Navigating racialised identity as a Black female educator within the educational journey: an autoethnographic study

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A full dissertation submitted in fulfilment of Master of Education (Educational Psychology)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

EDGEWOOD CAMPUS

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2024

PERSONAL DECLARATION:

I, Vuyelwa Mkhabela, declare that the research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university and does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source is detailed in the thesis and in the References sections Where other written sources have been quoted, their words have been rewritten, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced. Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks and referenced.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Almighty for guiding me through this journey. It has been a humbling experience, marked by significant learning, personal and academic growth, and a mix of highs and lows. Through it all this journey has been immensely rewarding.

To my supervisors, **Dr Zanele Zama and Dr Makie Kortjass,** thank you for your guidance through this process. Your kindness, patience, encouragement and support have made a huge difference in how I approached this process. Thank you so much for helping me find my way through this journey.

To my family, my parents, **Payi** and **Sonto Mkhabela**, none of this would have been possible without you. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I lost hope. Thank you for opening my eyes to the endless possibilities, for nurturing, guiding and supporting me through this process. You have been nothing but a source of inspiration and awe in my life. I hope this achievement brings you joy baba, as you watch over us. Ngiyabona baba no mama.

To my sisters, **Vuyiswa, Nozuko** and **Zoleka,** thank you for being there for me, academically and personally. Experiencing our post graduate degrees together and watching you all navigate the process, gave me fuel to keep going.

To my nephew, Umi and my niece, Asi thank you for always being eager to help me and encourage me through this process.

To my son, Unathi, thank you for being with me throughout this process, for checking on me whenever I was doing my work, reminding me to do my work and for stay up with me. I am so thankful for you.

DEDICATION

I would like to thank and dedicate this dissertation to my mother**, Sonto Mkhabela.** No amount of words can truly express the overwhelming gratitude I have for you. Thank you for installing a love of learning and growing in me. This degree is just as much mine as it is yours. Thank you for being my support structure, always solid, steady and constantly supporting my dreams. If it was not for you, I would have given up. When I look back through all the highs and lows of this process, you were always there. Never missing a step, and for that I am deeply thankful.

ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic research study aimed to explore the experiences of a Black female educator navigate racialised identity within the educational journey from pre-primary to high school, and university. This study is based on my experiences of attending predominantly white schools in Durban North during the early post-apartheid period. I am currently teaching in a township school in Ntuzuma, Durban. The study describes how my schooling experiences and historical background have influenced my teaching style. In this study, a gap is filled in the literature because few studies discuss post-apartheid experiences of Black females who attended primarily white schools. The Intersectionality theory underpin this study. The research questions were addressed using a qualitative approach and auto-ethnography, where the researcher is also a participant in the research. By using this methodology, the researcher was able to explore lived experiences through a variety of methods, such as memory work, photographs, artefacts, collages, critical friends, and reflective journals. This study found that parental involvement, sibling support, culture, and socioeconomic position were all factors that affected the ability to navigate predominantly White schools. The experiences shared showed that much of my Blackness was diluted, particularly issues with native tongue, which proved problematic during teaching practice. Unlike the literature, schooling experiences were challenging rather than traumatising. It was determined that due to attending predominantly white educational institutions, much needs to be unlearned about identity.

This motivates the researcher to become an effective educator.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE ILLUSION OF BELONGING

1.1 Introduction

Several contextual factors can influence educators' practice and how they interact with learners and fellow educators. As humans, we are complex beings profoundly shaped by our experiences. To explore how much, I decided to conduct an autoethnographic study that focuses on my experiences within the context of my educational journey and how those experiences have influenced my teaching practices. This chapter briefly discusses the focus and purpose of the study, the background, rationale, research aims and questions, key concepts, the theoretical perspective that underpins the study, the methodological approach, and the overall overview of the study.

1.2 Focus and purpose of the study

A significant purpose of this study is to assess my experiences as a Black female educator to develop a deeper understanding of my racialised identity within the context of my educational journey. This study focuses on how my experiences within my personal history and the challenges I faced within my education as a Black female have helped or hindered my teaching practice. As a result of attending a predominantly white pre-primary and primary school, then attending a predominantly white all-girl high school, followed by attending predominantly white universities, and now teaching at a Black school. I explore my experiences from the self-perspective within that larger context. Having spent most of my educational career within traditionally white spaces to now having a career in predominantly Black spaces, I am increasingly curious about how this has impacted me as an educator. Throughout my educational journey I have encountered and interacted with a variety of environments with a variety of genders and races, all of which have significantly influenced my teaching practices. Consequently, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences to enhance my effectiveness as an educator.

1.3 Background and context

I am an educator teaching in the intermediate phase at a non-fee-paying primary school in Ntuzuma, where I have been teaching for seven years. Teaching English First Additional Language and Personal and Social Well-being (Life Skills). The context in which I teach has presented me with many day-to-day challenges throughout the years. Each day presenting various challenges, including managing learner behavior and addressing issues related to their emotional, physical, mental, and financial well-being. Additionally, I face difficulties with learners' attitudes towards learning, overcrowded classrooms, and problems with the school's infrastructure. The lack of appropriate teaching resources and materials, along with language-related issues, also impacts the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It has been seven years since I began my teaching career at the same non-fee-paying primary school in Ntuzuma. During this period, I have experienced significant changes. My proficiency in isiZulu has improved, enhancing my ability to communicate effectively. I have also learned to manage overcrowded classrooms and navigate resource limitations. Additionally, I have adapted to the school's culture, and through this learning process, I have grown more comfortable and effective in my role as an educator in what was once an unfamiliar context.

Despite my years of experience, I occasionally still feel like I do not belong. This concern arises from distressing experiences related to how I communicate in isiZulu, which has sometimes led to my Black identity being questioned and criticised by colleagues and learners. These incidents have caused significant discomfort and made me doubt my effectiveness as an educator, despite knowing that I am competent. As a result of these experiences, I became curious about how my childhood memories and my schooling have shaped my identity as an educator and influenced my teaching practices in the classroom.

My experiences as a Black female growing up in South Africa during the transition from apartheid to the post-apartheid era have profoundly shaped my worldview. The context of my upbringing and the educational environments where I spent my childhood have played a crucial role in forming my identity. As I grew up in KwaMashu, a township characterised by high unemployment, overcrowding, inadequate housing, crime, and

under-resourced schools and health facilities. Despite these challenges, I attended predominantly white schools in Durban North, a well-resourced suburb known for its affluent residential areas, schools, and health facilities. Currently, I teach in Ntuzuma, another township marked by severe social and economic disadvantages, including a substantial informal settlement population, high unemployment, under-resourced schools and health facilities, and persistent issues with water and electricity access. These experiences highlight the enduring racial and economic disparities in South African education post-apartheid.

Thus, through this autoethnography of my experiences evoked from my childhood memories, I aim to understand how my identity as an educator has developed. I explore how my childhood experiences have shaped me as an educator by helping share some insights into how these experiences have affected my teaching practices. Focusing on how I navigated my racialised identity within the educational journey. This exploration spans my experiences during pre-primary, primary, high school and university at a time within the country's history where Black parents were given the opportunity of placing their children in former white schools due to the implementation of the 1996 South African Schools Act. This act prohibited discriminatory admission requirements: learners could not be excluded from admission to any public school despite their race, colour, or ability to pay school fees.

As mentioned earlier, my contextualisation of the world is built by the place where I grew up and the educational environment which helped form my identity. This study explores my childhood memories through a non-traditional qualitative research methodology, autoethnography. My experiences are shared through my personal narrative and the making of a collage to assist me in understanding what and how my background and schooling experiences have influenced my teaching practices.

1.4 Rationale

This section discusses the personal, professional and contextual imperatives that motivated this study.

1.4.1 My Personal experiences

Creswell (2017) suggests that a research topic is chosen because of practical educational problems encountered. This study was motivated by several factors. My study originated from discomforting experiences encountered in my early years as an educator. Particularly memorable was the struggle with communication barriers among my learners. I faced daily challenges as a novice educator, including dealing with many learners in the classroom, disruptive behaviour from learners, and becoming accustomed to the school culture. However, my difficulties communicating in isiZulu had the most significant impact on my teaching practice. The nature of teaching in a township classroom required that I code-switch. I found this extremely challenging since I needed more vocabulary to explain certain concepts from English to isiZulu. Additionally, I needed help understanding some of the answers my learners would provide when they answered in isiZulu.

In addition, my language issues required me to seek additional assistance from other educators when I could not articulate something back to my learners in isiZulu. These challenges resulted in other educators criticising, making fun of, and questioning my Blackness. In this situation, I felt uncomfortable and embarrassed whenever I needed assistance. These experiences made me pause and reflect on how my background and upbringing influenced my teaching practices. As Chang-Kredl and Kingsley (2014) state, our childhood memories are deeply ingrained within us, and they assist us in making sense of our current circumstances and choices. It is, therefore, vital for me to understand the influence of my childhood experiences, particularly those related to my educational journey, on my current identity as an educator.

1.4.2 Professional experiences

From a professional position, Pithouse-Morgan et al., (2014) state that to anticipate the future, recalling childhood memories and productive remembering require reflection on the past, thus bridging the worlds of the autobiographical, personal, and social. As an educator, it is my professional obligation to use such productive memories and childhood memories to construct my educator self. By exercising reflexivity, I seek to understand, unlearn, and become more aware of how my complex role relates to my learners and colleagues.

Additionally, my epidemiological assumptions motivated my study (Creswell, 2017). By conducting autoethnographic research, I aim to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the experiences of Black females throughout their educational journey and how these experiences have influenced their teaching practices. Through my autoethnography, I have shared my experiences in non-traditional research methodologies through storytelling and collage. Through exploring the educational journey from pre-primary to primary school to high school to university.

From a professional standpoint, there is a notable scarcity of autoethnographic studies that chronologically examine the educational journeys of Black females. Farmer (2021) highlighted this gap by analyzing the narratives of Black women in academia within South African higher education. The study revealed a significant shortage of scholarly articles and books addressing this specific topic, underscoring the need for more comprehensive research that chronicles and explores the educational experiences of Black women over time. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of further investigating and documenting the unique and often underrepresented perspectives of Black female learners in educational settings.

Farmer (2021) states that Black females face many issues in education and the academic world. Although it is impossible to consider all these issues, it is critical to investigate the chronological development of individuals within a particular society. For this reason, this study focuses on the experiences of an Black female during her educational journey through pre-primary, primary, high school, and university. Further, Langa (2020) reaffirms what Farmer (2021) stated about the importance of research that encompasses more than just one aspect of the educational journey by examining the schooling experiences in predominantly white schools. Even though Langa's (2020) study was very insightful, it was primarily focused on her schooling experiences.

In contrast, a study by Shabalala (2018) on a Black woman's education experience in South Africa sheds light beyond primary schooling. It explores her experiences in higher education. The literature review reveals a scarcity of studies focusing on the experiences of Black females throughout their educational journeys and how these experiences have impacted or influenced their careers, in this case, teaching. Due to its objective, this study is relevant to filling this knowledge gap.

1.4.3 Contextual experiences

This study is further motivated by the context in which I find myself as an educator. Teaching in a township school and facing daily challenges in communicating more effectively with my learners has resulted in the feeling of not belonging and needing to perform better as an educator. How my Blackness is questioned, ridiculed or criticised has affected me tremendously. Conceptually, I wish to gain a thorough understanding of racialised identity in white spaces and how those experiences affect and impact my teaching practices.

1.5 Research aims

1.To explore parts of my personal history that have impacted my identity as a Black female educator.

2.To identify the challenges that I experienced throughout my educational journey as a Black female educator.

3.To explore how my historical background has influenced my teaching practices.

1.6 Research questions

1. What parts of my history have impacted my identity as a Black female educator?
2. What are the challenges that I experienced within my educational journey as a Black female educator?
3. How has my historical background influenced my teaching practices?

1.7 Key concepts and theoretical perspectives

This section explains the critical concepts explored throughout this study: race, African, Black, Blackness, female, educator, navigate, identity, educational journey, predominantly white institutions and belonging. In addition, this section also discusses the main theoretical perspectives or lenses that underpin this study.

Race

Race is defined as a social construct that classifies people based on physical, cultural, or genetic traits seen as distinct and distinctive within a society or culture. The concept of race has its origins in European colonialism and has been used to justify racial hierarchies and discrimination throughout history. It is critical to note that race has social and political implications (Clair & Denis, 2015).

African

In the apartheid state, as in colonialism, the term "African" was used to classify individuals who had particular skin colours, curly hair, and specific facial characteristics by biological differences that distinguished races within humans. In addition, some refer to any individual who resides in or originates from, a part of the continental land mass known as Africa (Manji, 2019)

Black

The term Black refers to an ethnic group or category that encompasses individuals of Black descent. It is considered a racial classification used in social and political contexts. In the realm of race, being classified as Black signifies ancestry and cultural heritage rooted in the African continent (Duello et al., 2021).

Blackness

Blackness is a complex and multifaceted concept encompassing various aspects of identity, culture, and history. This term has been used throughout history to describe people of Black descent and is associated with various meanings and connotations. Blackness continues to evolve and is influenced by societal and cultural factors (Hrabovský, 2013).

Female

The term female refers to the gender of an individual. Females are individuals that possess reproductive organs and exhibit feminine characteristics. As a term, female encompasses many identities, including women, girls, and non-binary individuals who identify as female (Meyer, 2015).

Educator

An educator is a person who is trained and skilled in the transmission of knowledge and guidance to learners and individuals. Educators are vital in guiding and shaping learners' minds and skills in the educational process, deeply understand their subject content and can effectively communicate it to others. Educators are responsible for developing and implementing lesson plans, assessing learners' progress, and providing guidance and support throughout the educational process. The educators' role extends beyond the classroom, as they are often mentors and role models for learners, inspiring them to reach their full potential (Kolb, 2014).

Navigate

Navigating is guiding or manoeuvring one's way through a given environment or situation; finding one's way through, over, and across a given situation or environment and is the process of moving or progressing logically. The ability to plan, direct, or plot one's course or position to navigate, a plan is necessary (Thomason, 2017).

Identity

Identity refers to the personal characteristics and qualities that define an individual. It is the unique set of attributes that differentiate one person from another. Various factors shape identity, including cultural background, upbringing, experiences, and personal values. It is a dynamic concept that evolves as individuals grow and develop (Sokol, 2009).

Educational

Educational refers to learning and acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies through formal or non-formal means. It involves the systematic acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, enabling individuals to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in society actively. Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, play a significant role in providing education and facilitating learning (Kapur, 2019; Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

Journey

In this study, the term journey is used in the context of education. The term' educational journey' refers to the entire educational process of a person from the beginning of their

education, whether it is in a pre-school program or completing a degree program at a university (Laidlaw, 2008; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018).

Belonging

Belonging refers to the concept of feeling connected to a group or community. It encompasses a sense of acceptance, identity, and connection. Belonging is essential for individuals to grow and develop, providing them with a sense of community and social support. Research suggests that a sense of belonging can enhance psychological wellbeing, improve academic performance, and promote positive social interactions. Therefore, fostering a sense of belonging is crucial for cultivating a positive and inclusive environment for individuals to thrive (Sithaldeen et al., 2022).

1.8 Theoretical perspective

Grant and Osanloo (2014) state that a theoretical framework can explain theories that support research work. It aids researchers in determining the route of their studies. It clarifies how their assumptions about the concepts relate to their intended research. A framework functions as a platform on which research design and procedures for data collection, analyses, and interpretation are based (Cresswell, 2017). The theoretical perspective that underpins this study is The Intersectionality theory. The Intersectionality theory was developed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that recognises and addresses the interconnected nature of social identities and experiences. The theory acknowledges that individuals have multiple social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, that intersect and affect how they are perceived and treated. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals cannot be solely defined by one of their social identities but rather by the complex intersections and interactions between them. By highlighting marginalised communities' unique needs and experiences, this framework has contributed to advancing social justice and equity (Crenshaw et al., 2013).

It emphasises the importance of the woman's voice in expressing her own experiences, which this study aims to do. This theory was chosen as a supporting lens as it acknowledges the social-cultural and historical factors that influence Black women’s

unique experiences at the intersection of their racial, class and gender identities, paying close attention and highlighting the importance of a woman's standpoint (Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw et al., 2013; Al-Faham et al., 2019).

This frameworks is significant in the following ways: The Intersectionality theory helps me understand and gain insight into how my identity formation was impacted by my background and the experiences I went through during my schooling years post-apartheid in predominantly White. institutions. This is of importance, given the racial legacies of South Africa. As the Intersectionality theory stresses that nothing happens in a bubble, the formation of my identity happened within the context of where I grew up and the schools I attended post-apartheid within which multiple forms of overlapping discrimination, oppressiveness and disadvantage interacted in shaping my identity. These theories were used together to provide a holistic understanding of how gender, race and social class have intersected in shaping and influencing my identity and, in turn, how these experiences have influenced my teaching practices.

1.9 Methodological approach

This section briefly discusses the methodological approach used in this study. In chapter three, this approach is discussed in more detail and depth. This study utilises autoethnography as its methodological approach. According to Adams et al., (2015), autoethnography, as a qualitative research method, describes and critiques cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences from the researcher's perspective. Secondly, it recognises and values the relationship between a researcher and others. Thirdly, it involves reflection, commonly called "reflexivity", to understand the relationship between self and society, both specific and general, from a personal and political standpoint. Fourthly, it illustrates how people are trying to determine what they should do, how to live, and their struggles. Additionally, it combines intellectual rigour, emotion, and creativity.

Autoethnography was appropriate for this study as it challenges traditional scientific approaches. It allows me to be both the researcher and participant in the study which helps in documenting my experiences in a highly personal manner. This approach also allowed me to use non-traditional methods of generating data, such as memory work,

through photographs, artefacts, a reflective journal and collage-making (Ellis et al., 2011). This methodology gave me the opportunity to explore my background and challenges faced during my schooling and university days in a flexible way, using these various data collection methods that enrich the study. It encourages self-expression as the data can be presented in various ways. Furthermore, it allows me to share my narrative descriptions of being a Black female educator and the navigation within my educational journey. This approach gives a voice to research that might be overlooked. As Wall (2006) states, traditional scientific approaches require researchers to downplay themselves, denying their identity. This approach allows me to be the participant and researcher, allowing direct access to my research and a thick data description.

1.10 Conclusion and Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 1

This chapter outlines the foundations of the study, highlights the background information, and explains how it is framed and rooted. I explain the rationale and motivation for the study, the purpose, the focus, and the research questions in this chapter. A description of the methodology and theoretical perspective of this study is provided.

Chapter 2

In chapter two, the literature review is discussed. This chapter was designed to provide a solid foundation for understanding how Black females navigate their racialised identities within their educational journeys. Moreover, the chapter two literature review contains critical theories, concepts, and ideas. The theoretical perspective is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3

This chapter explains in detail how to formulate research questions for answering these questions. Autoethnography is an essential aspect of the methodology discussed. This chapter also discusses a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm and the research design. A discussion of the different methods used, including memory working through narrative writing artefacts, photographs, and critical friends, enabled the data triangulation—an

overview of data analysis methods, their strengths and limitations, and sampling methods. Furthermore, the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology and methods are examined in detail to determine validity or trustworthiness, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4

The fourth chapter addresses my first research question: What parts of my history have impacted my identity as a Black female educator? Throughout this chapter, I have recounted aspects of my history that have impacted me as a Black female educator. Using memory work, photographs, artefacts, and critical friends to ensure I was on the right track helped me evoke and stimulate my past experiences. I discussed my childhood and adolescent experiences which I emphasised more since they are the closest to my primary school teaching experience.

Chapter 5

Chapter five addresses my second research question: What challenges have I experienced during my educational journey as a Black female educator? This chapter gives a comprehensive account and reflection of my experiences in pre-primary, primary, high school and university, discussing the challenges I faced at every phase of my educational journey and how those challenges were navigated. This was done through memory work, using photographs, artefacts such as report cards, and my family as critical friends to help evoke my memories.

Chapter 6

Chapter six addressed my third research question: How has my historical background influenced my teaching practice? This chapter explored the parts of my history that have influenced my teaching practice. Through the making of a collage, this chapter helped answer the third research question. This chapter also includes the findings and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Introduction

Chapter one outlined the introduction and background to the study. The rationale and motivation for the study was described. I explained the purpose and the focus, to develop a deeper understanding of my racialised identity within the context of my educational journey. By assessing my experiences as a Black female educator, who attended predominantly white institutions and currently teaching at a predominantly Black school, I explore how these experiences have impacted on my teaching practice. The research questions aimed to explore the parts of my history that impacted my identity as a Black female educator particularly the challenges experienced within my educational journey as a Black female educator. my historical background has influenced my teaching practices. Further, a description of the methodology and theoretical perspective of this study was provided.

In this chapter, relevant literature on the experiences of Black females navigating their racialised identity within their educational journeys is reviewed. The concept of the educational journey is discussed in the context of this study, followed by an examination of racialised identity. The impact of colonialism and the apartheid legacy on the experiences of Black female learners is highlighted, including the apartheid-era legislation that significantly influenced these experiences. Additionally, post-apartheid educational reforms are considered. Challenges faced by Black female learners, from both international and South African perspectives, are reviewed. Finally, the theoretical framework underpinning this study is presented.

2.2 Educational journey

Education refers to the process by which knowledge, skills, and competencies are acquired, whether formally or informally. Achieving and disseminating knowledge is an integral part of this process, which enables individuals to develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate effectively in society. A key role is played by educational institutions, such as schools and universities, in the provision of education and the facilitation of learning. In the context of this study an educational journey refers to the process of the achievement and disseminating of knowledge that Black females undergo as they navigate through the various educational experiences in predominately white institutions from primary school to higher education and beyond (Wilder & Lilvist, 2018; Kapur, 2019; Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

2.3 Racialised identity and its implications in predominantly white institutions

Racialised identity, which signifies the importance of race in shaping individual and group identity, is a critical concept for understanding social dynamics and interactions (Croll, 2019; Mims & Williams, 2020). Racial identity involves an individual's psychological internalization of their own race and the race of others, shaping how individuals perceive and experience their racial identity and how they are perceived and treated by others based on race. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in broader historical, economic, educational, and political forces that significantly limit individual choice and shape social interactions (Broman, 2015).

The historical construction of racial identity highlights the influence of power dynamics. Europeans began classifying individuals based on skin colour in the sixteenth century, and by the nineteenth century, relatively clear definitions of racial groups had emerged globally. These dominant groups identified themselves as white and assigned contrasting labels to others, such as Blacks and Indians, based on societal power rather than scientific or medical foundations. This historical context underscores the discretionary nature of racial classifications and its reliance on social power (Broman, 2015)

Racial identity is a multidimensional construct which encompasses several components. Yip (2018) and Mathews et al. (2020) define racial identity as one's sense of self in

relation to racial group membership. Broman (2015) expands on this by identifying two main components: racial group identification and racial group consciousness. Racial group identification involves the strength of individuals' identification with their racial group and their sense of attachment to other group members. Racial group consciousness includes the evaluation of group memberships, relevant attitudes, and behaviours, suggesting an action orientation and a set of political beliefs associated with racial groups (Broman, 2015).

The fluidity and inconsistency of racial classifications further complicate the concept of racial identity. Research demonstrates that race is an arbitrary and fluid concept, biologically and sociologically inconsistent and contradictory (Cross, 2014; Broman, 2015; Davenport, 2020). Despite this, the social construction of racial identity leads to the labeling of individuals into specific groups and their self-identification with these groups. It is crucial to distinguish between being labeled as part of a particular group and psychologically identifying with that group (Broman, 2015).

The measurement of racial identity involves various constructs that capture its complexity. Studies have examined constructs such as self-consciousness, racial group identification, racial group perceptions, and acculturation (Liebkind, 2016; Safa et al., 2021). The common theme among these constructs is the strong psychological and emotional connection individuals feel as group members, which scholars consider central to defining racial identity (Broman, 2015).

The experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions illustrate the significance of understanding racialised identity. These learners often face alienation and exclusion due to the dominant white culture, negatively impacting their academic success and sense of belonging. Understanding racialised identity in this context provides critical insights into the unique challenges and barriers Black female learners encounter (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Ojuola, 2020; Mkhize, 2022).

The intersection of racialised identity with factors such as class, gender, and sexual orientation further complicates the experiences of Black female learners. Studies indicate that while Black female learners often have positive identities, they face challenges in negotiating their social identities (Davis et al., 2019; Francis, 2021). Given

the historical and social context of South Africa, which exacerbates the challenges Black female learners face in predominantly white institutions, understanding racialised identity is crucial (Motala & Pampallis, 2020).

2.4 The legacy of colonialism and apartheid on racialised identity

Understanding the historical context of colonialism and apartheid is crucial for examining the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions. The legacy of these oppressive systems has created an environment where Black female learners often face numerous challenges due to the enduring effects of policies implemented during these eras.

The legacy of colonialism and apartheid continues to profoundly impact the racialised identity of the Black population in South Africa. Policies such as the Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act, and Bantu Education Act enforced racial segregation and perpetuated a system of racial categorization that still shapes the experiences of Black females, particularly within educational contexts (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008; Puttick, 2011; Moorosi, 2021).

South Africa's deep-seated social inequalities have roots in the systematic exclusion of Black people dating back to colonial rule and continuing through apartheid. Racial discrimination began with the Dutch settlers' arrival at the Cape in 1652, leading to the dispossession of land and resources from local inhabitants such as the Khoikhoi herders and San (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015). Although some level of coexistence existed initially, British rule in the mid-nineteenth century solidified the racial hierarchy, denying equality between Europeans and the native Black population (Oliver & Oliver, 2017).

The establishment of governance based on race during both colonial and apartheid eras entrenched racial discrimination. In the nineteenth century, the Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State implemented various racially discriminatory laws. Despite the lack of clear definitions, these laws categorized individuals as whites and natives, often leading to inconsistent and arbitrary racial classifications (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015; Kalu & Falola, 2019; Maharaj, 2020).

The need to classify natives was partly driven by economic motives, such as the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911, which aimed to extract taxes from native workers. This act introduced racial categories of whites, Blacks, and coloureds, but without a uniform system for determining group membership. The lack of consistency in racial classification persisted until the National Party's rise to power in 1948 (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015; Kalu & Falola, 2019; Ellison & de Wet, 2020; Maharaj, 2020).

The National Party's implementation of the 1950 Population Registration Act marked a significant shift towards a more rigid and rule-governed system of racial classification. This act aimed to produce more effective and coordinated mechanisms of racial surveillance, fundamentally shaping the racial identity of the Black population. The systematic oppression of the Black population in South Africa was largely facilitated by the numerous laws implemented by the National Party during apartheid. These laws reinforced a racial hierarchy that positioned the Black population as inferior, profoundly impacting their racial identity. Key legislation, such as the Population Registration Act and the Bantu Education Act, institutionalised racial discrimination and segregation, which has had a lasting impact on the self-perception and societal treatment of Black individuals. Understanding these laws and their effects is essential to comprehending the challenges faced by Black female learners in predominantly white educational institutions (Breckenridge, 2014; Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015; Kalu & Falola, 2019; Maharaj, 2020).

2.5 The impact of apartheid legislation on racialised identity and experiences of Black female learners

The implementation of apartheid policies significantly impacted the experiences of the Black population. The following section will examine the effects of apartheid legislation on the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions.

2.5.1 The Populations Registration Act of 1950

The rise to power of the National Party in 1948 marked a turning point in South Africa’s history, as the party implemented a series of laws designed to entrench white supremacy

and racial segregation. Central to this strategy was the 1950 Population Registration Act, which sought to classify the South African population into four primary racial groups: Europeans, Asiatics, persons of mixed race or coloureds, and natives or pure blooded individuals of the Bantu race (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015). This classification system was more explicit than its predecessors, aiming to solidify the social construction of race. The Bantu classification was further subdivided into eight groups, with Xhosa and Zulu being the most numerous, and even the coloured classification was subdivided based on ethnic criteria (Breckenridge, 2014; Diallo, 2020).

2.5.2 The Group Areas Act of 1950

To maintain racial segregation and control, the National Party implemented the Group Areas Act of 1950. This act designated specific residential areas for each racial group on a compulsory basis, dictating where people could live, work, and attend school. The goal was to create a modern state that was racially segregated and economically, politically, and socially stratified, ensuring that each race remained in its proper place. This act laid the foundation for the physical and social separation of racial groups, perpetuating inequality and Marginalisation of the Black population (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015; Kalu & Falola, 2019; Maharaj, 2020).

2.5.3 The Bantu Education Act of 1953

Education was a critical tool for the apartheid regime to divide society and establish identities. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 aimed to provide separate and unequal education for different racial groups, severely limiting the educational opportunities for Black learners (Ndimande, 2016). This policy abolished missionary schools that had previously offered more equitable education to Black children and replaced them with state-controlled schools that were underfunded, understaffed, and provided an inferior curriculum. The result was overcrowded classrooms and inadequate facilities, further entrenching educational disparities (Gallo, 2020; Farmer, 2021).

2.5.4 South Africa's apartheid curriculum

The apartheid curriculum was explicitly designed to reinforce racial stereotypes and promote segregation, systematically excluding the history, culture, and contributions of the Black population (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015). The curriculum glorified white supremacy and nationalism while marginalizing Black nationalism and depicting the Black population as primitive and uncivilized. This biased educational content aimed to instill a sense of inferiority in Black learners, shaping their racialised identity and limiting their aspirations and self-worth (Thobejane, 2013).

The educational system's devaluation of Black culture and history perpetuated a distorted understanding of what it meant to be Black, reinforcing the ideology of white supremacy. The ruling party used education as a tool to ingrain these ideologies significantly impacted the racialised identity of Black learners, fostering a generation with a diminished sense of their capabilities and potential (McKeever, 2017; Kennemer, 2018).

2.5.5 Ongoing impacts and relevance

The lingering consequences of apartheid-era policies continue to affect the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions. Black female learners often face challenges related to identity negotiation, cultural alienation, marginalisation and access to education (Puttick, 2011; Motala & Pampallis, 2020). Understanding the historical context of colonialism and apartheid is crucial in addressing these ongoing impacts.

2.6 Post-apartheid educational reforms and the legacy of apartheid

In this section, post-apartheid educational reforms in South Africa, including the unification of segregated departments and the 1996 Schools Act are discussed. Also addressing the challenges in curriculum changes and persistent racial inequalities, particularly for Black female learners, highlighting ongoing systemic barriers. Understanding race and gender intersectionality is crucial for exploring the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions.

2.6.1 Transformation of the education system post-1994

After the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa undertook significant educational reforms to address the deep-seated inequalities of the past. The nineteen segregated Education Departments were consolidated into a single National Department and nine provincial Departments of Education. These reforms aimed to ensure equitable access to education, improve curriculum standards, enhance educator training, and upgrade infrastructure (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Chisholm, 2012; Sayed et al., 2013). These changes were pivotal in addressing historical injustices and creating a more inclusive educational landscape.

2.6.2 The South African Schools Act of 1996

The South African Schools Act of 1996 was a landmark policy aimed at transforming the education system to promote equity and redress. This act introduced inclusive practices, decentralised decision-making, and recognised cultural and linguistic diversity to ensure all learners had equal access to quality education (Mubanga, 2012; Motala & Pampallis, 2020). By implementing these policies, the government sought to dismantle the discriminatory structures of the past and create a more just and equitable educational system. Which facilitated the unification of segregated departments and allowed Black female learners to attend predominantly white institutions.

2.6.3 Post-apartheid curriculum reforms

South Africa’s post-apartheid curriculum reforms, including Curriculum 2005 and the Outcomes-Based Education model introduced in 1997, emphasized respect for human rights, social justice, and cultural diversity (Gumede & Biyase, 2016). Despite these aims, the Outcomes-Based Education model faced numerous challenges, leading to the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement in 2002 and its later refinement into the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement in 2012 (De Jager et al., 2017). Both the National Curriculum Statement and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement aimed to align the curriculum with the South African Constitution's values, promoting social justice and respect for diverse cultures. However, debates persist

regarding the curriculum's effectiveness in addressing the historical context and the ongoing impacts of apartheid (Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017; Russell et al., 2019).
Understanding these reforms is crucial for exploring the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions.

2.6.4 Ongoing challenges in addressing racial inequalities

Despite these comprehensive curriculum reforms, the legacy of apartheid continues to affect the racialised identity and educational experiences of Black female learners, who often face challenges in navigating predominantly white institutions. Persistent racial inequalities in educational outcomes and opportunities reveal that systemic barriers remain, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Black female learners (McKeever, 2017; Hino et al., 2018; Moorosi, 2021).

2.7 The experiences of Black females in predominantly white institutions

This section examines the experiences of Black female learners within both international and South African contexts. It explores the challenges documented in existing literature that these learners encounter, and examines how they navigate these obstacles within predominantly white institutions. The focus is on understanding the complexities and strategies involved in the educational journeys of Black female learners in such environments.

2.8 An international perspective

This section explores the challenges faced by Black female learners in predominantly white institutions from an international perspective. The discussion examines how demographic shifts have increased cultural diversity in suburban schools, the impact of professional development on addressing these learners' needs, the dual challenges of invisibility and hypervisibility, the importance of connection to academic success, the confrontation with normative standards of femininity, the practice of double consciousness, and the role of academic support and stereotypes. This comprehensive

examination aims to highlight the nuanced experiences and systemic barriers that Black female learners navigate in their educational journeys.

2.8.1 Increasing diversity in suburban school

According to Andrews et al. (2019), suburban schools have increasingly become culturally diverse since the early 2000s, prompting efforts to better meet the needs of minority learners. Despite these advancements, Black female learners have historically faced significant academic and social challenges in predominantly White suburban schools. Studies by Nash (2009) and Jacobs (2017) provide detailed insights into these experiences.

Black female learners often navigate a complex landscape where they encounter both overt and subtle forms of racial and gender-based bias. Nash (2009) highlights that these learners frequently confront stereotypes and preconceived notions about their abilities and behavior, which can undermine their academic confidence and performance. For instance, they may be unfairly judged or held to lower expectations compared to their peers, impacting their academic opportunities and self-esteem

Additionally, Jacobs (2017) explores how Black female learners wrestle with a sense of cultural disconnection in predominantly White schools. These learners often experience a lack of representation in curricula and teaching materials, which can lead to feelings of invisibility and exclusion. The cultural and social isolation they experience can hinder their ability to engage fully with the educational content and their peers. Moreover, the pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms while trying to maintain their own cultural identity can be emotionally draining.

These challenges are compounded by the need for Black female learners to constantly navigate between their own cultural values and the expectations of a predominantly White educational environment. The struggle to assert their identities while facing systemic biases contributes to a complex educational experience. Understanding these detailed experiences is essential for educators, as it underscores the necessity for culturally responsive teaching practices and supportive school environments that validate and address the unique needs of Black female learners, thereby enhancing their academic success and emotional well-being.

Despite this, Nash (2009) contends that in the United States of America, there has been an emphasis on professional development training for school staff focusing on racial and cultural diversity. However, schools are less likely to focus on the intersection of gender (female), ethnicity (Black), and the school (environment). Although, according to Mirza (2008), it is imperative to understand the background, experiences, and culture of learners from different cultures to close the gap between learners and their educators. By examining the lived experiences of Black females concerning the educational system, educators, researchers, and community members can learn more about how racism structures opportunities and limits future opportunities for Black female learners.

2.8.2 The dual experience of invisibility and hypervisibility

There is a common practice in the educational setting for Black females to find themselves frequently experiencing being in situations where they are discounted or excluded from discussions on education, where they must position themselves under one group identity, either by race or gender (Nash, 2009). According to Ricks (2014) and Joseph et al. (2016), Black female learners experience being invisible in the educational setting. Educators, administrators, and policymakers frequently overlook the needs of Black female learners, emphasising that Black female learners face distinct challenges in navigating their educational journeys yet those go unnoticed. These challenges are a result of social issues such as racism, poverty, violence, discrimination, gender bias, behavioural problems, and alienation from education.

While these social issues exist, Mirza (2014, p. 9) agreeably argues that Black females are considered "mute visible objects". As a consequence, Black female learners continue to experience marginalisation, oppression, and a feeling of unwelcome in the classroom. According to Nash (2009), the needs and experiences of Black females are seldom adequately addressed, while the attention is almost exclusively devoted to Black males. As a result, Black females have adopted coping and defence mechanisms to navigate their educational journeys. Despite this, educators and school personnel often misunderstand these coping and defence mechanisms as personal or cultural characteristics rather than as coping mechanisms in response to living with daily

microaggressions (Nash, 2009). This oversight has contributed to the invisibility of Black female learners.

In contrast to Ricks (2014) and Joseph et al. (2016)'s findings that Black female learners are invisible in the educational setting, Andrews et al. (2019) and Moore (2020) suggest that Black female learners experience being closely monitored during their interactions and navigation within predominantly white schools in order to ensure they assimilate effectively as not doing so would be a source of anxiety for their white peers. There is evidence to suggest that this type of surveillance can cause deep distress to Black female learners, according to Mirza (2014). Similarly, Ramdeo (2023) asserts that Black female learners are subject to an increased degree of visibility (or hyper-visibility) as a result of being watched closely and scrutinised.

2.8.3 The importance of connection for academic success

The literature suggests that Black female learners experience performing and navigate better academically in the classroom where they feel connected (Jacobs, 2017; Young et al., 2018). Nash (2009) says this occurs when a Black female learners' culture, background, and history are considered and acknowledged within the educational setting. Specifically, this refers to the school environment, the community, the teaching staff, the curriculum, and the standards and expectations placed on Black female learners. Furthermore, Hanif et al. (2023) suggest that academic achievement is closely related to social connection and its effect on Black female learners' self-concept. Additionally, Young et al. (2018) assert that this sense of connection contributes to an individual's identification as a learner and to their conception of themselves. The effectiveness of this lies in the ease with which Black female learners can navigate feelings of being excluded (a lack of feeling connected) and fitting (a sense of connection) in within predominantly white schools.

2.8.4 Confronting normative standards of femininity

In a society where normative standards of femininity are influenced by Western ideologies, such as having straight hair, light skin, and thin figures, Black females are

often subject to behaviours and practices that disregard their Blackness (Jacobs, 2017; Andrews et al., 2019). Black female learners experience having to confront and navigate racist and sexist stereotypes in school that diminish their identity. According to Moore (2020) Black female learners experience educators and other school staff viewing their femininity, including how Black female learners look, their style of walking, talking, dressing, behaving, laughing, and simply existing in educational settings, as a sign of attitude. In addition to rejecting Black femininity, educators publicly shame Black learners, calling them loud and outspoken when they attempt to address the issue of their own identity. Moreover, Moore (2020) indicates that educators are hypervigilant concerning the behaviour of Black females at school. This is in accordance with Mirza (2014), Andrews et al. (2019) and Ramdeo (2023), who all mentioned Black female learners being under constant surveillance at school. Due to this, Black female learners feel that their identity is not seen positively. Ultimately, Black female learners experience their academic contributions and accomplishments overlooked because of their identity (Andrews et al.,2019). Nevertheless, Moore (2020) highlights those Black females navigate this by supporting each other and embracing who they are.

In addition, Black female learners in predominantly white schools have experienced situations of being "the other", noticing early on that their hair, body type, and outlook on life were very different from that of their white peers. However, this experience, allows critical consciousness to evolve over time, as Black female learners expressed that this enabled them to embrace their identity Jacobs (2017, p. 264). However, Russell (2015) asserts that some Black female learners accept the role of being marginalised and being seen and treated as the other, nevertheless on occasion, would act or behave in a manner considered white to fit in with their peers. Despite this, DiAquoi (2010) and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2010) observe that Black female learners often form kinship groups to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among one another, which aligns with Moore's (2020) observation that Black female learners navigate white spaces and the perception of being the other by supporting one another.

2.8.5 The role of double consciousness

As Black female learners navigate predominantly white institutions, code -switching has become second nature. Code-switching is when Black female learners know how they behave and adjust their behaviour according to whom they are interacting with at

school. For Black female learners, it is imperative to behave in a way that disaffirms stereotypical beliefs that perpetuate the narrative of an angry Black female, a Jezebel, and sapphire imagery. This representation illustrates Black female learners who are angry, loud, aggressive, emasculating and have flamboyant hairstyles. It has been noted that Black female learners in an attempt to cope and navigate with varying expectations at school will often experience functioning in double consciousness (code- switching). However, this means that Black female learners are constantly at a tug- of- war about how they are perceived by their educators and peers (Morris, 2007, Moroe, 2020, Motro et al., 2022, Stevenson, 2023).

2.8.6 Academic support and stereotype

Black female learners have experienced that they must work twice as hard to navigate and achieve the same academic outcomes as their white counterparts. To successfully navigate and progress at school, Black female learners recognise that their strong sense of academic identity is attributed to their parent's support and involvement, especially their mothers. Moore (2020) asserts that Black female learners express having benefited from opportunities that are provided to them by their families, such as one-on-one tutoring, safe spaces that allow them to complete their work without conflict, where code-switching is not necessary, and where they have access to resources that compensate for what is lacking in schools.

Even though Black female learners have to work twice as diligently academically as their counterparts, they have experienced educators and peers having low expectations of them (Nash, 2009; Andrews et al., 2019). Black female learners highlight that there is a perception among educators and peers that Black people are only good at sports, singing, or something within the entertainment industry and not at utilising their brains. Even in advanced classes, Black female learners still need to be questioned about their intelligence, and they experience a less conducive learning environment due to the constant need to prove that they belong (Jacobs, 2017; Andrews et al., 2019).

2.8.7 Stereotypes of disruptiveness

Often, Black female learners are stereotyped as loud, unruly, disrespectful, unmanageable, and disruptive. Educators tend to classify all Black females as one group, which means that if one group is considered disruptive, then all Black female learners are also. Black female learners are negatively perceived by adults when they cluster in social spaces within schools, which does not happen with their white counterparts. Furthermore, they experience stricter discipline, more social correction and control measures from their educators and security personnel than their peers, as they are seen as dangerous, threatening and sassy (Jacobs, 2017; Tatum, 2017; Andrews et al., 2019).

2.8.8 Negotiating privilege and marginalisation

According to Jacobs (2017) and Moore (2020), when Black female learners have the opportunity to attend predominantly white institutions, they often have access to resources and networks that many others do not. However, despite this, Russell (2015) contends that the inter-sectional identities of being Black, female, and of differing socioeconomic backgrounds often cause Black female learners to be marginalised academically and socially within the school environment.

2.9 A South African perspective

The experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions in South Africa are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors. Despite the end of apartheid and subsequent policy changes, Black female learners continue to face significant educational disparities and systemic barriers. This section examines these challenges, focusing on accessibility, language barriers, assimilation pressures, feelings of unwelcomeness, the need for compromise, perceptions of inferiority, the policing of appearance, and persistent stereotypes. By exploring these issues, the chapter highlights the ongoing struggles and resilience of Black female learners in South Africa's predominantly white educational institutions.

2.9.1 Legacy of Apartheid and educational disparities

The legacy of apartheid has left an unforgettable mark on South Africa's education system, perpetuating racial and gender inequalities. Policies from the colonial and apartheid eras established a segregated and unequal education system that continues to marginalise Black female learners. Despite the South African Schools Act of 1996, which aimed to provide more comprehensive education opportunities, Black female learners still encounter significant challenges in predominantly white schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Langa, 2020; Farmer, 2021).

2.9.2 Accessibility challenges

Accessibility remains a major issue for Black female learners. Many live in townships far from the suburban schools they attend, facing difficulties due to inadequate public transportation. This lack of reliable transport hinders their ability to attend school regularly and participate in after-school activities, further disadvantaging them academically and socially (Shabalala, 2018; Langa, 2020).

2.9.3 Language barriers

Language is essential for exploring new meanings and concepts within the educational environment. Nevertheless, due to language, Black female learners experience a barrier to exploring new meanings and concepts (Machaisa, 2004). In contrast to the literature on international studies within the South African context, it has been observed that Black female learners experience a multitude of challenges due to language. Black female learners expressed the educational challenge of learning in the English or Afrikaans language and how greatly this impacted their academic success, as these are not their mother tongue. Black female learners furthermore express how language influences their exclusion from participating in specific cultural and sporting activities. It has been observed from the literature that in order to navigate effectively within the school environment, Black female learners would experience not using their home language or expressing themselves in a manner culturally acceptable to them while at school. Black female learners moreover expressed that they were discouraged from speaking IsiZulu by the teaching staff. However, their white counterparts could freely communicate in Afrikaans without fear of retribution. Due to these circumstances, Black female learners face struggles and are challenged by the scene of Blackness in

which they live. This perpetuates racism, Marginalisation, and the overshadowing of Black female learners. Despite this, Black female learners felt a sense of belonging when speaking the same home language as one another (Alexander & Mpisi, 2014; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Langa, 2020; Farmer, 2021).

2.9.4 Assimilation pressures

In predominantly white institutions, Black female learners experienced assimilating rather than being given the option of integrating into the school environment. As there seems to be an upholding of the dominant school culture in predominantly white spaces. Black female learners experienced having no choice but to adapt to the school's culture. As a result of this tendency of assimilation, Black female learners experienced feeling that their language and culture are inferior to those of their white peers. As a consequence, Black female learners ultimately feel unwelcome and have a low sense of belonging as they navigate these white spaces (Alexander & Mpisi, 2014).

In addition, the pressure placed on Black female learners to conform to white cultural norms and expectations led to feelings of alienation from their cultural heritage. Alexander and Mpisi (2014) argue that having a sense of alienation is directly contrary to the learner's fundamental need to belong. This resulted in Black female learners experiencing feeling isolated from the classroom setting, which in turn resulted in Black female learners distancing themselves emotionally from the learning process, which impacted their academic performance. Due to this, the overall experience of attending predominantly white schools' post-apartheid has been described by some Black female learners as a traumatic experience (Shabalala, 2018; Langa, 2020).

Furthermore, Alexander and Mpisi (2014) contend that during the process of assimilation, internal conflicts are created, which hinder the development of a strong sense of self among Black female learners. In addition, Black female learners experience facing challenges reconciling their racial and cultural backgrounds with the dominant white culture, resulting in a multifaceted identity formation process. This results in Black female learners in white spaces constantly experiencing having to police themselves (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Farmer, 2021). Maseti (2018, p347) asserts that "I perform my race differently in this white space due to implicit expectations about

how I am supposed to perform my race". As a result, Black female learners must pay close attention to how they carry themselves. As they navigate predominantly white spaces, they observe their actions, communication, work, interactions with others, and behaviour (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018). This is very similar to what was observed with their international counterparts when the following scholars, Morris (2007), Moroe (2020), Motro et al. (2022), and Stevenson (2023), referred to Black learners and their ability and necessity to code-switch at school, which means they adjust their behaviour according with whom they are interacting.

2.9.5 Feelings of unwelcomeness and low belonging

Black female learners experience a constant feeling of not being welcome as they navigate predominantly white spaces. This feeling of not being welcome comes from navigating school environments that were not decolonized. Black female learners expressed that educators were not accommodating to their cultural, socioeconomic differences and barriers to communication. Additionally, Black female learners expressed, just like their international peers, that educators adopted low expectations of them academically. Black female learners highlighted the potential for educators to stigmatise their academic failure as a product of poverty and an inadequate family environment, which leads to feelings of discrimination, marginalisation and not being welcome within the classroom environment (Alexander & Mpisi, 2014; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018).

Similarly, Mbatyoti (2022) affirms that there is an absence of acceptance of Black cultural identity, ethnicity, and linguistic heritage within white institutions (schools and universities). Pointing out that to navigate predominantly white schools, Black female learners needed to learn and unquestionably accept the ways and beliefs of the dominant group (British and Afrikaners) within the school.

Similarly, Black female learners transitioning to higher education exhibited feelings of intrusion. These feelings of unwelcomeness in predominantly white universities are illustrated in the following ways: Firstly, the absence of decolonization within the higher education infrastructure and systems. Secondly, segregation was prevalent on

campus, with residents divided primarily by race, as well as the continued display of statues and photographs of white people, who contributed to the oppression of Black people. Furthermore, only English and Afrikaans are offered as lecture languages and the use of colonised course materials that are not accurate or realistic (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Zulu, 2021 Mbatyoti, 2022).

2.9.6 Compromise of identity

It has been observed that Black female learners experience being in a constant state of compromise, not because resources are limited within predominantly white institutions but because they find themselves being placed in a position of having to compromise their identity. Conveying frustration that their opinions and interests as a reflection of their race and gender are not considered, ultimately compromises their sense of self. The things that matter to them are fundamental to their identity, yet restricting their exploration of them undermines their identity. Consequently, to navigate these white spaces, Black female learners experience having to compromise themselves to fit in and thrive in these environments (Mophosho, 2013; Chance, 2022).

2.9.7 Perceptions of inferiority

Among Black female learners, there is a perception that they are inferior to their white counterparts, which causes feelings of intimidation. Generally, this results from a lack of access to specific resources, cultural experiences, and how Black female learners express themselves. Lack of financial resources, access to printing equipment, information and materials for projects, tutoring, and the option of staying after school to work on school assignments, negatively impacts their academic performance, which in turn makes Black female learners feel inferior to their white peers. (Mophosho, 2013).

2.9.8 The policing of appearance

In predominately white schools, Black female learners experience discriminatory practices that police their behaviour and hair, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and

Eurocentric beauty standards. Black female learners are often subjected to strict rules and regulations that target their hair, clothing, and overall appearance, forcing them to conform to white norms. For instance, natural hairstyles such as afros, dreadlocks, and braids are frequently deemed unruly or unprofessional, while white learners' hair is rarely investigated. Similarly, Black female learners are often disciplined for wearing traditional clothing or accessories, while their white peers are free to express themselves without reprisal. These practices reinforce harmful notions of respectability and perpetuate the alienation of Black culture and identity (Canham, 2019).

2.9.9 Black females are stereotyped

Similarly, it has been observed that Black female learners' post-apartheid experience is similar to forms of being stereotyped as their international counterparts like being stereotyped as being loud, disruptive and having behavioural issues and lower levels of intelligence. However, in the South African context, it has been observed that further overarching negative stereotype of Black female learners is associated with transformation policies put in place post-apartheid, particularly in higher education. Black female learners experience and have been made to feel that their acceptance and presence in higher educational institutions is a means to increase diversity numbers within the institutions. This stereotype results in Black females being considered academically under-serving or unsuitable for higher education. In order to navigate their racial and gender identities, Black female students felt the need to make an impression in order to displace negative stereotypes. As a result, Black female students will be forced to overcompensate in everything they do to avoid fitting this stereotype. Consequently, Black female students are constantly underestimated and placed in a position and pressure to prove themselves (Maseti, 2018; Mbatyoti, 2022).

From the literature reviewed, it has been observed that the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly white institutions in South Africa illustrate the enduring impact of historical and systemic inequalities. Despite policy changes and efforts to promote diversity, these learners continue to face significant challenges that hinder their academic and personal growth. In addition recent studies have explored the intersectionality of race and gender concerning Black females' educational experiences

(Nash, 2009; Shabalala, 2018; Langa, 2020; Maseti, 2018; Maylor et al., 2021; Akala & Divala, 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2018). However, Farmer (2021) critiques the narrow focus of much of this research, advocating for a more comprehensive examination of Black females' educational journeys, from primary school through to professional careers. Farmer (2021) emphasizes the importance of understanding the cumulative impact of educational experiences over time, noting a significant gap in literature on this subject (Farmer, 2021). Hence, this study aims to fill and contribute to the gap in the literature and ongoing research on the experiences of Black female learners navigating their racialised identity within the context of their educational journey, in this case in predominantly white institutions.

2.10 Theoretical Framework

In the context of predominantly White (schools and universities), Black female learners face a complex web of discrimination and marginalisation shaped by the intersecting forces of racism, sexism and classism. To fully comprehend and consider the experiences of Black female learners, it is essential to employ a theoretical framework that captures the multiplicity of their identities and complexities of Black female learners' social realities. This is why the Intersectionality theory was selected to underpin this study. Incorporating the Intersectionality theory offers a unique perspective to analyse the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly White settings.

2.10.1 The Intersectionality theory

Intersectionality theory, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, provides a critical framework for analysing how various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia, intersect and compound to create unique experiences of discrimination and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019).

This theory is rooted in a philosophical stance that highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of identities. It critiques traditional single-axis approaches by

emphasizing that oppression is shaped by the interplay of multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, rather than being isolated to one axis of identity (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013).

The theories epistemology assumes are that knowledge about social identities and oppression is complex, relational, and context-dependent, emphasizing that identities intersect and influence each other rather than existing in isolation. It values subjective and situated experiences, particularly those of marginalized individuals, challenging the notion of objective neutrality by highlighting how power dynamics shape knowledge production. The theory critiques static views and recognizes that understanding is dynamic and evolving, reflecting the changing social contexts and perspectives of those who navigate multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019).

Intersectionality theory operates on several key ontological assumptions, including the belief that identities are complex and multifaceted, rather than reducible to a single category. It argues that identities are relational and contextually constructed, meaning their nature and impact depend on social, cultural, and historical contexts. The theory assumes that different forms of oppression and privilege intersect and interact dynamically, rather than existing in isolation. It also recognizes that social identities and experiences of marginalisation are fluid and subject to change based on shifting social contexts and power dynamics. Additionally, intersectionality assumes that power structures are embedded in the construction and valuation of identities, influencing how oppression is experienced and perpetuated (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019).

The methodological implications of intersectionality theory involve adopting a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to research that considers the interplay of various intersecting identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. When using this methodology researchers must design studies that are context-sensitive and reflective of the specific social, cultural, and historical factors affecting their subjects. This approach emphasises the importance of inclusive and participatory methods, ensuring that marginalised voices are central to the research and that traditional power dynamics are critically examined. Intersectional research often requires repetitive methods to capture the complexity of Black females experiences. When using this methodology

ethical considerations are also paramount, as I had to ensure that the methods respect my dignity as the participants in the study (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019).

Using intersectionality theory was crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding of how overlapping aspects of identity—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—intersect to shape Black female learners in predominantly White institutions (as I attended schooling in this context) and Black females educators teaching in predominantly Black institutions (as I am currently teaching in this context), experiences of privilege and oppression. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond single-axis perspectives, taking into account the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts in which these identities operate. By prioritising the voices of marginalized Black females, intersectionality helps to address often overlooked experiences and challenges reductionist views of social issues. It guides the development of more inclusive policies and practices by identifying gaps and areas where traditional approaches may fall short, ultimately supporting efforts to achieve greater equity and social justice (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019).

The theory encompasses eight key concepts, each of which will be discussed in relation to its impact of the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly White institutions and Black female educators in predominantly Black institutions as it sheds light on different aspects of intersectional oppression and privilege.

1.Intersecting Identities

Intersectionality states that individuals possess multiple, overlapping identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, religion, and age—that interact to form a complex and multifaceted individual identity (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013).

The theory states that Black female learners often navigate a predominantly White environments where their racial and gender identities intersect, creating compounded challenges. They may experience exclusion and bias not only because of their race but also due to gendered expectations that affect their academic performance and social integration. The lack of representation and culturally relevant curricula can worsen feelings of alienation and marginalisation. For Black female educators, in predominantly black institutions, the theory states that intersecting identities affect their roles within predominantly Black institutions. They might face additional challenges related to socio-economic status or regional disparities that impact their ability to deliver effective education. Additionally, Black female educators may encounter systemic issues related to resource allocation and institutional support, which can affect their ability to implement innovative teaching practices and maintain professional development. Their experience as educators is shaped by both their racial and gender identities, influencing their professional interactions and institutional support. Furthermore, Black female educators might experience unique forms of intra-racial bias, where they face scrutiny from both colleagues and learners regarding their professional competence and authority. This scrutiny can be intensified by gendered expectations, which might position them in stereotypical roles or limit their influence within the institution (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019, Framer, 2021).

2. Compound Discrimination

Compound discrimination refers to the overlapping and interconnected nature of various forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism, that Black females may face simultaneously. This concept is deeply rooted in intersectionality theory. It highlights that discrimination is not experienced in isolation but is compounded by multiple intersecting factors (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013). In the context of South African education, Black female learners in predominantly white institutions and Black female educators in predominantly Black institutions encounter distinct forms of compound discrimination that profoundly impact their educational and professional experiences (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Al-Faham, 2019; Langa, 2020; Framer, 2021).

Black female learners in predominantly white institutions experience compound discrimination at the intersection of racial and gender biases. These learners are subjected to both racism and sexism, which interact to create unique and complex barriers to their academic success and social inclusion (Alexander & Mpisi, 2014; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Langa, 2020; Farmer, 2021).

4.Academic Challenges and Stereotyping:

Racial Stereotyping: Black female learners often face racial stereotypes that question their academic capabilities and intellectual potential. For instance, they may encounter prejudiced assumptions that they are less capable or that their achievements are solely attributed to affirmative action rather than merit (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Shabalala, 2018; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023)

Gender-Based Assumptions: Concurrently, gendered expectations may influence how their contributions are perceived. Black female learners might be subjected to stereotypes about the loud or angry Black woman, which can affect interactions with peers and educators. These compounded stereotypes undermine their academic self-confidence and create additional stress (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

Isolation and Exclusion: The dual impact of racial and gender biases can result in social exclusion within the academic environment. Black female learners may find it difficult to form meaningful connections with their predominantly white peers, who may hold implicit biases or view them through stereotypes (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

Lack of Representation: The educational content and institutional culture in predominantly white institutions often lack representation of Black women's experiences and contributions. This absence can exacerbate feelings of alienation, making it challenging for Black female learners to see themselves reflected in the curriculum or faculty (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

Psychological and Emotional Impact

Increased Stress and Anxiety: The compounded nature of racism and sexism can lead to heightened levels of stress and anxiety. Black female learners may constantly navigate microaggressions and hostile environments, which impact their mental health and overall academic performance (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).Black female educators in predominantly Black institutions face compound discrimination that arises from the intersection of their racial and gender identities. This form of discrimination influences their professional experiences, career advancement, and institutional support. Even within predominantly Black institutions, Black female educators may encounter biases related to their race and gender. These biases can manifest in limited opportunities for career advancement, unequal pay, and fewer leadership roles. For instance, they might be overlooked for promotions or high-profile projects due to entrenched stereotypes about their capabilities or leadership qualities (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Farmer, 2021).Gendered Expectations: The intersection of race and gender can also impact their professional interactions. Black female educators might be expected to adhere to traditional gender roles or face criticism for deviating from these norms. Their authority and expertise may be questioned more frequently compared to their male or non-Black counterparts (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Farmer, 2021, Zulu, 2021).

3. Privilege and Oppression

Privilege refers to unearned advantages accorded to individuals based on their dominant group membership (e.g., white privilege, male privilege), while oppression involves systemic and institutionalized discrimination that marginalizes individuals (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013).

Black female learners often face systemic oppression due to their race and gender, in contrast to the privilege experienced by their white peers. This dynamic impacts their access to resources, academic opportunities, and social support, reinforcing educational disparities and hindering their overall academic experiences.

The compounded effects of privilege and oppression reinforce educational disparities. For instance, Black female learners might experience a lack of tailored academic support, such as tutoring or counseling services, which are more readily available to their white peers. Additionally, Socially, Black female learners may struggle to integrate into predominantly white institutions due to cultural and racial differences.In predominantly Black institutions, while Black female educators might experience less racial discrimination, they still encounter challenges related to gendered oppression and institutional constraints.

The institutional norms and practices may still reflect gender biases, impacting their professional roles and opportunities. For instance, they might face challenges related to gendered expectations about their teaching styles or leadership capabilities.The lack of institutional support and resources can make worse the effects of privilege and oppression within their professional environment (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

4. Contextualizing Experiences

Intersectionality considers the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts in which discrimination and marginalisation occur, influencing how identities intersect and how oppression manifests (Crenshaw, 2013; Cho et al., 2013).

The historical context of apartheid and ongoing socio-economic disparities in South Africa shape the experiences of Black female learners. The historical context of apartheid has left a legacy of systemic barriers that continue to affect Black female learners. These barriers include implicit biases held by educators, inadequate support systems, and limited access to mentoring and academic guidance. Impacting Black female learners interactions within predominantly white institutions and their access to equitable educational opportunities. Additionally, Black female learners in predominantly white institutions often experience cultural displacement. The curriculum and institutional culture are frequently aligned with the experiences and values of the predominantly white student body and faculty. This can lead to a lack of cultural relevance and representation, making it difficult for Black female learners to see themselves reflected in their education (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Zulu, 2021; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023). For Black female educators in predominantly Black institutions, face challenges related to underfunded, outdated infrastructure, and a lack of resources, which affect their ability to provide high-quality education and support for both learners and staff. the context includes institutional histories and resource limitations that affect Black female educators professional roles. Understanding these contextual factors is crucial for addressing systemic issues and improving support within these institutions (Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Farmer, 2021, Zulu, 2021).

5. Centering Marginalized Voices

Intersectionality prioritizes amplifying the perspectives and experiences of marginalized individuals, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013). Black female learners benefit from institutional practices that actively center their voices and experiences. This includes creating spaces for their narratives to be acknowledged and addressed within the curriculum and institutional policies, which helps counteract the effects of marginalisation and fosters a more inclusive educational environment. Similarly, centering the voices of Black female educators can lead to more responsive institutional support and professional development opportunities. It is crucial for their experiences and insights to inform policy changes and institutional reforms that affect their working conditions and career advancement (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Zulu, 2021; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

6. Intersectional Analysis

Intersectional analysis examines how multiple forms of discrimination intersect and interact, considering the complexity of different identities and experiences (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013). An intersectional analysis of Black female learners' experiences reveals how their racial and gender identities intersect with other factors like socio-economic status, influencing their access to educational resources and opportunities. This analysis helps identify specific areas where interventions are needed to address compounded forms of discrimination. For Black female educators, intersectional analysis provides insights into how their professional experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, race, and institutional constraints (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Zulu, 2021; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

7. Simultaneity

Intersectionality recognises that black females experience multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously, rather than sequentially (Crenshaw, 2013; Cho et al., 2013). Black female learners experience simultaneous racial and gender discrimination, which affects their academic and social experiences in complex ways. This simultaneity can lead to unique challenges that require holistic approaches to address effectively.

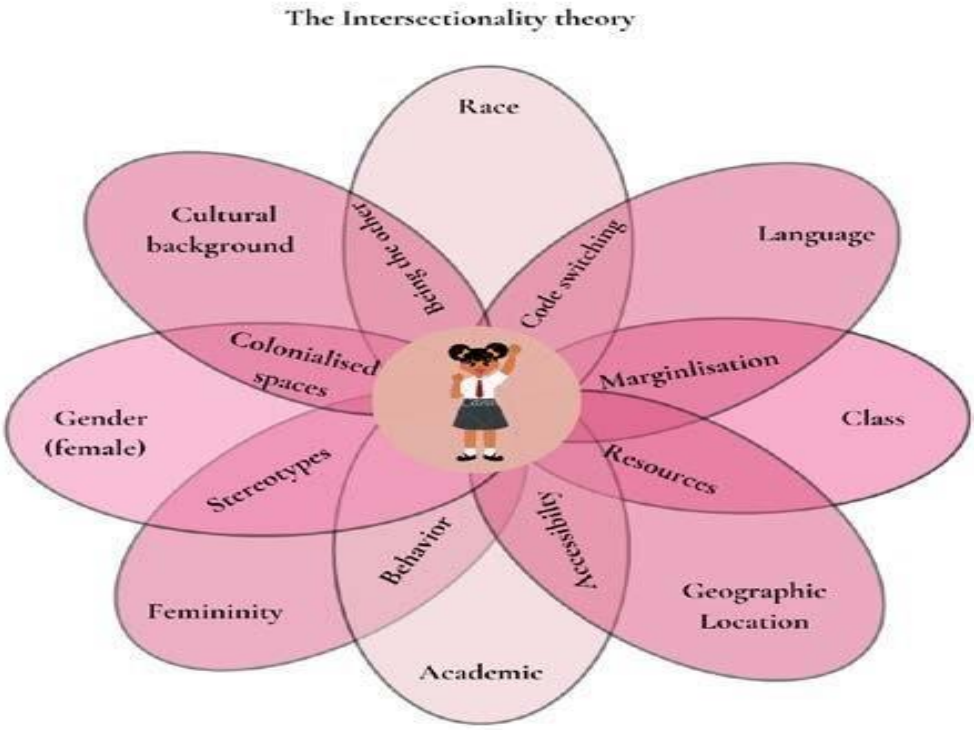
Black female educators also encounter simultaneous gendered and racial challenges within their professional roles. Recognising this simultaneity is crucial for addressing the multifaceted nature of their experiences and implementing supportive measures that consider all dimensions of their identities (Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Zulu, 2021; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

8.Structural Intersectionality

Structural intersectionality examines how institutional structures and systems uphold and perpetuate intersectional discrimination and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 2013; Carbado et al., 2013). Structural intersectionality highlights how educational policies, practices, and institutional norms can perpetuate racial and gender inequalities for Black female learners. Addressing these structural issues requires systemic reforms to create equitable educational environments For Black female educators, structural intersectionality reveals how institutional frameworks and

resource allocations impact their professional experiences(Nash, 2009; Ricks, 2014; Jacbos, 2017; Maseti, 2018; Shabalala, 2018; Andrews et al..2019; Moore, 2020; Zulu, 2021; Hanif et al..2023; Stevenson, 2023).

Diagram 2.10.4: Venn diagram of the intersectionality theory.
Authors original diagram



Above is a Venn diagram illustrating the multiple forms of intersecting and compound oppression experienced by Black female learners in predominantly white institutions, as identified in the literature.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter focused on reviewing literature on the experiences of Black female learners navigating their educational journey in predominantly white institutions. It has been observed that there is an overlapping of shared experiences of racism, discrimination, marginalisation, microaggressions, low academic expectations, assimilation, alienation, lack of resources, being overlooked, policing of appearance and behaviour, perpetuating stereotypes, experienced by Black female learners, internationally and within the South

African context. Additionally, within the South African context, language and the legacy of apartheid impact greatly on the experience Black female learners in predominantly White institutions. While existing research has explored the experiences of Black learners in predominantly White institutions, there is a lack of research on how these experiences potentially influence the learners who become educators and how it shapes their teaching practices. This gap is particularly concerning, as educators who have experienced Marginalisation and exclusion first hand may be best positioned to create inclusive learning environments that support the academic success and identity affirmation of Black female learners. By investigating this critical issue, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing body of research which could lead to developing inclusive education practices that support the well-being and success of Black learners and empower Black educators to create positive change in their classrooms and communities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

My educational experience has been shaped primarily by the schools I attended. These schools were predominantly White institutions from pre-primary, primary, and high schools and universities. In this study, I examine my personal and autoethnographic experiences to understand better how I navigated my racialised identity in these settings and discover how my experiences have influenced my teaching practices to become a more effective educator. The previous chapter's discussion focused on the literature review, which discussed the experiences of Black female learners in predominantly White institutions. The third chapter provides an overview of the study's methodology, which is qualitative and outlines the research design. Additionally, it explains the approach used to answer the research questions. Furthermore, I explain the approach, paradigm, and data generation methods. I then discuss data analysis and ethical issues. I consider the study's validity, and finally, research challenges are addressed.

3.2 The research design

The research design describes the strategy followed in this study. In the research process, several elements are involved, such as research questions and methods for data generation and the examination of data. A research design aims to provide a clear structure and direction for the research process so that the study can be conducted systematically and rigorously (Creswell, 2016). Research designs are crucial for researchers to address the research questions and objectives effectively. This way, I could choose the best methods and tools for generating and examining data, ensuring reliability and validity. In addition, the research design allowed me to anticipate and overcome possible challenges and limitations.

3.3 Methodology

The methodology used in this study was autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method examining the author's experiences, memories, and reflections. Autoethnography differs from traditional ethnography in that it focuses on the individual's life experiences. I was able explore and share my stories through personal narrative and cultural analysis. Autoethnography has become a significant methodology in sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education. In addition to enhancing my understanding of my own experiences, it contributed to a broader understanding of human experiences. Through self-reflection and sharing my experiences, autoethnography allowed me to challenge stereotypes, dominant narratives and provide unique insights into my and others' lives (Adams et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2022).

Using this qualitative research design, I combined my personal experiences and reflections with sociocultural analysis to gain insight into my educational experiences as a Black female in predominantly White institutions (Ellis et al., 2011). As this research design encouraged me to view myself from a broader perspective.With the aid of autoethnography, I was able to explore how I have navigated race and gender within my educational journey inside predominantly White institutions and how this has had an impact on the way I teach. The importance of addressing oneself is essential, as Hamilton et al., (2008) state that a deeper understanding of teaching and learning is achieved by recognising the importance of addressing oneself.

Autoethnography assisted me in integrating personal narratives with ethnographic inquiry to explore and understand my experiences in diverse cultural and societal contexts (Spry, 2001; Starr, 2010; Poulos, 2021). In this study, the experiences of race and gender were examined within the schooling, university, and professional contexts of predominantly White institutions post-apartheid. For an understanding and representation of cultural experiences, Ellis et al., (2018) emphasise the importance of personal narratives. According to her, autoethnography allows marginalised voices to be heard and challenges traditional research methods. Chang (2016) also states that autoethnography challenges traditional notions of objectivity and encourages researchers to embrace their subjectivity. In acknowledging the personal perspective, researchers can describe their experiences more authentically and intimately. Through

this approach, I bridge the gap between the researcher and the participant fostering a greater empathy and understanding between the two parties. In this way, the research process encouraged self-reflection, introspection, and active participation on my part.

In addition to providing valuable insight into my own experiences and identity, autoethnography illuminated more significant social and cultural dynamics (Denzin, 2019; Ellis et al., 2014; Allen, 2015; Chang, 2016) The art of storytelling plays an essential role in autoethnography. Using this method, I was able to convey complex experiences, emotions, and cultural contexts engagingly. Storytelling is used in autoethnography to bridge the gap between the personal and the social, allowing the reader to understand the research more deeply. It is for this reason that a narrative is constructed in this study as a means of exploring and sharing the complex experiences of a Black female in predominantly White institutions post-apartheid (Hayler, 2012; Gannon, 2017).

3.4 Research paradigms

Research paradigms are established based on my philosophical assumptions. This process allowed me to understand better how I view the world. In research, a paradigm is a framework or model that guides and shapes the understanding of a given subject. In a specific area of knowledge, assumptions, concepts, and approaches determine how it is approached and studied. A paradigm is also a set of beliefs and practices that define what constitutes a valid scientific inquiry and the boundaries of a scientific community. (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016, Yong et al., 2021)

The interpretivist paradigm guided this study. In the interpretivist paradigm, the goal was to understand how I interpret my experiences. This paradigm was an effective method of conducting this study as it allowed me to generate and interpret my experiences as a Black female who attended predominantly White institutions to better understand how these experiences have influenced my teaching practices. In addition, interpretivism emphasises the role of cultural and social contexts in influencing my perception and interpretation of reality. According to this paradigm, reality is socially constructed, and individuals create meaning. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Chowdhury, 2014).

Interpretivism is based on the concept of reflexivity. In research, reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of their biases and subjectivity. Thus, Finlay and Gough (2008) explain that interpretivist researchers recognise that their backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs can influence their interpretation and analysis. Therefore, reflexivity is essential to ensuring transparency and accountability in research.

An interpretivist paradigm also strongly emphasises context when analysing social phenomena. The interpretivist paradigm allowed me to be concerned with understanding how I make sense of my experiences as a Black female within the particular social and cultural contexts of predominantly White institutions (Creswell, 2016). To aid in understanding the complex interactions between me and my social environment, the broader context must be considered.

Paradigms have ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. In order to understand the foundations of scientific inquiry and research methods, it is necessary to understand these dimensions. Below, these dimensions are discussed (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2006; Alharahsheh et al., 2020)

From an ontological perspective, this paradigm holds that reality is socially constructed and subjective. It recognises that the researchers/participants' cultural and social background shape their experiences and interpretations of the world (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). As both the researcher and the participant in this study, I was required to recognise and explore how my lived experiences of race and gender intersected with the larger social structures, which were the predominantly White institutions I attended throughout my educational career (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Through this process, I understood how my ontology is shaped by societal expectations, stereotypes, and systemic inequalities, revealing the complexity of my existence.

Epistemologically, this paradigm deals with knowledge acquisition. Traditional positivist thought of objectivity and indifference are challenged in this paradigm. In contrast, it emphasises a subjective and reflexive approach to knowledge production (Ellis,1997; McIlveen, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Ellis et al., 2017). In order to gain insight and understanding, I critically reflected on my lived experiences. Using autoethnography, I

contributed to a diverse and inclusive understanding of my experiences as a Black female in predominantly White institutions. As a result, others and I are empowered to reclaim our voices. However, Adams et al., (2015) acknowledge that the researcher's identity, biases, and emotions may influence their interpretations and emphasise the importance of transparency and reflexivity in their research, which was maintained throughout the research process.

From a methodological perspective, this paradigm allowed me to employ various data collection and analysis techniques. As Ellis et al., (2017) state, various sources can gather materials, including personal narratives, conversations, artefacts, and visual representations. In this way, autoethnography allowed me to be creative with the methods I used to generate and interpret data.

3.5 Research Approach

Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2017), is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences and perspectives by employing non-numerical data. This approach is distinct from quantitative research methodologies, which focus on numerical data and statistical analysis. Instead, qualitative research seeks to offer context-specific insights that capture the richness and complexity of human experiences. The flexibility inherent in qualitative research proved particularly advantageous for this study, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted social phenomenon of a Black female's experience within the educational environment. This flexibility enabled me to examine the nuances of my subject matter holistically, uncovering hidden meanings and patterns that significantly influenced my understanding of teaching practices and personal insights. To gain a deeper understanding of my past experiences, I employed a range of qualitative methods, including narrative inquiry, reflective journaling, and personal interviews. These methods facilitated a thorough exploration of my experiences, enabling me to document and analyze them from multiple angles. Additionally, qualitative research supports the triangulation of data, which involves using various sources and methods to validate findings and enhance their credibility (Creswell et al., 2017). By integrating multiple data sources and perspectives, I achieved a more comprehensive and nuanced insight into the research subject, reinforcing the study's validity and depth.

3.6 Sampling

In this study, I serve as both a researcher and a participant. According to Chang (2022), autoethnography often employs the participant as an integral part of the research process. In so doing, I could examine my experiences as a Black female within my schooling experience, which took place in predominantly White institutions in Durban, while living in a township known as KwaMashu. As a researcher and participant in this study, I gained a deeper understanding of my experiences of navigating my racialised identity as a Black female within my educational journey.

3.7 Data Generation

This section discusses the methods used to generate data for my narrative. The vital thing to note is that I am both the researcher and the participant in this autoethnography. As a result, I am the primary data source for this study. I constructed my narrative using the following methods: memory work, photographs, artefacts, a collage, a journal, and conversations with critical friends. The following table (table 3.1) shows which method was used to answer which research questions. Subsequently, I will discuss in detail the different methods I used to generate the data.

Research Question	**Data generation activities**	**Participants**	**Data Sources**
1. What parts of my history have impacted my identity as a black female educator?	Reflected on found photographs and artefact to evoke memories from the photos and artefact. Having conversations	Myself Critical friends Siblings Mother The memory of my father	*Photographs* Parents' graduations Family photo Camp photo Photos with my sisters School photos Instagram search photo *Artefact* Casstte tapes Spinal x-rays High school hymn book

	with my critical friends to clarify any questions I had about my memories.		High school name badge
2. What challenges have been experienced within my educational journey as a black female educator?	Reflected on found photographs and artefact to evoke memories from the photos and artefact. Having conversations with my critical friends to clarify any questions I had about my memories. Wrote down any important information or feelings in my journal, that I did not need written in my laptop	Myself Critical friends Siblings Mother	*Photographs* Photos of a t.v show Photo of my dad's van Photo of Sunshine Park The Durban North Jap Garden Photo of a municipality bus Photo of my street Photo of my grade 2 class Photo of my grade 1 class *Artefact* Pre-primary report card A New Way book Whats app conversations A reading award Grade 6 report card Grade 10 report card *Journal*
3. How has my historical background	Making a collage Through found	Myself	Photographs Google images Canva

influenced my teaching practice?	images		

Table 3.1: Data generation

3.7.1 Memory work

During autoethnography, my memories were used as an investigative tool to help generate data for my story. According to Stephenson et al., (2008), Hayler (2010), and Giorgio (2016), memory work is a research method that examines one's memories and experiences to understand oneself better. It involves reflecting on and analysing personal memories, often through writing by utilising journals, extracts, artefacts and photographs. In this way, I could capture the richness and complexity of my experiences of navigating my racialised identity within my educational journey.

The study of memories allowed me to examine the complex connections between my memories and the broader sociocultural phenomena of predominantly White institutions. Recalling and examining my memories allowed me to understand how societal norms, values, and structures influenced my experiences. Through self reflection and critical analysis, I discovered and interpreted the complexities of my lived experiences (Onyx, 2001; Hayler, 2010; Chang, 2016). Additionally, Starr (2010) and Keleş (2022) state that memory work can transform autoethnographic research.

In this study, I employed a systematic approach to memory work, beginning with the collection of personal memorabilia to evoke and reflect upon my childhood and schooling experiences. This included photographs, artifacts such as old report cards,

school awards, a school name badge, old textbooks, a school hymn book, and the Mega Memory Tape series—a resource used during my school years—as well as WhatsApp conversations. These materials served as prompts to trigger and enhance my recollections and emotional responses.

With my data generation materials in hand, I dedicated specific periods to reflecting on my childhood and school memories, using these items to stimulate recall. Residing in my childhood home proved particularly beneficial, as it significantly facilitated the remembrance and activation of past experiences. I found myself revisiting various areas of the house while keeping a journal nearby to document my reflections and memories. This journaling process enabled an introspective exploration of my experiences through narrative writing, capturing significant life events and details.

Additionally, memory work in this study involved engaging in conversations with my mother and sisters, who shared my childhood and schooling years. These dialogues were instrumental in eliciting further reflections and uncovering additional details or memories I might have otherwise overlooked. The collaborative nature of these discussions revealed both shared and different experiences, providing a richer understanding of my past through collective memory exploration.

As a result of memory work, I was able to challenge predominant narratives regarding my time spent in predominantly White institutions. As I explored my past experiences, I had the opportunity to question established beliefs and assumptions. Using personal memories as a critical examination tool, I adopted a broader understanding of social phenomena. By doing so, memory work became a powerful personal and sociocultural transformation tool.

In this way, Mitchell et al., (2019) state that educators can deepen their understanding of their professional practices by reflecting and remembering. Similarly, Pillay et al., (2019) argue that memory work can assist educators in understanding their teaching methods and what informs their interests and practices as educators. The authors argue that educators can gain insight into their everyday practices by reflection. Therefore, this method was appropriate for answering the research questions relating to my personal history and the challenges I faced throughout my educational career. I hope

that by examining how my experiences have affected my teaching practice, I may be able to become a better educator as a result.

3.7.2 Artefacts

According to Wall (2006), and Cooper et al., (2022), artefacts are potent tools for autoethnography storytelling. Objects such as photographs, letters, and personal belongings provide visual cues and evoke memories and emotions. Readers can better understand my experiences when artefacts are incorporated into the narrative. According to the authors, artefacts play an essential role in autoethnographic research because they provide evidence of the researcher's lived experiences. In doing so, artefacts provide credibility and authenticity to the narrative. Within this study, I used the following artefact to help evoke, stimulate and recall my memories: I found photographs of my family, with my siblings, school photos, I used my school report cards, a reading book from primary school, WhatsApp conversations, mega memory cassette tapes, my school hymn book, my school name badge and my spinal x-rays. (the methods I used to generate data are listed in the table 3.1 above)

It is crucial, however, that artefacts are critically analysed in autoethnography. Even though artefacts enhanced my storytelling, they also had the potential to influence the narrative. Therefore, it was essential for me to examine the cultural, historical, and social contexts surrounding the artefacts and the power mechanics and potential biases they may introduce to the research (Chang, 2016).

3.7.3 Collage

In autoethnography, collages offer an innovative approach to generating data. This innovative method allowed me to combine visual elements like photographs, drawings, and found objects. They also allowed a multidimensional way of presenting my narrative. I could construct a visual narrative that captures my experiences through this method. In this way, collages can potentially present significant meaning when traditional forms of written expression inadequately communicate the depth and complexity of human experiences (Hamilton et al., 2009; Culshaw, 2019; Gerstenblatt, 2013).

Data generation through college making was a transformative process. I decided to make a digital collage, which allowed me the opportunity to create more freely. My

collage was created using an application called Canva. At first, creating my collage was intimidating; however, as I progressed, the process became more therapeutic and liberating. As, I gained a deeper understanding of my historical background and how it has influenced my teaching practice. I gained greater self-awareness and growth through the collage-making process as it prompted me to confront and explore my emotions, memories, and identity.

It is, however, imperative to emphasise the importance of reflexivity when using collage in autoethnography. To achieve a meaningful outcome, I critically reflected on my decisions during the collage-making process, as each element in the artwork contributes to the overall narrative. Conducting a reflexive practice during the collage-making process deepened my understanding of my experiences and the social-cultural and historical contexts in which they are situated (McIlveen, 2008; Pinnegar et al., 2009; Palaganas, 2017)

3.7.4 Reflective Journal

During the process of generating data, I used a reflective journal. According to Lindroth (2014) and Creswell (2019), a reflective journal is a written record of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and insights throughout the research process. In this study, I used a reflective journal to record my personal experiences, dates, special events, conversations with family, other educators and supervisors, observations, and reflections in a systematic and organised manner. By self-reflection and introspection, I better understood my cultural experiences and identity and better understood my experiences navigating race and gender in predominantly White institutions and its impact on my teaching practices. I kept a reflective journal to express my emotions, thoughts, and reactions throughout the data generation process.

3.7.5 Critical friends

In my autoethnographic study, critical friends played a pivotal role by offering insightful feedback and fostering deep reflection on my research process. These individuals, who shared a nuanced understanding of my research context and could closely relate to the challenges I faced, provided constructive criticism that was invaluable for refining my approach. Their input helped me critically examine and enhance my research practices, ensuring a more rigorous and reflective process

(Feldman et al., 2018; Noor et al., 2021). Through their engagement, I was able to navigate the complexities of my study with greater clarity and depth, ultimately strengthening the overall quality and impact of my research.

As part of this process, my supervisors, fellow master's students, colleagues, sisters, and mother acted as critical friends. In addition to providing honest feedback, guidance, and resources throughout the research process, my supervisors served as support and trusted advisors. These included assisting with research methodology, findings, and interpretations and obtaining ethical clearance. Other master's degree students and colleagues were present to provide feedback and share resources. While exploring my history and its impact on me, my mother and sisters played a crucial role of support by providing me with photographs, report cards and other documents. My sisters and I attended the same schools, so interacting with them about our schooling was beneficial. As a result, they assisted me in clarifying past events and assisted me whenever I had questions relating to specific events from our school years. During my memory work, this greatly assisted me. By engaging in dialogue with my mother, I was able to gain a better understanding of why she and my father chose to place us in predominantly White schools. Additionally, she could answer any questions regarding my younger years on which I needed clarification. This ongoing dialogue with critical friends has enabled me to identify blind spots, challenge assumptions, and improve the quality of my work (Stolle et al., 2018).

Figure 3.7.6: A workshop with my critical friends on campus Source: Author.

Figure 3.7.7: A WhatsApp conversation with my critical friends. Source: Author.

3.8 Data analysis

There is a significant amount of coding and categorisation involved in qualitative research. Coding assigns themes and categories to data from memory work, observations, or documents. The information generated from the data was analysed and organised to identify patterns and themes (Elliott, 2018). By categorising, I better understood my data by grouping similar information. In categorising the data, I developed categories and codes based on the data. Throughout this process, I continually reviewed and refined categories in response to evolving understandings of the data.

3.8.1 Interpretation and meaning making

Interpretation and meaning making involved connecting identified themes and patterns to relevant theoretical frameworks, existing literature, and personal experiences. I engaged in the sense-making process to gain a deeper understanding and insight from the data (Ngulube, 2015; Willig, 2017).

3.8.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is often used in autoethnography to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of analysis. I used multiple data sources, methods and perspectives for this study to validate and support my findings. As a result of combining different data sources, the analysis was made more credible and trustworthy (Ellis et al., 2011)

3.8.3 Reflexivity

Throughout the analysis process, reflectivity was employed. Reflectivity involved being aware of my role in research, how I influenced, and affected both the process and outcome of the research. As, it acknowledges and accepts subjectivity and biases (Haynes, 2012; Palaganas et al., 2017). I achieved this by recognising that my experiences, cultural background, and social position influence my interpretations and understandings throughout this study. In addition, I ensured that the research was conducted transparently. In this way, the integrity of the study was maintained.

3.8.4 Verisimilitude

For readers to become immersed in a narrative, verisimilitude plays a crucial role. This refers to the ability of an author to relate their own experiences realistically and genuinely (Ellis et al., 2011). To achieve this, I applied detailed descriptions and realistic dialogue of my experiences, writing in the first person when sharing my experiences and providing visual representations of them in the hope that the characters, settings, and events resonate with readers. As a result, I enhanced the verisimilitude of the narrative in the hope that readers could relate to the experiences shared on a deeper level (Gibson, 2021).

3.8.5 Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which my findings, interpretations, and conclusions correctly reflected my lived experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2000; Allen et al., 2015). This study achieved this by using a systematic and reflexive approach using the following techniques: critical friends, ongoing reflections, different data collection methods and triangulation. This way, I could provide a comprehensive and reliable account of my experiences as a Black female navigating predominantly White institutions.

3.9 Ethical considerations

During the research process, authors Adams (2008), Ellis et al. (2011), Adams et al., (2017) and Edwards (2021) suggest that the researcher follow ethical guidelines for conducting autoethnography. In doing so, before conducting my study, I had to be approved by the University of KwaZulu- Natal for ethical clearance. To obtain ethical clearance for my Master's study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I followed a structured process:

1. Drafting the Research Proposal: I began by drafting a comprehensive research proposal that included my research questions, methodology, data collection methods, and potential ethical considerations.

2. Review by Supervisor: I submitted the draft proposal to my supervisor for review. After receiving feedback, I made the necessary revisions to address their comments and suggestions.

3. Completion of Ethical Clearance Forms: I obtained the ethical clearance forms from my supervisor and completed them accordingly. After filling out the forms, I sent them back to my supervisor for further review and incorporated any additional feedback provided.

4. Submission to Ethics Committee: I then submitted the completed ethical clearance forms and my research proposal online through the Research Information Management System. This submission was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, which ensured that my research adhered to the university's ethical standards.

5. Receive Ethical Clearance: Once my application was reviewed and approved, I received formal ethical clearance. This document allowed me to proceed with my research.

6. Adherence to Ethical Guidelines: To maintain ethical integrity, I was careful to ensure that no harm came to me during the research process. This involved critically reflecting on my lived experiences throughout the study. Additionally, I replaced identifiable information with pseudonyms for all individuals and locations mentioned in the narrative to respect their autonomy and maintain confidentiality. This process ensured that my study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the univeristy and helped me uphold the highest standards of ethical research practice (Edwards, 2021; Dahal & Luitel, 2022).

3.10 Challenges

One of autoethnography's primary limitations is that it is characterised by subjective bias. This subjectivity could impact the validity of the findings (Kalu,2019; Denzin, 2019). To avoid this, reflexivity was used, where I became aware of how my race and ethnicity, economic status, behavioural patterns, personal characteristics, background, upbringing, role in the research process, interactions with supervisors and peers, and my career position may influence my research practice and results. Therefore, I ensured that critical reflection on these considerations accompanied the research process (McIlveen, 2008; Witkin, 2022).

The second challenge was writing (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Ellis et al., 2011 Witkin, 2022). I soon discovered that writing about my personal experiences was both uncomfortable and challenging, as it necessitated a deep and often vulnerable exploration of my childhood and educational years. The process of engaging in a narrative, literary, and reflexive writing style further compounded these challenges, as it required navigating

complex emotions and introspections while maintaining scholarly rigor. Crafting a compelling, believable, coherent narrative was a demanding task. I overcame this hurdle by being as open and transparent about my experiences as possible.

The third challenge relates to ethical considerations (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Ellis et al., 2011; Shim, 2018; Witkin, 2022). I needed to navigate ethical challenges carefully to protect participants' well-being and rights. This was achieved by following the ethical guidelines subscribed to by the university. It also ensured that I protected the identities of the people and places mentioned in the study.

A fourth challenge of autoethnography is that it may not comprehensively understand complex social phenomena. Since autoethnography focuses on individual experiences, it may not be able to capture broader structural and systemic factors. To ensure validity, I combined autoethnography with other research methods to understand my experiences better. (Wall, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011; Méndez, 2013).

The fifth challenge I experienced was that conducting an autoethnography is time consuming. Therefore, I made sure that I allocated adequate time and resources to conduct autoethnographic research effectively, which I attempted to do throughout the research process.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined and explained the research design and methodology used in this study. My research process has been discussed and justified to illustrate my direction in answering my research questions. A qualitative research approach was chosen for the study, and an interpretive paradigm guided the research process. In this study, autoethnography was used as the method of research. Through this, I recounted my experiences as a Black female educator navigating predominantly White institutions within my educational journey. In addition, the data collection and analysis were discussed. I always ensured that reflexivity was ongoing throughout the research process. The ethical considerations and limitations were also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR
PERSONAL HISTORY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, chapter three, discussed my approach to conducting research which included discussing research methodology and reviewing the various data generation methods. This chapter addresses the first research question: What parts of my history have impacted my identity as a Black female educator? Based on my personal history and through the reflection of my childhood experiences, the following parts of my personal history are discussed in this chapter: my parents' experiences with education, the environment in which I grew up, the people that moulded me, the bond that I have with my siblings, how I grew up, my parents influence, ideologies and support during my schooling experience and what significantly influenced my identity as a Black female educator.

4.2 A Black gown, Black cap and some hoods

I can always vividly recall how important education was in our family throughout my childhood and now as an adult as there was always a great emphasis placed on education. My parents took education very seriously as they knew the opportunities it could afford us. Both my parents understood the benefits of education and wanted to cultivate that for us since they had experienced first-hand the opportunities it had afforded them. My father, having been raised by parents who were both educators in KwaMashu, held close to the importance of education from a young age. He became an educator and then a high school principal in Kwa-Maphumulo, almost two hours away from KwaMashu. Having obtained a Master's Degree in Education, he was the first of five children/siblings to attend university.

Like my father, my mother was also the first in her family to attend university. After obtaining a Social Work Degree and an Honours Degree in Psychology, she became a Social Worker in KwaMashu. A single mother and grandmother, both domestic workers

in Durban North, raised my mother. Reflecting on the picture of my mother's graduation (figure 4.2.2), where she is surrounded by her mother, grandmother, sister, aunts and cousins, I recall growing up, how my gogo (my mom's mother) and mamkhulu (my mom's sister) always sharing colourful, joyful stories, which were sometimes accompanied by the difficulties and sacrifices associated with how much of an achievement it was for my mother to attend university. As she was the first person from her area to attend university she experienced pride that her family and community had for her. I have heard these stories throughout my childhood and recall how the pictures of my parents' graduations, especially the one of my fathers (figure 4.2.1) which, as children we used to see every day when we entered our parent's bedroom, ignited an everlasting passion for lifetime learning.

As a child, I wanted to follow in their footsteps, particularly in obtaining higher degrees. It is my memory that I always envisioned myself wearing a Black gown, a Black cap, and some hoods. As a result, it greatly influenced me in pursuing psychology and education qualifications, guiding my path to becoming an educator and scholar who values and has a high regard for teaching and learning. Additionally, as someone motivated to constantly seek professional and personal development, both in small and large ways, completing my master's degree in educational psychology sees that childhood vision realized.

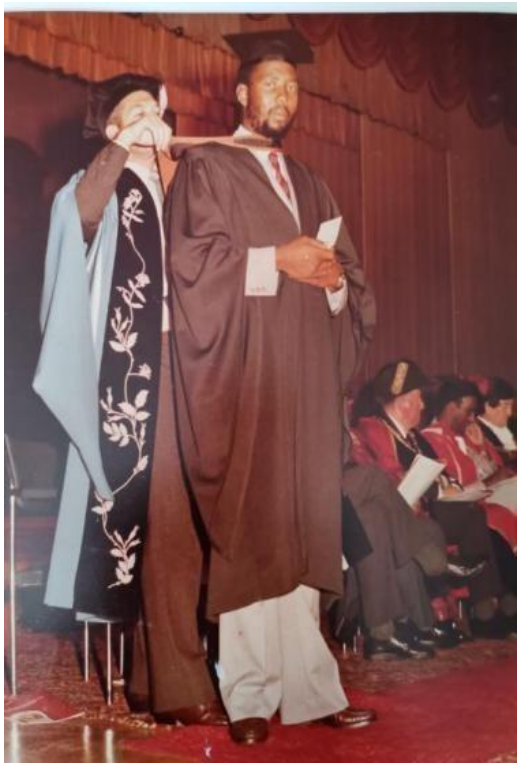


Figure 4.2.1: my father's graduation.

Source: Author.

Figure 4.2.2: my mom's graduation. Source:
Author.

4.3 Nurturing knowledge in adversity: the influence of a supportive home in KwaMashu on my educational journey

As a child, I grew up in KwaMashu, one of the largest townships in South Africa, located thirty-five kilometres from the city of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. KwaMashu was predominantly populated by Black South Africans in the late 1980s, with a population of approximately 200,000. Most of the population was Zulu-speaking, having been forced to relocate to the township during the apartheid era. Additionally, migrant workers from rural areas seeking work in nearby cities also flooded the township. KwaMashu experienced numerous socioeconomic challenges during this period. There were high unemployment rates and limited access to essential services, such as electricity, water, and sewage. This contributed to a surge in crime rates. Many residents suffered from overcrowding and poor living conditions due to the lack of proper infrastructure and housing. The community's socioeconomic hardships

were further exacerbated by the lack of educational and health-care facilities (Manqele, 2021).

For this reason, our parents tried to create a safe, loving and fruitful environment for us in which to grow up. When reflecting on my family photo and the huge smile on my face as I stand next to my dad (figure 4.3.1) I am reminded that my parents created an environment where the acquisition of knowledge would be our default home setting. Looking at that photo reminds me that growing up we could always lean on our parents and depend on their support and encouragement. I am additionally reminded of my parents sharing stories of how our father built our home before he and my mom were married, including a study/home office and a spacious yard for us to play and help him grow vegetables. In his study, I recall that he kept books on different topics and, as I recall, a beautiful brown stack of Encyclopaedia Britannica. We would always find him doing work and reading in there. My fondest memories are of him always with an open newspaper, which he read anywhere in the house. Watching him read and his love for absorbing information planted seeds in my sisters and me that constantly acquiring new information was something we should do. I remember many days spent in my dad's study, reading with my siblings, playing with puzzles, educational games and toys. My parents ensured we had many books to read, even before we could read as we were always encouraged to play and read with each other. Being raised in an environment where learning was simulated (our home) within a challenging environment (our township) profoundly impacted me as an educator; despite the limited resources available at the school, I also strive to create a friendly, fun, supportive, encouraging, and curious environment for my learners.

Figure 4.3.1: My family

Source: Author.

4.4 The role of Auntie Beauty in shaping my educational philosophy and embracing ubuntu in the classroom

Growing up, I recall we had a few ladies throughout our childhood who lived with us and helped take care of us. However, there is one lady I fondly remember and whose teachings and guidance I hold deeply in my heart. Growing up, if there was one person who reinforced all my parent's ideologies and assisted my parents in shaping me into the woman and educator I am today, it was Auntie Beauty. Auntie Beauty was a strict yet sometimes hilarious, loving, attentive Xhosa lady. I recall she had the shiniest Black dry permed hair. She used to take care of us when we were kids, mostly during our preprimary and primary school years. We all had a loving relationship with her; she was like a second mom to us. She was the one who would wake us, bathe us, feed us, and when we started taking a carpool to school, she would wait by the gate with us. She had a system of doing things that we, as children, learned quickly to follow. I remember our after-school routine consisted of coming home, changing out of our uniforms and making sure we put them in the laundry basket, eating, doing our homework, and then watching television. Just like my parents, she did not allow us to play outside the gate; she was stern when it came to us focusing on school, and she had no time or patience for nonsense. She also took our education very seriously, always encouraged us, and ensured we understood how important education was, even though she never finished

school. She always emphasised the importance of education to us. As children, she would make us aware of how privileged we were to attend well-resourced schools and that we should not take that privilege for granted. She was also not shy about disciplining us if need be. The most significant contribution was her making sure we completed our homework. Additionally, she ensured that we were always mentally, physically and emotionally ready for school. Having her in my life and the support she gave played a considerable role in making sure I could handle and face difficult or uncomfortable situations as a child at home and school.

During our primary school days, I fondly recall how we used to think it was funny and, at most times, unfairly inconvenient that her three-clock radio stories on Ukhozi FM would play at the exact time our cartoons would be playing. This meant we could not watch any television during that time. I recall her saying, “enza umsebenzi wakho wasekhaya” (do your homework). Which at the time felt like a way to ensure we did not disturb her radio story-time? However, as I reflect on those moments as an adult, I see that she just wanted us to complete our homework and instilled in us the awareness of delayed gratification as we could watch television after our homework. Those memories of her have always lived with me as they remind me of the significant contribution her presence had in my life. She played a massive role in shaping me as a young girl and my relationship with my studies and sisters. It was through my experiences with her that I reaffirmed numerous times in my career that I can help shape the learning experience of my learners. I have the responsibility to help, support and be there for my learners. It is my duty not just as an educator but as a Black woman to have my learners and the children around me understand the value of education just as she cultivated its importance for me. Auntie Beauty was not my family by blood, but she became my second mom. My experiences with her remind me every day of the idea and importance of Ubuntu in life and specifically within the classroom context with my learners. Letseka (2013) defines the concept of Ubuntu as a way to engage with people that allows for critical thinking, non-dominance, and the optimal development of human relationships. Ubuntu implies a sense of responsibility for others and one being, and one needs to be aware of one’s existence and obligations to others. This is a fundamental ideology to live by as a person, especially as an educator. Whenever I am in front of my learners, I am reminded that during their time with me, I am more than an educator to them, which is not a responsibility I should take lightly.

4.5 The strength of sisterhood: How family bonds shaped my educational approach and identity

Our household consisted of five girls. I was born in 1987, along with my twin sister, Vu. I remember when we were growing up, we shared an unbreakable bond. My mother dressed us both the same, we did all the same activities, and we spent all our time together. Two years later, in 1989, we were blessed with the birth of our middle sister, Zu, and two years later, blessed with the birth of our youngest sisters, Zee and Nokz, in 1991. Reflecting on the photos of my sisters, mother and I (figure 4.5.1 and figure 4.5.2) evokes memories of how my parents always encouraged my sisters and me to do things together. As well as encouraging us to always celebrate and be there for each other. I vividly remember my father enforcing a strict rule against playing outside the gate, on the street, as was the norm for children in a township. From a young age, my father sought to protect us from evil influences and harmful situations, and he wanted us to understand the importance of family structure, unity, and respect. Thus, I recall him always encouraging us to play in the yard or the house, telling my siblings and me we had everything we needed at home, including friends. As young Black girls born two and four years apart, my parents nurtured a strong bond between my sisters and me. That bond would be the basis for my ability to navigate my academic journey in predominantly White environments. This aspect of my history has significantly impacted my identity as a Black female educator. This can be seen in how I create bonds with my learners and constantly encourage them to create meaningful bonds with each other as a class.

Figure 4.5.1 My sisters and I at our front yard.
Source: Author.

Figure 4.5.2 My sisters, mom and I celebrating my sister’s birthday at my granny's house

Source: Author.

4.6 Parental sacrifice and educational commitment: Shaping my role as an educator

My parents held a powerful stance regarding their ideologies and expectations related to us and education. As a child, I recall them always saying our only worry was education, not playing on the street, friends, or popular hairstyles and clothes. My parents clarified that our only job was to ensure we did our best at school. They made us well aware, and it was apparent that they were always there to help assist us in whichever way we needed assistance. All my parents' resources went towards our education. From placing us in predominantly White schools from a young age to making sure we had all we needed to thrive in those spaces. We were not the type of children spoilt with brand-name clothing or unnecessary things and activities that were popular with children at the time.

However, we were spoiled with the resources my parents could provide that we needed to develop better. Things like extra classes for maths, English and Zulu, language and memory improvement programmes, being a part of certain clubs, choir, toastmasters, scripture union camps (which were holiday camps for children who were in the scripture union club at school, focusing on ministry), books, stationery and any other available activities my parents believed from which we could benefit. I vividly recall my mother getting us this tape series called "Mega Memory" in high school after we saw an advert that it helps improve memory. I recall my mom not hesitating to get us these tapes and how privileged and thankful we felt for having her get them. These actions taken by my parents to ensure a brighter future for us and to create in us an unending spirit of encouragement have had a significant impact on my life. Between my parents, my mom was the one assigned to do the groundwork with us, as my dad would usually be away for work. My mom sacrificed and invested much of her time and energy, driving us around and waiting long hours for us to complete our activities. I recall sometimes finding her asleep in the car, tired from work, yet still giving so much of herself for us. Her dedication towards our education fostered a deep, unshakable respect for education and its importance in my life. This part of my history has had a significant impact on my ability to be open and available to the needs of my learners as an educator, which has taught me that my learners' needs differ from person to person and that my best

efforts should be directed towards meeting their needs, assisting them in any way I can, within my power.

Figure 4.6.1: The Mega Memory tapes.

Source: Author.

Figure 4.6.2: At Scripture Union camp.

Source: Author.

4.7 Guiding media consumption: How my father's influence shaped my educational approach

As soon as my dad stepped into the house, I remember one of the first things he would ask us was what we were watching as he took the remote to change the channel. He was so stern about what media we consumed. If it was not educational, he deemed it a waste of time to watch, especially soaps like Days of our Lives and Generations, which were very popular while we were growing up, even though we needed a place to watch them. It was a well-known fact that our dad disapproved of such. He loved to watch wildlife shows, History, Discovery, National Geographic and the sports channels with us. He enjoyed learning new things and having us do the same. I recall Sundays being for a wildlife show called 50/50 on SABC 2 and wrestling on ETV later. The media my dad encouraged us to watch significantly impacted me as a young Black girl. It opened my eyes to different worlds and helped me become open-minded and nourish a love for learning new things. To this day, I care greatly about the media I consume. Reflecting on the screenshot of my Instagram searchers (figure 4.7.1) below reminds me that, as an educator, I am constantly looking for content that expands my knowledge of the subject matter or browsing Google, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube for ways to make my lesson plans and course materials more exciting and engaging for my learners.

Figure 4.7.1: Instagram searches. Source:
Author.

4.8 Embracing natural hair: The role of cultural norms and parents' guidance in shaping self identity and confidence in daughters

Hair can be a sensitive issue, especially for Black girls. Reflecting on my school photos (figure 4.8.1, figure 4.8.2, figure 4.8.3, figure 4.8.4) below, evokes memories of the fact that my sisters and I have always kept our hair short and natural. This hair was maintained throughout our schooling careers, except for specific moments in high school. We could braid our hair in cornrows or Bantu plaits; there was nothing crazy like using relaxers or extensions. Our hair was always straightforward and short which was not so much due to the school's hair policy, which stated that Blackgirls were to keep their hair short or braided without extensions.

Instead, however, due to my parents' ideologies regarding how girls should have their hair, my parents firmly believed that a school-going girl must have short hair and nothing else. Firstly, for my parents, short hair held cultural significance as a way of fostering discipline and respect. Short hair has been traditionally associated with ideas

of discipline and respect within the Black community. By adhering to this cultural norm, Black girls are seen as upholding their heritage and respecting their roots. This cultural significance plays a crucial role in shaping our identities and sense of belonging, which builds higher self-esteem. Secondly, our hair was more manageable when shorter and not in its full-on afro state. Short hair requires less maintenance and is easier to manage, especially for young girls who are often engaged in various school activities. Short hair allowed us to focus on our studies and extracurricular pursuits without being burdened by the time-consuming process of styling and maintenance. By encouraging this practice, my parents emphasized the importance of education and provided us with a conducive environment to excel academically.

Lastly, my parents held that doing your hair as a school-going girl meant ubuntombi, the idea that a girl does her hair for male attention and that you now see yourself as a young lady interested in dating for which my parents had no time or energy. The culture of maintaining our short natural hair was embedded so deeply within our family that I recall house visits from the young man who used to cut our hair almost at every beginning of a new school term. The brief he got from my dad was always the same," cut it short", he would say. Even though we would see other girls at school on the first day of each term with braids or relaxed hair, it never bothered us that our hair was short and in its natural state. It was all we knew. As a young Black girl, this tremendously impacted building a positive self-concept and a secure self-identity. This unconsciously embedded culture in our household and allowed us to feel comfortable in our bodies. Our parents encouraged us to accept ourselves, especially during our preprimary and primary schooling years. We were in spaces that emphasized Western beauty standards, and school hair policies restricted how African girls could style their hair. We were also around other young Black girls who thought it was better to relax their hair to fit in. Maintaining short hair throughout my schooling career played a huge role in impacting my identity. As embracing natural hair and rejecting Western normative beauty ideals creates a sense of empowerment and self-acceptance among Black girls. By encouraging me to embrace our natural textures and defying societal pressures to conform, my parents helped me become secure in my identity and celebrate my beauty in its authentic form helping me and my sisters become comfortable with who we are. The experience created a profound love for encouraging my learners to embrace who they are as they are. The importance of encouraging and fostering a positive self-image

for learners in primary schools cannot be overstated, especially for educators working in primary schools.

Figure 4.8.1: Grade 1 school photo of me.

Source: Author.

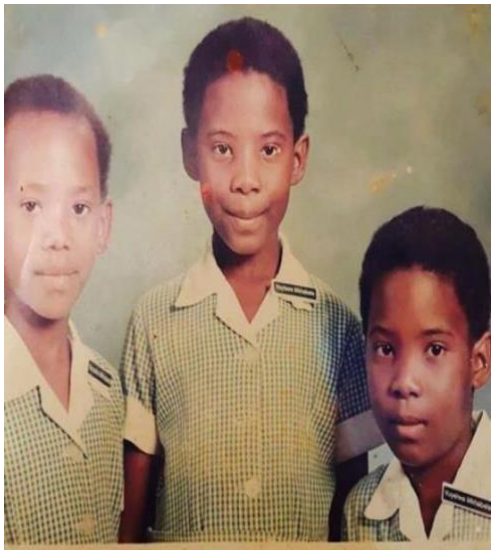


Figure 4.8.2 : Grade 2 school photo with my sisters.

Source: Author.

Figure 4.8.3: Grade 7 school photo of me and my twin sister.

Source: Author.

Figure 4.8.4: Grade 9 school photo. Source: Author.

Figure 4.8.9: Grade12 school photo with my sisters.

Source: Author.

4.9 Navigating scoliosis: The impact of self-identity and the drive for an inclusive classroom environment

At sixteen, discovering I had a condition that would drastically alter my appearance and affect my overall physical health unless I had surgery to try to correct it and stop it from progressing, had a massive impact on my identity. I recall being in grade ten when my mother noticed that my left shoulder blade protruded more than the other. Up until that point, I had occasionally mentioned my back being painful to my mom, but it never felt so severe until she noticed my shoulder and took me to our family doctor, who referred us to a specialist. It was there that I was officially diagnosed with thoracic scoliosis. Scoliosis is an abnormal lateral curvature of the spine, where the spine twists and curves to the side.

I remember being told I would eventually struggle to perform everyday activities, like standing, sitting and walking for a certain period. I would find specific jobs challenging to navigate, that I would not be able to have a baby, or that I would struggle to carry one. I remember how disheartened I was hearing all of this as I was young and looking forward to doing so much with my life. Even though the pain of doing everyday activities had set it, it was not so bad. I had to wait till I was nineteen to have spinal fusion surgery done. I remember moments leading up to the surgery, I struggled with pain and my body image, as it was visible with my posture that I was not aligned, my

clothes did not fit well, and some girls during high school would make mention of it once they noticed. That experience was never comfortable, and I already wore glasses, had braces and a head full of pitch-Black course natural hair. Having scoliosis on top of that did not help. Due to my scoliosis and difficulties with my vision, I have always been emphatic and sensitive to the possibility that my learners may be experiencing physical, emotional and mental difficulties, both visible and invisible and that it is my responsibility as an educator to facilitate an inclusive classroom environment for my learners through classroom management strategies.

Figure 4.9.1 Before spinal fusion

Source: Author.

Figure 4.9.2 after spinal fusion Source:
Author.

4.10 The influence of female educators: How Mrs B shaped my teaching philosophy and identity

As a young, shy, and anxious Black girl, I was significantly impacted by being taught by female educators. Most of my educators were female throughout my schooling career, from pre-primary to university. Despite having experienced pre-primary and primary school with only White educators, their impression on my life was overwhelmingly positive and never experienced anything but love and kindness. I fondly recall how all my educators, especially pre-primary and primary school educators, were always welcoming, warm, loving, kind, encouraging, nurturing, cheerful, inspiring, passionate, learner-centred, friendly, helpful, kind, generous, perceptive, animated, motivating, intelligent, patient, challenging but fair, devoted and always looked out for our well-being. My educators always made me feel seen and heard as a learner. It is difficult for me to forget my favourite educator, Mrs B, who was my class educator in grade four and again in grade seven. She was always encouraging, reassuring, and patient when I was sad, stressed, or experiencing difficulties. I recall our discussions on our favourite television show, Touched by an Angel. This heart warming, inspiring, spirit-led show followed three angels placed on earth to help people deal with their problems, with each episode focusing on a particular issue or person. The following morning, we would always discuss what we thought and felt about the episode from the night before. This experience opened my eyes to God's love and grace even more.

As a learner, I remember taking things to the car before and after school or helping her carry things as we walked to the parking lot after school. My memory of her calling me aside in grade six, informing me that I would be in her class in grade seven, and how excited and relieved I was to be in her class is still vivid. She encouraged me to apply for a scholarship for high school since she believed my grades were good enough to qualify and assisted me with the application process. My family and I were extremely pleased when we received the letter notifying me that my application was successful and that I would not have to pay a certain percentage of my grade eight school fees. The fact that I could reduce my parents' financial stress, even briefly, made me extremely

happy. As a result of her belief in me, I could see myself and my capabilities in a whole new light. Not only her belief but also her compassion towards me. I recall her calling me aside and letting me know I was not chosen to become a prefect as the educators thought I was overly timid for the position and unprepared. I recall her warm hug and telling me I should not be upset. While she did not have to pull me aside and inform me, she did, and my memories of that experience and those I had with her remain etched in my heart. I could write a book about her and her impact on my life.

As an educator, Mrs B was not only my educator but also a mother to me. This part of my history has impacted me so profoundly that I get emotional every time I think of her role in my life, especially now as an educator. I knew I wanted my classroom to reflect Mrs B's energy which always reminds me of how important and impactful our educator roles are. The experience has motivated me to become the educator Mrs B was to me and my learners.

Figure 4.10.1: My grade 4 class with Mrs B.

Source: Author.

4.11 The lasting impact of my schooling experience: Shaping my approach to education and learner well-being

My schooling experience played a profound role in my life. As a child, I spent most of my childhood at school, absorbing information, building friendships, forging my

identity, opening my mind to new worlds and possibilities, and finding out what I am good at and what I enjoyed and struggled with; I was able to explore who I was and who I had the potential of becoming. When I look at my school badge and school hymn book, (figure 4.11.1) below, I am transported back to high school. I recall the hymns we would sing at assembly as well as the pride we had when we sang our school song. I remember how important it was to always make sure I wore my name badge at school in keeping with the school rules. When looking and reflect on the postcard of the front of my high school, I recall how school honestly became a home away from home for me. It is in this environment that I experienced so much. I remember how big my preprimary, primary and high school were. I recall our spacious classrooms, with a maximum of 28 learners in a class, that overlooked the ocean. I vividly recall how some days I found myself staring at the blue ocean whenever I was distracted and how calming and peaceful those moments were.

The schools had huge fields and offered many sporting activities, such as athletics, cricket, hockey, swimming, tennis, and rugby, as well as a variety of cultural activities, such as music, drama, chess, toastmasters, sewing classes, book clubs and library centred clubs, computer and multimedia centred clubs and an art club. As learners, we were required to participate in extramural activities after school. My twin sister and I lived in the music room and library throughout primary and high school. Those spaces had become our safe places throughout our schooling journey.

I recall my school uniforms: in primary school, I wore a green and white checked dress, with my green and white name badge and a brown skirt and blazer with a white blouse and brown and white name badge with my house name under my name, in high school. I remember the school songs, the school houses I was in, Cato (green) in primary, Lewis (yellow) in high school and how full and heavy my school bags were. To this day, I hold dearly the school mottoes and their meanings. The primary school stated, "Honour God, build surely," and our high school motto stated, "To thine own self be true." I fondly remember our voices singing as one during school assemblies, paging through our hymn books, the fun school trips we would go on and the friendly and welcoming educators I had.

So many beautiful memories have been engraved in my mind, heart and spirit that I will treasure forever. However, no experience is without its challenges, even though I deeply respect, love and admire all the institutions I attended. I recall that my time in these spaces was not without their challenges. In my capacity as an educator, this makes me aware of the fact that my learners are experiencing much during their time at school and that I must ensure that my interactions with them are a positive, encouraging, and loving experience, making the best use of the limited resources offered by the school and always keeping in mind that they will also experience moments of joy and struggle in their education.

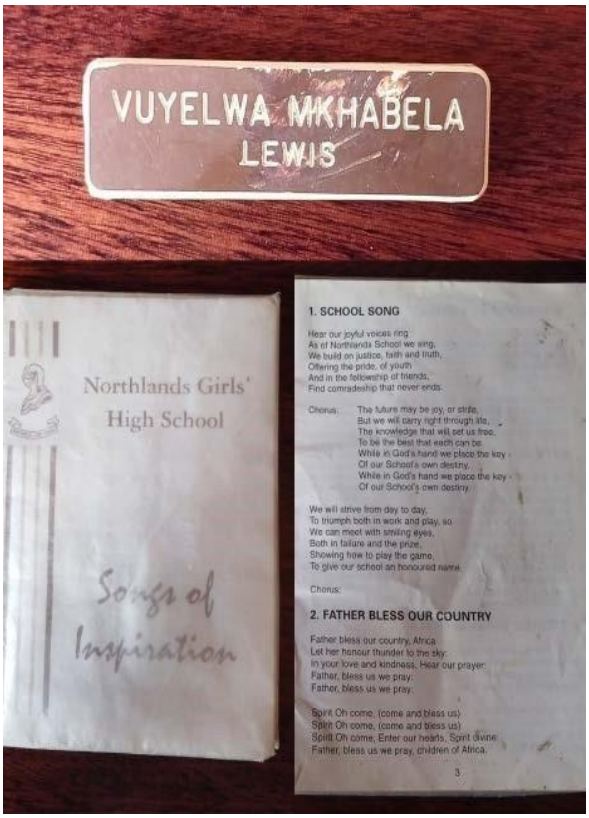


Figure 4.11.1: My high school name badge and my high school hymn book opened on the school song.

Source: Author.

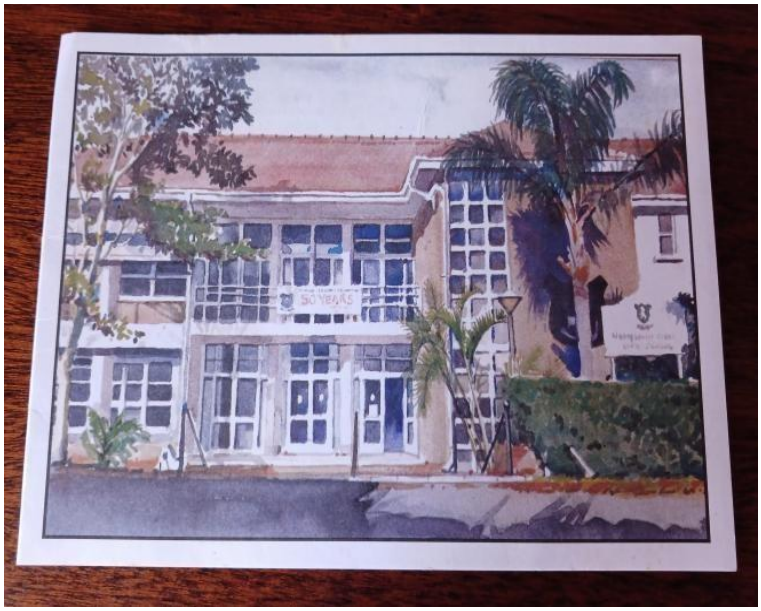


Figure 4.11.2: The front entrance of my high school.

Source: Author.

4.12 Conclusion

In chapter four, I addressed my first research question: How has my history impacted my identity as a Black female educator? This chapter allowed me to reflect on my childhood experiences through memory work, gaining insight into how these experiences shaped my identity as a Black female educator. It allowed me to examine how my family history, cultural values, and beliefs shaped my identity. In addition, I discussed how my interactions with others have shaped my identity. I considered how my educational experiences, places, and spaces shaped my identity during this process. By exploring parts of my history that have impacted me as a Black female educator, I hope to become a more effective educator. Additionally, I have been inspired to serve as an encouraging role model and influence for my learners, just as my educators and family members have done for me.

In chapter five I respond to my second research question: What challenges have I experienced in my educational journey as a Black female educator? I present a detailed account of and reflect on the challenges I faced during my educational journey.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHALLENGES FACED WITHIN MY EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, chapter four, I addressed my first research question by exploring parts of my personal history that have impacted me as a Black female educator. This was done by utilising different methods to generate data and then examining and reflecting on it. This chapter addresses my second research question by utilising memory work through photographs, artefacts and narrative writing to uncover memories related to the challenges I encountered in my pre-primary, primary, high school, and undergraduate years.

5.2 Navigating educational transition: A personal reflection on South Africa's post -apartheid education reforms

The first democratic elections in South Africa were a turning point in the country's history. The constitution rejected discrimination in education. Various policies and initiatives were implemented to promote inclusion, diversity, and equal access to quality education for all leaners. Among these measures were the revision of curricula, the establishment of non-discriminatory admission criteria, and the provision of support systems (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

During the period preceding the democratic elections, my parents removed us from a predominantly coloured and Indian pre-primary in Newlands. They enrolled us in a predominantly White pre-primary school. As a result of my parents' desire for a better education and future for us, we entered a pre-primary school in Durban North in 1991. At the time, my parents decided we should attend school in Durban North; my father was a principal in a rural high school, and my mother was a social worker in Kwamashu. Since they had experienced and understood the educational and socioeconomic challenges faced within township schools, they wanted to ensure that we had better opportunities. I recall my mom explaining their decision to me by stating that my father

had read an article in the newspaper that stated Black children were now permitted to attend White schools.

Furthermore, a family friend, a principal at a primary school in Kwamashu, advised her to search for pre-primary schools that continued into a primary school. This ensured that my mother would not have the issues of looking for a new school once we completed pre-primary school. This allowed the transition from pre-primary school to grade one to be as smooth as possible. In light of my father's work schedule, my mother found a school of which both my parents approved. Since my mother's mom and grandmother worked in Durban North as domestic workers, she was familiar with the area and wanted us to attend school there. It was because of my parents' vision that we were given a better opportunity, which is how our educational journey began and how predominantly White institutions became our second homes.

5.3 Childhood memories and educational navigation: The role children's television in school experiences

As a child growing up in a township and attending school in the suburbs, one of our first challenges was adjusting to making sure we quickly learned to abide by the clock. I have memories of my sisters and me waking up in the cold, dark early morning hours. I vividly recall waking up to hot porridge and cartoons playing in the background. I remember how that pattern continued throughout my childhood and primary school years. Looking at figure 5.3.1, figure 5.3.2 and figure 5.3.3, photographs of the popular children's television show Kideo, brings back warm and comforting memories of our mornings especially seeing the children on Buzz Street and remembering how the opening song would always bring a smile to my face. I recall how the order of the children's morning shows became a means of keeping track of time for us. We would always rush each other once this show was finished, as we knew we were running late. Reflecting on this show I see how it helped me navigate challenging moments within my pre-primary school experience as it reflected my experience so well. The show featured children who were around five and six different races learning relevant and interesting lessons, I also experienced at school, especially lessons of dealing with diversity in the new South Africa, acceptance and children of different races working and playing together. These lessons were taught by characters, Mr Chinwag, a grey

smart donkey who was always situated in a big red apple, Timothy Traddle, an overly sensitive and emotional tortoise who seemed to always have something wrong happen and some kind of pain in his body and he sang the most memorable song and the friendly lady, (who reminded me of my educators) who would always visit Buzz Street and help the characters solve problems as well as teaching the children lessons. I see now that this was more than a show, it was a tool that helped me better navigate my time at preprimary.

Figure 5.3.1: Photograph of children on the set of Kideo television show.

Source: Google images.

Figure 5.3.2: Photograph of Timothy Traddle Source:

Google images.

Figure 5.3.3: photograph of Mr Chinwag and the helpful lady on Kideo.

Source: Google images.

Following the morning television show time schedule helped us as young as we were; to understand how necessary it was to keep a schedule since our daily commute took significant time. Our mother had to ensure she got to work on time after dropping us off at school. I recall that during the early years of my schooling, my mom dropped us off and picked us up from school. However, it was common for one of her colleagues or a family member to pick us up when she could not. During my childhood, I recall being comforted by the knowledge that my mother always made arrangements to pick us up if she could not, particularly since making these arrangements was not always easy and the pre-primary and primary school frowned upon late arrivals and pick-ups.

5.4 Journey of connection: Navigating school transportation and building community

By the time we reached grade four, my middle sister was in grade two, and the two youngest were in pre-primary. Between grades four and seven, my parents arranged a carpool for us. Our mother could no longer take us to school, and finding an alternative was a challenge for my parents, so it was decided that my dad's van would be used to transport us. I remember my dad telling us he got a driver to drive us to school in his blue Toyota van. I remember how important it was for our parents that we had a safe and reliable mode of transport with drivers they knew. The carpool transported my

sisters and me, then at a later stage, our cousins and around four other children. We all lived in KwaMashu and attended schools in the Durban North area.

Figure 5.4.1: Photograph of my dad's van.

Source Author.

Looking at the photo of my dad's van in figure 5.4.1, above, I am reminded of the countless trips we took in it. Finding this picture helped me reflect on my past experiences going to school. Memories of the seating arrangement in the back of the van flooded my mind as I examined this picture. I recall two long wooden benches on each side and one shorter parallel to the back window. I vividly remember how uncomfortable the wooden benches we sat on would sometimes be. How could the mental of the van would feel on rainy days and how the wind would slightly blow through any minor cracks, sometimes making cold days even colder. I recall how awkward getting in and out of the van would be. The back door was so high that it would be a mission to coordinate a way to get in and sit down once in. I remember navigating through other children's school bags to get seated. Once seated, I remember how squashed we would be, as one bench could accommodate a certain number of learners. Looking back at those moments reminded me just how uncomfortable our trips would be at times, but also how much like home the back of the van was for us. As children travelling together daily to schools, where we sometimes felt like outsiders, having that time in the van in the mornings and afternoons together was a priceless, warm experience. We became each other's support, not only within the confinements of the van but also within the school, especially with the children who attended the same

primary school as us. Additionally, it made us closer to our cousins as we saw them every day. This experience made us desensitised to the fact that we were shifting spaces and entering a new world in our schooling environments every day, making it less scary to navigate these spaces as we had each other.

5.5 Perception of punctuality: Navigating commuting challenges and racial dynamics in school attendance

As a child, the commute from KwaMashu to Durban North always seemed long; our drive to school and back always felt like a mini road trip. I recall a few times I would fall asleep on the way to school; there was always morning traffic, and although not common, sometimes there would be issues with the car. The driver, our parents and we learners were always aware that late arrival at school was frowned upon, and detention was given to learners who arrived late. I recall how shameful and uncomfortable we would feel if we arrived late at school. Reflecting on those moments, I see now that I felt uncomfortable because we lived quite a distance from school. It always felt that it would be made a huge issue whenever Black learners were late, mainly if they lived in the township. I recall how the ladies at the front office always asked a million questions about why we were late and, at times, would reference the fact that we lived far away. As learners in the carpool and Black learners in general at school, we knew silently among ourselves that we could never afford to be late or picked up late after school as it always somehow just never reflected well on us as Black learners; whenever a Black learner arrived late or got picked up late. Even though I do not recall it being as a big issue when learners of other races arrived or got picked up late, even though we were seldom late, I recall even the thought was just too much of an uncomfortable experience to go through. As an educator, this experience has significantly heightened my understanding of the diverse home environments and circumstances that influence how my students arrive at school. I have come to recognize that frequent tardiness often stems from legitimate reasons beyond the control of my learners, reflecting the varied and sometimes challenging situations they face outside of school. This awareness has deepened my empathy and sensitivity toward their individual circumstances, allowing me to approach their lateness with greater understanding and compassion.

5.6 Beyond school walls: Navigating after school spaces and community connections

Whenever any child from the carpool had an after-school extra-mural activity, it became the norm that we would wait for them to finish at different parks around Durban North. Looking at figure 5.6.1, figure 5.6.2, figure 5.6.3 and figure 5.6.4, photographs of the two spaces we frequently waited at, the Durban North Japanese Garden and the Wyhnott Park, reminds me of the many memorable moments I experienced as a learner in these spaces. I recall the driver parking the van and everyone gearing up for when it stops, some excitingly taking off their school shoes and socks in anticipation of quickly jumping out of the van and rushing to the nearest swing, aeroplane-shaped jungle gym, slide or any other game. I recall occasionally seeing other Black or Black learners from our primary school in these areas. Their carpool would also be awaiting someone to complete their extra mural activity.

Figure 5.6.1: photograph of Wyhnott Park.

Source: Google images.

Looking at figure 5.6.1 above, I recall how soft the grass would feel under my feet and the sharp, painful sting of an occasional thorn at Whynotte Park. How open and spacious this park was, located right next to the Durban North swimming pool. I recall how amazingly warm the sun would feel on my skin and how we would sometimes gently close our eyes and point our faces towards the sun. Seeing red and orange colours across my field of vision always brought me joy. I recall how these peacefully calming moments were a much-needed stress release sometimes after a long day at school. On

good days, the wait felt short; we were too busy playing to notice. I recall how these spaces were filled with our laughter, joy and energy.

Reflecting, I see that during my primary school days, these parks and gardens became a warm, safe and comforting space for us Black learners as we waited. I recall how beautiful the Durban North Japanese garden was as a child. I fondly remember what fun it was to explore this enchanted place filled with birds and butterflies. I also remember the excitement of looking into the ponds and seeing brightly coloured Japanese fish.

Figure 5.6.2: Photograph showing the entrance of the Durban North Japanese Garden
Source: Google images.

Figure 5.6.3: Photograph of the play area at the Japanese Garden.

Source: Google images.

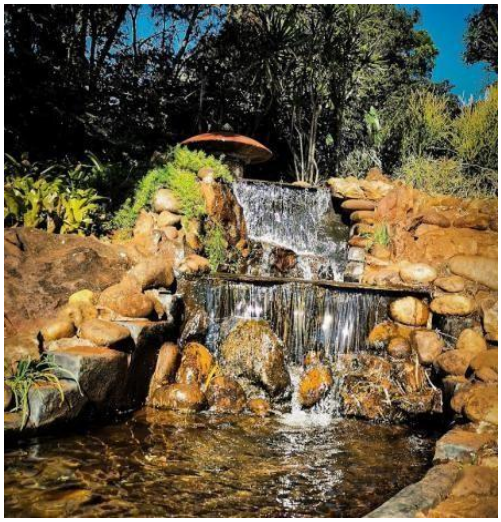


Figure 5.6.4 Photograph of a pond at Japanese Garden.

Source: Google image

Some days, however, were highly challenging; the wait would feel unbearably long. No amount of games or attempting my homework could distract me from the fact that time moved quite slowly. I remember experiencing feelings of being tired, hungry and annoyed that we had to wait for what felt like an eternity for the ones doing their extra mural activities. In comparison, children who lived in the area (usually our White counterparts) were already home. Relaxed, homework completed, fed and watched cartoons in the comfort of their homes. During these moments, I was constantly reminded that we lived quite a distance from the school. While reflecting, it becomes clear to me that for Black learners to participate in school activities fully, we had no choice but to spend countless hours waiting in parks for each other. It was one of the main ways we could navigate participating in after-school activities, and the only ties we had in these areas were these parks and gardens. Park days always meant that our after-school home routine started later; homework was done later, and we slept slightly later, even though we had early mornings, which was a challenging experience overall.

5.7 Carpool to community: Navigating public transport and building solidarity on the school bus

We started taking the Durban municipality school special number 998 bus from grade eight onwards. The photograph of the Durban municipality bus below in figure 5.7.1 brings back memories of our travel experiences to school. I remember the bus's green

and white appearance and the stress of always having to squint my eyes in order to read the bus number as the bus was approaching and having to reach into the inside of my brown school blazer pocket to get my bus ticket and waving it in order to stop the bus. The bus mainly transported high school learners from Ntuzuma and KwaMashu to schools in Durban North and other areas along the route.

Figure 5.7.1 A photograph of a Durban municipality bus.

Source: Google image

We did not know that the transition from a carpool with a few children to an overcrowded bus filled with children was initially challenging. It was my twin sister and my first time constantly taking public transport alone. It was the first time our parents gave us this much independence. Looking back, I remember how nervous and anxious that experience was for us. Before that point, we were not even allowed to step out the gate unless it was with our parents, a school carpool or a family member. Now, in grade eight, we were expected to do so every day; it was a very daunting ask of my parents. As shy, quiet, prone to anxiety thirteen-year-old girls, I recall feeling like they were bursting the bubble they had placed us in. It was a shock to the system.

The school special bus, number 998, was always full by the time it arrived at KwaMashu C section; I recall days where I would stand from the time I got onto the bus until I got to school or sitting on my twin sister's lap, whenever we managed to get a seat. I recall the many brown school bags from the girls from my school and the blue school bags that belonged to the boys from our brother school, along the sides of the seats. I recall a sense of familiarity among the older learners. As the years went by, I recall having

and feeling that familiarity and belonging with other learners on the bus, just like in primary school when we took the van to school. The school special bus, 988, was a safe space for Black learners before we got to school and on our return home. There was a sense of deep belonging, solidarity and understanding among the learners on this bus. What initially seemed like a daunting task in grade eight eventually became a place where, as Black learners, we found support and unity in each other. The morning and afternoon commutes, although long, looking back, felt like a needed way to regulate my nervous system before and after entering school. Being around other Black learners made it easier to navigate our white learner-dominated school. There was a strong bond among the learners who took the school special 998 bus.

5.8 Journeys to and from school negotiating safety, time and identity

Figure 5.8.1: My home street.

Source: Author

Looking at the photograph in figure 5.8.1 of the street where I grew up in, I am reminded that walking to the bus stop in the mornings on a quiet, empty street never felt entirely safe. I found winter one of the most challenging times since it was always dark outside when we left the house. Many instances of muggings marked our high school years during this time. I recall how uncomfortable it would be to walk to the bus stop for that

reason and how my mother would sometimes drive us up to the bus stop, which also usually occurred when we were running late. I remember how she would have to rush us to the next bus stop if we did not catch the bus at our bus stop. There was only one special school bus travelling to Durban North, so missing it was not good, as the next alternative was buses that dropped us a distance from school.

One of the positive aspects of the bus service was that it dropped us off and picked us up directly outside the school. However, high traffic levels and unforeseen issues with the bus or on the roads sometimes caused us to arrive late at school. As I recall, our principal tended to summon all Black girls who took the bus for meetings at various times throughout high school to address late arrivals. Whenever she spoke, she was fond of saying that if we could not get to school on time, we should attend schools near our homes. However, she knew our lateness was not regular and was out of our control. It was painful to experience these moments as I knew how hard my parents had worked to provide us with a better education than the township schools in our communities, and in turn, moments like this reinforced my constant sense of not belonging in these spaces. Notably, coming from the mouth of the most senior staff member showed us how unwelcome and unwanted we were.

5.9 A journey to high school acceptance

Our primary was close to an all-girls high school and an all-boys high school. We knew from the time we were in grade five that was the high school we wanted to attend as it was tradition for the girls at our primary school to attend this all-girls high. The application process was stressful, and the interview was scary. I recall my twin sister and I had an interview with the high school principal while in grade seven. I remember her asking us where we lived, how we would get to school, and why we wanted to attend this school since it was a distance from home. This question did not make much sense to me as we already attended primary school less than five minutes from high school. However, the principal notified us shortly after the interview that we had been accepted and would receive a formal acceptance letter. My mom, twin sister and I were so happy, excited and relieved. I remember going to my grandmother's house to tell her the news. It was such a massive deal for our family, especially since the high school was so close

to the home where my grandmother used to work as a domestic worker. I recall she was so proud of us.

Unfortunately, this was not the same outcome for other Black girls who attended primary schools in other areas, lived in a township and had applied to my high school. Even though the South African Schools Act of 1996, a policy which made school admissions race-blind, had been in place for five years by the time I was in high school, I recall my high school and other schools within the Durban North area being very strict on parents regarding where they lived. I remember a few of my parents' friends expressing to my parents that their children were denied acceptance because they lived far from the school. Schools were not admitting Black learners who did not reside within the school district. Even though this seems reasonable at first glance, learners of other races who did not live within the school's district were not being turned away in comparison to learners of Blackdescent. Some parents would use the addresses of their friends who lived in the area when applying to schools. Looking back at these instances, I always knew that my sisters and I were accepted into our high school mainly because of the primary school we attended. Had we attended another primary school, the chances of being accepted would have been slim. This realisation reminds me that discrimination had yet to magically disappear after implementing the South African Schools Act of 1996. The thought that we could have been deprived of a better education and that other learners were because we lived in a township community was challenging to understand and see happen as a child.

5.10 Language dynamics in early education

Language encompasses so much of who a person is. People's culture, world perspective, and how they process their thoughts and emotions are wrapped up in their language. Our languages play a crucial part in building and reaffirming our identity. This section explores my experiences related to navigating issues of language through pre-primary, primary and high school.

Our first encounter with children of other races occurred at our first pre-primary school, a church-based creche in Newlands. This neighbourhood is inhabited by coloured and Indian communities less than ten minutes away from KwaMashu. Although English

was spoken, we could communicate in isiZulu with our educators and other learners. However, when we started attending pre-primary school in Durban North, for the first time, we encountered white children who spoke English. Initially, we faced a language barrier since our home language is isiZulu, and the language of instruction at school was English. I recall a recent conversation with my mother about our pre-primary experience. When we started pre-primary, I recall her saying that the educators assured her that we would learn English quickly, so she did not need worry. I vividly remember my twin sister and I being discouraged from communicating in isiZulu by our educators. Even though I was young, I remember these moments as highly uncomfortable. Being denied the opportunity to speak my native language, I recall, was never pleasant. It became a recurring theme throughout my primary and high school years. In my experience as a Black learner, speaking isiZulu at school was prohibited, which became an unspoken rule. In contrast, I do not recall our white counterparts being reprimanded for speaking Afrikaans.

5.11 You cannot say that

Reflecting on this unspoken rule and our educators' discouragement of us speaking isiZulu, it appears that the educators discouraged us from communicating in isiZulu during our pre-primary years as a method of helping us adjust to the language and acquire it more rapidly, preventing us from relying on our native language for support. However, the method used was a very traumatic one. Consequently, this led to us became accustomed to speaking English over isiZulu at home and school as our primary language. This was the beginnings of us losing and diluting our Blackness to fit in, the beginnings of us assimilating into these spaces.

In primary and high school, however, being prohibited from communicating in our native language felt like censorship. educators and other non-Black learners had an issue whenever we communicated in isiZulu. I recall how uncomfortable they became when they did not understand what we were saying. Additionally, educators and other nonBlack learners sometimes felt and claimed that we were being too loud when we expressed ourselves in our native language. I always felt that those moments made me feel uncomfortable and disrespected as a Black learner.

5.12 Support and sibling bonds in primary school: We had each other

Figure 5.12.1: The cover page of my report.
Source: Author

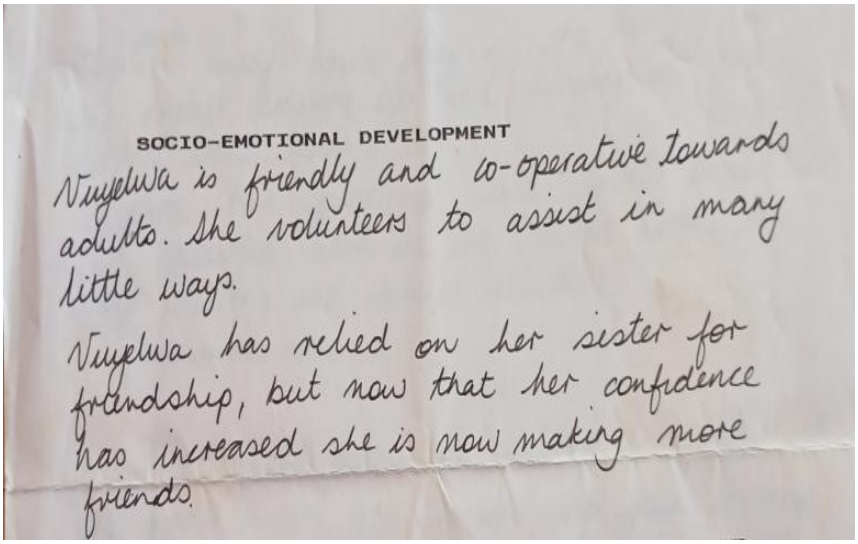


Figure 5.12.2 an educators remark from my report.

Source Author

I found my pre-primary half-yearly progress report and reading over the educators' remarks, discussing my routines, socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development,

class participation and overall school readiness somewhat unnerving. The section about my socio-emotional status in figure 5.12.2 stood out for me, and the educator mentioned that I have relied on my twin sister for friendship. This brings back memories of how much my twin sister was my rock, especially during our early years of schooling when communicating in English was still a challenge, it was comforting to have her with me to get through moments I struggled to express myself.

Figure 5.12.3 Photograph of Grade 2 class photo.

Source: Author

The remark in figure 5.12.1, was further reinforced when I came across a photograph figure 5.12.3 of our grade two class photo. As I examined this photo, I see my twin sister with a huge smile on her face and me just sitting there with no expression which reminds me of how much I still needed my sister, even after pre-primary as I had hardships with generally navigating, socially at school. I remember that was the last time my twin sister and I were in the same class in primary school. We had been in the same classes until grade two and I heavily depended on my sister. I recall our grade two educator Mrs K, sitting us down and explaining to us, but to me especially that we would not be in the same class in grade three. Reflecting on this I understand it was the educators' way of making me more independent however this was very challenging for me as I found it hard to adjust, make friends, and navigate through school. Having my sister constantly with me helped me get through many uncomfortable moments in

school. It was a truly comforting feeling knowing that we had each other for support throughout our basic education.

5.13 The transition to big school

Figure 5.13.1 Photograph of my grade one class with our educator and principal on Valentine's day.

Source: Author.

Finding a photograph in figure 5.13.1 of our first Valentine's Day in a big school I recall how happy that day was. My twin sister and I matched in our red shorts and pre-primary school t-shirts that still fit us in grade one. I recall our class was permitted to take a photo with our educator, Miss P and our principal, Mr R, in front of our artwork, which was displayed outside the front office area. This photo brings back memories of my experience entering a big school.

I fondly recall our first day of grade one, my sister and I waking up early with our green and white checked uniforms placed neatly on my mother's bed and our brown school shoes by the wardrobe. I remember our mom giving us the autonomy to dress ourselves. We were big girls, after all, starting big school. It was an exhilarating time for us, as this was the moment we had worked towards during pre-primary. Our pre-primary school was on the same premises as the primary school. Our pre-primary classrooms were adjacent to the foundation phase part of the primary school, so we would always

see the bigger kids and always looked forward to the day when we would start big school. The transition from pre-primary to grade one was smooth because of this.

Even though we were excited, and somewhat familiar with the school layout. I remember how nervous I was entering our grade one classroom. Meeting new learners and having a new educator was scary. However, having my twin sister in the same class brought a lot of needed comfort. I remember our classroom had twenty -three learners, only four of which were Black learners which I recall made me feel out of place at times, especially if I was the only Black learner seated in my group, as learners were divided and seated in groups. The classroom was full of colourful illustrations, numbers, the alphabet, and a reading area with a carpet we would sit on during reading time, just as we did in pre-primary; there was a sink and tap, a storeroom, where our educator would store our extra stationery, books and other school supplies. I recall having a chair bag that held our books and stationery bags, our names stuck on our desks and feeling an overall warm atmosphere created by our educator. Miss P was a young, loving, attentive and dedicated educator and I recall her smile, blond hair, and constant encouragement.

5.14 Literary development and childhood favourites

I recall grade one being filled with lots of work, spelling tests every Friday, orals, creative writing, maths problems and what seemed like an endless amount of stories on characters: Meg the hen, Deb the rat, Ben the dog, Jip the cat and fat pig.

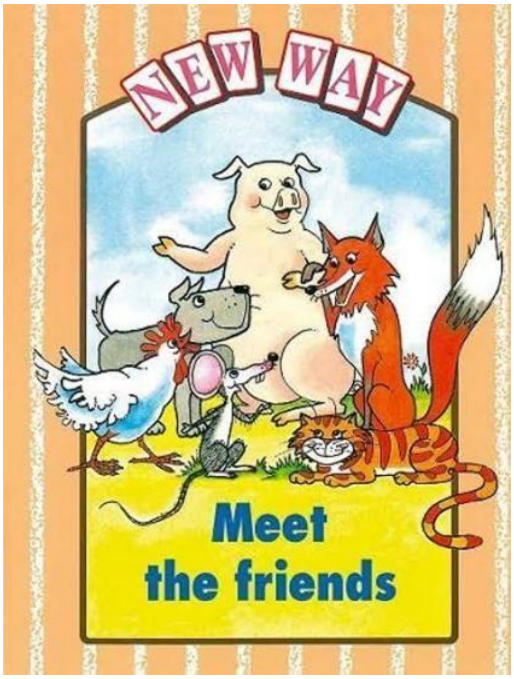


Figure 5.14.1 the New Way book, titled Meet the friends.

Source: Author.

Looking at the New Way book Meet the friends, and flipping through the pages, in figure 5.14.1, I recall how these books made our childhood. So much of the English language was learned through these books. The friendship between the different animals also taught us as learners in class to accept, help and be there for each other. I recall how excited I would be each week to get a new reader, wondering what adventure and lessons the animals would be on that week. I remember the big font size in the book and using my finger to help me try read the words, aloud on the page however, it became clear that certain aspects of the English language took a lot of work. I remember my twin sister, and I battled with spelling throughout primary school. We started attending extra English classes provided by educators at school towards the end of grade one and throughout primary school. We had to work extremely hard to overcome our hurdle with spelling which took longer than expected and caused me so much stress throughout primary school. However, our educators throughout the different grades always encouraged us to read.

5.15 The sanctuary of the library

I remember we loved being in the library, being surrounded by books in a quiet, calm place always made me felt like I belonged and was in a safe space throughout school as making friends was not easy. I recall how much my twin sister and I enjoyed spending breaks and time before and after school there. I remember we loved the library so much that we became library monitors in grades six and seven, which, at my school, you had to apply to have the position. Our love for reading helped my twin sister and me not just with spelling but also broadened our vocabulary and allowed us to experience different worlds through books. Worlds of Witches, wizards, monsters, vampires, The Chicken Soup series, kings, queens and knights, goose bumps and the Roald Dahl series to mention a few.

Looking at the Whats App message of the photo of the Sweet Valley Twins book in figure 5.15.1, my little sister sent to the family group and her reminding me how much I use to love this series which is a series of books that follow twin girls, Jessica and Elizabeth as they navigate their lives. I remember that this series of books always held a special place in my heart as the girls reminded me of my sister and me. It was fun reading about other twins and their experiences with each other and with school.

Figure 5.15.1 A WhatsApp conversation

Source: Author

As wonderful as these books were, however, I recall noticing that our libraries did not have books with Black children on the cover or books that described and explored the

experiences of Black children. Reflecting on this I realize, growing up I had become desensitised to not seeing covers with Black children or Black stories, that I thought and accepted it as normal. I remember, I only encountered Black characters in a book when he or she was mentioned as the main character's friend or classmate, and nothing significant was said about them. I always felt that Black characters were an afterthought in the books I read. I recall as an adult and educator thinking how this contributed to the shedding of my Blackness. I had consumed so many White centred books, I unknowingly absorbed world views, cultures, ideologies, perspectives, and experiences that were not part of my world. Experiences that were side lined, excluded, and did not represent the viewpoint of a Black child. While the books I read broadened my horizons, they omitted a large part of my world, which is the Black experiences. Reflecting on this, I clearly see how this impacted my identity in a negative way, in the long term as it did not afford me the opportunity to explore my identity in the books I was consuming.

5.16 Reflections on early reading achievements: the little book worm

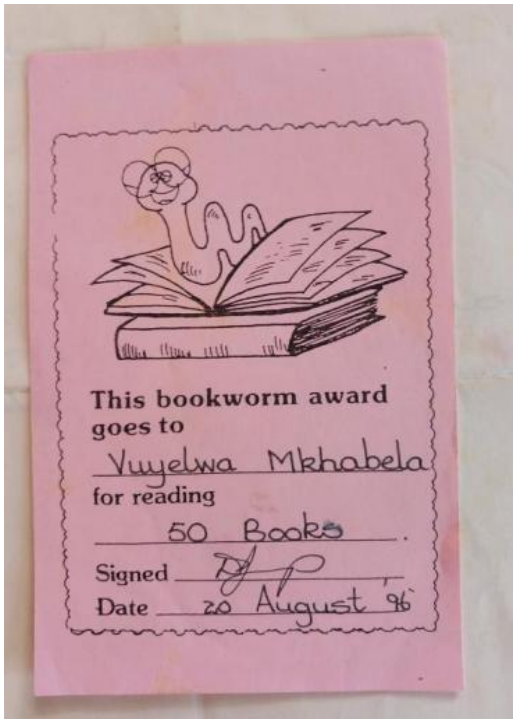


Figure 5.16.1: A reading award.

Source: Author

Finding my grade three book worm award, in figure 5.16.1 reminded me just how important reading was for me and how much I enjoyed it. I recall the countless times I

would read while on my way to school, in the back of the van or at times I read at the parks while we waited for learners to finish their extra mural activities. I remember how I struggled with reading because of my issues with spelling but always doing my best and never giving up. I recall, that it was in grade three that my love for reading intensified, and how I lived in books. Reflecting on this, I see that it was partly as a coping mechanism for dealing with the separation from my twin sister as it was our first time not in the same class. I used books to help me cope with that and it allowed me not to interact with the other learners. I recall as soon as I was done with a class activity, I would sit on the reading carpet and just read. I recall listing all the books I read on a worksheet that was pasted at the back of our English book and getting awards, just like the one in figure 5.16.1, at assembly for reading a certain number of books a term. I recall how proud of myself I was whenever my name would be called out in assembly to receive this award. This was always a happy moment as I understood the immense amount of work it took for me to read, not just for the sake of reading but for understanding. Understanding new words, worlds, cultures, and contexts through English was challenging, but I always tried my best. Finding my grade 6 report, in figure 5.16.2 and figure 5.16.3, reading my educators' remarks, reminded me just how hard I had to work on my English and that my struggle with spelling affected me nonstop through primary school. It also reminded me that isiZulu was an afterthought of a subject, I recall we started isiZulu in grade six and we were taught by a White educator.

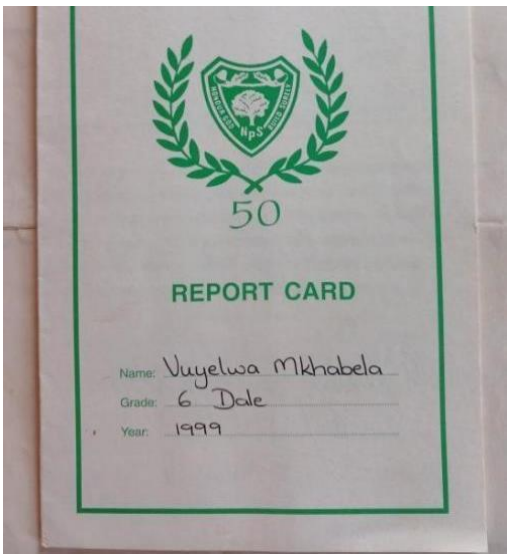
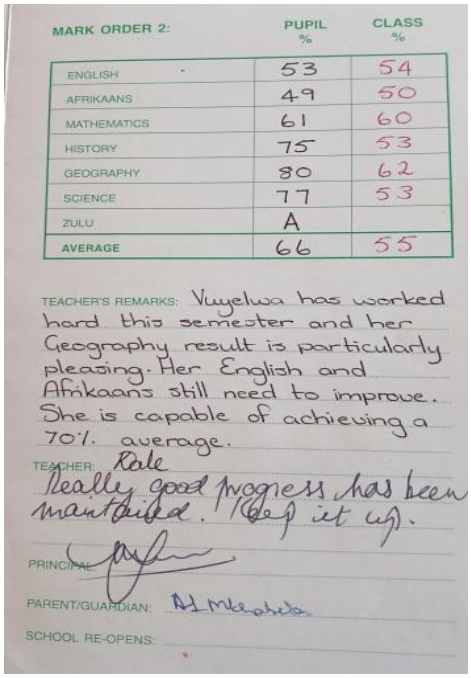


Figure 5.16.2: Cover of my grade 6 report card.

Source: Author.



MARK ORDER 2:	PUPIL %	CLASS %
ENGLISH	53	54
AFRIKAANS	49	50
MATHEMATICS	61	60
HISTORY	75	53
GEOGRAPHY	80	62
SCIENCE	77	53
ZULU	A	
AVERAGE	66	55

TEACHER'S REMARKS: Vuyelwa has worked hard this semester and her Geography result is particularly pleasing. Her English and Afrikaans still need to improve. She is capable of achieving a 70% average.

TEACHER: Rale
Really good progress has been maintained. Keep it up.

PRINCIPAL:

PARENT/GUARDIAN:

SCHOOL RE-OPENS:

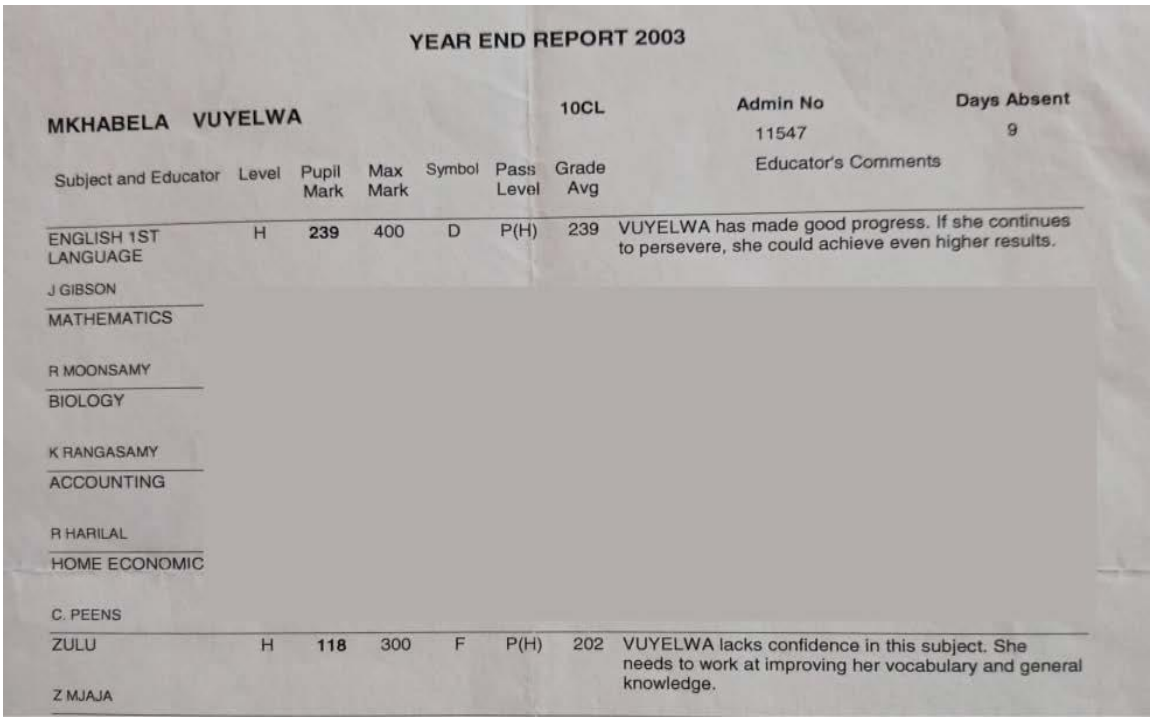
Figure 15.6.3: The inside of my grade 6 report card.

Source: Author.

5.17 Challenges with language and identity in high school

Transitioning from primary school to grade eight was a very nerve-wracking experience. As opposed to the warm and friendly atmosphere we had left behind in primary school, our high school had a more serious and colder atmosphere. Although I had become used to the English language when I reached high school, I still occasionally battled with issues of spelling. However, by the time I reached high school my native language had been lost, I did not just struggle with writing it, I had difficulties with speaking it and understanding certain words. English was our primary language in primary school, Afrikaans was our first additional language, and IsiZulu was introduced to us in grade six, being taught by a White educator. My twin sister and I were illprepared for isiZulu in high school. In grade nine, I recall how nervous we were when we had to choose isiZulu as our second language, knowing very well that we did not wish to study Afrikaans. Looking at the photograph of my grade ten report, figure 5.17.1, brings back memories of just how much I struggled with the languages in high school. My Zulu educator's remarks stating that I lack confidence and that I need to work harder with my vocabulary and general knowledge reminded me just how difficult even the simple things were for me. Reflecting on this makes me so sad that at grade ten, I battled as much as I did. I vividly remember how uncomfortable it was to know and struggle with my native tongue. I remember how grateful I had always been that

my parents afforded us the opportunity to get a better education but heart breaking that it was at the expense of unknowingly abandoning and neglecting so much of who I was, only realizing just how much when I had to select my second language in grade nine.



YEAR END REPORT 2003

MKHABELA VUYELWA | 10CL | Admin No 11547 | Days Absent 9

Subject and Educator	Level	Pupil Mark	Max Mark	Symbol	Pass Level	Grade Avg	Educator's Comments
ENGLISH 1ST LANGUAGE J GIBSON	H	239	400	D	P(H)	239	VUYELWA has made good progress. If she continues to persevere, she could achieve even higher results.
MATHEMATICS R MOONSAMY							
BIOLOGY K RANGASAMY							
ACCOUNTING R HARILAL							
HOME ECONOMIC C. PEENS							
ZULU Z MJAJA	H	118	300	F	P(H)	202	VUYELWA lacks confidence in this subject. She needs to work at improving her vocabulary and general knowledge.

Figure 5.17.1: My grade 10 report.

Source: Author.

I recall it was always awkward to be in the isiZulu period, mainly because other Black girls would make fun, say nasty remarks about how I pronounced my words or say hurtful comments when I was having difficulty reading. I remember when we were called upon to read in grade ten, the girl sitting next to me often said hurtful things when I struggled with words. She would even go as far as telling others not to assist me, which my friends from primary school often did. During these lessons, I always felt out of place and intimidated. There was always a sense of loss associated with the lessons because they reminded me of how much of my Blackness I had lost. It was also my first experience being taught by a Black educator, as in grades eight and nine, we had a White female educator who was fluent in IsiZulu. My twin sister and I had to attend extra isiZulu lessons in grades ten, eleven, and twelve, particularly in preparation for our matriculation exams. In our IsiZulu matriculation exam, I recall us being the last two learners to finish writing. The fact that I struggled so much with my home language was a difficult and stressful experience. Since I had difficulty speaking my native language, I was bullied by girls of the same race for not appearing Black enough. I recall

that the bullying did not just end at school, but I experienced it outside of school as well. I recall how isolating this experience was.

5.18 Representation and cultural marginalisation

One day last year, during a conversation with my grade five learners about bullying during a personal and social well-being lesson (life skills) I recall the conversation drifted off-topic and I was asked about my school years. Standing before them, I realised that a Black, coloured, or Indian educator had never taught me in primary school. It was difficult for me to realise that fact, especially as an educator, that I never experienced a Black educator during primary school years. Our primary school only had Black employees who were responsible for maintenance and cleaning and who became like family and a support for me during primary school.

First, this realisation deeply affected me because, although my primary school educators were caring, we came from very different worlds. Our educators did not understand the challenges that Black learners and their parents faced. In addition, there was a cultural difference between us. The one memory that I can recall, was when we learned about Shaka Zulu, and mentions of sangomas (Zulu traditional healers) came up, how the educator and other non-Black learners would say negative things about traditional healers, and I recall how they placed such a huge fear in me when they realised I knew nothing of them as a child. I did not realize just how deeply that fear was placed in me until I found out I had to start my journey in becoming a traditional healer. All I could remember was everything I heard at school, that it was all evil and that healers did horrible things. Reflecting on this I, see that they were feeding me stereotypes and misinformation from a non-Black perspective.

High school was different; and there were three Indian educators, two females and one male, as well as one Black female educator. Most of us were only exposed to Black educators in grade ten until matric for isiZulu. Although I experienced overwhelming stress and overwhelming feelings at times in the isiZulu class, it was the only class where only Black girls surrounded me, which was comforting at times. There was a sense of unspoken solidarity among the Black girls, which was amplified during those

lessons because we all, in one way or another, shared the same struggles and frustrations not only as Black girls in a predominantly White school but as teenage girls in general. Our educator often advised the girls in class when they asked her questions on various topics.

Representation challenges were widespread and did not just end with lack of Black educators. It also showed itself in different ways. For example, it was impossible to find a racially diverse selection of books in the school library, nor were there any representations of Black children in the books we read. Additionally, the course material lacked representation, it being centred around and perpetuating stereotypes. The art we created and displayed in the school did not reflect any aspect of the Black experience. Even the pictures and salutes displayed throughout the school, the music we sang and listened to in music class did not reflect the Black experience. As a result of the environment I was in, I was never able to see myself reflected back to me. I recall how this made me felt like an outsider and the only way I could deal with it all, is to fully accept it as my normal, and I found myself assimilating into this environment, as it was just easier that way.

5.19 Navigating high school hair policies

As I mentioned earlier in chapter four, the school policy and my parents' ideologies regarding hair maintenance had a profound effect on the development of my self-image and concept as a young Black girl. I did not experience any racial or personal tension related to my hair during my primary school years. However, the same cannot be said for our experiences in high school. The school code of conduct had several detailed and strict policies about behaviour and appearance. All learners were required to tie their long hair, maintain their short hair, not dye it, always comb it, and for Black girls, keep their natural hair short, not have an afro or dreadlocks and the use of extensions or artificial hair was not allowed. However, the use of hair relaxers and Bantu plaits was permitted.

Being in an all-girls high school surrounded by other Black girls who attended different primary schools changed my perception of my hair. Even though I doubt it was conscious then, I found myself wanting more and more to fit in. My twin sister and I

wanted our hair to be grown, relaxed and braided, as was the custom among Black girls at school since very few had short natural hair.

Unlike primary school, I observed a fair amount of racial tension in high school regarding hair issues. Several Black girls, especially in the higher grades, used extensions despite the school's policy prohibiting them from doing so. The tension and frustration could sometimes be felt when the principal addressed the issue during assembly. In other cases, I recall Black girls from all grade levels were summoned to a meeting in the school gym or hall. Regardless of where we were being addressed, being instructed on how to maintain our hair (especially when girls with extensions kept their hair tidy, neat and tied up) felt like a dictatorship, marginalising, and discriminatory since our counterparts were not subject to as much hair surveillance. It was unlikely that they would be named and shamed during school assemblies or called aside for special meetings if they are found to have violated the hair school policy. I observed that this was unfair in the context of collaborative unity with the other Black girls.

At these meetings, Black girls who did not adhere to the policy would be singled out and instructed to undo their hair by the following day. In her approach, the principal was typically aggressive and stern, reprimanding us all, not only those who did not follow the rules. These moments always left a bitter taste in my mouth and always reminded me that I was different, that I was not allowed to be myself and that I did not have the right to maintain my hair in a manner that was comfortable for me. In most cases, the girls used hair extensions to manage their hair better, and not as a fashion statement or for rebellious purposes. This principal did not just make those girls feel discriminated against, but it also made me feel as if my hair was an issue as if being who I am was an issue despite adhering to the policy. As a result, these moments served as a constant reminder of how oppressed we felt in these spaces as we were made to feel uncomfortable with who we were.

5.20 University challenges and community struggles

This section focuses on the challenges I faced during my undergraduate years. University was the first time my twin sister and I were separated. As I attended the University of KwaZulu -Natal, Howard College, she moved to Cape Town to attend the

University of Cape Town. Looking back at this, I am reminded how difficult it was to enter such a massive institution without my twin sister, the support system that I was so used to.

University attendance at UKZN Howard College required a lengthy commute, and I recall how much of a challenge this much travelling was due to my spinal condition. This time, the commute was in the form of a bus or taxi ride into town. Then, a taxi was taken to the campus. I would have to repeat the same procedure to return home. Due to my unfamiliarity with the city centre of Durban, I recall constantly feeling anxious whenever a bus or taxi approached it, and I had to get off. There was still a recurring concern regarding safety. A vivid memory of being mugged and having my phone stolen on my way to the KwaMashu taxi rank remains with me. It reminded me of the times that would happen during high school on our way to the bus stop. I experienced high levels of anxiety when walking through busy town streets, as I was forced to be hypervigilant. As a student, travelling to campus was always overwhelming until I joined a carpool towards the end of my second year.

5.21 Language barriers in higher education

The challenge with language was understanding psychology's theories, perspectives, and world views. However, it proved to be very challenging and overwhelming work to comprehend. Undoubtedly, academic writing and reading lengthy articles were for the strong-hearted. As a student, I recall spending countless hours in the cold library reading articles, working on assignments, making photocopies and preparing for exams. I recall how frustrating it was to hear fellow Black students assume that assignments, tests, and comprehension would be easier because I attended a once predominantly White high school. However, that was not the case as I still struggled regarding use of language.

5.22 Coping with spinal surgery in university

It was during university that I had my spinal surgery on the fourth of January 2007. where I had one of my left ribs removed and used along with six screws to fuse the thoracic part of my spine to help straighten my spine. I recall how difficult this time was; attending class after I had surgery was difficult. Walking, sitting, standing and just basically functioning was complex. I remember I had to wear a brace for my spine for six months, so navigating campus and sitting in class was difficult. I recall that it was the most challenging part of my university experience. I was not aware of any support structures on campus; the work load was intense, and all of this impacted my studies and mental health negatively. I recall how devastated my parents, and I were that I had to repeat some modules the following year. Reflecting on that time, I realised just how challenging it is not to navigate university when you have a severe medical condition; it opened my eyes to how difficult it was for other students who struggled with disabilities and any other restricting medical conditions.

5.23 Observations and reflections during teaching practice

I completed my teaching practice at my old primary school. I remember deciding to do it there because I thought it would be easier than completing it at a school closer to home, mainly because I still had issues with isiZulu and was nervous I would not do so well. Although my teaching practice experience was okay, I noticed things about my primary school that I had not noticed as a child to which I was utterly blinded. What stood out the most was the continued lack of diversity among the staff, and there were still no Black educators teaching in classes; however, now the school had Black sports educators who only came in to facilitate sporting activities, which appears odd today. It made me realise that if the school wanted, they would hire Black educators; they do not want to.

Another thing that stood out was a White educator's comment. I already knew her as we attended the same primary and high school, although she was a few years ahead. I also knew her as her mother was my educator in grade five. While catching up, we spoke about the university, and she asked how my studies were going; we spoke about my qualifications. I remember mentioning that I had just been accepted for the Masters programme. I was never ready for her response, saying that at some point, she had tried to apply but was not accepted as the university was accepting Black students into the master's programme, and that is probably why it was easier for me to get accepted. I

recall how shocked I was by her words. This was one of the most racist things I had heard. I felt so disrespected, as my friend experienced the exact primary education as we attended the same schools, and her mom was my educator. I remember how this kept playing in my mind. The fact that I had completed my undergraduate degree, having double majored in Psychology and Industrial Psychology, an honours degree in Industrial Psychology and completed my Post graduate certificate in education all meant nothing; in her view, I was accepted based on my race and not merit. I remember how infuriated I was at her words, yet too shocked to make an issue of it at the time she said it.

5.24 Conclusion

In this chapter five, I attended to my second research: What challenges have been experienced within my educational journey as a Black female educator? The narrative presented in this chapter explored my challenges during pre-primary, primary, high school and university. Using memory work, having utilized, photographs, report cards and narrative writing to simulate my memories I found that through this experience themes of accessibility, language, location, representation, hair and medical conditions come to the forefront of challenges experienced within my educational journey. Reflecting on all these challenges and revisiting my childhood made me realise how difficult this journey has been and the importance of a supportive structure, it had also made me aware of the impact all theses issues had on me growing up.

In the subsequent chapter, chapter six, I respond to my third research question: How has my historical background influenced my teaching practice? In this chapter I aim to present an in-depth narrative about how my personal history, which was explored in chapter four and the challenges explored in chapter five have influenced my teaching practice.

CHAPTER SIX

MY TEACHING PRACTICE

6.1 Introduction

My previous chapter, chapter five, discussed the challenges I faced throughout my educational journey, focusing on my experiences in pre-primary, primary, high school, and university. This chapter discusses how my historical background has influenced my teaching practice. This is accomplished through the making and examination of a collage, which explores my personal history (which was discussed in chapter four) as well as the challenges I have faced during my schooling and university years (that were discussed in chapter five) to try to understand how all these aspects of my life have influenced my teaching practice.

Figure 6.1: My Collage-Aspects of my life that have influenced my teaching Source: Author

6.2 Creating the collage

The collage on figure 6.1 represents aspects of my life that have influenced my teaching practice. In creating this collage, I used a program called Canva to create a digital collage. I used images from Canva, Google Images, and my own personal photographs. As I worked on my collage, these themes emerged: a proper foundation, school, student-centered, communication, physical challenges, family, work ethic, culture, sisterly bond, different roles, language, school mottos, and pencils. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss these themes in greater detail in relation to the collage.

6.3 Building a strong foundation

It seemed appropriate to make the background of the collage a blank notepad page. Having started school on a blank slate, we all gained knowledge and skills throughout the years that would be helpful to us as adults. This appealed to me since it symbolises the foundation of my schooling experience. This notepad reminds me of my days as a learner who used to write notes down in her exercise book and now as an educator who gives notes for learners to write in their exercise books. In deep reflection, I have realised how vital a proper foundation is as an educator, and I have realised how this has impacted my teaching. The experience has shaped me into an educator who is conscientious and mindful. Upon reflection, I realise that I have become more aware of the notes, stories, textbooks, pictures, poetry, and resources I use in my classroom, especially when selecting appropriate resources for my learners. For my learners to understand and engage with the content better, sometimes I must deviate slightly from the stories and activities provided by the Department. However, those stories and activities are aligned with the teaching themes.

Furthermore, selecting resources that portray a positive image of Black people is essential. It reinforces a positive self-image for my learners, and I believe it is a necessary foundation to establish for them. Looking at the torn parts of the notepad, I am reminded of the challenges I had to overcome in academics at school. My childhood experience influenced my teaching practice so that I have realistic expectations for my learners who face learning challenges. The experience has made me a patient, understanding, and encouraging educator, especially for learners with learning challenges.

6.4 School experiences and diversity

As I view the images of the diverse learners in a class and the symbol of the cross, I am reminded of my experiences as a learner and an educator. This collage section evokes warm and somewhat conflicting emotions I experienced in class. Growing up, our schools were Christian-based schools that emphasised Christianity over all other beliefs; however, the school, staff, and learners did not ignore the fact that our classrooms were filled with learners of different ethnicities. This brought with it a variety of religious beliefs, cultures, and perspectives. Having been exposed to a diverse and inclusive environment, I have learned the importance of respecting others' differences and trying to understand their viewpoints. This experience has profoundly influenced my teaching practice, especially as an educator of life skills. Even though my classroom contains learners of the same race as myself, there is a magical quality about our Black race that we could be one race, yet we hold so many different cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions.

The experience has influenced me in my work as an educator to create a warm and welcoming classroom in which learners are encouraged to respect each other's differences while at the same time accepting their cultural and religious beliefs. As a child, I was not encouraged to do this at school. My family supported my school's encouragement to have a relationship with God. As I mentioned earlier, there was an acknowledgement of different cultures, but I could never explore the cultural aspects of my identity. When I was a child, anything related to Zulu culture or any indigenous culture was mostly underrepresented at school, leading to much confusion. As a result, I ensure that my learners know and feel they can express their cultural and religious beliefs in my classroom without fear of judgment or disrespect.

This image of me and my learners in their traditional attire on Heritage Day as well as the photograph of my wrists wearing my beads is closely related to the image of the diverse classroom, as it illustrates the importance I place on respecting and understanding the cultural and religious differences among my leaners. Upon reflection, I have noticed that since I started my journey to become a healer, and I have been required to wear my beads when learners and parents see my beads, they do not hesitate to express their feelings and thoughts regarding any cultural issues that may contribute

to the barriers to learning of learners. Further reflection reveals how this has greatly influenced my teaching practice, as it has provided me with a deeper understanding of the challenges my learners may face, challenges that have nothing to do with education but significantly impact their ability to learn. I recall many instances where parents have come up to me and informed me that they discovered from traditional healers that their child is having problems at school as the child needs to change his or her surname, or the many instances when my learners would use a different surname from the one on their birth certificate because they were instructed that their ancestors did not recognise or want them to use their current surname. Before becoming a healer, I would have found this a difficult concept to grasp. However, since beginning my journey, I have gained a deeper understanding of these types of issues and can approach them more effectively in the classroom. In addition, I have communicated effectively with my learners and parents and provided them with the best support I can.

6.5 Emphasising learner centred learning

The image of the educator assisting the learner is positioned in the centre of the collage as it reminds me of how my educators used to assist me when I was in school. My childhood experience reminds me of how hands-on my educators were with me and my peers. I recall how my primary school educators would approach my desk if I required assistance, hunch over my desk, and assist me. When I struggled or did not understand, or even when I did and was doing well, my educators were there to guide or reward me—those moments made me feel seen and heard as a learner and like an essential classroom member, which I greatly appreciated. Throughout my academic career, my educators paid significant attention to me, going above and beyond what was expected of them. I received a great deal of guidance and support from them as a young girl, which helped me become more independent, possess a positive self-image, and have a strong sense of self-worth. My experience as a learner and now as an educator has been dramatically impacted by the way they treated me and concentrated on my growth and development. It has greatly influenced my teaching practice, making me aware of the importance of ensuring that my learners' growth and development are always foremost in my mind. My experience has also made me aware that I may sometimes fall short at times, as having fifty learners with different abilities and needs in a class presents

unique challenges. However, I should always strive to meet those challenges. As a result of my experiences growing up, I know educators' enormous impact on their learners' lives and minds. As a result, I am continuously reminded to ensure that my leaners feel safe, seen, and heard.

6.6 The role of Communication

The Black figures with arrows going back and forth is depicted in the image as a symbol of communication. It reminds me of my childhood communication with my parents, educators, sisters, and peers. As a child, I remember being occasionally nervous about asking questions, but I always tried and received positive feedback from my parents and educators. On reflection, I realised that neither my parents nor my educators were quick to provide me with the answers to the questions I was seeking. Instead, they encouraged me to think critically about what I was asking, asking me more questions to broaden my thinking process and assist me in creating an appropriate response. My experience of two-way communication in problem-solving has influenced my teaching practice in that I also replicate this with my learners. My approach is to probe my learners with questions if they do not understand something or have a question rather than provide an answer. As a result, I have realised that this encourages the learner to be more critical and independent in their thinking. As an English educator, I regularly deal with learners struggling to understand the language. As a result, concerning answering questions in class, I have found that most of my learners would prefer to express themselves in isizulu. When this occurs, I ask the other learners to help translate the sentence into English. This has proven to be a very effective way of motivating the learners to try, building their self-confidence, and giving them a sense of belonging. I was assuring them that their contribution was valuable in the classroom. I use this approach to create a classroom that encourages and fosters collaborative learning, classmates supporting one another, and open communication between learners.

6.7 Overcoming psychical Challenges

Reflecting on the image of the glasses and the spine with scoliosis, I am reminded of the challenges and changes I have encountered and still faced with my body and how

they have affected my life as a learner, student at university, and an educator today. My spinal condition and issues with my vision have significantly impacted how I approach teaching and learning. Scoliosis has dramatically affected how I teach; I cannot stand, sit, walk, mark, or write on the board due to the condition. It has an enormous impact on my ability to perform my duties. The pain can be unbearably heart breaking at times, and the constant discomfort can be extremely stressful.

My daily experience with these two conditions has opened my eyes to how physical limitations may affect my colleagues and learners. Consequently, I have developed a teaching practice that accommodates all learners with physical challenges as best I can, as well as keeping in mind that a number of my learners come from homes where their parents have passed away, have been abused, often go to bed with only the meal provided at school, are neglected and not well taken care of, and they are struggling with many other social and economic challenges at home. These learners must also be accommodated. It is equally important for learners who struggle emotionally to maintain their social and mental well-being as it is for learners who struggle physically. My experience has led me to become an educator who is aware that learners go through so much, and it is my responsibility to assist in any way I can. It is sometimes challenging to accomplish this task, given the number of learners in my class. However, I have noticed I am open to asking another educator or department head for assistance if I cannot assist a particular learner.

6.8 Family influence

A photograph of my family, including my parents, siblings, and children and the image of books placed right next to my family photo evokes various emotions. The greatest of these is gratitude, as they have all influenced my teaching practice in various ways. When I see the image of books, I am taken back to childhood memories of my sisters and I reading at home in my father's study or while riding in the back of the van to school. As a child, we would all help each other read. As I recall my mother sounding out letters when trying to help us spell our words while reading, I vividly remember how she would remind us of our phonics by saying, “I is for inky man, E is for eddy elephant”. It reminds me of how hands-on my mother was in our educational pursuits and the importance of parental involvement in school support. My life has been greatly

influenced by books and as a primary school grade five English educator, my childhood experiences with reading and books have influenced me to understand the importance of reading for understanding. Whenever I teach my learners, I have observed that my teaching style emphasizes my voice and body language to make the lesson more engaging and interesting for my learners. To make the lesson more engaging and interesting for the learners, I will illustrate the story I am reading to them to emphasize the importance of the story.

I recall throughout my childhood, my mother telling me I would make an outstanding educator one day. Based on her observations of me, when I explained things to her or my sisters, she always commented that I was very gifted. My mother's words planted a seed in me that I did not realise would sprout any fruit as my initial qualification was psychology. However, I always lived by them and was never nervous about my abilities when I entered teaching. As an educator, this has influenced my teaching practice since I understand the power of the words we speak and the seeds we plant in the minds of those we teach. In addition to planting positive seeds in my learners, I acknowledge and emphasise the things I believe in which they will succeed even if they are not aware of it. I try to be as encouraging as possible as I understand that my words are a means of planting seeds in their lives.

Throughout chapter four, I discussed how my parents encouraged my sisters and me to develop a bond and shaped my love of education. My parents' dedication allowed us to receive a good education. They made so many sacrifices for my sisters and me; along the way, they did all they could to provide us with the support we needed. There are no words to describe how much influence they have had on my teaching practice and how significant their presence in my life has been.

6.9 Work ethic

When I look at our family photograph and reflect on my childhood, I am reminded of their outstanding work ethic, perseverance, dedication, wisdom, fantastic management skills, resilience, fighting spirit, kindness, empathy, respect, a deep love for learning and helping others and never giving up. I am thankful for their open-mindedness and emphasis on personal development their love for our family and their encouragement

of a united bond between my sisters and I. I recall aspiring to emulate everything my parents did in their workplace since they were managers at some point in their respective fields when I became an educator. My father was a principal, financial advisor, taxi owner, and farmer; my mother was the managing director of social welfare in KwaMashu. Having watched my parents navigate their various roles with the utmost respect as a child, I was able to observe what conduct I should exhibit as an adult, which has had a profound impact on how I conduct myself within my profession.

6.10 Embracing culture

My parents fostered a love of education and encouraged us to embrace our culture and identity. The photograph of my learners and I on Heritage Day reminds me of when I was a child, my father would sometimes take my twin sister and me to cultural events, and I recall how out of place we would feel since we had never been to cultural events before. In hindsight, I am thankful that my father attempted to expose us to such events, even though we were uncomfortable. I am more comfortable engaging my learners as an educator who teaches at a township school with learners and community members who enjoy participating in cultural activities.

6.11 Sisterly bond and collaboration

The quote that reads “Nothing is more powerful than the bond between sisters” reminds me of the strong bond I have with my sister and because of my relationship with my sisters, I have become more aware of the power of collaborative engagement in my teaching. Growing up, my sisters and I were always helpful and supportive, especially concerning schoolwork. In my class and profession, I am continually required to understand and appreciate the potential and benefits of teamwork. I have two sisters who are educators. My little sister was a high school educator and is now a lecturer, my middle sister is a high school educator, and my twin sister is an economist who worked for the Nelson Mandela School for over a year. My sisters have been a great source of information and support if I needed advice or assistance regarding my teaching practices. As a result, I have developed the courage to realise that sometimes, I will

need assistance from others, including my colleagues. In addition, I am willing to learn from other educators to improve my teaching practice within my working environment.

6.12 Balancing different roles

As I reflect on my family picture and the educator wearing many hats, I think about all the different roles my parents and educators played in our upbringing. These roles have become more evident now that my sisters and I are mothers. The image of the educator wearing many hats reminds me of the many roles I have as an educator. One day, I will serve as a nurse, counsellor, policeman, judge, bodyguard, athlete, and much more to my learners. Sometimes playing these roles can be taxing but I have found that motherhood has influenced how I approach dealing with the task of playing various roles.

My experience as a mother before becoming an educator influenced my teaching practice in that I was prepared for the various roles required of educators. Reflecting deeper, I realise that being a mother has also given me a better understanding of and sensitivity to learners' needs and abilities. At my son's grade one parents' meeting with his educator, we discussed the challenges he faced during his first year at a big school, the experience, though fruitful, made me more aware of the sensitive nature of such conversations. As a mother, I know the importance of parent involvement and its impact on a child's development. As a result, I have become aware that some of my learners do not have parents and live with their grandparents, who cannot assist them with their homework, thus requiring additional support.

6.13 Language Challenges

The issue of language is very sensitive, and as I look at the image of the girl standing next to the question mark, I am reminded how difficult it was for me to learn isiZulu, and English as a child. Even though English has become the language I use most often, spelling was an issue for me when I was a child and, at times, still continues to be. Examining this picture, I am reminded of my struggles with isiZulu in high school and the amount of effort it took me for me to pass my native tongue, which still makes me sad to this day. The question marks the girl is standing next to is bigger than her which is exactly how I felt growing up, I always felt what I did not know was way bigger than me and unfortunately that was the case relating to my native tongue.

As soon as I began teaching and was placed in a township school, the language issue became a recurring concern. Once again, I felt ill-prepared as I had felt in high school. The image of the lady with the afro with a blank speech bubble, reminds me of myself standing in front of my class, with the exact facial expression on my face. I am reminded of the many times I stood in front of my learners, having to explain what I had just taught in isiZulu after having taught it in English. I had difficulty doing this due to my limited vocabulary in isiZulu. As a result, I asked other educators for assistance with vocabulary I did not know and was open and direct with my learners about my difficulty with isiZulu and how we would all need to assist each other, as well as apologising in advance if I mispronounced anything. As a result, I request that they assist me in saying it correctly. My first year of teaching was particularly challenging because of this issue, but as time passed, I saw a significant improvement in my ability to overcome this obstacle. My earlier discussion of a collaborative classroom environment made me realise that working with my learners on something I struggle with has created a safe environment for my learners where they can do their best without feeling judged by their classmates for not being able to pronounce or know every English word.

As an educator, the language issue has had a more profound impact on me than my inability to pronounce words. During my first three years of teaching, I recall many instances in which I felt out of place, not only with my learners but also with my colleagues. Although they were not intending to be harmful, some of my colleagues' remarks regarding my isiZulu were extremely painful to me. However, making this collage and reflecting on my experience of being an educator holistically, I see how this hurdle allowed me to be a transparent educator with my learners and colleagues, enabling me to become vulnerable and open, allowing me to understand my culture better and improve my language, which has improved my teaching effectiveness.

6.14 School mottos and values

In placing my school mottos on the collage, I am reminded of my primary and high school time. In reflecting on the fact that I still live by these mottoes today, I am very aware of their tremendous impact on my teaching practice. The motto of my primary school is " Honor God, build surely, " and it always reminds me to do what is right and continually strive to improve. As an educator, I am reminded of Proverbs 22:6, which

states, "Train up children in the way they should go, so that when they grow old, they will not depart from it". The verse reminds me of the importance of teaching my learners correctly, respectfully, and honestly, always considering their needs and capabilities. I hope they grow with my teachings just as I can with my educators' teachings. “To thine own self be true” is the motto that I was taught in high school, and it continues to motivate me as an educator to create a learning environment that allows my leaners to stay true to themselves. Providing them with a safe, nurturing environment where they can develop their full potential.

6.15 Significance of pens and pencils

The collage border is covered in pens and pencils, which reminds me of the stationery packs my mother would order for us at Waltons. We would be so excited paging through the catalogue, choosing which stationery we wanted. Placing our orders was always a highlight in term four. Every time my mom arrived with our packs, we were reminded that the school holidays were almost over and that a new school year was about to begin. I am reminded of how exciting it was to receive new stationery and how well-equipped my classmates and I were in the beginning and throughout the year. As an educator this border reminds me of the first day of the new school year and distributing stationery packs the Department of Education provides for our learners. I recall how learners shortly later would tell me they had no pens or pencils, whenever I found them not doing their work. This always confused me, as I was there when they were given their stationery packs. However, learners frequently complain about other learners stealing or losing their pens. As a result, I became aware of how privileged I was growing up. I always had what I needed and attended well-resourced schools. It has influenced my teaching practice in ensuring I provide extra stationery for my learners, even though this is difficult when there are learners daily who do not have pens.

6.16 Discussion

This study aimed to examine how I navigated racialised identity as a Black female educator in the educational setting. I was encouraged to examine my personal history and the challenges I faced throughout my educational journey to discover how these

aspects of my background have influenced my teaching practice in becoming a better educator.

6.17 Overview of my study

In chapter one, I described what motivated me to conduct my autoethnographic study. Following this was a description of the study's background. A brief description of the research aims and questions that guided my study is presented in the next section. A brief description of the theoretical perspective through which the study was viewed follows. In addition, I briefly discuss the methodological approach I chose, drawing on key concepts that have informed my thinking and learning.

In chapter two, I discussed the importance of a literature review for my study. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a solid basis for understanding why there is a lack of literature exploring Black female educators' experiences within their educational journeys. In addition to providing background information on my topic, the literature review strengthened and justified my research methodology. I discussed the history of education in South Africa, focusing on colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid periods, racialised identity, and the experiences of Black females in predominantly White institutions. Finally, I discussed the theoretical framework that underpins my study, the Nigrescence theory, which is supported by intersectionality theory and the Black feminist perspective.

In chapter three, I described my research process in depth, emphasising the research design, approach, and autoethnography as a methodology. I have summarised the instruments I used to generate and analyse my data by utilising memories, photographs, artworks, a collage, a reflective journal and described how critical friends have contributed and their importance in my research. This chapter discussed how I applied the interpretivist paradigm to autoethnography, explaining why and how it related to it. Further, I discussed the ethical issues and validity of my research and how I addressed my research challenges.

In chapter four, I addressed my first research question: What parts of my history have impacted my identity as a Black female educator? In this chapter, I used photographs, artefacts, and memory work to stimulate and make sense of my childhood and

adolescent memories. During my discussion of my personal history, I discussed how my family history, cultural values, beliefs, and interactions with others shaped my identity. As part of this process, I considered how my educational experiences, places, and spaces contributed to my identity.

In chapter five, I addressed my second research question: What challenges have I encountered during my educational journey as a Black female educator by using memory work. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed account and reflection on the challenges I faced during my childhood, primary school, high school, and university years.

In chapter six, I discussed my third research question; how my historical background has influenced my teaching practice. I explored this concept in this chapter by creating a digital collage. As well as a discussion on my study, reflection on my methodology and findings.

6.18 Reflecting on my methodology

It was my former supervisor and critical friend, Dr Frizelle, who first introduced me to autoethnography. Her explanation of the concept interested me, as I had never previously heard of it. My initial reaction to using this methodology was that it was an uncomplicated method for my study. The excitement I felt was short-lived, as I was flooded by many mixed emotions while contemplating this decision. I thought it would be like conducting an autobiography in that I would discuss my experiences and briefly interpret them, but that was not the case.

I rapidly learned and discovered that, as an auto ethnographer, I had to immerse myself in my own experiences while exploring the broader cultural, social, and historical context of those experiences. Initially, I was not aware of how difficult it would be to recall memories, and the level of openness and vulnerability necessary to explore my own experiences was sometimes challenging for me. However, I am aware and understand that in sharing my own story, as an auto ethnographer, I can provide readers with a unique perspective that offers a glimpse into my reality.

To provide a well-rounded account of the events I described, I had to remain self-aware and honest throughout the research process. Moreover, I had to ensure that my study was rigorous, credible, and trustworthy. I accomplished this using various data generation methods, such as memory work, photographs, artefacts, and family conversations. Additionally, I had to critically engage with the literature, research, and theories related to their topic to provide a deeper understanding of my experiences as an ethnographer.

This methodology was an overwhelming one to apply to my study. However, it allowed me to deeply contemplate my past experiences in the context of my educational journey as a Black female educator, which I doubt I would have ever done in such detail had my study not taken place. Experiencing it, I explored how my past has informed my present, allowing me to make more informed choices regarding how I approach my teaching practice now and in the future. It has also enabled me to unlearn certain ideologies I had around my struggles with my native tongue, my sense of belonging, and my feelings regarding my Blackness. When I began my study, I had no idea how transformative this methodology would be. Building this narrative with the assistance of my family, critical friends, and supervisors has been extremely powerful and mind changing for me. This methodology reinforced my desire for continuous improvement and development.

6.19 The research findings of my study

As a result of the themes that emerged from my narrative in chapters four, five and six, which addressed my research questions, I found that parental involvement, sibling support, educator engagement, and language have been vital findings of my study in navigating my racial identity within the educational context.

The experiences I had with my parents wanting a better future for us and seeking it through education in post-apartheid South Africa were congruent with those shared by the authors in the literature review Mkhize (2016), Shabalala (2018) and Langa (2020). The pre-encounter phase of Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory can be identified here, characterised by Eurocentric identity and defamation of Black identity in South Africa.

This is because white normative standards were usually used as the reference point. The quality of White schools has historically been superior to that of Black schools.

It was evident throughout this study that parental involvement is of great importance and power. As a young girl, my parents played a significant role in forming my identity, self-esteem, self-concept, and self-love and reinforcing a positive image, mainly using our hair. The culture of keeping our hair natural has significantly influenced my identity.

Within the literature, I also noted a slight difference between the experiences of researchers in single-parent households and those in two-parent households in navigating predominantly White spaces. One prominent feature is the allowance for additional resources in a household with two parents.

Secondly, in the literature review, researchers highlighted how parents became observers of their children's schooling due to the language barrier. However, this was different from my parents' experience. The accessibility issue is addressed in two ways, firstly with transportation and secondly with language. According to the literature review, transportation was a concern and prevented others from attending activities, but in my experience, this was different. As noted in the literature review, transportation played a significant role, but at different levels, depending on the family's socioeconomic position. Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory identifies the encounter stage as the second stage. At this stage, an adverse social event or several incidents involving one being Black are considered critical indicators. The recurring problem of accessibility in the form of language and transportation is evidence of this.

My findings resonate strongly with the literature (Langa, 2020; Shabalala, 2018; Maseti, 2018) on the issue of language and under-representation of Black educators in predominantly White institutions. Throughout my schooling journey, I also experienced a sense of not belonging, an inability to express myself, and a loss of my Black identity due to the predominant use of English over isiZulu. I did notice, however, that within my study, I recall being bullied by my Black counterparts because of my difficulties with my native tongue, something that had not been addressed in the literature review. In my study, I have encountered a research gap that sheds light on an area needing further research. As most of the studies reviewed focused on experiences in primary

schools, high schools, and universities and not on educators in the classroom, this study addressed a gap in research on language and its impact on educators' teaching practices. This study attempted to address this issue.

According to researchers Langa (2020) and Shabalala (2018), attending predominantly White schools in the early post-apartheid period was traumatic. However, in answering my research questions using autoethnography, I found that my views differ from those reviewed in the literature. In my experience, the most traumatic experience was the loss of my native tongue, which undoubtedly resulted in a dilution of my Blackness. However, my overall experience of attending predominantly White schools in the early days after apartheid was a very warm and incredible one that I cherish to this very day. Because I was experiencing the journey with my twin sister and sisters, we were always supported by each other, my parents were always there, and I had the most amazing educators who poured so much into building me up as a young girl. My educators were loving, caring, kind, and attentive and as far as I can recall, they were race-blind and treated every individual equally. I faced challenges (as discussed in chapter five). In knowing the history of our country, and the many inequalities and challenges faced by my parents, sisters and I in attending these schools, despite it being difficult for me as a child, it is bitter sweet to say, that those challenges do not overshadow or cloud the overall experience I had at these predominantly White institutions. As attending those institutions aided in the progression of my academic progression.

I found that as a young girl, navigating my educational journey and being able to face challenges was due to my parent’s significant role in building my identity, self-esteem, self-concept and self-love. Our hair played an essential role in reinforcing a positive image. Even as an adult and an educator, I continue to wear my hair in its natural afro state. It is possible to identify the third stage of Cross's (1971) Nigrescence theory, immersion-emersion. Because I teach at a township school, I connect increasingly with my language and culture. In conducting my research, I have resolved specific conflicts with my old identity and new worldview, which has been growing since I became an educator, highlighting the fourth stage of Cross' theory, internalisation. In this stage and study, I have been able to more deeply accept my identity as a Black individual, understanding that both Blacks and Whites have positive and negative characteristics.

By conducting this study, I plan to become a better educator to my learners by developing their self-confidence and self-belief and supporting them academically and holistically to the best of my abilities. This phase of my life corresponds to the fifth internalisation-commitment stage. Developing my personal and professional skills has enabled me to see how I can positively impact not just my race but a broader group of people, which is the focus of this stage.

6.20 Conclusion

This chapter, chapter six, addressed my third research question: How has my historical background influenced my teaching practice? The narrative presented in this chapter reflects aspects of my life that have influenced my teaching practice and has been presented in the form of a collage. When I began the process of making the collage, I did not know what to expect. In the previous chapters, I discussed my personal history and the challenges I had faced in my educational journey, but I was not prepared for the impact these challenges would have on my teaching practice.

Through this autoethnography my experiences navigating my racialised identity within my education journey as a Black female educator were explored. It became clear that my experiences are not unique, as others have similar ones. By recalling, reflecting, and sharing my experiences, I hope to give a voice to other Black females who have endured similar experiences. During my research, I realised there is no such thing as an insignificant experience or story. The use of autoethnography has enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of my personal life and how my experiences have shaped me as an educator. As challenging as it has been, sharing my story has also been a liberating experience. The purpose of sharing my story was to shed light on my research topic and understand how my past has influenced my teaching practice. This was to become a better educator for my learners. Due to this process, I have gained a greater understanding of the importance of our experiences as Black women.

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Appendix A

Miss Vuyelwa Mkhabela (206511631)

School of Education, Edgewood

Dear Miss Vuyelwa Mkhabela,

Original application number: 00005059

Project title: The exploration of a Black female educator s navigation of racialised identity throughout the educational journey: An autoethnographic study

Exemption from Ethics Review

PostalAddress: [redacted]

PrivateBagX54001,Durban4000
Website:

In response to your application received on 12 December 2019, your school has indicated that the protocol has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW.**

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited. For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

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

Yours sincerely,

Prof Phumlani Erasmus Myende
Academic Leader Research
School Of Education

UKZN Research Ethics Office
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Appendix B

Angela Bryan & Associates

6 Martin Crescent

Westville

Date: 09 June 2024

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis: Navigating racialised identity as a Black female educator within the educational journey: an autoethnographic study written by Vuyelwa Mkhabela has been edited by me for language.

Please contact me should you require any further information.

Kind Regards

Angela Bryan

angelakirbybryan@gmail.com

0832983312

Appendix C

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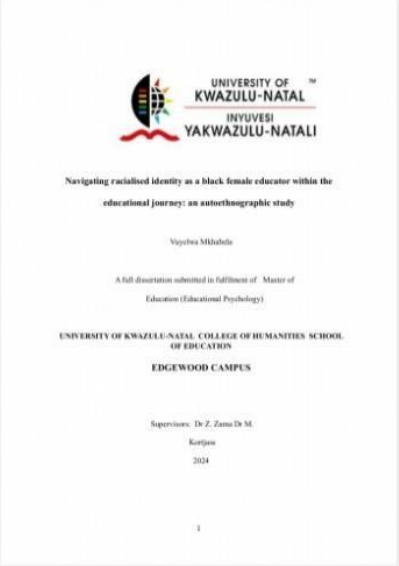

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INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Navigating racialised identity as a black female educator within the educational journey: an autoethnographic study

Vuyelwa Mkhabela

A full dissertation submitted in fulfilment of Master of Education (Educational Psychology)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

EDGEWOOD CAMPUS

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