, various analytical theorists may arrive at divergent outcomes in studying the same discursive writings or narratives (in the case of this study) (McLeod, 2024). Since this personal perspective lens is ingrained within qualitative analysis, I, as the researcher, ensured that measures such as having critical friends and my supervisor as 'peer debriefers' (McLeod, 2024) throughout the analysis process were in place. I also ensured the use of reflexivity (continuous questioning of my intentions and preconceived notions, as a researcher) (Reid et al., 2018) to allay overplaying subjective interpretations within the study.

Corpus-based analysis, which uses the text as a fixed, unchanging product, rather than something evolving, and related to contextual situations in which it occurs, may prove as another weak point within discourse analysis (McLeod, 2024). That is, it may have limited contextual sensitivity, and furthermore may neglect unspoken features of interaction which are an important contribution to spoken discourse (McLeod, 2024). In this regard, I again used reflexivity as a cyclical process moving back and forth between text and context as a means of avoiding relenting to these discourse analysis limitations.

3.7 Semiotic Insights

3.7.1 Sizing up Semiotics

According to Ramrathan (2002), semiotics, a word of Greek origin (*semeion*, which means sign), was founded by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and by American

philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Ramrathan (2002) mentions that Saussure purports semiotics as “a science that studies the life of signs” (Ramrathan, 2002, p. 85) and that Saussure coined the word semiology in reference to the study thereof. In other words, semiotics, which focuses on studying signs and symbols, particularly as aspects of language or other discourse systems, is cognisant of the formation and understanding of meaning, whereby a sign, constituting a single unit of exchange, conveys meaning (Odhiambo, 2022). Peirce’s perception of semiotics was that a sign represented to an individual, something in a particular regard or manner and that anything we do can be perceived as a sign (Berger, 2004). In short, the field of semiotics deals with signs, symbols and the meanings behind these, found within different communication systems.

3.7.2 Key Constructs of Saussure’s and Pierce’s Theory

Pierce (1813-1914) and Saussure (1857-1913) differed in their approach to semiotics. The key constructs of their theories, derived from literature (Ramrathan 2002; Goharipour & Gibson, 2022), are explained below.

3.7.2.1 Saussure: The Sign, The Signifier and The Signified

According to Ramrathan (2002), Saussure relayed that every sign is constituted by:

1. a signifier → the form (word/image/sound) the sign assumes
2. the signified → the mind concept it symbolises

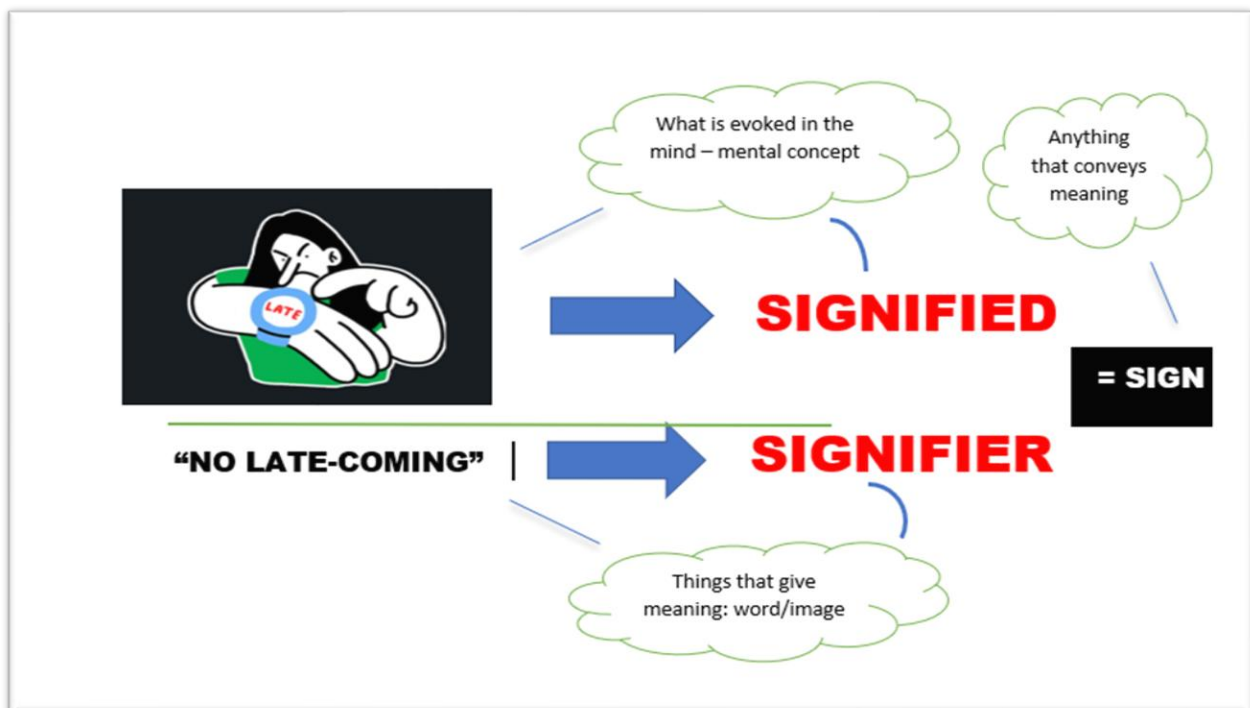


Figure 3.6: Visual image showing Saussure’s semiotic constructs

3.7.2.2 Peirce's Three-Part Model:

According to Goharipour and Gibson (2022), Peirce relayed that every sign is constituted by:

1. the representamen → the form the sign assumes (may be non-material)
2. the interpretant → what the sign means
3. an object → about which the sign is

The interpretant, in Peirce's model of sign, is the distinguishing feature between the two theorists' notion of semiotics. The Saussurian representation omits allusion to the object in the realm within its dual structure, thus developing an arbitrary nature of signs, meaning that the relationship created between the signifier and the signified is more conventional in nature (Ramrathan, 2002).

For this study, the Saussurian model was adopted. This two-part model structure stresses upon the arbitrary interaction between the signifier and the signified, as opposed to Peirce's triadic representation, for a more meaningful creation of meaning within teachers' narratives of recognition and shaping of their identities.

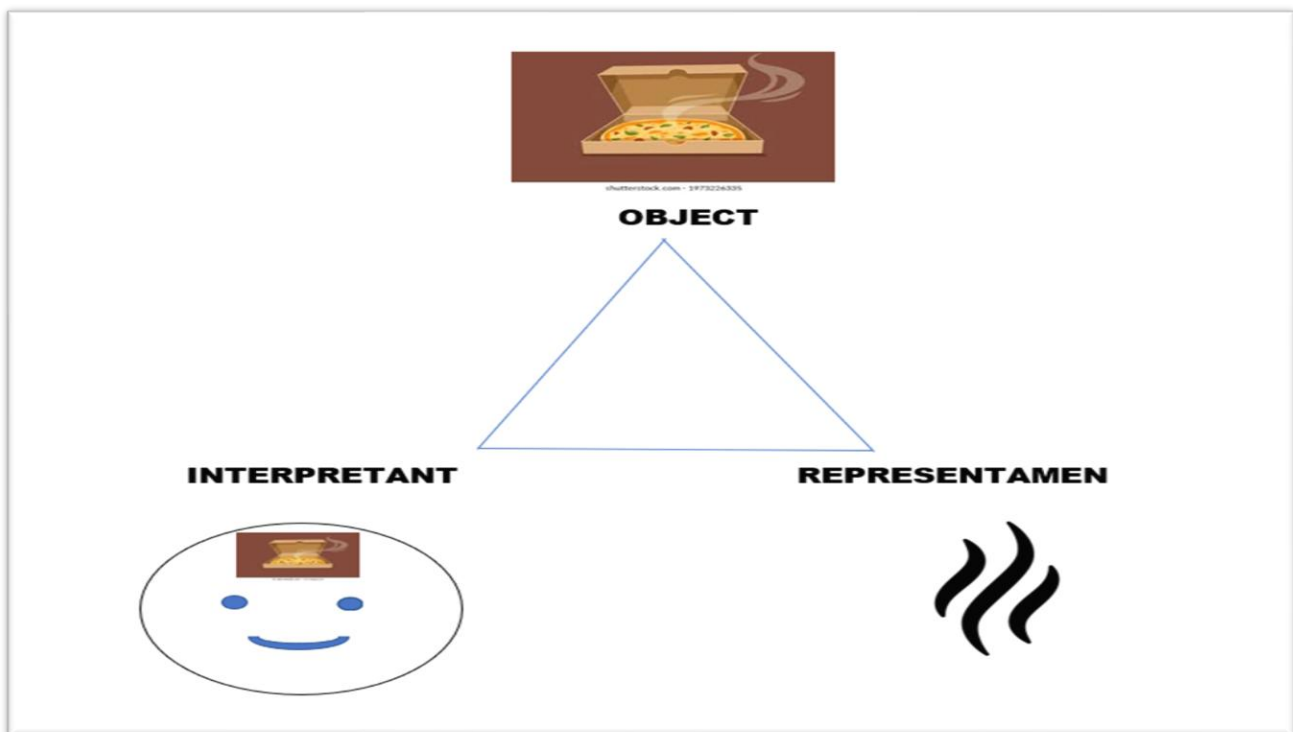


Figure 3.7: Visual image showing Peirce's semiotic constructs

3.7.3 Semiotics and its Suitability to my Study

Semiotics within this study was employed as an analytical lens to find out how meaning is made and transmitted in teachers' narrative stories of acknowledgement and identity formation. Semiotics provides invaluable insights for analysing how a person communicates and perceives

their experiences through the use of signs and symbols. Saussure's dyadic model of the sign, consisting of the signifier (sign, word or expression) and the signified (mental picture it symbolises) whereby he emphasises the conventional manner of the sign and how it indicates that meaning is not inbuilt, but constructed by way of social and linguistic mediations, makes it especially appropriate to this study on recognition. Peirce's three-part model, which centres on the interpretant and therefore supports a more pragmatic understanding of meaning, contrasts with Saussure's system in which language operates within a socially constructed network. Noting this distinction is important for this study, which explored how teachers' personal and professional identities were shaped and conveyed through the narratives they shared. These narratives spanned across various sociocultural settings, wherein meaning-making, seen as evolving in nature, was determined and influenced by recognition or the non-receipt of it, which others offer. Hence, Saussure, with his arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified, was apt as a supporting theory, as he emphasises language rather than being a clear conveyer of meaning, is a place wherein identity and interpretations move between being shaped and re-shaped.

3.7.4 Sifting through Semiotic Limitations

Ramrathan (2002) mentions that the communication between the signifier and the signified is not one of seamlessness and directness. The two components of the sign constantly move between fragmenting and reassembling into new arrangements, therefore exposing the deficiency of Saussure's semiotic model where linguistics operates from within an organised sign system (Ramrathan, 2002). In acknowledging this, understanding emanating from signs then, evolves from setting to setting and perception to perception as the signified and signifier continually exchange places in each new context (Ramrathan, 2002). This kind of instability could prove to be a limitation in respect of semiotics and the use of Saussure's model of sign for this study. However, using reflexivity and peer debriefing as discussed under discourse analysis allowed for the mitigation of any inadequacies arising from this aspect of Saussure's model of the sign and the use of semiotics as a theoretical construct in this study. In contrast, viewing this critique of Saussure's sign model in a different light could, in reality, have contributed to benefiting the study rather than limiting it. That is, rather than perceiving the back and forth manoeuvring between, and reconfiguring of, the sign and signifier within changing contexts as previously described, in a limiting capacity, this precise undoing and reforming of new connections could have been the necessary contribution that led to a more data-rich study, instead of yielding static, fixed results towards meaning-making of the signs and symbols within the teacher acknowledgement stories shared and how they influence the personal and professional self.

3.8 Tying Together the Three Theories

3.8.1 *Rationale for combining Honneth's Theory of Recognition, Discourse Analysis and Semiotics*

In this study, I employed a three-tier theoretical lens to explore and explain the stories of TA and the ways the teachers' experiences may shape meanings of self and their position as teachers. Honneth's theory of recognition, discourse analysis and semiotics were used as a composite framework underpinning the thread of this study. The implication of using three varying lenses via which to explore TA experiences and their effects lies in the reasoning that the combined theories as a framework will have opened up a complex understanding of TA and teacher identity.

The three theories discussed together formed a lens that was used to explore and explain TA experiences as a complex and fluid phenomenon, ever-shifting between the inner and outer self to shape the identity of the teacher. Honneth's (1995) three levels of recognition, while focusing on external and internal acknowledgement experiences, also emphasised how these experiences shaped the development of teachers' sense of self. Similarly, discourse analysis allowed for a close study of language which underpinned the narratives, and showed how teachers' TA experiences were influenced and determined by organisational and social discourses. Semiotics further scaffolded these two frameworks by drawing on the symbolic behaviours and use of Saussure's sign models to add to understanding words and signs which carry meaning within school contexts. Thus, using these three lenses as analytical tools made it possible to learn about teacher stories of acknowledgement and how it was conveyed and perceived in the school arena and further provided insightful comprehension of the intricate ways that teachers navigate their personal and professional selves.

3.9 Summative Reflections for Chapter 3

This chapter focused on the theoretical lenses shaping this study on Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities. The frameworks used are outlined and then show how the integration of the three framings form a triadic network underpinning the study on TA. A short summary of the key theoretical concepts follows.

Honneth's theory of recognition. Axel Honneth's recognition theory sets the grounding viewpoint on how recognition, or its absence, affects the formation of personal identity. The three zones of recognition (love, rights and social esteem) are drawn upon to create understanding of how teachers encounter and interpret TA in their professional lives.

Discourse Analysis. Within this approach, the use of language and its role in the construction of teachers' narrative realities were explored. Teachers' acknowledgement stories shared, thus stem from and are reflective of social values and organisational norms.

Semiotics. The semiotic lens hones in on the study of the signs, symbols and other non-verbal indications within teachers' lived TA experiences and stories. Using this framing lens allows insightful interpretations and sociocultural undertones that shape the teacher's identity in the school setting, to be unpacked.

The three framing lenses together enable a nuanced interpretation of teachers' narratives to emerge, giving insight into how recognition lends itself towards an ever-changing sense of personal and professional self within the teaching field.

Chapter 4, which follows, is the methodology chapter, and it explains the research design and approach used for this study on TA.

The 4th Chapter: Research Design and Approach

Making Methodical Moves

4.1 Chapter Prologue

Meth chapter - a recipe of sorts

It started with a plan...

Thoughts, ideas - the steps began

How and why, explained deadpan

In detail, what and where, all bared with no ban

Ontology, epistemology - clear to the layman

No guesses, paradigm shifts rollin' in the research van

Qual or quant, decided by me - 'cause I can

Every tool precision-picked, run through a scan

Data methods, data types - fit together, one clan

Rigour, vigour... bound like a wristband

Reasons throughout the Meth recipe, span

Cross-checked, in-depth methods, who and when - the mind ran

'Recognition', the base - through narrative lens, I expand

The recipe is set, method spread like a handheld fan

Ride the method flow, see where it lands!

@katie_rekindled

Figure 4.1: Introductory poem: Meth chapter - a recipe of sorts

4.1.1 What's in a Poem?

In commencing with this chapter, I grappled with ideas on how to adequately present my understandings and perceptions of what methodology and the workings within this chapter would entail. Oftentimes, to gather my thoughts, I turn to writing or drawing, which has a calming effect and helps centre my thoughts and conceptualisations. The result in this instance, was the rap poem developed to organise the processes and happenings for this

chapter. The poem title speaks of a methodology chapter being *a recipe of sorts*. Hence, I perceive methodology to be the combination of the ingredients (represented by the title headings) to create the thesis structure itself. Swarooprani (2022) defines methodology as a framework to systematically describe the problem statement of the research study. That is, within the methodology section of a study, the researcher identifies the steps that will be outlined in examining the research problem, including the rationale for it (Swarooprani, 2022). The poem which appears at the beginning of this chapter, mirrors this definition by explaining, that this chapter started with a research plan, conceptualisations and thoughts about how to go about writing the steps that underpin the reasons for methodological choices made, and how these are revealed in detail and in clear, simple language for ease of understanding. All of the concepts, such as ontology, epistemology and paradigm employed in this study, were thought out with insight and accuracy (discussed later in the chapter). Therefore, this chapter describes the pieces of the methodology puzzle and how they connect and develop into one coherent unit. The main phenomenon of acknowledgement is mentioned as the buoying concept purported through a narrative writing perspective, and laid out for all to see and understand. The last line is anticipatory in nature, urging and inviting the reader to embark on this methodology journey and see it to the end.

4.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

The previous chapter provided a detailed insight into the theoretical framework underpinning this study. In this chapter, the research design that underpins the data generation process of this study is presented. This chapter also illustrates the rationale (referred to as the *how and why* in the introductory poem) for the selected methodological processes and design, together with an outline of the research procedure and subjacent research paradigm. The chapter further elucidates the participant selection process, the research setting and sampling methods employed (in the poem, this is alluded to by the words 'what and where').

This methodology chapter explains the qualitative and narrative stance adopted to explore primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities within the context of this study. The narrative inquiry approach permits us to view teachers as educated and enlightened individuals and illuminates a portal for introspection and chronicling of stories that play a role in shaping and reshaping the educational climate (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, narrative inquiry as a selected methodology and as employed as a backdrop underpinning this study on TA, allows the researcher and participants to manoeuvre in a "three-dimensional sphere" iconised by space, time and place to co-create meaningful accounts of TA stories. In other words, this narrative framing allows for revisiting

and reflecting on their own experiences and the development of relationships with colleagues and learners in an iterative way, communicating on an emotional and cognitive level whilst maintaining mutually respectful limits. The key features and rationale, including guidelines, appropriateness, advantages and disadvantages for choosing the narrative inquiry approach, are further elaborated on as the chapter progresses.

The data production plan and research tools executed in the data collection phase are extensively described. These instruments allow for an intensive investigation and insight into the TA experiences of primary school teachers and their personal and professional identities. The strategies utilised skilfully elicit key memories and tap into the affective states of participants, generating deep, meaningful and nuanced understandings for analysis.

In addition, this chapter incorporates the data analysis methods, procedures for data presentation and interpretation, issues of relational and procedural ethics, trustworthiness and validity, including the inherent limitations, all portrayed with openness and rigour, characteristic of this study.

4.3 Chapter at a Glance

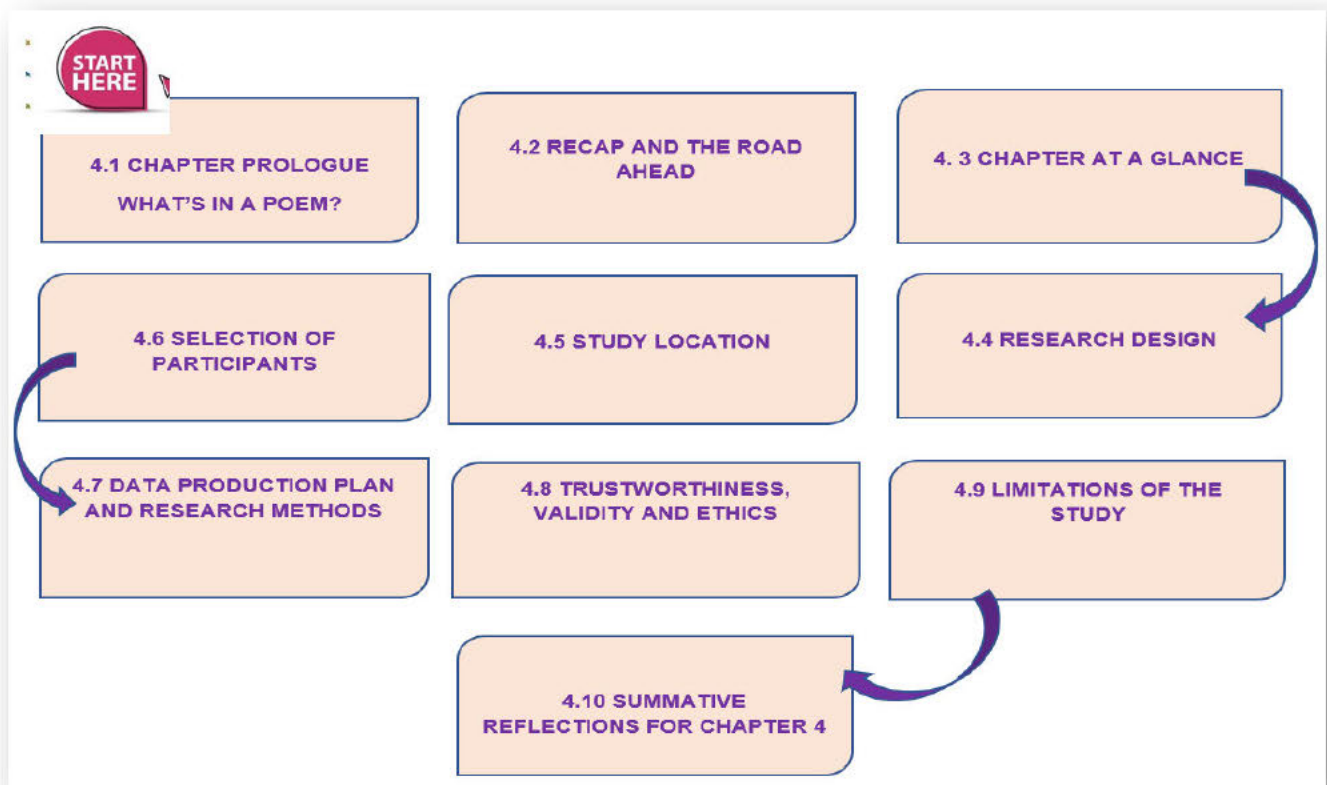


Figure 4.2: An overview of Chapter 4

4.4 Research Design

4.4.1 Research paradigm

In the poem at the outset, the terms paradigm, ontology and epistemology are hinted at being made unreservedly clear within the methodological journey of this chapter. The ensuing paragraphs bear testimony to this clarity and explain these terminologies before describing the selected paradigm for this study and how this paradigm and its components, such as ontology and epistemology, relate to the study at hand.

A research paradigm can be defined as the researcher's frame of reference, which is essentially the viewpoint, conceptualisation, philosophy, or belief system that guides the understanding and evaluation of research findings (Khatri, 2020). It is, therefore, a fundamental and all-encompassing worldview for perceiving research phenomena (Khatri, 2020). In other words, the paradigmatic lens thus guides and informs the researcher throughout the study about his/her stance on seeing and noticing world observances and occurrences. Ontology focuses on the nature of reality, whilst epistemology addresses the essence of knowledge and how we arrive at understanding it (Pretorius, 2024). Methodology relates to techniques employed for exploration (Khatri, 2020), and axiology is concerned with ethics and the moral principles of research (Pretorius, 2024). Combined, these elements define research paradigms' grounding principles and convictions (Khatri, 2020).

In this study, the interpretive paradigm embedded in constructivism was ascribed to (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Interpretivist constructivism focuses on individual experiences and engagements, including social settings for knowledge acquisition (Tanlaka & Aryal, 2025). This means that the lived experiences of participants and their interactions within social situations are a means of meaning-making and understanding. The ontological perspective of the interpretive constructivist paradigm deals with the individual viewpoint on how people perceive the world, whilst the epistemological perspective of this paradigm states that knowledge gain is through subjective participation in the creation of meaning (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). This paradigm seemed to be most suited to the study based on the title of Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities. That is, in this study, I was interested in finding out individually perceived realities and lived experiences relating to stories of teacher acknowledgement in relation to the personal and professional self. The selected paradigm thus makes provision for the opportunity to view the world from the participants' perspective (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The methodology for this study employs a qualitative and narrative inquiry approach using art-based methods and unstructured interviews for data collection and analysis of the participants' stories of TA experiences. In this study, axiology concerns how I have applied the rules for an ethical and

unbiased study, taking into consideration equitability and inclusivity whilst being aware of how these factors affect research procedures as well as the morals contained within the stories of TA and its shaping teachers' personal and professional identities.

4.4.2 Research methodology and research approach

4.4.2.1 Qualitative Methodology and Narrative Inquiry Approach

For any research study, the researcher selects between qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods, a choice pointed out in the introductory poem of this chapter. For this study, a narrative inquiry methodology embedded in the qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research employs, amongst others, tools of observation, life events and stories that depict the everyday occurrences and challenges that people are facing in their daily lives through a focus lens on the underlying meanings and intent, which is not ideally quantifiable (Taherdoost, 2022). Furthermore, qualitative studies are beneficial in studying a phenomenon such as TA with minimal available resources owing to its investigative and probing nature (Taherdoost, 2022). Hence, the qualitative approach wherein new perspectives, concepts and the proposing of new ways for understanding phenomena (Taherdoost, 2022), fit in well with narrative inquiry as a form of study which in itself incorporates collections of story-telling experiences and its individual perceptions and interpretations as its defining feature (Butina, 2015).

According to Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022), stories within narrative inquiry are useful for directing researchers in enhancing the comprehension of phenomena. Furthermore, they emphasize that whilst interacting with this approach, knowledge is co-constructed and the relationship between researcher and participant is one whereby they are co-participants working together across specific times and places (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), humans are inherently storytelling beings who, personally or within social circles, live storied lives. Therefore, to conduct research through narrative inquiry is to study how human beings experience, interact with and observe the world and is thus befitting as a qualitative study. In this study on TA, it was this distinct focus on examining and perceiving stories experienced and retold that placed narrative inquiry aptly in the seat of the qualitative research approach (Kutsyuruba & Stasel, 2023).

Clandinin (2013) mentions that stories about school remain perpetually embedded for us all, across time periods in the stories we execute and the stories we reside in. Furthermore, school stories significantly mould and shape these stories that we reside in and execute. This implies that, unwittingly or not, we inhabit our own stories implanted within us from a young age, and as we go on, we recreate these stories that were instilled in us by ourselves (Clandinin, 2013).

In short, this qualitative study and narrative inquiry methodology enabled me as a researcher to work closely with participants and zone in on their storied lives regarding the phenomenon of TA in this study.

4.4.2.2 Key features of Narrative Inquiry

The distinctive feature of narrative inquiry is storytelling (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). The co-composing of these stories spans over time and place and is rooted in participants' lives. Within the narrative inquiry approach, three key features of story analysis come into play, that being, sociality, temporality and place (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Dewart et al. (2020) and Clandinin et al. (2007) explain these features as follows: *Sociality* refers to the social and personal conditions, such as the participants' hopes and feelings as well as their surrounding environmental conditions (Dewart et al., 2020; Clandinin et al., 2007). *Temporality* refers to stories which are continuously evolving depending on the specific time period and draws on the transitioning nature that individuals, places and incidents have between their past, current lives and future circumstances, resulting in a kind of causal relationship taking place over an amount of time (Dewart et al., 2020; Clandinin et al., 2007). *Place* refers to the actual physical domain where the events occur over a period of time (Dewart et al., 2020). The particular place constitutes an important part of narrative inquiry in that it reflects the effect of experiences in that place (Clandinin et al., 2007).

Bruce et al. (2016), in describing the key features of narrative inquiry, mention that this approach is seen as studying events as a story and as a manner of thinking whereby these stories are a grounded exhibition of lived, told and retold experiences. Consequently, the key purpose of the narrative inquirer is to question the experiences of participants to attain an in-depth interpretation of their lived experiences within a particular setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, *story* in itself can manifest in different ways, for example, "stories within stories, memos, reflections, debriefs, individual interviews, team interviews, audio analysis, and metaphoric analysis" (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022, p. 4).

The above scholars highlight narrative inquiry as being the most suitable and appropriate methodology for this study, as the phenomenon under study directly places emphasis on the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences and therefore aimed to find out through the narratives that teachers shared, what this phenomenon entailed in relation to their personal and professional identities. It seamlessly moved back and forth between storyteller and researcher in order to explore the lived experiences of teachers whilst considering sociality, temporality and place. Furthermore, I, as the researcher, strove to co-create and co-construct stories through iterative engagements in a collaborative manner to find the meaning of the phenomenon under study, which is teacher acknowledgement.

4.4.2.3 Guidelines for Narrative Inquiry Research

Conducting a narrative inquiry requires the researcher to follow certain guidelines. The aim of narrative inquiry is to elicit a change in the lives of others in that, after the inquiry, both parties, that is, the researcher and participants, attain new insight into their lives and their storied experiences (Clandinin, 2013). In this study, this change could only be achieved if the participant and the researcher discovered how teachers' personal and professional identities and daily practices were influenced by TA experiences shared by the teachers. Furthermore, certain mechanisms ought to have been used to prompt and awaken memories to gather rich data in narrative inquiry. These mechanisms were in the form of object work, words, and photographs (Clandinin, 2013), to name a few.

4.4.2.4 The appropriateness of Narrative Inquiry to understand TA

Reflexivity refers to the iterative, continuous and active process that a researcher using the narrative inquiry approach follows. This means that reflexivity infiltrates through all stages of the research process (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Clandinin et al. (2007) further ask for a substantive reason relating to why the research study is imperative on a personal, social and practical level. In doing this, reflexivity is regarded as being authentic with the self, the research as well as the audience. It is an in-depth process that advocates self-analytical recollections for the purpose of conducting the study (Tracy, 2010). It entails awareness of the self, which in turn directs our understanding of who we are and what values impact our actions whilst engaging in the process of research (Hickson, 2016). It then becomes evident *what* one is researching and encourages thinking in a narrative manner with regards to storytelling across time and place (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

As the researcher in this study, I was prompted to recognise participants' interpretations and stories as located socially and grounded in reflexivity. This meant that as a narrative inquirer, I had to turn the lens on myself in order to understand my own TA experiences, recording these in my researcher diary, and this consequently enabled me to better understand my participants' experiences and stories. Therefore, the research process in its entirety became a collaborative process between the researcher and the participant (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022) in the exploration of TA experiences in primary schools in moulding teacher identities and on their daily practices.

4.4.2.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Narrative Inquiry as a Research Approach

Narrative inquiry is advantageous in that it is an evolving approach that uses the emergent design (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). This means that it stems from the evolving

process of data collection to analysis to create new ideas of employing reasoning of an inductive nature, arising from the accounts of participants (Bruce et al., 2016). Furthermore, narrative inquiry involves reflexivity, which refers to a constant self-reflection throughout the process of research (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). A further advantage of using this method is that the voice of the participant is prioritised, and this is attained by linking discursive practices that bind understanding (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Thus, by using stories, I, as the researcher, was able to centre the storytellers' voice to form a holistic and complete interpretation (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Conversely, narrative inquiry does have some drawbacks. The narrative inquiry methodology may lead to fabrication and fallacies being used to construct meaning and value (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Hence, data can be forged and used to tell an untruth as simply as telling a truth (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this study, such a challenge was overcome by my keeping a researcher diary to keep clear, accurate and unbiased accounts as the research progressed. Another very pertinent danger in this approach is known as the "Hollywood plot" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.10), whereby everything eventually works out smoothly in terms of end results. To overcome this, I, as the researcher, had to become more aware of the untold, secret stories that exist, as much as I was of the stories that are apparent and told (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

4.5 Study Location

This study explored teacher acknowledgement experiences through the stories that teachers in primary schools narrate. The two schools that were selected are situated in the greater Durban area of Verulam and Ottawa in KwaZulu-Natal. I recruited four teachers from the two primary schools and engaged with them so that they could share their lived experiences. To account for teachers' personal and work commitments, some interactions had to take place off-campus via online calls, while others occurred in person. Both formal and informal interactions were attained over time during the fieldwork stage of the study

4.6 Selection of Participants

In this study, purposive sampling was used because it corresponded well with the qualitative methodology and narrative inquiry approach selected for this study. In qualitative studies such as this study, the objective is to form rich, detailed descriptions rather than to generalise findings (Merriam, 2009); hence, purposive sampling was deemed suitable. The purposive sampling strategy is a deliberate selection of participants because of the characteristics they possess (Etikan et al., 2016). Furthermore, Etikan et al. (2016) posit that the researcher ascertains what needs to be explored or discovered and sets out to recruit

willing participants who will provide the information required according to their experiences or knowledge base.

Purposive sampling is advantageous because it is cost-effective and non-time-consuming, allowing for detailed data gathering (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Yet this type of sampling poses a high risk for researcher bias due to the sample being formed by way of the researcher's judgement (Sharma, 2017). However, this is only the case when the judgement is based on poor considerations and ill conceptions rather than clearly-defined standards (Sharma, 2017). Therefore, I selected the teachers as participants for this study in a careful, well-thought-out manner to counter the possibility of such bias.

In this study, participants were purposefully selected (Maree & Pieterse, 2007) from two primary schools in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. The following criteria were used to select the teachers from these primary schools to participate: the teachers selected were occupying level 1 positions in primary schools, were in a permanent post with more than five years in the teaching field and were willing to be a part of a study regarding TA experiences. No management members were included in this study. In the initial stages, I had planned to include myself as a participant; however, after a thorough rethink about this idea and considering the intensive nature of a master's study, particularly on the phenomenon of TA, I understood the depth and time investment that would be required from the researcher's seat. I foresaw it as wiser to fully attend to my participants and to focus on the details that their narratives were perceived to reveal, in this way turning my undivided attention to the phenomenon under study, TA. However, I did engage with the research methods on a personal level in an attempt to understand the thoughts and feelings of my participants. For the purposes of this study, pseudonyms used to protect the participants' identities and that of their schools. These pseudonyms were allocated to the participants by myself, in my position as researcher.

Based on the criteria laid out in the previous paragraph, four level-one teachers participated in this study. The participants that I had recruited are all females, with ages ranging between 30 – 55 years old, occupying a permanent post with more than five years in the teaching field, and were willing to be a part of a study regarding TA experiences. These standards meant that the participants selected, having been in the profession for a significant amount of time, would have served as useful human resources in supplying first-hand anecdotes and detailed information concerning the field of study. Having all female teacher participants indicated that the current phase of schooling is mainly dominated by women teachers (Tašner et al., 2017). This may have been due to the teaching field being seen as one of responding to the natural female call to nurturing and providing for others (Tašner et al., 2017). Further biographical

details about the participants are encapsulated within the narratives in the data presentation chapter.

4.7 Data Production Plan and Research Methods

Data in this narrative study was generated using arts-based methods. Arts-based methods refer to any type of social inquiry that implements the use of creative arts in its research (Jones & Leavy, 2014). The study employed these methods to highlight the important information regarding stories of TA experiences and in relation to teacher identity.

In deciding which research methods to use for collecting data in this study, several types were considered. After pondering over many methods, including memory drawings, portraiture, object inquiry and the like, and taking into account the magnitude of a master's study, I narrowed the options down and focused on employing a few methods as opposed to having a large quantity of research methods. This was further anticipated to enable the participants to attend to the methods chosen, wholly and fully. Hence, I selected letter-writing, object inquiry, collage inquiry and an unstructured interview in this way, choosing to go with quality rather than quantity. Participants were first given a choice between the object inquiry, collage inquiry and letter-writing activities. The choice given to participants regarding these three methods of data generation is informed by the ability of the participants to express themselves through a medium that they would be comfortable with. The unstructured interview was a requirement across all participants as a follow-up to the initial activity selected. In this way, the participants were not overwhelmed by focusing on too many research methods, and feeling unable to do them to their full potential. The participants, being teachers themselves, were engaged in several personal and professional commitments; thus, this was further accounted for in minimising their already crammed workloads. However, this thought process was not to slight the study in any way, but rather to ensure that the best and most data-rich information would be gleaned regarding TA.

Table 4.1: Data generation (see also Appendix 7: data generation guidelines and instruments)

Research questions	Research approach	Research methods	Data source	Quantity per method and participant	Relevance to aspect of self
1. What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?	Narrative inquiry	Unstructured interviews	Teacher's stories	1x1hour	Personal and professional
2. How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers? AND 3. How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?	Narrative inquiry	Collage inquiry Letter writing Object inquiry	Teacher's stories	1 collage 1 letter to friend/family member 1/2 objects per teacher	Personal and professional

4.7.1 Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews are interviews in which there are no set questions and answers, but rather it is reliant on interpersonal relations between researcher and participant (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). It is also dependent on the production of spur-of-the-moment

questions in a constant continuity of correspondence (Patton, 2002). Hence, in this study, I held conversations with the participants (interviewees) and developed questions by way of the answers given in the participants' narratives shared (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this way, I, as the researcher, discovered unexpected themes and developed a better insight into the social situations of the interviewees from their viewpoint (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

I used prompts to deepen particular experiences that were of relevance to my agenda (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) to allow for free-flowing (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) and informative conversations to take place.

There were also challenges with unstructured interviews as a research method. One such challenge was that data collection was time-consuming (Patton, 2002), especially when the researcher was just starting off and was yet to get a feel of the on-the-ground and face-to-face research field (different from the use of the arts-based methods done before the interview). Winning trust and building a relationship with participants also required time (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Furthermore, the length of an unstructured interview is known to take longer than other types of interviews because of the personalised nature of the interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). These challenges were overcome by ensuring that sufficient time was set aside for each unique interview.

If participants were forthcoming with information and were willingly engaged in responding to questions asked, I accommodated them by extending the interaction time rather than cutting them short while speaking. However, where I found the conversation veering off topic and taking an unrelated turn, I discreetly led the participant back to the phenomenon at hand, being TA. There was a fine line in discerning relevance from random responses, and one has to sometimes allow the participant to continue even when this is happening, as this keeps the rapport going between researcher and participant and avoids the participant feeling inadequate or afraid to due to having to answer 'correctly' and quickly.

The stories generated from the unstructured interviews were used to respond to the sub-question one: *What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?*

4.7.2 Letter writing

Letter writing is employed in qualitative studies by several researchers as a self-reflexive and reciprocal method in order to populate data and as a means for introspection of the self and their lived experiences (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). Letter writing and its self-reflective nature allow the participant to write about their experiences via remote interaction, especially when participants are from different locations (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

Therefore, they need not be face-to-face during the writing process. This enabled the participants to feel comfortable and at ease to write at their own pace and convenience.

However, I had to be wary of the sensitive nature of this research method. It can be a traumatic and emotionally draining process to write and share experiences of such a personal nature and can leave the participant feeling like they have revealed too much (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). Hence, to overcome this challenge, I reassured and supported participants throughout the process and also informed them that they need not reveal more than they were content and happy with sharing.

Teachers in this study were asked to write a letter to a colleague about a positive or negative TA experience and how it made them feel, act and behave. The letters written gave insight into their meanings of self personally, and as teachers and how this sense of self consequently affects their work practices.

In selecting and determining the workings of this method of research, I embarked on writing a letter myself in order to get a sense of how the participant would engage with this research method. This was done solely for experimental purposes and was not used within the capturing of data results and findings. However, it served to help me understand letter-writing as a research method and how to approach the interview scene with more perception, once I had viewed participants' letter-writing activities. Turning inward in this way paved a new understanding of letter-writing as an included research method in this study. It enabled me to feel the raw emotions of writing something so personal and to anticipate such feelings that participants may have experienced. Furthermore, it gave me the impetus to exercise kindness and care for the process involved when I had received their efforts.

Below, I present the example of a personal letter written to a departmental head who made a huge impact on my teaching life and the TA experiences that I have lived through. It is a reflective letter wherein I express my emotions about how she made me feel during the time we taught together.

Dear Mrs H.

I wish that you could read this letter and know how much you meant to me. I am writing to tell you about the many fond memories I have of you and how you made a huge difference to my burgeoning passion for teaching from very early on in my career. The effects of your words and actions are ever-lasting and will never be forgotten.

I wish you knew what a huge and gaping hole you have left in me the day you closed your eyes. I recall holding your hand and standing at your hospital bedside as you breathed your last and all I could think of was that I had lost the one person who had so much faith in me and my abilities. You were my rock, my pillar of strength, the face I looked for first each morning, my mentor, someone I fondly called, 'my school mom'. You took me into your arms and held me close, teaching me and guiding me from day one. I felt safe for as long as you were around. I remember walking in on my first day and seeing your encouraging smile. You immediately took me under your wing and nestled me safely, nurturing my teaching skills, praising and acknowledging my achievements, cheering my success and supporting me through my weaker moments.

If only you could see me now, I know you would be proud. I carry the flag of teaching high because of you and the way you encouraged me to. I distinctly remember you rooting for me when I applied for the vacancy at the school and how you were ecstatic when I was successful in getting it.

You never belittled me even when I did not fall in line with a task or duty. Your soft coaching did not feel like reprimanding because you corrected me in a way that did not make me feel stupid or less than you. Even when I handed you a copy of my paper for moderation that was not very neatly handwritten I remember how you pleasantly joked whether I had set that paper whilst I was asleep. I took that as a learning curve and forthwith was careful to always be meticulous and neat in my presentation of any school work.

The way you carried yourself with such poise and dignity, always well-dressed and symbolic of a true teacher has made me follow suite and I now try to mimic your ways as best as I can. You exuded positivity and perseverance in all you took on and spilled this over to others so that we felt like doing the same. You were kind to teachers, learners and cleaners alike, never differentiating according to class or race and that is an admirable quality I still aspire to.

Thank you for everything you were and continue to be in my life. I miss you very much.

Love KV.

Figure 4.3: Image of my letter written to a teacher who made me feel valued, as a way to understand letter-writing as a research method

4.7.3 Collage Inquiry

Qualitative studies are adeptly suited to arts-based research methods, particularly collage portraiture (Gerstenblatt, 2013). Pillay et al. (2019) describe the collage-making process as simple, yet it allows for creative expression and attainment of a variety of thoughts and ideas irrespective of the artistic capability of the participant. It is a practical task that visually depicts ideas, messages and life events. Furthermore, a collage entails visual representations involving the cutting and pasting of images and text from printed media that speak about a particular phenomenon. Van Schalkwyk (2010) describes it as a depiction or narrative showcasing and entailing our thoughts and speech as well as our unconscious actions. Thus, this arts-based research technique allowed for self-reflection and recollection of prior lived experiences, which may be from a specific time or place. An individual could have therefore uninhibitedly expressed their emotions, thought back to experiences and recounted incidents with creativity.

When deciding to use this method of collage inquiry for my research study I recalled a very unique collage that my sixteen-year-old daughter had made to use on the back of her phone to serve as a decorative phone cover. On closer inspection, I realised how significant the collage was in representing her character, personality, thought patterns, likes and dislikes in relation to her own identity and behavioural practices in her daily life. The collage gave a sense of the experiences of her life and how they had shaped who she is now. This exciting reflection was the impetus behind using collage inquiry as a research method, as I had felt strongly that it would be a means to elicit meaningful stories of TA shared by teachers and to provide insight into how it may have shaped their meanings of self and their daily practices in the workplace.



Figure 4.4: Example of my daughter's collage that inspired my using collage inquiry as a research method

In this study, I asked my participants to cut out and paste images and words from unused magazines or newspapers to design a collage and thereafter they were to present it to me orally. They were requested to use a large piece of paper and paste onto the page, those pictures and words that were best related to their TA experiences, with a particular focus on how these experiences may have shaped their sense of self. I viewed this reflective and illustrative technique as a way of providing a deep insight into how the teacher experienced TA and how it moulded their identity within the context of their primary school.

In considering collage inquiry as one of the research methods included in this study, I envisaged that some participants may have felt intimidated to produce perfect collages with no 'mistakes.' It was important that I reassured the participant that perfection was not being

sought after but rather that the content of the collage in relation to the question posed was to hold weight. Although collage inquiry as a research method was an option for participants to select, they opted to do letter-writing and object inquiry instead. In retrospect, this decision may have been attributed to time constraints, such as work and other commitments. Hence, teachers chose 'easier', more convenient and less time-consuming methods to respond to and describe their thoughts and feelings on the phenomenon of TA.

4.7.4 Object Inquiry

González-Monteagudo (2018) mentions that via objects we make meaning of our sense of self and societal contexts. This implies that objects help us recall places, time periods and symbols in order to understand and explain humankind in a better way (González-Monteagudo, 2018).

A formal introduction to object work was at the beginning of my master's study when I was asked by my supervisor to pick an object in the room and do a write-up on it. As I wrote on the box of crayons chosen, my thoughts and ideas began flowing, and I was amazed at how such a simple object could elicit so many memories, connections and past experiences. Mitchell (2017) affirms this when she mentions that there are significant bonds between memory and objects. This means that our lives with their collection of objects obtained from various places, mould and remould us and speak of our sense of self (Govinden, 2017). Furthermore, the objects can give invaluable data in terms of lived experiences (Chirikure et al., 2017). In this study, I used object inquiry to draw out the lived experiences of teachers in relation to their memories and meanings emanating from the objects and how they may have shaped who they are, what they do and how they behave on a daily basis.

Mitchell (2017) mentions a possible forewarning about object study in terms of the rules and laws regarding not bringing people harm whilst using participants' data. Hence, in this type of arts-based study, it was important to remember that the data source, such as the object itself, always belongs to the participant (Mitchell, 2017).

In writing the following object inquiry write-up, I became more au fait with this particular method as a tool for understanding its place in my study and further gain a sense of placing myself in the shoes of the participant who was the responder to the request for an object inquiry write-up.

A BOX OF CRAYONS.....OR A SPLASH OF COLOUR TO MY WORLD?

Sometimes you have to see people as a crayon. They may not be your favourite colour, but you need them to complete the picture – facebook.com/DeepLifeQuotes

Looking around the room, my eyes fell upon the lone box of crayons sat atop my study table almost like a misfit surrounded by a world of academia in which it certainly thought it must not belong. Or could it perhaps be wrong? Could this box of crayons be the splash of colour in an otherwise very stern and serious world?

As I stared fixedly at it, my mind began to ponder.....

We are all very much like this box of crayons. Misfits.....so to speak. We stand out or we try to fit it in, each of us unique just as every colour in that box of crayons. Yet each of us can contribute to our society positively or negatively and infuse some shade of brightness or darkness depending on our mood, our mental and emotional state, our psychological state and in short our very mindset. Some colours in that box like people, add a hue of hope whilst others cast a shadow of sadness and sorrow. Some become blunt over time having been selected, needed, used more than others perhaps being more giving of themselves in a selfless way, whilst others remain almost unchanged, perhaps like people stunted by their own imagined or real fears. I can almost hear them within that box....as if they were people in a room full of others, be it in a staff meeting or a classroom full of learners, when called upon to volunteer or effect some sort of change, they shy away from the view of the person standing in front thus remaining the same, stagnated and unyielding as the day they were placed into that "box".

As I study the crayons more closely, I realise that each of them can make a difference depending on how they are put to use. Some colours, like people, when mixed together can set the world alight with colour, creating and producing a work of wonder perhaps....masterpieces, works of art and add beauty and splendour to an otherwise ordinary workspace whilst others when combined create forces of darkness, doom and gloom, almost like the evil, destruction, corruption and mayhem that exists in our world.

My eyes rove over some crayons that my little one has preferred over others and I wonder, what prompted his choices? Why did he select certain colours over others? Perhaps he thought they would affect the outcome of his work in a more positive way than if he chose others. I think back to some of his early drawings, and attempts at writing his name, deliberately forming the alphabets making up his name, letter by letter until he got it right. Then came that proud moment and bright smile when he realised his achievement followed by the look of pure joy at hearing the praise and acknowledgement of his great feat. "Mommy, are you very proud of me...because I got it right?" In reply I respond that yes I was indeed very proud of him because he got it right but more so because he tried!

That's all that really matters I think, as I glance at the box once more, in an ever-changing world wherein exists a kaleidoscope of colour that we all try to add our very own 'splash of colour' We may not stand out or be noticed at all, but we surely can and will complete the picture!

Figure 4.5: My object work write-up which served to expose me to object inquiry as a type of research method

The collage inquiry and object inquiry activities aimed to respond to research sub-question three: *How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?* and research sub-question two: *How do teacher acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self?*

4.7.5 Coherence amongst Methods

4.7.5.1 The Use of One Method under Research Question 1 and Three Methods under Research Questions 2 and 3

Research Question One, (*What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?*) directly underpins the main Research Question (RQ) (*What*

are teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement in primary schools?), hence I needed to attend to it in a more detailed and in-depth manner. Thus, using unstructured interviews under this RQ served to cement the understandings and perceptions provided by participants during the interview itself to form a well-rounded basis for the study, whilst fortifying their conceptions shared in their selected activity, which spoke to RQ2 and RQ3. This type of thorough response and rigour led to the way being paved for a better understanding of teachers' stories of TA within the rest of the study. Furthermore, the three research methods under RQ2 and RQ3 (letter-writing, collage inquiry and object inquiry) elicited responses which leaned towards both said RQs, and were thus aptly grouped together. In addition, it was imperative to use methods that provided information adequately for both RQs two and three whilst simultaneously considering that participants had been given a choice of selecting one amongst the three methods. In doing this, whichever one method they had decided on needed to apply itself to both the latter RQs and not just one, as this would have resulted in an incomplete or biased study. In addition, participants were nervous to share information (even though these were visual/written activities and were not face-to-face); therefore, one method (unstructured interviews) was sufficient as a means of summing up of the information I had required to answer the main RQ and consequently RQ1. By focusing on the written/visual activity first under RQ2 and RQ 3 (letter writing/object inquiry/collage inquiry), I had built more rapport with participants and had gained their trust – they were more relaxed, comfortable, and willing to share their experiences. Lastly, a variety of methods in the second and third questions was crucial to gain reliable and trustworthy accounts of the teachers' stories of TA. In spite of the discussion and explanations provided in this section, it must be noted that there is no single method that is specific to answering a certain RQ entirely, and that they all inevitably overlap in response to all three RQs and the main RQ as well.

4.7.5.2 The Use of Multimodal Methods

The unstructured interview used in RQ1 was an oral task; letter writing appealed to those whose strength lay in written activities, the collage inquiry included visual, written, and sensory aspects, and object inquiry incorporated the visual, oral, and written aspects. Using such multimodal research methods were all relevant to the study at hand and thus worked collaboratively and in coherence with each other, to extract necessary information on teachers' stories of TA and how it may have shaped the personal and professional self. Hence, the variety of methods planned shows how the visual and oral tasks served to complement each other. The object inquiry, collage inquiry and the letter writing activities in RQ2 and RQ3, for example, were told in the voice of the participant – it was *their* story thus it increased believability and made the study more plausible.

4.8 Trustworthiness, Validity and Ethics

4.8.1 Trustworthiness and Validity

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), credibility refers to the level that a study's findings are a precise portrayal of the lived experiences of the participants as narrated by themselves using their own words. In this study, credibility was guaranteed by ensuring that more than one data generation method was used (Ary et al., 2010). Furthermore, when arts-based methods are employed in narrative research, believability is increased (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Thus, the data in this study was gathered by collage making, object inquiry, letter writing and unstructured interviews.

Polkinghorne (1995) mentions that the credibility of a narrative story is based on ensuring accuracy in data collection and that the plot is plausible. To ensure credibility, triangulation was used as a validity tool. Thus, various sources were referred to, to find common themes, and multiple consultations with participants ensued (Ary et al., 2010). A researcher's diary was also kept to make certain credibility prevails. Credibility was also enhanced by the use of purposive sampling, which was the sampling technique used in this study, acquainting oneself with participants early on in the research process and using data collection methods that were clearly outlined and well-detailed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Authenticity refers to the degree of fair and equal distribution of varying perspectives and opinions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, authenticity was ensured by obtaining multiple points of view in the form of the narratives shared by participants and attained over time.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), dependability relates to whether similar findings would manifest upon repetition of a study. Ahmed (2020) affirms this by stating that the audit trail should allow a researcher to undertake a study of a similar nature if replication is desired. In this study, a well-recorded audit trail of all the steps used during data generation was sustained. Researcher notes contained in the researcher's diary as a form of ongoing reflection formed part of the analysing, understanding and reporting of data.

Confirmability was also ensured in this study by the researcher's review of a variety of literature sources as well as making certain that all data was transcribed and reported and shared with the participants (Maree, 2016).

4.8.2 Ethics - Procedural and Relational

To uphold ethical values in this study, I applied for ethical clearance (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017) from the University Registrar and the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. I also sought gatekeepers' permission from the

Department of Basic Education – KZN and the principals of the primary schools of the participants to conduct the study. Signed consent forms served as a portrayal of upright ethical implementation (Prosser & Burke, 2008). Thus, the participants were provided with consent forms to sign as an agreement to participate in the study. Furthermore, a narrative inquirer must make certain that the emotions and opinions of the participant are not explicitly exposed since reflecting on previous experiences may yield negative emotional trauma (Clandinin, 2016). Hence, confidentiality and anonymity had to be maintained to the highest degree to ensure participants' rights were protected and to allay any harm that may have been caused to them.

Over and above all ethical considerations discussed, participants were reassured of their voluntary participation, for example, during interviews and the choice to exit the study process whenever they wished to (Alshenqeeti, 2014). As a narrative inquirer, it is my responsibility to respect the stories told and lived by the teachers. In reconstructing the co-constructed stories, I ensured that no harm was brought upon the teacher or any person mentioned in the stories. The stories of the lives studied were represented in all their complexity and not reduced just to suit my research agenda. All emplotted stories were composed of multiple stories, shared in the participant's voice and through varied texts (letter-writing, object inquiry, etc.), to ensure openness.

4.9 Limitations of the Study

Poor internet connection, coupled with load shedding, intermittently hampered the progress of this study. Hence, I ensured that all devices were fully charged at any given time. Several times, I had to find an alternate location to work from during load shedding and unprecedented power outages, which on some occasions went on for more than twenty-four hours. Furthermore, I ensured all work was constantly backed up to prevent any loss of important data. The availability of participants posed a problem as teachers were busy with year-end assessments. To meet this challenge, I used the post-exam period and part of the school holidays and also found times that were suitable for my participants. Using the internet meant that I needed a considerable amount of data. To counter this problem, I applied for student data allocation. The use of technology to gather data from participants presented a challenge for some participants. Using varying and lively methods for data generation allowed for participants of different technological abilities to be kept engaged. In narrative studies, it may be easy to misconstrue experiences shared; thus, the use of several methods for data collection also proved useful to verify meanings and responses that were vague. With the rising cost of living, transport costs for both parties in the case of face-to-face meetings became a logistical problem. To address this limitation, proper budgeting was needed to

accommodate this cost. Lastly, time constraints due to work and family commitments hindered progress with my study. To combat this challenge, I became more mindful of practising good time management skills and recruited extra help to comfortably juggle work, home and study needs.

4.10 Summative Reflections for Chapter 4

The introduction to this methodology chapter was done through the poetic word to explain what the chapter entailed. The chapter further detailed and rationalised methodological choices underpinning this study, including the qualitative methodology used, the narrative inquiry approach, and the methods and instruments for data collection and analysis. These choices were based on the study's purpose to explore primary school teachers' narratives about TA and how these narrative experiences shaped their personal and professional selves.

Using arts-based methods and unstructured interviews for data collection allowed for rich, contextually-based and nuanced accounts of the shared experiences of the participants in this study. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, participant confidentiality and researcher reflexivity, were closely considered in this study and clearly delineated throughout the chapter.

Whilst all effort was made to employ methodological constructs of rigour, particular limitations and viable mediations thereof were affirmed. Overall, the methodological stance undertaken enhanced a well-grounded engagement with the study's research questions.

The next chapter engages the presentation of data and findings generated through the methodological processes outlined in this chapter.

The 5th Chapter: Presentation of Data and Findings

Sketching Storied Scripts of Self and Recognition

5.1 Chapter Prologue

5.1.1 Character Sketch: A Short Reflective Dialogue between Self-Acknowledgement and External Acknowledgement

Self-Acknowledgement picks up her phone after a long, hard day at work. Her heart swelled with pride as she read the words on her screen: “I, just messaged to say that Jauhara was amazing, she moved hearts in the way she spoke...she blew us all away...I have never met anyone like her”. Self-Acknowledgement who was seated alone at her table in class, beamed from ear to ear, then sighed and set her phone down. I have done well, she thought. I am a great mum, an amazing writer, and a phenomenal teacher. She straightened her crown, rose confidently, glanced briefly around, and strutted off...her head held high in affirmation of who she was. In the not-so-far distance, External Acknowledgement, having watched the encounter, nodded his head in approval. Journal entry, November 2023.

In this short character sketch, Self-acknowledgement, a teacher by profession, describes how she felt as she read a WhatsApp message she had received regarding her own child's rendering of a speech at the child's school assembly. Self-acknowledgement recalls feeling extremely proud of herself, remembering how she had helped her child to write that speech. She felt proud as a mum when her child, having delivered it to a level of perfection, had gotten such raving responses. It gave her personal identity a boost and her thinking then meandered to her professional being, her agility and adeptness with writing and teaching English, leading in turn to a boost in who and what she is as a now Master's student and also as a teacher. External acknowledgement (representing her network of colleagues, friends, and family) is not far off, and he watches the scene in admiration and with a sense of support.

Different forms, expressions, and conceptions of acknowledgement, and their influence on the personal and professional self, are portrayed in this sketch. Some of these expressions and forms are internal or self-acknowledgement, external acknowledgement and the impact and resulting feelings, thoughts, and emotions on the professional and personal self. Such expressions, forms, and influences of acknowledgement are found within the narratives of the participants in this chapter. Hence, this sketch creates a portal of thinking of what is to manifest from the whimsical and winding tales weaved by the participants about TA.

5.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

In the previous chapter, the methodological stance of this study was described in detail. In this chapter, I present the narratives of the four participants. Each narrative has been constructed using first and third-person voices to eloquently capture the essence of the experiences of the participants. As explained in the previous chapter, each participant was given the option to either do a collage, write a letter, or do an object inquiry. Using the collage, letter, or object inquiry as an entry point, then led to the subsequent unstructured interview. The narratives of the participants are then developed from the interviews, each narrative preceded by their respective letter, collage, or object inquiry. Following each narrative, an analytical summary of the narrative is presented to illuminate the key issues related to teacher acknowledgement. These key issues, arising from the narrative analysis, will be the subject of further engagement in the following chapter.

The chapter begins with a short character sketch portraying an interaction between Self (internal) Acknowledgement and External Acknowledgement. The character sketch illuminates some forms of acknowledgement, sources of acknowledgement, and conceptions of acknowledgement. These acknowledgement forms, sources, and conceptions are found within the narratives of the participants, which follow in this chapter.

5.3 Chapter at a Glance



Figure 5.1: An overview of Chapter 5

5.4 The Data Presentation Process

5.4.1 The Process of Working with the Participants' Selected Activity and the Development of the Interview

In this section, I am working with data. I present the steps that I have taken to know and understand the data, to identify areas in which I could write, and to identify preliminary themes. To show how I finalise the themes within which the data will be presented, I use constructs of narrative inquiry to guide the process of writing and presenting the data.

Having invited all participants to write either a letter, do an object inquiry, or a collage as an activity from which I would be able to glean their thoughts and feelings about TA, I set about studying these selected activities with rigour and intent. I aimed to gauge how participants viewed TA and how they related it in terms of their personal and professional selves. Three participants opted to write a letter, whilst one selected the object inquiry activity. Upon completion and receipt of the activities, I meticulously highlighted words and phrases that I perceived as pertinent to my study and looked closely for any bearing on TA. Through this process, I saw the early and tentative emergence of possible themes and sub-themes. Using these highlighted snippets of their letters and object inquiry, I proceeded with unstructured interviews, the questions of which were drawn directly from the highlighted sections of their selected activities. Each participant was asked approximately 15 to 20 questions, which spanned between 45 minutes to an hour. The participants' answers, in some cases, led to the consequent questions within the interview process.

The image shows a handwritten letter on lined paper. The letter is addressed to a 'star learner' and describes their academic progress and achievements. To the right of the letter, there are three yellow sticky notes with text analysis prompts. The first sticky note is dated 2023/11/05 and the second and third are dated 2022/11/06.

Dear [redacted]
(To my star learner)

When I think of you [redacted] it's always with such joy and satisfaction. I have watched you grow from a naive and uncertain little girl to a confident and efficient "Senior" grade 7 learner.

You decided to be the best at the beginning of this school year, and you promised me the Dux award will be yours by the end of this year. You have steadily progressed through this year and achieved many academic goals, such as winning 5 out of 6 fixtures in debates, being chosen as the best speaker in all fixtures and progressing to circuit level in the Speech contest. You have also achieved 100% this term in Social Sciences

Sticky Note
Mrs K. Vorsee 2023/11/05 21:29:19 (g)
Options
LEARNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (TEACHER NARRATES HOW SHE RECEIVES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FROM THE LEARNER)

Sticky Note
Mrs K. Vorsee 2022/11/06 21:38:30 (g)
Options
YOU SEEM TO DESCRIBE TEACHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AS COMING FROM THE LEARNER IN YOUR LETTER
WHAT DOES TA MEAN TO YOU?
WOULD YOU SAY THAT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT COMES MAINLY FROM THE LEARNERS? EXPLAIN
WHAT ARE YOUR EXPERIENCES OF TA AT YOUR SCHOOL? HOW DO THESE EXPERIENCES MOULD YOU AS A PERSON/TEACHER?
HOW DOES THIS POSITIVE FEELING INFLUENCE YOU AS A PERSON AND, AS A PROFESSIONAL?

Figure 5.2: A portion of a participant's letter-writing activity and my workings, leading to the unstructured interview question prompts

All of the participants' stories, in the next section, have been developed using the unstructured interview following the activity selected by the participant. This means I studied the selected activity done by each participant, then interviewed each participant employing a different and unique set of question prompts based on the particular participant's activity. The interviews were then analysed, annotated, and highlighted further, closely scrutinising responses with an eye toward their perceptions of TA and its personal and professional implications. The data collected from the interviews was then used to create the narratives for each participant in this chapter.

Transcript 1: Interview 1 Participant 1

Good afternoon, ma'am.

Good afternoon

Welcome to this interview and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I really appreciate it.

You're welcome.

Okay, let us begin. The first question is, what does teacher acknowledgement mean to you?

Teacher acknowledgement, the way that I... see it as best is that you get your acknowledgment from your learners. You do get acknowledgment from your managers, but, it somehow [intonation, emphasis] feels better when it comes from your learners. Acknowledgement from them would be the letters that they write to you. Also, the way that they greet you in the morning when they see you, that they happy to see you. They're eager to learn. Acknowledgement comes from when they get the correct answers in class, that lets you know that what you're doing is making a difference. And even uhm...when they feel...uhm you know, like you... they can open up to you, talk to you about challenges they have in their work or even at home. That's acknowledgement, for me as an individual that's acknowledgement. As much as we can get it from our managers or our principals that they praise us in a staff meeting... You feel good, you do feel good, but the core acknowledgement that I, well, enjoy the most is the one that I get from my learners. Okay.

Okay, thank you. Second one is Teacher acknowledgement...Is teacher acknowledgement important to you as an individual and as a teacher? So first as a person? Is teacher acknowledgement important to you? And then as a teacher, and why would you say so?

It's very important [pause], it's vital for a teacher to feel fed themselves, they have to be acknowledged. Firstly, acknowledged by... your community... is also very important, that you are serving them and you are serving the learners and you're making a difference. Like, uhh...you know, when when you're put up on social media, by the school for things that you've done for the learners. That's a good form of acknowledgement, personal achievement. You take it as a feather on your cap. Uhhmm... In terms of like acknowledgement, just repeat the second...

I said as an individual and as a teacher, and then why

Well, we do QMS but... we feel acknowledged by our peers as well you know, when they tell us that you know, you helped to do a certain task and... I performed better or, you know, even your manager comes to you and says, like, for example, when I set my social science papers, my manager came to me and told me that I set, according to the standard of the subject advisor, and she was very pleased. So immediately that whole day became brighter to me. Because, I was acknowledged for something that I'd done, you know, as a

Comment [MKV1]: Conceptualisation of TA: → acknowledgement from learners more significant than that of colleagues/SMT

Comment [MKV2]: EXAMPLES/TYPES/FORMS OF TA

Comment [MKV3]: CONCEPTUALISATION OF TA → innate, feel fed.

Comment [MKV4]: EXAMPLES/EXPRESSIONS/FORMS OF TA: How and from whom

Figure 5.3: A portion of a highlighted interview transcript used to formulate the narratives

5.4.2 Presenting the Data and the Narratives in this Chapter

To present the data in the next section, I first showcased each participant's selected (data collection) activity (see introduction in 5.1 for examples of activities that participants

could choose from). Next, I used the narrative method to elaborate on who the participant is and to provide some insight into their personality and biographical details concerning their work life. This will enable a sketch of each participant to emerge, thus adding a deeper perspective on who the participants are. The narratives follow, under separate headings to give insight into their thinking and feelings about what Teacher Acknowledgement means to them as a person and as a teacher, their experiences of Teacher Acknowledgement, and how it has influenced them personally and professionally. I also include some of their reflections on Teacher Acknowledgement experiences.

5.5 Celine's Story

5.5.1 Activity Selected: Letter Writing

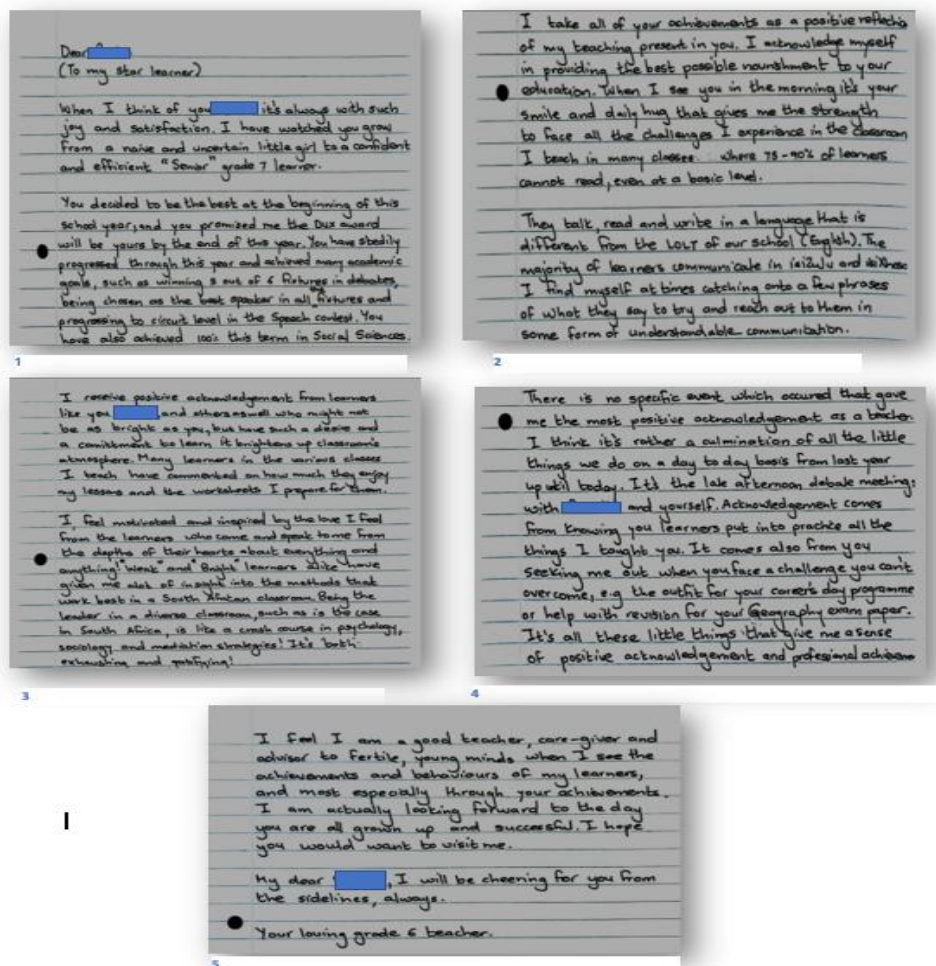


Figure 5.4: Celine's letter-writing activity (see Appendix 8: Participant 1's Selected Activity – Letter Writing)

Celine chose to write a letter to her brightest learner. In the letter, she shared many thoughts and ideas about TA, including her views, experiences, and the influences that TA has on her.

She provided insights into her personal and professional self through the letter she wrote. These insights were used as prompt questions in a follow-up unstructured interview based on Celine's letter. The insights and responses stemming from the letter and interview were used to write the narratives below.

5.5.2 Who is Celine?

Celine is a 37-year-old teacher. She is an Indian female with *17 years of teaching experience*. Her qualifications include a *BA degree, majoring in Psychology and English, followed by a PGCE, majoring in Social Sciences and Life Orientation*. Celine is qualified to teach in *the Senior and FET phases*. She has taught the following subjects in the course of her teaching career: *English, Life Orientation, Geography, Social Sciences, Life Skills, Natural Sciences and Technology, and EMS*.

5.5.2.1 Celine's Personal and Professional Identity in relation to TA

Celine views herself personally as someone that *stands for ethics, hard work, perseverance, academic excellence, high moral standards and impeccable manners*. She says that, as a professional teacher, these are the values she *emulates as an educator* and which she aspires to instil in her learners. Her letter writing to her top-performing learner illuminates her internal TA when she feels that she was part of her learner's *development and achievements*. She elaborates on this sense of self-acknowledgement when she can see the fruits of her *emotional investment and emotional energy through the achievements* of her learners.

Celine also recognises the importance of the learners' parents' acknowledgement of the teacher as part of her external TA. She argues that *the child is with us half of the time. And the other half they are with the parent, and so we are in loco parentis and are teaching them morals and values as well*.

As an individual, Celine interacts with her learners on a very personal level, saying that, *owing to the many sad contextual factors* her learners face on a daily basis, she always ensures they know she is their *second mother* and they can go to her *anytime and for anything*. Celine also mentions how her professional involvement with her learners *actually fits in well* with who she is, because she *draws from the well of her own soul* when she teaches. She elaborates that *every hour spent, activities done, planning, etc.*, done by her is done with these *professional and personal traits in mind*. She says that *in essence, these qualities make her into the teacher* her learners and colleagues see every day. She firmly adds that she *means every day because she also believes in consistency*.

Celine recalls her initial years of teaching her top-achieving learner, where she described the learner as *uncertain, not being confident*. She now believes that the learner is *absolutely mature, committed and dedicated*. Celine goes on to explain that she has *given her the so-called equipment for her to use to succeed, being mature and also her realising the importance of education*. She believes that she has *shown her that...that education is like a journey, and that the end results can be very rewarding*. Celine adds that she was motivated to become a teacher because she feels passionately about children who come from disadvantaged communities. She mentions that for her top performing learner, who hails *from a very poor background*, for example, to *achieve her aspirations would mean the world to Celine and just bring her so much joy*.

To her, teaching is viewed as a *calling*. She says that *it's not just a paying 9 to 5 job. It's a person's sacrifice of their time, talents and treasure*. Celine is *very intrinsically motivated and does not have to receive things in order to want to do something*. It's more about how she feels about it. She means that if she *feels very strongly that to achieve something and get it done*, it would be *because it comes from the inside, not from the outside*. As much as Celine likes the positive acknowledgement, she can *survive without it*. For Celine, personally, she is always about the way that she *can make a person feel about themselves* and that when it comes to learners, she tries to *motivate and reach out to them on an emotional level first*. She feels that if she's done that, then she can take it as *a feather in her cap*.

Celine explains that, as a teacher, she does not *become despondent* when the learners perform poorly, but rather she looks at it as *a way for self-improvement*. For her, then, it's a tool to help her improve herself.

5.5.3 How does Celine view TA?

Celine explained that she views TA as emanating from her learners and describes it as *best is that you get your acknowledgement from your learners*. She mentions that she also gets acknowledgement from her managers, but *it somehow [intonation, emphasis] feels better when it comes from your learners*. She feels recognised by her learners through the letters that they write to her. She says that she also feels acknowledged by her learners by the way *they greet her in the mornings*. Celine also indicated that acknowledgement comes from when the learners get the *correct answers in class*, and explains that this *lets you know that what you're doing is making a difference*. She adds that she feels acknowledged by her learners when *they can open up to her, talk to her about challenges they have in their work or even at home*. Furthermore, she says that acknowledgement from learners is *to show respect. If they respect us, they acknowledge us as their teachers, and that is a reward*.

Celine feels that *it's vital* for a teacher to feel *acknowledged by the community* as well, and cites an example of how the school can inform the community. She believes that the school can use *social media to inform the community of exemplary things that the teachers do or achieve*. In Celine's view, acknowledgement should also come from the parents and the SGB. She continues by saying that the SGB represent the parents and are in the *best role* to let teachers know whether they are achieving well with the learners. She adds that if they get *no response from them*, then they don't know whether they are *pleased* with the work that they are doing. Hence, as such she believes that the SGB should acknowledge them as teachers.

Celine feels that acknowledgement from management is very important, because there are *certain educators that thrive on it*, meaning that *when they work hard, and they are complimented on the achievements* it only *motivates them to work harder*. Celine maintains that *WhatsApp messages complimenting teachers on the school groups* is a good form of acknowledgement, not discounting personal recognition by school managers when given a *pat on the back*., Some of the acknowledgement phrases, suggested by Celine, which her school managers could use to show acknowledgement include *I saw you go the extra mile, I see the improvement you've made in this child's life. Keep going. You're doing well...Very important*. To her, this show is a form of acknowledgement. She fondly recalls a former principal who once had a party for all the educators and called it *Teacher Appreciation Day*.

In addition to being acknowledged by school managers, parents, SGB, the community and the learners, Celine feels that teacher acknowledgement should also come from one's family, including their spouses. She explains that, if they acknowledge that they *are emotionally invested in human development through their teaching responsibilities*, it makes their *difficult life as teachers more rewarding*.

Celine concludes this part of her story by saying that, though small, these acts of acknowledgement, verbal, written or gestures, *make a difference in their resilience to remain as teachers despite the challenges that they face as teachers*.

5.5.4 Celine's Teacher Acknowledgement Experiences and their Impact on her

Celine narrated a few positive TA experiences from different educational stakeholders and how it influenced her as an individual and as a teacher. She briefly mentioned, as an example of acknowledgement, doing QMS where teachers are appraised according to certain criteria. Celine mentions how she *feels acknowledged by her peers* as well, and she speaks about its impact on her performance as a teacher. For her, it's *when they tell us that, you know, you helped to do a certain task and... I performed better, you know*. Celine also provided an example of positive TA from SMT by mentioning that *even if your manager comes to you*

and says, *like, for example, when I set my social science papers, my manager came to me and told me that I set, according to the standard of the subject advisor, and she was very pleased.* Celine further explained how this positive TA experience made her feel after receiving it. She said that this acknowledgement made her *whole day brighter* for her.

In the following part of her story, Celine revels in her anticipation of her best-performing learner's possible receipt of the Dux Award when she says that *at this point...* she thinks that her learner *might be getting the Dux* and that she was *very secretly excited about that*. She explains that *it's like not only is it a dream come true* for her learner, but that it was for her as well. Celine was aware of the learner's vision of wanting to achieve this Dux Award from the time *the learner was in grade six*, but that she *didn't fully see the learner's ability to achieve this*. Celine says that the learner had *shown her that she (the learner) is able to do it...* *She's walked the path. And she's found her way.* When she thinks of this learner retrospectively, she thinks of her as *a blooming flower, something that started off as a bud, and then it just opened up, it's now just beautiful and glowing and radiant.* Celine describes the learner possibly receiving the Dux Award as *more than an internal achievement*.

As an example of negative TA experience, Celine mentioned *punitive punishments from the principal* as very negative, and that negative acknowledgement is when managers and leaders *show no empathy* towards the staff. Celine believes that *every situation is dynamic and every person's life is different*. She feels that being punitive is when principals make *blanket statements about one individual's actions, or when they punish her* for something that they (managers and leaders) *don't or couldn't understand* why it was done. She presents an example of this kind of negative acknowledgement when a couple of teachers didn't come to a function we had on a Saturday. Celine says that the principal *came down really hard on the educators*, and the rest of the educators felt that it was *uncalled for without explanations*. She further reasons that *life happens to educators, too*. She explains that *they're not just robots, that you can put them in a box, take them out when you need them. They are also human beings. They have families, they have lives.*

Celine mentions that the acknowledgement from the principal in the form of WhatsApp messages for the staff who attended the Saturday function *felt good* because she (the principal) *recognised the teamwork* and the fact that it was on *a public platform*. Celine then cautiously adds that the acknowledgement from the principal is *very few and far between*, and as such, it is *greatly appreciated*. She emphasises that this acknowledgement motivated her to work *even that much harder*.

In Celine's opinion, negative TA experiences can also emanate from learners in the form of *bad behaviour*, which she believes is a reflection on her not doing her *best as a teacher*. She explains that to her, it means there is an *underlying problem* relating to the learners' respect for her, which she takes *personally*. Celine gives an example relating to her sense of not being respected by the learners. The example she uses is that of her *inability to communicate in the language of the majority of learners*, and as such, the issues of *accent and pronouncement destabilises* her.

Celine goes on to speak about the absence of TA from colleagues and its impact on her. She mentions that *she is actually currently in that situation now*, where there is a lack of TA from a colleague that is *affecting* her *very badly*. She feels *unmotivated* to be a teacher and has *doubts* about her choice of teaching as a career. She adds that she feels like *part of the furniture*.

5.5.5 Celine's Reflection on TA

Celine's reflections on TA begin with a hesitant laugh when responding to whether one should seek TA. She explains that *that's a difficult [laughs nervously] question because it is important as an individual to get acknowledgement, but it's not 'everything.'* She continues to explain that if one is distracted by how *good* they are all the time, it's like a *vanity issue*. Celine emphasises her idea of TA being important *for personal and professional growth*, but not in an *overriding manner*. She acknowledges that she is a *leader* and leads by *ethical conduct*.

5.5.6 Analysis of Celine's Narrative

Celine views teacher acknowledgement as an internal or implicit recognition of her contributing to the education of her learners and, as such, holds the learners' accomplishments as her beacon of her personal and professional life as a teacher. While she receives external acknowledgement from her learners and school managers, these are supplementary to her ethical responsibility of becoming and being a teacher. She places more value on being acknowledged for her work with her learners. Hence, her sense of TA is staying true to her ethical and moral responsibility of being a teacher and supporting her learners. While she welcomes external TA from her school managers and parents, she believes that the greatest joy comes from her learners' achievements. Forms of positive acknowledgement include quality management reports where her peers recognise her contributions to the school, being used as case examples for her school to outside stakeholders, some complementary words from peers, managers and parents, letters from her learners and from her family. She feels elated when she receives positive TA. Punitive punishments, making blank statements and no empathy for staff by school leaders are some of the forms of negative TA she

describes. She also says that negative TA can also emerge from learners who behave poorly which she feels, is a reflection, of the teacher's failure. Celine believes that TA is good for the teacher personally and professionally, but that it should not be overriding factor in a teacher's life.

5.6 Shania's Story

5.6.1 Activity Selected – Letter Writing

A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Thank you my "younger self" for giving me this priceless opportunity to reflect, guide and advise you. Being a tad bit wiser than you, I thought it appropriate to write you this letter. I do acknowledge that you won't be surprised that I found myself in a public service career. No, not a nurse like Florence Nightingale although I do love to be her for just one day. I found myself being led to the greatest profession known to man, a teacher of course! How I ended up here, well, it would be by utmost pleasure to take you with me on my incredible journey.

We all have those moments in our lives when we ask ourselves the questions...Who am I?...What is my purpose in life? Continuously asking yourself "Why am I being labelled as inattentive?" A chronic "rule-breaker", "Mischievous" and "Going against the grain". I do acknowledge that you feel different, sometimes lost. You feel that most times your mind is your worst enemy. Being a young lady in our beautiful country, you WILL aspire to dream big and be easily distracted and disillusioned by reality and the negative events happening in society, however, have no fear. I am here to tell you a little secret. The unwavering determination to educate yourself and to allow yourself to be taught is the greatest gift not just for you but to all the children who will one day be in your care. Whether it be in spirituality, religions of the world, quantum physics, politics, new-world phenomena, philosophy or even UFO's; never allow yourself to desist from learning irrespective of having thoughts that are incessant. You will realize your passion [redacted]. Your open-mindedness and thirst for knowledge is a great attribute. It exemplifies the humility and tolerance you possess to courageously say "I am a life-long learner". You will teach children important life lessons like: "Every single one of us has an innate talent, something that we are really great at and no matter what path we take in our lives and we need some form of education to attain it. You will teach children that education is not just important

for their future but also the future of South Africa and its people and whatever they dream of becoming will determine whether or not we as a nation can successfully conquer our future challenges. Most importantly, you will teach children that it doesn't matter how different they are and what special needs they have, if they persevere, passionate and trust their intuition, it will lead them to great success. If you ever feel discouraged by your career choice and decide to quit, you are not just quitting on yourself but quitting on your country and its people.

[redacted], where you are right now does not determine where you will be in the future for the future alone is based on the choices you make. Realise your power and potential and follow the exemplary example of Nelson Mandela who never allowed his failures to define him. There are times that you may ponder the reason why you're so remarkably different from other people, why it is that you cannot complete a fictional novel and why you're always drawn to literature that feeds your soul. The answer is simple: You question everything and more remarkably, you will teach your learners to do the same. This is a great quality and when you succeed in allowing a questioning mind to unfold, it is an even greater achievement. Never doubt your ability to "think outside the box" as the world needs more creative, courageous and formidable leaders. Yes, [redacted]...your role as an educator allows you to lead. Someday you're going to be a significant player in shaping and moulding young minds.

In all your modesty, I want to remind you off a few significant achievements during your tenure as a teacher. You may be astounded by what you read in this letter because right now self-doubt may cloud your perception as it does to many a young mind. [redacted], you possess an innate need that compels you to always assist and be a pillar for the down-trodden and marginalised. During your tenure at [redacted] primary, whilst completing your Social Sciences Degree, you will suddenly have an epiphany that will change your life forever. Being tasked with the care of orphaned and vulnerable children, you will have first-hand encounters with children who are impoverished without a ny form of

family support, you will encounter children who are "different" much like yourself, it is these interactions that will be the steering force to try your best to further help those that are in dire need. You will ask yourself, "How would Sociology, Criminology and Psychology together possibly help young children with special education needs?", although Freud and Erik Erikson would fervently disagree. It is during this epiphany that you will decide to immediately change your programme of study. Deep down you know you are "different" just like them. However, being "different" is not necessarily a bad thing. Deep down you know that you can make a difference.

Do you recall all those award shows you watched on television? Charlize Theron received an Oscar for her phenomenal performance in the movie "Monster". What an incredible moment! Imagine getting an award for being the most outstanding, imagine what it's like receiving a standing ovation, receiving special gifts for your performance, sitting at a gala dinner with the "elites" or even being interviewed for a magazine. It's difficult to imagine of course, especially if you view yourself as "different" from the rest. Today [redacted] am here to tell you that you will someday receive all of the above. Your heart will race in anticipation and excitement as you walk onto that stage as one that made it onto the Dean's List. You will receive a standing ovation when it is announced that you were the first woman from Kwa-Zulu Natal to receive this prestigious award. What if I tell you, you will receive gifts, a special photo shoot, an interview which will be in a publication. You're probably wondering what on God's green earth have you accomplished to be deserving of all these accolades. It's simple, with great pride and admiration I will next share this secret. In your three year programme of study, you will receive the highest aggregate in the country. Yes! Even your ADHD cannot stop you. Furthermore, this achievement was only accomplished by the Western Cape, never in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Yes you were also the first woman to accomplish this, hence all the fuss.

say these things with much pride and admiration. We always believe that one should lead by example. Well, you're the perfect example for the child who believes that they are an "outsider", "a rebel", "an outcast" or "different from the status quo". It is through your own experiences, challenges, determination, perseverance and fortitude that helps blaze the trail for the children in your care. There is another acknowledgement that also bears mentioning. This entails a conversation you had with a previous principal. As the conversation progressed, he mentioned that you're known as a "trouble-maker." Unfortunately the conversation ended abruptly and you didn't have the opportunity to clarify the meaning of this statement. Weeks went by and you finally mustered the courage to ask your principal what he meant by his statement. He answered most eloquently and I quote " , there are two types of trouble-makers in the world, the first being someone who seeks to cause trouble for their own personal gain, someone who in essence who is selfish and a narcissist." He then proceeded to say the following: " , you're fortunately the second type for you cause "trouble" to benefit others and not for self-gain. The second type are the true leaders. It takes courage to confront those that are seemingly in positions of power, however you consistently do it irrespective of the consequences. That is how I first recognized you as a potential leader."

However, I believe the greatest acknowledgement you will ever receive is not from your colleagues, your managers or your peers but from the heart of a child. When this happens, it seals the deal.....you're definitely doing something right. I'm going to quote a letter you will receive from a child one day. This in a nutshell will reiterate all that I have encapsulated in this letter.

To

A true leader has the confidence to stand alone. The courage to make the right decisions and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He/she does not set out to be a leader, but, through the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent he/she rises as a leader just like the phoenix rising from its ashes".

The power of this statement needs no explanation.

Much light and love

Sincerely

Figure 5.5: Shania's letter-writing activity (see Appendix 9: Participant 2's Selected Activity – Letter Writing)

Shania opted to write a letter to her younger self. She provided many of her emotions and conceptions regarding TA, including her views, experiences and the effect of these TA experiences on her as an individual and as a teacher. These conceptions and emotions shared were used as prompt questions in a follow-up unstructured interview based on Shania's letter written. The information from within the letter and the interview assisted in writing the narratives below.

5.6.2 Who is Shania?

Shania completed a Diploma at the Baktivedenta College of Education and Culture in Bangalore, India. She could not return to India due to a violent mugging incident that occurred in South Africa. She continued with her studies in South Africa by studying a degree through UNISA in Criminal Psychology - Bachelor of Social Sciences.

Shania started her teaching career at the Sathya Sai School in Newcastle in 1999 and continued there until 2006. She got married in 2007. She settled down and then began working

as a substitute educator in a primary school in from 2009 to 2016. Thereafter, she changed her course of study and completed a Diploma in Education (NPDE). She furthered her studies by achieving an advanced Diploma in Education with the following major subjects: Barriers to Education and Academic Learning; learner with a) Physical barriers, b) Emotional barriers, c) HIV/AIDS, Cognitive disorders, and e) Behavioural disorders. From 2016 to the present year, she has been placed in a mainstream school teaching the following subjects: Natural Sciences and Technology (NST) in Grade 5, NST in Grade 4, Personal Social Wellbeing (PSW) in Grade 5, and Creative Arts (CA) in Grade 5.

5.6.2.1 Shania's Personal and Professional Identity in relation to TA

Shania believes that TA is important to *an extent*, and explains that *when we are busy with life, itself, and there's so much of things to do in a day including many challenges, we tend to forget how important we really are and that it can all become a little bit mundane and robotic*. She feels that *it's good when somebody gets you refocused, reminding you of your purposes*. Shania mentions that she does not need TA for her own self-worth but that it's important to *hear it now and again, 'in the midst of everything happening*.

Shania perceives herself as having an *operating modus*. She affirms that her *modus of operating is more internal than external*. She says that she is the *greatest judge* of herself. She claims that she doesn't *really look towards external things* to make her the person that she is. She admits that it can be *negative* in a way because of the *high standards* she holds herself but also recognises that she has to *get back to reality* to keep a *balance*. She believes that teaching is a *very dynamic profession, always changing, always evolving*, and she says that *self-reflection* gives her the *space to keep pace with the change* and with the *dynamics of the children* within the classroom. This, for her, is what keeps her focused on what she does as a teacher, not on any *sorts of acknowledgement*. Due to her *internal locus*, Shania says that *her mind thinks like, as a collective and as a group*. She claims that an *absence of acknowledgement* would not *affect her very deeply*. She believes that, as a collective, they are a *team*, clarifying that they (meaning her colleagues) *stand united in everything* and that even if somebody was doing something *wrong*, they all took *responsibility* for it.

Shania describes her personal work ethic and how she becomes *overwhelmed* by *checklists* which she cannot follow in an *orderly way* like others and that she *works with an untidy table, with things lying all over*. She relates that *that's part of the ADHD* which she suffers from and that her *Departmental Head (DH)* knows her problem and knows how to work around it, even though to others, it may seem like she is a *rebellious person* by having her work *not come in time*.

She is able to recognise ADHD in others easily, being a qualified special needs educator. She expresses how *excited* her principal was when he found this out. He tasked her *henceforth* with the screening, identification, assessment and supportive learning (SIAS) portfolio at the school. She recalls how a comment was made whereby one of the educators in the community questioned how a special education needs teacher can be appointed as a DH. Shania anticipates that *there'll be more judgements if they knew she is ADHD* and it would be *hurtful* because she's had that *labelling* all her life. She feels that for her, *just avoiding telling people*, saves a *whole lot of drama*. She laments that at her school, one cannot do too much for fear of being *targeted* by colleagues because they would be *outshined*.

5.6.3 How does Shania view TA?

Shania defines TA as having *somebody recognise your purpose*. She bases this view of TA on the belief that everyone has *certain talents or a purpose* that one *gravitates towards that brings happiness and fulfilment*. For her, *when it comes to acknowledging that (talent) it means that ... when somebody acknowledges us we are being 'told, you are on the right path'*

Shania expresses her view about seeking TA: *'I vehemently believe that you don't seek it.'* She says that her *ex – principal at her previous school once told her something that stuck out to her for many years now*. He (her ex-principal) said to her: *"Don't chase after it, because the moment you chase after it, it eludes you"*. She continues: *'I learned a wise lesson even though at the time I didn't realise it that is, if one is 'pure in your intentions and you come from a place of truth, and you come from a... place of sincerity then things like this find you and that one does not necessarily go out to look for it.*

For Shania, TA being positive or negative *depends on the 'acknowledger.'* She says that it lies with *the person giving it...* meaning *'where are they coming from?'* For example, *a narcissist can give you negative acknowledgement, based on his or her inferiority complex, or trying to maybe belittle you so they would feel better*. On the other hand, she says that *if a person is giving her acknowledgement in a negative way, and she knows that that person is coming from a good place, for her it's constructive*. She explains: *'I will take it as something that I need to build on.'* For Shania to accept acknowledgement, a person *would have to earn that respect for her to put them on a pedestal* and consider them as *a leader*. She adds that it would have to be *somebody that she would like to follow but not somebody who comes from a selfish space*. Referring to the latter part of this example, she *will not even recognize that type of acknowledgement (from a selfish person), be it negative or positive because positive would be something they (the person with selfish intent) probably want from me*. She adds: *'we've all been in this case where we were used and abused... for a purpose?'*

Positive reinforcement in Shania's opinion could also be from the learners. She says: Sometimes learners will write you a little letter, come to you and tell you ma'am or write a little note in the book and uhhh... it's coming from a very innocent space. She thinks that when you're acknowledged by a child, it cements the fact that she is doing something right in the eyes of the child saying that 'ultimately that's what we are there for' and not for our managers, nor for government but rather for the child in the class. She adds: 'We are the tire that hits the ground.'

In addition, she mentions: *'you have your colleagues as well.... maybe your friend would coordinate something' and 'if I go to my friend to say well done. It's also positive.'* With colleagues, she feels that *there is always the complementing of each other, support and cheering each other on...*

For Shania then, *all stakeholders who are involved in education be it... colleagues, parents, leaders, the Department of Education (DoE) as well, our employees which will be part of DoE, and communities as well* are all important sources of TA. She mentions that the school *just recently had two large community functions: the prom, and graduation which we (the teachers) attended, and served 'for the benefit of our children', and for the parents' consumption as well.* She says that *parents have acknowledged and thanked the teachers.* She thinks that *that is very important... because we (the teachers) tend to be forgetful in remembering how important and how good we (the teachers) are in shaping a country, shaping the world.* She concludes: *'We need a little reminder now and again...'*

5.6.4 Shania's Teacher Acknowledgement Experiences and their Impact on her

As an example of *positive acknowledgement*, Shania recalls: *'Some years ago, we had Teacher Acknowledgement Day in school and each teacher was given a page on which every teacher wrote a little note to them.'* She reminisces over *some of the things that she read there* saying *'wow, you go back and say I did this? I am actually like this.'* She describes how it *'makes you feel good and that 'it's very important for teachers to get acknowledged.'* She also feels that *the positive acknowledgement will inspire her to do more and to be better* because she will *feel like she is worth it and that she is valued as a teacher.* She states that *it doesn't have to be a communication in words but it can be an action...*

Shania explains further that *teachers also need to get acknowledged in staff meetings.* She says: *'very often we find situations where everything that's going wrong is mentioned in the staff (meetings), but not much that is going right.* She thinks that there *'needs to be a move away from that paradigm of thinking where we only acknowledge the negative and not the positive'* because *'when you (managers) do that, you (managers and teachers) are not in*

harmony, you (teachers) are disempowered.' Shania stresses that as *managers, as leaders, as people that are in leadership roles, they need to not forget who put them there and uhh the people who put them there are the people that they need to...* Shania backtracks at this juncture and catches herself before continuing; *'ok wrong choice of word... and I say make happy...but its people that they need to satisfy to move anything forward.'* She explains that this is because *once people are happy, 'everything you need...the universe, you don't even have to lift a finger. It will come and it will happen.'* She expresses in a disillusioning tone: *'But uhh unfortunately, there's not many people that are workshoped in leadership in this country. They don't know, they've lost the plot.'*

For Shania, leaders *need to support the staff and they need to empower them.* They need to realise that *our families and our homes* are intertwined and that *there's a lot of things we (teachers) are juggling.* She mentions also that *the mind is very fragile, especially after COVID19, our experience as a country with the floods and especially as women in this country who have been marginalised.* For her, it is *important that managers take cognisance of these things* and not *just dictate and have expectations irrespective of what...a person is enduring in their life.*

Shania explains the reference in her letter to the word 'troublemaker' that a principal once called her. She says that *this was a man that she couldn't easily forget* and that *he was highly respected.* She reverts to an earlier part of the interview where she spoke about *respect being earned* and how she would *only consider acknowledgement from a person if that person has earned the right to tell her something.* So, for her, in this scenario being called 'troublemaker' *hurt so she took it to heart... and it worried her until she reached a point she had to ask him, about, 'what did he mean?'* She adds: *'I wouldn't have asked him if it hadn't, if I didn't respect him that much to have asked him to... I wouldn't have recognized his opinion.'* Shania says that the 'label' *made her feel like she was that little girl again that hasn't changed and evolved* and more so because *it came from him... a significant person.* She further *remembers driving home that day and replaying this conversation and becoming a little bit antagonistic towards him, in her mind, stubborn, and a bit rebellious as well* for labelling her. Shania relates that when she finally *asked him, it was a different meaning than the day when she was driving home after the incident.* Shania describes having had to *muster up the courage to go ask him (the principal) what he had meant by naming her 'troublemaker' because she was afraid that he was going to say could worsen how she already felt....* She recalls *laughing and laughing* when he explained that, *there are two types of leaders and he says that the second type will create a problem for the benefit of an entire lot of people* and she *smiled* and thought *'he gets he gets me.'* For her, *that was a breakthrough moment.* She says: *'For me if the principal gets*

me...all is gonna be well.' She tells of how it affected her professional self: *'It elevated me, to the point that I can work with this man to better this place, to make people happy... and begin to get everybody on board and we can work together not in a self-esteem way but more in a progressive way.'* She explains further that had he said: *'You're a troublemaker because this is what you do'* in a negative context then she would have been crushed. She adds: *There's no other way to put it, especially because of the way she held his opinion such high regard...*

In addition to her study achievement which she acknowledged in her letter to herself, Shania narrates, during her interview, a positive TA experience whereby she *received the acting post as Departmental Head (DH)*. She describes this as a *great achievement* in her career. She explains that *we had a great leader who has since passed away*. She continues that *he was a person that... understood his staff and he used to push her to the limit not disempowering her while doing that but he nurtured and took her under his wing and all he wanted was to be the best for all his staff*. Shania says that *all that was short-lived because within a few months, things just started heading south in terms of... undercurrents ...towards him, where he lost his will*. To her, he lost *the enthusiasm and that eagerness that was so infectious that when someone would come out of his office they would think 'I am going to conquer the world, that's how powerful I am.'* She says further that *it was unfortunate, the way things at school...with underhandedness and manipulation, that a good man who was a blessing to have on this earth, let alone the school... life was cut short*. She adds: *'We would have gone from good to great under his leadership... and we are at the moment stifled, we are in limbo, if not deteriorating.'*

Shania abhors when *negative teacher acknowledgement* is meted out to her peers. She becomes *enraged* if leaders and managers are *callous with 'infecting' the mind of a teacher*, and that it *means they don't care about the child* because that *'infection' will inevitably go to the child*. Her opinion is that *the approach is really important*. For example, *if a teacher comes into school first thing in the morning, you decide that you want to call this teacher in and you deal with this teacher in a critical manner, to destabilise the mind of the teacher*, then in that way you will be *destabilising the mind of about 200 children that the teacher is going to see on that day*. She argues that *it means they (the manager or leader) needs to be removed from office because they are a threat to education and as a ripple effect, a threat to a child*. To Shania, *'you can give negative acknowledgement'* but it should be such that *people come out from there being better than what they are before they come in not where the teacher leaves the school premises not wanting to even come back the next day*. To her, it is unacceptable that *people use the word 'reprimand the teacher'*, the way a teacher *reprimands learners*

because the teacher *is a professional and they come in with a lot of knowledge, insight and wisdom.*

Another example of negative TA that Shania narrates is to do with the *Quality Management System (QMS)*, an appraisal mechanism for *rating teachers according to certain performance standards.* She tells the story of a *principal who conducted a workshop which she had attended.* She explains how he said: *“Do not score your selves three and four (the highest scores). Give yourself one and two (the lowest scores).”* He went on to explain that *the only way you could give yourself a four was, if for example, your classroom is conducive to teaching and learning then it means you have curtains from window to window.* Shania thought this to be *absurd* as each school is *unique* and *what works for one school may not work for another,* especially where *affordability* may be a key socio-economic factor.

Shania feels that *in the same respect the types of advice, criticism or acknowledgement you get from the principal can be very biased based on the circumstances where they see themselves.* Additionally, *if you are the principal's pet, you're going to get good acknowledgement* but that *if you are somebody that the principal is too threatened by, or he/she doesn't like you based on a certain race,* then there may be *bias.*

Another incident Shania relates is when she *was given a school policy to sign* and she *refused to sign the policy* as she *did not communicate and escalate it to the members of the union of which she represents 14 people.* In her opinion, there must be *debate, dialogue and collaboration with each other* which to her are important forms of *communication in acknowledging the voice of teachers.*

Shania says that she is *guarded* at her school *about what she says, about what she lets go from herself from her heart and about being ridiculed and mocked at.* She recalls how she *found out that she was given a nickname of a politician that ‘talks a lot but knows nothing.’* She also remembers *once when, the teachers were having a workshop and she raised her hand to ask a question and there was like whispering and uproar in the back, as if to say: ‘there she goes again, Oh my God!’* She says: *‘I don’t know what got into me on the day I stood up, and I said, don't do that. Please don't do that.’*

5.6.5 Shania's reflection on TA

Shania reflects on *being a teacher* as the most important profession there is *undoubtedly.* *There's no other profession that is grooming future citizens.* By this she explains that it is not just *the economic system and the contribution there* but *the grooming of people who are going to contribute to the growth...to the holistic growth of the country... meaning to the country's values, the country's treatment of each other, the country's patriotic system, the*

love and care we have for each other. For Shania, the teacher is *in a very powerful situation when they stand in front of the classroom because they're dealing with ... with children that they can mould and groom.* For her, *the most exciting thing is being an educator in South Africa.* With its *harmful past that mentally and psychologically damaged people* she believes that *'if you have a passion for something and you have the insight and the foresight to see that this is where I want to go in my journey, you will be able to make a difference because that will resonate from you to the child in the class.'* Shania feels that a teacher should *lead by example.* She admits that *'We are not perfect. We are humans. We have our bad days. We have our good days, yet 'we have those days when we go home and we know without anybody having to tell you or to ask.... I'm in the right place' and 'I know that I'm supposed to be here.'* She adds further that *'we are very fortunate to be paid for giving a service... we are being paid for helping others... because service to man is service to God.'*

Shania mentions that at her school, TA (from management) is *not just insufficient.* She thinks *it's lacking completely.* To her understanding, *insufficient means there's something.* She says: *'I mean there's a void. There's nothing at this school... there's nothing...'* She emphatically points out that *'you can't... you can't thank human beings on social media,* because to her *'thank you' is a very personal thing, a very personal thing.* She claims that *when you are thanking somebody, it's recognising their effort* and that is why they must *see you face to face and be able to 'look at your satisfaction, and feel that they are worth it.'* She thinks that *people who are devoid of being able to give gratitude to others, have not received gratitude themselves, so they don't recognise how gratitude must be done.* She ponders that *maybe...we (teachers) should 'teach them?'* She says that *maybe they have no realisation that anything is wrong.* Shania adds that she thinks that *the principal's got a very good set of staff, but with politics, they (SMT) get caught... in it and it takes one person to create a huge problem which they (SMT) get caught up in... this cycle and then the attack is not on that person anymore.*

Helplessness is something that is very real for Shania, in that she cannot *act out against injustices such as stealing from the poor* that she sees *daily,* because she would be *victimised* and be seen as a *threat to what they were doing.* She narrates how *people approach her* with information and *pleas of help* with which *she cannot do a thing* even in cases where it caused *colleagues to be hurt and removed from the institution.* If she were to *react* she says that she would be *assassinated and killed* and so instead she *is silenced and burdened by the weight of carrying it all* to the point that it *makes her want to quit.* There is an *internal battle* between her *rational brain* saying, *'don't get involved'* and her *ethical brain* saying *'don't be like this person that's full of ethics and morals when you not'* and are *unable to stop such occurrences.*

Shania speaks of '*self-blame*', '*self-loathing*' and '*self-harm*' when she was younger for things that *happened at home* and how '*you want to hear how bad you are because that is where the reinforcement is.*' She says she reached the stage of maturity and forgave herself for also having blamed '*her life*' on significant others.

5.6.6 Analysis of Shania's Narrative

Shania's understanding of TA is that it is a recognition, either by self or by others, of the things one does beyond the mundaneness of teaching in a school. TA either acknowledges the talents or outstanding things that one does or identifies shortcomings in expectations. In addition, for Shania, TA is a sense of reinforcement for the teacher or a sense of re-focusing for the teacher. She believes that TA is dependent upon who acknowledges, and this acknowledgement could be perceived as positive or negative by the teacher, depending upon how it is said and in what contexts it is said. She gives an example of this where she experienced negative TA from her school managers, which troubled her until she approached her manager to explain the comments he had made to her, which, after receiving the explanation, felt positively acknowledged. Negative TA, Shania believes, labels people, which may not be good for the self-esteem of the teacher, but positive TA improves the self-esteem of the teacher and reinforces the teacher's sense of self-worth. Self-acknowledgement, she believes, is the greatest judge of oneself, but external TA elevates this sense of self-worth and reinforces or inspires one to continue with the good work that one is doing. Forms of TA include letter writing by learners, little notes in the notebooks, verbal utterances by learners, colleagues, school managers and parents, inscriptions on reports by colleagues and school managers and overt levels of support and encouragement.

5.7 Viv's story

5.7.1 Activity Selected – Object Inquiry

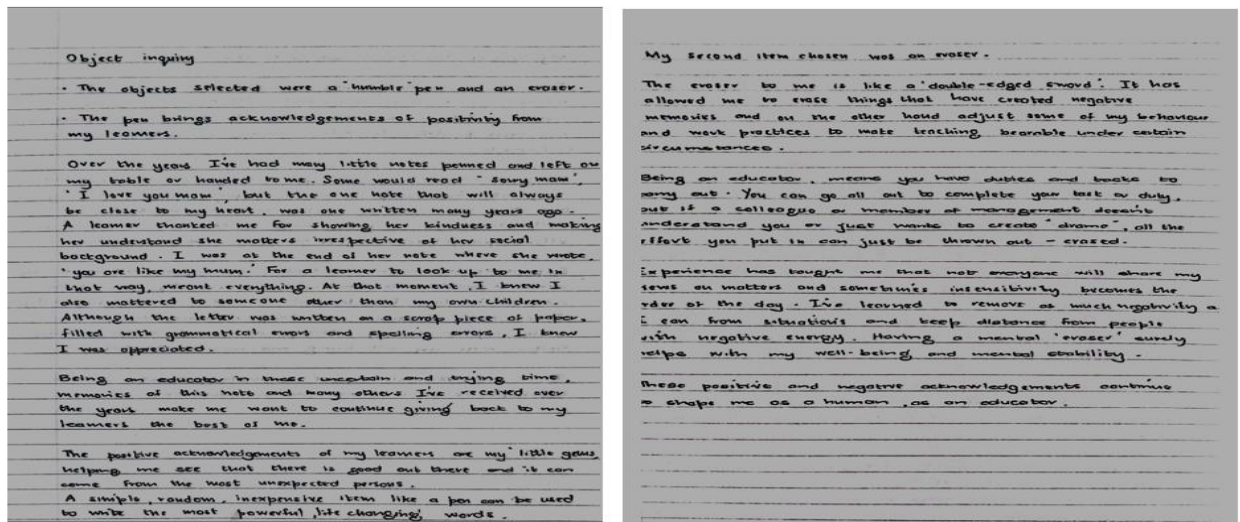


Figure 5.6: Viv's object inquiry activity (see Appendix 10: Participant 3's Selected Activity – Object Inquiry)

Viv chose to do an object inquiry. She selected two objects, a pen and an eraser. She did a write-up based on these two objects and their entanglement with TA. In the write-up, Viv shared many of her ideas and opinions about why she chose these two objects particularly, and how it links with her thinking, views and experiences of TA. She gave insight into her personal and professional self through the write-up she wrote about the objects. These insights were used as prompt questions in a follow-up unstructured interview based on the object inquiry write-up. The insights and responses shared were used to write the narratives which follow.

5.7.2 Who is Viv?

Viv is a middle-aged Indian female with almost 30 years of teaching experience. She gives a brief biography of herself as having *been around for half a century, teaching for almost 3 decades, [and having] completed [a] four-year teaching diploma at Springfield College of Education.* She is qualified to teach in the intermediate and senior phase. Viv's teaching experience has spanned across many different subjects. She explains that she has *taught all subjects in the Intermediate Phase (IP) (except isiZulu), Natural Science (NS) in the Senior Phase (SP) and did a little of Foundation Phase (FP) in her early days.*

5.7.2.1 Viv's Personal and Professional Identity in relation to TA

Viv's personal and professional identity relates to TA. She sees herself as *first and foremost, a MUM.* She mentions her *love for children,* and how this prompts her to be

passionate about teaching. She speaks about her role as a mother to her learners. With reference to a letter written by a learner to her, Viv says that, when they speak of mums, no one can take the place of a mum...there must have been something to have triggered that child to say you are like my mum, to me it was like emotional. She explains further that she thinks internally that the validation of that child having that love beyond colour and how it made her feel so ...proud ...that she has achieved something as a human. Viv thinks twice about staying away. She explains that, we get that leave. I can take my 12 days a year. But it's like ... huh uh...if I'm not there... She pauses and thinks of her own children and then says: What would my children do if their teacher wasn't in school for the day? So, it makes me think about it. She says that when they are here they are my kids... I am the caregiver. So, to me I can't let them down... so that's what keeps me here.

She mentions the self-fulfilment that she gets from *filling a blank canvas - teaching them to be the best they can be*. Furthermore, she speaks about pushing them towards this success by *not blaming circumstances*. She derives her love and passion for teaching from her (Viv's) grade 2 educator, who *had so much love and patience* with all of them and always *pushed them to read and use their imagination in writing*. It was because of the nature of this teacher that she says that, she knew then *that's what she would like to do*. It is this role model teacher whom she reminisces as one that she *loved to bits* who was significant in driving her towards her chosen career path and the formation of her professional identity. Viv also believes that her professional path *was mapped out* for her long before she decided to become a teacher. Viv firmly believes that *teaching is a calling*.

Viv thinks that positive TA is imperative from *when you start teaching, because that is your stepping stone to the rest of your career as a teacher*. She reiterates that *if you face the negativity there*, meaning the initial point of being a teacher, *it will break you... you will hate what you're doing*. She describes how she *was fortunate enough* to have *principals that were kind, generous, humble humans*. She continues to elaborate that having *worked under all male principals and they were all elderly* and that because she *was a youngster going in... and they were all of that mature age* she was always regarded as a *daughter* and later as a *sister*. So, she always *got that, you know that energy, that good energy* from them. Viv says that they contributed to her remaining in the profession because *it pushed* her to believe that she *can survive*. She paints a scene of the opposite being true as well when she says that, *had those management staff been negative. It can just destroy you*. She highlights a defining learning and appreciation from her previous principals by saying that *I think the best thing I got was... they taught me how to be human. You know? When an elder looks at you as a youngster and says you know I don't think you should do it like this. Do it like that. You*

know...you take it and say *Okay they not being nasty, not finding faults. But they want to develop.* Viv highlights another approach that her previous principals took when engaging with teachers in an affirmative way. The experience she uses to highlight her principals' approach is: *it's not that 'come to my office. I want to see you now.'* *I know my principals used to take the time to come to me or call me in when I'm not busy.* She says that they would not call *at the end of the day when she was leaving at half past two, or first thing in the morning...* and that they would politely ask, *Ma'am, when can I see you? Do you have some time today? I just want to discuss something with you.* Viv recalls that *it was that approach that led me to want to continue today ...* reiterating that, that is why she is here for so long. Viv believes that it was these *first few years of her teaching that made her want to continue.* She quickly adds that she *can't say the same about the last few years* of her teaching.

Viv exclaims how *nice it would be to be acknowledged* by her colleagues sometimes. She cites an example of the kind of acknowledgement she would like to receive, by saying, *when you do something or you've achieved something, to say well done! Good work! I couldn't have done it better.* She views it as *just those small little things...* She adds other examples of acknowledgement by saying that *now and again if they want to, they can say uhh you're senior, so I'll give you the time off, I'll acknowledge you, take the time off as a form of reward or you're serving relief today. No, ma'am. It's okay. I will serve relief.* For Viv, *it's those little things* that acknowledges her as a *person and showing compassion.*

Viv laments that sometimes *colleagues, just don't understand* her. She affirms that *we all have different ways of approaching things and doing things.* Viv describes herself as *very loud* and one who does not *take flack.* She does not keep *quiet.* If she wants to say something, she gets it *over and done with...* If she's made a mistake, she acknowledges that mistake and *will apologise.* Viv speaks about having a certain limit to negative acknowledgement by saying that, *if you keep on rubbing her the wrong way...You'll face her wrath* because she does not *need to be quiet and complacent forever. There's only a limit, everybody has a limit... you must know when not to overstep.*

5.7.3 How does Viv view TA?

Viv views TA as something that *doesn't mean monetary value,* rather she acknowledges the recognition derived from others. She explains that *it's a feeling that you get when somebody shows appreciation, and acknowledges what you've done for their children or for the school.* She elaborates on the use of a pen which she chose for her object enquiry by explaining that *words can change the life of a person. It can be negative or it can be positive.* To her, *something so simple* like a pen, *has so much of power.* She explains that *the pen has the ability to write just one letter or two letters* and for her *the effect of teacher*

acknowledgement is like that. She believes that it's not how much you say to the teacher. It's how you put it forward...to the teacher. She adds that it's in your actions and that sometimes words do not express exactly how you want them to feel.

She goes on to explain that *it may be different for another colleague* but that to her it's a *simple, hug, or thumbs-up, an 'I know you exist or thank you so much.'* To Viv, that acknowledgement means more than *buying a big present at the end of the year to say, 'thanks, mam.'* She also describes the acknowledgements she gets from interactions with learners. She uses an example of what learners would say as positive acknowledge: *if you tell me, mam, what you said to me, inspired me or mam it made me think again. I feel acknowledged... I fulfilled what I needed to do for that day or for that time.* She further describes the notes her learners write to her and the meaning they hold for her. In her words, *so these little notes they can be on... as I told you, they were on such a scrap pieces of paper with such poor vocabulary, but I could understand what the child was getting across to me. So, to me that I don't need any other acknowledgement, monetary, not anything, just that child to say, 'mam, you made a difference and that means a lot to me'*

For her personally, as an individual, *acknowledgement* particularly, is important. To her it is, because she believes that her *passion is teaching.* She maintains that she *grew up wanting to be a teacher.* For Viv, acknowledgement comes from the outcome of her efforts in teaching, which she cites some examples like *I just want to see it in my learners, in my community, the world as a whole.* Moreover, she emphasises her efforts to the teaching field in that *if I make a difference in one life, I can say that I've satisfied what I set out to do.* She believes that being a teacher is a *noble profession, it's a calling* and that *TA should not be asked for... But if it's given, take it...politely. Do not let it build your ego to an extent where you cannot do without it.*

With regards to her colleagues, Viv describes how she feels. Viv explains that she *just doesn't want to be associated with people that have that...you know that stigma attached to them whereby they think, "I am greater... I am better. Everything is mine."* Despite this, Viv says that *the respect is there for authority... she has respect for their authority and position.*

Viv speaks about a sense of belonging by saying that she is here *to make a difference.* *So, to me, having done what I've done, and having that one child acknowledge me to say ma'am you belong where you are, this is your right profession It's just those little things that they say or they do that makes you feel you know what...everything's gonna be okay, let me just be where I am, I belong here.*

5.7.4 Viv's Teacher Acknowledgement Experiences and its Impact on her

Viv's opinions about positive TA, revolves around the concept of kindness. She says *kindness is the top of my list when it comes to getting anything from anyone. Material stuff, come and go. You can replace that, but one act of kindness will change the life of an individual or individuals forever. So, to me, if I'm kind, I know the children will be kind to me ...you get what you give. So, I can't expect my children to show kindness or others to show me kindness if I am unkind.* She continues by explaining the forms of kindness one can experience. She says *kindness can be shown in different ways. It doesn't have to be how much I care for you. It can be something incidental, for example, it's like just passing by and asking: Are you okay? Just a tap on the shoulder... You know, I know you are here.* Viv feels that *sometimes we don't truly know people. We don't listen. We just see people. We need to listen. So, when a kind word or kindness is being shared, it's so nice like it makes... it pulls at your heart.* She reiterates that *to be acknowledged with kindness is better than getting a gift...or anything material.* Viv also affirms that *even with kindness there are boundaries.* She also notes that *you cannot be kind to somebody who is always negative because you're achieving nothing.* She continues to explain that *kindness can result in the opposite effect.* Viv says that *you know what they say, forked tongue. You can be kind. They can turn around and be so nasty that you go back and say, why was I ever kind of that person?* On whether this would make her want to stop being kind, Viv responds with an emphatic, *No, I will never stop being kind, it will not stop me. I will take those bad words. I will take those bad actions, but to me, I will be who I am. Because that's like, that's me, that's me.*

Viv is also mindful of her ways of interacting and giving acknowledgement to others by saying that *in the same tone I know when to say something, when to just give a hug, when to just touch a shoulder, to show my kindness.* Her self-awareness allows her to discern when to respect her colleague's privacy and *not to, you know, go and question or whatever.* With regards to receiving negative acknowledgement Viv dislikes taking the brunt for others. She explains that *sometimes you just get rapped on the knuckles for things even if it was not your fault.* This makes her feel that *negativity is bombarded when you open your mouth to... to fight for those that cannot speak for themselves.* She doubts the worth and value of her voicing her opinions because it makes her *want to sit back and think next time maybe I should think about myself.* Viv reveals that being told *don't take it personal* then makes her ponder about whether *negativity makes somebody to step back and think.*

Viv reflects about learners who approach her and still recognise her after several years have passed. She says that *you don't know what a feeling it is, it is just too precious. You hold on*

to it. Sometimes, if I go to a petrol station, there's a pump boy, he says ma'am, you taught me, you remember me?

Viv's TA experiences have taught her that *if you get positivity coming towards you, you are going to give back positivity. When you get negativity, you are going to say NOTHING. You don't care.*

Viv believes that the *negative memories* she has experienced *have made her stronger*. She has learned that *one cannot rely on some things. And... sometimes human relationships exist only for maybe a one-sided game. So those negative memories that are created by teacher acknowledgment, where blame is put where it's not supposed to be*, Viv acknowledges that *her hurt feelings will last just a while*.

5.7.5 Viv's Reflection on TA

TA from leaders or managers do influence Viv. She says that *sometimes they forget we are people*. Viv explains that *we need a kind word now and again, we are not robots*. Viv thinks that as much as there is value to receiving TA from school leaders and managers, *it must not lead to one's haughtiness*. She believes that *one should not ask for it. But if it's given, take it...politely in a way that one does not let it build one's ego and where it becomes an expectation to an extent where you cannot do without it*.

Viv uses an eraser as a metaphor in her object inquiry activity, to go against the embedded power within negative TA that inflicts on an individual. She explains that *it can be a removal technique. It's gone, it's gone. You don't see it again, thereby removing the baggage carried by negative TA*. Viv explains that when an eraser is used it is because one need *to make a change where needed. The need for change is signalled by negative TA*. However, she also says that negative TA *will break her* because all she ever wants to do is *to create a safe place* her for children and a *safe place* for her colleagues. To have something negative thrown her way it will cause *some conflict* within her.

TA, she says, is an indicator of value. She knows the extent of her value as a teacher by the responses she received from the people around her. *Recognition and affirmation from them signal's a high level of value as an individual and as a teacher*. The opinions of the people do matter to her. She narrates a small anecdote in this regard: *even when I'm sick...and I can sneeze 1000 times and get 1000 blessings and I tell them, hold on. There's another one. Do not yet... and they think it is so funny*. For Viv then, it is in these details that make her *know she is valued by the people that surround her*.

5.7.6 Analysis of Viv's narrative

For Viv, teacher acknowledgment is an emotional experience rather than a tangible act or event, which provides her with a sense of self-worth and self-fulfilment. TA, she believes is a recognition or affirmation or validation of her belief of what being a teacher is. Viv also believes that TA is imperative in the early parts of one's career as a teacher and it has the potential to influence who the teacher becomes. Positive TA has the potential to contribute towards teacher development and negative TA, while it creates negative sentiments, also has the potential to contribute towards teacher development but can also compromise one's development as a teacher. Viv is also conscious of how TA presents itself, meaning that the tone and words used in acknowledging a teacher (either positive or negative) makes a difference and can lead to positive or negative outcomes. Viv believes that negative TA should be erased as quickly as possible. Viv also believes that TA should be based on the outcomes of her efforts and can be expressed either verbally, in writing or in gestures. Simple expressions of care from her colleagues and school managers or simple notes from her learners, is what she appreciates as TA. The sources of teacher acknowledgment include the self, learners, colleagues and school managers.

5.8 Alexis's Story

5.8.1 Activity selected: Letter Writing

1. Letter writing

15 Down Memory Lane
Lotus Park
Verulam
4340

28 August 2023

Dear Kesisha,

I hope you are doing well. In your previous letter you said you are interested in becoming a teacher and you asked me on my opinion about teaching because of my years of experience. In this letter, I'm going to tell you all about my experiences as a teacher thus far.

As you well know, I love teaching and I take my job very seriously. I show much passion and dedication to my career. My work is impeccable, and my love for the little kids in my class goes a long way.

i) The first experience I want to enlighten you on happened in my very first year of teaching. The primary school I attended when I was a child called and asked if I'm interested in a voluntary position as a grade R teacher and that it will be a good experience for me. I accepted because I have always dreamt to be a teacher and follow in my father's footsteps.

I arrived at the school and the principal welcomed me and told me all about the school, code of conduct and rules for educators at the school. The staff were very welcoming towards me especially those teachers who taught me when I was young. I got into the classroom and met the children for the first time and you could just see in the eyes of the children that they were afraid of getting used to somebody new. I introduced myself and started showing off my fun, childish and silly side and the children automatically started to get used to me and were more affectionate and accepting compared to how they were when they first met me. I had good class control and managed to meaningfully gain the attention of the learners at all times. The principal checked up on me quite a number of times and she was quite impressed that the learners were well disciplined and the children were actively and happily engaging in their work.

One week passed and she called me to the office and told me that she is really impressed with my work, my planning, my preparation, the way I interact with the kids, teachers and parents and she offered me a position as a grade R teacher in that school and I immediately accepted. I felt so proud of myself, so overjoyed and truly blessed. It felt amazing to see that my dream of becoming a teacher came true. After this positive acknowledgement and starting of my career I pushed forward and tried every way to make my teaching even more exciting with the learners, to involve parents as much as I can, to engage and discuss ideas with the teachers and just have a positive influence to those around me.

ii) In my second year of teaching, I had a different principal and he had a different approach on everything. In his eyes, grade R teachers were nothing and they didn't have any value at the school they were just meant to teach grade R. You weren't given any duties or any recognition above just being a grade R educator. This was really disappointing and demotivating but I pushed forward because of the children and the positive remarks I was getting from the parents. The second grade R class teacher decided to resign to work as a secretary at the school so I was given both classes to look after until another teacher should come in and I ended up looking after seventy 4-5 year olds in one classroom. Even though I had such a daunting task ahead of me I tried my best to make sure all children were taken care of and occupied and were still learning in the process even though they were sitting in many areas in the classroom, like the tables, the cubicles and carpeted areas. One child asked to use the toilet and 5 minutes had passed so I went looking for her. I searched the school for her and couldn't find her and took the matter to the office this is when it all went spiralling downwards.

The principal shouted at me and told me that because I am not a mother that is why I do not know how to look after a child. He told me that I am not fit to be a teacher and that I should reconsider my career decision because I could lose a child. He continuously shouted at me and degraded me so badly that I just broke down and cried but he still continued. I started to apologize and as I apologized the child's mother came to school. She started explaining that her neighbour saw her child outside the classroom and told her to come home one time with them so she doesn't have to walk in the heat. The child went along with them leaving her bag at school. The mother apologized for the neighbour's irresponsible behaviour by not reporting to me first before taking leave.

I accepted the apology of the parent and the principal said everything is okay to the mother but did not say anything to me. I left the office and went back to my class rethinking whether I really should be a teacher because of this. I felt defeated, insulted, demotivated and worthless all at the same time. I phoned my mum and she helped me to pick myself up again and to remember that I am doing it for the kids and should not feel judged by what the principal told me. No apology was ever given by the principal. This incident was a turning point in my career. I picked myself up and decided to use the words used against me to strengthen me and to empower me to do my job even more passionately and fiercely. Whenever I face any difficult person or situation, I choose to let it build me not break me and to also not wait for apologies that I most likely will never receive.

iii) The next principal had joined our school on my birthday and he was the best principal I have ever experienced in my whole teaching career thus far. He motivated me and told me that I can be so much more and that I should study and further myself and improve myself because he sees so much of potential in me. He saw my worth and did not limit me to "just a grade R teacher".

He should call me into his office and taught me things so I can be empowered for future managerial positions. He was a real father figure to me. I could talk to him about school, family, finances and he always gave advice in every aspect.

Him being my mentor, had the biggest impact on my life and career and because of him I felt I could do anything tackle any task, any duty even if it's something new, I knew I could do it. I have this mindset ever since then and I'm using the same mindset in my new school which I am at now and everything I take on head on and I am really grateful for the faith he had in me and for the way he empowered me.

iv) Lastly, I just want to talk to you about teaching overall and how this has been such an amazing experience for me. Teaching me have your ups and downs but at the end of the day it is the most rewarding experience. Teaching made me into the person that I am today, all my experiences shape me to who I am.

The countless lives that I have touched in all these years, the parents that I became friends with, the children who still remember me even after so many years have passed, I will never forget these precious moments.

Last week, I went to a store and someone just stopped me because he recognised me as his grade R teacher and he said "Mam, I still remember you! You were the best teacher in all my years, I am now in matric and I will do you very proud". I was brought to tears by this and just hugged him and he was so shocked that I could still remember his name. On the same day, at the same store, the cashier recognised me and told me how her child still talks about me after all these years.

This made me feel really happy, really proud and worthy of having a title of a teacher.

It doesn't matter what people say or what people may do, always remember what you are made of, what you were called to do and what you are equipped to do. Go out there and make an impact as well as I know you will do. The education department and the lives of the many learners will definitely benefit having someone like you on their side. You are a great person with amazing qualities and I know you will fall in love with this career just as much as I am.

Thank you for the love and friendship that you have given me all these years even after you moved to Johannesburg. I really miss you here in Durban, please don't forget to visit me next time you come down.

Yours Sincerely
Alexis

Figure 5.7: Alexis's letter-writing activity (see Appendix 11: Participant 4's Selected Activity – Letter Writing)

Alexis chose to write a letter to her best friend, who was interested in becoming a teacher and had asked Alexis for advice. In the letter, she explained her ideas and perceptions on TA, including her views, experiences and how such experiences affected her personal and professional being. A follow-up unstructured interview ensued thereafter to strengthen her insights regarding TA. The insights from the letter and interview were used to write the narratives below.

5.8.2 Who is Alexis?

Alexis was born in Johannesburg in 1990 and moved to Durban in the same year. She is currently 33 years old. She is an Indian female with 15 years of teaching experience, having commenced teaching as an unqualified teacher. She completed her B.Ed. Degree by attaining a NSFAS bursary in 2016, having studied through UNISA. She started teaching in 2009. She has taught various subjects in both phases. She says that she has taught grade R for 11 years (Subjects: English, Maths, Life Skills). In 2020, she taught grade 4 (Subjects: Maths, CA), grade 5 (Subject: SS) and grade 7 (subjects: NS and LO) for 2 terms. Thereafter, she got placed in another school as a Foundation Phase teacher and has taught grades 1 to 3 since 2021. (Subjects: English, Maths, Life Skills). This year she is teaching Grade 3.

5.8.2.1 Alexis's Personal and Professional Identity in relation to TA

Alexis begins her story by explaining why she chose the teaching profession. She says that she got into teaching because her *father is a teacher* and that she was inspired by him when she used to watch how he would teach while she was waiting for him to go home. She recalls imitating the way he spoke and wrote on the board and she felt *happy and confident* doing the same *especially* pretending to *mark a "register"* with her teddy bears. She mentions that as time went by the *longing to be a teacher grew*, and when the opportunity presented itself, for her to volunteer her services as a teacher, she *grabbed it with both hands*. She continues by saying that teaching has kept her *young, jovial and fun*. She sees herself as *a child at heart* and says that that's why the *kids love her, enjoy her lessons and actively participate in activities and lessons in and out of the classroom*.

For Alexis, teaching, she claims, will always be her *calling* and that she will continue to do it to the best of her ability. Her motivation for continuing to be a teacher lies in her being *acknowledged by everybody*, especially her learners.

Alexis narrates her first experience of teaching when her childhood school had called her to volunteer. Her dad was already teaching in that school and the school had a vacancy for a teacher. She describes the feeling when she went there, and she just felt like it was for her. In her own words: *This is a place for me to be and this is what I've always wanted to be from, from small*. She continues to explain that the fact that they were so *welcoming*, and this warm welcome took away the fear of

her first experience of teaching. Her initial fear was what others, including the learners that she would be teaching, would think of her as a fledgling teacher. Alexis did rationalise her taking this substitute post as her *first-time teaching experience* and that she acknowledge that this experience would give her a sense of what teaching is about. She continued her rationalisation of taking this post, even though she was unqualified as a teacher, that she could *approach someone and learn from them*.

5.8.3 How does Alexis view TA?

Alexis envisages TA to be something that she thinks can *really help a lot*. She explains that *if somebody gives you a good acknowledgement then you want to do more and you feel appreciated*. She says that positive TA should emerge from personal accomplishment of the tasks given to her as well as from external recognition from school leaders, colleagues, parents and learners either through verbal, non-verbal and textual messages. Examples of verbal messages would include sayings like, *“Oh, you do it so well”* and of textual message would include *acknowledgement photos*. These messages, she says, encourages her to do *it better* and more *enjoying* for the *children*. She gives examples of doing more in the face of positive acknowledgement and these include trying *new things like bringing to class internet, movie days and new songs* as additional activities.

Alexis explains her experience of negative TA is *emotionally draining* on her. She explains that she *gets so sad* and that this sad feeling makes her *eat as a compulsion* as a way of *dealing* with it. Alexis also says that in the context of negative TA, she will still do what she does because she *loves* her job and her *children* that she teaches. Alexis gives an example of her thoughts in response to negative TA by saying that when she goes into the classroom, her emotions *change in the face* of her children being *so happy and wanting to learn*. She says that it is her *passion* for teaching children and because she wanted to be a teacher based on her father as a role model that drives her. Alexis rationalises her drive by also saying that she is not doing it *for them* (meaning managers or leaders). She also claims that she derives her strength from spirituality, indicating that she believes that one does *everything as you're doing it unto God*. Alexis mentions, in her letter, the incident with a principal who treated *grade R teachers as nothing*. She laments how it was *demotivating* and compared it to her previous principal who encouraged her to continue to teach and to take up studies to become a teacher. Alexis affirms that there's not a *specific* kind of acknowledgement that she *needs*. To her, the children that she teachers matters most. Acknowledgement, both positive and negative, while these may have some emotional impact on her, does not destabilise her drive to continue teaching in the way she does. She uses examples of her children that *come in and hug* her and the parents of the children who meet and greet her continually. She expresses that there is *no right way* of acknowledging teachers. She elaborates by saying that one does not *need a*

certificate every week or a letter every day. For her, it's just the fact that she reads into how others *approach* her and how *relationship* with her are *harnessed*.

Alexis does still feel that *it's good to be acknowledged*. She thinks that *in every aspect of our life...it's good to be acknowledged*. She says that it's nice to have *positive and negative* acknowledgement, which she believes one can learn from.

5.8.4. Alexis's Teacher Acknowledgement Experiences and their Impact on her

Alexis narrates that her acknowledgement experiences are derived *mainly* from *the children*. She tells of the *hugs, it's always the hugs* (from the children) and explains that when COVID came they *couldn't hug anymore* but replaced the hugs with *fist bumps*, or even *shoes hits*. These actions, she says, kept the *affection* between them. She continues with examples of her experiences with her children that suggests to her their positive acknowledgements. These include, learners who *buy extra sweets* from the shop to give to her, the letters that she receives from her children that she teachers and the *way that they stand next her table in the classroom in search of attention*. Their responses when she asks them *what happened and they say... 'ma'am, you so pretty ma'am'*, she says that *it's like the fact that you could be having the worst day with, whatever and there the child will just come up to her and say, 'I'm sorry ma'am. I don't know why you sad but I'm sorry.'*

Alexis says that even with the teachers, the affection by her colleagues through various acts of endearments, are signs of positive TA. Alexis says that she loves affection and that she is glad that even teachers in her school can be *affectionate* to her. Some examples of such kinds of affection include verbal comforts like *you're working so hard – take a break*; or some request to do *confidential volunteer work* for the principal that signals the level of trust that the school leadership have on her.

Alexis also indicates that positive acknowledgement boosts her *confidence* for her and it *sets the tone* for the day for her.

Alexis also derives confidence in her teaching abilities through positive acknowledgement from her Head of Department (HoD) and believes that TA, both positive and negative improves her competence as a teacher. She relates an example of being supervised in her class by her HoD who wrote a positive report on her teaching and included the following extract: *"I am so impressed with your work and your teaching. I can send you a photo if you want that. I am really happy that this is the future of our teachers, and keep up the good work."*

Alexis says that negative TA does have an emotional impact on her for the day which sometimes last for a week. She also says that the children *sense it* and they respond

noticeably different to her on that day. The emotional turmoil is carried beyond school and into her home where she *mulls* over it, sometimes extending into a week of unpleasantness. Alexis reflects on the experiences she had with a previous principal who told her that she is *not going to be a good teacher* and that she *don't even have children* and that's why she *does not know how to look after them. You're not a mother. That's why you don't know the importance of safety'* Alexis used this negative TA experience to *better* herself.

5.8.5 Alexis's Reflection on TA

Alexis believes that positive TA enhances one's commitment to being a teacher. Having commenced teaching without a formal teaching qualification, the positive TA that she received reinforced her desire to become a teacher, which led her to take part-time courses to achieve qualified teacher status. She says that, personally positive TA *can make a very big difference in... anything... future activities.*

Alexis perceives TA as something one does not *actively seek* but believes that if taken positively, can contribute to *one's well-being as a teacher and which would lead to improving oneself on an on-going basis.* Having understood the value of TA in a teacher's personal and professional life, and now being a manager in her classroom, she acknowledges the teachers she works alongside in various ways, including verbal, written and gestures. She says that she does that for her teachers, *with the ATPs... they don't ask.*

Alexis derives the greatest acknowledgment from her learners through the letters she receives from them. She has a box wherein she *keeps all of these letters* and her learners continue to give her *letters because of keeping their previous letters in that box.* Alexis also acknowledges the TA that she receives from her school leaders and feels that *rewards in the form of certificates* makes her *feel nice* and *spurs* her on.

Alexis recognises self-acknowledgement and says that *sometimes* you should just give *yourself that pat on the back'*. She reflects on her first day walking to the grade R classroom and compares it with who she has become now and feels very *proud* of herself. Negative self-acknowledgement, she says, is also very important for her. She explains that *we are all human and we all have our days where we are just done with everybody* and that this is part of *being human.*

Alexis believes that TA is crucial *at the start* of a teacher's career based on her personal journey into being a teacher. Both, positive and negative acknowledgements, she claims helps a teacher to *grow and become resilient.* Elaborating on negative TA, she adds that *if somebody is so early in the career to tell you you're not capable or something, at the beginning, you will actually believe it and say, you know what, okay, I'm not cut out for this. If*

they can say it now maybe I'm not gonna make it to be a good teacher in the future. And why must I wreck everyone's lives, all the children's lives

5.8.6 Analysis of Alexis's Narrative

Alexis's narrative wove a story around her ideas and conceptions of TA and how she perceives TA. Her story also meanders through a flow of TA experiences and how they influence her personal and professional being. Alexis's reflections on her TA experiences also feature within her stories. Several pertinent points in relation to TA emerge from Alexis's narratives. These are discussed in the section below.

Teacher acknowledgment from Alexis is a form of recognition or implicit and explicit noticing of an instance (an act, activity or event) or attribute in a teacher. She cites several examples of such instances (e.g. *personal accomplishment of the tasks given*) and attribute (e.g. *she just felt like it was for her*) that was recognised either by herself or by others. These instances or attributes could be positive or negative, but they do stand out and are noticed, either implicitly by oneself or explicit by others (e.g. a colleague or a school manager). Alexis has experienced both positive and negative forms of TA and believes that both are necessary for the growth and development of a teacher. The positive TA, she believes, are encouraging and contributes to sustaining her resolve for becoming a teacher, while the negative TA are needed for her personal and professional development as a teacher. She also believes that some negative TA have an emotional and other effects on her and that could disrupt her professional practices as a teacher for several days to a week, suggesting that the emotional trauma of negative TA needs time for healing and after this healing period is over, reflections on the instance that warranted the negative TA is engaged upon internally by her for introspection. Some of her strategies in coping with negative TA includes eating excessively, reminding herself of why she became a teacher and the love of her children that she teaches. The forms of positive TA that she receives includes a sense of self-acknowledgement/accomplishment of the things that she has done, letters received from her learners, confidence that she receives from her managers and recognition awards. The forms of negative TA include those of reprimand by managers and exclusions. Alexis believes that teachers need both forms of TA (positive and negative) for their personal and professional growth and that these should be part of the life of a teacher.

5.9 Summative Reflections for Chapter 5

In this chapter, I showcased the narratives of the four participants. Each narrative was developed using the participants own voice and my voice to enunciate the core experiences of the participants. Each participant prior to the narrative being created engaged in either a

collage, letter-writing activity, or an object inquiry. Subsequently, an unstructured interview followed wherein the question prompts stemmed from the selected activity. The narratives of the participants were then formed from the interviews. Each narrative in this chapter displayed the respective letter, collage, or object inquiry as a precursor to the narrative story. An example of my workings with a participant's activity and interview transcript was included to visually represent how the narratives emerged. An analytical summary of the narrative followed each participant's narrative to highlight pertinent points regarding teacher acknowledgement. In the next chapter, these analytical points will feature as the basis of discussion in the development of themes and sub-themes concerning TA.

The 6th Chapter: Discussion of Findings

Shifting from Stories to Significance – Seeking Sense in Recognition and the Self

6.1 Chapter Prologue

It is the storyteller who makes us what we are, who creates history. The storyteller creates the memory that the survivors must have - otherwise their surviving would have no meaning (Achebe, 2000).

6.1.1 And I quote...

The words of Achebe (2000, p. 18) quoted above initiate a powerful resonance with this study, which explores how primary school teachers' story their experiences of acknowledgement and how these stories influence their personal and professional identities. Storytelling in the form TA narratives shared in chapter 5 and as alluded to in Achebe's (2000) assertion is an emphatically human-centred act of identity development making teachers "what we are" (Achebe, 2000, p. 18) and positioning theirs and others social, cultural and ethical stance in society (Achebe, 2000). This quote implies that the storyteller, through their interaction with us (the reader or researcher), shapes personalities and perceptions (of TA), perhaps both theirs and ours indicative in its reference to making *history* (Achebe, 2000; Gee, 2021). This chapter discusses the findings of the *histories* (narrative stories) formed by the *storytellers* (participants) in this study.

6.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

In the previous chapter, the narratives of each participant were developed and presented, followed by the analysis of each of the narratives. In this chapter, I engaged closely with the narrative analyses to show the emergence of key themes, sub-themes and findings. A cross-case analysis was the basis of this analysis of narratives in this chapter. The chapter commences with a description of how the themes for this analysis of narratives is presented as a way of presenting the findings of this study. Thereafter, a thematic presentation of the findings, are presented. The discussion of the findings, are included within each of the sub-themes and themes.

6.3 Chapter at a Glance



Figure 6.1: An overview of Chapter 6

6.4 Working with Data

The narratives itself are developed from unstructured interviews and either a letter-writing or object inquiry activity done prior to collating the data within the narrative analysis. The progression from raw data to discussion and findings appears in the form of the diagram below. The highlighted block indicates where the present chapter lies in relation to the process of data collection and data analysis.

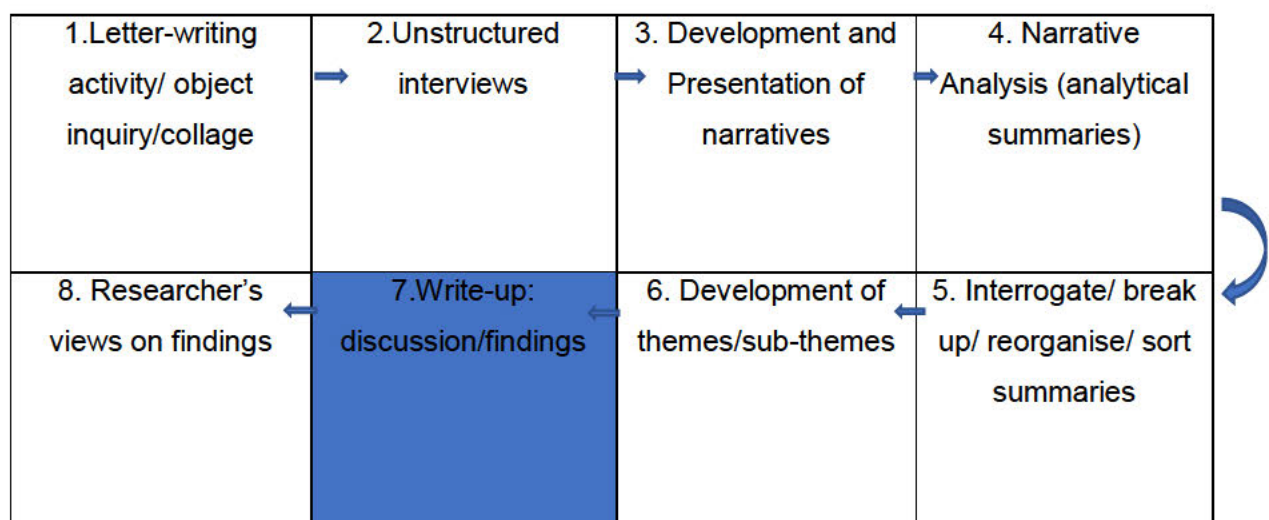


Figure 6.2: A trajectory from raw data to findings

6.5 Theme 1: Conceptualisations of TA

In this theme, the term TA was unpacked and explored first by definition and through the viewpoints of the participants in the study. The importance that teachers accrue to TA was also delved into within this theme. Thus, two sub-themes emerged from this theme, namely, *how teachers understand and define the term TA* and *the value and significance teachers attach to TA*.

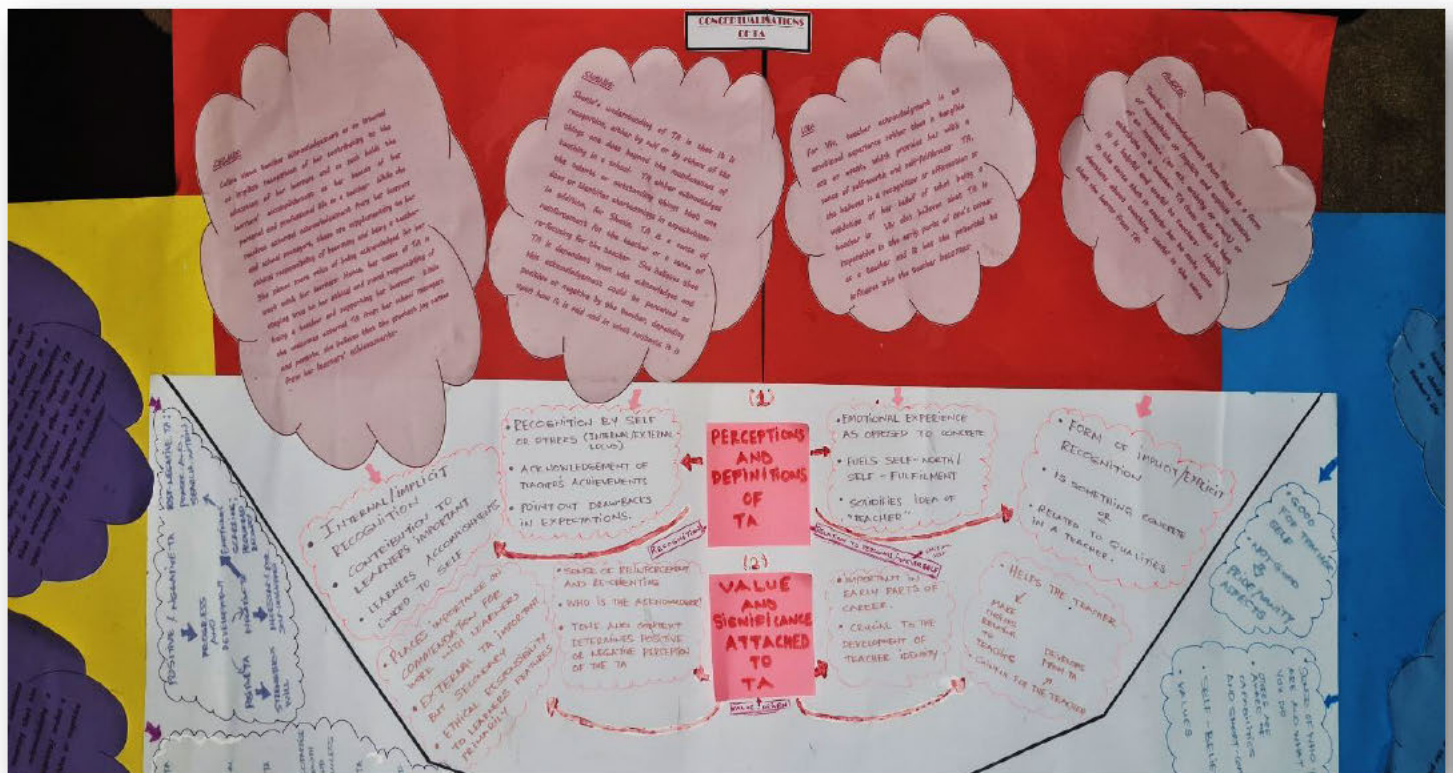


Figure 6.4: Visual representation - Theme 1

6.5.1 Sub-Theme 1: Perceptions and Definitions of TA

6.5.1.1 Introduction of Sub-theme 1 and how it relates to the study

In this study, I explored how the participants perceived the concept of TA. This sub-theme is relevant to Theme 1 in that it provides an understanding of what participants' thoughts, ideas and perceptions are about TA, narrated through their stories. Through the discussion of this theme, their conceptualisations surrounding TA emerged. It is important to find out what these ideas and conceptions are, so as to respond to RQ1: *'What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?'* and furthermore, to explore these stories of acknowledgement in relation to their personal and professional identities, as stated in the title for this study.

6.5.1.2. Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Finding 1

Finding 1: Recognition as a perception of TA

The data reveals that the participants view TA as a form of recognition, the source of which could be internal or external. That is, the participants seem to understand the term TA to mean a kind of intrinsic or extrinsic honouring of a teacher. The excerpts below are the participants' responses extracted from the narratives presented in the previous chapter and serve to validate the opening statement of this paragraph.

*Celine explained that she views TA, as emanating from her learners and describes it as best is that you get your acknowledgement from your learners. She mentions that she also gets acknowledgement from her managers, but, it somehow [intonation, emphasis] feels better when it comes from your learners. Celine reveals that she is also very intrinsically motivated and does not have to receive things in order to want to do something. It's more about how she feels about it. She means that if she feels very strongly that to achieve something and get it done, it would be because it comes from the inside, not from the outside **(Celine)**.*

*Shania defines TA as having somebody recognise your purpose. She bases this view of TA on the belief that everyone has certain talents or a purpose that one gravitates towards that brings happiness and fulfilment. For her, when it comes to acknowledging that (talent), it means that ... when somebody acknowledges us we are being 'told, you are on the right path'. **(Shania)***

*Viv views TA as something that doesn't mean monetary value, rather she acknowledges the recognition derived from others. She explains that it's a feeling that you get when somebody shows appreciation, and acknowledges what you've done for their children or for the school. **(Viv)***

*Alexis envisages TA to be something that she thinks can really help a lot. She explains that if somebody gives you a good acknowledgement then you want to do more and you feel appreciated. She says that positive TA should emerge from personal accomplishment of the tasks given to her as well as from external recognition from school leaders, colleagues, parents and learners either through verbal, non-verbal and textual messages. **(Alexis)***

The responses show acknowledgement as received from the learner as important, whilst also detailing how either internal (self) or external (other education stakeholders) recognition serves as a kind of TA.

6.5.1.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Finding 1

From the excerpts in the previous section, a clear thread of the term recognition, conceptualised as a commendation of one's duties and tasks (Movsessian, 2018), synonymous to TA emerged. That is, the conception of recognition by Movsessian (2018) aligns with the perception of TA held by the participants in this study, that TA, through the lens of recognition, is in lieu of actions they may have performed.

Finding 1, Recognition as a perception of TA also alludes to recognition as being either internal or external. Literature affirms this statement by mentioning that an operational schooling institution is reliant on the recognition of educators (Rocque et al., 2024), and that such recognition could enhance teachers' self-confidence and success through reviving their internal disposition (Zhang et al., 2023). In relation to this study, the *recognition of educators* mentioned in this instance, purports that TA may be seen or experienced, by the participants as an external form of recognition, whilst the reference to *self-confidence* and *internal disposition* implies the perception of TA as an internal form of recognition.

Similarly, dedication is the skill of knowing one's self and an activity using both intrinsic and extrinsic resources, fostering a feeling of commitment towards a duty and seeing it to fruition with purpose (Ismail et al., 2022). The participants' narratives reinforce this view of TA being a form of recognition by describing such a sense of commitment and its external aspects in stating the feeling of wanting to do more when acknowledged positively. They further mention that this feeling stems from within, hence referring to the internal aspects of recognition.

Finding 1 also refers to recognition from the learners as a perception of TA. The participants, particularly Celine, refers to viewing TA as *emanating from her learners and describes it as best is that you get your acknowledgment from your learners*. Her lens of TA is focused on the receipt of recognition from her learners by way of how she contributes to their learning and in terms of their accomplishments, as the learners are the recipients of how they experience the teacher as the primary responsibility of teaching. In other words, she views TA as a measure of responsibility when teachers disseminate information, hone in on student skills and develop the outlook and opinions of the learner (Hattie, 2003) and as such prioritise the value of TA from learners to enhance intrinsic TA.

6.5.1.4 Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Finding 2

Finding 2: Understanding of TA in relation to self: Teacher emotions

TA also relates to how the teacher feels about himself or herself, personally and professionally. There is a sense of emotion associated with the meaning of TA. That is, whilst TA is seen as a form of recognition, it also carries emotional understanding for the participants, relating not just to the teacher self, but the emotional self as well. Furthermore, this emotional meaning of TA can be both negative and positive.

At this juncture, it is important to analyse the term Teacher Emotions (TE). To do this, the word 'emotions' is first defined, and consequently leads to making sense of what TE entails in relation to this study. Emotions are a set of largely vague concepts used to describe a domain of behaviours which proves difficult to construe accurately, and to encapsulate pragmatically (Frenzel et al., 2021). It is the portal through which a person can navigate themselves and their surroundings, moving between the two like a pendulum in an existential continuum of happenings and social fields, including their reactions and encounters (Frenzel et al., 2021). Thus, the term TE in this study can be derived from this understanding of emotions. It is viewed as a multi-faceted meaning comprising overt physical expressions, including verbal and nonverbal behavioural sequences of mind-body connections which culminate into personal lived experiences (Scherer & Moors, 2019; Mulligan & Scherer, 2012) of TA.

The statements below are excerpts from the narratives of the participants which demonstrate the TE dimension of TA.

She elaborates on this sense of self acknowledgement when she can see the fruits of her emotional investment and emotional energy through the achievements of her learners.
(Celine)

She emphatically points out that 'you can't... you can't thank human beings on social media, because to her 'thank you' is a very personal thing, a very personal thing. She claims that when you are thanking somebody, it's recognising their effort and that is why they must see you face to face and be able to 'look at your satisfaction, and feel that they are worth it'.
(Shania)

With reference to a letter written by a learner to her, Viv says that, *when they speak of mums, no one can take the place of a mum...there must have been something to have triggered that child to say you are like my mum, to me it was like emotional.* **(Viv)**

Alexis explains her experience of negative TA is emotionally draining on her. She explains that she gets so sad and that this sad feeling makes her eat as a compulsion as a way of dealing with it. Alexis says that she loves affection and that she is glad that even teachers in her school can be affectionate to her. (Alexis)

The emotional aspect associated with TA features strongly across the participants' narratives. There seems to be a sense of feeling either good or bad about the self.

6.1.5.5 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Finding 2

The excerpts imply that the way in which TA is conceptualised by the participants is based within an emotional realm. That is, these excerpts display how TA links with the teacher's well-being and contentment within their workplace through their feelings and emotions. This means that TE features as a pertinent representation and determinant in the holistic well-being of the teacher (Fried et al., 2015), including how they view themselves personally and professionally.

Finding 2 (Understanding of TA in relation to self: Teacher Emotions) also suggests that self-acknowledgement as a component of TA interacts with the teacher self in a yin-yang relationship with TE. This implies that TE cannot be separated from who the teacher is on a personal level and in relation to their professional development. This close connection between self-acknowledgement and TE, including its correlative bond with both the personal and professional self, is alluded to in a study by Chen (2020). In Chen's study (2020), he mentions that regardless of the pertinence in various spheres of schooling, much of the existing research on TE focuses on the effects of TE, yet the mannerisms of TE, particularly the teachers' conceptualising of their TE experiences, are almost void. This statement points towards the value of the teacher internalising and understanding their own self-acknowledgement and how it relates to their feelings and emotions. Both Viv and Celine's narrative excerpts affirm their conceptualising of self-acknowledgement and its role in understanding TA in relation to TE.

Furthermore, within this emotional domain of TA, both the positive and negative aspects of TA seem to fuel a sense of self-worth. In the context of this study, the terms self-worth and self-esteem are used interchangeably. Mbuva (2017) supports this synonymy by stating that self-esteem is deemed as, having a sense of self-worth. According to Mbuva (2017), not much focus has been afforded to the self-worth of teachers. This view seems to be a common thread running through the excerpts in Finding 2.

Shania refers to this *worth* when *she claims that when you are thanking somebody, it's recognising their effort and that is why they must see you face to face and be able to 'look at your satisfaction, and feel that they are worth it.'* This example can be deemed as the positive facet of TA drawing on the emotions of the teacher, which then influences their feelings about themselves. In the same vein, Alexis explains how experiencing negative TA adversely impacts her emotional self. For her, experiencing a show of affection, as a kind of emotion, is key to her well-being and worthiness. Literature supports the participants' narratives in saying that, should the skills, capabilities, behaviours and accomplishments of a teacher be acknowledged by management and the community, it would enhance a feeling of self-worth within them as opposed to those individuals who do not receive such acknowledgement (Muhammad et al., 2022). Thus, they would perceive the self as a worthy possession to the organisation to which they belong (Muhammad et al., 2022).

6.5.2 Sub-Theme 2: The Value and Significance Teachers Attach to TA

6.5.2.1 Introduction of Sub-Theme 2 and how it relates to the study

In this study, I explored how the participants attached value to TA (that is, their thinking about TA and its value), and in this way is relevant to Theme 1, their conceptualisations of TA, narrated through their stories. It is important to find out what these value attachments are, so as to respond to RQ1: *'What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?'* and furthermore, to explore these stories of acknowledgement in relation to their personal and professional identities, as stated in the title for this study.

6.5.2.2 Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 2: Value and Significance Teachers Attach to TA

Finding: TA is associated with values

TA holds value and significance for teachers. This means that, TA is a value-driven concept for teachers. The following are excerpts from the teacher's narratives, which allude to TA having an element of value and importance attached to it.

Celine explains that, as a teacher, she does not become despondent when the learners perform poorly, but rather she looks at it as a way for self-improvement. For her then, it's a tool to help her improve herself.

For Shania, TA being positive or negative depends on the 'acknowledger.' She says that it lies with the person giving it... meaning 'where are they coming from?' For example, a narcissist can give you negative acknowledgement, based on his or her inferiority complex, or trying to maybe belittle you so they would feel better. On the other hand, she says that if a person is

giving her acknowledgement in a negative way, and she knows that that person is coming from a good place, for her, it's constructive. She explains: 'I will take it as something that I need to build on.' For Shania to accept acknowledgement, a person would have to earn that respect for her to put them on a pedestal and consider them as a leader. She adds that it would have to be somebody that she would like to follow but not somebody who comes from a selfish space. Referring to the latter part of this example, she will not even recognize that type of acknowledgement (from a selfish person), be it negative or positive because positive would be something they (the person with selfish intent) probably want from me. She adds: 'We've all been in this case where we were used and abused...for a purpose?'

Viv thinks that positive TA is imperative from when you start teaching, because that is your stepping stone to the rest of your career as a teacher. She reiterates that if you face the negativity there, meaning the initial point of being a teacher, it will break you, you will hate what you're doing.

Alexis believes that TA is crucial at the start of a teacher's career based on her personal journey into being a teacher. Both, positive and negative acknowledgements, she claims, helps a teacher to grow and become resilient. She adds that if somebody is so early in the career to tell you you're not capable or something, at the beginning, you will actually believe it and say, you know what, okay, I'm not cut out for this. If they can say it now maybe I'm not gonna make it to be a good teacher in the future. And why must I wreck everyone's lives, all the children's lives.

There is value attached to TA in a manner that teachers get a sense of their strengths or shortcomings and that they employ this self-knowledge to improve who they are and their behaviours and practices. The value and significance of TA is also reliant on the source of the TA and the timing of the acknowledgement in regards to where in the trajectory of their career it is given.

6.5.2.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 2

TA provides some value, whether it serves as reinforcement of good behavioural practices or for one's own improvement. That is, TA helps identify shortcomings in the teacher themselves, with the purpose of responding to them in some way. For example, Celine sees learners' poor performance as a yardstick for her own growth, rather than as a negative form of acknowledgement. For her, their underachievement propels her towards aiming higher and working on her 'self' as a teacher. She foresees this situation as an opportunity to enhance her skills, with a view towards receiving commendation for her work with the learners, as a

positive form of acknowledgement. Spruyt et al. (2021) mention that with school institutional standards on a down slope, the prediction would be that teachers perceive themselves as accountable and consequently devalued in social circles. This implies that teachers largely blame themselves and face a sense of backlash from society for the poor academic results of learners. Celine's narrative however, portrays that whilst she does feel a sense of accountability, she does not permit herself to be derailed but rather employs this responsibility of the learners' lack of performance as a metaphorical 'sling shot' towards improvement, development and betterment of the self. Literature further proposes that school functionality and efficacy is largely borne by teachers and their learners' scholastic results, judging by the knowledge discrepancy prior and post the teaching and learning experience (Spruyt et al., 2021). Hence, raw performance marks generally become a point of referral. The implication henceforth, is that teachers in schools with a greater number of underprivileged learners feel less worthy in the public's eye due to the low academic results (Spruyt et al., 2021). Celine seems to perceive this differently and puts a positive spin on an otherwise negative scenario with her sight set on inner work and enhancement, and a focus towards a forward instead of backward 'self' spiral.

The value and importance of TA also seems to lie squarely on the originator that the TA stems from. Their position or status in relation to the participants is cognisant. Shania and Alexis mention within their narratives that the TA, positive or negative, matters, depending on where and from whom it is derived. For them, if the person providing the acknowledgement is revered and holds value in their view, then any form of TA is seen as sentimental and constructive, leading towards development of the teacher and personal self. In contrast, if the acknowledger is seen in a negative light, undeserving of their respect or a person of low integrity in their eyes, the acknowledgement would be swiftly dismissed and rarely even considered. Such 'acknowledgers' referred to in the narratives may be individuals such as administrators and leaders who have the power to exact either a positive or negative effect on the teacher self, which consequently yields results in a positive or negative form for the organisation itself (Shepherd-Jones, & Salisbury-Glennon, 2018). This indicates that the style of leadership and who the administrator of TA is holds significance and value. Hence, in essence, these two factors hold 'weight' for the teacher.

In addition, the point of time that the TA is received in the lifespan of a teacher's career is of relevance. From Viv's and Alexis's story, it is perceived that TA plays an integral role from the commencement of the teacher's career, in order to set the stage for the forthcoming years. In their opinion, if the teacher is weighed down by negative TA at an early juncture in their teaching career, the harm caused would be crippling and destructive to the self, resulting in

despising their work and tasks expected from them as teachers. In other words, their narratives imply that negative TA that is received right at the outset and in the formative years of teaching could 'tire' the teacher out and result in teacher fatigue. Santoro (2021) affirms this notion, that teacher fatigue, which particularly affects novice teachers, indicates that an individual teacher has limited affective and bodily capabilities and that fatigue swiftly depletes these capabilities, and that the exhaustion further affects their efficacy and job performance. The suggestion is that teachers are expected to grow more tolerant to enhance their resilience in intense job situations (Santoro, 2021). Such 'forbearance' towards negative TA received, particularly in the initial teaching years, is precisely what Viv and Alexis's stories frown upon. In addition, degradation of a teacher's will, that is negative TA, adds to teacher attrition in the early years due to feelings of inadequacy in meeting work-related demands allotted to them by others, whilst degraded teachers, also perceive leaving the profession in lieu of being unable to meet work-related demands accrued on their own selves (Santoro, 2021). Hence, negative TA at the start of a teacher's career may result in an abrupt and premature exit of the profession. Thus, in review of the points discussed in this section, it seems plausible to suggest that TA holds value early on in a teacher's work life and can cause teachers to either reach great heights or sink into the depths of despair.

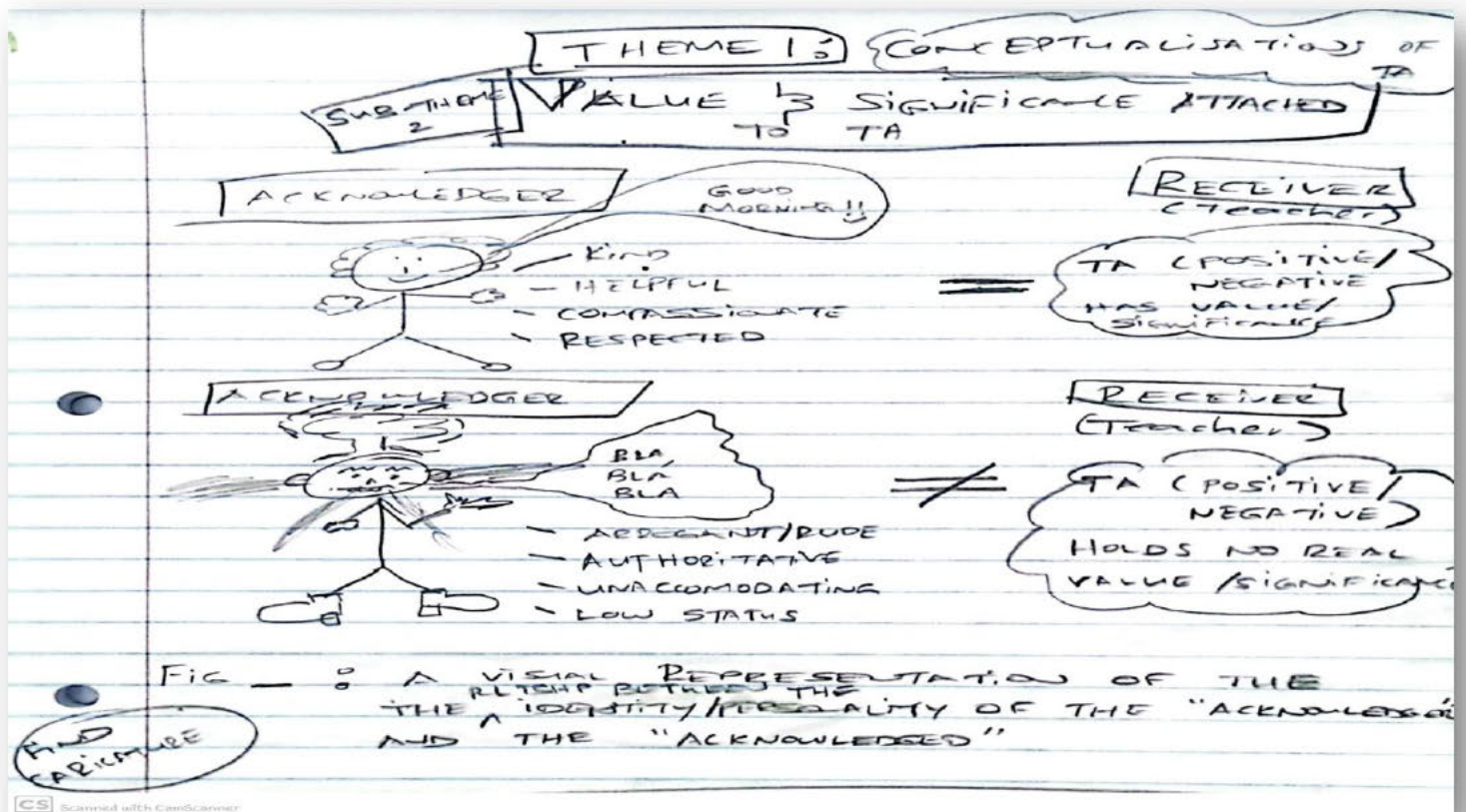


Figure 6.5: Working with data for sub-theme 2: how the source of TA bears significance

part of responding to RQ2: *How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?*

6.6.1.2 Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Verbal and Textual Forms of TA

Finding: Teachers experience both verbal and textual forms of TA as important, but seem to prefer mostly verbal forms of TA from their colleagues, and both verbal and textual forms of TA from learners

Data presented in the previous chapter shows that teachers experience both verbal and textual forms of TA. Chapman and White (2019) define these forms of acknowledgement as 'words of affirmation' and a kind of recognition in writing or verbalised format affirming an achievement or identity characteristic that is worthy. Hence, verbal forms of TA can be interpreted as those kinds of recognition that are experienced orally or in an audible manner and textual forms of TA bear reference to a written or pictorial format of praise and worthiness, both acknowledging a character trait or successful performance of value.

To demonstrate how these two forms of TA engage with teachers' idea of appreciation, snippets of the teachers' stories in this regard follow. The excerpts are separated into how these two forms of TA are perceived by teachers when received from their learners and subsequently when received from their colleagues. The snippets which follow further allude to which form of TA, that is, verbal and/or textual forms of TA, teachers seem to favour from their learners, and which forms of TA are preferred in regards to their colleagues' acknowledgement of them.

Forms of TA received from learners

She feels recognised by her learners through the *letters that they write* to her. She says that she also feels acknowledged by her learners by *the way they greet* her in the mornings. Celine also indicated that *acknowledgement comes from when the learners get the correct answers in class, and explains that this lets you know that what you're doing is making a difference*. She adds that she feels *acknowledged by her learners when they can open up to her, talk to her about challenges they have in their work or even at home*. **(Celine)**

Sometimes learners will write you a little letter, come to you and tell you ma'am or write a little note in the book and uhhh... it's coming from a very innocent space. She thinks that when *you're acknowledged by a child, it cements the fact that she is doing something right in the eyes of the child saying that 'ultimately that's what we are there for' and not for our managers, nor for government but rather for the child in the class*. She adds: *'We are the tyre that hits the ground.'* **(Shania)**

Viv reflects about learners who approach her and still recognise her after several years have passed. She says that *you don't know what a feeling it is, it is just too precious. You hold on to it. Sometimes, if I go to a petrol station, there's a pump boy... he says ma'am, you taught me, you remember me?* She further describes the notes her learners write to her and the meaning they hold for her. In her words, *so these little notes they can be on... as I told you, they were on such a scrap pieces of paper with such poor vocabulary, but I could understand what the child was getting across to me. So, to me that I don't need any other acknowledgement, monetary, not anything, just that child to say, 'mam, you made a difference and that, means a lot to me' (Viv)*

Alexis derives the greatest acknowledgement from her learners through the letters she receives from them. She has a box wherein she keeps all of these letters, and her learners continue to give her letters because of keeping their previous letters in that box. In addition to the letters that she receives from her children that she teaches, Alexis mentions the *way that they stand next her table in the classroom in search of attention*. Their responses when she asks them *what happened and they say... 'mam, you so pretty mam'*, she says that *it's like the fact that you could be having the worst day with, whatever and there the child will just come up to her and say, 'I'm sorry ma'am. I don't know why you sad but I'm sorry.'* (Alexis)

Drawing from the above snippets of data, textual forms of TA, especially from their learners, is valued by teachers suggesting further that these TA from learner are more authentic to teachers because it gives these teachers the sense that their direct and purposive engagement with learners as their (teachers) core responsibilities, leading to their validation of their role as teachers in a school system. TA received from learners both in a verbal and textual form are favoured by teachers. Several examples mentioned in the narrative excerpts, reiterate this point, such as, when learners write a letter or a note expressing their appreciation (textual TA) or merely complimenting the teacher; confiding in the teacher; or sometimes vocalising empathy for what a teacher may be experiencing; or even when they recognise the teacher after several years have passed and approach the teacher to verbalise their joy at seeing them (verbal TA) all of which Celine, Alexis, Shania and Viv mentioned in their narratives. This kind of verbal and textual acknowledgement from learners seems to soothe teachers in a 'coping balm' with their daily difficulties at work (Gradišek et al., 2020). Thus, it can be likened to fulfilling in teachers, a type of 'calling' (Gradišek et al., 2020). Hence, working with young people in this instance, seems to fuel a sense of job satisfaction which in turn translates into an overall 'feel-good' mind set (Richardson & Watt, 2006 cited in Gradišek, et al., 2020). That is, both verbal and textual forms of TA from the learner, seems to be enjoyed

by the teacher as it closes a chasm of the need to belong. It engenders a feeling of comfort as it is perceived as rising out of innocence, genuineness and meaningfulness.

Forms of TA received from colleagues

Some of the acknowledgement phrases, suggested by Celine, which her school managers could use to show acknowledgement includes *I saw you go the extra mile, I see the improvement you've made in this child's life. Keep going. You're doing well.* **(Celine)**

In addition, she mentions: *'You have your colleagues as well...maybe your friend would coordinate something' and 'if I go to my friend to say well done. It's also positive.'* With colleagues, she feels that there is always *the complementing of each other, support and cheering each other on...* **(Shania)**

Viv exclaims how *nice it would be to be acknowledged* by her colleagues sometimes. She cites an example of the kind of acknowledgement she would like to receive, by saying: *when you do something or you've achieved something, to say well done! Good work! I couldn't have done it better.* She views it as *just those small little things...* She adds other examples of acknowledgement by saying that *now and again if they want to, they can say uhh you're senior, so I'll give you the time off, I'll acknowledge you, take the time off as a form of reward or you're serving relief today. No, ma'am. It's okay. I will serve relief.* For Viv, it's those little things that acknowledges her as a *person and showing compassion.* **(Viv)**

Alexis says that she *loves affection* and that she is glad that even teachers in her school *can be affectionate* to her. Some examples of such kinds of affection include *verbal comforts like you're working so hard – take a break; or some request to do confidential volunteer work for the principal that signals the level of trust that the school leadership have on her.* **(Alexis)**

Drawing from the excerpts on TA from colleagues or school leaders, verbal, and sometimes acknowledgment by managers through giving teachers greater responsibilities is appreciated by teachers. These verbal acknowledgements and additional responsibilities given by their managers are suggestions of them being noticed and appreciated and are considered external forms of rewards, tangible and intangible in nature.

6.6.1.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Verbal and textual Forms of TA

According to Movsessian (2018), it is integral to learn the forms of acknowledgement that teachers desire to effectively keep teachers buoyed in the teaching profession. This study affirms Movsessian's (2018), notion of supporting teachers in keeping afloat in the teaching field. One way of doing this is to find out what they understand and seek in terms of verbal

and textual forms of acknowledgement. The narrative clips documented in the previous subsection suggest that both verbal and textual forms of TA are significant for teachers. That is, both TA forms are considered important by teachers. The findings below elaborate further on the nature of this significance.

In a study by Grillo and Kier (2021), eight out of nine participants perceived supervisor feedback as valuable and special, irrespective if the comments were made on a public platform or in a personal capacity. One particular participant clearly recounts an incident of validation wherein her principal verbally acknowledged her presence for all school functions and further praised her by relating this committed attendance by alluding to how her classroom space might be. This example demonstrates the value of verbal TA for teachers.

In this study such joint acknowledgement of colleagues' proficiencies and skills is mentioned by participants as manifesting, for them, in a verbal form. Pesonen et al. (2021) purport that effective collaborative team-teaching stems from a reciprocal and symbiotic association. Furthermore, such an interrelation consists of traits including shared admiration for a work partner's proficiency, abilities and insights (Pesonen et al., 2021). These verbal forms of TA are evident within the participants' narratives when they describe how management could acknowledge when a teacher goes *'the extra mile'* and encourages them to *'keep going'*; or using words such as *'well done'* or *'good work'* and even noticing how hard a teacher is working and telling them to *'take a break'*. All of these verbal cues signal that participants favour verbal TA from their colleagues and management members.

The discussions thus far, reveal that teachers accept and identify with both forms of TA analysed here, and whilst they acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between verbal and textual forms of TA, they differ in how they interpret these forms and which of the two they feel more inclined to receive from learners (verbal and textual) and colleagues (mostly verbal) respectively.

6.6.2 Sub-Theme 2: Physical and Emotional Forms of TA

6.6.2.1 Introduction of sub-theme 2 and how it relates to the study

Sub-theme 2 delves into the physical and emotional facets of TA. These two facets of TA and their exploration within this study are important in formulating a response to RQ2: *How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?*

These two forms of TA will first be conceptualised under separate headings to provide an understanding of each form and its nature and characteristics, followed by the analysis of findings and the discussion thereof.

Physical Forms of TA

Body language, a form of nonverbal interaction, is integral to interpersonal ways of communication (Kucuk, 2023). Body language (seen as physical TA in this study) is defined as nonverbal transmission of messages and feelings by means of physical gestures, body positions, and facial and ocular cues (Kucuk, 2023). Examples of such body language or physical forms of TA refer to acknowledgement experiences whereby a teacher gets a pat on the back (Movsessian, 2018) or a congratulatory handshake from a colleague upon completing a task or performance. It may even manifest in the form of congratulatory celebrations such as award ceremonies or farewell events (Movsessian, 2018). Another example may be the sharing of resources or gestures in getting classroom duties done (e.g. *She says that she does that for her teachers, with the ATPs... they don't ask*, which Alexis speaks of). A simple smile or a nod of encouragement that may help to spur the teacher on (e.g. Shania alludes to - *it doesn't have to be communication words, but it can be an action*) further serves as a form of physical praise and affirmation. From learners, these kinds of physical TA may include a thumbs-up, fist-bump, high-fives or small tokens like gifts, drawings or notes are mentioned in this study, as recalled by Alexis and other participants. Attentive listening in class or standing up to show respect when a teacher walks in (mentioned within Celine's narrative acknowledgement from learners is *to show respect*) are other forms of physical TA from learners. A hug in the morning from a learner or work friend, for instance, (a comment made by Viv as part of her experiences shared) can foster feelings of joy and help teachers to navigate the complexities of their workday with renewed vigour and resilience (as will be described in the narrative quotes in the next section).

Emotional Forms of TA

Emotional forms of TA, occur when learners or colleagues express their feelings of appreciation and gratitude towards teachers. It is a form of validation expressed by feelings of joy. According to Barrett et al. (2019), an individual's affective being is easily discernible from the individual's facial motions, what is commonly known as facial or affective articulations. This means that the way a person feels (their emotions), is easily read on their faces through their facial movements or expressions. Such facial cues are a particularly important measure in pedagogical fields such as a primary school, due to their ability to convey a range of affective outcomes, namely, excitement, lack of interest, surprise or joy (Kucuk, 2023). These emotions

as forms of TA and their interaction with physical forms of TA are discussed in the analysis and findings section below.

6.6.2.2 Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Physical and Emotional Forms of TA

Finding: Physical forms of TA influence the emotional forms of TA and vice versa

The narratives presented in chapter 5 reveal that there is a close relationship between physical and emotional forms of TA, whereby the both forms rely on each other in a kind of interdependent cohesion. That is, one form cannot be isolated from the other. The short pieces of the participants' stories which follow provide key features of this claim.

Celine mentions *personal recognition by school managers when given a pat on the back*, Viv talks of forms of TA being *something incidental, for example, it's like just passing by and asking: Are you okay? Just a tap on the shoulder... You know, I know you are here*. She goes on to explain that *it may be different for another colleague but that to her it's a simple, hug, or thumbs-up, an 'I know you exist or thank you so much.'* To Viv, that acknowledgement means more than *buying a big present at the end of the year to say, 'thanks, ma'am*. Alexis says *it's always the hugs (from the children)*. Alexis also explains that when COVID came they couldn't hug anymore but *replaced the hugs with fist bumps, or even shoes hits*. These actions, she says, *kept the affection between them*. She continues with examples of her experiences with her children that suggest to her *their positive acknowledgements*. These include learners who *buy extra sweets from the shop to give to her (gifts in previous section)*, the letters that she receives from her children that she teaches and the way that they *stand* next to her table in the classroom in search of attention.

From these narrative extracts, it is evident that the participants perceive acts and gestures such as a pat on the back from colleagues, learners buying sweets, and learners standing by the desk for attention, as physical forms of TA. On closer inspection of each of the participants' statements above, there is a clear undertone of the affective state of TA emerging, even when the statement carries a message of the physical aspects of TA. These finding statements are elaborated on, within the discussion of findings section below.

6.6.2.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Physical and Emotional Forms of TA

Psychology has long since affirmed that our physical and affective states of being are interconnected. Emotions can be described as our response to events and occurrences and can be connected to what makes us human beings (Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, what exists

and transpires on a physical level transcends into an emotional level with the emotions experienced within this transactional engagement in turn affecting the experiences in the physical realm.

For example, from the excerpts above, Celine speaks of personal recognition by way of a *pat on the back*, and whilst this is a physical gesture, the implication deduced is that impact will be felt as an emotional experience. In Viv talking about checking if one is *okay, just a tap on the shoulder...I know you are here*, tells of how these physical acts will possibly make the teacher 'feel' which connects with the emotional state of the recipient, in essence becoming an emotional form of TA. Alexis too explains how in the absence of hugs during Covid19 and with this gesture being replaced by shoe hits which kept the *affection* between her the students, thus showing how the physical TA evoked a sense of 'feeling' and can thus how the physical form of recognition could also be considered an emotional form of TA. Even further, her examples of the physical acts of *buying extra sweets to give her* or *standing next to her table* have the emotive element of how these acts of 'love' and 'seeking attention' make her feel acknowledged.

Derived from these findings is the influence of the physical form of TA (bodily gestures and physical acts) as going beyond merely existing in social situations but, into the emotional self of teachers (Kucuk, 2023). These physical acts of TA extend towards playing a major role on how teaching and learning transpires in schools (Kucuk, 2023). Physical acts of TA, synonymous it seems, to body language and gestures, are unspoken symbols that are employed by teachers and learners within learning interactions to communicate knowledge and articulate emotions (Kucuk, 2023). It is evident from the extracts quoted in this section that physical TA serves as a way to maintain and enhance affective state in the school environment. Hence, these unspoken signals inherent in facial cues, physical gestures and body posture can shape how the teacher feels, acts and thinks within the overall interactional systems of education.

These simple acts of physical touch and conscious gestures of motivation are vital for a teacher's well-being (emotional aspect of the self) and perseverance in the teaching field. They act as reminders of the value and worth a teacher holds in the lives of learners or colleagues alike.

6.6.3 Sub-Theme 3: Social and Cognitive Forms of TA

6.6.3.1 Introduction of Sub-Theme 3 and how it relates to the study

Sub-theme 3 discusses social and cognitive forms of TA, under the umbrella theme of Forms of TA. Like the previous two sub-themes, namely, verbal and textual forms of TA and physical and emotional forms of TA, sub-theme 3, social and cognitive forms of TA, attempts to respond to RQ2: *How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?* The ensuing sub-section commences by defining these two forms of TA and explaining their relevance to this study.

Social Forms of TA

Teachers feel motivated, perform better and interact more cohesively within a school environment, wherein recognition is given prominence (Meng & Briscioli, 2024). Social recognition, specifically, is a multi-structural phenomenon extending further than personal or singular achievements and encompasses a holistic affirmation from colleagues, learners and other stakeholders in the school as an institution (Strongman, 2017, cited in Meng & Briscioli, 2024). From these literary sources, social forms of TA, then, are definitive of acknowledgement that is collective and cohesive, involving a group of people recognising an individual's overall contribution and value within the education field. Furthermore, individuals have an inherent need to be accepted and affirmed; hence, work life within the school field moves beyond the professional protocols of indifference within social interactions, to the comfort of interpersonal contact that features a personal element to it (Hargreaves, 2001). Thus, in mapping out the meanings associated with social forms of TA, the subjective geographies of teachers, interspersed with collegial and collaborative relationships shared with peers, is cognisant of the conceptualisation that teaching as a collective (team), far outdoes teaching in isolation (Hargreaves, 2001).

Cognitive Forms of TA

In this study, this form of TA relates the acknowledgement of the teacher's insights, problem solving skills and ability to think critically. It includes recognising the teacher's contributions and abilities by entrusting them with higher-end tasks, for example, which translates into recognition of their intellect and expertise. According to Sullanmaa's et al. (2024) study, this type of professional recognition attained from work peers offered a sense of vocational autonomy within professional societies, improving their work ethic, their ideas surrounding efficiency and competency, and their abilities to grow and develop within such societies (Sullanmaa et al., 2024). The supporting idea here, is that conscious growth and development within professional circles can be promoted by means of professional recognition (Sullanmaa

et al., 2024). Hence, cognitive forms of TA allude to the amount of professional agency a teacher has to perform tasks that demand a higher-order level of thinking and skill set.

6.6.3.2. Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 3: Social and Cognitive Forms of TA

Finding: Social and cognitive forms of TA as concepts of collaboration and social and professional recognition

Social and cognitive forms of TA were featured within the narratives in chapter 5. The recognition of teacher's competencies and skills, together with the value of networking and collaborating as key features of social and cognitive forms of TA which McGrath (2023) and Mezza (2022) speak of, bore relevance to this study of TA and the way the presence or absence thereof, enhanced teachers' ways of reinventing their personal and professional space. Whilst other participants mentioned cognitive aspects of TA exclusively (for example, when Alexis mentions requests from the principal to do *confidential volunteer work* that signals the level of trust that the school leadership have on her). I make a poignant point here, in the showcasing of only one participant's narrative wherein this finding (including both social and cognitive forms of TA) took prominence. Four segments of Shania's lived experiences follow, amplifying this point and describing the finding in more detail.

Segments 1: She believes that, as a collective, they are a *team*, clarifying that they (meaning her colleagues) *stand united in everything* and that even if somebody was doing something *wrong*, they all took *responsibility* for it.

Segments 2: For Shania then, *all stakeholders who are involved in education be it... colleagues, parents, leaders, the Department of Education (DoE) as well, our employees which will be part of DoE, and communities as well* are all important sources of TA. She mentions that the school *just recently had two large community functions: the prom, and graduation which we (the teachers) attended, and served 'for the benefit of our children', and for the parents' consumption as well.* She says that *parents have acknowledged and thanked the teachers.* She thinks that *that is very important... because we (the teachers) tend to be forgetful in remembering how important and how good we (the teachers) are in shaping a country, shaping the world.* She concludes: *'We need a little reminder now and again...'*

Segment 3: Shania explains further that *teachers also need to get acknowledged in staff meetings.* She says: *'very often we find situations where everything that's going wrong is mentioned in the staff (meetings), but not much that is going right.* She thinks that there *'needs to be a move away from that paradigm of thinking where we only acknowledge the negative and not the positive'* because *'when you (managers) do that, you (managers and teachers)*

are not in harmony, you (teachers) are disempowered.' Shania stresses that *as managers, as leaders, as people that are in leadership roles, they need to not forget who put them there and uhh the people who put them there are the people that they need to...* Shania backtracks at this juncture and catches herself before continuing; *'ok wrong choice of word... and I say make happy...but its people that they need to satisfy to move anything forward.'* She explains that this is *because once people are happy, 'everything you need...the universe, you don't even have to lift a finger. It will come and it will happen.'* She expresses in a disillusioning tone: *'But uhh unfortunately, there's not many people that are workshoped in leadership in this country. They don't know, they've lost the plot.'*

Segment 4: Another incident Shania relates is when she *was given a school policy to sign and she refused to sign the policy as she did not communicate and escalate it to the members of the union of which she represents 14 people.* In her opinion, there must be *debate, dialogue and collaboration with each other* which to her are important forms of *communication in acknowledging the voice of teachers.* **[Shania]**

Shania's narrative excerpts capture both social and cognitive forms of TA and her inclinations about both these forms. For her, both forms of TA discussed here relate to collaboration and the concept of working together and refer to recognition of a teacher's contributions and competencies. Whilst social forms of TA are linked to the concept of social recognition, cognitive forms of TA are associated with professional forms of recognition, both forms sharing a public platform for TA.

6.6.3.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 3: Social and Cognitive Forms of TA

There is a clear thread of how social and cognitive forms of TA fare in the current sense towards future projections of how these forms should pan out, from the descriptions within the above-mentioned participant's shared narratives. The following are some points of note which Shania expresses with much gusto to drive home the finding that these two concepts are mainly definitive of its collaborative feature embedded in social and professional ways of acknowledgement. These ways are:

1. Thinking as a collective, recognising the importance of togetherness in all circumstances
2. All stakeholders bear the responsibility for fostering and maintaining social and cognitive forms of TA, the effects such recognition reminders are longstanding
3. Major school events such as prom or graduation are opportunities for these forms of TA to manifest and grow

4. Staff meetings are a good platform for acknowledging teachers' competencies, contributions and serve not only as a means of social networking but a manner of unitedly affirming the teacher via such interpersonal interactions in a positive as opposed to constantly focusing on affirmations of negative nature.
5. Highlighting the consequences for SMT, of hyper-focusing solely on negative social affirmations
6. Responsibility of playing a leading role, such as being a union representative (a cognitive, high-end task as a form of TA) is cognisant of the collaborative and dialogical features of social forms of TA

6.7 Theme 3: Teacher Learnings derived from TA

Whilst previous themes accounted for how TA is perceived (Theme 1) and applied (Theme 2), this theme delves into the learnings that teachers derive from both their personal and professional TA experiences. Such learnings show how TA becomes a position of introspection, identity development and meaning formation. This third theme was a merging of two initially separate themes, effects of TA and learnings of TA which shared several overlapping concepts and ideas (see figure 6.3 a and 6.3 b).

This theme takes an in-depth look into analysing the learnings for teachers emerging from TA experiences, the effects on the teachers' personal and professional self and consequently, the way in which they navigate their teaching practices. The analysis and findings which follow are embedded within the narratives shared in chapter 5 and strive to respond to *RQ3: How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?* Theme 3 analysis and finding discussions are divided under the following three sub-themes: Learnings about TA, Personal learnings for teachers and, Professional learnings for teachers.

6.7.1 Sub-Theme 1: Learnings about TA

6.7.1.1 Introduction of Sub-Theme 1 and how it relates to the study:

This sub-theme highlights teachers' perceptions about the nature and meaningfulness of TA. Such learnings are integral to this study in that it exposes teachers' shifting knowledge of TA as an evolving, multidimensional and affectively-nuanced concept as opposed to being something that is standard and straightforward. It also describes their awareness that TA is based on social constructs and situational specificities and further relates to their sense-making of the self and their work practices.

6.7.1.2. Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Learnings about TA

[Finding 1: Learning: TA is dynamic process](#)

Participants, through their narratives, described the dynamic nature of TA. That is, they interpreted TA as, not merely a singular occurrence or act, but influenced by time constructs, deliberateness and interpersonal conditions. The following extract is an example from Shania's narrative about this learning:

She explains that *we had a great leader who has since passed away*. She continues that *he was a person that... understood his staff and he used to push her to the limit not disempowering her while doing that but he nurtured and took her under his wing and all he wanted was to be the best for all his staff*. Shania says that *all that was short-lived because within a few months, things just started heading south in terms of... undercurrents ...towards him, where he lost his will*. To her, he lost *the enthusiasm and that eagerness that was so infectious* that when someone would *come out of his office* they would think *'I am going to conquer the world, that's how powerful I am.'* She says further that *it was unfortunate, the way things at school...with underhandedness and manipulation, that a good man who was a blessing to have on this earth, let alone the school... life was cut short*. She adds: *'We would have gone from good to great under his leadership... and we are at the moment stifled, we are in limbo, if not deteriorating.'*

Thus, Shania reveals her learnings of how TA can occur in an evolving manner (in this case, the TA landscape changed from favourable to unfavourable) over space of time, with deliberate ill-intent and within relational contexts.

Finding 2: TA can be viewed by teachers as either having positive or negative effects

The data further revealed that TA can be seen by teachers as having, either positive or negative effects on their selves. When TA was meted out negatively, teachers felt degraded or suffered an emotional disconnect from their jobs. In contrast, when TA was meaningfully dealt out, teachers felt a will to continue with their work and a sense of belonging. These learnings (positive and negative) are presented below, as annotated snippets (Viv's and Shania's) from the full narratives in chapter 5 where this learning is evident:

Viv speaks about a sense of belonging by saying that she is here *to make a difference*. *So, to me, having done what I've done, and having that one child acknowledge me to say ma'am you belong where you are, this is your right profession It's just those little things that they say or they do that makes you feel you know what...everything's gonna be okay, let me just be where I am, I belong here.*

Shania abhors when *negative teacher acknowledgement* is meted out to her peers. She becomes *enraged* if leaders and managers are *callous with 'infecting' the mind of a teacher,*

and that it *means they don't care about the child* because that *'infection' will inevitably go to the child*. Her opinion is that *the approach is really important*. For example, *if a teacher comes into school first thing in the morning, you decide that you want to call this teacher in and you deal with this teacher in a critical manner, to destabilise the mind of the teacher*, then in that way you will be *destabilising the mind of about 200 children that the teacher is going to see on that day*. To Shania, *'you can give negative acknowledgement'* but it should be such that *people come out from there being better than what they are before they come in not where the teacher leaves the school premises not wanting to even come back the next day*.

Viv's example shows her awareness of how TA can have a positive effect by enhancing her sense of motivation and her feelings of belonging. Shania's excerpt reveals her insight into how TA can cause a teacher to suffer a sense of demoralisation and emotional distance from work.

Finding 3: Teachers understand that TA is necessary for well-being

Teachers showed understanding that TA is important for their well-being. In many instances, they stated that recognition enhanced their emotional stability especially within challenging school contexts. The excerpt below is one such example:

Shania believes that TA is important to *an extent*, and explains that *when we are busy with life, itself, and there's so much of things to do in a day including many challenges, we tend to forget how important we really are and that it can all become a little bit mundane and robotic*. She feels that *it's good when somebody gets you refocused reminding you of your purposes*. Shania mentions that she does not need TA for her own self-worth but that it's important to *hear it now and again, 'in the midst of everything happening*.

Shania understands that TA is needed to promote general well-being, in the midst of work challenges.

6.7.1.3 Discussion of Findings for Sub-Theme 1: Learnings about TA

The findings reveal that teachers realise the dynamism and relational nature of TA. This aligns with Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, whereby recognition is seen as nuanced, evolving and inter-relational. Learnings about the positive and negative effects of TA, indicate that teachers know and understand the semiotic and discursive undertones that meaning is constructed through affective interactions and that TA an essential fuel for overall well-being.

6.7.2 Sub-theme 2: Personal Learnings for Teachers

6.7.2.1 Introduction of Sub-Theme 2 and how it relates to the study

In this sub-theme, the focus is on the personal learnings that teachers articulated in regards to being recognised. Theme 1, having dealt with their understandings about the nature of TA itself, turns focus now, on how these TA experiences shaped their emotional and self-awareness, their self-confidence and their social value.

6.7.2.2. Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 2: Personal Learnings for Teachers

Finding 1: TA has intrinsic and extrinsic value that contributes to teachers' personal well-being

The narratives revealed that TA enabled teachers to see themselves differently. In some cases, acknowledgement reinforced elements of their personality or ability that they had not fully recognised themselves. Shania's excerpt below, exemplifies these statements:

Shania says that she is *guarded* at her school *about what she says, about what she lets go from herself from her heart and about being ridiculed and mocked at*. She recalls how she *found out that she was given a nickname of a politician that 'talks a lot but knows nothing.'* She also remembers *once when, the teachers were having a workshop and she raised her hand to ask a question and there was like whispering and uproar in the back, as if to say: 'there she goes again, Oh my God!' She says: 'I don't know what got into me on the day I stood up, and I said, don't do that. Please don't do that.'*

This excerpt reveals how Shania's knowledge of and confidence in, her personal self, emerged from this TA encounter. Being able to know how to respond intrinsically (thoughts about how to counter the ridicule) and express this response extrinsically (by speaking up for herself) contributed positively to her personal well-being.

Finding 2: TA contributes to knowledge of the self in terms of humanistic attributes

Teachers' narratives shared, showed that TA enhanced their ability to reflect on who they are as human beings, not just as teachers. Such reflections engender humanistic learnings such as kindness and care, shown to them which inspires them to continue in the same way. Viv's extract displays this, below:

She highlights a defining learning and appreciation from her previous principals by saying that *I think the best thing I got was... they taught me how to be human. You know?* Viv recalls that

it was that approach that led me to want to continue today ... reiterating that, that is why she is here for so long.

Thus, Viv's self-awareness in this example, is rooted in humanistic values of humility and compassion.

Finding 3: TA has socialising effects

Teachers further introspected on the socialising effects of TA. Such effects promoted deeper collegial connections in the school context. Viv speaks of this as follows:

Viv's TA experiences have taught her that if you get positivity coming towards you, you are going to give back positivity. When you get negativity, you are going to say NOTHING. You don't care.

This concise extract hints that TA whilst being personally affirming is also socially enabling in that it can enhance interpersonal relations and foster a sense of professional cohesion.

6.7.2.3 Discussion of findings for sub-theme 2: Personal Learnings for Teachers

The personal learnings shared by teachers suggests that TA serves as a vital part of shaping their personal self. Their learnings that recognition having both intrinsic and extrinsic worth, also enhanced their affective well-being. Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition affirms this whereby emotional elements with respect to self-confidence is promoted through being noticed and considered as worthy by others. This also aligns with Zee and Koomen's (2016) and Andrews (2011) views about empathy and care as humanistic attributes fostering self-awareness. Lastly, the social effects learning in finding 3, revealed teachers' that teachers noted acknowledgement as a connection-building device amongst colleagues thus affirming its socialising effects (Zakaria et al., 2021).

6.7.3 Sub-theme 3: Professional Learnings for Teachers

6.7.3.1 Introduction of Sub-Theme 3 and how it relates to the study

This sub-theme highlights the professional reflections of teachers from their TA experiences. While sub-theme 2 focused on personal and emotional learnings, this sub-theme captures how recognition enabled teachers to reassess their professional roles, duties and ability to make professional decisions. Hence, the attention in this section, is not on their personal affective affirmations but how they viewed themselves operating in the school context in a professional capacity.

6.7.3.2. Analysis and Findings for Sub-Theme 3: Professional Learnings for TA

Finding 1: TA gives an indication of their roles and responsibilities as a teacher and reminds them of the purpose of being a teacher

Teachers described through their narratives, that TA guided them towards a clearer idea of their roles and responsibilities as professionals. It answered their 'why', in terms of choosing teaching as a career.

As an individual, Celine interacts with her learners on a very personal level saying that *owing to the many sad contextual factors* her learners face on a daily basis she always ensures they know she is their *second mother* and they can go to her *anytime and for anything*. Celine also mentions how her professional involvement with her learners *actually fits in well* with who she is, because she *draws from the well of her own soul* when she teaches. She elaborates that *every hour spent, activities done, planning etc.* done by her is done with these *professional and personal traits in mind*. She says that *in essence, these qualities make her into the teacher* her learners and colleagues see every day. She firmly adds that she *means every day because she also believes in consistency*.

Recognition for Celine, in this instance, gave her a sense of her duty towards the learners and cemented the reason she is in the professional position (of teacher) that she holds. She serves them as a dedicated teacher and is present for them even on a personal level and this fulfils her purpose in being a teacher.

Finding 2: TA gives teachers an indication of their contribution to the learners, their colleagues and the school

Teachers reflect that TA communicates feedback about how they contribute professionally and that their existence is meaningful to learners, colleagues and the school context as a whole. Shania expresses this finding below:

For Shania, the teacher is *in a very powerful situation when they stand in front of the classroom because they're dealing with ... with children that they can mould and groom*. For her, *the most exciting thing is being an educator in South Africa*. With its *harmful past that mentally and psychologically damaged people* she believes that *'if you have a passion for something and you have the insight and the foresight to see that this is where I want to go in my journey, you will be able to make a difference because that will resonate from you to the child in the class.'* Shania feels that a teacher should *lead by example*. She admits that *'We are not perfect. We are humans. We have our bad days. We have our good days'* yet *'we have those days when we go home and we know without anybody having to tell you or to ask.... I'm in the*

right place and *'I know that I'm supposed to be here.'* She adds further that *'we are very fortunate to be paid for giving a service... we are being paid for helping others... because service to man is service to God.'*

By saying this, Shania articulates her professional significance to the learner in the classroom and to the teaching field as a profession.

Finding 3: TA builds teachers' confidence in taking professional decisions relating to their teaching responsibilities, the learners' learning and the school as a professional organisation

Another crucial learning from teachers' narratives is that TA solidified teachers' confidence in their professional decision-making. In other words, recognition validated their professional judgements as shown below:

As much as Celine likes the positive acknowledgement, she can *survive without it*. For Celine, personally, she is always about the way that she *can make a person feel about themselves* and that when it comes to learners, she tries to *motivate and reach out to them on an emotional level first*. She feels that if she's done that, then she can take it as *a feather in her cap*.

She recalls *laughing and laughing* when he explained that, *there are two types of leaders and he says that the second type will create a problem for the benefit of an entire lot of people* and she *smiled* and thought *'he gets he gets me.'* For her, *that was a breakthrough moment*. She says: *'For me if the principal gets me...all is gonna be well.'* She tells of how it affected her professional self: *'It elevated me, to the point that I can work with this man to better this place, to make people happy... and begin to get everybody on board and we can work together not in a self-esteem way but more in a progressive way.'* She explains further that had he said: *'You're a troublemaker because this is what you do'* in a negative context then she *would have been crushed*. She adds: *There's no other way to put it, especially because of the way she held his opinion such high regard*.

Celine's excerpt reveals her confidence boost comes in choosing to validate others' feelings at her work place. Although she may not need to receive TA, being able to make a deliberate and conscious choice to recognise others, is in itself TA, which enhances her confidence as a teacher. Shania's recognition by the principal also served as an affirmation and confidence in her professional decisions to take the school forward.

6.7.3.3 Discussion of Findings for sub-theme 3: Professional Learnings for TA

The data revealed that TA served as a means of reinforcing teachers' professional selves. It affirmed their main purpose of being a teacher and recognised the seemingly

inconsequential things they do. Honneth’s theory of recognition reflects this finding on the third level of social esteem, where recognition is at its highest, results in a sense of professional self-esteem. Their professional impact beyond the academic realm, referred to as teacher change by Tam (2015), is also emphasised in these findings. Lastly, TA enhanced professional confidence in recognising the teachers’ independence and autonomy relating to professional responsibilities, learning and the school context (Tam, 2015).

6.8 Comparative Table of Themes

The following table shows a comparison of the themes within this study, its description and the nature of its content and is applicable, particularly, to the data analysis and findings chapter (Chapter 5) and the discussion of findings chapter (Chapter 6).

Table 6.1: Table comparing the three themes in this study

THEME	DESCRIPTION	KEY FEATURES	CONTENT
Theme 1: Conceptualisations of TA	Teachers’ perceptions, understandings and definitions of TA	Reflective and abstract: TA is recognition; TA is emotive, TA is value-driven, etc	
Theme 2: Forms of TA	How TA is enacted or experienced (e.g. verbal, written, physical, emotional, social and cognitive forms)	Descriptive, presenting TA as it emerges in everyday practice	
Theme 3: Learnings from TA	What teachers take away from their TA experiences and how it shapes their personal and professional identities and their work practice.	Retrospective, analytical, interpretive and reflective: Focus is on lessons learned from TA rather than what occurred.	

6.9 Summative Reflections for Chapter 6

This chapter detailed the findings based on the narrative analyses, revealing the emergence of key themes and sub-themes. The chapter discusses these findings using excerpts from the narratives of participants to foreground how teachers conceptualised TA,

the forms of TA and how these forms are enacted and the teachers' learnings, both personal and professional, that emerge from TA.

The next chapter provides a conclusion to the thesis by detailing, amongst other things, the key findings arising from the data analysis, methodological and theoretical framing reflections, and the study's future placements.

The 7th Chapter: Conclusion

Curtain Call: Closing Conversations on Chords of Recognition and Characteristics of the Self

7.1 Chapter Prologue

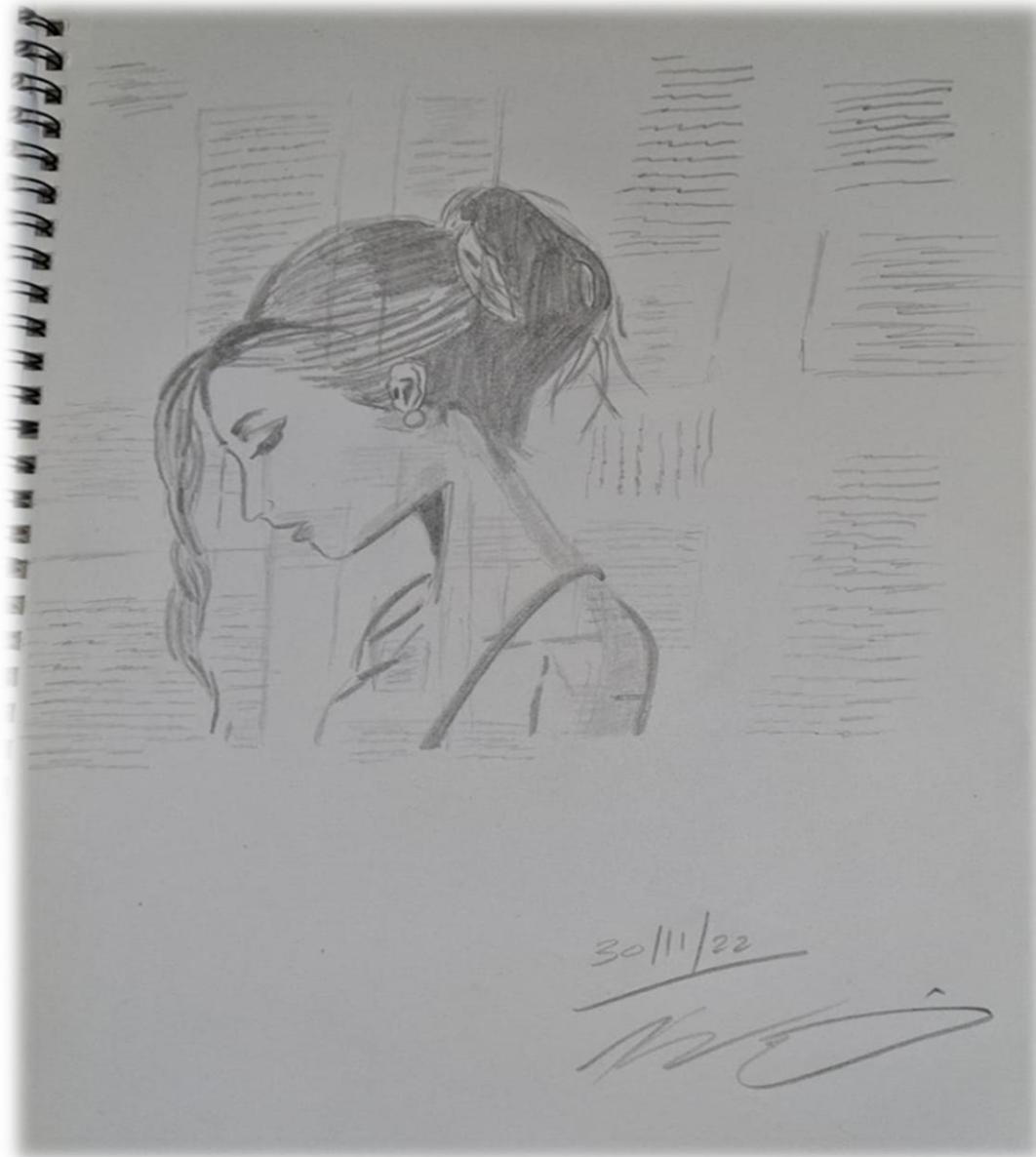


Figure 7.1: Chin up, buttercup

7.1.1 *The Tale of the Teachers in this Study*

As I sat to write the 'beginning of the end' of my thesis, I recalled this image I had sketched in the early stages of my study journey. I reached for my sketch pad and revisited the sketch in an attempt to reconnect with and revisualise the thoughts that had prompted the

recollection of this intimate image and its reason for resurfacing as the roadway to my research was narrowing to an end.

It was her downcast eyes that gave it away - her worries, her fears, her insecurities...it was all there, etched in the tiny lines framing her youthful face. Young and impressionable, she worried if she was enough, she worried if she was doing things 'right', having once been told otherwise and she worried whether what she did was making any difference at all. The slight, almost unnoticeable dip of her shoulders an indication of defeat, but only temporarily so, for through the delicate parting of her lips escapes a silent, heaving sigh to keep going. Deep down, she knew she mattered.

She reminded me of the teachers in this study...

It is in the solemnness of her expression, an unmistakable subtlety in the tilt of her, ever-so-slightly upturned chin, and a quiet and soft gesture of self-worth and certainty in her own value. She is thoughtful, introspective, a silent force to be reckoned with. Quiet, yet confident, she did not feel the need to shout it out loud as her value was already known to her, an inner voice of self-acknowledgement whispering her recognition in the wisps of stray tendrils escaping the bun fixed atop her head.

And again, she reminded me of the teachers in this study...

She exuded a fiery resilience, and a strength evident in her shoulders set back in quiet defiance, its form carrying the weight of her complex stories, a symbol of who her younger self was and who she shall inevitably become. Resoluteness in her self-identity prominent in the sharpness of her jawline, the graphite strokes forming lines of surety, lines mimicked in the collective tautness of her hair pulled back into a bun, this bun perhaps a holding cell, housing the discursive noises around her, a buzz of abhorred assumptions about colleagues where conversations to her dismay, are about teachers, and not to teachers.

She reminded me of the teachers in this study...

It was in the tell-tale signs of the tired lines around her mouth, set in firmness of unmistakable confidence with a hint of the quivering of a bold and fearless soul, one that speaks her mind. Her nurturing nature, hidden under the lamenting gaze of being constantly misunderstood, whilst seemingly inhaling and absorbing genuine validation and kindness and expending the same, were marked by her the arch of her neck bent slightly forward, in a sense, almost giving in but not quite giving up.

She reminded me of the teachers in this study...

In a quest to quell the incessant inner ramblings around this picture, drawing it out, reflecting on its emergence to mind at this stage of my study, I realised its place value.

These...are the teachers in my study...

Their stories and its shaping of their sense of self, like this image, are multi-faceted and evolving. It is an echo of Honneth's recognition theory, discourse analysis and semiotics combined, as their lived experiences highlight how acknowledgement, or its lack thereof, influences not merely how they are perceived by others but also how they perceive their own selves. Against the backdrop of their narrative yearnings for validation in both a personal and professional capacity, this image embodies engravings of stories that overlapped, stories that had shared yet distinct meanings, the stories that wove the fabric of my study.

7.2 Recap and the Road Ahead

In the previous chapter, the analysis and findings based on the participants narratives shared, were discussed. These discussions were set out under three broad themes, namely Conceptualisations of TA, Forms of TA, and Learnings of TA. Furthermore, sub-themes found within the broad themes, enabled the organisation of ideas, towards answering of the research questions and allowed better understanding of the findings within this study. Several key findings emerged from the data analysis phase in Chapter 6. In this chapter, these key findings will be discussed. The chapter begins with a sketched prologue depicting the teachers in this study and the essence of their shared stories. Other discussions in this chapter will include a thesis review, methodological and theoretical reflections, research question relook, recommendations for future research, and implications for policy and practice. The chapter will conclude with summative reflections for chapter 7 and the thesis as a whole.

7.3 Chapter at a Glance



Figure 7.2: An overview of Chapter 7

7.4 Thesis Review

The intent of this study was to explore the phenomenon of TA in the context of primary school teachers' stories and how these narrated experiences play a role in forming both, the personal and teacher self.

Chapter one offered a preview into the thesis by attempting to introduce the concept of TA in a unique manner, in the form of an ode to my namesake, Khadija (RA). An ode, a recitation or incantation (Udhayakumar, 2021), such as *Ode to Khadija*, uses lyrical undertones of praise to highlight a personality of note (Udhayakumar, 2021). In writing and applying this ode to my study, I found a way to make sense of and showcase the understandings of TA to my readers and to help the reader further learn the placement of this phenomenon in my study and its possible contribution to the academic world. The chapter opened up chambers of conceptualisations on TA, channelling the readers inner conversations towards discourses surrounding the topic, through explaining the personal and professional rationales for the study, background, focus, purpose, research questions, methodological and theoretical

inceptions, amongst other key starting points contained in an introduction to a thesis. In this chapter, I made my footprint by arguing for necessitating TA as a viable phenomenon for research, pre-empting the use of primary school teachers' related narratives and how these lived TA stories made them identifiable, on the personal and professional fronts.

Chapter two drew on the literary works that largely influenced the ideas and conceptions of recognition in relation to TA. Working through the perceptions of Nayak and Ashok (2022), Movsessian (2018), Pesonen et al. (2021), Spruyt et al, (2021) and several other scholars, the chapter took shape to share how TA and teacher identity featured as an already tapped into yet still to be fully explored concept.

Chapter three, a theoretical trance traversing a trio-like framework, toggled through Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, discourse analysis and semiotics to provide three theories as a backdrop upon which the study on TA, leaned. In questioning the purposes of a theoretical backing and the methods of formulating such, for dissertational use (Kivunja 2018), I learned how to manipulate my selected theories to display a clear understanding of its relation to TA as alluded to in the title of my study.

Chapter four, dealt with the methodological scaffolding wrapping the study on TA, in a tight embrace of how and why the research design stood within the stance of qualitative and narrative inquiry approaches, and justifying the use of arts-based research methods, such as letter-writing and object inquiry whilst roping in trustworthiness matters and articulating limitations and delimitations for the study.

Chapter five and six, presented the data as narrative voices of the participants (Celine, Shania, Viv and Alexis) and their TA experiences, related by myself, as the researcher and subsequently analysed these narratives to form the findings and discussions thereof.

Chapter seven, culminated the research study on TA toward its concluding phase, offering key findings and future recommendation for further research.

7.5 Methodological Thoughts

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach. As a narrative inquirer, my aim was to gather and compile in-depth data through teacher's narrative stories, thus making use of a qualitative methodology. Using the three key components of narrative inquiry, I attempted to translate and interpret these primary school teachers' stories of lived everyday experiences about TA. These three components as explained by Dewart et al. (2020) and Clandinin et al. (2007) are as follows: temporality, which casts a view into participants past experiences and those of present that mould their individual and teacher selves; sociality, which points towards

the significance of the participants interactions with me as the researcher, the nature of which is integral to the perceiving the dynamics of the shared narratives; and place, which emphasises the essentiality of providing an accommodating atmosphere, whereby participants feel motivated to speak their stories in an uninhibited manner. In addition, the scene resembled the insight and richness of the stories communicated. In keeping with these key narrative inquiry features, I ensured friendly, safe spaces allowing participants to freely share aspects of their TA stories and their inner and work selves. Interviews were set up in advance and at their convenience. Furthermore, I expressed an authentic interest as a researcher in their lived stories. Upon reflection, I acknowledge that at times, the lengthy interviews led to excessive amounts of data to pore through, and have learned the importance of proper time management, whilst still allowing participants their due time and freedom to articulate their stories without time being a restraining factor.

I also acknowledged my role as an insider researcher, as a real and contributory factor in the collection of data, because some of the participants belonged to the same educational institution as myself. This acknowledgement enabled me to collect unbiased data, untainted my own prior knowledge of events or occurrences that I may relate to within one of the schools under study.

My methodological reflections include thinking back to the advantage of using the Otter app, to transcribe accurately what participants were saying whilst also using the original pen and paper method to compliment the app-generated transcripts for better accuracy. Upon downloading the transcripts, I printed out the copies thereof and meticulously read through to ensure that the teachers' stories were correctly captured in their authentic voices as they intended.

Offering a choice of any one from three, arts-based methods such letter-writing, object inquiry and collage making, created a less-tense way of gathering data, fostering creativity whilst enabling data-rich information to filter through towards presentation, analysis and discussion of findings.

Regular check-ins on their progress and repeating question or instructions during my interactions led to participants appreciating and valuing the process, finding it a joyful as opposed to a tedious task. Hence, there was no reluctance or lack of willingness to participate in this study.

7.6 Theoretical Throwback

Varpio et al., (2020) describe a theoretical framework as a mirroring of the researcher's workings underscoring the theory's application in a particular study. Hence, to use a theory in

a study, the researcher must engage with it to know whether it fits in with the topic for exploration (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The exploration of TA experiences of primary school teachers and the shaping of their identities, matched with the selected theories for this study.

In hindsight, the employment of the three theories in framing this study on TA was not merely appropriate, but necessary and advantageous. Theoretical triangulation, which is the application of two or more theories to outline a study (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023), as is the case in this study, was daunting at the outset owing to complexities in transmitting each framework's worthiness authentically. In addition, the depth associated with a concept such as recognition entails a battle that transcends merely being known, but being affirmed as a professional and moreover, a valued professional (Felix, 2019), called for the use of more than one theory to adequately describe and set the scene for its comprehension. As such, using three theories, was more enticing than concerning. Hence, I proceeded with selecting and applying Honneth's (1995) recognition theory which primarily focused on recognition in terms of love and care, discourse analysis whereby meanings behind words held value and semiotics as the significance of symbols and signs during teachers' lived TA experiential interactions to multifocally study TA stories and identity formation of the teachers in this study. This proved beneficial in that, TA, being a dynamic phenomenon, was able to be interpreted and perceived with more clarity from this triadic angular glance.

7.7 Key Findings of the Research Study

The research questions and data analysis and findings, directed my perceptions and interpretations of key findings within this study. These key findings have been organised under the three main themes of the study, below.

7.7.1 Key Finding for Theme 1 - Conceptualisations of TA

In this study, the key finding about teachers' conceptualisations about TA as a form of internal or external recognition has been described to enhance their self-confidence. Therefore, within this key finding, recognition as a form of TA emerges as a link to Honneth's theory of recognition (zone 1) which deals with the aspects of love and care. The purporting here, is that if teachers receive the necessary love and care (external TA) as Honneth (1995) mentions, it results in them self-actualising (internal TA) by way of self-confidence. In this same vein, the conceptualisations of TA include elements of TE. Love and care within Honneth's theory of recognition are emotive elements of TA. That is, TA is conceptualised within an emotional realm. This extension of the key finding regarding conceptualising of TA, is significant in teachers having a sense of feeling good or bad about themselves (positive or negative self-worth), a form of self-acknowledgement leading to the well-being of the teacher.

Thus, this key finding supported by level 1 of Honneth's recognition theory, which refers to the basic needs of love and care and its resulting self-actualising goal of self-confidence, enhances the emotional self and well-being of the teacher (Zhang et al., 2023).

7.7.2 Key Finding for Theme 2 - Forms of TA

The narratives of the participants revealed that the forms of TA take on a multifaceted understanding, through a fluid-like interplay between recognition, discourse and symbolic and representational meanings. This key finding is explained in the paragraphs that follow.

Verbal and textual forms of TA received in the form of spoken affirmations and written notes, which not only validated teachers' professional worth but semiotically fulfilled a need for belonging. In Honneth's recognition theory, this need for belonging is related to the basic needs of love and care and a sense of safety, usually found in primary relationships, which may be why teachers took comfort in receiving such forms of TA so willingly from the learners (a site of innocence and meaningfulness as is cognisant when one is a child within a primary relationship). Discursively, these verbal and textual affirmations were reflected in the participants' narratives as words of praise for a 'hardworking and selfless' teacher.

Beyond the verbal and textual contexts, the multi-dimensionality aspect of the key finding relating to forms of TA, extends to relational recognition. These occur through physical and emotional TA by way of smiles, and physical gestures of gratitude which semiotically convey the affective meanings related TA. In line with this, Honneth's theory of recognition again is drawn upon for its love and care domain in respect of affective recognition, whereby emotional support fosters a sense of self-confidence. The foregrounding of this key finding, in terms of physical and emotional TA also takes cognisance that in some cases, these acknowledgements forsook dominant discourses of efficiency or normalcy by illuminating the elements of care and human connection as valid measures of achievement.

Social and cognitive TA also part of the dynamic nature of the forms of TA, relates to the affirmation of competencies, behaviours and accomplishments of teachers by SMT and colleagues. This is applicable to the third zone of social esteem within of Honneth's theory of recognition which advocates that recognition on this level leads to a sense of self-worth, actualising at the highest level into a reaching a positive sense of self-esteem. Recognition here and in relation to the multi-layered nature mentioned in the key finding statement is linked to the social and cognitive elements of recognition, where organisational symbols (referring to both high-end tasks and titles, and being collectively praised) serve as semiotic and discursive markers of value in both a personal and professional sense.

Meaning-making of TA lived experiences, occurs within these symbiotic, co-existent relationships between the forms of TA, against the backdrop of Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition in terms of stories of love and care, discourse analysis, by referring to the word-related implications and semiotics whereby signs and symbols in their interactions with others is leaned towards.

7.7.3 Key finding for theme 3 - Learnings from TA

A key finding for theme 3 of this study is that TA promotes both personal and professional learnings for teachers, reiterating levels of recognition that are significant to Honneth's recognition theory. In a personal sense, teachers narrated that TA fosters their affective well-being and self-perceptions, mirroring Honneth's conceptions regarding emotional recognition and how it shapes the teacher's self-confidence and self-respect. In a professional sense, TA enhances teachers' sense-making of their purpose and duties, and further validates their efforts towards learner development and the educational context, in keeping with social esteem as acknowledgement affirming teachers' worth in society. Furthermore, teachers perceived TA in a dynamic sense, with positive or negative potential effects, which reinforces the need for ongoing, meaningful recognition towards moulding both their sense of self and their feelings of belonging within schooling contexts.

This theme further reveals the way in which discourse about acknowledgement, meaning the way it is verbalised, proffered or withdrawn, plays an integral role in influencing the identity of teachers. Using discourse analysis, proves that the linguistic and contextual domains within which TA is engrained, serves to either maintain or downplay teachers' sense of worth. Semiotically, the representations of TA (signs and symbols such as facial expressions and bodily gestures) convey meaning that is perceived differently by individuals, against the backdrop of their own storied lives and situations.

7.8 Response to Research Questions

The following research questions formed the basis of this study on Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgement and their Personal and Professional Identities.

The proposed research study was directed by the following main research question:

What are teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement in primary schools?

The sub-questions that appear hereunder were formulated to answer the main research question:

1. What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?

2. How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?
3. How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?

Below, I provide a narrative response to these *what* and *how* sub-questions:

7.8.1.1 What are the Stories of Teacher Acknowledgement Experiences in Primary Schools?

Under this RQ, I strove to explore teachers' TA stories to understand how they conceptualised the phenomenon of TA and their rationale for doing so. The stories of teachers on TA are revealing in several dimensions. On the phenomenon of TA, they collectively indicate that TA is a form of recognition, mostly positive recognition of the work that they do as teachers individually and collectively. Sometimes, teachers experience negative TA which they can take either in a positive way (to assist them in developing themselves personally and professionally) or a negative way (in which it may have long term and short terms feelings of unworthiness, yet some may take these negative TA as points in their professional career to reflect upon for further professional growth).

7.8.1.2 How do Teachers' Acknowledgement Experiences Shape Teachers' Meanings of Self and What they are as Teachers?

This RQ attempted to explore how the TA experiences teachers encountered, helped influence their personal and professional identities. Teachers value TA received in its various forms. For example, teachers appreciate the verbal and textual TA they receive from colleagues and learners. Even though, the textual forms of TA received from learners are simplistic in nature, it buoys them up and enhances their sense of purpose as teachers. Physical and emotional forms of TA are closely related with each one having an effect on the other. For example, a simple hug makes the teacher feel worthy and this in turn boosts their sense of self. Social and cognitive forms of TA give teachers a sense of validation in both a personal and professional sense by being recognised in a collective sense and they thus internalise these ideas about how others think of them. They also enjoy having their competencies and abilities recognised enhancing their thoughts about who and what they are as teachers.

7.8.1.3 How does a Teacher's Sense of Self Shape how Teachers Negotiate Everyday Practice?

This RQ aimed to explore how the teachers' thinking about their personal and professional identities influence how their work performances manifest. Negative and positive

TA both have effects on the teachers' sense of self and consequently on the teachers' work efficacy. If a teacher is to perform well in their work field then the kind of TA experienced, whether negative or positive, should serve to enhance rather than drag them down in the work they do. The way in which the TA is administered and interpreted is of significance in what it does for the teacher within their work practices. That is, intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a role in determining how the teacher understands the TA they experience and how this understanding becomes relational to the way they perform in the classroom and within their job as a whole.

7.9 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, future research should enable a deeper and more expansive interpretation of TA by turning attention to ideas and questions that arose specifically from the three themes of conceptualisations of TA, forms of TA and learnings of TA.

7.9.1 Exploring how Different School Settings Shape Conceptualisations of TA

Through this study, it emerged that teachers' perceptions of TA are inherently personal and largely shaped by their individual teaching situations, narratives and sociocultural viewpoints. Prospective research could study how teachers from diverse contexts in terms geographical settings or those from well-resourced schools for example, form conceptualisations of TA and whether clear understandings surface, as compared to this study which focused on a small group within a particular setting. Teachers and SMT members would benefit from this recommendation by enabling them to expand the learnings thereof towards unique and context-specific responses of recognition patterns and behaviours in places of learning.

7.9.2 Incorporating Informal and Ordinary Forms of TA within Schools

Formal recognition by means of receiving awards, accolades and titles within the forms of TA was a noted feature of the narratives and subsequent findings of this study. However, the study also mentioned informal and discreet forms of TA such as praise and thanks from learners and colleagues as having value and meaning. Further research could track these seemingly mundane forms of TA across broader samples to understand its possible repetitive occurrences, effects and prevalence. The beneficiaries in this regard would be school leaders and policy makers. This may lead to new perspectives about the way in which schools assess and enhance teacher morale, extending over the realm of performance measures to social and interpersonal practices.

7.9.3 Exploring Effects and Learnings of TA on Novice Teachers

While some teachers in this study mentioned timing of TA and its importance in the early stages of a teacher's career, there is room to explore how negative TA and positive TA or lack of recognition impacts and influences identity development and the retention and curbing of teacher attrition for novice teachers. Teacher training institutions would benefit from this recommendation in that the findings thereof could empower orientation personnel and programmes, that focus on affective-professional support as a basis for development.

7.10 Implications for Policy and Practice

Recognition though not to be sought after, as the key findings suggest, is still a necessary part of a teacher's every day work life. Lack of acknowledgement for teachers, may have far-reaching implications both on a personal and professional level. In this section, the focus is on the implications of the lack of acknowledgement, which Honneth (1995) refers to as 'disrespect', for policy and practice.

7.10.1 Lack of recognition and teacher well-being

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) allude that when recognition is absent or lacking, in addition to other existing factors such as unmanageable workloads and low remuneration, teachers become stressed and face high levels of burnout and other psychological health problems. This affects their overall well-being and ability to carry out tasks as part of their daily practice (Rocque et al., 2024). Honneth's (1995) theory supports this implication by referring to 'lack of respect' (on level 1, which is the need for basic love and care) and how the teacher's morale and belief in self can decrease as a result.

7.10.2 Lack of Recognition and Teacher Attrition

Teachers, in not receiving adequate recognition and support, together with limited avenues in terms of professional development, are exiting the teaching field in large numbers (Rocque et al., 2024). Honneth (1995) explains this form of disrespect on level 3 of his theory of recognition (social esteem), whereby teachers receive social and cognitive recognition in relation to work competencies. The downside of this lack of recognition, is that the schooling system suffers because teachers with expertise and qualifications become scarce (Rocque et al., 2024).

7.10.3 Lack of Recognition, Learner Results and School climate

How a teacher feels personally and professionally has a direct impact on the teacher's efficacy and how they interact and perform within the classroom. Teachers who are shown appreciation, and experience job contentment are more prone to fostering a wholesome

learning field, which in turn influences the learning and interactional progression of their learners (Rocque et al., 2024). This lack of recognition (a form of 'disrespect' on Honneth's second level of his theory of recognition) related to professional rights thus leads to poor efficacy and work performance.

7.10.4 Action Needed in terms of Implications for Policy and Practice

This study undertaken in primary schools in KZN, focused on the role of recognition or its lack thereof on teachers and their personal and professional identities. In view of teaching policies influencing teachers' work selves, ambition, and affective states, it is crucial to learn the aspects shaping how teachers view their personal selves, their learners and their professional identities and practices (Lim, 2021). Hargreaves (2020) cited in Lim (2021, p16), states that the teaching field's sense of educational duty is "trapped inside a rationalised and bureaucratised system" such that teachers experience a gap in emotional aims and outside influences due to constantly changing learning climates (Lim, 2021). This implies that policies relating to the teaching profession which are devoid of the affective element and are seemingly stuck in a sterile cycle of logic and laws, needs to be revisited to accommodate the human aspect (particularly, the perceptions and roles of acknowledgement) within teachers' daily practice and furthermore, align with the impact on their individual and work selves. Lim (2021) also affirms the implications for practice listed in sections 7.8.1 to 7.8.3, by acknowledging teachers rising workloads, poor psychological health and well-being, the crisis regarding teacher retention and work practice performances in terms of learner outcomes, all relational to how a teacher may be recognised or not. Performance management systems as part of school and departmental policies where teachers face appraisal and how these can be used as tools for change are cited as a positive implication for both policy and practice (Lim, 2021).

7.11 Summative Reflections for Chapter 7

This chapter commenced with a tale describing the teachers and their narratives in relation to TA experiences. A chapter overview and thesis review followed. Methodological thoughts and theoretical reflections were also included. One of the main aspects of this concluding chapter was the key findings of the research study, followed by the response to research questions and recommendations for future research. A discussion of implications for policy and practice ensued, and the chapter ended with summative reflections for chapter 7. The researcher's final words follow as a way of bringing this thesis to a close.

7.11.1 The Researcher's Concluding Comments

In many ways this study, was for me, the researcher...the teacher...the individual. In developing and exploring this topic on Teacher Acknowledgement and how it tells the tale of who one is, as a teacher and as an individual, I fulfilled an innate need to understand myself, my need for validation from others and my innate ability to validate myself. I learned, that it is not in my control, to receive acknowledgement, or to enforce the receipt thereof, for acknowledgement is a free-flowing river, untamed, and unrestrained. I learned, that a dip in this river of acknowledgement is imperative for personal and professional growth, but that drawing acknowledgement from the well within is just as, if not more, vital to one's sense of self. I learned all this, through the narratives of the teachers in this study, who taught me how to perceive, receive, provide, retrieve and derive insight from Teacher Acknowledgement. In essence, I learned of acknowledgment (from the self or others) as a necessary survival skill set. I learned of both recognition and misrecognition...I learned... that acknowledgement, for me, means that...

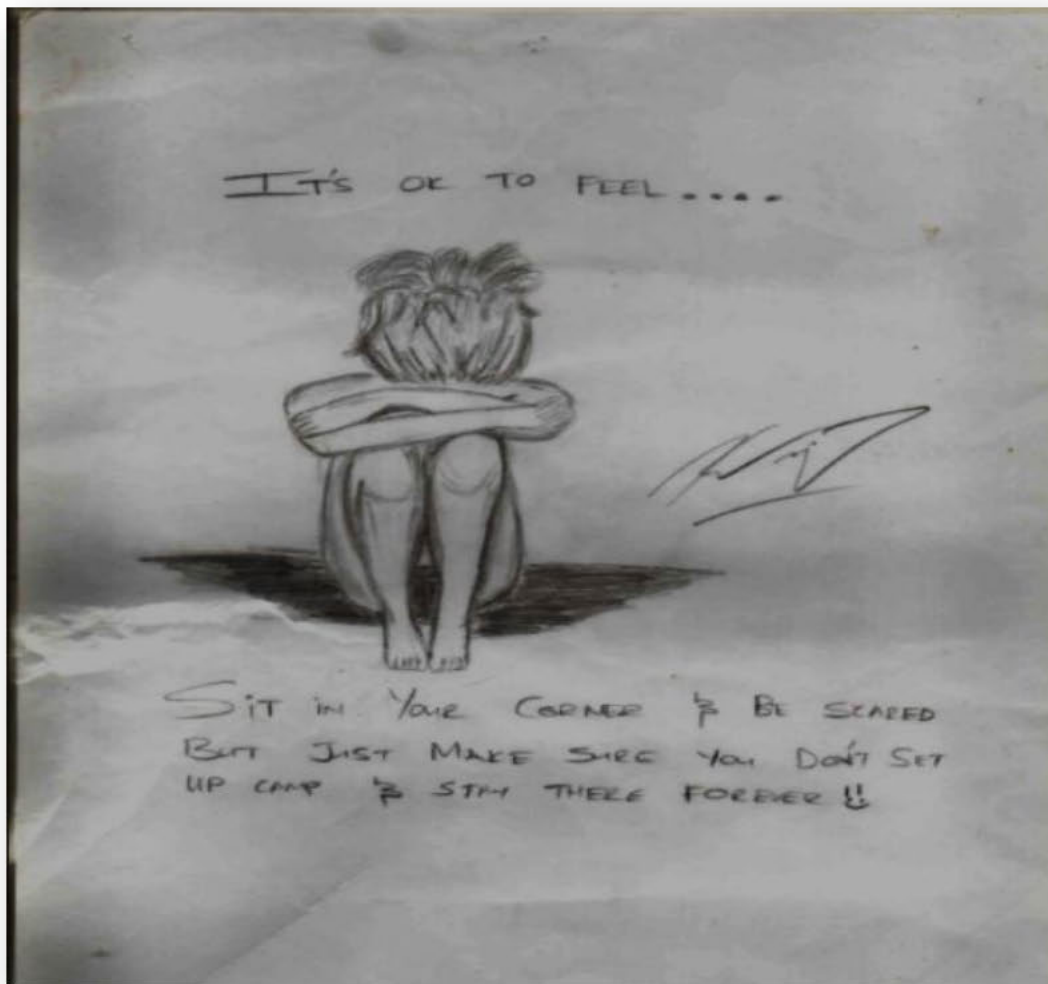


Figure 7.3: It's OK to feel...

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Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance - UKZN



21 August 2023

Khadija Vorajee (202515791)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear K Vorajee,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005948/2023

Project title: Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 01 August 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

This approval is valid until 21 August 2024.

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 2: Permission Letter – DoE



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7531

Mrs Khadija Vorajee

4339

Dear Mrs Vorajee

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: “PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ STORIES OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES.”, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **20 July 2023 to 31st March 2025**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.


Mr. G. Ntuli
Head of Department: Education
Date: 20th July 2023

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix 3: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: ___/___/___

Dear Sir/Mam

I, Khadija Vorajee am a Masters student (full dissertation) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities, School of Education. My specialization is in Teacher Development Studies and I am under the supervision of Prof. Daisy Pillay.

You are invited to consider participating in a study involving research on ***Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities***. The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore stories of teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement from the self and others and how it shapes primary school teachers' personal and professional identities. Furthermore, the study will delve into teachers' experiences of teacher acknowledgement and understand how it shapes what teachers think and do when they receive or do not receive acknowledgement in the workplace.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the stories of teacher acknowledgement of the teachers working in primary schools;
2. To understand the stories of teacher acknowledgement and how it shapes teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers;
3. To determine how the teachers' sense of self shapes how they negotiate everyday practice

I selected you as one of my participants because you meet the selection criteria of being in a level 1 position in primary school, serving in a permanent post with more than five years of experience in the teaching field at a school based in the Phoenix and Ottawa areas of Durban.

I would like for you to share your experiences of teacher acknowledgement to contribute to the study on primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement in relation to their personal and professional identities. I aim to use online platforms and/or face-to-face interactions to meet with you and have discussions and generate data which will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data production process will involve the generation of the primary school teacher's stories of personal experiences using memory drawings, unstructured oral interviews, collage inquiry, object inquiry and letter writing. The duration of your participation, if you choose to enroll and remain in the study, is expected to be approximately five months. The study is funded by myself.

Given that the study is drawing on the individual's memories of particular nodal moments and critical experiences of their personal/lived experiences of teacher acknowledgement, I assure you that the study will not compromise teaching and learning time as it will be conducted after school hours using online platforms such as WhatsApp/Zoom and/or in-person interactions and will take place at a time convenient to the level 1 teacher as a participant. If

your participation in the study awakens any feelings of discomfort, I will be providing my participants with the details of the UKZN psychologist Angeline Stephens - Email: stephensa@ukzn.ac.za Contact Number: 0800 800 017.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw participation at any point, and that in the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur a penalty or loss of treatment or other benefits to which you are normally entitled. The potential consequences of your withdrawal include the exclusion of the data already gathered from you in the study and the final report. Should you wish to withdraw, the procedure requires you to get in touch with the researcher so that the withdrawal paperwork can be filed. The researcher will terminate your participation if you do not actively cooperate or feel endangered during the study.

The study will not incur any costs from you as a participant for participating in the study. There will be no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study; however, Mobile data of R200 will be provided to you by the researcher for online interactions for the duration of the study.

For your confidentiality in this study, pseudonyms can and will be used and no personal/clinical information will be shared. The data collected in this study will be stored in a hard drive that only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to and the data will be stored for five years and destroyed after.

For any enquiries regarding this study please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Professor Daisy Pillay. You may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Contact details are as follows:

Name	Contact Number	Email address
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor-UKZN)	[REDACTED]	pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA	<u>Tel:27312604557-</u> <u>Fax:27312604609</u>	Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za
Khadija Vorajee (Researcher)	[REDACTED]	202515791@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Mrs Khadija Vorajee

Ukzn masters student/researcher

Appendix 4: Participant Informed Consent Document

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____ (full name and surname) have been informed about the study entitled *Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities* by Khadija Vorajee. The researcher and I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at _____ or email: 202515791@stu.ukzn.ac.za

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

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES
Video-record my interview	YES
Use of my pictures/drawings/writings for research purposes	YES

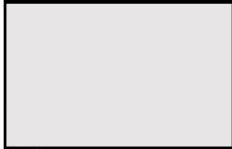
Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable) Date

Signature of Translator
(Where applicable) Date

Appendix 5: Request for Permission from Principal to Conduct Research

██████████
██████████
4339



REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear ██████████ (Principal) of ██████████ Primary School

I trust you are well.

My name is Khadija Vorajee. I am currently pursuing my studies towards a Master's of Education Degree (Full Dissertation) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Edgewood campus. My specialization is in Teacher Development Studies. As part of the requirements for the degree, I will be conducting a research study titled: ***Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities***. The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore stories of teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement from the self and others and how it shapes primary school teachers' personal and professional identities. Furthermore, the study will delve into teachers' experiences of teacher acknowledgement and understand how it shapes what teachers think and do when they receive or do not receive acknowledgement in the workplace.

The main research question I seek to answer is:

What are teachers' lived experiences of acknowledgement in primary schools?

The sub-questions that appear hereunder will attempt to answer the main research question:

1. What are the stories of teacher acknowledgement experiences in primary schools?
2. How do teachers' acknowledgement experiences shape teachers' meanings of self and what they are as teachers?
3. How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?

As this study is using narrative inquiry as a research method, I will be looking at past and present practices. I hereby request your approval to conduct a study with three Level One Teachers from your school as participants in this study. The data production process will involve the generation of the primary school teacher's stories of personal experiences using memory drawings, unstructured oral interviews, collage inquiry, object inquiry and letter writing. All data that will be collected will be used for my research project report. Permission is also requested from you for the publication of the findings in the form of research reports and publication in research journals. You will be informed if such publications take place.

Given that the study is drawing on the individual's memories of particular nodal moments and critical experiences of their personal/lived experiences of teacher acknowledgement, I assure you that the study will not compromise teaching and learning time as it will be conducted after school hours using online platforms such as WhatsApp/ Zoom and/or in-person interactions and will take place at a time convenient to the level 1 teacher as a participant.

The data collection and production will start from AUGUST 2023 and will take place at a time convenient to the Level One Teacher as a participant. The participant will be apprised of the research process, his/her participation and his/her rights in the research processes, through the informed consent form. His/her permission will be sought prior to his/her participation in the data collection process. The research is scheduled to take place once you have granted permission and after ethical clearance from the university has been obtained. Permission is also going to be sought from the Department of Education to conduct the study.

Please note that:

- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- The choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research is left on to the participant. He/she will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- All confidentiality will be guaranteed by using the pseudonyms to protect the school and the participant's anonymity.
- Any information given by the participant cannot be used against him/her, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- The participant's involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you require any information about this study upon its completion, I will be most willing to provide you with this at the end of my study.

For any enquiries regarding this study please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Professor Daisy Pillay. You may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Contact details are as follows:

Name	Contact Number	Email address
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor-UKZN)	[REDACTED]	pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA	Tel: 27312604557- <u>Fax: 27312604609</u>	Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za
Khadija Vorajee (Researcher)	[REDACTED]	<u>202515791@stu.ukzn.ac.za</u> vorajee.khadija0@gmail.com

Thank you



Mrs Khadija Vorajee

Appendix 6: Principal's Declaration of Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PRINCIPAL'S DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The title of the research dissertation: *Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities*.

I, _____ (Full name/s of Principal) have been informed about the study entitled: *Primary school teachers' stories of acknowledgement and their personal and professional identities* by Khadija Vorajee. I hereby grant permission to the researcher to conduct research using a participant from my school. I understand that the participant has willingly agreed to participate in this research study and that she/he are at liberty to withdraw from the research study at any time, should they so desire.

I also understand that the name of the school, name of the participant and their responses will be kept confidential. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. I am aware that if I have any questions or concerns about my rights as the Principal of the study participant, or if I am concerned about any aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27312604557 -Fax: 27312604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby **provide/do not provide** consent to:

		Do consent	Do not consent
1.	Consent to Khadija Vorajee conducting research.		
2.	Consent to Khadija Vorajee to use photographs/pictures/writings provided by the participant.		

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL: _____ DATE: ____/____/____

Appendix 7: Data Generation Guidelines and Instruments

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' STORIES OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

A research study by Khadija Vorajee

Thank you for choosing to be a part of my study. This document contains details about your engagement in this study.

Choose one of the following three activities:

After engaging with one of the activities, you will be interviewed in order for me to gain a deeper understanding of your selected activity.

1. Letter Writing:

Write a letter (or several letters) to anyone you are comfortable to share your experiences about being acknowledged as a teacher, either by yourself (self-acknowledgement) or by someone else (e.g. your teacher colleague, a learner, a parent, a Head of Department, principal). The acknowledgement could be positive or negative. Your letter should focus on; (i) the event/activity/teaching that you were acknowledged (including self-acknowledgement) for; (ii) was it a positive acknowledgement or negative acknowledgement; (iii) your feelings about this acknowledgement; (iv) what followed after the acknowledgement; and (v) any influence that this acknowledgment may have had on you as a teacher or you as a person.

1. Using an A4 page with ruled lines write your letter about your experiences.
2. Include as much detail as you can about your thoughts, feelings and personal meanings attached to this experience/s.
3. You may write one letter made up of about 4 experiences or 4 separate letters, each focusing on one experience of teacher acknowledgement. The stories you write about may be made up of negative or positive experiences and/or self-acknowledgement or external acknowledgement experiences.
4. Use a pseudonym to sign off on the letters.

An unstructured interview will then take place with your using the letter/s as a medium/ia through which a deeper insight about your experiences of teacher acknowledgement will be pursued.

2. Collage Inquiry

Participants will be asked to gather old newspapers and other print media such as magazines and pamphlets in readiness for this task. The instruction prompting the collage task will be:

*Create a collage that depicts the question:
“What do I do that gives meaning to my life as a teacher”*

Develop a collage that expresses your experiences about being acknowledged as a teacher, either by yourself (self-acknowledgement) or by someone else (e.g. your teacher colleague, a learner, a parent, a Head of Department, principal). The acknowledgement could be positive or negative. Your collage should represent (i) the event/activity/teaching that you were acknowledged (including self-acknowledgement) for; (ii) was it a positive acknowledgement or negative acknowledgement; (iii) your feelings about this acknowledgement; (iv) what followed after the acknowledgement; and (v) any influence that this acknowledgment may have had on you as a teacher or you as a person.

1. Cut out images and/or words that best represent your thoughts, feelings and responses about your experiences of being acknowledged as a teacher.
2. Compose a visual story of these experiences in relation to you as a teacher.
3. Arrange the images and words pictorially so that it represents these teacher acknowledgment experiences and its influence on you as a teacher or as a person.
4. Give your collage a title.

An unstructured interview will then take place with you using the collage as a stimulus to recall your experiences of teacher acknowledgement.

3. Object Inquiry

Select one or more objects from the school environment that represents experiences about being acknowledged as a teacher, either by yourself (self-acknowledgement) or by someone else (e.g. your teacher colleague, a learner, a parent, a Head of Department, principal). The acknowledgement could be positive or negative. The object/s selected should be a stimulus/i for recalling (i) the event/activity/teaching that you were acknowledged (including self-acknowledgement) for; (ii) was it a positive acknowledgement or negative acknowledgement; (iii) your feelings about this acknowledgement; (iv) what followed after the acknowledgement; and (v) any influence that this acknowledgment may have had on you as a teacher or you as a person.

The following questions will be used to facilitate this activity with greater ease:

1. What do the selected objects have to do with your sense of self as a teacher?
2. How does the first object evoke positive memories and feelings in you and how this relates to your workplace behaviours and practices?
3. How does the second object evoke negative memories and feelings in you and how this relates to your workplace behaviours and practices?

An unstructured interview will then take place with your using the object/s as a memory tool to recall your experiences of teacher acknowledgement.

Thank you

Appendix 8: Sample showing Possible Interview Questions for Participant One (Based on Selected Activity – Letter Writing)

PARTICIPANT 1: LETTER TO LEARNER

RESEARCH QUESTION	POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	THEME
<p>1. What are the stories of TA experiences in primary schools?</p>	<p>1. What does TA mean to you?</p> <p>2. Is TA important to you as an individual and as a teacher? Why?</p> <p>3. Should you seek TA? Why? Why not?</p> <p>4. You have mentioned “watching the learner grow into a senior learner” and, numerous other achievements/successes the learner has attained. Explain why you would consider the learner’s growth and achievements to be something significant to you. Paragraph 1 and 2</p>	<p>Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Conceptualisation of TA</p>
<p>2. How do teachers’ acknowledgement experiences shape teachers’ meanings of self and what they are as teachers?</p>	<p>5. “You promised me the Dux.....” What will the learner achieving the Dux award mean to you as a teacher and as an individual? Why would this be considered to be a symbol of acknowledgement? Paragraph 2</p> <p>6. There is a sense of pride and joy when you speak of the learner in your letter. What form of acknowledgement would you interpret this to be (internal/external/both)? Why?</p> <p>7. You mention the learners’ language of communication being different from the LOLT and that you have to “catch” what they say. Why is the language of communication an important factor for acknowledgement? In this regard, would you consider communication/lack of communication with colleagues as relevant to TA? Are you, for example attributing your personal development/learning to what you can gain from your learners? Paragraph 4</p> <p>8. From whom should you expect to receive TA? Why? (leaders/principals/colleagues/learners/parents/receipt of rewards/ letters of appreciation/the self/ other)</p> <p>9. What kinds of TA would you expect from your: learners/school managers and leaders/parents/colleagues?</p> <p>10. You speak of the receipt of positive acknowledgement from learners when they come to you to speak about something or for any help, and its consequences on you as a teacher. What do you understand by/consider as positive TA and negative TA? Why? Paragraph 6 (letters/awards/words from colleagues or learners/ recognition in minutes)</p> <p>11. How would negative TA influence you as a teacher and as an individual? Why?</p> <p>12. How would positive TA influence you as a teacher and as an individual? Why?</p>	<p>Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA</p> <p>Creating a context for TA</p> <p>Creating a context for TA Examples of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA</p> <p>Documentary drivers for TA</p> <p>Examples of TA Effects of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA Effects of TA</p>

PARTICIPANT 1: LETTER TO LEARNER

<p>3. How does a teacher's sense of self shape how teachers negotiate everyday practice?</p>	<p>13. How could positive/negative TA from leaders and managers have an influence on your performance and well-being as an individual and as a teacher?</p> <p>14. In the absence of TA, how would this affect you as a teacher?</p> <p>15. "culmination of the little things" What are some of these little things which others (learners/colleagues/leadership) do, that you would consider as culminating into positive/negative TA? What would you consider as the outcome of this culmination of 'little things' they do? Paragraph 7</p>	<p>Examples of TA Creating a context for TA</p> <p>Effects of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA Documentary drivers for TA</p> <p>Effects of TA</p>
	<p>Ok, we seem to have covered a lot , let me scan through my questions to see if I have covered sufficiently the kinds of things I want to know and what I might still need to know for my study.....</p> <p>16. "When I think of you, it's always with such joy and satisfaction" What for you is satisfaction in terms of TA? (what do you mean when you say you are satisfied) paragraph 1</p> <p>17. "You decided to be the best at the beginning of this school year..." Is this something you expect from your learners or do you want for them to take responsibility for their own growth? What does it mean for you as a person and as a teacher, when the learner made this decision? paragraph 2</p> <p>18. In regards to learners' achievements, do you become despondent if they have not achieved? Why? What about those that do not achieve? What influence do the learners' achievements have on you as a teacher and as an individual? Paragraph 3 and 8</p> <p>19. You mention the desire and commitment in your learners to learn and the feeling in you of being motivated and inspired by your learners. Why is this important in terms of TA? When motivated, what do you as a teacher and individual like to do? Paragraph 5 and 6</p> <p>20. Describe an incident or situation where you changed your method of teaching as a result of learners' response. What were you responding to by changing your teaching methods or by engaging your learners? What influence did the change in method have on you as a teacher and as a person? Paragraph 6</p> <p>21. "Being a leader in a diverse classroomlike a crash course in psychology, sociology and mediation strategies. It's both exhausting and gratifying" In what ways and by whom have you been recognised as a leader</p>	<p>Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Creating a context for TA Conceptualisation of TA</p> <p>Effects of TA</p> <p>Conceptualisation of TA Effects of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA Effects of TA</p> <p>Documentary drivers for TA</p>

PARTICIPANT 1: LETTER TO LEARNER

	<p>in your classroom? What do you mean when you say it is both exhausting and gratifying? Paragraph 6</p> <p>"..It's your smile and daily hug that gives me the strength to face all the challenges....". In what other ways do you feel you are able to manouver your daily practices (what else do you consider that might drive you forward in your work practices?) paragraph 3</p> <p>22. What will it symbolise for you in terms of acknowledgement when this learner grows up to be successful? What would them visiting you mean to you as a person and as a teacher? Paragraph 8</p> <p>23. "cheering from the sidelines, always". What kind of acknowledgement would you consider this to be? (internal/external/self/positive). Is there someone that has had this influence on you in your personal or professional capacity? Paragraph 8</p>	<p>Effects of TA Documentary drivers for TA</p> <p>Conceptualisation of TA Effects of TA</p> <p>Examples of TA</p> <p>Creating a context for TA</p>
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Appendix 9: Participant 1's Selected Activity – Letter Writing

Dear [redacted]
(To my star learner)

When I think of you [redacted] it's always with such joy and satisfaction. I have watched you grow from a naive and uncertain little girl to a confident and efficient "Senior" grade 7 learner.

You decided to be the best at the beginning of this school year, and you promised me the Dux award will be yours by the end of this year. You have steadily progressed through this year and achieved many academic goals, such as winning 5 out of 6 fixtures in debates, being chosen as the best speaker in all ^{the} fixtures and progressing to circuit level in the Speech contest. You have also achieved 100% this term in Social Sciences.

I take all of your achievements as a positive reflection of my teaching present in you. I acknowledge myself in providing the best possible nourishment to your education. When I see you in the morning it's your smile and daily hug that gives me the strength to face all the challenges I experience in the classroom. I teach in many classes where 75-90% of learners cannot read, even at a basic level.

They talk, read and write in a language that is different from the LOLT of our school (English). The majority of learners communicate in isiZulu and isiXhosa. I find myself at times catching onto a few phrases of what they say to try and reach out to them in some form of understandable communication.

I receive positive acknowledgement from learners like you [redacted], and others as well who might not be as bright as you, but have such a desire and a commitment to learn it brightens up classroom's atmosphere. Many learners in the various classes I teach have commented on how much they enjoy my lessons and the worksheets I prepare for them.

I feel motivated and inspired by the love I feel from the learners who come and speak to me from the depths of their hearts about everything and anything! "Weak" and "Bright" learners alike have given me a lot of insight into the methods that work best in a South African classroom. Being the leader in a diverse classroom, such as is the case in South Africa, is like a crash course in psychology, sociology and mediation strategies! It's both exhausting and gratifying!

There is no specific event which occurred that gave me the most positive acknowledgement as a teacher. I think it's rather a culmination of all the little things we do on a day to day basis from last year up until today. It's the late afternoon debate meetings with [redacted] and yourself. Acknowledgement comes from knowing you learners put into practice all the things I taught you. It comes also from you seeking me out when you face a challenge you can't overcome, e.g. the outfit for your career's day programme or help with revision for your Geography exam paper. It's all these little things that give me a sense of positive acknowledgement and professional achievement.

I feel I am a good teacher, care-giver and advisor to fertile, young minds when I see the achievements and behaviours of my learners, and most especially through your achievements. I am actually looking forward to the day you are all grown up and successful. I hope you would want to visit me.

My dear , I will be cheering for you from the sidelines, always.

Your loving grade 6 teacher.

A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Thank you my “younger self” for giving me this priceless opportunity to reflect, guide and advise you. Being a tad bit wiser than you, I thought it appropriate to write you this letter. I do acknowledge that you won't be surprised that I found myself in a public service career. No, not a nurse like Florence Nightingale although I do love to be her for just one day. I found myself being led to the greatest profession known to man, a teacher of course! How I ended up here, well, it would be by utmost pleasure to take you with me on my incredible journey.

We all have those moments in our lives when we ask ourselves the questions....Who am I?.....What is my purpose in life? Continuously asking yourself “Why am I being labelled as inattentive?” A chronic “rule-breaker”, “Mischievous” and “Going against the grain”. I do acknowledge that you feel different, sometimes lost. You feel that most times your mind is your worst enemy. Being a young lady in our beautiful country, you WILL aspire to dream big and be easily distracted and disillusioned by reality and the negative events happening in society, however, have no fear. I am here to tell you a little secret. The unwavering determination to educate yourself and to allow yourself to be taught is the greatest gift not just for you but to all the children who will one day be in your care. Whether it be in spirituality, religions of the world, quantum physics, politics, new-world phenomena, philosophy or even ufo's; never allow yourself to desist from learning irrespective of having thoughts that are incessant. You will realize your passion Your open-mindedness and thirst for knowledge is a great attribute. It exemplifies the humility and tolerance you possess to courageously say “I am a life-long learner”. You will teach children important life lessons like: “Every single one of us has an innate talent, something that we are really great at and no matter what path we take in our lives and we need some form of education to attain it. You will teach children that education is not just important

for their future but also the future of South Africa and its people and whatever they dream of becoming will determine whether or not we as a nation can successfully conquer our future challenges. Most importantly, you will teach children that it doesn't matter how different they are and what special needs they have, if they persevere, passionate and trust their intuition, it will lead them to great success. If you ever feel discouraged by your career choice and decide to quit, you are not just quitting on yourself but quitting on your country and its people.

[redacted], where you are right now does not determine where you will be in the future for the future alone is based on the choices you make. Realise your power and potential and follow the exemplary example of Nelson Mandela who never allowed his failures to define him. There are times that you may ponder the reason why you're so remarkably different from other people, why it is that you cannot complete a fictional novel and why you're always drawn to literature that feeds your soul. The answer is simple: You question everything and more remarkably, you will teach your learners to do the same. This is a great quality and when you succeed in allowing a questioning mind to unfold, it is an even greater achievement. Never doubt your ability to "think outside the box" as the world needs more creative, courageous and formidable leaders. Yes, [redacted]...your role as an educator allows you to lead. Someday you're going to be a significant player in shaping and moulding young minds.

In all your modesty, I want to remind you off a few significant achievements during your tenure as a teacher. You may be astounded by what you read in this letter because right now self-doubt may cloud your perception as it does to many a young mind. [redacted] you possess an innate need that compels you to always assist and be a pillar for the down-trodden and marginalised. During your tenure at [redacted] Primary, whilst completing your Social Sciences Degree, you will suddenly have an epiphany that will change your life forever. Being tasked with the care of orphaned and vulnerable children, you will have first-hand encounters with children who are impoverished without any form of

family support, you will encounter children who are “different” much like yourself, It is these interactions that will be the steering force to try your best to further help those that are in dire need. You will ask yourself, “How would Sociology, Criminology and Psychology together possibly help young children with special education needs?”, although Freud and Erik Erikson would fervently disagree. It is during this epiphany that you will decide to immediately change you programme of study. Deep down you know you are “different” just like them. However, being “different” is not necessarily a bad thing. Deep down you know that you can make a difference.

Do you recall all those award shows you watched on television? Charleze Theron received an Oscar for her phenomenal performance in the movie “Monster”. What an incredible moment! Imagine getting an award for being the most outstanding, imagine what it’s like receiving a standing ovation, receiving special gifts for your performance, sitting at a gala dinner with the “elites” or even being interviewed for a magazine. It’s difficult to imagine of course, especially if you view yourself as “different” from the rest. Today [redacted] im here to tell you that you will someday receive all of the above. Your heart will race in anticipation and excitement as you walk onto that stage as one that made it onto the Dean’s List. Your will receive a standing ovation when it is announced that you were the first woman from Kwa-Zulu Natal to receive this prestigious award. What if I tell you, you will receive gifts, a special photo shoot, an interview which will be in a publication. You’re probably wondering what on God’s green earth have you accomplished to be deserving of all these accolades. Its simple, with great pride and admiration I will next share this secret. In your three year programme of study, you will receive the highest aggregate in the country. Yes! Even your ADHD cannot stop you. Furthermore, this achievement was only accomplished by the Western Cape, never in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Yes you were also the first woman to accomplish this, hence all the fuss.

[REDACTED] I say these things with much pride and admiration. We always believe that one should lead by example. Well, you're the perfect example for the child who believes that they are an "outsider", "a rebel", "an outcast" or "different from the status quo". It is through your own experiences, challenges, determination, perseverance and fortitude that helps blaze the trail for the children in your care. There is another acknowledgement that also bares mentioning. This entails a conversation you had with a previous principal. As the conversation progressed, he mentioned that you're known as a "trouble-maker." Unfortunately the conversation ended abruptly and you didn't have the opportunity to clarify the meaning of this statement. Weeks went by and you finally mustered the courage to ask your principal what he meant by his statement. He answered most eloquently and I quote [REDACTED] there are two types of trouble-makers in the world, the first being someone who seeks to cause trouble for their own personal gain, someone who in essence who is selfish and a narcissist." He then proceeded to say the following: [REDACTED], you're fortunately the second type for you cause "trouble" to benefit others and not for self-gain. The second type are the true leaders. It takes courage to confront those that are seemingly in positions of power, however you consistently do it irrespective of the consequences. That is how I first recognized you as a potential leader."

However, [REDACTED] I believe the greatest acknowledgement you will ever receive is not from your colleagues, your managers or your peers but from the heart of a child. When this happens, it seals the deal.....you're definitely doing something right. I'm going to quote a letter you will receive from a child one day. This in a nutshell will reiterate all that I have encapsulated in this letter.

To

A true leader has the confidence to stand alone. The courage to make the right decisions and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He/she does not set out to be a leader, but, through the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent he/she rises as a leader just like the phoenix rising from its ashes”.

The power of this statement needs no explanation.

Much light and love

Sincerely

Appendix 11: Participant 3's Selected Activity – Object Inquiry

Object inquiry

- The objects selected were a 'humble' pen and an eraser.
- The pen brings acknowledgements of positivity from my learners.

Over the years I've had many little notes pinned and left on my table or handed to me. Some would read 'sorry mam', 'I love you mam', but the one note that will always be close to my heart, was one written many years ago. A learner thanked me for showing her kindness and making her understand she matters irrespective of her social background. I was at the end of her note where she wrote, 'you are like my mum.' For a learner to look up to me in that way, meant everything. At that moment, I knew I also mattered to someone other than my own children. Although the letter was written on a scrap piece of paper, filled with grammatical errors and spelling errors, I know I was appreciated.

Being an educator in these uncertain and trying time, memories of this note and many others I've received over the years make me want to continue giving back to my learners the best of me.

The positive acknowledgements of my learners are my 'little gems,' helping me see that there is good out there and it can come from the most unexpected persons.

A simple, random, inexpensive item like a pen can be used to write the most powerful, 'life changing' words.

My second item chosen was an eraser.

The eraser to me is like a 'double-edged sword'. It has allowed me to erase things that have created negative memories and on the other hand adjust some of my behaviour and work practices to make teaching bearable under certain circumstances.

Being an educator, means you have duties and tasks to carry out. You can go all out to complete your task or duty, but if a colleague or member of management doesn't understand you or just wants 'to create "drama"', all the effort you put in can just be thrown out - erased.

Experience has taught me that not everyone will share my views on matters and sometimes insensitivity becomes the order of the day. I've learned to remove as much negativity as I can from situations and keep distance from people with negative energy. Having a mental 'eraser' surely helps with my well-being and mental stability.

These positive and negative acknowledgements continue to shape me as a human, as an educator.

Appendix 12: Participant 4's Selected Activity – Letter Writing

1. Letter writing

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Verulam

4340

28 August 2023

Dear Kerisha

I hope you are doing well. In your previous letter you said you are interested in becoming a teacher and you asked me on my opinion about teaching because of my years of experience. In this letter, I'm going to tell you all about my experiences as a teacher thus far.

As you well know, I love teaching and I take my job very seriously. I show much passion and dedication to my career. My work is impeccable, and my love for the little kids in my class goes a long way.

i)The first experience I want to enlighten you on happened in my very first year of teaching. The primary school I attended when I was a child called and asked if I'm interested in a voluntary position as a grade R teacher and that it will be a good experience for me. I accepted because I have always dreamt to be a teacher and follow in my father's footsteps.

I arrived at the school and the principal welcomed me and told me all about the school, code of conduct and rules for educators at the school. The staff were very welcoming towards me especially those teachers who taught me when I was young.

I got into the classroom and met the children for the first time and you could just see in the eyes of the children that they were afraid of getting used to somebody new. I introduced myself and started showing of my fun, childish and silly side and the children automatically started to get used to me and were more affectionate and accepting compared to how they were when they first met me. I had good class

control and managed to meaningfully gain the attention of the learners at all times. The principal checked up on me quite a number of times and she was quite impressed that the learners were well disciplined and the children were actively and happily engaging in their work.

One week passed and she called me to the office and told me that she is really impressed with my work, my planning, my preparation, the way I interact with the kids, teachers and parents and she offered me a position as a grade R teacher in that school and I immediately accepted. I felt so proud of myself, so overjoyed and truly blessed. It felt amazing to see that my dream of becoming a teacher came true. After this positive acknowledgement and starting of my career I pushed forward and tried every way to make my teaching even more exciting with the learners, to involve parents as much as I can, to engage and discuss ideas with the teachers and just have a positive influence to those around me.

ii) In my second year of teaching, I had a different principal and he had a different approach on everything. In his eyes, grade R teachers were nothing and they didn't have any value at the school they were just meant to teach grade R. You weren't given any duties or any recognition above just being a grade R educator. This was really disappointing and demotivating but I pushed forward because of the children and the positive remarks I was getting from the parents. The second grade r class teacher decided to resign to work as a secretary at the school so I was given both classes to look after until another teacher should come in and I ended up looking after seventy 4-5 year olds in one classroom. Even though I had such a daunting task ahead of me I tried my best to make sure all children were taken care of and occupied and were still learning in the process even though they were sitting in many areas in the classroom, like the tables, the cubicles and carpeted areas. One child asked to use the toilet and 5 minutes had passed so I went looking for her. I searched the school for her and couldn't find her and took the matter to the office this is when it all went spiralling downwards.

The principal shouted at me and told me that because I am not a mother that is why I do not know how to look after a child. He told me that I am not fit to be a teacher and that I should reconsider my career decision because I could lose a child. He continuously shouted at me and degraded me so badly that I just broke down and

cried but he still continued. I started to apologize and as I apologized the child's mother came to school. She started explaining that her neighbour saw her child outside the classroom and told her to come home one time with them so she doesn't have to walk in the heat. The child went along with them leaving her bag at school. The mother apologised for the neighbour's irresponsible behaviour by not reporting to me first before taking leave.

I accepted the apology of the parent and the principal said everything is okay to the mother but did not say anything to me. I left the office and went back to my class rethinking whether I really should be a teacher because of this. I felt defeated, insulted, demotivated and worthless all at the same time. I phoned my mum and she helped me to pick myself up again and to remember that I am doing it for the kids and should not feel judged by what the principal told me. No apology was ever given by the principal. This incident was a turning point in my career. I picked myself up and decided to use the words used against me to strengthen me and to empower me to do my job even more passionately and fiercely. Whenever I face any difficult person or situation, I choose to let it build me not break me and to also not wait for apologies that I most likely will never receive.

iii)The next principal had joined our school on my birthday and he was the best principal I have ever experienced in my whole teaching career thus far. He motivated me and told me that I can be so much more and that I should study and further myself and improve myself because he sees so much of potential in me. He saw my worth and did not limit me to "just a grade R teacher".

He should call me into his office and taught me things so I can be empowered for future managerial positions. He was a real father figure to me, I could talk to him about school, family, finances and he always gave advice in every aspect.

Him being my mentor, had the biggest impact on my life and career and because of him I felt I could do anything tackle any task, any duty even if it's something new, I knew I could do it. I have this mindset ever since then and I'm using the same mindset in my new school which I am at now and everything I take on head on and I am really grateful for the faith he had in me and for the way he empowered me.

iv) Lastly, I just want to talk to you about teaching overall and how this has been such an amazing experience for me. Teaching me have your ups and downs but at the end of the day it is the most rewarding experience. Teaching made me into the person that I am today, all my experiences shape me to who I am.

The countless lives that I have touched in all these years, the parents that I became friends with, the children who still remember me even after so many years have passed, I will never forget these precious moments.

Last week, I went to a store and someone just stopped me because he recognised me as his grade R teacher and he said "Mam, I still remember you! You were the best teacher in all my years, I am now in matric and I will do you very proud". I was brought to tears by this and just hugged him and he was so shocked that I could still remember his name. On the same day, at the same store, the cashier recognised me and told me how her child still talks about me after all these years.

This made me feel really happy, really proud and worthy of having a title of a teacher.

It doesn't matter what people say or what people may do, always remember what you are made of, what you were called to do and what you are equipped to do. Go out there and make an impact as well as I know you will do. The education department and the lives of the many learners will definitely benefit having someone like you on their side. You are a great person with amazing qualities and I know u will fall in love with this career just as much as I am.

Thank you for the love and friendship that you have given me all these years even after you moved to Johannesburg. I really miss you here in Durban, please don't forget to visit me next time you come down.

Yours Sincerely

Alexis

Appendix 13: Turnitin Receipt



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

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Submission title: **Khadija's Masters thesis**
File name: **Masters_full_thesis_Khadija_turnitin_version.docx**
File size: **16.85M**
Page count: **163**
Word count: **55,675**
Character count: **294,146**
Submission date: **16-Jun-2025 10:25AM (UTC+0200)**
Submission ID: **2700292924**



Primary School Teachers' Stories of Acknowledgment and Their Personal and Professional Identities

BY
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(STUDENT NUMBER: 2021 5791)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS IN EDUCATION

School of Education

College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa

2024

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR PREVANAND (LABBY) RAMRATHAN

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NUMBER: HSSREC/0005048/2023

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31/7/25