Teaching controversial issues in an independent South African boys' school - an autoethnography

by

CALLAN MOORE

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in the

Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Prof Johan Wassermann

NOVEMBER 2023

Declaration

I, Callan Moore, declare that this dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in the Department of Humanities Education at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Callan Moore   Professor Johan Wassermann

Ethical Clearance Certificate

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Ethics Committee

Make today matter
www.up.ac.za

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER:**	EDU205/21
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd	
	Teaching controversial issues in an independent South African boys' school – an autoethnography	
INVESTIGATOR	Mr Callan Moore	
DEPARTMENT	Humanities Education	
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	07 June 2022	
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	24 October 2023	

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

CC

Mr Simon Jiane
Prof Johan Wassermann

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

Fakuiteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for research and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

iv

Dedication

Dedicated to all young educators trying to find their place in the complexity of the South African educational landscape.

Acknowledgements

My education has been the culmination of thousands of moments of kindness and care from teachers, family, friends and parents - completing this dissertation is no different.

1. I would not have had the courage to enter this arena without the strength offered to me by my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be all glory.

2. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Johan Wassermann, who has been a guide and a mentor throughout my time at the University of Pretoria and over the course of this study. Thank you for your patience and empathy.

3. My most heartfelt thanks to my wife, Savannah. This study would have floundered without your unwavering love and support. Thank you for believing in me, especially when I did not believe in myself.

4. Thank you to my mother and father, whose love and support have been the foundation of my education. You continue to inspire me. All that I am I owe to you.

5. To my siblings Liam, Kerryn and Branna. I am blessed to have such a wonderfully caring and supportive family.

6. Finally, I thank my friends and colleagues who have supported me through this study. Thank you for your support and prayers.

Abstract

As a legacy of our troubled past, South Africa continues to grapple with inequality and marginalisation. Regarded as a profoundly unequal society, access to education remains a contentious issue. South African independent boys' schools are embedded within the intricacies of the South African education system. Almost three decades after democracy, these schools still embody their colonial mandate to produce citizens of the Empire in culture and ethos. This evocative autoethnography explores the complexity of a White, male educator's attempt to teach controversial issues in the formal, informal, and nonformal curricula of the South African independent boys' school. Complexity theory was utilised to explain the intricate influence of the constituent elements of my teaching practice. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for an emic process of critical conversations with co-witnesses and co-constructors of my experience. This was combined with memory work to construct an autoethnographic narrative in the form of short stories. This research reveals the complex relationship between understandings of gender, whiteness, a colonial legacy, and an emergent multiracial elite class of South Africans. In turn, this exposes the nuanced way in which problematic constituent elements of independent boys' schools influence the teaching and learning of controversial issues. Thus, this study serves as an attempt to place the independent boys' school into the context of the broader South African education system and offers a nuanced understanding of how learners at these affluent and privileged institutions are taught and learn controversial issues.

Declaration by Editor

Editing Certificate

Client: **Callan Moore**

This certificate is to record that I, <u>Yvonne Thiebaut</u>, have completed an edit, format and reference list check of your Magister Educationis, **"Teaching controversial issues in an independent south African boys' school: An autoethnography"**.

The edit <u>included</u> the following:

Spelling; Tenses; Vocabulary; Punctuation; Pronoun matches; Word usage; Sentence structure; Content (limited); Format; Reference list
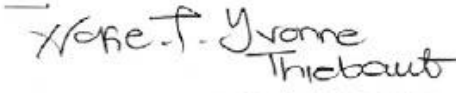
The edit <u>excluded</u> the following:

Correctness or truth of information (unless obvious); Correctness/spelling of specific technical terms and words (unless obvious); Correctness/spelling of unfamiliar names and proper nouns (unless obvious); Correctness of specific formulae or symbols or illustrations

Name of Editor: Yvonne Thiebaut

Qualifications: Bachelor of Arts Honours (Psychology) degree and Bachelor of Arts (Theatre Arts & Drama) degree; PEG member (2010); Crimson Enago Academic Editor

Signature:

Xone T. Yvonne Thiebaut

Date Issued: 04 December 2023

The editor will not be held accountable for any later additions or changes to the document that were not edited by the editor, nor if the client rejects/ignores any of the changes, suggestions or queries, which he/she is free to do. The editor can also not be held responsible for errors in the content of the document or whether or not the client passes or fails. It is the client's responsibility to review the edited document before submitting it for evaluation.

iix

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CAPS	Curriculum Academic Policy Statements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EFL	English First Language
IEB	Independent Examination Board
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (Or "Questioning")
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
US	United States

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1 - New Boy's Orientation

1.1 Introduction

To what extent is teaching controversial issues essential in a democratic society? Is it the place of schoolteachers to teach controversial issues in the classroom? Who can teach controversial issues effectively if that is achievable? Is there space for a White, male, heterosexual teacher in sensitive and controversial discussions in contemporary South Africa?

These questions result from the complexity of my experience as a new teacher in the South African educational landscape. A few years ago, on my first day as a fourth-year BEd pre-service teacher completing my teaching practice, I sat in a staff professional development session. My first day as a teacher was much like my first day as a schoolboy—new stationary, polished black shoes and a naivety that would be quickly exposed for all to see. The setting was one of the most expensive independent boys' schools in South Africa—a shining descendent of the British Empire, one of many such schools in the country. I was unaware that the professional development session I would be privy to would be a scathing indictment of the schooling model in which I had grown up. Teachers stood and shared stories of how they have been marginalised, mistreated and overlooked. They described the school and the systemic prejudices which still underpinned it and its practices, which are controversial issues appearing as a product of the cultural norms of this traditionally White institution.

I started my fourth year with practical teaching without experience. I had attended prestigious schools, enjoyed academic success and was eager to cut my teeth in the classroom. As a History and English teacher, I was trained in the theory and how to engage in navigating conversations on controversial issues. I studied theory on what constituted a controversial issue within the South African context, how learners might react to discussions in the classroom and the theory around ensuring classroom management. I understood the importance of teaching controversial issues to adequately prepare learners for participation in a democratic society, as underpinned by the South African constitution. However, I found myself entirely unprepared to teach

1

controversial issues. I had little understanding of my Whiteness and privilege. I did not understand the role my understanding of my masculine identity would play in my attempts to address controversial issues. I felt ineffective and ill-prepared to teach young men in an independent school. I stood in front of classes, dreading questions that concerned matters of race, sexuality or gender.

This feeling of inadequacy has driven this study, which will be styled as an autoethnography of my experience of teaching controversial issues within my context of an independent boys' school in South Africa, with its incredibly wealthy and, due to an emerging Black middle class (Soudien, 2023), multicultural community. This study analyses me as an educator, my beliefs, views and biases, how they were constructed, and my context to allow me to improve teaching controversial issues within the classroom and as a whole and reveal insight into teaching controversy within South African independent boys' schools. An autoethnographic study is the meeting point between the self and the reality in which we find ourselves (Denzin, 2014). An autoethnography reveals an understanding of the self through reflection and will be used to reveal insight into my teaching practice of controversial issues within the context of an independent boys' school.

This chapter serves as a roadmap for the rest of this study. It explains the background and context of my teaching experience, my rationale and motivation for the study and the focus and purpose of the research, followed by concept clarification and mapping of the chapters. This chapter will introduce complexity theory as it relates to teaching controversial issues to provide the framework for this study and construct my understanding of teaching and learning controversial issues. The methodology of autoethnography will be used to explore the complex connections between my lived experience, my teaching of controversial issues and the complexity of my socio-cultural-political context. The research design will be explained, use critical conversations and narrative analysis, and be augmented through letters of verisimilitude. This study aims to contribute to understanding teaching controversial issues in independent boys' schools.

1.2 Background and Context

Education, its availability and disparities in its quality remain a contested issue in South Africa. Despite almost three decades of democratic rule, the legacy of the former apartheid era, built on a foundation of racial exploitation, continues to show in a struggling education system (Badat & Sayad, 2014). South Africa remains a grossly unequal nation, frequently ranking very low among countries in economic equality (Khadiagala, 2018). Under apartheid, economic inequality was synonymous with racial disparities. While it is problematic to state that White minority capital still controls the economy, the disparity in income between households remains vast. Four legacies of the previous regime have led to the entrenchment of inequality in South Africa and limited political power (Khadiagala, 2018). These legacies are spatial inequality, a legacy of transgenerational asymmetries in patterns of social development and capacities, a legacy of racially skewed asset ownership and a capital-centred economy that crowds out the potential for informal or labour-intensive growth. This final factor has created insiders (an intertwined economic and political elite) with access to markets and outsiders who remain chronically unemployed (Khadiagala, 2018). Race continues to be a notable divider in those with access and those without, as unemployment remains a fundamental indicator of inequality, with racial group inequality continuing to increase following reconciliation (Branson, Garlick, Lam, & Leibbrandt, 2012). Educational inequalities have seen an increase in earnings inequality between racial groups, highlighting the importance of addressing disparities within the educational system (Branson et al., 2012). Despite these disparities, the capital-centred economy has coupled with the new administration, leading to the emergence of a deracialised wealthy social class (Khadiagala, 2018). I find in my independent school classroom the children of this wealthy South African elite, which is in stark contrast to the educational experience of the South African majority who, in reflection of the inequality of South African society, do not receive an education of a similar standard.

Private education in independent schools is not novel. Many of these schools admitted Black learners long before political reconciliation in 1994 (Pretorius, 2019). The South African

government allowed the fee-paying semi-private Model-C schools to continue to charge fees[1]. The effects of this policy were limited. Pretorius (2019) highlights the racial discrepancies that still exist in independent schooling, with over 18% of White children, who make up a far smaller proportion of the larger South African demographic, and only just over 2% of Black learners attending independent schools.

So why allow independent schools to exist? The new South Africa created space for independent schools when, in 1994, South Africa moved towards democracy. The new constitution stated that anyone has the right to establish an independent school if they (a) do not discriminate based on race, (b) register themselves with the state and (c) maintain standards comparable to public schools (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, s 29(3)). The South African Schools Act of 1996 states that all registered schools, other than public state schools, are independent, classifying them as either public or independent (Department of Basic Education, 1996). The terms private school and independent school are frequently used interchangeably, clarifying that all schools that are not state schools are independent. Therefore, the school I attended and where I work now are both independent schools.

The divisive nature of independent schooling in South Africa raises questions about its value to a democratic system (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008). Many believe that they are "islands of privilege" (Motala & Dieltens, 2008, p. 127) that work against attempts to bring equality to the South African schooling landscape. Kenway and Lazarus (2018) describe independent schools as moral utopias and question South African high-fee independent schools and the old English public school model they follow. This research will focus on what Kenway and Lazarus (2018) describe as independent schools.

How should a teacher who has benefitted from privilege and inequality teach controversial issues

---

[1] International consultants advised policymakers that if Model-C schools, former fee-paying White schools, were not allowed to use additional fees to hire more qualified staff and improve resources, primary decision-makers and opinionmakers would pull their kids out of the public system in favour of independent schools (Fiske & Hall, 2004).

in this setting? The setting is a school that grounds itself in Eurocentric modalities and moral identifications but is now a multicultural space, seeking to educate extremely wealthy learners in a system that aims to bring equality to all. My understanding of what makes a good teacher of controversial issues is shaped by my schooling experience in an independent boys' school in Pretoria. English-speaking independent schooling in South Africa has a unique history.

Established when the Union of South Africa, formed in 1910, was still a member of the British Commonwealth, although some are even older, these schools were created as models of the English public school. They were tied closely to the church[2], followed a belief in gender and physical isolation laid down by the White English model and established themselves as boarding schools (Ashley, 1971). These schools were elitist in those accepted into schools and the expectations placed on learners (Ashley, 1971). Schools such as these are and were bastions of Britishness that modelled Whiteness, despite their geographical distance from Britain herself, into citizens of the Empire (Lambert, 2009). Lambert (2004) shows the close ties between South African boys' schools and the British Empire in principals proudly expressing pro-British sentiment, the importance of the First and Second World Wars in schools' histories and the model of the Victorian masculine identity engendered in boys. This masculinity model has its roots in sports. Many schoolmasters' convictions were that manly boys played team games and were, therefore, taught the values desired by their Anglophilic society (Lambert, 2004). While the history of the school I teach at does not stretch back to the First World War and is in a city traditionally regarded as Afrikaans, its foundations are built on the legacy of schools that do—schools that it now regards as kin. My understanding of good education is rooted in a system created for young, White, heterosexual men at the turn of the twentieth century. My teachers had filled this model. I did have female teachers, but the primary figures at all the independent schools I attended were men. Very few Black teachers taught me, and no member of staff openly expressed that they were members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Considering the complexity of my teaching context, the learners, as participants in conversations on controversial and sensitive topics, form a crucial part of my teaching context. Learners in my

---

2 The Anglican, Catholic and Methodist Churches

multiracial classes are frequently disengaged from the current political realities but have a strong connection to topics that, when broken down into their constituent elements, are frequently controversial. These issues link to race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, identity and class, to name a few. South African independent schools have been thrown into controversy as learners and parent bodies look to address the inequalities they have identified within their school communities. These inequalities include a lack of inclusive hair and dress policies (Wilké & Osman, 2018) and the mistreatment of Black staff (Hlalele, 2021). The school I work in is no different. Staff and learners have pressured the school executive and principal to address ongoing inequalities. While these attempts are noble and necessary, the lamentable gap between independent education and the standard of education provided by the Department of Basic Education makes private education in independent schools appear as an ignoble relic of the apartheid era of unequal opportunity (Pretorius, 2019).

Most of my learners come from exceptionally wealthy families and are politically connected, with boys on scholarships and bursaries being the minority. Most of my learners have very little knowledge or understanding of the apartheid era or its legacies and are detached from the reality of contemporary South Africa that most people face. They are far more in tune with a growing global culture and community than a local one. Race and racial identity within independent schools are complex and multifaceted (Soudien, 2010). Attempts to get my learners to engage with historically significant controversial issues, such as apartheid, race, land and politics, are often ineffectual. Despite my attempts at varying the teaching practice, learners disengage from conversations or respond with sanitised responses, showing they are responding with what they believe I want to hear. However, these are crucial topics in meeting the Curriculum Academic Policy Statements' (CAPS') demands and preparing learners to be active and transformative members of a democratic society. Remedying these failures is necessary to be an effective teacher to future participants within a democratic society.

However, exceptions do crop up. While teaching Lara Foot Newton's *Karoo Moose* in an Advanced Programme English class, a learner asked me what a White person knows about the experiences of Black women in underprivileged communities. In a moment of blind panic, I was unsure if he meant Foot Newton was out of her depth or me. Looking back on teaching the

module, I cannot help but worry that I was insincere, that I was unconvincing in my attempts to show sympathy or empathy towards victims of gender-based violence, and that I have no place in teaching literature addressing issues of racial discrimination. Through reflection such as this on narratives of my lived experience, I seek to understand my teaching of controversial issues in South African independent schools. This research is not done to gain insight into best practices, far from it. Autoethnography intends to tell stories through the lens of culture that allows reflection; this aids in leading a more just and meaningful life (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Through this exploration of lived experience, I have seen remarkable examples of kindness and care in my learners through my interactions with them and their interactions with each other.

Despite the apparent issues that arise from independent schools in a country wrecked with inequality, schools can be vehicles for positive change, and their learners can be influential change agents. Therefore, it is imperative that I teach controversial issues adequately and as a means for inculcating democratic values in learners. How can I better shape the children of South Africa's wealthiest and most influential people so that they use their privilege to better their nation through self-study, which contributes to the field of education?

1.3 Focus and Purpose of the Study

This research focuses on analysing how I, as a White, cisgender, heterosexual man, teach controversial issues in an independent boys' school. This research aims to gain insight into how I teach controversial issues and why I teach them the way I do. I seek to understand my teaching practice and the nature of my South African independent boys' school classroom context.

1.4 Research Questions

While good research questions do not guarantee good research, problematic ones can create issues at every stage of the research process (Agee, 2009). The research question should be a how question and answer the question of what presents the specific problem or gap to be studied (Klopper, 2008). I have chosen a single, overarching question that has directed my research and,

as is frequently the case with qualitative research, is concerned with thick descriptions of experiences within my context of a South African independent boys' school.

- How do I teach controversial issues in a South African independent boys' school classroom?

1.5 Concept Clarification

As will be explored in more depth in the following chapters, I understand my teaching of controversial issues as a complex system nested within the complexity of the independent boys' school (Davis & Sumara, 2009). As such, its constituent elements influenced my teaching. The elements of this research require clarification to make meaning of the complexity of my teaching of controversy.

i) Independent Boys' School

South African boys' schools using English as an instruction medium are closely linked to Colonial Britain and the notion of the Empire (Ashley, 1971; Lambert, 2004; Lambert, 2009). These institutions sought to transform boy learners into citizens of the Empire who would embody the values needed in good soldiers (Lambert, 2004). In describing a boys' school, Bantjes and Nieuwoudt (2014) state: "The school's phallocentric history has inevitably given rise to a culture which prizes traditional masculine traits while simultaneously marginalising women and more feminine ways of being and doing" (p. 378). Therefore, the South African boys' school is rooted in a legacy of colonialism and hegemonic understandings of Whiteness and masculine identity.

Where does the independent school fit into the landscape of the South African education system? Independent schools are linked to class and privilege (Motala & Dieltens, 2008) and are accommodated by the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Department of Basic Education, 1996). Therefore, while independent schools are frequently referred to as private, this research will use the term independent to refer to schools that register with the government but operate

and pay teachers independently. Many of these schools also choose to register with the Independent Examination Board (IEB) rather than write the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations (Hill, 2019).

Therefore, for this study, independent boys' schools will refer to those that cater for boys, use English as the instruction medium, and are closely linked to the English public school model, the Anglican church, and its colonial legacy. Furthermore, these schools operate independently from the Department of Education, which is another defining element of what is understood as an independent boys' school.

ii) Controversial Issues

Providing a clear definition of what constitutes a controversial issue is problematic, which will be explored further in the literature review. Dearden (1981) argues that a topic with more than one view on an issue that is not contrary to reason is controversial, referred to as the epistemic criterion. Similarly, Pace (2021) distinguishes between sensitive and controversial topics, arguing that controversial issues require exploring multiple interpretations to be taught effectively. This definition is valuable for this research but must be used tentatively and considered a guideline rather than a rule.

A clear-cut definition of controversial issues is problematic due to several factors, including the influence of systems, such as parent and governing bodies (Ho, McAvoy, Hess, & Gibbs, 2017) and barriers to academic freedom (Misco & Patterson, 2007). Issues can also flip back and forth between being controversial and not based on current norms and beliefs (Mcavoy & Hess, 2013). Learners bring their understanding into the classroom, which must be engaged with sensitively. These contrasting ideologies and perspectives can lie beneath any subject and be explored using dialogic techniques for teaching controversial issues (Bickmore & Parker, 2014).

Therefore, this study will use an inclusive definition of controversy (Pace, 2019). While the distinction between sensitive and controversial issues is recognised (Pace, 2021), the changing nature of the controversy and the influence of other systems on teaching controversial issues

9

means that each teaching–learning situation requires unique analysis and evaluation to determine its controversial nature.

iii) Whiteness

The literature review will explore the different waves of Whiteness studies. The connection between Whiteness as it exists within the South African context and the legacy of White supremacy must be noted to clarify the concept of Whiteness. Whiteness is rooted in colonial expansion and can be described as a social personality that is ideologically supported, first instigating the construction of race (Steyn, 2005). White supremacy is a relationally structuring principle that sees resources flow away from those racialised as Black towards those racialised as White (Steyn, 2015).

These three understandings allow a platform from which to explore teacher Whiteness. It clarifies that Whiteness is rooted in a history of colonial expansion and is a social personality within a hierarchically structured society where resources flow from those racialised as Black towards those racialised as White. This description is not all-encompassing but offers a means to view teacher Whiteness. Whiteness also exists on a spectrum through which White identity and its relation to Blackness can be understood (Helms, 1995). This White identity spectrum allows for variation within White identity and clarification.

iv) Masculinity

Many ways exist to describe the masculine and its relationship to the feminine (Connell, 2020). While many methods used to describe the masculine have been arbitrary or problematic, Connell's (1995) model of hegemonic masculinity has been an influential understanding of relations. Masculinity can be described as a place in gender relations, the practices where men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of those practices (Connell, 2020).

While the masculine domination of the feminine serves as the foreground for understanding hegemonic masculinity, homophobia and the fear of appearing feminine are crucial in

10

constructing and regulating masculinities (Anderson, 2009). Decreasing levels of homophobia leads to a lack of rigidity in masculine identity (Anderson, 2009). For this study, the production of masculinity will be understood as being multifaceted, resulting in multiple masculinities organised within a hierarchy (Connell, 2008). The importance of homohysteria in regulating masculine identities will also be acknowledged.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory provides a framework to study the links between the many factors that have contributed to my teaching of controversial issues. The transdisciplinary and interdiscursive nature of complexity theory makes it well-suited to educational research (Davis & Sumara, 2009). Complexity theory "concerns itself with environments, organisations, or systems (such as independent schools) that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements or agents are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways" (Mason, 2008, p. 36). This description lends itself to this research, as my teaching of controversial issues has been constructed through the influence of several factors, including my understanding of what is controversial, the construction of my identity, including my Whiteness and masculinity, my context (an independent boys' school in South Africa), my understanding of teaching and the learners whom I teach.

A complex system comprises interacting elements that must be studied holistically (Morrison, 2012). Complexity theory allows for understanding to emerge from the constituents of a system and the myriad of connections between those constituents (Mason, 2008). A point in case is my independent school where colonial legacy, Whiteness, an emerging Black middle class, a set curriculum and the expectations of various stakeholders influence the classroom. Therein lies the appeal of complexity theory in the study of teaching and learning controversy. Complexity theory allows me to study the various factors that have influenced my teaching of controversial issues in my narrative using theories and frameworks suited to those factors, as explored in the literature review. These factors include broad, structural elements such as race, culture, ethnicity, class and religion. I will then seek to understand the connections between those factors. A complex system is self-organising and readjusting (Morrison, 2012). Davis and Sumara (2009)

describe it as akin to a brain or social collective capable of learning, growing and becoming more nuanced. The above suits this research, as my understanding of my teaching of controversial issues remains "emergent" (Davis & Sumara, 2009, p. 43). In sum, complexity theory provides a framework for analysing the complex factors that have influenced my teaching of controversial issues.

As such, this research's focus requires me to root my understanding of learning in theory by integrating aspects of experiential teaching and learning and complexity theory. Experience is the foundation and stimulus for learning, and learners actively construct their experiences (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 2003). This approach is a learner-centred understanding of learning, where knowledge results from grasping and transforming experience (McCarthy, 2010). While I agree that learning is the product of experience and learners construct their understanding, I do not feel that a determinist understanding of learning truly reflects its complexity or the learner.

Learning is the product of complex biological and experiential change that transforms the physical and the behavioural (Davis & Sumara, 2014), in line with the complexity framework that informs this research. Additionally, my understanding of the learner is framed by the complexity theory. Rather than viewing learners as isolated or insulated, they are viewed as complex entities who are the products of their experiences and can adapt to their reality (Davis & Sumara, 2014). Therefore, my teaching of controversial issues seeks to provide an experience that connects with the complex system of experiences and factors influencing learner identity during knowledge construction. Understanding myself as a complex and multifaceted system of constituents demands that I view my learners' understanding similarly.

1.7 Research Design, Methodology, Methods and Analysis

A research methodology is the "plans and procedures for research that span the research decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection" (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). This research design will explain the nature of my autoethnography, how the data will be co-constructed, presented, analysed and discussed, how sampling will occur, and how trustworthiness will be upheld.

12

Autoethnography is the intersection of autobiography and ethnography (Adams et al., 2017). Autoethnographers seek to represent epiphanies that allow others to experience my experiences to gain understanding (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Through this, I aim to bring others into my reality by expressing my lived experience as literature. As a methodology, autoethnography is a blurred concept and cannot be described with a single definition. A fundamental characteristic is using personal experience to critique cultural experience, focusing on the researcher as the self (Fourie, 2021). This ambiguity allows me to use autoethnography to authentically portray my lived experience in teaching and learning controversial issues. However, it is still an academic process, and one cannot stray too far from the "ethno" of autoethnography. It requires the researcher to focus on how the personal experience is embedded in and informed by cultural contexts (Winkler, 2018). For me, this entails situating the reader of my study within my context, as autoethnography dictates that researchers must retrospectively and selectively create narratives that portray experiences that stem from cultural contexts (Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, this research must focus on my cultural context and should be informed by the complex influences that have structured my understanding of controversial issues. I aim to understand the culture through a study of the self.

This research will take the form of an evocative autoethnography. While other forms of autoethnography might fit my described research, I am taking ownership of my narrative and the intentions of this study by describing it as an evocative autoethnography. Evocative autoethnography brings the reader into the ethnographer's experience through narrative storytelling of personal narratives and the detailed writing of experienced emotions and events rather than an analytical autoethnography, which would explain social phenomena (Adams et al., 2015). My narrative will take the form of narrative vignettes rooted in memory work and construction. Adams et al. (2017) hold that autoethnographies differ and that some focus on the "auto" or self, while others focus on the social or "ethno" phenomena. An evocative autoethnography uses socio-logical introspection and emotional recall to make sense of the researcher's lived experience (Fourie, 2021). Through evocative autoethnography, I seek to show, not to tell. Fourie (2021) explains that telling conveys, whereas showing evokes and connects the reader to the lived experience. T"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing

where you might be swept off to."his evocative autoethnography will focus on my personal experience in teaching controversial issues and use personal narratives to connect the reader to my experience.

1.8 Outline of Study

Chapter 1 is the foundation and pilot for this study, introducing the background, context, rationale and methods. While the outline of the study has been explained, Chapter 2 will unpack and navigate the literature. This literature review serves as the basis for the study's conceptual framework. Chapter 3 will explain the blueprint for the study, as it explains the chosen methodology and research methods used to study my experiences. Chapter 4, the representation of my data, takes the form of a narrative interspersed with vignettes. This representation of lived experiences will be the data from which meaning will be discerned. Finally, Chapter 5 will serve as the data analysis and the concluding chapter. In this chapter, I seek to identify themes within my narrative, connect those themes to existing literature and come to new understandings.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter served as a roadmap and overview of my study. This chapter explored the background and context of the study. The complex history of independent boys' schools was investigated within a broader South African context. The rationale for the study and the importance of addressing teaching and learning controversial issues within the independent boys' school context was unpacked. Following this, the research question is stated—how are controversial issues taught in South African independent boys' schools? The theoretical framework, to be further explained in Chapter 3, is introduced. Autoethnography as the methodology for this study is introduced, and insight into how this study is structured is given. Chapter 2 will explore the literature and theory, laying a foundation for the study to follow.

Chapter 2 - First Prep: The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Maree (2016) defines the purpose of the literature review as finding the gap between what has been written and locating gaps in the literature. Its purpose is to give context to the research and highlight its place in the bigger picture of knowledge. It motivates why the researcher feels that the research is of value. To study a topic, one must understand the literature (Randolph, 2009). My study is an evocative autoethnography set within an independent boys' school and focused on the teaching and learning of controversial issues. My exploration into the literature begins with controversial issues and pedagogical practices that support their teaching and learning. The literature search included guidance from my supervisor, the university's library and Google Scholar, moving from an informal engagement with grey literature to a deeper academic endeavour. Exploring controversial issues presented a unique challenge, explored in the literature below. Teaching controversial issues to boys within my context as an independent boys' school followed. While some sources provide insight, minimal literature directly speaks to the focus of this study regarding my context. In Chapter 1, I have explored the history and identity of independent boys' schools. In addition to navigating the literature on controversial issues, autoethnographic studies in teaching controversial issues in independent boys' schools were scarce, thus presenting a gap within the literature.

2.2 Understanding controversial issues

Controversial issues and how to motivate learners in acceptable ways to have consequential discussions on matters of controversy remain complex. Pace (2021) distinguishes between sensitive topics that require sensitivity and care due to their emotive nature and controversial issues, which must be posed as open to multiple interpretations to allow for student deliberation. Controversial issues are also context-specific; for example, in post-conflict societies like South

Africa, requiring learners to judge issues made far bigger by their environment might be destructive (Pace, 2021). Teaching and learning controversial issues can also be viewed as including topics in the curriculum that could be inappropriate or objectionable to administrators or parents (Ho et al., 2017). Misco and Patterson (2007, p. 542) show that issues become controversial when "non-negotiable barriers" limit academic freedom. For example, teaching controversial issues can also be understood as pedagogical practices to assist learners to "investigate, evaluate, or deliberate issues that have competing views" (Ho et al., 2017, p. 549). Hess describes controversial political issues as "questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement. These are authentic questions about the kinds of public policies that should be adopted to address public problems" (2009, p. 37). Other theorists also believe that classifying teachable controversial issues requires distinguishing between open and closed questions (McAvoy & Hess, 2013).

Dearden (1981) theorises that topics can be classified as controversial if there is more than one view on said issue that is not contrary to reason. This understanding of controversial issues, known as the epistemic criterion, calls for the non-directive teaching of issues classified as controversial (Hand, 2008). However, what is perceived as controversial can "tip" back and forth over time and is influenced by teacher beliefs (Hess, 2009, p. 77). Controversy is also linked to historical, constitutional and moral influences (Ho et al., 2017). This research will use the term controversial issues "inclusively" (Pace, 2019, p. 219) and refer to scholars' multiple interpretations of the phrase, as what appears controversial to some might be a closed topic to others. The above will be explored further according to my context because emotionally charged topics appear frequently and in unforeseen places. Bickmore and Parker (2014) show that contrasting ideologies, perspectives, and problems lie beneath any school subject. Any content can be used to drive dialogic pedagogies that explore controversy, showing that controversy can appear anywhere and through any subject content. Therein lies the difficulty in defining controversial issues and teaching them. How do we teach controversial issues and achieve the mandate that calls for constructing morally conscious democratic citizens?

2.3 Theoretical underpinnings of teaching controversy

Before the teaching of controversial issues can be explored in more depth, the nature of teaching and learning must be better understood. Globally, teacher training programmes frequently emphasise practical knowledge, but the theoretical underpinnings of the teaching process are often marginalised (Moore, 2012). While teachers engage with educational theories in their training, it is not supported by tangible ways to link theory with practice and subsequently rely on the pragmatism that comes with experience (Alexander, 2013). Therefore, an understanding of pedagogy is needed if controversial issues are to be taught effectively. Pedagogy is frequently used as a synonym for teaching, but this is erroneous (Loughran, 2013). Pedagogy is "embedded in the relationship between teaching and learning" (Loughran, 2013 p.118). To many, teaching appears effortless, and the difference between effective and ineffective teachers is the result of minor idiosyncrasies on the part of "good" teachers (Russell & Loughran, 2007) due to the prevailing and incorrect belief that learning is the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the learner (Loughran, 2013). Many within the teaching profession focus on learning and the learner rather than on teaching (Alexander, 2013). How do we break down pedagogy or the purpose of this study with its specific focus on the teaching and learning of controversial issues? Pedagogy relies on teacher–learner relationships that must be the focus of studies on teaching and learning (Loughran, 2013). Additionally, effective teaching depends on an educator's pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) comprising content and pedagogical knowledge, both of which influence learning (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019).

Additionally, this study requires an inquiry into critical pedagogy. Giroux (2020, p. 4) holds that pedagogy cannot be separated from social contexts. Classrooms "too often function as modes of social, political, and cultural reproduction, particularly when the goals of education are defined through the promise of economic growth" (Giroux, 2020, p. 5). Schooling replicates the dialectic relationship between power and dominant ideology, and "progress in the twentieth century was stripped of its concern with ameliorating the human condition and became applicable only to the realm of material and technical growth" (Giroux, 2018, p. 5). Due to this dominant Western ideology, teachers were deskilled and governments began to promote pedagogies and educational goals that were focused on the training future workers (Giroux, 2020). Thus, critical pedagogy,

17

as it relates to the classroom and education system, does so in the form of "modes of intervention dedicated to creating those democratic public spheres where individuals can think critically, relate sympathetically to the problems of others, and intervene in the world in order to address major social problems" (Giroux, 2020, p. 13). It also seeks to reestablish historical consciousness to negate the extremely problematic view of history as uncomplicated and irrelevant (Giroux, 2018).

Furthermore, teaching controversial issues is integral in new learning within a democratic society and necessary if learners are to be leaders in a nation wracked by inequality and other issues. Teaching controversial issues within a democracy is as crucial as "the ability to discuss controversial issues and the possession of the procedural values that underpin democratic debate" (Chikoko, Harper, Gilmour, & Serf, 2011, p. 6). Democratic values are not genetic and must be taught and practised. The founding provisions of the South African Constitution describe South Africa as a sovereign and democratic nation, and the Bill of Rights defines democratic values as "human dignity, equality and freedom" (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 5). While the above seems straightforward, the word democracy is used in many contexts (Dahl, 2020). Democratic processes require each member to have the opportunity to achieve an enlightened understanding of policies and the consequences of decisions if they are to be effective participants in the democratic process (Dahl, 2020).

How can this enlightened understanding be achieved without understanding controversial issues and how to navigate them carefully? Teaching controversial issues, such as views on equal rights and gender and racial equality, in a way that gives mutual respect to all parties is essential, and formal school is influential in this practice (Chikoko et al., 2011). The school, as a setting, is fundamental to this. The school is the best site for democratic education due to its diversity (although varied from school to school), and learners and teachers are forced to congregate and must, therefore, think of themselves as a collective (Parker, 2010). Therefore, the teaching and learning of controversial issues in schools is essential for inculcating democratic values in learners to aid them on the path to achieving enlightened understanding (Dahl, 2020).

While the need for teaching and learning controversial issues is clear, the methods vary from

country to country, and what works in one will not necessarily work in another (Pace, 2021). Teachers of controversial issues can be divided into three categories: "avoiders", "containers" and "risktakers" (Kitson & McCully, 2005, p. 35). Avoiders seek to avoid controversy wherever possible, choosing to focus on curriculum in a sanitised manner. Risktakers present multiple perspectives, willingly engaging with contemporary theories and learner beliefs. Containers, somewhere between the two, engage with controversy but contain the process through process and classroom practices (Kitson & McCully, 2005). Most contemporary pedagogical approaches to teaching controversial issues have focused on discussion-based practices (Ho et al., 2017). No one way exists to teach learners to engage in discussions on controversial issues; however, the pedagogical practice of effective teachers shares some primary characteristics (Hess, 2009). Dialogic techniques can vary from open discussions as seminars, walking dialogues and role-playing to structured dialogues and silent debates (Pace, 2021). Parker (2003) provides two categories for discussing controversial issues: seminars and deliberations. Socratic seminars aim to increase learner knowledge of specific texts, whereas deliberations focus on what a community should do (Parker, 2003). These two structures can be used to cultivate "political friendship" in individuals with different views on an issue (Parker, 2010, p. 2830). Furthermore, "constructive conflict talks" work to get learners to engage in constructive dialogues on issues that lead to actual conflict (Bickmore & Parker, 2014, p. 326).

How educators facilitate and reflect on these discussions determines their effectiveness. Eight overarching strategies have been identified in teaching and learning controversial issues that teacher educators use in training pre-service teachers (Pace, 2021). These eight overarching strategies are emphasising creative resources and small group activities, cultivating a warm, supportive environment, selecting, timing and framing issues, steering discussions, addressing potential emotional conflicts, preparing, reflecting on teacher identity and role and proactive communication with parents and administrators (Pace, 2021). These strategies represent a road map for the effective teaching of controversial issues. Teachers should make it their role to clarify what learners believe rather than telling them what they ought to believe (McCully, 2006). In this way, the teacher teaches with and for discussion and takes conscious steps to control their power in swaying learner beliefs (McCully, 2006). While the importance of effectively teaching controversial issues is understood, teaching them remains a daunting task for educators.

19

2.4 Challenges faced when teaching controversial issues

Whether or not to teach controversial issues as controversial is challenging, especially those that "tip" back and forth between open or closed (Hess, 2009, p. 113). Engaging learners in difficult conversations about contemporary issues and addressing the often volatile emotional responses while still trying to meet the curriculum demands places tremendous strain on the educator (Barton & McCully, 2012). This strain is worsened if the teaching environment is not conducive to teaching controversial issues. Wassermann and Bentrovato (2018, p. 77) show that when a school's ethos and culture drive a "hidden curriculum", teaching controversial issues is stifled, and teachers feel demoralised. A part of this informal learning is the history learners bring into the classroom. These stories about wider society and "what they perceive as their own place within those stories" are formidable obstacles in teaching learners about alternative perspectives (Barton & McCully, 2012 p. 373). With its troubled history, the South African context gives learners many differing historical perspectives to bring into the classroom.

Furthermore, lack of academic freedom pressures teachers and leads to the avoidance of academic issues that go against the views of the school administration (Misco & Patterson, 2007). Therefore, engagement with controversial issues comes with some risks for teachers (Pace, 2019). Controversial issues also have emotional connections for teachers who are often unwilling to discuss such emotionally charged content within their classroom (Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Difficulties arise in negotiating learner emotions as well. Balancing discussion and emotionally charged understandings of issues that learners bring from home is a challenging process not frequently taught to pre-service teachers (Pace, 2021), leading to teacher fear and hesitation. Fear of litigation and a desire to avoid conflict makes teachers uncomfortable discussing controversial issues in classrooms (Chikoko et al., 2011). These challenges to teaching controversial issues require teacher training in discussing controversial issues in classrooms. A void exists in the research on effectively preparing teachers to teach controversial issues (Pace, 2021). While controversial issues might appear in pre-service teacher curriculums, they do not often include methods for discussions on controversial issues (Chikoko et al., 2011). Learning to teach controversy is paradoxical, as it includes understanding classroom authority and requires the teacher to bring conflict into the classroom through pedagogical practices (Pace,

20

2021).

2.5 Teaching controversial issues to boys—The masculine as controversial

This study's focus requires a deeper delve into teaching boys and all it entails. The crisis in boys' education is well known. Globally, where boys and girls have equal access to education, boys underachieve and are far more likely to drop out of school (Bristol, 2015). This research is not ignorant of the ongoing challenges girls face in schools; however, women continually outperform men in higher education (Van Bavel, Schwartz, & Esteve, 2018). These statistics are disproportionately distributed since, in middle-income communities, Black boys are at greater risk of detrimental in-school and out-of-school outcomes (Bristol, 2015). Girls outperform boys in literacy benchmarks and test scores, with the most significant difference being reading levels (Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). The underperformance in the classroom is coupled with a growing concern over the mental health of young men. Suicide and suicide ideation in men are five times higher than that of women (Payne, Swami, & Stanistreet, 2008). Within the South African context, suicide in young men is attributed to feelings of disconnectedness, issues relating to belonging, pressure to conform to the gender regime, and feelings of shame (Meissner, Bantjes, & Kagee 2017). While this research does not seek to answer questions about mental health, these realities help create an understanding of the space in which I teach controversial issues.

Many causes are attributed to these gender-related issues within schools. One is the need for male teachers within the classroom (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). Viewing teaching as feminised is short-sighted, but an increase in male teachers in the classroom would negate the achievement gap between boys and girls (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). A need exists for male teachers, as the prevailing view of teaching as "women's work" is a barrier for men in the profession (McGrath, Moosa, Van Bergen & Bhana, 2019). To right this, within Australia and South Africa, those with political power must "challenge gendered divisions by visibly promoting alternate, caring, and gender-equitable versions of masculinities" (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 156). Perceptions are fundamental in the gap between boys and girls as well. Studies show that boys from the age of seven believe in stereotypes regarding inferiority within the

21

classroom (Hartley & Sutton, 2013). Parents have an influence as well. Boys' lack of aptitude in language skills has been traced to their lack of personal motivation and parents' perceived beliefs in boys' abilities in the classroom (Heyder, Kessels, & Steinmyar, 2017).

Masculinity and gender are also sensitive topics leading to issues of controversy that require careful navigation. They are necessary in this context for learners to be democratically conscious citizens. Issues related to gender and sexuality consistently appear in my classroom. Learners must understand issues related to gender and masculinity. Examples of controversial issues that arise in my classroom include gender-based violence, sexuality and gender identity. These issues are closely tied to how masculinity is produced within my context. The work of Connell (1995) on masculinity explains the practices that allow men's dominance over women and other men.

Historically, the masculine can be distinguished in four ways (Connell, 2020). Essentialist measures have identified a core feature of the masculine and hung an account of men's lives on these essences of the masculine. However, the choice of these features is frequently arbitrary, revealing more about the individual choosing the feature than about the masculine (Connell, 2020). The second school of thought was led by positivist social sciences that sought to statistically discriminate which patterns are fundamentally masculine and feminine (Connell, 2020). Unfortunately, they ignore that the features described as masculine or feminine do not fall neatly into binary typologies of gender. Thirdly, those trying to distinguish what is masculine sought to identify what is normative (Connell, 2020), which is ineffectual, as few men live up to what is normative. What use is a norm if it does not represent the group it seeks to describe? Finally, researchers used semiotic measures that abandoned the personality level and defined masculinity through symbolic differences. Thus, masculinity is that which is not feminine. However, this does not allow for analysis of other relationships or how gender relationships are identified within them. Thus, masculinity is definable as it is "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and gender" (Connell, 2020 p. 7). The structure of the gender model is three-fold and is founded on relations of power (often described as patriarchy), production and cathexis (Connell, 2020).

Multiple forms of masculinity exist and are organised in a hierarchy (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is normative and requires all to position themselves about it. Although it might only be enacted by a few, those men whose masculinity is distinguished as subordinate (indeed all men) benefit from their compliance to this hierarchical system (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The construction of masculinity is multifaceted. Still, schooling (and single-gender boys' schools like mine) forms the primary point of constructing masculine identity, and teacher interaction, role-modelling and not shying away from conversations on masculinity are essential for shaping masculinity that is a positive force for societal change (Connell, 2008). The above is understandable, as masculinity and gender are heavily influenced by social factors, including schooling and familial structures (Connell, 1995). Patterns of internal division and emotional conflict due to their association with gendered power underpin displays of hegemonic masculinity, often linked to relationships with fathers and ambivalence to feminine movements towards change (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

While an understanding of how masculinity is used in the domination of women, for this study, it is also necessary to understand the changing relationship between adolescent males and their masculinity. Inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) explains the changing understanding of masculinity regarding regulating expressions of masculine identity (Anderson, 2009). Homophobia is central to constructing and regulating masculinities. In the absence of homophobia, men's gender is founded on openness, increased peer tactility, softening gender codes and close friendships based on emotional disclosure (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). A societal fear of being identified as homosexual was the impetus for establishing hierarchical masculinities (Anderson, 2009). This fear of being perceived as feminine has been called homohysteria, and it restricts men's masculinities and creates hierarchy (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Homohysteria appears within spaces where there is antipathy for homosexual men, an awareness of homosexual men as a significant portion of the community, and where gender and sexuality are conflated (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). IMT's criticism of Connell's hegemonic masculinity is that it does not explain the changing nature of masculinities, as homophobia declines in more economically developed nations where more nuanced representations of masculinity do not fall neatly into hegemonic or subordinated categories (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). IMT has been used successfully to explain the

23

changing nature of masculinities within a traditionally feminine setting, an American cheerleading team, where practices that do not fall into Connell's (1995) hegemonic model are given social capital. IMT was similarly used to study emergent changes in masculinity within American fraternities (Anderson, 2009) and British high schools (McCormack, 2012). However, IMT is not without its criticism. De Boise (2015) argues that IMT does not account for the privilege afforded to heterosexual men, and to describe homophobia as being in decline is a dangerous notion. Anderson and McCormack (2018) respond to this criticism by saying that while sensitivity and studying heteronormativity is crucial, its decline is supported by empirical evidence.

Considering the above, what then about the South African context? Teaching boys has been explored earlier in this chapter and has revealed that young men espouse violence and hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity studies have been conducted within the South African context. They show how the model is valuable in broadening the understanding of gender inequality and warn against the misuse of the term, such as conflating violence with hegemonic masculinity, forgetting men's vulnerabilities and forgetting that multiple hegemonic masculinities exist (Jewkes et al., 2015). IMT has been used to study the connection between orthodox understandings of masculinity and homophobia within a South African university contact sports team (Rothmann, Antonie, Nell, & Ellis, 2022). Their findings support multiple hegemonic masculinities concurrently but also emphasise the Andersonian principle of emergent inclusive masculinities where homohysteria is in decline. The above is further complicated because South African men internalise the dominant notion of men as dangerous, physical and powerful; however, there are also "contestations, vulnerabilities, anxieties and a range of affect, that 'trouble' the dominant notion of young men as engaged in a 'simple', powerful, physical and dangerous masculine performance" (Schefer, Kruger, & Schepers, 2015, p. 106). This multiplicity in masculinity must be acknowledged but not used as an apology for the continuation of sexual violence linked to hegemonic masculinity.

Therefore, within the context of my study, I, as an educator, must acknowledge Connell's work on hegemonic masculinities and, as shown by Jewkes et al. (2015), the ongoing imbalance between lived gender relations within the South African context. Similarly, Anderson's (2009)

24

work on homohysteria as the impetus behind the regulation of masculinities must be acknowledged as South African schools remain deeply homophobic (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2017). Therefore, as with my exploration into Whiteness, gender and sexuality provide me with privilege, as heteronormativity and gender relations display a clear imbalance towards me as a heterosexual, cisgender White man. It falls on me to understand the construction of gender relations, how it influences my learners, and how it informs my teaching practice.

Since my teaching is in a single-sex school, I am acutely aware of the emphasis placed on the masculine and its connections to teaching practice. Therefore, a need exists to evaluate one's practice and ensure that one is not perpetuating gender stereotypes or hegemonic masculinity. Pedagogical practice and teaching strategies break down assumptions and stereotypes and challenge norms (Martino & Meyenn, 2002), leading to teaching practice and masculinity in the English classroom context. Furthermore, male teachers must play a role in dissolving the "historical legacy of hegemonic masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia" that prevails within schooling (Martino, 2008, p. 189). Rogers (2013) studied how boys' understanding of history interplays with their construction of masculinity. While not set in the context of the English classroom, the interplay between the curriculum and boys' masculine identities within the gendered space of the boys' school provides a precedent for studying teaching and learning space to comprehend my classroom's nuance better. As an English teacher, I frequently find myself teaching content containing potentially controversial issues that can challenge the hegemonic masculinity that prevails within my classroom and teaching context. Evidence indicates that boys dislike English and its tendency to require learners to express their opinions and emotions (Kimmel, Shapiro, & Purpal, 2005). However, English teachers are uniquely positioned to enact change by building on situated literacies, disrupting traditional power relations, reading against texts and creating new texts that promote freedom and expression (Macaluso, 2016). Martino (1995) identifies the potential for change in the English curriculum. By selecting the correct texts and creating a space that minimises personal vindication, learners can question the patriarchal disposition to see the world in binary terms. How does one choose these texts and use them to do this? Male-positive literature using positive intervention to aid learners in becoming literate members of positive male leadership should be sourced (Gouws, 2008). In a later paper, Gouws (2009) uses Henry IV to teach positive

25

masculinity, as it provides examples of Prince Hal's coming of age as examples of debate and discussion and links to the positive male image. These papers analyse a university context, and the texts selected are Eurocentric, but some principles relate to my context.

Moving beyond my immediate context to the broader South African context, incidents of disruptive behaviour in elite boys' schools illuminate the school's gender regime and reveal the relationship between learners and the hegemonic masculinity espoused by the institution (Bantjes & Nieuwoudt, 2015). Changes in the views on masculine identity in the workplace and society were noted from the advent of democracy (Walker, 2005). Masculinity within South African schools is complex. Often, violence and hegemony are normalised, but multiple masculinities exist within the South African schooling context, and there is a push to understand masculinity and its complexity (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). A "complex situation points to the interdependence of masculine constructions at school with the wider social, economic and political life where violence continues to remain a powerful tool to express hegemonic masculinity despite all efforts to address it and change the singular picture of masculinity in South Africa" (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019, p. 16).

What research exists on teaching boys effectively? The innate differences between boys and girls should be acknowledged, and practices should be adjusted to accommodate teaching boys. However, Watson et al. (2010) provide a response that does not seek to cater to preconceptions about teaching boys. They argue that it is "more productive to challenge culturally and socially constructed understandings of masculinity through pedagogical reforms than to reinforce and cater to them through a boy-friendly environment" (Watson et al., 2010, p. 359), aligning with this research that seeks to understand the teaching and learning of controversial issues. It is by "looking beyond the classroom" that teaching controversial issues adds value to boys' education (Watson et al., 2010, p. 359). Looking beyond the classroom ties in with the educational theory that divides teaching and learning as formal, non-formal and informal. First presented as a research paper by Coombs and Ahmed (1974), this description of teaching and learning adds insight to this study. While it is tempting to view the formal, non-formal and informal as distinctly independent, all learning situations contain attributes of formality and informality (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003). Furthermore, attributes of formal and informal learning

are interrelated within teaching and learning settings, and while these interrelations influence the nature and effectiveness of learning, they can only be understood by studying their wider context (Malcolm et al., 2003). These interrelations allow me to understand the unique connection between the formal curriculum regarding the teaching and learning of controversial issues and how my teaching and the context of the independent boys' schoolwork influence the non-formal and informal learning of controversy.

While a large body of literature exists on teaching controversial issues and the difficulties teachers face, literature that has a specific focus on my context is sparse. Much literature exists on the challenges of teaching boys, but literature on teaching controversial issues, as defined in this research, remains underrepresented. This research focuses on the South African context and, more specifically, the independent boys' school. The difficulties in teaching boys in these spaces have been explored, but scant research focuses on teaching controversial issues in the monastic boys' school classroom, focusing on teacher pedagogy and experience. Therefore, this research adds to the small body of research on teaching controversial issues, specifically within South African boys' schools. As explained in my rationale and motivation for the study, these elite schools, flawed as they may be, can be sites for the genesis of meaningful change in our young democracy. Therefore, this research offers insight into teaching controversial issues to boys in this unique context.

2.6 Autoethnographies of teaching controversial issues

The tools used to study teaching controversial issues vary; however, for this research, I will use evocative autoethnography as the methodology for studying my lived experience in a specific context. The rationale for this model will be discussed elsewhere. This chapter will explore autoethnographers' journeys in studying the teaching of controversial issues through the autoethnographic lens to gain insight into the existing literature. Finding autoethnographic research focusing on the teaching of controversial issues was not an easy task. Luckily, a shift in social science research has seen the rise in studies that include subjective understandings of reality and use the subjective underpinnings of human experience as the foundation for generating understanding (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Therefore, a footing exists from which I

27

began exploring the teaching of controversial issues.

Autoethnography is frequently used to emancipate marginalised voices and address imbalances underpinned by race and class (Wall, 2006). Therefore, most literature approaches teaching controversial issues from a similar viewpoint present insight into teaching controversial issues from a South African context, as seen in Aboo Gani's study on teaching "sensitive topics" from the Islamic context as a female teacher. The research uses an autoethnographic narrative and looks to explore "particularly the sensitive topic of sexual education and linking it to the Islamic perspective" (2020, p. 1). The study explores and represents the complex interplay between gender, Islam and teaching. Similarly, autoethnography has been used to study the need for culturally responsive teaching in diverse classroom settings (Martin-Lindsey, 2021). While the research does not explicitly focus on teaching controversial issues, it uses autoethnography to study the adaptation of teaching methods due to observations made through the cultural lens.

Furthermore, a study of value to my research is Cremin's (2018) work on peace education. Cremin uses autoethnography to explore the complexity of peace education given the conflict in a school context. The concern that autoethnography is frequently considered an exercise in "navel-gazing" is voiced and explored; however, it is shown that it can effectively explore teacher experience in teaching controversial issues, even if that is not what they describe peace education to be (Cremin, 2018, p. 4). Narrative vignettes explore the educator's lived experience to create meaning for the future rather than factually describing the past. Describing classrooms as "heterotopias" (p. 18) that are "sites of counter-narrative and are capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several realities that are incompatible with each other. They are bound by rules that give them a particular identity, and they serve to highlight the illusionary character of normative or dominant spaces, and/or to create an alternative reality that can begin to offer some form of compensation". Cremin (2018, p. 18) offers a reassuring and inspiring insight into my study conducted in an independent boys' school.

2.7 Autoethnographies of White males teaching controversial issues

A common theme of autoethnography is the emancipation of marginalised voices (Wall, 2006).

28

While the benefits of an autoethnography for individuals facing obstacles relating to systemic and structural social issues, such as racism and prejudice, are clear, how does the methodology lend itself to exploring the lived experience of a White male teacher teaching controversial issues? Some literature does offer insight. Marom (2016) used autoethnography to explore their teaching of indigenous content in teacher education programmes as a White immigrant in Canada, weaving their framework into a personal narrative that reveals a multicultural and complex teaching environment. Furthermore, autoethnography has been used to explore the experiences and practices of White teachers in classrooms with predominantly Black and Hispanic learners (Pennington, 2007). The study uses an autoethnographic narrative to understand the White teacher's desire to "save" the student and the pervasiveness of Whiteness in the classroom (Pennington, 2007, p. 98). The study sought to use autoethnography as a reflexive tool to help teachers better understand Whiteness. In a later study, autoethnography is used to explore and critique White identity using critical Whiteness studies and proves helpful for framing this critique regarding classroom practice (Pennington & Brock, 2012). The development of White identity within the South African context is explored using autoethnography. Jarvis (2014) explores the personal socialisation of Whiteness by geopolitical influences and education, and Lombard (2020) studied the cultivation of White Afrikaner identity in the South African context. Ohito (2019) uses autoethnography to study and argue for including pedagogies of embodiment in training teachers to understand the potential that Whiteness has in exacerbating the pain caused to socially othered learners.

Autoethnography can be used to improve teaching practice. Autoethnography has been used by White male teachers to study teaching in first people's education in Australia (Wood, 2017). While it is not a South African study, Wood's description of himself as a "White, male, able-bodied, property-owning teacher in Australia, I am a representation of dominant power" (2017, p. 50) speaks to my context. Autoethnography as a personal narrative is used to study the teaching of what could be controversial. Wood finds that "as teacher research, my reflections have empowered me to determine my professional development needs beyond those of the White systemic education policymakers, and consequently have opened me to the possibilities of pursuing a critical pedagogy of hope in my teaching" (2017, p. 54). As explored later in this chapter, Whiteness is a prevailing theme in my narrative and experience of teaching and learning

controversial issues. As such, literature highlighting autoethnography's relevance in the study of Whiteness is significant to my context.

2.8 The complexity of Whiteness in teaching controversial issues

Reflection on my teaching practice highlights a category of controversial issues that I feel most uncomfortable teaching: issues regarding race and their links to the history of systemic oppression in South Africa. This prevalence of race as a topic that leads to issues of controversy in my context, along with the unique history of race and identity in the South African context, makes my Whiteness and inherent racial prejudice of particular importance in this study. Within South African society, the "National Question" (Southall, 2022, p. 5) drives continued discourse on the outlook of race within our nation: what does the "non-racial society" that was conceived look like, and how might we achieve it? Since South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994, South African society has been redefining its intergroup relations through reconciliation (Steyn, 2005). Rainbowism, thought by many to be a utopian pipedream, was the goal of those who led the transition to democracy, which upheld the view that South Africa is home to all who live in it (Southall, 2022). Almost thirty years after democratic elections, South African society is far from de-racialised, if multicultural. An analysis of Whiteness and my subsequent privilege is needed to ascertain the influence of my racial identity on my pedagogical practices and on what and how I teach.

Twine and Gallagher (2008) identify three waves of Whiteness studies. While they agree that the scholarship is diverse, it shares a common understanding: "an examination of how power and oppression are articulated, redefined and reasserted through various political discourses and cultural practices that privilege Whiteness" (Twine & Gallagher, 2008 p.7). Du Bois (1903) led studies of the first wave of Whiteness and identified that Whites received a public and psychological wage with material and social privileges. He also found that Whites' easily explicable view that engagement with those they viewed as lower than themselves was undesirable and impractical, which drove what he termed "colour prejudice" (Du Bois, 1899, p. 229). His establishment of an understanding of the "colour line" would also give insight into the hegemonic view of Whiteness as normative (Du Bois, 1903, p.15). The correlation between

Whiteness and wages remains (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). The second wave of Whiteness studies is criticised for focusing on Whiteness without looking at its connections to broader societal factors and those who are oppressed by it (Garner, 2017). Scholars investigated the pathology of racist individuals rather than the systemic and structural factors that reproduced and normalised White supremacy. The second wave was categorised by a multidisciplinary intellectual effort invested in expanding on Du Bois's critique, which sought to make White supremacy visible (Garner, 2017).

Within the United States (US) context, the critical legal theory credited the field, as it looked to identify how the legal system benefited those it categorised as White (Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). Third-wave Whiteness studies, where we currently find ourselves, build on the two previous waves. The third wave focuses on analysing the "nuanced and locally specific ways in which Whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed and reinvented" (Twine & Ghalleger, 2008, p. 5). Four interconnected strands of development in Whiteness studies exist: the ever-widening arsenal of tools with which to study Whiteness, the various ideological narratives that maintain White privilege, the practices and strategies that Whites employ in their struggle to recuperate, reconstitute and restore White privilege and focusing on the nuances and locally specific ways in which Whiteness functions (Garner, 2017). The above situates this study firmly within the third wave of Whiteness studies, as race forms an undeniable factor in my teaching identity and practice.

The inability to settle on one definition of Whiteness can be viewed as a strength and a weakness (Garner, 2017). While the lack of one definition means a lack of clarity, it has allowed academics more room to manoeuvre and has led to the striking components of the third wave (Garner, 2017). Whiteness can be viewed as an ideologically supported social personality brought about by people of European descent due to European colonial expansion and who originally facilitated the construction of race (Steyn, 2005). Steyn states that "Blackness" was co-constructed as a foil to Whiteness and that race serves as a relationally structuring principle "according to which economic resources, actual and potential, systematically flow away from those racialized as Black, toward those racialized as White" (2005, p. 22). Furthermore, Whiteness can be explained as "the relative privilege, profit and power of those occupying the structural social positions of

Whites in a hierarchically ordered racial society" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 248). These three definitions allow for a platform from which to proceed, i.e., Whiteness as a social personality whose origins rest in colonialism and the relationship between Whites and others within a racialised society along with the systemic inequality that upholds White supremacy. This understanding is fundamental in navigating my Whiteness and subsequent privilege. How Whiteness plays out within the South African context is crucial for understanding how Whiteness influences my teaching practice. What specific elements of South African Whiteness should be explored?

Whites in South Africa are a diasporic people, and one should be mindful of this when seeking to understand them. Southall (2022, p. 231) describes the White South African community as a failed settler state. Comprising two groups, those of Dutch and British descent, the White South African community was divisive before the onset of democracy; however, aside from a small minority, they were united in their support of White supremacy (Southall, 2022). Unlike other diasporic communities, Whites in South Africa are not disenfranchised, dislocated or dispossessed (Garmen, 2015, p. 243). The historical and political configuration of South Africa meant that before 1994, most Whites did not experience their Whiteness, and the subsequent privilege over others it afforded them was, for the most part, invisible to them (Steyn, 2005). However, the rapid decentralisation of Whiteness within the South African community has led to the need for White South Africans to create a new narrative regarding who they are and how they fit into the new South Africa. Steyn entitles the leveraging of White South African's unique hybridity as a diasporic people with a connection to global Whiteness and a privileged people within Africa due to their Whiteness as "White Talk" (2005, p. 127-132). It is through "White Talk" that Whites reach "into its diasporic dimensions in order to maintain, and regain, its centeredness, the power of Whiteness" (Steyn, 2005, p. 132). White views of the country are often negative. Furthermore, White South Africans express pessimistic views on the South African political and economic situation, blaming the African National Congress (ANC) government for the nation's perceived shortcomings and attempts to address the historical legacy of Black disadvantage, which many Whites perceive as reverse racism (Southall, 2022). White South African's colour blindness further complicates the above, and their subsequent unintended racism is the most significant barrier to addressing issues brought about by Whiteness (Southall,

2022).

Where does this leave me? As a young, White South African of British descent, is there, as Southall puts it, "still White in the rainbow?" My experience is intricately connected to the slipperiness of Englishness and South African identity, the legacy of White supremacy within South Africa and the need to decentre and recentre Whiteness (Garmen, 2014). Garmen cites Steyn's (2001) intervention programmes with Whites, showing new ways for Whites to negotiate and engage with issues relating to Whiteness. White involvement in antiracism movements is complex. There exists the risk of White people centralising Whiteness in the discourse on antiracism through their involvement, warning against the narcissistic gains and symbolic rewards from White involvement in antiracism (Matthews, 2012). White people gain cultural capital through public displays of shame and guilt, which they believe sets them apart from other immoral White people (Sullivan, 2012). This statement echoes a quote from the Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie, who wrote in her award-winning novel, *Americanah*, that "Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it" (Adichie, 2013, p. 378). Vice's (2010) call for White people to disengage and withdraw from the public and political space entirely leads one to believe that a White person cannot play any beneficial moral role in the quest for a non-racial society. Whether Whiteness can exist without privilege and empire has been asked (Garmen, 2014). However, I cannot, as an educator, avoid or distance myself from controversial issues relating to race. To do so would be to perpetuate the colour blindness identified as a root cause of White supremacy.

How do I understand my Whiteness in the context of teaching and learning controversial issues? In an article entitled "Whiteness is a White problem", Tanner (2019) warns against placing the burden of addressing White supremacy on Black people. Tanner acknowledges the need to give voice and opportunity to those marginalised by Whiteness but highlights that White people must do the work to dismantle White supremacy. Similarly, "White people's souls may indeed need saving, but to demand that Black and other non-White people be the vehicle for White salvation merely replicates the racial inequalities and abuses that led to their damnation" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 27). Thus, as a White person, the responsibility for addressing the privilege I receive and the White supremacy I perpetuate falls on my shoulders. While my identity as a White person

33

disqualifies me from leading thinking on antiracism, understanding my complicity in a system of oppression allows me to seek ways to address White supremacy. I cannot be excused from involvement in a solution.

All my thinking and understanding come from a White and privileged perspective, something I must always acknowledge when seeking to live my Whiteness in a way that does not perpetuate supremacy. Writing on the White academic's role in decolonising the South African curriculum, Mathews (2021) states that Whites occupy an ambivalent position as the cause of the problem while attempting to solve it. She states that this does not mean they cannot contribute to the solution, only that this ambivalence must be acknowledged so that their participation is not an attempt to alleviate White guilt. The literature shows that to continue with the White supremacist status quo, through actively seeking to reaffirm Whiteness or through misguided attempts to dominate antiracist movements, is the easy option for White people. Constructively grappling with Whiteness requires a concerted effort to move away from the centre and work to understand one's complicity in systemic oppression. While a daunting task, I take comfort in the words of Garmen, who states, "[I] believe that, by contrast, the great privilege they have been afforded is to be located in Africa and to be exposed to Africa's assertion of self against White hegemony. I choose the route of trouble and choose to continue to be troubled" (2005, p. 248).

Helms provides a spectrum through which to understand my journey of White identity. Helms (1995) holds that White people are socialised in a biased society, and the unearned benefits that come with White privilege can have lasting psychosocial effects on the identity of White people. A spectrum of White racial identity was developed to provide a model to define and overcome the perpetuation of racism (Helms, 1995). This model is still valid and has successfully been used to analyse the development of White identity in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement (Moffitt, Rogers, & Dastrup, 2021). The White identity model breaks down Whiteness into six schemata, with the latter three focusing on evolving a non-racist identity (Helms, 2014). This model lends itself to my teaching practice and understanding of White identity. This spectrum reveals the difficulty in identifying Whiteness as a White researcher and the danger of falsely believing that White privilege exists as a "good–bad" dichotomy and that attempts at allyship make one pseudo-independent and exempt from the unequal benefits of

34

Whiteness. Racism still exists in many areas within the context of education, and the White identity spectrum will be used to understand the source of prejudice (Helms, 1995). Understanding my White identity and how the unequal society I grew up in perpetuates racial bias is essential in understanding how learners respond to my teaching of controversial issues.

With this understanding of Whiteness in mind, my discomfort, perceived ineptitude in teaching issues relating to race, and the prevalence of race as a controversial issue in class and the content I select as an English teacher demand an exploration into the learner's perception of race. Black learners are often torn between two almost contradictory identities: being a member of a born free and democratic society and having to conform to the Whiteness of the education system (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). While the above might be true, my experience with boys from wealthy backgrounds shows that they present a closer affiliation to a global culture shared among themselves, regardless of race. Many White learners in independent schools fall into the category of "global Whiteness", where they identify with a global society or culture aligned with Western values and modalities (Soudien, 2010, p. 358). Many of my learners are uncomfortable discussing issues of race and identity and tend to be oblivious or choose to ignore the realities of those suffering in South Africa. This ignorance is, of course, not always the case, and some learners have a view to change how they interact with others in a society where race is still such a controversial topic. The White learners fall into what Soudien calls "New South African Whiteness" (2010, p. 358), actively seeking to identify with and contribute to the new South Africa. They acknowledge their privilege and understand the responsibility this privilege comes with and the need to use it to incite change.

Many of my Black learners remove themselves from conversations or content that highlights communities suffering under the legacy of Apartheid, and some fit Soudien's description of "many learners are oblivious to the social critique floating around them, or rather choose to ignore it. There is an apparent naïveté about them in terms of race" (2010, p. 359). Believing this to be the entire picture for my learners would be a misunderstanding derived from my position of privilege. This would ignore my learners' ability to recognise and navigate racial power imbalances on a spectrum from withdrawal to active protest to succeed in an unequal environment. Employing these strategies to attend a school whose culture is overwhelmingly

35

Eurocentric would be overwhelming for any young person. Events such as the student protests at schools in Pretoria show that learners understand the lasting impacts of the colonial legacy (Alubafi, Ramphalile, & Rankoana, 2018). Learners in South Africa identify the reproduction of inequality within school policies and cultures and stand against them (Hiss & Peck, 2020). Believing that my learners do not have the same understanding of colonial legacy would be naive. Therefore, attempts to essentialise my learners' understanding of race would be folly. This research views the learner as a complex entity whose identity is influenced by many factors and experiences. One cannot control the context in which the teaching of controversial issues occurs but only those variables, such as pedagogical practice and the framing of controversy (Pace, 2021). Learners will bring their understanding of controversial issues, and pedagogy must be used to accommodate them.

Within desegregated classrooms, the teacher's interactions with learners of different races, their body language and their interactions in non-academic settings outside the classroom are critical (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). This statement is noteworthy, as I am a White male teacher and cannot identify with the personal emancipatory theme upon which much of the writing on teaching race is centred. Within my English classroom setting, a space exists to evaluate these actions and reflect on the bias I might outwardly present. Some research has been conducted on teaching English and the controversial issue of race. Martin (2014) deliberately selected Huckleberry Finn for problems of race the novel highlights and used critical race theory to analyse and break down the issues for learners to question their understanding and acknowledge the distinct differences in views between Black and White learners. Issues regarding racial identity that arise in my classroom include discussions on the Black Lives Matter movement, the history of racial oppression in South Africa and Eurocentricity. The English classroom allows for racial dialogue, as in literature, one must analyse the plot, setting, character conflict and development (Thomas, 2015). However, it is not always this easy. It has been commonplace in the English classroom to ignore and remain silent on the issue of race, which is often incorrectly seen as gracious (Thomas, 2015). An analysis of two teachers' classrooms found various issues of navigating race in literature, such as the "n-word" in literature (Thomas, 2015). The paper states that as the literature presented in class becomes increasingly inclusive, race talk will become increasingly prominent and must be addressed.

36

2.9 Complexity theory

Engaging with the literature has revealed much, but what is abundantly clear is the complexity of my identity, the factors influencing my teaching of controversial issues and those that make said issues controversial. Complexity theory provides a framework to study the links between the many factors that have contributed to my teaching of controversial issues. Complexity theory's transdisciplinary and interdiscursive nature makes it well-suited to educational research (Davis & Sumara, 2009). Complexity theory "concerns itself with environments, organisations, or systems that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements or agents are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways" (Mason, 2008, p. 36). The above is true for the teaching environment, "schools exhibit many features of complex adaptive systems, being dynamical and unpredictable, non-linear organizations operating in unpredictable and changing external environments" (Morrison, 2008, p. 22). This description lends to this research, as several factors have constructed my teaching of controversial issues. These factors include my understanding of what is controversial, the construction of my identity (including my Whiteness and masculine identity), my context (an independent boys' school in South Africa), and my understanding of teaching and the learners I teach.

A complex system comprises interacting elements that must be studied holistically, such as the independent boys' school where I teach (Morrison, 2012). Complexity theory allows for understanding to emerge from the constituents of a system and the myriad of connections between those constituents (Mason, 2008). Complex systems are self-regulating, not by some grand design, but through connection and feedback between constituent elements (Morrison, 2008). Emergence is the partner to self-regulation: "The self-organized order emerges of itself as the result of the interaction between the organism and its environment, and new structures emerge that could not have been predicted from a knowledge of initial conditions" (Morrison, 2008, p. 21). Morrison (2008) explains that complex adaptive systems respond to external changes and reorganise accordingly. Therein lies its appeal. Complexity theory allows me to study the factors that have influenced my teaching of controversial issues and the emergent phenomenon in my narrative using theories and frameworks specifically suited to those factors, as explored in my literature review. These factors include broad, structural elements such as race,

culture, ethnicity, class and religion. I will then seek to understand the connections between those factors. A complex system is self-organising and readjusting (Morrison, 2012). It is akin to a brain or social collective capable of learning, growing and becoming more nuanced (Davis & Sumara, 2009). The above suits this research, as my understanding of teaching controversial issues remains "emergent" (Davis & Sumara, 2009, p. 43). Complexity theory provides a framework for analysing the factors that have influenced my teaching of controversial issues.

Complexity theory provides a helpful framework within education and, in my context, the teaching and learning of controversial issues. When looking at teaching practice, it helps to view expertise as emergent. Complexity theory views systems as complex, emergent and adaptive. Complexity theory has been used to explain English First Language (EFL) teacher's professional development (Yuan & Yang, 2022). The above shows how the framework can identify connected constituent elements, adapting to create the emergent practice.

Furthermore, complexity theory has been used as a lens through which to study differences in the teaching practice of writing teachers (Martin & Dismuke, 2018). Building on the work of Davis and Sumara (2009), they show that teaching and learning is an adaptive complex system nestled together. Similarly, Martin and Dismuke (2018) distinguish between teacher practice and the development of practice (defined as having to do with professional growth) as two distinct systems, although entwined and co-nested within teaching. The above is relevant to this study, as they state that from the "perspective of complexity theory, professional growth involves the development of knowledge and skill systems embedded within the operative system." (Martin & Dismuke, 2018, p. 25), which is essential in my journey to understanding the development of teaching controversial issues. Within my teaching (the operative system), developing the knowledge and skills system should be the focus.

This study's focus requires me to root my understanding of learning in theory by integrating aspects of experiential learning and complexity theory. Experience is the foundation and stimulus for learning, and learners actively construct their experiences (Jarvis et al., 2003). It is a learner-centred understanding of learning where knowledge results from grasping and transforming experience (McCarthy, 2010). While I agree that teaching and learning are the

products of experience and that learners construct their understanding, I do not feel that a deterministic understanding of learning truly reflects the complexity of learning or the learner. Learning is the product of complex biological and experiential change, transforming the physical and the behavioural (Davis & Sumara, 2014). Morrison (2008, p. 26) highlights that "the teacher is vital, intervening judiciously to scaffold and create the conditions for learning-through-self-organization and the child's emergent knowledge", which aligns with the complexity framework that informs this research.

Additionally, complexity theory frames my understanding of the learner. Rather than viewing learners as isolated or insulated, they are viewed as complex entities who are the products of their experiences and can adapt to their realities (Davis & Sumara, 2014). Therefore, my teaching of controversial issues seeks to provide an experience that connects with the complex system of experiences and factors influencing learner identity during knowledge construction. Understanding myself as a complex and multifaceted system of constituents demands that I view my learners' understanding similarly.

2.10 A complex model for understanding teaching controversial issues

Considering the theory explored above, a model for understanding the complex interplay between the constituent elements of teaching controversial issues is needed. The teacher's practice and knowledge are complex interconnected systems (Dotger & McQuitty, 2014).

> A teacher's knowledge is an interconnected system of different ideas, and those ideas interact with one another in that a change to one idea prompts changes to others. Similarly, a teacher's practice is a system comprising an interrelated set of actions, such as those that make up a lesson. If one instructional move changes, others also tend to change as the whole system of practice evolves. (Dotger & Mcquitty, 2014, p. 77)

Therefore, as complex systems are nested within other systems, my teaching and knowledge of controversial issues cannot be considered separate systems. Even when describing teaching actions, they implicitly refer to teacher knowledge. Thus, this research will describe the teacher's

39

system of practice and the interconnected system of knowing as the teacher's "operative system" (Dotger & Mcquitty, 2014, p. 77). This operative system describes the teacher's knowledge of controversial issues, practices used to teach controversial issues and the connection between knowledge and said practices, nested within a series of other systems that influence the operative system in complex ways. These systems interact with the operative system, ranging from "classroom norms to district settings, to community contexts and national policies" (Martin & Dismuke, 2018, p. 23).
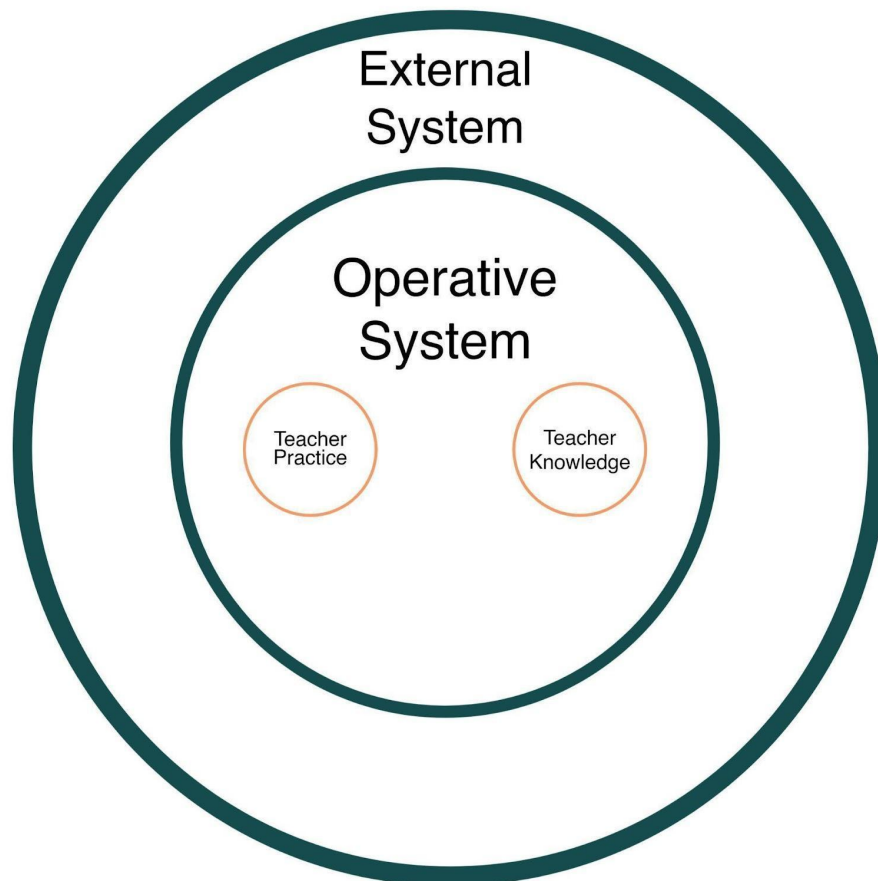
Figure 2.1: The operative system (Martin & Dismuke, 2018)

A simple example can be given to understand the operative system in practice. I teach Shakespeare's Othello, where representations of race and identity are a central theme. My operative system would interact as a complex system. My knowledge of race and its representation in Elizabethan literature and the current discourse on Whiteness would interact with my practice as an English teacher and researcher studying the teaching of controversial issues. My operative system is simultaneously nested within other systems, such as my context, an independent boys' school, the CAPS curriculum and others. Thus, the complexity of teaching controversial issues becomes apparent.
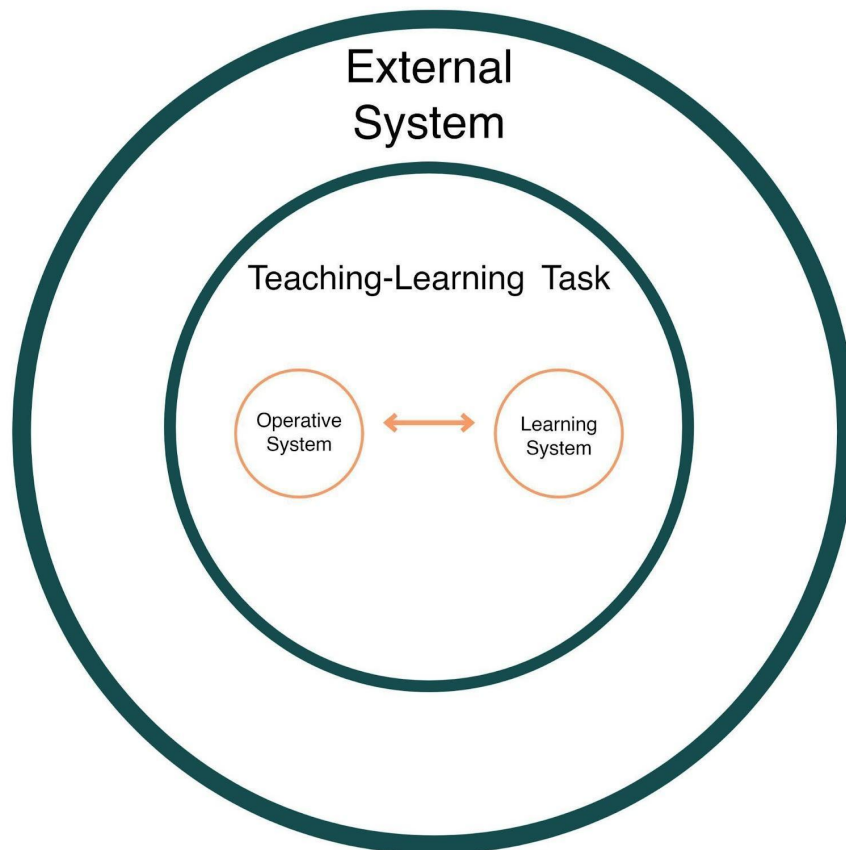
Figure 2.2: The teaching and learning system (Martin & Dismuke, 2018)

Just as the operative system is nested within external systems, the teaching and learning systems interact, which, in theory, results in the emergence of new understandings or, as Mason phrases it, "the emergence of new phenomena" (2008, p. 43). Therefore, learning outcomes are situated within the dynamic interactions between the teacher (operative system), the learner (learning system), the social setting and the task (relating to controversial issues) (Martin & Dismuke, 2018). This understanding of the operative system and its relationship with external systems and the learner will be the framework for understanding the teaching and learning of controversial issues.

2.11 Conclusion

A comprehensive literature review includes all the primary themes and subthemes of a particular topic interwoven with the methods and findings of specific studies (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). The first aim of a literature review is to summarise, evaluate and review the body of writing on a particular topic (Knopf, 2006). This review allows the researcher to find new lines of inquiry, separate what must be done from what has already been done and link theory with methods (Randolph, 2009).

Exploring the literature began with understanding teaching and learning within the South African context. The importance of PCK and distinguishing critical pedagogies intimately connected to the South African context were noted. More specifically, the context of my teaching practice required grounding the teaching of boys in theory. The growing divide between girls and boys in the classroom and the connection between understanding masculinity within the educational space and disruptive behaviours highlight the space for a study such as this one.

The choppy waters of identifying and teaching controversial issues were explored. While many studies on the training of teachers to teach controversial issues have been conducted, most notably the work of Pace (2021), the complexity of identifying an issue as controversial and the contextually specific nature of controversy allow for this study to add value to the field. The literature on teaching controversial issues within a South African independent boys' school is almost non-existent, highlighting the value of this study.

As relating to teacher identity and teaching controversial issues, this study requires insight into Whiteness and the South African context. The complexity of the South African racial landscape and the pervasive nature of White supremacy were explored. Southall (2022) and Steyn (2015) provide insight into the history of South African Whiteness and its lingering impact. While the limitations of my actions as a White man (Garner, 2017) were explored and explained, Helms's (1995) White identity spectrum model provides a pathway through which to attempt to be part of the solution rather than perpetuating White supremacy. The above reinforces the importance of this study, which seeks to explore the experience of a White teacher and my role in dismantling the legacy of White supremacy.

Masculinity as an identity marker and controversial issue was also explored. Connell's (1995) model of hegemonic masculinity and Anderson's (2009) IMT provide two models for understanding masculinity. These two models highlight the power imbalance between the feminine and the masculinity and the impact of homophobia on understanding masculinity. The context of the independent boys' classroom and teaching controversial issues relating to masculinity remain largely unexplored, leaving a gap for this research.

The theory in which the study is grounded was explored. Complexity theory was used to explain the teacher's operative system, defined as the teacher's practice and how it relates to teacher knowledge (Dotger & McQuitty, 2014). Similarly, the operative system was described regarding its relation to the learning system within the teaching–learning process (Martin & Dismuke, 2018). This understanding of teaching controversial issues as a complex system that interacts dynamically with external systems, such as an independent boys' school context, provides a lens through which to analyse the data.

The different themes and subthemes and their connection to theories and methods were explored. Therefore, the gap within which this study fits can be described. This study sits within a growing body of literature on teaching controversial issues but focuses on the teacher and the South African boys' school context. It looks to understand the experience of a White, heterosexual, cisgendered man and his teaching practice as it relates to teaching controversial issues. It addresses some issues regarding boys' teaching space. The research will be conducted through

43

the lens of complexity theory to describe teacher practice and knowledge as an operative system.

The specific gap that this study addresses within the existing literature is the contextually specific study of the teaching and learning of controversial issues within an independent boys' school, which, by nature of its complexity, is situated within the broader South African education system. As the study has been grounded in theory and literature, Chapter 3 explains the research methodology.

Chapter 3 - Second Prep: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A study of self within a specific context is, understandably, open to a great deal of criticism, begging the question, how does one avoid producing a study that is no more than only an exercise in navel-gazing? Hubris is a risk, but so is an excess of self-degradation that skews data to the point where the autoethnography becomes nothing but an autobiography. Autoethnographic research can never come to the objective truth, if it even exists. The value of the autoethnographic study of the self is in its subjectivity. I seek to create meaning by studying the self, the 'auto', and my context, the 'ethno'. This evocative work must be authentically subjective if it is to have value. It must, of course, be rooted in theory and evidence but cannot be an extraneous watering down of my lived experiences relating to the teaching and learning of controversial issues in an independent boys' school—to do so would be to produce a simulacrum.

Therein lies the challenge of an autoethnography, especially an evocative one, as I understand it. As a researcher, I must design a study that meets the expected rigour required of an academic dissertation that is trustworthy and meets the expected standards of verisimilitude. Simultaneously, the study must be designed so that I explore my lived experiences relating to the teaching and learning of controversial issues authentically—an immensely powerful and emotional undertaking. Articulating the said experience through a written narrative in a way that connects with the reader poses yet another formidable challenge.

This chapter explains this study's research design. I will unpack and explain the theory behind my choice of methodology, research design, approach and paradigm. It will also explore autoethnography and evocative autoethnography as the methodology for the study. I will lay out the steps used to collect and analyse data. The research limitations will be explored, as will the ethical considerations needed in a study that addresses sensitive topics and has the potential to evoke emotional responses from participants and readers.

3.2 Research design

Harris (2019) describes research as the researcher's attempt to tell better stories about the world, how it works and research on it. Therefore, research design depends on one's story and assumptions about the story they find themselves in (Harris, 2019). While this might seem simplistic, it is an apt way to explain that the connection between ontology, epistemology and methodology is crucial for research and is in the foreground of this chapter. In this discussion of the theory, I explain my research design. The research paradigm, discussed later in this chapter, operates in the background of a study as a set of understandings. What occurs in the research is a research design that carries those understandings in its method of action (Durdella, 2019). However, it is more than this. Creswell and Creswell (2017) explain that designing research includes answers to broad questions on knowledge assumptions and specific descriptions of methods. As such, the research design is the control centre the researcher uses as the framework for their study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.3 My research paradigm

Behind each research paradigm is a set of philosophical questions that inquire about the nature of reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) (Durdella, 2019). Research paradigms are "a set of beliefs and feelings about the work and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 26). The research paradigm constitutes the abstract or theoretical beliefs that shape how the researcher interprets and acts in the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm. In the interpretive research paradigm, one's constructed reality is explored and built through human interaction and in the actions one has taken (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Interpretivist studies acknowledge degrees of subjectivity in the researcher and participants in the study (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Interpretivist studies, such as my autoethnography, hold that the methods used to study the physical sciences, such as the positivist paradigm, cannot be used to study how humans interpret their world or how they choose to act on those interpretations (Pham, 2018). In this study, I seek to interpret my lived experiences to understand the teaching and learning of controversial issues and my context of an

46

independent boys' school. The above fits into the interpretivist paradigm's usefulness in gaining a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon, in the case of my study, the teaching and learning of controversial issues, rather than attempting to come to generalisable findings (Pham, 2018) by interpreting lived experiences as memory data presented as narrative short stories.

In this study, I seek to interpret my lived experiences regarding my teaching of controversial issues in the classroom, as a teacher, in my education, and in my professional practice to understand the teaching and learning of controversial issues by looking at my teaching practice in formal, non-formal and informal spaces (Malcolm et al., 2003). However, this study is not only of the self. By studying my lived experience, I hope to create a window into my context and add to the research on independent boys' schools in contemporary South Africa and on teaching controversial issues. This understanding is gained by interpreting my lived experiences to bring the reader into my world. This interpretation will occur through an evocative autoethnography.

Williams (2000) highlights the limitations of interpretivism as a research paradigm. McPhail and Lourie (2017) argue that realist approaches are needed in education and that interpretivist approaches are limited. They believe that epistemological plurality in post-modernist thinking threatens objectivity and that interpretivist paradigms are in danger of becoming relativist. While these concerns are valid, they do not describe my aim. As explained later in the chapter, I did not intend to generate universal or objective truths or claim to present truth in my narrative. I have written a series of evocative pieces as short stories in collaboration with co-constructors and co-witnesses of my experience, which are subjective and influenced by my biases to understand my teaching and learning of controversial issues. My research has value in this subjectivity and bias.

3.4 My research approach

Aligning the belief system behind a research approach, the research question and the approach are prerequisites in a successful study (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, & Varpio 2012). The interpretivist paradigm explored above must align with the research approach. Studies that adopt traditional quantitative methods seek to provide objective and universal truths.

While these studies might provide insight into other phenomena, my study, which is concerned with the complexity and reflexivity of human experience as it relates to the twin acts of teaching and learning, cannot be undertaken using methods that claim to have objectivity and logical conclusions (Atkins & Wallace, 2012) As a research methodology, autoethnography is a qualitative method because it offers nuanced, complex and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences and relationships, such as my experience teaching controversial issues within my context of an independent boys' school, rather than general information about large groups of people (Adams et al., 2015). Discussing an approach is discussing how one views realities, describes reality and creates and orders descriptions and explanations of social phenomena (Flick, 2018).

Qualitative research should follow an iterative design that moves from a base of empirical understanding up through its theoretical apparatus and back down to its empirical base (Flick, 2018). I have laid out my empirical base in the literature review and now describe the theoretical apparatus through which my study will occur. Qualitative research allows for analysing lived experience within a particular context and, in this case, is idiographic. It allows for insights into my lived experience but cannot be used to develop universal principles outside of my unique context (Maree, 2016). In my study of the self, I do not claim to develop universal principles that are transferrable outside my unique context of a South African independent boys' school. I seek a nuanced, complex and specific understanding of my teaching of controversial issues within my context. I seek to create thick descriptions of my lived experience, teaching and learning controversy, which a qualitative approach affords me.

Ontological issues relate to reality and its characteristics (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, researchers agree with multiple simultaneous realities (Creswell, 2013). The ontological assumptions in the paradigm hold that reality is subjective and that any number of intangible realities are possible if there are individuals to construct them (Chalisa & Kawulich, 2012). Qualitative researchers embrace the notion of multiple truths and, as such, reject the concrete reality attributed to human experience (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). With this understanding, the qualitative researcher believes participation enriches the study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). This ontological assumption is held in this study as autoethnography is the

48

study of subjective and unique experiences. From this, I produce specific and complex interpretations of what echoes the truth.

Epistemological issues relate to how knowledge is known. In qualitative research, the researcher understands that knowledge is subjectively constructed (Creswell, 2013). The epistemological understanding is that knowledge is subjective and constructed through personal experience; therefore, the narrative is legitimate knowledge (Chalisa & Kawulich, 2012). My interpretivist paradigm assumes that, as the researcher, I impact the social world and the social world, in turn, impacts me. Therefore, the researcher's perspective and values inevitably influence the findings (Pitard, 2017). Therefore, my autoethnography explores how knowledge is created through my interactions with the social world in teaching controversial issues within my specific context of an independent boys' school.

3.5 Research methodology

Methodology is "a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 29). Referring to the above, this section will explore the skills, practices and assumptions of autoethnographic research. Grant, Short and Turner (2013, p. 2) describe autoethnography as a methodology "concerned with producing creatively written, detailed, local and evocative first-person accounts of the relationship between personal autobiography and culture". An autoethnography allows one to read between the lines of one's lived experiences within one's cultural context to understand one's reality (Alexander, 2005). Through this methodology, I aim to gain insight into my teaching by analysing my lived experience of teaching controversial issues within my contextual reality.

Autoethnographic work has faced much scrutiny in its history as a study methodology in social sciences (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). This potential for criticism makes me wary of producing an evocative autoethnography. The question must be asked: can any meaning be gleaned from a study of the self? Chang (2008) states that studies of the self are rooted in anthropologists' belief that culture is to be found in the private sphere of the self. Thus, the smallest unit of culture is

individuals who can actively interpret the world they inhabit. Autobiographical and narrative studies are not new, but a resurgence over the last two decades has been divergent, as self-reflexivity has been at the forefront of anthropological studies (Chang, 2008). In such work, the researchers insert themselves into the study. In autoethnography, the researcher is the subject (the researcher) and the object (that which is to be studied) (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Put simply, in ethnography, the researchers insert themselves into the culture to be studied; in autoethnography, the researcher is a living part of the culture to be studied (Williams, 2021). Naturally, the question of objectivity has been raised, and the receptivity of autoethnography as a study methodology varies from field to field and institution to institution (Throne, 2019).

While these concerns must be given their due, objective truth is not the aim of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology that offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge on specific individual's particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people (Adams et al., 2014,). While objectivity is crucial for studying other phenomena, studying something as mercurial as an individual might not be as fruitful. Therefore, it is fitting to attribute the emergence of methodologies, such as autoethnography, to a "crisis of representation" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 22). This identity crisis emerged when researchers recognised the limits of knowledge claims about identity, lives, beliefs, feelings and behaviours through empirical and scientific methods (Adams et al., 2014, p. 22). This scepticism of generalised knowledge claims based on traditional attempts at objectivity has led to the rise of methods that include a heightened sense of self-reflexivity and a focus on emotional experiences (Anderson, 2006). Therein lies the value of an evocative autoethnography in teaching controversial issues in an independent boys' school—it is a means for reflecting on the self and experience, transcending methodologies that represent only objective truths.

Autoethnography stems from anthropology but is distinct from other narrative studies because it transcends mere narration for cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). However, this must not lead one to place autoethnography into a particular box. Scholars disagree on which box autoethnography fits. Its value is in the fact that it does not fit neatly. Some place autoethnography within the paradigmatic family of inductive research approaches, others view it

50

as a form of ethnography, while some find it more aligned with narrative research approaches (Throne, 2019), making it crucial to clarify "whose and which autoethnography" will be used in the study (Thorne, 2019, p. 50). Williams's (2021) four fundamental autoethnography features are significant for this study. (i) Researchers share their lived experiences and shared humanity with participants. (ii) There is no claim to objectivity, as the researcher is the focus of the study. (iii) In a move against traditional understandings of empirical research, subjectivity is valued for the depth it adds to understanding. (iv) Autoethnography differs from other journaling or narrative writing forms. The process transcends narration and systematically analyses personal experience to understand cultural experience. Autoethnography is thus rooted in context and differs from other narrative studies in its ethnographic underpinnings (Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

Multiple forms of autoethnography exist. While these different forms are more similar than different, one must work through the complexity of this growing and changing field to set parameters for this research. Autoethnography has an evocative tradition. Autoethnography rose as a postmodern and poststructuralist conception of ethnographic research, inviting the reader to be moved aesthetically, effectively and rationally through feeling and living with the narrative (Winkler, 2018). As Ellis (1999, p. 669) puts it, the goal of evocative autoethnography is "to extend ethnography to include the heart, the autobiographical, and the artistic text". These autoethnographies include multiple layers of consciousness represented through narrative, diary entries, dialogue and other forms of expression. Evocative autoethnography fractures the boundaries between social science and literature and aims to create a compelling description of subjective emotional experiences to resonate with the reader (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As a methodology, it rejects traditional realist and analytical approaches to ethnography, as this violates the value and integrity of autoethnographic writing (Anderson, 2006).

Autoethnographic studies focus on the complexities of lived experience and how culture flows through personal experience and vice versa. It seems inescapable that such studies would be built upon and that multiple forms of autoethnography would be developed. Anderson's (2006) proposal of an analytical form of autoethnography proved to be a watershed moment for the model. Anderson gives five fundamental features of analytic autoethnography. He argues that "analytic autoethnography involves complete membership, sustained reflexive attention to one's

51

position in the web of field discourse and relations, and textual visibility of the self in ethnographic narratives" (Anderson, 2006, p. 387). The primary difference between analytical and evocative autoethnography is in Anderson's final two features. These are active dialogues with participants outside of the self. It is argued that "solipsism and author saturation in autoethnographic texts are symptoms rather than the underlying problem" (p. 388). Analytical autoethnography includes data or dialogue with others to gain insight into the complex social network the researcher is part of. Anderson's final criterion is a commitment to an analytical agenda—using the empirical data from a study to gain insight into some social phenomena.

While some understanding of what autoethnographic research entails has been discussed, and I have explored its forms, the question remains: what will my evocative autoethnography look like? A quandary that is made no easier by delving through the many autoethnographies that have contributed to the field. As stated in the previous chapters of this dissertation, this autoethnography takes the form of an evocative autoethnography. An autoethnography is an immense undertaking that, when done with trustworthiness, is a personal and emotional experience. Therefore, the most crucial criterion in labelling an autoethnography must be what the author believes their work to be. I will elaborate on my reasons for styling my autoethnography on the teaching of controversial issues as evocative in the paragraphs below.

An excellent place to start is by stating why this research will not take the form of an analytical autoethnography. Anderson's (2006) seminal work on analytical autoethnography states that they use empirical data to gain insight into some social phenomena. While my study seeks to gain insight into teaching practice as it relates to teaching controversial issues, I make no claims to producing empirical evidence or objective truths. My project is not a realistic one but deeply immersive. It allows deeply personal experiences to be portrayed and considered in wider cultural contexts so that they can be studied for significances and meanings that are of value to others who may read my autoethnography (McCormack, 2018). It cannot be based on a "sanctified scientific doctrine of truth" (Spinazola, Ellis, & Bochner, 2021, p. 36). These uncompromisingly unemotional and sanitised texts are neither relevant nor helpful for exploring authentic lived experiences. While statistics, medical reports, facts and generalisable findings give insight into cancer and its prevalence, they do nothing to help gain an understanding of what

it is to experience cancer as a human. For academic work to do this, the line between art and research must be blurred (Spinazola et al., 2021). It must be evocative. The value of autoethnographic writing rests in the richness of the text produced. Evocative autoethnographies seek to show rather than tell.

In sum, regarding my dissertation,

> the focus of evocative and critical autoethnography is less about knowing and more about living; less about controlling and more about caring; less about reaching immutable truths and more about opening dialogues among different points of view; less about resolving differences and more about learning how to live and cope with them; less about covering life experience with disembodied concepts and more about finding ways to personify the "untamed wilderness" of lived experience (Spinazola et al., 2019, p. 41).

Thus, I aim to produce a reflexive work where the researcher and the researched join with the reader to create short stories of lived experience (Short, Turner, & Grant, 2013). It would do little justice to said lived experience if these reflective and reflexive works followed a chronological order just for narration. The piece might twist and turn as fractions of memories connect to fractions of other memories, linking threads that shape and grow as the reader experiences the writing (Short et al., 2013). I undertake to produce this rich, reflective and reflexive writing. The methods for constructing such a work will follow in the paragraphs below.

3.6 My research methods

The first step in the autoethnographic journey is to situate oneself within one's story by analysing one's past narrative (Adams et al., 2017). The initial stage of this process is identifying, selecting and categorising data (Chang, 2008). The methods used to construct data must be explained. My autoethnography was conducted in three phases. The initial phase was what Hughes and Pennington (2017) describe as the construction of external data to bolster my understanding of my lived experience, which Adams et al. (2015, p. 77) refer to as "field work". This construction was done by perusing artefacts, such as school reports and awards (Chang, 2008), informal

conversations with key role-players in my lived teaching and learning experience (Adams et al., 2017) and conversations with former learners. Phase one was followed by phase two, or the construction of internal data, as memory work (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). The data were reflected on and represented as a personal narrative in a short story format. The data were analysed and discussed using a framework based on Chang (2008) and the complexity theory described in my conceptual framework. Finally, a process of establishing verisimilitude was undertaken to ensure that the data uphold standards of trustworthiness (Loh, 2013).

(i) Phase 1: External data construction

Artefacts are material cultural manifestations illuminating their historical contexts (Chang, 2008). I will use essential artefacts from my history to construct memory data for analysis to gain further insight and bolster the trustworthiness of my research. These include written artefacts, such as reflections and assignments from my time at school and university, diary entries, images, my portfolio for teaching practicals and others. These primary sources of my lived experiences provide insight into my life and teaching and learning practice. While written artefacts are crucial, other artefacts, such as photographs and objects, allow for further interpretation and fill gaps in understanding. Just as memories are analysed and interpreted for understanding, so too are artefacts analysed and documented to enrich the narrative presented in this study. Furthermore, I have kept field journals throughout this research. This field journal includes mind maps, diagrams, poetry, sketches, recalled memories and key moments from my teaching practice and will be included in the study. Chang (2016) highlights the importance of the field journal because it plays a role in self-observation and transparency. These artefacts will represent the foundation on which to build my narrative.

I must engage with others who have contributed to my lived experience to ensure that this study is not an act of self-centred navel-gazing. Therefore, I engage in memory-sharing conversations with individuals who have contributed to constructing my narrative. Due to ethical considerations, these individuals and groups cannot be named and rather than a formal interview,

the interviews took the form of critical conversations (Adams et al., 2017). Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. My three co-constructors of experience have been named Jack, Bishop and my mother. The richness and importance of these conversations reveal insight into my experience and identity due to their informality (Adams et al., 2017). They are removed from the researcher–subject dynamic and are thus an opportunity to experience an individual's connection to memories. One must note what is being said by listening mindfully and noting hesitation, pauses, silence, facial expressions, body language, and, most importantly, what is omitted (Adams et al., 2017). While I prompted the participants to engage, I wanted to drive the conversations in any direction. I believe this would detract from the authenticity of any autobiographical understanding that might have derived from these interactions. These memory-sharing retellings aim not to get the story right but "to incorporate others' memories into the body of our own and then again into others' through reperformance" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 53). If the value of autoethnography is in its reflection of lived experience and identity, these memory-sharing conversations must hold true to those tenets.

For this research, conversations were held with my mother, former teachers, mentors and colleagues. These individuals were identified as co-constructors of my lived experiences. Through this, I aim to understand other views of my lived experiences related to my teaching of controversial issues and my context of the independent boys' school to add truth to my tentative conclusions. These conversations were documented with notes and used to enrich the narrative presented in this study. After writing my narrative, these co-constructors of experience read my narrative to add a layer of analysis and ensure verisimilitude.

Conversations with former learners are needed if I construct a narrative that truly reflects my teaching of controversial issues. Unstructured topical interviews, structured as reflective conversations, have value and reveal insights previously unseen (Adams et al., 2017). As a researcher, I am the focus of my autoethnography, but through these discussions, my former learners are co-witnesses to my experience regarding my teaching of controversial issues. They can provide insight into my understanding of how I teach controversial issues (Adams et al., 2017). These conversations were conducted in the same way as described above. These co-witnesses were asked to read my narrative after it was written to add a layer of analysis and

55

ensure verisimilitude. These conversations were anonymous and voluntary. Pseudonyms were used to hide participants' identities. The pseudonyms used for my three co-witnesses of experience are Felix, Isaac and Jason, and they will remain anonymous using pseudonyms. They were asked to read my narrative and write letters of verisimilitude to augment my memory data.

(ii) Phase 2: Internal data and narrative constructions

Following the external data collection, I focused on representing my reflection and memory work as a personal narrative. Chang (2008) defines personal memory as the foundation of autoethnography because it gives insight into the current self and the complexity of what has come before. The question of truth and meaning regarding my ontological and epistemological assumptions outlined above, derived from the narrative, is significant. Narrative and narrative analysis are not valuable in the search for the truth. Due to the ever-changing nature of human identity and one's inability to completely recall events, thoughts, half-thoughts, decisions or unfulfilled plans, narrative cannot be a true representation of exact facts; rather, new understanding is obtained in the telling and retelling of narrative (Granger, 2011). In this regard, autoethnographers seek to create "aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience", but these descriptions are not factual (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 277). Since there can be no return to the original experience, experiential writing shifts the representation to presenting experience (Wall, 2008). The narrative is more than an incomplete reenactment of events; it is also fertile ground for the genesis of new understanding (Granger, 2011). I do not claim that my autoethnography will generate universal truths or objective facts; that is not my intention. By studying my subjective experience, I aim to draw readers into the context of my teaching and learning to give them an understanding of my reality. The data obtained in the initial stages of the research shaped the direction of my narrative, focusing on my teaching of controversial issues. I aimed for the process to be organic, and it followed the advice of Adams et al. (2017) to use meaningful pieces of literature to develop a narrative voice and character. I hope that the presentation of my narrative allows for personal and authentic understanding to emerge.

Writing short stories as my narrative follows from external data collection. A narrative can never be a factual recounting of events (Granger, 2011). Instead, this autoethnography aims to identify

56

meaning in "(non)-fictions" inspired by lived experience (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 64). The writing of my narrative was a two-part process. The first was the emic process of memory recollection (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). The data obtained from my internal data construction and artefacts were used to initiate the writing process. Reflection/writing should begin early, and throughout the research process, notes and diary entries should be kept to help navigate the process (Chang, 2008). I have kept an electronic journal and engaged in reflective writing throughout the research. The second part of my writing process, or the etic, is the actual writing of my narrative. In constructing my narrative, I aimed to construct the basic elements of storytelling, including narrative voice, context, plot, characters and dialogue (Adams et al., 2015).

My short stories are presented as a realist narrative. Realist narratives use perspectives to connect the reader to the experience (Adams et al., 2015), which is helpful in my autoethnography, where I seek to create a narrative that evokes an understanding of my lived experience as a white, cisgender, heterosexual male teacher. Chang (2008) highlights that finding your style to convey your narrative is crucial. I experiment with voice, style and structure as my study unfolds. Therefore, I interjected comments from my co-witnesses and co-constructors of experience to add nuance and complexity to my narrative. Furthermore, I included memories, written as realist narratives, distinct from the broader narrative to add depth to the narrative and, through this, echoes of truth.

3.7 Analysis of the narrative

Chang (2008) states that a systematic approach to analysing memories must be in place to develop an understanding from personal narratives. In turn, Hughes and Pennington (2017) describe how the analysis of personal narratives can generate meaning. They state that narrative can be deconstructed into metaphors and critical events that are analysed to create meaning. These metaphors and critical events are coded using broad concepts such as (and in the context of this study) controversial issues, teaching and learning in an independent boys' school. These memories are used to gain emic narratives subject to etic analysis from which understanding can be obtained (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). In this research, I analyse and reflect on memories

57

that contribute to my understanding of my teaching and learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, controversial issues and myself as a teacher (Malcolm et al., 2003). This memory work is then reproduced as a narrative that forms the body of this research. Once the data are categorised, a clear system for data analysis is needed (Chang, 2008). This analysis system is rooted in the theories described in my conceptual framework. The following steps are used, adapted from Chang's (2008) model and integrated with the complexity theory described in my conceptual framework.

Identifying cultural themes that are analysed using established theories specific to those themes
Identifying and analysing controversial issues using fundamental theories identified in my literature review
An analysis of the connections between the multiple constituents that influence my teaching of masculine identity using complexity theory, as outlined in my theoretical framework
An analysis of inclusion and exclusion
Connect the past to the present
Contextualise broadly
Frame with theory

Table 3.1: The process for constructing meaning from my narrative (Chang, 2008)

Meaning was extracted from my narrative using these suggestions. My evocative autoethnography does not intend to generate universally applicable generalisations, but the experiences presented in telling and retelling new understanding are synthesised and linked to prominent cultural themes (Granger, 2011). My narrative is analysed, discussed using this framework, and presented as short stories. Through this, I identify controversial issues in my practice, link these to cultural themes and note what has been included and omitted in my narrative. Using complexity theory as my framework aims to identify the multiple connections between these influences on my practice and how they contribute to my teaching of controversial

issues. Since autoethnography is not linear, I identify the connection between my internal and external data and explain the links between similarities and differences. Lastly, I frame the data with existing theories to place my research in the context of the research field. The process is not a narcissistic exercise. I use the multiple layers of my analysis to ensure verisimilitude. Through the study of self, I provide a window into my context and the teaching of controversial issues.

3.8 Sampling

The selection of individuals who could contribute to my study as co-witnesses and co-constructors of experience required particular care. Purposeful sampling is used in this research to select participants in both sets of interviews. Purposeful sampling requires the researcher to focus on cases that strongly represent the phenomena of interest. In this case, the chosen individuals have shared the experiences presented in my narrative (Maree, 2016). Only specific individuals were chosen because they are co-constructors and co-witnesses of my narrative regarding teaching controversial issues and can provide insight into them. Sampling must produce participants willing to share valuable insights and conform to what Shaheen and Pradhan (2019, p. 26) call "good informants". Intensity purposeful sampling allows me to select informants that are rich examples of the phenomena of interest (Patton, 2002). The decision about the relevant criteria rests with the researcher (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019).

The criteria for participant selection in this study must be shared experience with the study's focus: me. I selected participants who are co-witnesses to my experiences as a learner, student-teacher and teacher of controversial issues within an independent boys' school. Some are former teachers, some are colleagues, and some are former learners. I hope this diverse group of participants will allow for the development of rich external data. While I was initially set on a group of co-witnesses and co-constructors, I have grown as a teacher as the study has unfolded. Through discussions with co-constructors of experience and my supervisor, the group has grown to include co-constructors of experience that I engage with outside the classroom and with newly matriculated students who have witnessed my teaching as I have engaged with literature on controversial issues.

3.9 Trustworthiness

The final phase of my research required me to establish trustworthiness by verisimilitude. Traditional models of academic rigour question the academic nature of autoethnography (Le Roux, 2017). If its findings are problematic, the research's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability and authenticity must be addressed. Additionally, the question of collaboration and verisimilitude must be raised. Does the auto in autoethnography mean that the researcher must isolate themselves from others? The answer is an obvious no. If the self is to be studied as part of a context and context is an extension of the self, then others must be included in the study. Trustworthiness, confirmability and credibility are to be met through verisimilitude. For an autoethnography to have trustworthiness, it must have verisimilitude and ring true to the reader (Loh, 2013). Verisimilitude ensures trustworthiness and creates clarity and coherence in writing while linking the reader to the writer's experience (Denzin, 2018). Therefore, I had critical conversations with individuals who shared my lived experience and read and critically analysed my narrative, enhancing the dependability of the research. The subjective nature of my research as an analysis of my lived experience means that the findings cannot lead to a transferable universal understanding. Still, the study's value comes from its analysis of personal experience as a window into an individual's experience of social contexts. The study must resonate and seem plausible to the consumers to establish verisimilitude in a narrative study (Loh, 2013). Hence, the trustworthiness technique of member-checking, specifically peer and audience validation, was essential. I established verisimilitude in my context by assessing the narratives and events I transcribed. These key role-players wrote letters of verisimilitude that are included in the study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Edwards (2021) explains the difficulty of conducting autoethnography ethically. She explains that although autoethnography is used to explore the self authentically, notable ethical implications arise when individuals are represented within a researcher's autoethnography. Relational ethics should be a primary concern for the autoethnographer because writing about individuals reveals personal details or sensitive information, even when pseudonyms are used

(Ellis et al., 2011). One must find a careful balance in respecting individuals and their views and opinions, and when this cannot be done, recreating events in fictitious accounts presents a viable alternative to recreating realist accounts (Edwards, 2021). The following ethical considerations were considered when selecting participants for the critical discussions on the narrative events presented by this research, and those asked to read said narrative and provide verisimilitude.

Each participant was informed that I was constructing a narrative based on memory analysis of our shared experiences. They were asked for their consent to include my interpretation of these events. Each participant was informed that our critical discussions would be analysed and used to reconstruct my understanding of my historical narrative. Participants asked to read my narrative were asked for consent first and were required to consent for their critique to be used in the study. While participants were not asked to do anything that would put them in physical danger, an autoethnography is rooted in emotional experience. I forewarned the participants of the nature of the narrative events and let them read the narrative in private to minimise the danger of unexpected emotional experiences or embarrassment from experiencing an emotional response in front of me. The school where I teach, the university I attend and, most importantly, the learners in my classes, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants, and no dates are given for the events within the narrative that might cause harm. Participants were told how they were portrayed. If there was no way to portray the individuals in the narrative ethically, fictitious recreations of events are used to ensure anonymity (Edwards, 2021). In this way, fiction was used to hide the identities of individuals in the study. Complete transparency is used in the study to ensure that no deceptive practices are used. Additionally, ethical clearance was given by the University of Pretoria for completing the study (no. EDU205/21).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter is a roadmap for my methodology and research design. The ontological and epistemological assumptions, the rationale behind these assumptions, and how these assumptions aided me in addressing my research question were discussed. The links between my theoretical framework and the body of literature were explained. Furthermore, the literature on autoethnography as a methodology was explored. The methods, ethical considerations and

trustworthiness of autoethnographic research used in the study were stipulated. The following chapter presents my narrative and the data constructed using the methodology described here.

Chapter 4 - The Village Schoolmaster

4.1 Introduction

This chapter's title, taken from the Goldsmith poem, is not meant for self-admiration. No, I chose this title because I chose boys' education. A piece of me wanted to be the stern and learned schoolmaster whom the village (my school and community) marvelled at. As will unfold later in this chapter, I grew up on this. It went hard with me, but it was all I knew. I write this chapter not because I had a road to Damascus moment but rather because I have been shaped by the last three decades of democracy since 1994, as schools such as mine have—shaped by a tertiary education at a South African university and by people outside the world of boys' schools. I attended a boys' school that was different from the boys' school my father attended forty years earlier. I teach in a boys' school that differs from the one I attended only a decade ago. Yet, as much as they are different, they remain the same. The South African boys' school model has irrevocably changed my identity. My current attempts to teach controversial issues to boys in the same system follow in the chapter below and are based on the data constructed using artefact analysis and critical conversations with co-witnesses and co-constructors of experience.

I returned to my school to take on a teaching job, not unlike Thomas Gray, who, in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*[3] that schoolboys play, ignorant of the world awaits them and thus, "Alas, regardless of their doom, The little victims play! No sense have they of ills to come, Nor care beyond to-day". It would be naive to call the immensely privileged learners in my class victims, but they do have little understanding of what awaits them. They are as privileged in the South African context as those learners described in the poem. I, too, had little understanding of the realities of South African life as a schoolboy. I believed that becoming a schoolteacher would make me that village schoolmaster. I did not understand the controversy of my environment and that what content educators must teach if they are to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their students or the controversy surrounding me.

---

3 A boys' school in the United Kingdom

If my school, and other schools like it, are to have any place in this new democracy, they cannot remain islands of privilege with no connection to the world around them. It cannot continue producing learners whose ambitions do not extend beyond fulfilling the promise of their privilege. It cannot continue to be led by schoolteachers who perpetuate the prejudices of the South African independent boys' school of the last two centuries.

Considering the previous chapters, this autoethnographic narrative, as short stories, attempts to personify the wilderness of my experience (Spinazola et al., 2019). It is not a sanctified document of truth (Spinazola et al., 2019). Instead, it explores my private sphere in my context (Chang, 2008). My narrative is linear and interspersed with short stories written as moments of conscious reconstruction based on memory work that cannot be accurately represented as a paragraph in a linear narrative. I included diary entries and university assignments to ensure that my writing takes the form of multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis, 1999), which Chapter Five's analysis will support. The narrative below is partly inspired by constructive critical engagements with crucial role-players in my lived experience.

In embarking with me on this journey of the self, I ask that you remember that this narrative is most likely as flawed as its author. However, the goal of its writing was never to find the objective truth or make bold claims about the nature of boys' school education and the teaching of controversial issues. Instead, it is to gain understanding so that some meaning might be made from lived experiences regarding teaching and learning in the context of the independent boys' school and that the experiences of teachers and learners and the teaching of controversial issues might be better understood. As Longfellow (1838) writes in his *Psalm of Life*,

"Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day."

4.2 Blazers and baggy caps

My connection with independent boys' schools began in September 2006. I was accepted into a prestigious boys' preparatory school in Pretoria in grade 6. I was overwhelmed by the prospect of attending the school. We attended an open day, and I recall being shocked by the incredible facilities: smart boards, a design and technology lab, a classroom fitted with ovens for culinary lessons, an art room and, to my delight, an enormous library.

While excited to attend the school, with its mushroom-like baggy caps and smart grey blazers that give this short story its name, my parents continuously reminded me that we were "not like the other families" at the school. I could attend the school because my mother had taken a teaching post at the girls' school down the road—the sister school. Traditionally, the children of staff at independent schools are given a discounted rate at a small family of like-minded schools whose history is connected. I was reminded by my mother that I would not have the things other boys had, and I would not be able to do some of the things other boys had the opportunity to do.

I was introduced to the elitism of these institutions before I even arrived at the school. Before being admitted, I was required to write an entrance examination. My mother had always told me I was a bright boy, but I was quite out of my depth writing that exam. I remember sitting in an office writing the paper, ten years old, bawling my eyes out because I believed I was failing and would not gain entrance to the illustrious school. As a teacher, I now know that these exams are more to judge where a prospective student is regarding the academic standard and are seldom used to bar a boy child from entering, but at ten, all I felt was that I had let my parents down. A teacher came into the room and kindly handed me a tissue before asking if I was finished.

I was permitted to join the school and quickly immersed myself in the culture. I looked just like the other White boys, perhaps a bit shabbier, as my uniform was second-hand from the back of the school's uniform shop. I played sports, attended classes and got into my fair share of trouble. However, I did not excel at the most crucial thing at this laddish English boy's school: sports. I

was a late bloomer with little interest or penchant for the most critical sport in the world of the school, cricket. I was a good swimmer and enjoyed rugby, but I was not good enough to excuse my ineptitude with a bat and hardball.

"Well, I did notice, and I wasn't sure if it was because was a boys' school or because it was private that you really struggled when you went to an all-boys school, academically and emotionally, you got physically sick. I had to keep taking you to the paediatrician often. That's a feature from school. And your confidence definitely took a huge knock in those years."

My mother's words above help paint a picture of the grade 5 boy entering this elite space. Bullying is a feature in every school, more so in boys' schools. My mother was unaware that I was not physically ill but was feigning illness to avoid having to go to school. I made an easy target. I joined the school late; I came from a family with different financial means and was a shy and timid boy with bright red hair. Surprisingly, none of this was the focus of the ridicule. Much to my surprise, I was told I was gay.

I am not. At 28, I identify as a cisgender, heterosexual married man. At 12 years old, I did not identify as anything besides an aspiring Pokémon trainer/Jedi Knight[4]. Despite this, I vividly remember the hierarchy of our 40-boy group being regulated by homophobic slurs. My classmates circulated crude and wildly anatomically inaccurate drawings. I participated in this wholeheartedly. Describing inability on the sports field as "gay" or letting another boy know that he was a "faggot"[5] were commonplace, even for twelve-year-olds. This overt homophobia was coupled with the difficulty of navigating the changes in our bodies as we hit puberty. I clearly remember being delighted when the school matron allowed us to swim in the pool on hot summer days, which meant we would not have to use the open showers when I was left to stay in a boarding house overnight. Boys who did not proudly display the spoils of puberty when changing for sports practices were labelled as homosexual. The term "*SPUD*", from Van Der Ruit's (2005)[6] novel of the same name, rose to prominence while I was in grade 7. As a late

---

4 Both

5 A commonly used homophobic slur.

6 Van Der Ruit's protagonist, a boy attending a South African Boys' school in the 1990s is called SPUD due to his late sexual development.

bloomer, this was a big deal to me as a twelve-year-old.

The transition to high school coincided with my parents' financial woes and my father's ever-worsening battle with alcoholism. Already set apart from my peers, as my parents were not astronomically wealthy, despite being White middle-class and far wealthier than most South Africans, especially Black South Africans, my alcoholic father drew attention to me and my family. Independent boys' schools enjoy pomp and ceremony and I remember my mother in tears as we drove away from a grade 7 Leaver's Dinner, where my father had become so intoxicated that he could barely walk, making loud and inappropriate jokes in front of other parents who seemed, to me anyway, to have perfect lives. My interactions with teachers made me feel like an outsider in this elite world. My mother remembers:

"but certainly, the headmaster was awful, and I did feel it with the teachers. I kind of felt they gave you less because - and I was almost paying full fees then - it wasn't as though you were getting a freebie, and I was paying three-quarters of the school fees. But it was because I wasn't from the same social class as the others that I felt you were not as well treated as the others."

Simultaneously, the question of independent boys' high schools and their prestige became increasingly important to me. Just as independent boys' high schools measure their prestige by the number of international universities their alumni attend, their prep schools measure their worth by the number of scholarships their boys receive from estimable boys' colleges. Ironically, scholarships that ought to be given to learners who cannot afford to attend these schools are often bestowed on boys who attend exceptionally expensive prep schools. Therefore, word of mouth circulated the list of acceptable high schools in our grade. I am confident the same thing happened among parents next to cricket fields and at Parents' Association meetings. High Schools gave presentations to our year group and bid on the best of us as if they were prized thoroughbreds.

There was no question of where I would attend. My parents would receive the same discounted rate at the nearest boys' independent school. Funnily enough, the ranking of these schools used the same criteria as our organisation as individuals. Those of us who were attending independent

schools were told by those attending the local boys' former model-c schools that our school was gay. Insults like those boys have "zippers on the back of their shorts" and "Did you hear that school has 700 boys but only 300 beds?" became common. Replies included, "you are going to disappear at that school. You will become a number", and the very private school, "you are going there because your dad works for mine". Out of the fifty boys in our grade, I can only remember two going to non-monastic schools, which are model C. Of course, it was expected that one we attend a school with a similar ethos. Whether the high schools we attended were independent or not, they were all far more similar to our prep school than they were different.

The blazers and baggy caps of my primary school years were my introduction to the world of elite independent boys' schools. They shaped my understanding of what was "acceptable" behaviour and what the "correct" expectations were in terms of gaining entry to the club.

4.3 Honours ties and rugby boots

The high school I entered was just as prestigious as my prep school—a small school in a predominantly Afrikaans city boasting 550 boys. Attending this elite school was an enormous burden on my family. Again, I was reminded that I could only attend this school because of the discounted rate my family was receiving. My mother recalls:

"I remember getting really quite scared when I bought your school uniform, which at that stage cost R4000 and I thought how am I going to cope with all these extras? And I remember going to parents' nights in your house (schoolhouse) on a Sunday and feeling quite out of things."

Despite the evident financial and social strain on my family, I was excited to move on from my prep school, and I quickly found there was a lot to learn; however, not in the classroom, as reason would have you believe. I can remember very little from my grade 8 year in the academic sense other than that I did not perform particularly well. There were unwritten rules and traditions that, when broken, were reinforced in often violent ways. Privileges were reserved for

68

boys in higher forms[7], such as walking on grass, wearing specific ties, standing in areas, and speaking in places. Duties such as carrying bags, polishing shoes, making beds, preparing tea, running the bounds and fetching things were expected of those in lower forms for those in higher forms. The "fagging" system was another feature of everyday life. The arrangement has its roots in British Public schools, pairing a junior boy, the fag, with a senior boy, the fag master. The fag is required to perform various menial duties, such as polishing shoes and fetching books, in exchange for the senior boy's protection. The institution has changed the name of the arrangement to the "mentorship system", but to the boys, it still carries its former moniker. To say that much of it was not fun would be a lie. I relished the opportunity to be a part of something, to belong. I revelled in the structure, attending chapel services and formal assemblies in my "number ones"—our blazers and ties.

Simultaneously, life at home was growing increasingly more challenging, and the school offered me an escape. My father was drinking more than ever, and it was clear to me that my parents' marriage was under strain. This influenced my schooling. In my mother's words:

"personal circumstances at home were so difficult in your… especially with grade eight or nine years that I think that also had a huge impact on your academic achievement."

I remember a particularly trying day:

My face had been sunburnt again. This happened almost every Saturday. After playing a full rugby game for my under-fifteen team myself, I had spent the rest of the day supporting other teams. Finally, when all the other fixtures had been played, the day culminated with the first-team rugby game.

It was with immense pride that I jumped up and down on the stands with my schoolmates, cheering on the older boys. It was a regular mid-winter afternoon on the Highveld where the dryness of the season coupled with the warmth of the African sun to produce a lip-cracking heat that I have not encountered anywhere else. Hence the sunburn.

---

7 Schools, such as mine, frequently refer to Forms rather than the South African Grade.

Despite the heat, we wore our blazers with pride. Cheering our heroes on and belittling the opposition.

"Scrum College scrum!"

"Hey number three, why did you eat all the pies, you fat bastard!"

"Swing low, sweet chariot! Coming forth to carry me home!"[8]

Once the battle had subsided, we sang our school hymn and then were allowed to depart. I have always found it strange when people are shocked to hear that the school week at boys' schools runs until late Saturday afternoon.

I waited in the school parking lot to be picked up. Unlike my far wealthier schoolmates, I did not have a cell phone so I hoped that my parents would remember that the game ended at two o'clock and were on their way. I knew my mother would be angry that I had forgotten to put on sunblock. As was always the case, my angry sunburn and bright red hair served to produce a rather striking appearance.

The line of Land Rovers, Porches, BMWs and Mercedes Benz's that stretched out of the school gate began to thin just as, much to my shame, my father came careening through the gates in his white Toyota Tazz, billowing smoke and missing a front bumper. Trying to ignore the scoffs and snickering, I jumped into the car as fast as I could.

I could tell my father had been drinking. He wasn't supposed to drink anymore. Not since he had returned from rehab. There was a silver travel mug in the Tazz's cupholder. It wasn't filled with coffee.

I ducked down as we left the school and tried not to be seen as we motored away from the school. I checked my sunburn in the car's mirror.

---

8 The English Rugby Teams traditional song

70

"Hi Dad"

"Hey Cal"

We sat in silence. A lump formed in my throat as I saw the tears start to form in my father's eyes.

"Don't worry, Dad, I won't tell Mom."

My mother's belief that our circumstances at home influenced my academic achievement is reflected in my school reports. However, in my mind, I kept the turmoil at home distinctly separate from school. I wanted nothing more than to assimilate seamlessly into the space. I followed the rules and participated in whatever I could. I could never participate in the "extras", as my mother called them—the outrageously expensive overseas tours or extra murals—but I played sport and performed on the stage. I remember choosing water polo, partly because my father had played it at school but mostly because I was tired of being the boy with the cheapest and worst cricket bat. I was not particularly talented and did not make the A side in any of my sports as a junior, which is a crucial factor in deciding where one sits in the school's social hierarchy.

Headmaster
Callan is a lovely boy but I am not happy with the standard that he achieved in his academic work. Callan is better than this and I would encourage him to be more ambitious in the term ahead. We have most certainly not seen the best of Callan yet!
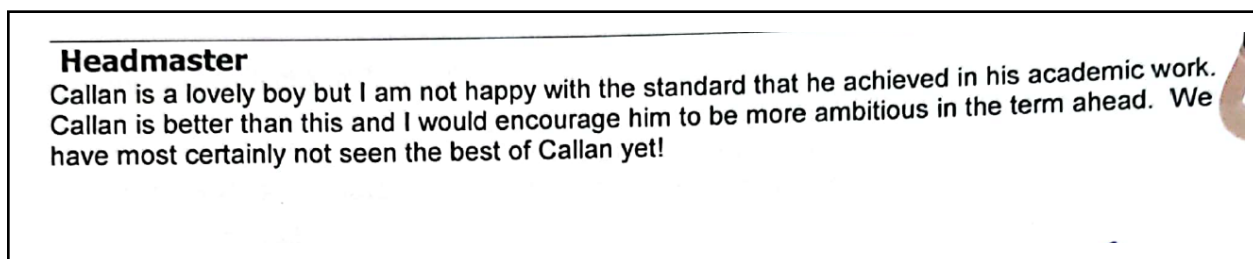
Figure 4.1: The headmaster's comment on my midyear Grade 8 report

Initially, I was as shy as I had been in prep school. I was a little overweight and quickly found that being a "ginger"[9] made one an easy target. However, there were clear groups within the

---

9 An unfortunate name given to those boys with red hair.

school. The wealthy White boys played for the A sporting sides, and their mothers or drivers collected them immediately after school or practices. My parents both worked, and I was frequently left at school until the early evening. Almost all the Black boys, many of whom were the children of influential politicians and business people, played basketball, which at the time did not demand the same social currency as the more traditional sports and were frequently left at school until late in the evening. I moved between groups quite well and made some close friends.

I began high school in 2009, fifteen years after the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools. No teacher ever laid a finger on me; however, what happened between boys was unregulated violence. Arriving late would result in one being required to perform some form of physically taxing punishment. Running or contorting one's body into straining positions were most common. Failing this, a kick, a punch or a whack with a belt from a senior boy would suffice. There were no formal canings or beatings, and the rules of engagement were clear to all involved. Physical violence between boys of the same age was also common. I carried bruises on my arms and legs throughout my schooling career. Again, the unspoken rules were understood. Striking the arms, legs, stomach or back of the head was fair game. There was enough to enforce hierarchy, but it never escalated to the point where it could not be brushed off as boys being boys. Organised fights between boys were arranged in spaces away from teachers' eyes but never without "approval" from the combatants first. One of my former teachers and colleagues, Jack, recalls that

"Some of my saddest times at the school was around the cultures in boarding houses that were for me particularly toxic. And those were often perpetuated by staff. And so, this whole idea of of of like a culture of silence, this insidious kind of bullying that seems hard to root out - this pecking order and hierarchy that creates almost like a Lord of the Flies kind of environment at times."

Jack's memory of the school reflects mine. The most bizarre feature of the school was that the staff had no formal discipline system in place. I think I received break detention once or twice over five years; otherwise, the enforcement of school rules was left to the prefects. The formal discipline system was called drills, some relic from a time when schools were required to make

72

soldiers for the Empire rather than members of a democracy. We were required to exercise physically, and running the school's boundaries was the most common. The more sadistic prefects cooked up other punishments. Crawling across fields and standing in a blazer, staring at the wall of the school chapel in the Highveld heat, were probably my least favourite. In hindsight, that this happened under the noses of staff is unbelievable. Maybe this is a presentist mindset; maybe my teachers thought this arrangement was better than the beatings they had received or dished out. Jack remembers:

"So institutional culture. And I think it has a lot to do with masculinity. And that whole narrative, you know, like, suck it up, or hardship develops resilience, instead of making a space safer, where people don't have to become resilient, you sort of saying, well, you know, suck it up, like just get through it, and the kind of gendered language that then gets used both from boys and staff members. Things like 'Don't be gay,' 'Don't be a pussy,' 'man up' all that kind of gendered language that creates a notion of masculinity. That, you know, it feels like kids have to assimilate into that kind of space."

The use of language Jack refers to was commonplace. Just as in primary school, words like gay and faggot were used to revile any sign of perceived weakness—a lack of willingness to compete, a close friendship between boys, expressing emotion other than anger or laughter in response to very specific boyish humour, ineptitude on the sports field. They were even used to distinguish the difference between day scholars and boarders. The school was split between those boys who lived in the city and those who stayed in school boarding houses. The boarders frequently referred to the day scholars or day boys as gay boys. On the sports field, if a player scored a try or goal that the opposition believed to be down to luck or did not require a great deal of effort, it would be called a gay boy try, and its validity would be questioned. This barrage of measures of masculinity was particularly common in our junior year of high school. They never went away, but once the hierarchy was firmly established, it was more a case of maintaining its hold.

Race and its role in regulating our interactions was far more apparent at high school than in primary school, from my privileged White viewpoint. There were very few Black teachers, and

the student body was still disproportionately White. Racism was overt and surreptitious. Far fewer Black families attended sports events or artistic performances, something that was chalked up as a lack of interest on their part and not on the school's obvious Whiteness. Racial slurs were used as frequently as homosexual slurs to regulate hierarchy. It was a running joke that the school would elect one Black deputy head boy as a rule. No explanation was given for this joke that I remember. It could have been our reasoning for why a Black student was elected. Colourism and discrimination against those boys whose skin was darker than others were also prevalent. Once a year, the school held a popular vote to elect the boy with the darkest skin. Horrifically, a Black school shoe was held up against the contestants' faces as a measure. The boy who received the loudest applause was elected. The student body would hand out similar awards to the fattest boy, the boy with the most impressive physique and the ugliest boy.

At school assemblies run by the matrics, which we referred to as the head boy's assembly, the sexual exploits of boys were either boasted or ridiculed. The complexion of the women described in these interactions was often brought up and sometimes compared to that of the boys in the audience. I am certain there were many other explicit and subtle examples of racism, which, as a White male, do not stand out in my memory. I, of course, participated in all of this. It was normalised. Again, "boys will be boys". Whether they were Black or White, they were all part of this collective masculine identity.

As time passed, I began to succeed in high school. I grew in confidence and stature from my third form year. I began to find some success on the sports field, in the classroom and on the stage. I played first-team rugby, received various honours and was elected a prefect. I was a little unorthodox in that I was both a drama geek and a rugby player, but this only meant I had more honours to place on my blazer. My father, sober and healing, was proud of me. My mother, a teacher, was also immensely proud. My mother began teaching at my school, which alleviated many of our financial woes, as I could then attend the school for a vastly discounted rate, even less than we had been paying before. However, I had finally begun to fit into this world of elitism and prestige. I found that I could traverse the hierarchical ladder, using success and acknowledgement from the institution. Rugby was the most influential of these tools. To play first-team rugby at a South African boys' school is to achieve gladiatorial status. While my

school, like all South African boys' schools, was sporting mad, rugby was king. I loved the game. I have always loved contact sports, as they allowed me to use strength and effort rather than finesse and nuanced skills. However, the sport's real appeal is what it gave me off the field. While my mother was perhaps prouder of my achievements in the classroom and on the stage, these did not carry the same weight as the success within the four white lines of the rugby field. This success is reflected in a school report below.

Headmaster	Mr Tom Hamilton
Superb! Callan remains one of the most courageous, committed and respected members of our school community and he has once again made excellent contributions in every aspect of school life this term. An exemplary leader and marvellous role model, Callan was an inspiration and a source of strength for so many other boys. His courage and intelligence shone like a beacon in multiple contexts and for Callan to close the term as the recipient of Full Colours for Rugby is a tremendous achievement in addition to all that he did in our Cultural Week. His academic work was solid and I expect him to do considerably better in his closing term here - he deserves all the success that comes his way. We are privileged to have a young man of Callan's calibre in our school community!	

Figure 4.2: The headmaster's comment on my midyear Grade 12 report

Leaving school was made into quite an event. There were valedictions, prize givings and final assemblies. My perception of the institution was overwhelmingly positive. In my eyes, the barbarism of my early years was well worth it if it meant that I was to become who I believed myself to be then. I was accepted into a Bachelor of Science degree programme at one of the country's most distinguished universities, and all looked good. The privileges afforded to me and my peers by the nature of attendance at the College were explained repeatedly throughout our journey through high school. I was to become an Old Boy, the next step in the privileged Anglophile's journey to manhood. Housemasters' and Heads' farewell speeches foretold our future success and reminded us to cherish our memories. We were inducted as Old Boys and told never to forget who we were and where we came from. These steps have shaped my understanding of what it means to be an educator and reflect my classroom dynamic. The rugby togs and honour ties of my formal secondary education have stayed with me and, like many of my colleagues who teach in a boys' school who are Old Boys themselves, continue to shape my

identity as an educator.

4.4 Cap and gown

As a schoolboy at one of the most expensive independent boys' schools in the country, I was continually reminded that university would be different to our sheltered environment. We would not be afforded the support we received from teachers and would have to learn to be independent. It was not that what made attending university a challenging transition for me. What made it challenging was that the value system engrained in me over my years as a schoolboy differed entirely from that I experienced when I entered tertiary education. The institution had celebrated their understanding of achievement, and I had shaped myself to it. My identity was built around my ability to knock over other boys while running with a rugby ball, the awards I had obtained, the honours I had received. I suddenly found myself in a space where individuality was a core feature in the academic space; conformity was not celebrated.

Away from organised sport and the things that had defined me left me feeling rudderless. Being in a toxically masculine space for as long as I had, however, left its marks. My measures of masculine identity had been defined by bodies, strength and imagined sexual exploits. In hindsight, the development of my eating disorder and body dysmorphia seems like a natural extension of how my value system emerged at school. I became obsessed with exercise and my diet. I counted calories, prepped meals, and eventually began purging by making myself sick after meals. My Diary entries below show how challenging the transition after school was for me. It led to depression and therapy. It influenced how I engaged with others, coached teams, and spoke about the masculine to other men and boys. These hidden controversies reveal the influence of my schooling in an independent boys' school on my understanding of masculine identity—an influence that is reproduced in my teaching practice.

My chief worry is the lack of sleep. Lying awake for hours nervously trying to go to sleep. Having heart palpitations and crying spells. I dont know what's causing it but it cant be good. Maybe it's a culmination of everything.

I am constantly obsessed with what people think of me and my body. That's why i see myself as fat and go to the gym three times a day. My relationship with the gym, while improving, is still not a healthy one. If i miss gym or eat unhealthily my self-worth plummets. I didnt stress to the Dr enough how much i am bugged about my self-image. I told mom though and she's probably told the whole world.

I love my family more than anything in the world. I know that's cliche but i do. Recently though i feel a bit estranged from my dad. He doesn't talk to me like he used to. He's more closed, more reserved. Instead I find myself closer to mom than ever. I like when she looks after me and feels sorry for me. I get angry at myself when i crave peoples pity. I shouldn't want that. That's for weak people. I have this image for myself as a strong man. A righteous man. An intelligent and fit man. Dad would disagree. He would tell me that that's pride and that I should surrender to God and that humility is the path to serenity. I disagree. While I admit that humility is key and it falls into the perfect image of myself I also think pride is important. I have little in terms of physical appearance and crave affirmation which wouldn't be the case if I had more self-pride.
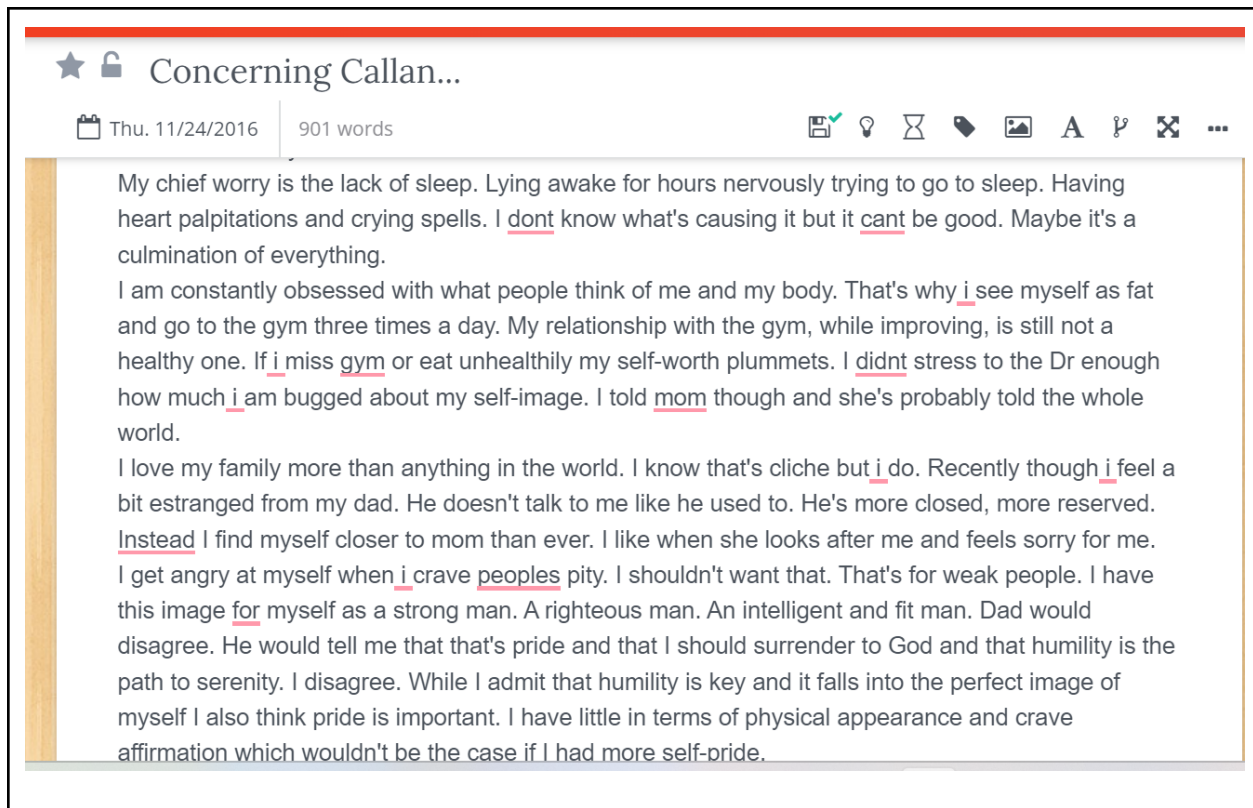
Figure 4.3: Diary entry dated 24 November 2016

The diary entry above reveals the difficulty adjusting to the world outside my independent boys' school experience. The fact that I kept a diary at all was inspired by a comment made by a schoolteacher who mentioned that great men kept diaries. His example was that great symbol of colonial might: Sir Winston Churchill. However, as a young man away from his sheltered world for the first time, my means for validation and measure of self-worth were gone. I had shaped my identity around the institution's values, only to find that they did not translate to the space in which I found myself, which manifested as depression, anxiety and an eating disorder. As described in the diary entry above, my self-worth was linked to my physical appearance. I became dangerously obsessed with my body and what it looked like. The "Dr" referenced in the diary entry was a psychiatrist my parents recommended. Interestingly, even in this narcissistic self-obsession, the theme of masculinity is front and centre—the image I wanted for myself was "A strong man. A righteous man. An intelligent and fit man". The diary entry below reveals my lack of purpose beyond the obsession with the physical. I explain that I had been to the gym

77

three times in one day and was still obsessed with what I had eaten. The identity I had formed regarding the sports field was gone, yet the measures of masculinity forged through my assimilation into a boys' school remained.

★ 🔒 Tired but talkative

Save now
✔ Saved 7 years ago

📅 Mon. 11/28/2016 | 170 words

💡 ⧖ 🏷 🖼 A ⅄ ⤢ ⋯

Tiring day. Three gym sessions. Feeling good about the work done but not about how much I ate for dinner. It was too much.
Sat in the sun too much and got a little sun burnt and was then was tired the whole day.
Spent the day driving people around. Was irritating.
Still feeling a lack of purpose in my life beyond gym. Now really feeling a desire for more in life. I mean a girlfriend and a social life in general. I don't know where to start though. I don't want to hang out with Themba's friends and I am too embarrassed to ask Craig. Maybe I should join a youth group. I just need more out of life.
Got nervous because a list was put on ClickUp of people whose History exams didn't go through. My lecturer phoned me and it was a simple error and we sorted it out.
Dad is in Australia and I am missing him. Rest of the family is getting on my nerves.

Figure 4.4: Diary entry dated 28 November 2016

I chose to study teaching because I imagined myself as a classic village schoolmaster. I envisioned myself as a history teacher, beloved by his students for his wit and humour. I imagined myself as a principal of a boys' school, in full academic dress and with idiosyncrasies that the boys and staff loved. I have not entirely abandoned this dream. I must admit that my current teaching identity is more a marriage of this initial dream and my attempts at becoming a teacher who can make a meaningful difference in my community. However, my time at university and some of the students I was lucky enough to study alongside irreversibly changed my understanding of an effective teacher. My studies away from the boys' school space have shaped my teaching of controversial issues and understanding of my context. Lecturers and curriculum were challenging me in a tertiary education institution, not without its colonial burden but one far more willing to present the realities of South African life.

78

Naturally, I found solace in the familiar. At the university's education campus, many former monastic boys' school pupils were looking to pursue careers in teaching or sports coaching. I became friends with many of them. However, I could not hide from the questions in lectures and assignments. I took history, English and psychology, which forced me into moments of disequilibrium where I was required to question my beliefs. I attended methodology lectures where lecturers discussed the need to prepare students for active participation in a democratic system. Historiography assignments focused on marginalised voices. In English literature modules, I was expected to study African literature. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) marked the first time I saw colonialism from a "land to the boat" perspective. Many lecturers became examples of educators who questioned the overarching or accepted narrative around controversial issues relating to race and class that I was taught at school. They became academic role models who, through practice, revealed the potential of education that had, up until that point, been little more than a bumper sticker or one-liner in my understanding of teaching—all the while, I was attempting to create the picture of what sort of educator I was to become.

My first actual engagement with the teaching of controversial issues occurred during my teaching practicals. My initial school placements fell through, and I could leverage the privileges afforded to me through my connections as an Old Boy to choose two private schools as the sites for my teaching practicals. My ability to do this highlights the privileges one buys when one attends an independent school.

Introduction

The South African school history curriculum is complex and emotive for all involved in both its construction and for those teaching it to young South Africans. These young South Africans enter the classroom with a pre-existing narrative of the topics covered by the curriculum, formulated by their own experiences, the narrative told by their parents and close community and the growing accessibility to information in the digital era. The new history teacher, therefore, must navigate a minefield of emotive and controversial topics whilst trying to ensure that the necessary historical skills are learnt, and that all perspectives are acknowledged and respected even though they must be analysed critically and evaluated for reliability. This is a momentous task for the new and experienced teacher alike, and requires constant self-examination and regulation of internal-bias and subjectivity. All teaching requires preparation and professional development, but South African history teaching requires the teacher to analyse themselves before the engagement with source-material or the learners themselves, in order to ensure that they are willing and capable of respecting and managing the multiple perspectives expressed by the learners.

One does not need to look far in order to identify which parts of the curriculum could be controversial, and why they lead to heated and emotive debate within the classroom context. Considering South Africa's history, and the lingering effects of an unequal, segregated and violent past, it becomes evident that the learner is faced with a host of potentially controversial topics. Not only that, but South Africa's segregated past ensured that the multiple narratives of the past that have emerged were not constructed on shared experience, meaning that common ground on controversial issues is often scarce. The learners bring these varied perspectives on South African history into the classroom, creating the complex environment that teaching takes place in.

The controversial issues that the South African history teacher must deal with do not lie exclusively in the distant past. Themes and ideas addressed in the curriculum are still clearly evident in the learners' worlds. Issues such as Land-Expropriation-Without-Compensation, farm-murders, Black-Lives-Matter, free tertiary education, State Capture and hard-lined political groups on both sides of the spectrum are all closely linked to South Africa's painful past. These contemporary issues are also brought up in class and, just as with topics within the school

Figure 4.5: An image of an undergraduate teaching methodology module, JMH 300, an assignment that entitled "Personal Philosophy on Teaching History" 6 November 2018

This extract from a final year assignment reveals some understanding of the South African landscape and my budding interest in teaching controversial issues. However, this desire to be an effective teacher of controversy was rooted purely in theory until I began teaching practicals at my former high school. As I have said, I used the resources at my disposal as an Old Boy and arranged with the school and the university that I could complete my practical at the prestigious boys' school. The school was attempting a metamorphosis. Management was actively trying to

initiate a process of reflection that would help engender more belonging in the staff and student body. Conferences were held, and staff members were encouraged to share their stories. It was, initially, inspiring. I was, once again, thrown into disequilibrium, as the future of my dream to become a classic schoolmaster was shaken by stories of discrimination and control. Stories of marginalisation and secretive coverups were brought to light, and I found myself questioning my education and reevaluating the teachers I had idolised.

I remember:

"I think that we have to say that a boy from this school is a sexist."

"I don't feel seen."

"I know that often you don't mean it, but…"

"I do not feel that I have a voice".

The university's teaching practical office had dropped me. The school where I was meant to complete my teaching experience had let the university know that they no longer had space for a student teacher, but due to oversight, the office hadn't let me know. So, seeing an opportunity to get into a top boys' independent school, I asked the high school that I attended if I could volunteer my services in their English department. The university office was so happy that they didn't have to arrange a practical for me that they agreed.

So, like a grade one boy on his first day of school, I arrived at my alma mater. I looked like an Old Boy: short-back-and-sides haircut, an Old Boy's tie and pointed leather shoes. I once heard someone say that they can always tell if a man went to a South African boys' school by their colour palate—black, brown, grey, white and navy blue. I certainly wasn't an exception.

I nervously entered the staffroom. Looked around. Gave a few awkward nods and waves to my former teachers.

81

It was the day before the start of term. Traditionally, teachers meet on this day to joke about how short the holiday was, complain about holiday marking that they haven't started yet and then make plans to "hit the ground running." New to this performative exercise, I took part as best I could.

The day's proceedings began with a session on diversity and inclusion.

An external mediator, a short Black African man in his early thirties, led the session. He immediately cut through the outer layer of polite and phlegmatic discourse that so often characterises staff meetings and seminars within the boys' school space.

"Today, we are going to give voice to those who have been voiceless," he explained. "Because there is hurt here, decades of hurt."

As he went around the room, members of the staff stood and shared incredibly powerfully about what they had faced within the institution. Stories of marginalisation, neglect and pain. Tears were shed in a space that I felt would be entirely sanitised and academic.

There were other students in the session except, unlike them, I had shared in the stories being told. I had never been a teacher before, but I had been ignorant of the hurt being revealed. I was complicit in the perpetuation of the culture being described.

Since this event, many of my high school classmates have asked me what teaching was like at the school I attended. I think anyone would be uncomfortable navigating the transition. Former teachers become colleagues, and one gains an insight into the school's operations. However, my induction was staggering. The stories we told as Old Boys about our schooling had changed. The schoolmasters, who had become mythopoetic legends, were fleshed out in all their humanity for me when I began as a teacher. The veil was lifted so dramatically from the beginning that I was thrown into disequilibrium and have yet to put the pieces back together. That which I saw as infallible was, in many ways, farcical. I was not the only one who saw the day's events as

82

monumental. Jack remembers that:

"But I remember feeling then that this was the first time in our - in my time at the school, that we in a staff meeting like that had given marginalised people the chance to speak boldly and bravely. And so, I think in my own personal journey that took me, lightyears ahead of where I would have been. So that was a catalyst for me to I think, engage with a number of, particularly colleagues of colour around understanding my role in - not that I was asking them to do the work for me - but just in terms of understanding what I could do in my sphere of influence to shift things."

Another former colleague also noted that she saw the session as immensely positive:

"I think what stood out for me that day was that someone said that what the staff purport: that the school was, in other words, relational or accepting was actually a myth. And it kind of opened that whole, I think, space for people to start thinking and questioning. And especially people of colour, and in particular, women. I also remember that the men found it very difficult to keep quiet and in fact, were admonished for not speaking, not keeping quiet at one stage."

The events of that day, away from the classroom, would shape how I approached my teaching practice and postgraduate studies. I completed my undergraduate degree with distinction, and my former high school hired me straight out of varsity. Another stage of my life was to be shaped by the independent boys' school world. I was hired because I am an Old Boy, and the school had seen I was capable through my practicals. That nepotism, or "networking", as those privileged enough to be connected call it, was the route to my appointment and has been a source of guilt throughout my short career. It has fed self-doubt and frequently led to me feeling as though I was an imposter. Regardless of how I was appointed, I was determined to prove myself as a professional. I was determined to be an effective teacher. I naively believed I was equipped to effectively teach controversy in my subject and in a controversial space.

I wish I could say that all my shortcomings and narrow understandings were unwritten during my time at university. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I was fortunate enough to have mentors

and peers who allowed me to see beyond the borders of the space where I was raised. I remain a privileged, heterosexual White male with the opportunity to attend one of the best universities in the country. However, my attempts at becoming a better teacher in my space were born in my time at university. My time in a cap and gown was the beginning of my interest in teaching controversy and the first time I believed my education to be controversial.

4.5 Academic gown and a coach's whistle
(I) An initiation - the club

I was employed straight out of university as a full-time teacher in one of the country's most prestigious independent boys' schools: the school I had attended. I understand why. I know it was because of who I am, where I went to school, how I speak, who my parents are. I know that many other teachers are more qualified and talented. I entered the classroom as a half-baked teacher, straight back into the environment I had found so easy to be a part of and taught with many of the staff who had taught me. This club, the privileged and masculine world of boys' schools, is one I am a part of. This privilege is how I received my job. The reality of this has, at times, been difficult to swallow. At other times, it elevated my belief in my abilities. Many male teachers I interact with at boys' schools are a part of this club. Our staff comprises men who have attended boys' schools around the country. There is this unspoken belief that individuals from such schools are initiated and understand how things ought to be run. When faced with problems within our school's context, one of these men will respond with, "Well, when I was at (insert boys' school name here), we would …". As if this validates all that follows.

It would be remiss of me to paint a picture of a deeply unhappy staff member. In my interactions with co-constructors of experience, many stressed that they love the school. They acknowledge that it has its many faults, yet feel a sense of belonging:

Jack: *"I think, because on one level, I always say to people, The College was the place that like saved me, which sounds very dramatic."*

Mom: *"Everyone was really very different. And all those different elements together. made for a*

really good, creative, innovative, efficient department. And people were allowed to experiment and within reason, of course, and yeah, and I just, I just think, I grew so much during those years, I was always allowed to try new things. I was given quite a lot of free rein, by my headmasters to explore and, in fact, it was encouraged and to reinvent."

Bishop: *"And regardless of the challenges that are there, I still think it's a great school. It's a place where it's all about relationships. I think. I've never been to any other school where the staff and the boys are so close, so close that the boys you know*"

These are comments from three current or former colleagues of different races, two men and one woman, who clearly feel a close connection to the institution. This adds layers of complexity to the experience of the institution and reflects my challenging relationship with the independent boys' school model. Staff are looked after. Boys are encouraged to pursue excellence in many spaces. It is the space where I was raised and feels like home. Yet, how could I ignore the underlying systemic issues and the troublesome realities?

For the most part, the school remained the same. Boys attended chapel services multiple times a week, hair and uniform policies remained restrictive, and the values espoused by the institution were still similar to those ingrained in me. I reflected on what made me desirable to the institution when they hired me. I coached rugby successfully, performed duties diligently and dressed in a manner befitting of an educator at a top boys' school. I was a White, heterosexual, Christian man who appeared to be sensitive enough to engage with diversity, inclusivity and controversy in a way that reflected the institution's sensibility and practicality. In many ways, it was all I was.

Once again, I found myself within this system that celebrates a certain model of masculinity and Whiteness in its educators. The measures of identity I had strived to meet at school once again offered a means to establish my self-worth. The privilege my gender affords me within this space is clear. A former colleague remembers:

"Well, personally, as a woman, I felt that although I was given many opportunities, there were

also many that from which I was barred because I was female. I wasn't able to become in those days, a deputy head or a head of house. That route was barred to me."

However, my start to teaching coincided with the start of my postgraduate studies. While much of my honours degree focused on curriculum design and assessment protocols, much of it was startlingly novel. The most significant was a mock research project that marked my first engagement with autoethnographic writing, which helped me direct my desire to become a more effective teacher. The teaching of controversial issues first emerged as the focus of my postgraduate studies. I had a caring and patient lecturer who indulged my desire to better myself as an educator and introduced me to the reflective writing process. Snippets of a rudimentary attempt at a rationale for autoethnographic writing are included in this study and reveal a sincere, if naive, desire to grow to become an effective teacher. Continuing my studies while re-entering the boys' school space forced me to reflect on what it means to be an effective teacher of controversy when it would have been far easier to assimilate back into the dominant culture.

As already explored, the institution I was teaching at was amid a reflective process where a professional development programme was used to address underlying systemic issues. The focus of this process was a history of racial discrimination. This decision to address underlying systemic issues made me feel as if I was part of something bigger than only the teaching of a prescribed curriculum. However, I do not know if the attempts at reflecting on the existing culture were as well-received by other staff, particularly the White men. A former colleague notes that:

"I found it quite upsetting. I think that the vision was so narrow. And that's, so few people could actually see the issues that were present around race and discrimination, and sex and gender in general."

While Jack reflects that:

"But I'll often often reflect on that and think, and I look retrospectively at at how it didn't seem to impact on people, you know, and mostly people who probably are in - held some kind of power.

86

And in that dynamic actually could ride the wave, and just wait for things to pass."

In truth, I was frequently caught playing two parts. At times, I was the academic who questioned the College's colonial legacy, pushed to include more emotive and sensitive content in our curriculum, and asked questions about policies or corrosive practices dressed up as tradition. However, at other times, I slipped into the role of a classic South African village schoolmaster. It was with real ease that I played the part. On the rugby field, I had to continually remind myself about the language I used and what sport the boys played. In the staffroom, I found myself sitting with other men, projecting the generally White all-boys club image for which schools such as mine are known. I frequently reflected on the values of the College in many ways, from enforcing uniform policies to expecting boys to greet or don their caps. I sang the school hymn with gusto and had expectations of what a boy from my school should act like. I was proud, for many reasons, to have attended the school that I did. I am also ashamed of a great deal of what schools such as mine represent. This ambiguity, contradiction and amalgamation of personas reflect the transition schools such as mine now must undergo. To ignore my obvious biases and the influence of my Whiteness and heteronormativity on the spaces in which I engage would be irresponsible. Just as schools like mine continue to fail in their attempts to find a way forward, so too do I fail to teach controversial issues effectively.

I began in the classroom, and initially, I came on strong. In my first year, I was given a classroom and taught controversial issues to every grade other than matrics. I was required to read prescribed novels and plays to prepare to teach them. I was also asked to assist with the curriculum design for grade 9. All of this was very intimidating. The fear that I would be found incapable drove me to succeed. That I was undeserving of my position shadowed my first year of teaching. I was determined to prove, more to myself than anyone else, that I had not been hired only because I was an Old Boy. In addition to the stresses of starting as a new teacher, I wanted to teach controversial issues and engage in real depth and breadth discussions. Unfortunately, my initial attempts were met with little success or enthusiasm. I chose poetry and setworks that I hoped would lead to moments where controversy would surface. My learners would mostly be disengaged and had no desire to interact meaningfully with the content. They were uncomfortable, which made me uncomfortable. I was fearful that I was overstepping but had

87

charged myself with the desire to teach issues of real relevance. I wanted to be an effective teacher. I frequently found myself preaching to boys rather than discussing controversial issues.

Despite this identity crisis, I have found some success in my classroom and other spaces where quiet victories could be won, as will be explored later in this chapter. I used various tools to initiate discussions on controversial issues. The classroom is a space where, despite my trepidation and fears, I feel I can have the most impact in my engagement and instruction of controversial issues. The dominant narrative of the institution within a troubled country remains challenging to influence; the classroom is a more acquiescent space. This acquiescence is impacted by that which sits outside the classroom. While you are warned that politicking is a part of every industry, I have found that the perceived link between virtue and education in boys' schools has positive and negative consequences. For one, the unspoken ideological beliefs of the institution find their way very readily into the classroom. The description of a memory below explores this in more depth. The institution's hidden curriculum drives a particular narrative that rears its head in many forms (Wassermann & Bentrovato, 2018). In my case, it is in long-lasting beliefs on what it is to be a boys' school man and the belief that this way of life is very much under attack that slipping standards regarding hair policy and dangerous narratives around gender supposedly threaten a boys' school for boys who identify as boys.

How I fit into this shared identity of boys' school Old Boys is confusing. One's membership demands a level of loyalty. It is a currency of certainty that does not pale when questions about the problematic methods used to make men are asked. Sometimes, I am a loyal member and agree that the fruit must mean the tree itself is good. At other times, I question the underlying issues of colonial legacy and privilege. This complexity is articulated by Jack, a former teacher and colleague who notes that:

"*But also see you as someone who like, so you maybe fit those stereotypical roles in a boys' school. But I don't think I definitely don't see you fitting the stereotypical mould. So, there's a difference when I you see coaching rugby, or when you're involved in house structures, whatever. But I definitely see you as someone who who can challenge challenge the status quo. My concern is sometimes that because you were a student that you maybe feel like you can't say what you*

want to say."

This dual identity is not hidden from my learners. Felix, a former learner and co-witness to my experience, recalls:

"I think if I were to say one way to describe it would be that you're very caring in a way. So, you sort of subvert the traditional masculine role of being very overtly strong in a way, like too strong to be spoken to something. And I think you also benefit from being a male within the classroom. So, I think instantly, you have more respect from kids coming into the classroom than a female - that's the best way I could describe"

These understandings are compounded by the fact that I am an inducted member of the Old Boy collective. Discussions in my class around controversial issues frequently include questions about how things were when I was at school. While I was only a schoolboy ten years ago, my learners believe that the institution is vastly different and long for stories of a time when, they believe, things were simpler. They have heard things from other schoolmasters who assure them that men were men when things were left to matric boys when they had the power to discipline boys. I have found that many of my matric boys lament the absence of this power. The irony is that the only difference is that the school is no longer a willing advocate for such methods of behaviour modification. I had one of my colleagues, an Old Boy from a South African boys' school, describe his schooling as "the first half of the film *Full Metal Jacket[10]*". Many a true thing is said in jest.

---

10 A 1987 Film set during the Vietnam War

Mr. Moore's Musings

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2023

A toast to

Working at a boys' school is a demanding and difficult job. Working at a boys' school as a former pupil can be traumatising. South African boys' schools employ system similar to the French Colonial system of assimilation. You are adopted - body, mind and soul - into an institution. What came before is of little importance. What does not conform is either exiled or put to death. I was no different. This process is itself traumatising. I remember, as a young man, feeling lost, confused, scared, and angry at the loss of my identity. Any deviance from what was expected was punished both physically and emotionally. The picture of the South African schoolboy, dressed in his dazzling blazer and tipping his cap to those who walk past has its foundations in violence. It is institutionalised violence. Initially, through brutish laws that allowed schoolmasters to take canes to adolescent boys and, in the years following democracy, in schools' willing dereliction of duty. Schools ignore the systemic violence carried out by students. Abuse is glossed over and branded "tradition".

I teach at a boys' school. I teach at the boys' school that I attended. And, as a schoolboy, I enjoyed this exclusive club. Buying my ticket and gaining membership was a bloody business but, once I was in, I made sure that everyone knew I was a part of a select group of men who had been inducted at this respected fraternity. Truthfully, to my shame, I made sure that it was just as tough to gain membership to this club as it had been for me. The system works. Of course it works. It is a two centuries old apparatus that was designed to turn boys into tools of empire. Expansion required hard, unfeeling men who were willing to perform barbarous acts in the name of "higher ideals". While history remembers the Spartan agōgē, it is British boys' schools that created the sadists who hacked out the largest empire in history, who carried out atrocities on five continents and who "won" two world wars.

I walk into the staffroom a very different person. I was entirely unprepared for university. I walked into my first lecture as an entitled and elitest matriculant with little understanding beyond my own whiteness and hegemonic masculine identity. I entered into a liberal and forward-thinking faculty and

Posted by Callan Moore at 4:08 AM

No comments:

ABOUT ME

Callan Moore

View my complete p

BLOG ARCHIVE

This is where the diary entry cuts off. I most likely had a class or a sports practice to get to.

Figure 4.6: Diary entry dated 6 January 2023 which followed an incident where other staff consumed alocohol on campus at a function celebrating matric results while on duty.

I do not leave room for ambiguity when it comes to violence between boys, yet I do find that I am still trying to figure out how I place my schooling into my identity as a teacher. What virtue is there to impart to those boys in my class? How should it influence my teaching of controversy? If that which was taught has merit, can it be removed from the problematic method? The diary entry above was born out of frustration. I could not believe that my colleagues could not see that their actions were putting the learners at risk. I did not expect the piece to take the form that it did. I sat down and wrote. More alarming is that when I returned to the piece, I felt guilty for painting my school in that light and allowing outsiders into the sanctum. I have found that many of my colleagues are still the boys in blazers with mushroom caps, proud to share their views on education, which would not have been out of place in a staff room in the 1980s. I frequently fit into this mould. I can reminisce on a schooling experience that has shaped me, yet can I separate that from a present where I teach controversy? It is a duality that yields no easy answers and is present in all I do. Do I still wear my blazer and mushroom cap?

(II) Classroom controversy

I was given my own classroom and classes to teach. I was worried that my learners or their parents would not take me seriously as an Old Boy and rugby coach. Eager to prove myself an effective teacher, I tried to implement some methods for teaching controversial issues that I had encountered in my honours programme. These methods comprise discussion-based practices commonly used in teaching controversy (Ho et al., 2017). I was not met with a great deal of interest. The boys were standoffish and disengaged. I would try to begin a conversation in class, and while a few boys would respond to my prompts, they were the more academically inclined boys. I was part of an English department already trying to challenge learners and get them to engage with controversial content. Consequently, the learners almost viewed discussions around controversy with disinterest or apathy. Felix recalls:

91

"I think what it comes down to is the sort of normalisation of difficult issues. So it's like I think a lot of the kids don't want to come to class and speak about difficult issues the entire time and when it should be like that, but I don't feel like in the morning, I don't want to go to class and speak about why South Africa sucks because women have no rights and then go to English and speak about why South Africa sucks because it's unequal and then go to, like, if you understand what I mean. So, I think a lot of the kids tend to then withdraw into themselves. And I think, not particularly you, but I think the system could do more to try and coax those kids out of the things. I think a lot of the time what happened is that, like I said, there'd be a few of us, that would sort of lead the conversation and always be in a good mood or whatever."

This withdrawal from issues deemed controversial was common in my class. Few boys would challenge me when I would present a particular viewpoint. While there were open discussions in class, that which had the potential to become truly controversial was treated with a phlegmatic and sanitary shortness that was challenging to overcome. Jake, another former learner, remembers that:

"I think the space allowed for us to have conversations around things or just to have a DNA that was different to other schools. We had the ability to talk about race and talk about gender and talk about issues that pertain to us, um, just because of how small the school was, though, I think as with most kind of boys' schools, we definitely did shy away from a lot of the pressing issues. And I don't know, if that was purely due to ignorance, I don't know if it was purely due to not my problem, not my monkey, not my circus. I don't even know if it was just to do with that as, as boys in school, we don't need to worry about, we don't need to worry about things that don't pertain to us. But there was definitely a fine balance between those who were involved in a conversation and those who are purely trying to get to matric as fast as they can - or matriculate as fast as possible."

While there was certainly an element of ignorance, as Jake highlights, many of the boys lacked the willingness to engage critically with issues of controversy that extended beyond the realm of the school itself. Learners were willing to discuss race regarding sporting codes and representation based on race within provincial teams but were frequently unwilling to unpack issues relating to the broader South African context. Similarly, masculinity was readily

92

discussed, but LGBTQ+ rights made learners uncomfortable. As Jake says, perhaps it was a case of "not my monkey, not my circus". Despite the initial lack of interest, I continued to press my teaching of controversial issues, dedicating entire lessons to discussions per the methodology of teaching controversial issues (Pace, 2021). As my studies continued, my understanding of the teaching of controversy grew. Yet, many learners continued to be disengaged. Felix recalls:

"So, I feel like we're getting more people interested. And it would lead to more discussions, I think what often happened is, there were a few of us very keen to argue and discuss and be loud. But then there was also a lot of guys, I'm sure that were just trying to get the day passed, and sitting quietly and doing their own thing, so and I think that clear divide could be bridged more if everyone was enjoying the conversation and getting interested"

Despite these difficulties, I set rules for classroom discussions called FRED and taken from Pace (2021). The acronym stands for Freedom of Speech, Respect, Equality, and Diversity, and all our post-lesson reflections use personified FRED's approval as a measure of effectiveness. The dialogic techniques include Socratic seminar-styled discussions, walking debates, silent debates (Pace, 2021), and a discussion technique adapted by one of my colleagues called P4C (Philosophy for Children). While the structured discussions yield varied results, as seen in the vignettes depicted in this chapter, it is frequently in the unstructured moments that my ability to adapt and teach controversial issues is tested. I would frequently ask questions in the hopes that my learners would be forced into a moment of disequilibrium, as described by one of my former pupils, Jake, in the extract from a conversation below:

"...so obviously, regarding - we'd obviously have the setwork book but obviously, you as a teacher, or in the setting would like facilitate some questions. And those questions also, weren't really prescribed, I believe maybe we're kind of a lot of impromptu, more to kind of get us to kind of soul search or to be a lot more reflective. So, questions on how do we kind of fit into the space? You asked Conrad once who were like, yeah, but you Conrad, you as like a White male in South Africa, how do you fit into - how do you fit into that picture? Forcing, not forcing us but I think, really placing, placing the ball in our court with a lot of things that I think a lot of boys haven't thought about, ever, because I think they took their existence for granted. But then you

really like put them in a context with a lot of, I think, really intricate, and well-positioned questions, which really made them be reflective of how they took things for granted."

These moments were either the product of the curriculum where the conversation around a prescribed poem, play or novel would offer the opportunity to approach a topic in a way that allows the controversial to come to the fore, or they would arise during lessons I had allocated explicitly for discussion and debate. These conversation-based lessons would occur on days when we had a longer lesson or if my class was ahead of the grade in the planned curriculum. We would have forum-styled discussions in my classroom about a topic that they had constructed, or I would organise a walking debate in an open space outside my classroom. The memory below is from a discussion where learners were required to generate their questions and then elect one for the class to discuss in a forum. There were positives in my engagements with learners. Felix remembers:

"I think it's taught; I liked the way it was taught in very in a very casual sense, and people were allowed to bring forward their own viewpoint. So, I still remember me and Justin used to fight all the time about our different viewpoints on what would like what the meaning of your life should be about whether you should try and make as much money as possible, or try to be happy. And I never went out of the classroom feeling like I despise Justin for his viewpoint. And I don't think he ever came out of the classroom feeling like he despised me. We both just had our space to try convince each other and if it didn't work, we went away and we came back next time as eager to do it again."

Even when these discussions were not as effective as I had hoped, I tried to my best to keep engaging with the boys during the lessons. This might have been forceful at times. Jake remembers:

"Yes I think it requires, it requires almost like a forceful line of, not forceful a sense of like you're bullying someone, but force like direct confrontation, and as kind of like seeing within your class, like answering questions that people just would have never engaged with the topic at all. And even if they don't answer even if they are a bit resistant or if the answer is a bit lacklustre. I think that's more important and more valuable than not posing the question. At all in its entirety."
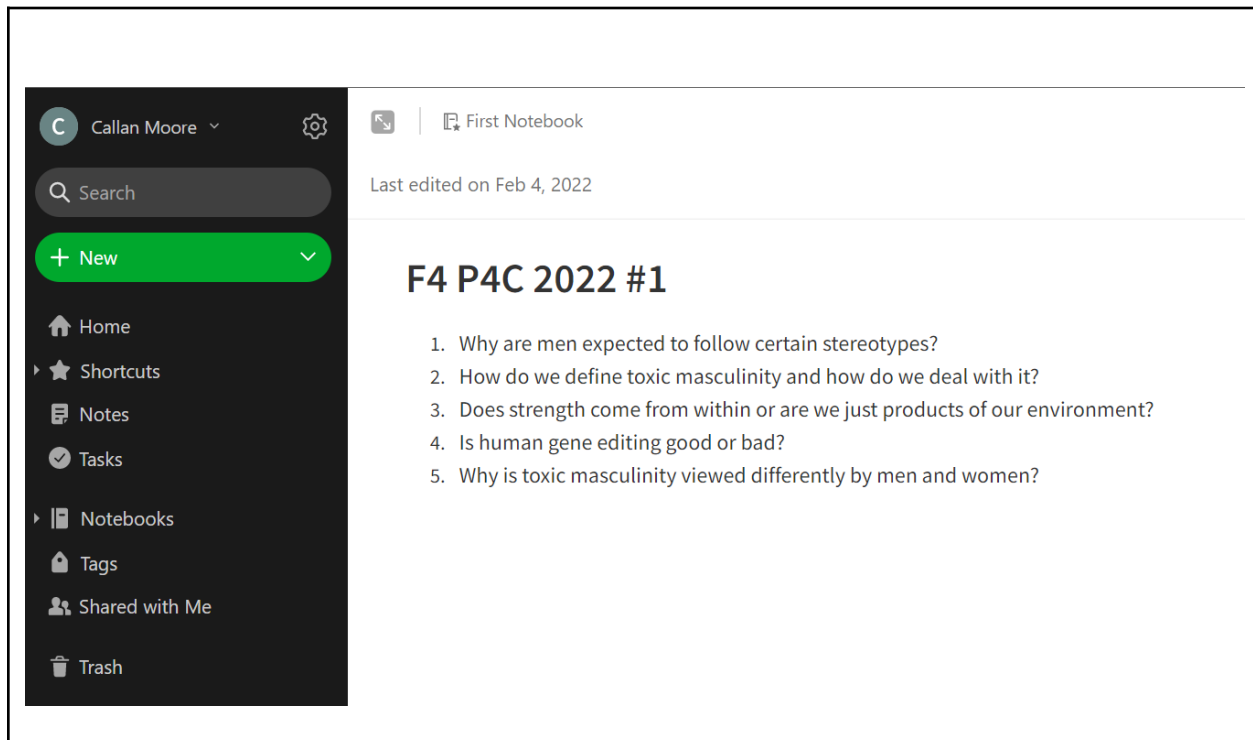
94

Figure 4.7: Discussion questions generated by learners.

Lessons that focused on teaching controversial issues using methods that required learners to generate their questions allowed me insight into what questions they believed to be controversial. There were no limits on what the learners could discuss. We would use a blind vote to determine which topic to discuss to negate any pressure to vote for a particular topic. As seen in **Image 2**, the topics could cover various controversial issues.

The framework was successful in some ways. Focusing the entire lesson on discussing controversial issues of race and masculinity was something the learners enjoyed, whether this was because we had moved away from the traditional, intended curriculum or because they genuinely wanted to engage with controversial issues, which is worth considering. I approached these lessons with some trepidation, continually glancing out of the many windows of my classroom to spy whether executive members might be watching and wondering what the source of the chaos flowing out of my classroom was.

I remember a particularly trying lesson:

"FRED wouldn't agree with that!" the grade nine learner exclaimed.

His interjection, although said in jest, was a moment of triumph. I hadn't expected them to use the acronym this early in the year. The fact that he thought to use it, even if it was meant to get a laugh from the other boys in the class, meant that at some level he understood what it meant.

I didn't invent it. The acronym FRED is a tool used to regulate conversations on controversial issues. I took it from Pace (2021). It stands for Freedom of Speech, Respect, Equality and Diversity.

"FRED sits in our class," I had said in an earlier lesson. "He decides whether or not what we are discussing is in line with the rules of the classroom. We won't always get things right, myself included, but if we reflect on what FRED would agree with, we can learn to do things in a constructive way."

The boy's outburst offered an escape hatch for what was quickly becoming a volatile discussion. I had used a discussion technique that the learners knew well. The learners were given a prompt and then worked individually and in small groups to generate a discussion question for the whole class. Today, the prompt was an image of a fist and a great deal of the questions focused on power.

The boys are meant to drive the discussion themselves. While they often need me to get them started, today they were rearing to go.

"Well, first we have to decide what power and happiness mean."

"Nah, he doesn't really have power."

"Men are losing power."

All things considered, I thought the conversation was moving in a generally positive direction - until it became political, that is.

"Just look at how our government uses power!"

Gulp.

My classroom sits in an elite private school in the capital city of South Africa. I have taught boys whose parents are affiliated with all the major political parties. I have taught the relatives of struggle icons and the children of leaders of the former regime. One need only go through my class's roll call list to see the stock these boys come from. So, you would think that boys from families as connected and influential families would be informed on current affairs or South African political history? Not at all.

As a testament to this lack of understanding, the smallest boy in the class puts up his hand and yells, giggling while he does so, that: "South Africa needs a leader like Adolf Hitler!"

System failure. I can see the headline now:

"English Teacher In A Prominent Boys' School Training Learners To Be Fascists"

I suddenly become very aware that all my windows are open. My first reaction is to look out of the classroom windows to see if any of the members of the executive, my head of department or God forbid, the headmaster are within earshot of my classroom.

"Nah!"

97

"Yoh!"

"You can't say that!"

I knew that once the shouting and laughter died down, the boys would look to me for the next step. My reaction would determine what was acceptable behaviour. They all knew what was said was unacceptable. The laughter and shouting were a clear indication that they knew that the other boy's remark was deviant. Now they were all waiting to see what would happen next. What is the young White teacher who, in jacket and tie, represents this institution and its values, going to do about this flagrant disregard for all decorum?

Then, just as I was imagining my inevitable meeting with HR, another boy offered me my escape route.

"FRED wouldn't agree with that!"

Relief.

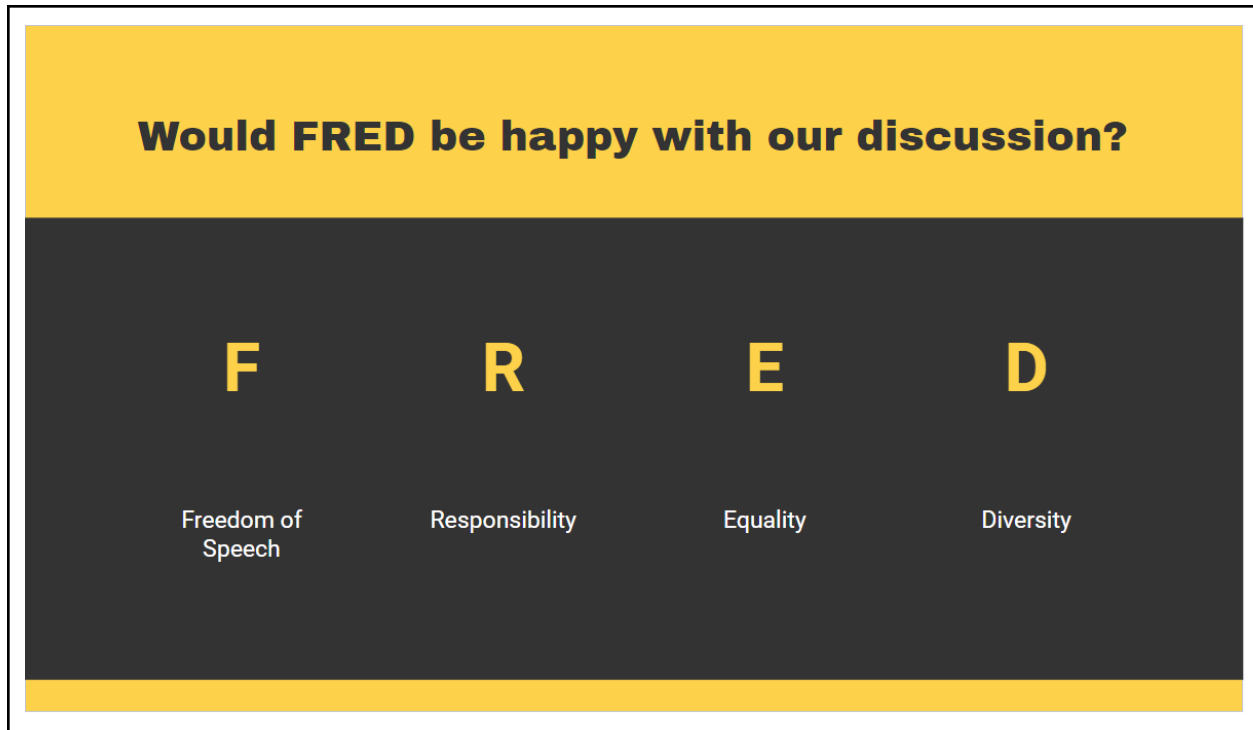*"So, tell me boys, why wouldn't FRED agree with that?"*

Figure 4.8: A slide from a presentation shown to learners before discussions on controversial issues.

The lesson recalled is one such example of a lesson that made me deeply uncomfortable. While the boy's described response might seem ludicrous, I found that such attempts to shock are one way for learners to try derail my attempts to get them to engage with controversy that makes them uncomfortable. These risk-takers are still outliers, with most learners remaining avoiders in the face of controversy (McCully, 2006). Proclaiming the merits of one of history's most notorious figures might be an extreme example, but referencing infamous internet chauvinists, such as Andrew Tate, or jokingly stating that women ought to be limited to household chores after marriage is common.

It quickly becomes apparent what my personal beliefs are regarding specific controversial issues, and learners occasionally present these views as they believe they will benefit them during tests and examinations. Isaac, a former learner, remembered that:

99

"I remember boys would talk about how in an English paper, you have to take a certain you have to have certain beliefs if you want to do well in English. There was a question paper on Covid the one time. And one of the boys was talking about how he was very tempted to write about why the ad (advert) against the Covid-19 pandemic was a hoax, but he was worried that he wouldn't get the distinction that he wanted."

Within my lessons, I try to use questions and the Socratic method to assist learners in reaching a point of disequilibrium. I can sometimes be disengaged, and there are some issues that I shy away from, which will be discussed later in the chapter. I correct learners when they disobey the rules of FRED or when their views are no longer controversial, as they are contrary to reason (Dearden, 1981). I try not to get emotional, even when learners are clearly trying to trap me for their amusement. In this regard, Jake recalls :

"So, I don't think that you know, your own biases. I don't think that limited you. But I think you are also a very, I think you're also a very diplomatic person as well in the classroom space. So, we were [laughs], we would try to bait you into agreeing with us."

I quickly learned that, in 45 minutes, it is unlikely that I could address worrying views or perspectives on a plethora of controversial issues in their entirety. In this regard, Isaac notes:

"In situations in which like, you can tell that something has upset you, you don't take your anger out on the boys, you'd rather leave the discussion behind. Like, you, it was not necessarily easy. But you could tell us a class when you got frustrated at the discussion. But instead of just hammering your point even harder. You said like, let's leave this to another day."

And that:

I think it's the school. Really, I just think it's - I don't think the school allows for, allowed for, like full discussions to be held, which I mean, periods of 45 minutes, if my memory serves correctly. It's like, there's only so much you can say within 45 minutes on top of the teaching that has to be done. And on top of the teaching that has to be done. So, I do think that they didn't do it?

While leaving issues for another day frequently helped, it was not always possible. While my philosophy on teaching and learning was built on a foundation of teaching controversial issues and their importance, I was required to teach a particular curriculum: the CAPS English curriculum. In some ways, this allowed for engagement with controversy, but especially as learners neared matric examinations, I was forced to teach a set of examinations and their expectations. Felix remembers:

"So, I think the best way we in AP English, I think we did a lot more than he did in normal English, because normal English is kind of like, teach 20 poems and you get get done, you know. So, and I think it's also it's better in forms three and four, in terms of addressing actual issues that matter, rather than matric kind of just becomes a preparing for the exam. So, you kind of lose that beauty of the classroom"

And recalls:

"I think it's the - it's very difficult. There's a clear line between teaching and like casual conversation in the sense, you know, and I think it could be more casual conversation. But that's the fault of the IEB system that we've brought into. So, like I said, I think it's gotten a lot less within at least the last year, where there was a lot less of those, like nuggets of everyone enjoying the classroom"

As teachers at an independent school, we are given the autonomy to design our curriculum from grade 8 to grade 11; thus, I was given more freedom to address controversial topics, including selecting the texts. Text selection is crucial for teaching topics that might be deemed controversial to break down prejudices (Martino, 2002). While teachers are dictated to in-text selection for our final grade 12 examinations, we can select our set works for all our other grades. These choices will frequently allow for the discussion of controversy. I have selected a few African novels to inspire learners to engage with African authors. I chose *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958) for a grade 10 own-choice novel module. All learners were allowed to select which novel they would like to read and study and were then sent to that teacher's class for the study duration. For me, Achebe's novel was my first noteworthy understanding of the realities of colonialism. Nigerian in origin and focus, it served well as a means for discussing

101

colonialism and patriarchy and mental health and suicide. However, a South African novel, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995), did not have the same impact. Despite being closer to home, the novel's events were so far from my learners' experiences that they were frequently disengaged.

I used Mda's novel (1995) to teach South African history, as many learners lacked the basic historical knowledge needed to understand a novel set during a South Africa transitioning toward democracy. I used creative writing techniques that required the boys to use magical realism, a tool used by Mda, to engage with the novel's themes. I used the novel as the basis for conversations to little effect. While my boys were willing to discuss the novel, it was frequently superficial, knowing how to play things to get my approval and move on. I had a similar lack of success with Craig Higgenson's (2015) *The Dream House*, selected by the Independent Examination Board (IEB) as an option for grade 12 learners. A novel that explores the weight of memory and South African identity, it did not appeal to my learners. While our department tries to represent different South African experiences, we cannot do this entirely. We frequently select texts that we feel are significant.

In the regard Felix recalls:

"I think it's the nature of the curriculum, too. So, a lot of the boys were - was there anything within the curriculum around Afrikaans culture, around the lived experience of Afrikaans boys or stuff like that, for example. So, I think it's sort of diversity for the sake of being diverse. In superficial - superficial let's learn everyone's lived experience, but then doesn't give the kids the opportunity to bring forward their own lived experience, which would be more valuable in including kids within the class and teaching other kids within the class of like, other lived experience, if you know what I mean."

This absence of Afrikaner voices was something that had not occurred to me. In my mind it was as if Afrikaans-speaking White South Africans were the guiltiest party in the torrid history of the country. I continued to focus on the voices of those whom the legacy of apartheid has marginalised. While South African novels that focus on the experience of those marginalised did not find much success in my attempts to teach and learn controversial issues, contemporary

American novels that focused on similar themes were more successful. Angie Thomas's (2017) *The Hate U Give* was particularly helpful for discussions about the controversy of race. Thomas's novel follows a young woman from a Black community who attends a school in a predominantly White and affluent area. This forces her to adopt a dual identity, one as a member of the Black community and another that her White school will approve of. I taught this novel against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement. My learners could identify with the duality in identity, and the need to support the movement by posting an all-Black image on social media was debated in my class. My learners were more receptive of the Americanised exploration of prejudice than they were of an African one, most notably because it was so far removed from the South African reality. This was reinforced when teaching *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007), which follows a similar narrative arc. The protagonist is a young Native American boy who leaves his reservation to attend a White school. Again, basketball and other Americanisms made for a far more compelling vehicle for the teaching of controversy than African novels, speaking to an experience far removed from the South African reality. It was telling that learners were far more willing to engage with literature depicting the geopolitical realities of controversy on another continent. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* helped teach controversy. However, it benefits my context since it is written for an international audience. Noah explains the context he finds himself in as a young Coloured person in South Africa and paints a picture of the obstacles his circumstances presented. This detailed explanation of prejudice benefited my learners, whose ignorance of South African history was frequently disappointing.

The complexity of my classroom within the schooling space in contemporary South Africa in which I teach has proven challenging. I cannot speak for other subjects within my context, but the school's management has provided little guidance or professional development on teaching controversy within classroom spaces, perhaps because it is not in their interests. Formal instruction would do little to improve performance in assessments in the formal curriculum. Whether the school's management would be willing to allow learners to teach controversy is more complex. As an elite school, the College frequently looks to commodify virtue and would no doubt view the teaching of manageable and acceptable controversy as a benefit of the institution's image. Simultaneously, my trepidation in teaching certain topics reveals that the culture of the school would not allow for teaching controversy that is not in line with the school's

narrative, which is reflected by the former learners I have engaged with who recall conversations on controversial topics in History, Drama and Life Orientation; otherwise, it is in conversations that form a part of the hidden curriculum where controversial issues appear. Isaac recalls:

"I know, in certain discussions with like math teachers, predominantly math teachers, actually, for some strange reason, they were a lot more. You know, they would like mention something. Like, my matric year, one of the math teachers was like, I don't understand the point of being gay. But then they realised what they had said no, like, but you know what, this isn't the place for that discussion. So that, like a lot of those comments, were they want to have the type of discussion, but they don't have to face necessarily, so then they would not go any further into the matter."

This avoidance reveals what is deemed acceptable controversy (McCully, 2006). All the while I operated within a space where the classroom was influenced by the macro narratives of the school, such as what acceptable representations of masculinity and racial identity are. The academic space is only one sphere of an institution, such as the College. My ambitions were high because I hoped to make a meaningful impact on a teaching and learning culture where my classroom makes up a small part. In some cases, there have been successes. As Jake recalls:

"Continue, continue to go down, continue to go down route cuz I think I know I know a lot of people live in a bubble and are under this idea that school is merely about academics. School is merely about playing a first-team sport. School is really about getting the victor ludorum for the gala day and then going home. If you're in a space of like learning, I truly believe that you need to be grappling with all the ideas and everything that everything that is important to humanity and not just Macbeth on a Thursday, calculus on a Tuesday or anything, continue to do the work that you do. It's important, of course."

(III) "A boys' school for boys who identify as boys"

Certain controversial issues have been of specific relevance to my teaching and learning practice. This chapter has already explored the independent boys' school model and the masculine

104

underpinnings of the environment. In my classroom, issues relating to sexuality and LGBTQ+ rights have been challenging to navigate. Felix recalls:

"We did a lot of work around women's place in society, men's place in society, race - we also did not as much I'd say about sexuality."

Reflecting on my practice while considering the memories of my co-constructors has forced me to admit an avoidance of the teaching of issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community. There has been a recent push for schools, such as the one where I teach, to address the proverbial elephant in the boarding house: where do single-sex boys' schools stand in a society whose understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation is changing? While some boys' schools have seen it fit to raise the rainbow flag above their schools, other institutions have doubled down on their conservative Judeo–Christian values. Our executive has described my school as "a boys' school for boys who identify as boys"—no room for misinterpretation there. This institutional avoidance is reflected in my interactions in spaces outside of the classroom (McCully, 2006). I remember an incident in a boarding house:

Half-Lights! Lights out in ten minutes!"

There was panic as boys ran up and down the stairs in various stages of undress, carrying toothbrushes, school shoes and bits and pieces of homework.

"Sir, please can I have late prep?" a boy asked.
"No, it's already half past nine," the teacher responded sternly.
"But sir it's for ma'am Brown's class…"

Laughter erupted from the adjacent cubicles.
"Make sure that you use gender-neutral pronouns!"

"Guys, that is enough, everyone in bed."

"Sir, did hear about that… uhm… person at St Jane's? Apparently, she identifies as a dog and her parents asked the school if she can have an extra hour of break to bark."

More laughter. One boy imitated a schnauzer from across the dormitory.

"Boys, it is time for bed."
"But sir, do you think if a guy who wants to be a girl… an it, wanted to come to school here they would let them?" he asked grinning.
"We would have to have a discussion with their parents about their child's well-being and then we would make a decision that is in the best interest of the child." the teacher responded hesitantly.

"Nah sir, you can't think that!"
"I do and it is time for bed." He responded, clearly becoming irritated.

Boys began appearing out of cubicles to join the conversation.
"Sir, I identify as an Apache helicopter, and I want 15 minutes per period to rotate."

More laughter. The boys imitated a helicopter.

"Boys, if someone is struggling with gender or sexual identity, the least I can do is call them what they want to be called. Let's start getting ready for bed, please," The teacher stated with a sigh.
"But sir, do you think if God wanted all this gender nonsense he would have started things that way?"
"Sir, in my country it's easy - it is illegal to be gay."

"Alright boys, we can talk about it tomorrow. Right now, it is bedtime."

"Lights OUT!"

The house bell rang.

Considering the interaction above, and others like it, I am not conflating the discussion around gender with that of sexual orientation and only pairing them in the discourse because both are issues that I have skirted over in my classroom as part of formal education, but the informal and non-formal curricula taking place outside of lessons (Malcolm et al., 2003). I have been quite clear in my stance and support for the LGBTQ+ community, but I do so with the discomfort and distance that come with my biases. The irony is that I am most ready to tackle issues regarding masculinity, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is frequently regulated by homohysteria (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). When discussing sexual orientation and gender identity, I frequently speak in broad and general terms that do not link to individuals' lived experiences. As seen in the memory above, discussions focusing on gender and sexual identity are commonplace inside and outside the classroom. The interaction above is an example of how humour, ridicule and parody are used to police sexualities in a space where heterosexuality is compulsory (Francis, 2020). Religion is used in heated discussions on controversial issues. The short narrative also reveals the complexity of the boarding space where boys from different countries, some far less progressive African nations, occupy the same space.

These moments of controversy also arise in the formal teaching space. Isaac recalls a lesson where gender identity became the source of disagreement:

"I think, the most polarising and the hardest to talk about was one time in class, we had a discussion about trans athletes. I do feel like I do feel like not that you struggled. But you didn't have as much input as usual just because it's a very complicated subject."

He went on to explain that:

"Okay, so I remember that Joe, I think he was talking about how it was like, recently been allowed for trans athletes to compete within sports and how like, they're going to start dominating the Olympics. And I remember him, and I were having like this back and forth, because it was a reading. It was a reading assignment, I think. Right? So, him and I were having

107

a back and forth where it was like, because I unfortunately spend the majority of my time listening to like, different beliefs and stuff. I had some prior research, not anything, not anything, like substantial, but I just knew a bit. So, then I had like, the Olympics had been allowing trans athletes. And it was like, there was a constant back and forth. And neither of us really knew what was happening. But you were like, just, we were just sharing what we had learned. And then at a point, you had asked us to go back to what the task on hand was, which was the reading. And I don't know, that was just a very, I was very - not surprised - but it was just like, normally, when you have a polarising topic in your class, you make sure to add your own input."

It was not that I did not try to engage with issues relating to LGBTQ+ rights. As Felix puts it:

"because a lot of the guys had very backwards beliefs about transgender people competing in eras, transgender people compete in athletics and stuff. So, in a few of the guys said, for example, if I remember, it was like, they should, like they should just not be allowed to compete, and they should just like lying to themselves or whatever, like very backwards beliefs. And once again, it wasn't treated hatefully in a sense, it was kind of broad, you just brought it forward and let them have their viewpoints and then still, tried to convince them why it was wrong, even though it doesn't necessarily work, because the guys are quite stubborn."

I used Pace's (2021) model for controversial issues in discussions around this topic. The R in our acronym FRED stands for respect, and we agree that our rule book, the South African Bill of Rights, allows for freedom from discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation. We agreed as a class that each person has the right to human dignity. Therefore, we can conclude that discriminating based on gender or sexual orientation is "contrary to reason" (Pace, 2021) and, therefore, not controversial. This argument had some success, but the boys still addressed the topic at a distance. Comments such as "Okay, sir. I get that people can do what they want, but I still think it is wrong" are common. The dialogue below helps to paint a picture of how boys engage with issues relating to gender. A childish humour that removes discomfort for the learners becomes the means to engage with the topic. I remember:

"Sir, are you straight… or are you super-straight?"

Roars of laughter.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you attracted to all women or just cis-gendered women?"

Twenty-three sets of eyes all fixed on me at once. The usual cacophony of post-break boyishness had come to an abrupt halt.

"Uhm… I don't know exactly what you mean."

I knew exactly what he meant. I was used to Tshenolo's questions. They were usually meant to test how well I could bob and weave through the complexity of modern-day societal issues in front of two dozen eighteen-year-olds. I am sure that it was far more entertaining to watch me stumble over my words than it was to trudge through The Dreamhouse for the fourth lesson that week.

"Sir, I mean are you attracted to transgendered women too?"

Side-eyed grins and muffled laughter told me that this was a question that they had asked others too. That this was a planned ambush. Whether the boys had meant it as a malicious trap or not remained irrelevant. I cannot pretend that I shared the boys' humorous outlook on the topic.

"I am attracted to my fiancé…"

"Aaaaah"

"Sir, that's not an answer!"

"Sir, what if ma'am wasn't in the picture, you met someone, and it turned out that they were transgender?"

"I don't really know. I have never been in that situation." I admitted. "Would you be open to starting a relationship with someone who is transgender?"

"Aaaah! Sir!"

"You can't say that!"

"I'm not like that sir!"

Laughter.

Needless to say, it would be very difficult to refocus on the setwork.

As seen in the short narrative, I was ill-equipped to discuss controversial issues around gender. While I fully recognise that I cannot speak from the lived experience of a transgender or homosexual person, it has been revealed to me that I might have disregarded my role as an individual with the ability to stand in solidarity with members of the LGBTQ+ community. This lack of willingness to engage with controversial issues was identified by Isaac, who recalls:

"You struggled, because like you didn't put as much input as you normally do. And I feel like that's just due to a lack of not knowing, compared to, compared to a lot of us within, like a teenage boy group, who does a lot of our YouTube and our Tik-Tok would be sports content, sports content, then the random Ben Shapiro, Jordan Peterson clip talking about like trans athletes - it's very strange, how easily our feeds get getting affected"

He remembers feeling that I did not have enough understanding of these controversial issues to teach them effectively:

110

"And I feel like you didn't have the ability to go against those, because you just, I don't know, maybe a lack of knowledge."

I struggled, despite being a Christian, a great deal with learners who attend fundamentalist Christian churches. I feel I am set against their families and pastors and find little headway. However, whether this is a smokescreen to hide homophobia is still unclear to me. In our discussion, Jake remembers that other than issues relating to homosexuality, he felt that the student body was primarily secular:

"I don't think the Christian values are viewed - other than maybe other maybe we do stray away from talking about homosexuality".

The nature of the independent boys' school as heteronormative and hegemonically masculine is explored earlier in this chapter through my experience as a schoolboy. However, these sentiments were reinforced by my former pupils, co-witnesses, and co-constructors of my experience in trying to facilitate the teaching and learning of controversial issues. This homophobia is present in the formal classroom and the informal and non-formal spaces of the school (Malcolm et al., 2003). Isaac remembers this:

I think there was, other than like blatant homophobia, there was - people were afraid of a lot of different things. Like, from the perspective of a lot of boys in boarding, they were afraid to like, if we do introduce the idea that like, some people are gay, and then they come out, there will be this fear that like, oh, the gay guys are gonna spy on us while we're in the shower. And they're gonna, like go into our rooms, while we are sleeping, and they're gonna like, you know. So yeah. This is a very big fear for like, their own safety. So yeah. And other than that, it was if they weren't afraid, necessarily a lot of boys used, used - some used their religion as backing for why they believed what they believed.

This was reinforced by another former learner, Felix, whose belief that the school was more open to discussions on controversial issues linked to race:

111

"I think the race issue has been done better in the sense, but I think the sexuality issue is still terrible, in the sense that a lot of kids come out of the school and come out as gay, or however they wish. But the fact that they don't come out at school shows that that's the factor that was keeping them from coming out".

This homophobic undercurrent might have a religious foundation, but it filters through to discussions within the classroom and between learners. I am most uncomfortable when learners ask questions about sexual identity and Christianity. As the school's Chapel Warden[11], learners and parents frequently believe I share their prejudices and will look to me for support in their beliefs. While I do not hesitate to let the boys know where I stand, I am ashamed to say that I have not been outspoken in correcting learners' parents. My beliefs are clear to community members and influence my teaching of controversial issues in the formal classroom. Felix, when asked about my religious beliefs, recalls:

"So, I know it's religious in a way, so I know religion makes up a big part of it. But what I respect is that you don't let religion overpower your other viewpoints."

In terms of the planned curriculum, I have not chosen texts reflecting the experiences of people in the LGBTQ+ community as frequently as I have selected texts focusing on issues relating to race and masculinity. In my first year of teaching, I chose an article on a transgender ballet dancer for a grade 9 comprehension, and my head of department received an email from a parent complaining about the content of the assessment and how it went against his family's beliefs. Since then, I have been conscious and even fearful about what I select as content for my classes. While I still try to represent different marginalised groups, this experience continues influencing how I create content. The extract from an examination paper is one example of how I have continued to try to put myself and my learners outside of my comfort zone.

---

11 A Lay-minister in the Anglican Tradition

Figure 4.9: An excerpt from a Form 1 (grade 8) examination paper

Addressing the feminine is also frequently met with resistance by learners. In a Further Studies English[12] (FSE) class, I told a group of grade 11 learners we would do a block on feminist poetry. The FSE curriculum allows teachers the autonomy to select their poets and novels from a prescribed list. This was met with some disdain. I was surprised. These boys are considered top academics, and I expected them to be willing to extend themselves. To combat this obvious block towards the term feminist, I began the block with an introduction to the different waves of

---

12 A voluntary English course advertised to our top students. The subject is managed by an independent body and is not linked to the IEB.

feminism. Following this, we mind-mapped their understanding of the concept on the board. The class only had five learners, so all the boys were involved. We wrote down ideas they associated with the term feminist. I hoped that they would eventually move beyond their preconceptions and that we would get to the tenets of the movements I had introduced to them. They began with interjections like "blue hair and earrings" and "social media" and built to the more worrying, such as "feminazi" and "hypocrites" and other negative descriptions learners seem to attach to what they believe to be feminists. When asked where they see feminists who fit this description, they answered on social media. It was only at my behest that they moved, albeit briefly, to ideas such as suffrage and gender-based violence. The poets I had chosen were Sylvia Plath and Maya Angelou. While the boys enjoyed the poetry and could even appreciate the poets within their contexts, the weight of their disdain towards the idea of feminism sat in the wings. With a bit of prompting and, rather than looking at the merit of the poetry, the lesson would evolve into a light-hearted banter session aimed at their understanding of the modern feminist movement. Equal pay in sports between men and women and the lyrics of prominent female music artists were frequently used as ammunition in their attempts at humour.

My teaching of issues related to the masculine is complex. The elements that add to that complexity are nested in the complexity of the independent boys' school. This heteronormative and religious backdrop for teaching controversy adds to the trepidation I feel in teaching controversial issues related to gender and sexual identity. The avoidance of teaching these issues reflects my connection to the independent boys' school space.

(IV) True to tradition: A White space

My teaching of controversial issues relating to race has been complex. It was more an exploration and understanding of my Whiteness than a groundbreaking example of solidarity with teaching controversy in and around the theme of race. My school was amid a significant shift towards addressing issues relating to inclusion and diversity when I first arrived as a teacher. It shaped my first steps in professional development as a teacher. I was given Nene Molefi's *A Journey of Diversity & Inclusion in South Africa* as a part of our weekly professional development seminars. While it was White teachers leading the discussions, I thought that, at the

114

very least, these discussions were happening. Much of this initial drive to address issues relating to racism and a lack of diversity drove me to teach controversial issues. However, already on the decline, Covid has stalled the formal initiative towards inclusivity. While the school still boasts an Africa Club and a Transformation, Diversity and Inclusion Portfolio, led by staff and learners, it does not have the platform it had pre-Covid. This loss of momentum meant that the school staff regressed to avoiding discussions on controversial issues in formal settings.

Within the classroom, my understanding of Whiteness has transformed how I approach issues relating to race. The pervasive nature of Whiteness and how it is policed and deployed within my space (Twine & Gallagher, 2008) are issues that I try to reflect on in my practice. I still approach teaching controversial issues relating to race with some trepidation. However, my institution's willingness to address race makes issues regarding race far easier to discuss and, to my shame, more defensible in the face of inquiry from my superiors compared to some other controversial issues. A significant shift in my understanding has been understanding my role in the anti-racist movement. While I was initially inspired by White educators who were leading discussions on race at my institution, it quickly became apparent that there was a notable absence of Black voices empowered to make a change. Whiteness, the relative privilege, profit and power of those who occupy White spaces (Goldberg, 2002), was still prevalent, even in our methods of addressing inequality and equity, which has shifted my teaching to focus on Whiteness, something I can speak to, rather than naively trying to put a voice to the experiences of the marginalised.

My learners are mostly, as explained before, immensely privileged. Therefore, framing Whiteness and inequality in a way that links to their understanding of reality is challenging. Their privilege, due to their class, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it removes some of that which separates many South Africans because the boys in my diverse and multicultural classroom share many similarities in their schooling history and the prospect of promising opportunities once they finish high school. However, it separates them from the reality of other South Africans. The complexity of this understanding of race is reflected in Felix's recollections:

"I think what I picked up from my friends is that they never felt alienated by the system being I think the school has gone quite a far away not in repairing the issues of the past because the kids have come to the school are already very privileged in the sense. So, they've already - they're not the kids coming out of the townships that truly need to benefit from reparations from the past - they're kids that are already doing better. But within that context, they've been made to feel that they still have opportunities to excel at school. And such"

As the quote above shows, learners accept the boys in their spaces. My learners make friendships across racial and cultural lines. However, that it is a White and privileged space is not lost on my learners. The unspoken norms of the institution govern interactions are remembered by Isaac:

"So, I think it was like people that could afford the school were, like us people that could afford to school and whose families had been in the school had a much easier time getting into what I call like the schools type of culture. compared to a lot of new-generation boys, especially boys with scholarships who had to like leave behind what they knew from home. Even for like a guy like me who in like his entire life had been within traditionally Eurocentric places, struggled a bit coming to the College just because of the fact that like when I was in the College it was very hard to operate within the system, because it wasn't clear cut rules like okay, you can't do this, you can do that. It was more of they were trying to cater to everyone, but you knew like, subtly, if I was to speak my home language, people at the school wouldn't be happy about it."

Regarding the pervasive nature of Whiteness within the school, a Black colleague, Bishop, explains the duality in a way that I could not:

"One boy actually said before that, you know, I'm in the school. I'm an African, you know, and I come from a Pedi culture, but I feel like sometimes I need to leave my Pedi-ness out to try and fit in into this mould into this White, English colonial space."

Some of my learners, most of them Black boys, understand the realities of South Africa, the lingering impact of colonialism and apartheid and the difficulty in entering a White space, yet many do not, making the teaching of issues regarding race complex. Some boys will readily

116

discuss issues relating to race, while others will shy away, which is frequently the product of differing experiences outside of the space. Jake remembers:

"I think a lot of times, like in White families a lot of these issues are sidestepped or are avoided, dodged are not spoken about or spoken about in like, euphemisms. A lot of the times, especially in White middle-class families, because we're entering - you're entering… this is a long answer, but you're exiting apartheid. You kind of know, you've crossed the bridge of democracy. And so, a lot of White families just get to say our slate is clean, you know, keep moving on. It's a rainbow nation. You know, what happened in the past should stay in the past. There are a lot of people in Black families and Coloured families, a lot of us still have to face it. We are still visiting our family in the Cape Flats over Christmas; we're still going to Mamelodi."

This difference in experience and the past controversy has influenced the classroom environment. While there is obvious discomfort in facing one's Whiteness in the face of the history of South Africa, learners are frequently apathetic or disengaged from these discussions. However, this is not always the case. Frequently, a few White boys are willing to engage with issues regarding race, but they are usually academically stronger boys. Jake goes on to say.

I think a lot of yeah, I agree. [laughs] I'm trying to be as diplomatic as possible. But yeah, I think a lot of time, the White person class didn't really contribute topics or as more people kind of usually I mean, Matthew was the exception. I think that was just the home that he grew up in. But I think a lot of the time we think it was the Black guys or people of colour, people in the class - I mean, I was the only Coloured guy in the class - who contributed to the discussions.

In my teaching practice, I have found that I address race, especially Whiteness, with less trepidation than issues such as LGBTQ+ rights. The current socio-economic realities of the country and its history provide me with sufficient sources for discussion on controversy. I feel supported by the institution in my attempts to teach issues regarding race, something I do not feel regarding gender. My tendency to give my opinion on issues and push learners to engage with content is remembered by Jake:

117

"I've always known you to add your own, not necessarily your own perspective. But to add context to whatever we're talking about was very important, in the sense of like, the wider South African experience when you were dealing with poetry, and other such literature would be very helpful in understanding the perspective of the author and maybe the characters within the work itself."

My classroom is adorned with quotes from literary greats, and in an attempt at inclusion, I have included several African and American quotes. Yet, I frequently ask myself whether this is a shallow attempt at dressing myself in a more pleasing light. I have balanced Tolkien, Lewis and Shakespeare with Achebe, Adichie and Serote. I have put notable speeches from Roosevelt alongside Mbeki's "I am an African". A description of the African philosophical principle Ubuntu sits above my light switch alongside our school's badge. I cannot decide whether this is a charade or if these small actions are crucial. My learners are frequently almost oblivious to the posters.

Surprisingly, despite the number of learners who have come through my classes, whose families are deeply connected to this country's political history, current and past, mostly American icons capture the learners in my class's imagination. The likes of Kanye West[13] and LeBron James[14] decorate the walls of dormitories. In 2020, a group of boys taking chapel decided it was appropriate to say something in memoriam of Kobe Bryant, a deceased professional basketballer who had passed away in a helicopter crash on the other side of the world. Mostly American music blares in our school gymnasium and corridors. The boys have even adapted popular American songs into war cries to be sung next to the rugby field. Basketball has rapidly become one of the College's most successful sports. "I just want to ball" is carved into one of the desks in my classroom. Many of my learners see basketball as a space where they are free to express their identity. Isaac remembers the complexity of the interplay of race and sport:

"Like, you see, something like basketball didn't have the same level of cultural strictness. But that's also because basketball was very heavily dominated by Black boys within the school,

---

[13] A famous American recording artist

[14] A well-known and successful American professional basketballer

118

compared to sport, rugby, When I played rugby in form 1. And it was a lot stricter with like what we could and couldn't do, compared to couldn't couldn't do in like basketball and stuff like that."

To this experience and point of view, Felix adds that:

"But I think what I saw within my friend groups and stuff, I always felt comfortable hanging out with a majority Black friend group through my basketball and stuff, and I never felt alienated being amongst different kids"

While controversial issues relating to race appear in informal and non-formal settings, their presence in the formal curriculum can be complex (Malcolm et al., 2003). I recall a particularly challenging lesson:

"But they don't even come from here!" he exclaimed

Teaching South African poetry requires some historical context before the elements of poetry can be explored. To be honest, as a history teacher masquerading as an English teacher, I enjoy this. Whether it be the history of the Soweto Poets, the conditions of the trenches that inspired Owen or hierarchical structure of Elizabethan society, I enjoy teaching poems as historical documents.

I had never taught the Boer War or poetry from the Boer War before.

As a child, offhanded comments like "they have hated us since the Boer War" were not uncommon when my older relatives spoke about Afrikaners. Perhaps this shortsighted understanding of the Boer War as a "White" conflict lead to my mishandling of this particular poem.

An uneasy feeling had settled on the class.
"But they don't even come from here!"
"My family has been here since the Voortrekkers. My uncle's farm was my grandfather's and he got it from his father."

119

I knew that I had to respond first.

"Boys, remember what we are trying to achieve: multi-perspectivity. We need to be able to stand in someone else's shoes."

"You can understand why land and land ownership are still such controversial topics."

"Imagine that you are…"

As seen in the dialogue above, the issue of land and land ownership is controversial and has made its way into my classroom. In that specific class, still very new to teaching, I was particularly nervous about the conversation's outcome. I did not consciously think about what negative consequences might arise, only that I was leading a controversial discussion and that it centred on a particularly sensitive aspect of South African history. Jake, the learner in the dialogue who questions the Boer speaker's claim to the land, recalls the interaction:

And I think it was and I think I had a bit of a dispute between myself and Darren regarding because the poem was about an Afrikaans, kind of an Afrikaans woman who is lamenting, like how the Boers in her nation where kind of killed and the dispute between like Boers and like English people, but they're not in the backdrop. You know, and they don't really mention people of colour in the poem. And I kind of brought it up, you know, it's kind of ironic that it was a kind of like the Boers were lamenting that their people were being taken away.

I cannot recall exactly how I approached the moment of conflict. Luckily, Jake could remember more:

"I think you shed light on kind of, like, what is it multicultural perspectivity is it I think, was, multi-perspectivity [corrected], were the words you used, and how everyone kind of has, has their own kind of viewpoints and can't disregard the viewpoints of others, even though other viewpoints are kind of equally valid and equally true? And kind of shedding light to that?"

120

Multi-perspectivity was a buzzword in my early teaching of controversial issues. I learned the concept from a particularly influential lecturer during my undergraduate degree. If perhaps a little simplistic, I believed that if I could get learners to understand, even to the slightest degree, the perspectives of others, I would have gained some success. Given this, I attempted to address particularly controversial topics, focusing on the school and its engagement with issues regarding race. One of the earliest topics for conversation was the school's hair policy. I recall a particularly challenging interaction with a learner:

"Sir, can I talk to you?"

He made for a rather striking figure. Tall, shoes polished and in his honours blazer with Deputy Head of School emblazoned across his pocket. It was odd that he was standing outside my classroom at the start of break. The other boys were streaming towards the dining hall to get their midday snack.

On another occasion, I might have asked him if we could chat during our next lesson but the emotion in his voice worried me.

"Of course, Jason."

We moved into my classroom. A cliche English classroom, the walls are adorned with quotes from famous authors, speeches from influential men and women and, of course, a poster that explains the functions of the apostrophe.

"What's up?"

"Sir, I don't know what to do. I am supposed to be in charge of discipline but Mr Marsh told me that my hair is unacceptable. I woke up an hour earlier to make sure that my hair was okay for the inspection. I changed what he told me to change sir. It's not in my eyes and it's not touching my collar. What is wrong with my hair sir? What is wrong with my hair!?" He said, all in one breath. His voice began to tremble, and tears formed in his eyes.

121

Embarrassed, he looked at his feet.

Jason's hair appeared to have more product in it than it usually did, and he had styled it in a way that I hadn't seen before. He had parted it in the middle. Jason was a particularly bright boy who excelled in the classroom and in the Arts. He had lost out on being the head boy to a sportier boy who was more marketable for the schools PR campaigns, as was usually the case. One of my favourite students, it hurt me to see him in such distress.

The school's hair policy was restrictive. At a time when many boys' schools have moved away from prescriptive hair regulations, our school had doubled down on hair, stating that it was a core value of the school.

I am ashamed to say that I was not particularly loud in my dissidence. While I spoke openly about my views on restrictive hair policy in my class, I remained mute in the staffroom. I had told my boys that descriptions of appearance that included language such as "neat" and "natural" was insensitive and non-inclusive but I did not have the courage to say anything to other staff. I felt that I was too young, that it would jeopardise my success and that as a White teacher, I could not be a voice in opposition.

But this left me with Jason in my class, looking for help. As a White teacher, I could not claim to share his experience. I could not promise to change the policy for him. Mr Marsh was effectively my line manager, despite how backwards I felt his beliefs were and, for the most part, the school executive agreed with him.

"Jason, I'd like to propose something."

"Yes sir?"

I encouraged Jason to write about his experience. To put pen to paper and articulate his emotions. In whatever form he thought best. I explained to him that I was embarking on an

122

autoethnography and that the process is meant to be restorative. I told him that, if he wanted, I would read through his writing and, if he felt up to it, that we could send it to the headmaster.

I have yet to send it to anyone.

The events described in the narrative above are an epochal juncture in my teaching and learning of race. So much so that Jake, described in my vignette, was a co-witness to my experience. In the moment, I felt that I had no lived experience from which to base my advice and attempts to comfort him. I was very conscious of what I was saying, but as I had openly denounced the school's hair policy in my class, I could not recant my commitment to supporting boys that these policies were harming. My suggestion to use autoethnographic writing to understand his pain helped to reshape my appreciation of the tool. In this regard, Jake recalls:

Yeah. So, it was the end of assembly and obviously, of course, at all-boys schools you do like a hair check at the end by the staff side. And then I got pulled over. And there was an issue to do with the curls of my hair. And then there's like, questioning and interrogating, regarding am I putting product in it. Am I doing this? Am I trying to alter it? Actually, I'll give that comment now - what I've kind of realised from that experience, but anyway, I, I was quite like hurt as to like, why am I getting questioned about my hair, this kind of just how it is, you know, I haven't altered it in any other way. I approached you with regards - or you actually caught me after the assembly. And then I actually - I shared it with you and then you encouraged me to, to express my - express what I'm feeling in a creative outlet, whether it be like song, song, rap, or a piece of writing.

That he had come to me and trusted me with his emotions regarding the interaction and that he was willing to write about his experience and share it with me was particularly fulfilling. He goes on to explain that:

"I think I still do; I still do pieces of writing like that - Or I will journal more, I do a lot more reflective work either. I'll do a lot more creative, reflective work. I think being able to, I think, look, my emotions, or really reflect on my emotions, and how I feel about myself and how I feel

about others, and how I can kind of put those together as a tool when I - that was, that was awesome."

(V) Within the white lines

The sports field has been the site of controversy outside the formal curriculum (McCully, 2006). Issues relating to race, which have made me particularly uncomfortable and anxious about teaching controversy, appear in the informal spaces of practices, matches and around the coaching of sports. I recall:

I hate losing.

I especially hate losing to that school.

The morning frost clung to the boots of the under-fifteen players as they rucked and rolled across the pitch. Parents stood on the touchline dressed in a combination of school supporter's kit and K-Way puffer jackets.

"Ref!"

"He's standing offside!"

We were never in the game. Standing behind our own try line more than once, I tried my best to encourage my boys.

"Courage boys,"

"We don't go backwards for anybody!"

124

"Do you want to play rugby?" This did little to lift their spirits. Our other coach had already left in an ambulance with a boy who had a suspected concussion. There is a heaviness that sets into a team that

knows they cannot win. It slows them - mutes them as they wait for the ordeal to end.

Mercifully, the final whistle drew the onslaught to a close. The ceremonial gentlemanly handshake is expected after every game.

"Good game"

"Well played"

"Good luck for the rest of the season"

felt a tug on my shirt.

"Sorry sir?" The most diminutive boy in the opposition side was looking up at me, mud-covered and with bits of grass in his hair.

"Sir, I feel like I have to say something."

"Yes champ, how can I help?"

"Sir, the boys who were on your bench… after we scored a try… they were saying things to my friend. The one who plays eighth man… They called him a Venda-boy, Sir, and they were laughing at him. Uhm, they said other things too."

I could see by the look on his face that this meant a great deal to him. I didn't understand. I understood that my players had insulted this other boy in some way, but I didn't understand it exactly.

125

"Okay, my boy, I will sort it out…"

"I just felt it was wrong, sir"

I did not sort it out. I handed the issue off to a Black staff member. The boys who had insulted the other boys were Black, and I felt that I was not the right person to address it. To be honest, I was scared. I did not understand the insult, and I felt that I would not know how to address the boys who were guilty of insulting the other boys. I was also scared of what the consequences of the exchange would be. An exchange between two boys from two boys' schools recently resulted in a national incident that led to a lawsuit and destroyed the relationship between the two schools. Rightly or wrongly, I did not want to be caught in a situation like that.

It was a Friday afternoon and the visiting school's buses began rumbling in through a gate and onto the fields. A dry afternoon, the fields had begun to turn the dusty brown of a Highveld winter. The grass had become those desiccated bits of last summer's pride that cling persistently to the bottom of trousers and lodge stubbornly in one's hair for hours after practice.

Gradually, the mass of boys made their way to where their hosts were waiting. They kept rank, walking as a nervous phalanx, their giddy anticipation palpable in the form of balls being thrown back and forth and the tackle-like hugs boys so often give one another.

On that occasion, we were playing hosts. Each boy was asked to welcome players from the opposing school into their homes. It was just assumed that each family had the capacity to accept boys into their homes.

I stood next to the field, clipboard in hand. I had just come from class and had taught the last lesson of the day. Teaching Atwood to matrics in the last lesson on a Friday is a mammoth undertaking and I was ready for the weekend to begin. The billeting out of boys was the last thing I was required to do.

126

I lined my boys up. They had sheepish grins on their faces as they tried to look impressive in the face of their opposition. I looked down at my clipboard and began to call out names. Each host boy was given at least two boys to host so that no visiting player was expected to stay with a family on his own. I kept calling names, ignoring requests from my players for specific boys who they had previously been hosted by or whom they knew. First come first serve. I read quickly, sounding like an impatient auctioneer. Bags were lifted, goodbyes said, and players were introduced to waiting parents.

It was about fifteen minutes before there were only coaches left on the fields. I walked over to our director of sport who was characteristically flustered by the day's events.

"We're all finished," I explained "Here is the list of boys who have been paired up. Am I right in thinking that we are to-"

My phone rang in my pocket. Probably my wife checking to see why it was that I was so late in returning home on what was usually my only free afternoon in the week. I was mistaken. It was a parent.

I put on the voice I reserve for parents, visiting dignitaries and the headmaster. A deferential mix of loquaciousness and obsequiousness.

"Good afternoon ma'am. How can I help today? Your son has just left the field with the visiting boys."

"Good afternoon, Mr Moore; Sorry to bother you but I am quite upset." She explained. "Santi has just called me and told me that he was given two boys to host that he doesn't know."

"Yes, ma'am, that is how our arrangement works," I said tentatively, "we ask boys to host our opposition's boys as we believe that will help to expose boys to new situations and help them develop important skills-"

127

"No, I know that" she interjected, *"But you see I have been in contact with the moms of the boy who hosted Santi last year and we having been looking forward to hosting him this year. Him and his friend. Santi told me he told you this but that you gave our boys to somebody else. I am very upset Mr Moore."*

"I am sorry about the inconvenience ma'am. Had I known how close you were with the visiting boy's family I would have altered our arrangements but, unfortunately, I have already allocated those boys to other families whom I cannot inconvenience now," I said, *"Hopefully Santi can get to know these boys and develop new friendships."]*

"You see that's just the thing Mr Moore, Santi phoned me, and he is very worried about these boys. And I have driven around, and I have seen a lot of the boys who have been paired up and I don't know why you have given us these boys" she said, starting to sound a little exasperated.

My blood chilled as I began to catch her meaning. The thought hadn't occurred to me as I was billeting the boys out. I had read out the number of boys each player had volunteered to host, and the visiting coaches had pulled boys out of the crowd. I hadn't thought about what each boy looked like and how that may be received. I suddenly became very aware of the fact that I was standing on a field, with senior members of staff and visiting staff all around me watching and that this parent was about to pick up two boys from the car park.

"Mr Moore we are happy to host, but why did these boys have to be given to us? We don't know how to feed them or what they expect." She explained as if this was a clear problem that anyone in my position should have foreseen. *"They do things differently in their homes. I don't know what they do. We planned on going to mass this evening. Do they go to mass? You see, Mr Moore, we just want everyone to be comfortable. I don't know if they are going to be comfortable with us."*

"Ma'am, no one is expected to host. It is entirely voluntary. I am on my way to the car park now where I will meet Santi and make other arrangements for the boys, "I said trying to keep the desperation out of my voice.

I signalled to Santi's housemaster as I walked that she should come over. My face must have looked troubled as she stopped her conversation with one of our guests and joined me.

"I am on my way right now, ma'am. Please don't worry about hosting. I will take care of it," I said desperate to keep the boys away from her. I was already doing the mental arithmetic to move things around and find space for them in my boarding house.

"Where will they stay Mr Moore?" She asked. "We wouldn't want them to feel unwelcome… You know Mr Moore it's fine, we will take them. I just wish these things were arranged better so that everyone is comfortable. The whole thing has been poorly communicated. If we were given White boys then I would know what to do with them. It's fine Mr Moore, I see them now. I don't want them to feel unwelcome.

"Please can I ask you not to do anything until I get there ma'am?" I pleaded; my breath short as I ran up to the car park.

Issues relating to race extend to the rugby field and beyond. As long as I have been a coach, the rugby club at the College has had predominantly Black coaching staff. Our Director of Rugby and senior coaches are all Black men with experience in coaching at provincial and national levels. Surprisingly, considering the history of South African rugby and its symbolic connection to Afrikanerdom, in my school, most of the White English men coach hockey in the winter. I am lucky that I coach with a senior Black executive staff member because he enjoys engaging with learners in a different space. Working together, we have tried to be authentic and intentional in some of our actions. Selecting Black captains to ensure that we are inclusive is one way we tried to make the sport more welcoming to boys from primary schools and homes where rugby has not been as well-received as football. We have attempted to engage with Black parents who frequently do not feel as welcome spectating their children's matches by making conversation and explaining the nuances of the game after matches and practices. This exercise has been well-received, yet I frequently defer to my colleague regarding such engagements with parents because he is more comfortable in taking them on and is better received by Black parents.

The incidents described in the vignettes above indicate some race-related issues that sit beneath the surface of rugby coaching as the means for teaching controversy. My experience of rugby, as described in this chapter, shows the importance of the sport in establishing a hierarchy. Issues are sometimes straightforward and demonstrative, such as boys, Black and White, saying that there are too many "brothers", Black boys, in a particular side for a small-sided game at practice, thereby reinforcing a stereotype that Black boys are quick. On another occasion, I had a boy ask to borrow a ball because he would be staying late after practice as his parents only fetch him later, which he described as working on "African time". These small comments, not intended to insult anyone, are frequently easily unpacked with a private discussion, asking a boy what he meant by a specific comment, how that changes our team and how individuals feel they belong in our team. More complicated instances have included those, such as when a boy was insulted by boys from my school due to his complexion. I felt unequipped to address this situation and passed it on to more senior Black coaches. In this regard, Bishop recalls:

"Myself and another member of staff, we then took it on and called the boys in to unpack it further. And I think for me, what you've done - you acted well, you know, because it was uncomfortable for you. And you didn't know how to take it further, you know, came to me, knowing you know, the amount of languages I speak and I am a Venda, but being a Venda that's been all over South Africa. And so we were able to call these boys in and actually unpack and sit them down and make them understand how, how unfair and how unkind it was for them to say what they said, you know, just because somebody's have a darker complexion, doesn't mean they might not even be Venda, you know, and yet you're busy calling the Venda then you know you're the darkness of your skin shouldn't determine, you know what you are called know how you treat it"

Reflecting on the incident, I am still uncertain how I could have been of more help. I conversed with the guilty boys and reprimanded them in general terms with the classic "Is this how we ought to behave?" and "You are a representative of your school". I felt extremely uncomfortable. As a White person, I did not feel it was my place to correct Black children on how they saw other Black people. While the player on the other team's hurt was enough for me to understand what the boys had done was wrong, I did not have a foundation of experience from which to act.

Another challenging, controversial issue to navigate as a coach has been selecting boys to attend provincial trials and their subsequent selection for different provincial teams. The selection of players based on race, often called "quota players" by South Africans, is frequently a contentious and emotive topic that has recently been the focus of additional controversy. This mindset has repercussions in every sport-minded school whose coaches are asked to nominate players for trials within their specific unions. Given that my school is situated within a predominantly Afrikaans city, we are one of the few schools expected to produce Black players for selection—this is not an unspoken arrangement. My senior coaches will remind me to nominate Black players, who are more likely to be selected.

The conversation with the White mother who did not want to host Black children in her home is another example of my naivete. I assumed that because her son was friendly with Black players and that I had never seen him behave in a way that betrayed any deep-seated prejudice, his parents would be the same. I had not noticed that the boys I had paired him with were Black. My clear colour blindness reveals the privileged lenses through which I view interactions in my coaching space (Southall, 2022). I do not doubt that those boys whom I was required to allocate to a family were very conscious of what I had missed and that they were, if momentarily, in my care as a White man. Bishop, who coached with me, recalls:

And I think it was probably the first time that was happening in their house in a space where Black people were always seen as workers.

That I shoved them into a White space without considering that has forced me to reflect on all the other occasions where Black learners have been in my care, on sports tours and away fixtures, and I have failed to adequately understand the challenges they face in entering White spaces: a trip to Bloemfontein or Cape Town and what it means to different players; who I have paired with on a bus or in hostels.

The sports field presents a nuanced, complex, non-formal space for teaching controversial issues (Malcolm et al., 2003). It is a space for expressing the school's macro-narrative, and controversy regarding race and gender is telling. While carrying a whistle, my teaching of controversy sheds

131

light on the complexity of the independent boys' school and the lasting impact of the English public school's obsession with ball sports.

4.6 Final bell

This chapter presented my narrative as constructed through the methodology outlined in Chapter 3. As stated earlier in the chapter, I make no claims in presenting objective truths. This chapter is the subjective expression of my experience, some co-constructed through critical conversations with co-witnesses and co-constructors of my experience. In Chapter 5, I extract meaning from this narrative of The village schoolmaster to better understand my teaching of controversial issues in an independent boys' school. The complexity of my teaching and learning of controversy is nested within the complexity of my identity as a teacher who attended and teaches at an independent boys' school. I hope that I can find some meaning in the study of this complexity.

Chapter 5 - Late Prep and Lights Out: Analysis and Interpretation of the Narrative

5.1 Introduction: Constructing meaning from the narrative

In this chapter, I generate meaning from the data produced in the narrative Chapter Four. As Chang (2008) highlights, the analysis and interpretation of data cannot be separated from data collection, as data collection fills gaps and enriches the study. While the practical aspects of the study are not linear, what follows is an attempt to mine through my autoethnography to gain illumination in whatever form. Autobiography becomes ethnographic when authors become conscious of the implications of their history in larger social formations and historical processes (Blackburn, 2021). Therefore, this chapter aims to identify my experience of teaching in boys' independent schools into frameworks of Whiteness, masculinity and South African education.

No one model for data analysis will provide neat and finished answers in autoethnographic studies (Chang, 2008). I am not seeking neat and finished answers; complexity and ambiguity are clear in lived experiences within complex spaces. I am not attempting to find objective truths. Adams et al. (2014, p. 102) offer criteria for evaluating an autoethnography: "Making contributions to knowledge; valuing the personal and experiential; demonstrating the power, craft, and responsibilities of stories and storytelling; taking a relationally responsible approach to research practice and representation". I attempt to present an analysis that upholds these criteria.

This autoethnography aims to create a culturally meaningful text. The data cannot speak for itself; therefore, my role as the ethnographer has been to string together, explain and transform the narrative into a text that describes my cultural tenets and connections to others within society (Chang, 2008). How do I link lived experiences to broader societal structures and history? The framework outlined in Chapter 3 is the lens through which to analyse and interpret the data.

Initially, I identified themes throughout the data that will serve as headings and waypoints for the analysis. While specific aspects of my experience or context could serve as prominent themes,

they do not accurately represent the ambiguous and shifting nature of identity as represented in autoethnography. Therefore, I chose broader themes to allow for an authentic representation and understanding of the complexity of my experience. Note that the data analysis remains in line with the theoretical underpinnings outlined in Chapter Two, which shows that complex systems, my teaching, are nestled within other complex systems (Davis & Sumara, 2008); therefore, my operative system falls within the complexity of my context, its history and societal structures.

After one peels away the layers of this study's rationale, it becomes clear that at its core is a feeling of ineptitude in teaching controversial issues and subsequent anxiety. Chapter 2 explores the importance of teaching controversial issues, and Chapter Four shows that I have some understanding of this importance. However, when faced with the complexity of my context and the baggage of boys' school norms and traditions, teaching controversial issues is bemusing. At first, I aimed to dedicate an entire segment of this chapter to that avoidance; however, it quickly became clear that my avoidance and containment of these issues of controversy had different, complex systems that needed to be placed within a broader analysis of specific themes (McCully, 2006). Therefore, each theme will discuss my avoidance of specific controversial issues.

Table 1, in Chapter 3, presents the guiding principles of my analysis and interpretation. It is crucial to distinguish between analysis and interpretation. Analysis relates to identifying essential features of data and the analysis of the interrelationships between them, whereas interpretation focuses on finding cultural meaning beyond the data (Chang, 2008). These two features of inquiry work concurrently and are used throughout the autoethnographic process to derive meaning. They are represented in the principles presented in Table 1.

Chapter Four uniquely expresses my lived experience in a mix of narrative forms. A reflective narrative is punctuated with narrativettes of realist narratives and excerpts from an artefact analysis. From these narratives and artefacts, meaning is derived using the principles presented in Table 1. The narrativettes, themes and metaphors are identified within the thick descriptions of experience and placed within the context of their complexity. They are nestled within the complexity of my experience yet are expressions of my identity, biases and understanding.

Finally, this chapter does not seek to justify or give excuses for the events described within the study or for elements relating to my practice. I only seek to link the meaning interpreted within the study to culturally significant themes and ideas to add to the body of research on teaching controversial issues and independent boys' schools in South Africa.

5.2 Review of my study

Reviewing this study's chapters to see the connection between the themes presented in this chapter is necessary. Chapter One is the introduction and offers an overview of the study that follows. The background and context of the study, the history of independent boys' schooling and my context as a teacher of controversial issues within that complex space are explored. I clarify the terms for the study and summarise the theoretical framework and the proposed methodology of the evocative autoethnography presented in the dissertation. This chapter is a roadmap to the study that unfolds in these pages.

As the roadmap has been laid out, Chapter Two is a guide through the literature in the field. Literature on teaching and learning controversial issues and its importance in teaching democratic values is explored. The complexity of Whiteness and its waves of studies were reviewed. Masculinity and its complex connection to teaching boys was also explored. Chapter Two also describes the theoretical framework developed for the study. Complexity theory is offered to understand the complex connection between the elements in which my teaching of controversial issues is nested.

Chapter Three outlines the study's methodology as evocative autoethnography. The chapter lays out the methodological theory, the research approach, the paradigm and the assumptions used in the study. The chapter also describes the methods used to construct data and how that data are analysed. Through this, I explain how the study reveals insight into my teaching of controversial issues.

Chapter Four is the autoethnographic narrative. This narrative is a constructed expression of my experience teaching controversial issues in an independent boys' school. It includes my education in an independent boys' school and connects my experiences as a learner to my current teaching practice. The narrative is presented as a data collection constructed in critical conversations and reflective narratives. This raw data offer a source from which meaning can be uncovered.

5.3 The "new school": Those who qualify

My teaching of controversial issues, my operating system as described in Chapter Two, is nested within the complexity of the independent boys' school system. These schools' identities are nested within the complexity of South African history, a still emergent democratic identity and as seen in the nation's and boys' schools' colonial legacy. What is still notably absent in studying prestigious independent boys' schools is understanding the emergence of a complex school identity rooted in the legacy of a colonial education system and influenced by the coming of democracy in 1994. While the racial and cultural makeup of the school might have changed, it has remained very much the same in ethos and exclusivity.

The school's exclusivity is highlighted in my initial engagement with the institution. Even if I now understand it to be performative, my writing of an entrance examination is an example of exclusivity in practice—only those worthy of admittance who have been able to pay for an exceptional education may enter. The above marked the beginning of a feeling of ineptitude, a theme throughout my narrative. This exclusivity extends beyond the exorbitant fees charged to parents. I felt that the school treated me differently because I did not come from the same background as other boys, and this is reinforced by my mother's comments. My father's alcoholism is another example, in my mind anyway, of how I failed to live up to the institution's expectations, real or implied. Of course, the irony is that I still came from a family that benefited from many privileges. By nature of our Whiteness, we did not carry the burden of the colonial legacy of poverty. The privileges afforded to White South Africans influenced my mother's education and employment at a top independent school, reflecting the notion that many White

South Africans did not experience their Whiteness or their subsequent power over others (Steyn, 2005).

An extension of this question is glaringly obvious: why continue with a model of schooling so connected to the colonial legacy? If the initial purpose of independent and public boys' schools in South Africa was to produce citizens of the Empire, what is the motivation to continue with this modus operandi? The schoolmaster in me desperately wants to cry out that my educational model better prepares learners for life's challenges within a democratic society. However, this would only prove the lasting influence of the colonial legacy, that is, in truth, the arm that turns the wheel of boys' schools in South Africa. Parents desire that their sons model the virtues of the men these schools have produced over the last two centuries, as seen in my narrative, where parents are deeply invested in the prestige associated with which school their children attend and my interactions with parents who have frowned upon issues that go against this understanding. It is seen in the expressions of wealth, in the physical descriptions of facilities and opportunities afforded to my learners and in actions, such as serving alcohol during the school day.

> "Most of the elite schools in South Africa are identified as providing the type of capital that is of high symbolic value, such as access to quality learning opportunities, effective educational management and organisational structures, excellent facilities, as well as a wide range of resources, amongst other advantages" (Feldman & Wallace, 2021, p. 2).

A new-age, wealthy class of South African parent seeks the same privileges afforded to White South Africans by their acceptance and membership in schools like mine. Elite independent schools, such as mine, have been the domain of White South Africans who withdrew from state provision following the coming of democracy (Southall, 2022). How do we describe this new order of elite independent boys' school families?

Democracy has allowed racial inequality to hide behind the guise of equal opportunity, allowing those who turn the wheel of disparity to consciously or unconsciously profit from South Africa's disparate economy (Southall, 2022). The reluctance to give up this educational model was seen

137

at the transition of power in 1994, where Whites, nervous about the threat of decline in the quality of education, saw to it that the new legislation allowed the continuation of independent and model-C schools in traditionally White neighbourhoods (Southall, 2022). This reluctance to abandon influence over children's schooling is alive and well in institutions such as my own. However, as described in my narrative, classrooms are now multicultural reflections of three decades of democratic rule yet are no more a true reflection of the true South African experience than they were when only White children were permitted.

Kenway and Lazarus (2017) describe elite schools as a commodity and help to make sense of the changing South African elite and the appeal of independent boys' schools. With their colonial foundations, elite schools claim to uphold a superior ethos and morality, and that virtue is a byproduct of an education at an elite school. These virtues are elements of the commodity: "Virtue is obliged to have utility, and this means it must be commodified. Parents must want to pay for the school's virtues. If virtue can coincide with new financial opportunities, all the better" (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017, p. 273). To socially manoeuvre around the realities of the privileges afforded to students attending elite schools, schools such as mine navigate a complex balance of avowals and disavowals of their power and privilege. This manoeuvre takes the form of acknowledging privilege but the insistence that its learners are not elitist but grounded, the insistence that elite institutions operate as meritocracies, and most sinister, the notion that elite institutions are diverse spaces when, in reality, diversity is only embraced if it can be commodified (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017).

By my admission, the school I teach at is privileged, with learners seemingly connected to a globalised identity in ways that only the elite upper class can. Felix notes: "*I think the school has gone quite a far away not in repairing the issues of the past because the kids have come to the school are already very privileged in the sense. So, they've already - they're not the kids coming out of the townships that truly need to benefit from reparations from the past - they're kids that are already doing better*". This multi-racial class of elites whose children share the experience of privilege by nature of their wealth seem perfectly happy to pay for the commodity that is elite education at boys' independent schools. My attempts to teach controversial issues play into the narrative that elite schools use their superior virtue and ethos for the betterment of all (Kenway

138

& Lazarus, 2017). That this commodity continues to wear the uniform and perform the traditions of an imperial legacy seems largely unimportant as long as the prestige and privilege of elite schooling remain.

As a study that focuses on a White teacher within a historically White space, it is crucial to remember that one cannot, when studying White South Africans, forget that they are a diasporic people, a failed settler state (Southall, 2022). White South Africans leverage their hybrid identity as members of a global Whiteness and the privilege afforded to them within the South African context by their Whiteness (Steyn, 2005). My primary and secondary schools exhibit the elements of coloniality and the British public school system, which have survived into their third century of life, exemplifying the colonial settler hybrid identity. I chose titles that refer to clothing or uniforms that reflect this legacy. This model, first formulated by Thomas Arnold at Rugby School in the nineteenth century, emphasises the desired values mediated through a headmaster and his assistant masters who held influence in their learners' lives far broader and deeper than mere academic instruction (Honey, 1975).

My schools have many of this model's features. Houses, ties, awards, and, as is clear in my narrative, the obsession with team games became a feature of the British public schools and their colonial derivatives. The uniform, insignia, and badges that identified my and my learners' membership to the exclusive institution are typical features dating back to the turn of the last century (Thompson, 2001). My difficulty in finding my place within my primary school was, as explained by my mother, in part because I was not a capable sportsman. In my narrative, I highlight my limited ability with the cricket bat and ball, symbols of colonial boyhood. In my words, I describe my evolution from a shy and meek junior boy to a first-team rugby player as a significant part of my education, clearly highlighting my belief in the boys' school measure of success. This obsession with sporting prowess, with a specific celebration of ball sports, is a feature of South African independent and British public schools. Sports are viewed as vital for developing a young man's character, measured by sporting achievements rather than intellectual achievement (Lambert, 2001). The same is evident in my story. My headmaster's celebration of my rugby achievements and my views on rugby as a defining aspect of my character are evidence of how it has shaped my teaching and learning of controversial issues.

139

This complicated relationship between the independent boys' school and sports in the 21st century continues to be a theme in my context and has remained constant. Jake's comment that learners believe school to be about "*playing a first-team sport*" or winning the "*victor ludorum*"[15] at an inter-house event highlights the ongoing expectation that learners excel at sports. However, representations of sporting success are more nuanced. My learners' apparent obsession with basketball serves as an example. This distinctly American sporting code, linked to globalised media culture, has become another avenue for expressing colonial boys' school values. While the ball sports might have changed, in my institution, the obsession with representations of the masculine, as athletes and scholars, has not. The cultural links between basketball and American consumer media culture add another layer of complexity to sports and its connection to race and masculine identity. Isaac's recollection that basketball did not have the same level of "cultural" strictness but allowed for expressing dissonant identities compared to a more traditional sport, such as rugby, is telling. My school's obsession with sports introduced by colonial schools is another example of how Whiteness allows institutional features to protect White privilege within sporting programmes (Hextrum, 2020). While this study cannot claim that basketball offers a space to contest this in independent boys' schools, it is a space for contention and complexity within my institution.

As per the guidelines for analysis, as outlined in Table 1, it is interesting to note what I leave out of my narrative. One question I did not ask as a learner and teaching professional was why my parents chose to send me to an independent boys' school. In my narrative, I make it clear that I was impressed by the facilities. It was as if it were an unspoken fact that this sort of institution would prove more profitable and naturally lead to a more successful life than the schools I had previously attended. I do not mention that the scholastic provision would be better, although it was comparably better than that of state-run schools, which face far more challenges than my small and wealthy independent schools. My parents and I believed that admittance into this exclusive club was best for me, that this commodity, whether we felt we deserved it or not, would offer us the best prospect for future success. I bought into this. I remember being told by my parents and some teachers when I performed poorly or misbehaved that if I kept it up, I

---

[15] It is not surprising that the award given to the top achiever at an interhouse event is given a Latin moniker.

would be sent to the model-C school down the road. The exclusivity of the institution and its apparent superiority over other South African schools was core to my parents sending me to the schools they did to become a part of this extension of this new elite, this new order.

5.4 A second-rate Socrates: Controversy in the formal teaching space

As discussed in Chapter Two, that which constitutes a controversial issue is contested. However, this research acknowledges that a controversial issue has multiple interpretations that are not contrary to reason (Dearden, 1981) and that these interpretations must be explored to fully comprehend and teach the issue (Pace, 2021). However, the complicated nature of controversy and its connection to various external factors (Ho et al., 2017) and the changing nature of controversy (McAvoy & Hess, 2017) force us to take an inclusive approach to controversy. In my narrative, controversial issues appear within my classroom and school context and are complex and challenging to place within neat parameters. However, those controversial issues in the formal curriculum are easier to identify, if not easier to teach.

It is crucial that teaching controversial issues is rooted in democratic thinking to teach the procedural values that underpin democracy (Chikoko et al., 2011). Evidence of this is clear in my narrative, with the acronym FRED taken from Pace (2021) as a discussion guideline. It is also clear that I attempt to use the dialogic techniques popularised in teaching controversial issues (Ho et al., 2017), with Jake and Isaac recalling instances where discussions were the focus of lessons. However, having a framework for discussions does not mean success. Felix recounts the tiresome way in which he was expected to engage with issues of controversy in different subjects, an account that supports my comment that learners are frequently disengaged in lessons. This withdrawal from discussions could result from the disparity between the lived experience of my wealthy learners and the content matter. As Felix says, learning that "*South Africa sucks*" is not particularly interesting if one is so far removed from the realities of poverty.

However, the nuance in teaching controversy is expressed in the different accounts made by my co-witnesses of experience. Jake reflects positively on time spent in my class but notes challenges in teaching controversy. He states that the smaller classes, a privilege afforded to

141

those who can pay for it, allowed learners to discuss controversial issues, such as race, but that learners shied away from issues that were "*not my monkey, not my circus*". He acknowledges that the teacher is frequently forced to prompt learners into discussion and that many of the topics discussed are issues his peers had never considered. Felix adds that while a small group of learners engage actively in my discussions on controversial issues, many are "*just trying to get through the day*". Jake admits that many boys were trying to "*matriculate as fast as possible*". This disengagement by learners is a common issue teachers of controversy face in heterogeneous classrooms, where teachers rely on positive learner responses to produce productive lessons (Pace, 2021).

Within the classroom, rigid notions about gender and sexuality are also clear in my narrative. My engagement with issues around gender and sexuality is complex, as noted by Jack, a former colleague: "*But I definitely see you as someone who who can challenge challenge the status quo. My concern is sometimes that because you were a student that you maybe feel like you can't say what you want to say*". As an inducted member of the institution, the complexity of expressions of masculinity, and their teaching poses many challenges. A need exists for male teachers to break down the historical legacy of hegemonic masculinity within the classroom (Martino, 2008); however, my narrative shows I have struggled to make sense of rapidly evolving understandings of gender identity. My former learners reveal a hesitance to engage with issues relating to the trans-experience, which, especially to Isaac, stands in contrast to how I engage with many other issues. That Felix carried this over proves that it is not coincidental that I approach these issues with trepidation. While some of the voices in my narrative speak to my ability to transcend rigid understandings of the masculine, it is riddled with contradictions—my professed dual identity being one of them. In this, I become an avoider of controversial issues (McCully, 2006). I admit that, at times, I play the scripted role of a male teacher in performing a gendered role that is proof of the contextual role in the establishment of my understanding of gender (Connell, 1995).

The classroom also appears as a racially segregated space within my narrative, which is complex, as learners in my narrative describe the space as jovial yet, simultaneously, problematic instances of racism appear. Felix, a White learner, notes that the school has overcome issues relating to

142

race but that this is because students do not come from underprivileged townships. This comment speaks to the complexity of race-class reconstitution of privilege, as learners believe themselves to have a shared lived experience based on their class. However, Isaac comments on Black learners' difficulty entering the space and the perceived need to assimilate into the institution's culture. Bishop's comment that learners are required to abandon their "*Pedi-ness*" when attending the school further reinforces this forced assimilation to White ideals. Jake describes the lack of understanding that White boys have of the realities facing Black and Coloured families when he describes the difficulty of attending an elite independent boys' school and having familial connections to impoverished areas. Jake also mentions that White learners are hesitant to engage in conversations relating to race and that he believes that White families do not engage with topics relating to race relations. My narrative reflects White defensiveness as avoiders of controversy and the belief in the continuation of White norms, with expressions of gender, such as hair and dress, taking the forefront and particularly controversial topics, such as land ownership, within the classroom context (McCully, 2006).

Considering the South African independent boys' school context, it is unsurprising that race and gender appear as the most prevalent themes from which controversial issues appear in my narrative. However, that my learners feel that the curriculum is not effective in addressing these issues is telling. Felix notes that discussions were most effective during the AP English period because the curriculum, learning so many poems, as he recalls, "*hindered us from focussing on issues of controversy*". Martin (2014) identifies the need for teachers to select texts that stretch learners in teaching sensitive issues. I do that, but there is a notable absence of reference to the prescribed works I select. This omission contrasts with the learners' view that the conversations that move away from the prescribed curriculum are most beneficial. My former learners also discussed the need to finish the curriculum and the time constraints, 45-minute periods. These external influences and their effect on the successful teaching of controversy reflect the views of Ho (2017).

My description of the connection between my Black boys and a global understanding of Black identity adds another layer of complexity. The connection to Western music and sport, particularly basketball, as defining features in my students' understanding of the self exposes the

143

complex interplay between race and class. The connection to Black American icons and resistance movements, most notably the BLM movement, by wealthy Black South African boys reveals insight into resistance to a global Whiteness and solidarity with a global understanding of Blackness. That the complexity of these understandings of race is brought into the classroom against the backdrop of class-based privilege and within a nation wracked with inequality presents a contextual specific nexus of understanding of race that is fluid and nested within the complexity of the independent boys' school context. The above indicates the emergence of the "new school", as described earlier in the chapter.

The changing nature of controversy is reflected in my narrative. Hess (2009) states that controversial issues flip-flop back and forth. While issues that arise in my study are clearly connected to broader and historical themes, such as colonial legacy, race and gender, their specific details are contextually specific. Hair and uniform, for example, within the independent boys' school and its connection to Whiteness was not as topical in my account of school life in my narrative. In my recollection of my schooling experience, I express astonishment that the school permitted violence between boys, whereas, within my teaching practice, the school seeks to address issues relating to violence and masculine identity. However, discussions around racism, land and homophobia remain more constant themes, presenting the South African independent boys' school as a changing tapestry of controversy, intricately linked to global and national factors.

As discussed in the theoretical framework for this research, the complexity of my teaching of controversy is nested within the complexity of my context, an independent boys' school (Davis & Sumara, 2008). This context presents a complex and nuanced setting for my teaching of context. At times, I appear as a renegade separatist whose lessons stand in contrast to the narrative of the institution, as seen in my, if ineffective, attempt to usurp the reasoning behind hair policy, my push-back against parents and my selection of content. However, often, I fulfil the trope of a classic boys' schoolmaster, happily reproducing the prejudices and problematic views that have characterised boys' schools. The above, coupled with the macro narratives that I am so anxious to go against in my teaching of controversy, affect the classroom space. I flip between being an avoider and a risk-taker as I struggle with the duality of my identity (Barton &

144

McCully, 2012). These external factors and their inherent controversy influence my teaching of controversy (Ho et al., 2017)

The success of my teaching of controversial issues is, if anything, marginal. As explored above, I fail to engage with most learners in my class in depth. Learner engagement is crucial in successfully teaching controversy (Pace, 2021). That my White learners are the most disengaged and uncomfortable in discussions where they have limited experience is a worrying reflection of the national discourse. My desire to engage with controversy, as a young White teacher, could be viewed as a promising change in the context of independent boys' schooling; however, that I, as a White teacher, am seeking to make myself a part of the solution to a system from which I continue to benefit reeks of Whiteness and White talk (Steyn, 2005).

5.5 A (school) master of what? Teaching controversy through the informal curriculum

My schoolboy identity was followed by my goal to become a schoolmaster. Like the independent boys' schools I attended, this mythopoetic persona is rooted in a legacy of colonial boys' school education. I confess in my narrative that I imagined myself as the Village Schoolmaster. In the traditional sense, the schoolmaster formed an integral cog of this colonial education system. Masters played a role in enforcing British beliefs on character and manliness (Honey, 1975). My belief that boys should engage with controversy to become active citizens within a democratic system is founded on a belief that education is more than only a scholarly pursuit, which formed a pillar of the model built by Arnold and Marlborough two centuries ago (Honey, 1975). My nuanced understanding of a schoolmaster is the Frankensteinian combination of those values that can be traced to the Scotch and Rugby schools and contemporary South African democratic values. A born-free South African, I grew up on the celebration of new democracy within a schooling system whose initial function was to produce boys whose attributes made them useful in expanding British colonialism. Thus, teaching controversy extends well beyond the classroom and the informal and non-formal curricula.

This desire to become the cliché boys' schoolmaster is seen in my reflective writing pieces from undergraduate assessments and projects. My admission of what I sought shows the influence of

the institutions I attended: "*I envisioned myself as a history teacher, beloved by his students for his wit and humour. I imagined myself as a headmaster of a boys' school, in full academic dress and with idiosyncrasies that were loved by boys and staff. I have not entirely abandoned this dream*". To the *uninitiated*, single-sex education must appear as a perplexing model for instruction in an era where understandings of gender are shifting. However, as explored in this dissertation, boys' schools have a unique place within the South African education context. The initial drive for creating British boys' schools on the tip of the African continent indicates the colonial legacy that these institutions still, consciously or unconsciously, reflect. The shaping of masculine identity must be considered, considering the model and the vision of schools like mine. The schools I attended and taught at are masculine spaces, and my narrative makes the expressions of these masculine spaces clear.

A former teacher, Jack, reflects on how boys and staff use specific language to regulate masculinity: "*Things like 'Don't be gay,' 'Don't be a pussy,' 'man up' all that kind of gendered language that creates a notion of masculinity*". My reflection on being bullied and the violence learners used in their interactions fits the hegemonic model of masculinity described by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). My desire to fit into this masculine space indicates a hierarchy I desperately sought to climb. When I had proved myself physically in that supposed great arena of South African manhood, the rugby field, I was elevated to where I felt I belonged within the masculine space. As my headmaster highlighted, rugby achievements were the pinnacle of my success in my last year of school. Reflections on the colonial measure of manhood explored earlier in this chapter are clear in the rippled surface of my narrative. Ball sports, granitic strength and conformity are clear themes.

This hierarchical structure was formalised and made a part of the institution. That senior learners had the authority to force younger learners to complete physical exercise as punishment for rules deemed privileges reserved for prefects seems archaic to those outside of the space; however, its normalisation, only a decade ago, indicates the understanding of hierarchy shared by boys, and evidently by nature of their silence, staff. This was done to achieve some resilience or endurance celebrated by independent boys' schools. As Jack describes: "*So institutional culture. And I think it has a lot to do with masculinity. And that whole narrative, you know, like, suck it up, or*

146

hardship develops resilience, instead of making a space safer, where people don't have to become resilient, you sort of saying, well, you know, suck it up, like just get through it". Violence between boys, as described in my narrative, in multiple forms is evidence of the internalisation of men as violent and powerful (Schefer et al., 2015). This regulation of masculine identity, or "*Lord of the Flies kind of environment*", as one of my co-witnesses of experience calls it, is performed by boys. Violence and bullying allow children to reinforce those traits deemed acceptable behaviour within a gendered script (Felix & Green, 2009). The specific script is complex and reflects the school's values and history.

This essentialist understanding of masculinity aims to identify the essence of the masculine and hangs the lived experience of men's lives onto given descriptors; however, this often reveals more about those choosing these essences of the masculine than it does about masculinity (Connell, 2020). The rigid understanding of masculinity evident in my schooling experience is reflected in my identity descriptions in a diary entry: "*A strong man. A righteous man. An intelligent and fit man*". As Connell explains, this description reveals far more about how my environment has shaped my understanding of masculine identity than it does about the masculine. This understanding of masculinity is, according to Jack, reinforced by the staff, as he states: "*Some of my saddest times at the school was around the cultures in boarding houses that were for me particularly toxic. And those were often perpetuated by staff. And so, this whole idea of of like a culture of silence, this insidious kind of bullying that seems hard to root out*". This is seen again in my narrative, where a former colleague shared that she felt that not all promotion pathways were open to her. This was not an issue for me, as Felix notes that I gained the respect that female teachers do not have within the space.

Boys' schools, as the site of reinforcement for problematic understandings and expressions of violence, are not new. Morrell (2002) notes that schools are spaces of violence. He goes on to describe school violence as expressions of gender linked to social inequalities. Bhana and Mayeza (2020) state that how young boys construct, negotiate and experience violence within the school context also reveals the nature of violence within South African schools. However, violence as a means of constructing a masculine identity within the independent boys' school in the 21st century is notably absent from studies on school violence and masculinity, indicating

147

that the expensive and prestigious commodity that is paid for by parents dressed up with virtue and tradition, is viewed as normative. The problematic presence of school violence presents a complicated view of the efficacy and longevity of monastic boys' education. How does one justify the espoused virtues of elite boys' schools if, at their core, they continue to lack inclusive understandings of masculinity?

5.6 The measure of men

Using homophobia to regulate the masculine hierarchy is a clear theme in my narrative. Reflection revealed that homophobic slurs were commonplace in my schooling, as early as my primary school years, which carried through to high school, where a rigid understanding of masculinity is evident. This use of homohysteria to regulate expressions of masculine identity is in line with Anderson's (2009) views that the fear of appearing feminine regulates masculinity in hegemonic spaces. This heteronormativity is, according to my co-witnesses, reinforced by staff and highlighted in my interactions with parents who view fluid understandings of gender as against their religious values. Isaac recalls boys being fearful of being labelled as gay, especially within the boarding house, as this would result in being mocked by other boys. This connection between fearing to appear feminine might explain why, as explained by former pupils, I struggle to teach issues relating to gender and sexuality. My environment has shaped my understanding of masculinity and is no doubt influenced by the heteronormative space in which I was educated.

I cannot be so naive as to neglect the complexity of the space in which I teach. Schefer et al. (2015) highlight the complexity and variation in masculine identity within the South African context, and I, too, cannot ignore the complexity of my space. However, homohysteria (Anderson, 2009) was and is used to regulate masculine expressions within my space. That I so clearly recall being called gay, and other boys being called gay, at primary school speaks to this. That traditional measures of the masculine, such as sport, are and were an overwhelmingly powerful factor in the measure of identity within these spaces reinforces this claim. As I stated in Chapter Four, "*Describing inability on the sports field as "gay" or letting another boy know that he was a "faggot" were commonplace, even for twelve-year-olds*". Jack, a former teacher, states that, within the school space, "*things like 'don't be gay,' 'don't be a pussy,' 'man up', all that*

148

kind of gendered language that creates a notion of masculinity. That, you know, it feels like kids have to assimilate into that kind of space". The regulation of masculine identity is reinforced through homophobic language. The institution and my obsession with ball sports and the status within these spaces that comes from success within the White lines of the sports field reflect the narrative of what a boy "ought" to be. It is clear from my narrative and school reports that my success at school was measured by my eventual success on the sports field, which aligns with Mordaunt-Bexiga's (2011) view that racial and masculine superiority is performed in the cultural context of rugby.

Due to my membership to the exclusive and masculine club, I am complicit in the continuation of the norms so firmly entrenched within independent boys' schools. However, something must be said about the influence of the space in which I teach. Connell (1995) emphasises that masculinity and gender are heavily influenced by social factors, including schooling and familial structures. To refer again to the framework of this study, the complexity of my understanding of masculine identity is nestled within the complexity of my school's understanding of the masculine and how they are policed and reproduced. The independent boys' school context has shaped my understanding of the self. I am a product of the complexities of this education model, meaning I am intimately connected to a set of norms reflected in my study. I have carried this narrative into my classroom, and my avoidance of teaching issues regarding gender and sexual identity reinforces the homohysteria that regulates rigid understandings of the masculine (Anderson, 2008). I was not the only educator complicit in this, as Isaac highlights that other teachers have mentioned their distaste for homosexuality.

5.6 A White tradition

Considering the South African context, the history of unequal access to education and legacy of unequal opportunity, it must seem obvious that Whiteness would appear as a critical theme within my narrative. My identity as a White male teacher who attended a traditionally White boys' independent school, with all its inherent privileges, attempting to teach controversial issues to a multi-racial classroom in the era following democracy is a complex set of circumstances, but one that cannot be separated from the pervasive nature of Whiteness—my Whiteness and the

Whiteness of the institution in which I teach and in which I was taught. My study sits within the field of third-wave Whiteness studies and, in its unique and contextually specific way, looks to explain how Whiteness is defined, deployed, performed, policed and reinvented within my context (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). My school, and by extension, this study, balanced upon the tightrope of Whiteness and White identity in the wilderness of the new South Africa almost three decades after the first democratic elections. It is, to a large degree, a study that adds to how White South Africans have sought to make meaning of their place in a nation that has seen the rapid decentralisation of Whiteness, in the political sense anyway, following the onset of democracy (Steyn, 2005).

Elite independent boys' schools are White in legacy, character and practice. The negotiation of democracy allowed independent schools to hold onto their resources, and the politics of redistribution, defensive for White South Africans, has allowed White citizens to continue to secure access to privileged education (Southall, 2022). As revealed in my narrative, the makeup of the student body is racially diverse, if not so in class. Soudien (2023, p. 4) describes the reconfiguration of race and class as "the coalescence of old and new privilege—of old White middle-class interests with those of the new Black middle class" and has seen the continuation of inequality and privilege afforded to elite, former White, schools. That my classroom is multi-racial does not take away from the fact that the school itself is White in identity.

The above is seen in the enforcement of hair policy and uniform. Jason's interaction with me in the classroom is one such example. As explained by Soudien (2023), the new coalition of race and class in the independent boys' school often struggles with one another, manifesting in several ways, including hair policy and language use. The school's enforcement of a hair policy, rooted in colonial legacy, has appeared in many elite former White schools in the country. These physical expressions of Whiteness are monuments to the racial division on which schools, such as mine, were founded. However, the classroom space offers insight into understanding my and my learners' lived experiences.

As is the case with autoethnography, the complexity of the data offers no easy answers. Helms (2014) rejects the notion that Whiteness exists on a good–bad dichotomy and warns of how

challenging it is for the White researcher to identify Whiteness. The fluidity of my White identity and that of my learners is telling. As described in my narrative, I grew up in a biased and privileged world. Attending independent boys' schools and believing myself to be of a lower economic class than my peers reveal my ignorance regarding the economic privilege afforded me due to my race. That my parents could pay anything at all for my education placed me in a privileged bracket within the South African context. I was, and am, conditioned, like all Whites, by my upbringing within this biased White space (Helms, 1995). The conditions of my education were overwhelmingly White. The expressions of overt racism, such as the use of language and performances of racism at assemblies, framed my understanding of race, and as explained by Steyn (2005), I was ignorant of the privilege. As described in my narrative, I had few Black teachers, and White educators guided my education. I attended university, and any account of the difficulty in securing a loan or obtaining admission to a tertiary education institution is notably absent from my study; so too is any mention of the burden of family members, reliant on me as a breadwinner—all examples of my privilege within the academic space.

My expression of Whiteness shifted across a spectrum of expression (Helms, 1995). My apparent obsession with the image of the colonial schoolmaster and my admission that I do, at times, portray that image reveals the White lenses through which I look at my career as an educator. As per the framework for this study, the complexity of my teaching practice is nested within the complexity of my identity as a White South African (Davis & Sumara, 2008). My attempts to teach controversial issues regarding race are complex because I am arguably the cause of the continuation of White norms within my space and am attempting to be their solution (Matthews, 2021). My narrative hints at using my classroom to make a meaningful difference within the field of education, elevating my status within the anti-racist movement.

Soudien (2010) describes three discourses of privilege that result from the reconstitution of privilege within former White schools. All three are revealed within my experience, in myself and my learners. My learners' connection to a broader, globalised Whiteness is clear in their connection to international sport and the consumerist values that appear so often. In the interactions described in my narrativettes, where parents and learners have been portrayed as overtly racist, there is a clear display of "old-new South African Whiteness" (Soudien, 2010, p.

151

355). Occasionally, as in the being and belonging workshop description, White characters in my narrative display "new South African Whiteness" (Soudien, 2010, p. 356). However, Soudien describes this discourse of Whiteness as requiring a commitment to community and the need to "put something back". A notable absence from my narrative is any reference to an interaction with the local community or a positive footprint left by the institution. While the school runs some charitable projects, that these are left out of my narrative is a revealing factor; it is not the institution's core business. The values espoused by the school are for its members and their interaction within the curated space created by its community.

The pervasiveness of Whiteness is revealed in how the institution and parents reproduce it. My ignorance of the Black experience, when I sent boys to stay with a White family and the resulting racist issue that arose, highlights the complexity of the reconstitution of race and class within the independent boys' school space (Soudien, 2023). My belief that the boys would be perfectly fine and that our parents would be welcoming reveals that, in some ways, I am as naive as Felix, whose comments that the College has overcome racial inequality stand in contrast to some glaringly obvious contradictions. If anything, it reinforces the point that Whites cannot be at the centre of anti-racist movements and must move themselves out of the centre if true understanding and dismantling of racial injustice is to be achieved. This colour-blindness (Steyn & Foster, 2008) is a problematic avenue for reinforcing inequality and silencing Black voices and experiences. While my narrativette reveals a singular event on an afternoon, it is no doubt a signpost of daily instances where my Whiteness and my White talk hinder me from identifying instances of racial inequality and the reproduction of White privilege by myself and the school.

A particularly contentious theme within my narrative is that of discrimination between Black boys based on their complexion—boys with darker skin tones being the target of mockery by boys with lighter complexions. Colonial rule and racial segregation established a problematic relationship between the colour of one's skin and access to socio-economic opportunities, the result of which has left a legacy of colourism and even a skin-lightening cosmetic industry (Anjari, 2022). In the case of my narrativette, the racially charged mockery was linked to the word Venda, a cultural group from the North of South Africa. Here, my colour-blindness was again revealed in my ignorance of the weight of the insult and my failure to engage with the

152

issue constructively on the field (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Whites enjoy the privilege of membership to a dominant grouping in a racially imbalanced world and, therefore, are not forced to engage with racism, resulting in Whites viewing discussions around race as taboo, leading them to avoid such discussions when faced with racial stress (Thomas, 2019).

I exhibit a degree of this avoidance in interacting with learners and facing discussions around race and colourism. My belief that I should be the solution and my need to be knowledgeable on all topics reveals my bias as a White man. However, I am still uncertain regarding how I would have engaged with a controversial issue of this magnitude within my capacity as a White person. My fear that to comment on my Black learners' racial prejudice would come across as hypocritical reveals the complexity of my context—a White teacher, reaping the benefits of White identity within an unequal society, correcting Black boys on issues regarding race while feeling entirely uneasy by the nature of Whites' hesitance to experience race. I slip into White talk (Steyn, 2005) and begin moralising and assuming, by the nature of my experience, that I am correct and somehow virtuous in my engagement with the topic I, by my confession, do not understand. Not because I believe I am right, but because in my narrative, I feel as if I must, am entitled to by nature of my identity. The above reveals the White male teacher's inability to address pertinent issues emerging within the independent boys' school context.

5.7 Proposing answers to my research question

When proposing answers to my research question, it is crucial to remember that I make no claim to any universal truths or objective conclusions. My study is a contextually specific autoethnography that seeks to present echoes of truth. With this in mind, what more can be said about *teaching controversial issues in an independent South African boys' school: An autoethnography*, after an analysis of my constructed data? As explained in my theoretical framework, how do the complex constituent elements of my teaching of controversy allow for the understanding of my practice?

153

The teaching of controversial issues, my operative system, is a complex system nested within the controversy of the independent boys' school (Martin & Dismuke, 2018). The complexity of my education has influenced this operative system in an independent boys' school, which was the genesis of my desire to become a schoolmaster. The legacy of my education continues to shape my teaching of controversial issues and the duality of my teaching identity. Similarly, my teaching of controversy is influenced by the non-formal and informal curricula of the school (Malcolm et al., 2003). The colonial legacy within the institution and its Whiteness shaped my approach to teaching controversy. Furthermore, the formal curriculum has hindered my teaching of controversy because it does not lend itself to teaching more than required to pass grade 12.

The context of my teaching of controversial issues presents yet another complex system that shapes teaching practice. Many of the colonial values described by Lambert (2004) and Honey (1975) are still present in the independent boys' school I teach. An obsession with ball sports and upholding Victorianesque values are consistent themes in my narrative. Simultaneously, elite schools' commodification of virtue is also clear in my school. While these continuations of colonial tradition and values are present in the independent boys' school, the reconstitution of race and class in South Africa and the subsequent emergence of a wealthy Black middle class means that the independent boys' school classroom is now a multicultural and multi-racial space (Soudien, 2023). This new school values the independent boys' school's core virtues and is seemingly happy to pay the exorbitant fees to ensure they continue. However, this new multi-racial student and parent body has led to contention between parties. In my narrative, Black staff are seen speaking out, learners identify that White learners cannot engage in discussions on controversial issues relating to poverty and basketball offers a space where learners can dodge the rigid expectations that come with more traditional sporting codes, such as rugby.

Understandably, the formal curriculum and the classroom are complex settings for teaching controversial issues. My avoidance of controversy is clear in the anxiety I feel when confronted with specific controversial issues (McCully, 2006). My learners remember my avoidance and containment of issues relating to gender. Their attempts to frustrate me with questions regarding gender identity reveal that my learners understand the complexity of these controversial issues.

Despite my learners using homophobia to regulate expressions of masculine identity (Anderson, 2009), that the classroom is a space where learners can bring up discussions on gender is a promising development in teaching controversial issues in independent boys' schools. Similarly, my learners recall that White boys are less likely to engage in controversial issues regarding race, and when they do, it can become problematic. However, my narrative reveals incidents where learners take on the role of risk-taker, willingly engaging with controversial issues regarding poverty, hair policy and land ownership.

While some positives are noted, many factors hinder teaching controversial issues in independent boys' schools. My learners recall that the curriculum does not allow adequate time for teaching controversial issues. Furthermore, learners are apathetic and unwilling to learn about how "*South Africa sucks*". This apathy can make my teaching of controversial issues ineffective, coupled with my anxiety in teaching controversial issues that do not align with the school's ethos, complicate my teaching of controversy.

The informal and non-formal curricula also offer insight into the complexity of teaching controversial issues (Malcolm et al., 2003). Whiteness shapes the independent boys' school. Hair policy, language, uniform and norms reinforce the institution's inherent Whiteness. White talk allows me and others to normalise the school's White norms (Steyn, 2005). My Whiteness also influences my teaching of controversy. My colour-blindness and the guilt that arose in sending two Black learners to stay with a White family that resulted in a racist incident is an example. Furthermore, the colourism in the narrative and my need to avoid issues relating to colourism add an additional layer of controversy to teaching controversy.

Just as complex as issues regarding race, the complexity of controversy relating to masculinity is also clear in my narrative and teaching controversial issues. Learners continue to regulate expressions of masculine identity through homophobia, which is further reinforced by staff. The school reinforces this by declaring it a "boys' school for boys". While learners use issues regarding gender to reinforce expressions of masculine identity, they can identify sensitive and controversial issues that ought to require sensitivity. That some of my learners desire to discuss

155

these issues in class and can identify my anxiety in teaching them reveals the complexity of teaching in a setting where the constituent elements of controversy clash.

Therefore, it is challenging to define an answer to the research question clearly. However, it is in the complexity of the data and analysis that autoethnography has value. Considering the proposed conclusions above, some recommendations can be made. Since autoethnography is contextually specific, future research must seek to further understand the emergence of the "new school" of independent boys' schools. This new, multi-racial, class of wealthy South Africans are a small minority of supremely affluent citizens in the most unequal society globally. While this might seem like it is feeding into elitism, this same group presents the potential to use controversial issues for a positive change through the opportunities afforded to learners. As laid out in my theoretical framework, my teaching practice, or operative system, is nested within the complexity of understandings of masculinity, Whiteness, a colonial legacy and an emergent multi-racial elite (Martin & Dismuke, 2018). It is equally essential that future research focuses on teacher anxiety in teaching controversy within independent boys' schools. The elements that feed into the complexity of the boys' school need further understanding if effective teaching of controversy is to occur.

5.8 Methodological reflections

The effectiveness of evocative autoethnography as a method of exploring teaching practice is uncommon and will, I am sure, garner a great deal of scepticism. Autoethnography, as explored in Chapter Three, is not without its criticism and its efficacy in producing reliable outcomes and understanding has been questioned (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). What truth, if any, is to be found in the study of the self? The question of whether it is worth using a study of the self as a method for teaching controversial issues within the context of the South African independent boys' school is, I hope, revealed in the preceding chapters. Evocative autoethnography allowed me to explore the unique connection between my relationship with the independent boys' school, its connection to my personal and professional identities and my teaching of controversial issues. I hope the text of Chapter Four is, as Ellis (1999) puts it, a depiction of the heart, the autobiographical and the artistic. Evocative autoethnography allowed me to express the

156

complexity and nuance of my lived experience and its entanglement with the space in which I teach as a unique moment in the discourse of South African education three decades on from the advent of democracy.

Historical artefacts as a source of reflective inspiration profoundly impacted my autoethnographic process. Since my focus is education, as a learner and teaching professional, it was helpful to discover that my parents saved a great deal of documentation and class work. It could be a common thing for parents to do, but viewing school reports, photographs and awards decades on through the lens of academic research provided tangible vestiges of the complexity of my experience. Using these artefacts as information sources forced me to appreciate that my shifting identity is the product of the complexity of my experience and the different constituent factors that have contributed to that complexity. As these factors of influence are always changing, so too does my identity as a teacher (Morrison, 2012). Many of these artefacts were connected to my experience at an independent boys' school as report cards, rugby festival programmes, testimonials, awards, and honorary ties reveal my parents' emotional investment in my identification as a member of this exclusive club.

Similarly, my conversations with co-witnesses and co-constructors of experience add depth and nuance to my understanding of the self and my practice. That their testimony reaffirmed some of my initial beliefs was reassuring; however, there was a great deal that I failed to see through my lens of experience. These fundamental role players were individuals whose experiences intertwined with my complexity and allowed me to make meaning from conversations on our shared experiences (Adams et al., 2017). My learners provided insights I had failed to notice, specifically regarding my teaching practice. While I was more prepared emotionally for positive and negative comments on my teaching practice, I was unprepared for the overwhelming echoes of truth they shared regarding my experience as a human. The conversations were mostly emotional in some way or another. I did not expect that after leaving my class, I would still feel such a strong connection to my former learners. I did not expect colleagues to speak so meaningfully about our shared experiences. Most of all, I did not expect my mother's description of her experiences to be so novel for me, and for them to place missing pieces into my mosaic of understanding. I expected these conversations with critical role players to be more like

157

interviews reflecting on data to be studied but, in the end, they were moments in which meaning was made.

I believed, naively, that writing my autoethnographic narrative would be a linear process, that I would look at my prompts and raw data and then, starting at the beginning of my experience, write from start to finish. It was not the case. Reflecting on my methodology, the experience reflected the messiness of all human experiences. Error led to understanding, reflection added depth and every success was followed by a gnawing doubt that saw me scrambling to rework a paragraph for fear of misrepresenting my experience. It was not until I was deep into my writing that I came to terms with the fact that the piece, missteps and all, reflects the focus of the study: myself. It allowed me to sink into writing in a way that I had not yet experienced. The narrative, which I enjoyed writing the most, allowed me to dabble in cathartic artistry, which could be ironic, considering my profession as an English teacher, but the release offered by creative writing was surprising. I hope I have created an evocatively thick piece of writing that allows for identifying themes that echo the truth (Ellis et al., 2011).

Following the writing of the autoethnography, I believed that analysing my data would be a process of finding gems on which to focus my study. It was, again, a misconception. Rather than a series of epiphany moments, my data analysis and theme identification were more like listening to music and realising that distinct melodies were being repeated. Rereading or relistening repeatedly allowed me to identify themes. The exploration of these themes was more challenging in some ways than the writing of my narrative. To take a step away from my context and experience was difficult. My experience was intertwined with the research process. Slipping between being the focus of the study, which required authentic reflection and internal angst, to wearing the cap of critical researcher made for a complex transition. However, this process of etic analysis has allowed for new insight into the teaching of controversial issues within my context (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). As such, I found that evocative autoethnography provided a methodology that allowed me to explore my complex relationship with the independent boys' school and its lasting influence on my teaching practice. Therefore, the methods allowed for representing lived experience in a way that a more traditional ethnographic set of methods might not have. While some might argue that the data created in this study is not transferable, its

158

contextual relevance has value. Shedding light on experience in a way that objective and empirical evidence could not.

5.9 Personal: professional reflections on the study

When I began this study, I believed it would be an undertaking to merely improve teaching practice, a means for me to find my place in my current role as an educator of boys in an immensely privileged space. I did not expect the depth of my connection to this educational model, the complexity of its entanglement with my identity and the many problematic ways it has shaped my interactions with learners. I also believed that the study would focus on the classroom; however, and maybe due to the enveloping way boys' schools assimilate their learners, it quickly became clear that the hidden curriculum and my complicity in it play just as crucial a role in my teaching of controversial issues. Whether it be in the classroom, on the rugby field, in the boarding house or in the Anglican chapel, my engagement with learners is a complex system of constituent elements and is nested within the complexity of the South African independent boys' school space (Davis & Sumara, 2008).

In Chapter One, I state that I believe that the school at which I teach can be a vehicle for positive change. I still believe that it can, not because of any enduring belief that it is the most appropriate educational model but because of the realities of the reconstitution of race and class in the elite schooling environment (Soudien, 2023) and because the privileged learners in my class have a far more realistic opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to our now thirty-year-old democracy. The elitism of the old order still exists. That parents are willing to spend hundreds of thousands of rands annually for the prestige of these historic schools is proof enough that some of that which was valued by the colonial society prevails. However, in the context of the new South Africa, my narrative reveals a complex interplay between the legacy and tradition of these institutions and the emergence of values connected to a global identity—one that, in our South African context, is accessed through the unequal distribution of wealth yet, and perhaps this is positive, is multicultural.

159

I also explain that this research resulted from my insecurity and inadequacy in the face of teaching controversy. I explored numerous ways in which Whiteness permeates social spaces earlier in this dissertation; however, my narrative is one that asks the glaring question: Is there still White in the rainbow (Southall, 2022)? Similarly, the complexity of masculine identity and how hegemony and heteronormativity is enforced reveal the complexity of boys' experience within this gendered space (Connell, 1995). So too, then the question must be asked whether single-gender education has, morally, a future in the South African education landscape.

The simple answer to both questions for independent boys' schooling is no, not in the way it has existed over the last century of South African education. My narrative reveals the disconnect between my experiences and value system and my learners' emergent understanding—the complex reproduction of values traditionally attributed to boys' schools yet a resistance to conform to some of the institution's attempts to whitewash identity. For those wealthy White South Africans who have chosen to stay and get on with life (Southall, 2022), it appears that the independent boys' school is a site of contest and controversy. Whether these institutions have a future will depend on their willingness to adapt to the South African elite's continually changing identity and values. Their children, some of whose words are quoted in this research, have identified issues in this educational model and will, as they inherit, hopefully make equitable changes.

In terms of my place as an educator in the context of South African independent boys' school education, I do not feel that this research has provided me with any concrete answers. It has only served to highlight glaring issues in the value system I have inherited as a part of this system of privilege. It would not be constructive or entirely factual to state that I have no place in the teaching of controversy due to my academic history. Yet, in gaining the insights this research has afforded me, I can seek to teach controversy in a way that positively equips learners to move beyond the many problematic ways in which independent boys' schools shape thinking.

5.10 Conclusion

The initial motivation for my investigation into teaching controversial issues in an independent boys' school was a feeling of ineptitude. I did not see the future of an educator such as myself in an education system whose mandate is to address controversial issues linked to a history of oppression and segregation. As explained in Chapter One, my school still reflects the British public school system designed to create citizens of the British Empire (Lambert). However, almost three decades post the nation's first democratic elections, where does a school modelled on a Victorian schooling system find itself? How can a teacher so intimately connected to this educational model teach controversial issues to a multi-racial and multicultural group of learners who reproduce and contest the problematic remnants of the classic boys' school?

This study reveals the complex and nuanced relationship between the teacher and the independent boys' school. Teaching controversy occurs in the formal, informal and non-formal curricula (Malcolm et al., 2003). The formal curriculum offers a space for teaching controversial issues regarding race, gender and the complex South African history. However, this controversy extends beyond the formal classroom to the sports field and other spaces. Furthermore, the reconstitution of wealth and class in South Africa has led to the emergence of a multi-racial middle class, which can be seen in my teaching environment (Soudien, 2023); subsequently, the rise of controversial issues reflecting the complexity of this multi-racial space. This new school of learners and parents are willing to reproduce some of the elitist thinking that has been foundational to independent boys' schools for the last century. However, tangible measures of Whiteness, such as traditional sports and hair policies, have become controversial issues. My learners reveal a willingness to discuss these issues and other issues regarding race, but only in a narrow way that reflects the experiences of a small and wealthy minority.

Furthermore, hierarchical and hegemonic masculinity continues to exist within the independent boys' school context. Homophobic slurs and the criticism of all that is perceived to be feminine continue to regulate masculine identity (Connell, 1995), reflecting Anderson's (2009) description of homohysteria. The above is further complicated by my discomfort in teaching issues

161

regarding gender and sexual orientation. In this way, I continue to reinforce the existing hegemonic understanding of masculinity. However, my learners' ability to identify my unease in teaching controversy and their readiness to discuss issues reveals a budding willingness to discuss these issues within formal and informal settings.

The future of independent boys' schools and White, heterosexual, cis-gendered male teachers who teach in them is beyond the scope of this study. However, this autoethnography reveals the complexity of teaching controversial issues within the current South African boys' schools. Teaching controversial issues is influenced by a complex interconnection of understandings of gender, Whiteness, a colonial legacy and an emergent new multi-racial elite. Simply put, my teaching of controversy in an independent boys' school is flawed yet ambiguous and nuanced, reflecting the complexity of the South African education system three decades after democracy. I hope that the autoethnography laid out here will echo some truths and, through that, add to understanding the complexities of teaching controversial issues in a South African independent boys' school.

References

Aboo Gani, S. (2020). *Teaching sensitive topics within an Islamic context: A female beginner teacher'*s *autoethnographic account*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pretoria.

Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2017)*. Autoethnography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(4), 431-447. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902736512

Alexander, B. K. (2005). Performance ethnography: The reenacting and inciting of culture. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 411-441.

Alubafi, M. F., Ramphalile, M., & Rankoana, A. S. (2018). The shifting image of black women's hair in Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences, 4*(1), 1471184.

Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive m*asculinity*: The c*hanging *n*ature *of m*asculinities. Routledge.

Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2018). Inclusive masculinity theory: Overview, reflection and refinement. *Journal of G*ender *S*tudies*, 27*(5), 547-561.

Anjari, S. (2022). From Black Consciousness to Black Lives Matter: Confronting the colonial legacy of colourism in South Africa. *Agenda*, *36*(4), 158-169.

Ashley, M. J. (1971). The education of white elites in South Africa. *Comparative Education, 7*(1), 32-45.

Atkins, L., & Wallace, S. (2012). *Qualitative research in education*. S Pham age.

Bantjes, J., & Nieuwoudt, J. (2014). Masculinity and mayhem: The performance of gender in a South African boys' school. *Men and Masculinities, 17*(4), 376-395.

Barton, K. C., & McCully, A. W. (2012). Trying to "see things differently": Northern Ireland students' struggle to understand alternative historical perspectives. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 40*(4), 371-408. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2012.710928

Bhana, D. (2012). Understanding and addressing homophobia in schools: A view from teachers. *South African Journal of Education, 32*(3), 307-318.

Bhana, D., & Mayeza, E. (2019). 'Cheese boys' resisting and negotiating violent hegemonic masculinity in primary school. *Norma, 14*(1), 3-17.

Bhana, D., McGrath, K. F., Van Bergen, P., & Moosa, S. (2019). Why having both male and female teachers is a good idea for schools. *The Conversation.* Retrieved from https://theconversation. com/why-having-both-male-and-female-teachers-is-a-good-idea-for-schools-123780

Bickmore, K., & Parker, C. (2014). Constructive conflict talk in classrooms: Divergent approaches to addressing divergent perspectives. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 42*(3), 291-335.

Blackburn, F. (2021). *Autoethnography for Librarians and Information Scientists*, 31-145. Routledge.

Branson, N., Garlick, J., Lam, D., & Leibbrandt, M. (2012). *Education and inequality: The South African case (No. 75)*. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit, University of Cape Town.

Bristol, T. J. (2015). Teaching boys: Towards a theory of gender-relevant pedagogy. *Gender and Education, 27*(1), 53-68.

Carrington, B., & McPhee, A. (2008). Boys' 'underachievement' and the feminization of teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 34*(2), 109-120.

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as Method.* Left Coast Press.

Chikoko, V., Gilmour, J.D., Harber, C., & Serf, J. (2011). Teaching controversial issues and teacher education in England and South Africa. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 37*(1), 5-19.

Chilisa, B., & Kawulich, B. (2012). Selecting a research approach: Paradigm, methodology and methods. *Doing Social Research: A Global Context, 5*(1), 51-61.

Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities.* 2nd ed. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Connell, R. (2008). Masculinity construction and sports in boys' education: A framework for thinking about the issue. *Sport, Education and Society, 13*(2), 131-145.

Connell, R. (2020). The social organization of masculinity. In *Feminist Theory Reader* (pp. 192-200). Routledge.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & society, 19*(6), 829-859.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

165

Coombs, P. H., & Ahmed, M. (1974). *Attacking rural poverty: How nonformal education can help*. A research report for the World Bank prepared by the International Council for Educational Development. International Council for Educational Development

Cremin, H. (2018). An autoethnography of a peace educator: Deepening reflections on research, practice and the field. *Emotion, Space and Society, 28*, 1-8.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Dahl, R. A. (2020). *On democracy.* Yale university press.

Davis, B., & Sumara, D. (2009). Complexity as a theory of education. *Curriculum Inquiry, 5*(2), 33-44.

Davis, B., & Sumara, D. (2014). *Complexity and education: Inquiries into learning, teaching, and research*. Routledge.

De Boise, S. (2015). I'm not homophobic, "I've got gay friends" evaluating the validity of inclusive masculinity. *Men and Masculinities, 18*(3), 318-339.

Dearden, R. F. (1981). Controversial issues and the curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 13*(1), 37-44.

Denney, A. S., & Tewksbury, R. (2013). How to write a literature review. *Journal of C*riminal *J*ustice *E*ducation*, 24*(2), 218-234.

Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography.* 55 City Road, London: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (2018). *Performance autoethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Routledge.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. (5th Ed.). Sage.

Department of Basic Education. (1996). *South African Schools Act No 84*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Dotger, S., & McQuitty, V. (2014). Describing elementary teachers' operative systems: A case study. *The Elementary School Journal, 115*(1), 73-96.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1899). *The Philadelphia negro: A social study* (No. 14). New York, NY: Cosimo publications.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The talented tenth* (pp. 102-104). New York, NY: James Pott and Company.

Durdella, N. (2019). *Qualitative dissertation methodology: A guide for research design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Edwards, J. (2021). Ethical autoethnography: Is it possible? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*(3), 1-6.

Ellis, C. (1999). Heartful autoethnography. *Qualitative Health Research, 9*(5), 669-683.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (pp. 733-768).

167

Erlingsson, C., & Brysiewicz, P. (2013). Orientation among multiple truths: An introduction to qualitative research. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, *3*(2), 92-99.

Feldman, J., & Wallace, J. (2021). Costs and benefits: Scholarship students' reflective accounts of attending an elite secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 22(4), 431-447.

Felix, E. D., & Green, J. G. (2009). Popular girls and brawny boys: The role of gender in bullying and victimization experiences. In *Handbook of Bullying in Schools* (pp. 173-183). Routledge.

Fiske, E. B., & Ladd, H. F. (2004). *Elusive equity: Education reform in post-apartheid South Africa*. Brookings Institution Press.

Flick, U. (2018). *Triangulation in data collection. The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection*, pp. 527-544. Sage.

Fourie, I. (2021). *Autoethnography for Librarians and Information Scientists*. 1st ed. Routledge.

Francis, D. A. (2017). Homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools: A review. *Journal of LGBT Y*outh*, *14*(4), 359-379.

Garman, A. (2014). *Troubling white Englishness in South Africa: A self-interrogation of privilege, complicity citizenship, and belonging*. Lexington Books.

Garner, S. (2017). *Surfing the third wave of whiteness studies: Reflections on Twine and Gallagher. In Celebrating 40 Years of Ethnic and Racial Studies*. (pp. 446-461). Routledge.

Giroux, H. (2020). *Critical pedagogy*. (pp. 1-16). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

Goldberg, D. T. (2002). *The racial state.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Gouws, D. S. (2008). Enabling men in literature: Teaching male-positive masculinity. *International Journal of Learning, 15*(7), 147-157.

Gouws, D. S. (2009). Boys and men reading Shakespeare's 1 Henry 4: Using service-learning strategies to accommodate male learners and to disseminate male-positive literacy. *International Journal of Learning, 16*(10), 483-496.

Granger, C. A. (2011). *Silent moments in education: An autoethnography of learning, teaching, and learning to teach.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Grant, A., Short, N. P., & Turner, L. (2013). *Contemporary British autoethnography*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Brill.

Hand, M. (2008). What should we teach as controversial? A defense of the epistemic criterion. *Educational Theory*, *58*(2), 213-228.

Harris, D. (2019). *Literature review and research design: A guide to effective research practice*. Routledge.

Hartley, B. L., & Sutton, R. M. (2013). A stereotype threat account of boys' academic underachievement. *Child D*evelopment*, 84*(5), 1716-1733.

Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helm's White and people of color racial identity models. In Ponterotto, J. G., Casas J. M., Suzuki, L.A., & Alexander C.M. (eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling*. Sage. pp. 181-198.

Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion*. Routledge.

Hextrum, K. (2020). Segregation, innocence, and protection: The institutional conditions that maintain whiteness in college sports. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *13*(4), 384-394.

169

Heyder, A., Kessels, U., & Steinmayr, R. (2017). Explaining academic‑track boys' underachievement in language grades: Not a lack of aptitude but students' motivational beliefs and parents' perceptions? *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 87*(2), 205-223.

Hill, R. (2019). *Does IEB make the grade? Alternative testing methods and educational outcomes: The case of the IEB in South Africa*. Unpublished thesis, Master of Commerce, University of Cape Town.

Hiss, A., & Peck, A. (2020). "Good schooling" in a race, gender, and class perspective: The reproduction of inequality at a former Model C school in South Africa. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *2020*(264), 25-47.

Hlalele, D. (2021). Crests and troughs in inclusion: Narrative expressions of a Black teacher in independent schools. *REMIE: Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research, 11*(2), 102-127.

Ho, L., McAvoy, P., Hess, D., & Gibbs, B. (2017). Teaching and learning about controversial issues and topics in the social studies. In Manfra, M. M. and Bolick, C. M. (eds.), *The Wiley handbook of social studies research.* John Wiley & Sons.

Honey, J. (1975). Arnolds of the bushveld: [boys' private schools in South Africa]. S*ymposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa*, 22-25.

Hughes, S., & Pennington, J. (2017). *Autoethnography: Process, product, and possibility for critical social research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jarvis, B. J. (2014). *Whiteness and education in Southern African spaces: an autoethnography*. PhD thesis, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Jarvis, P., Holford, J., & Griffin, C. (eds.). (2003). *The t*heory *and p*ractice *of l*earning. Routledge.

Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., Hearn, J., Lundqvist, E., Blackbeard, D., Lindegger, G., ... & Gottzén, L. (2015). Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions. *Culture, health & sexuality, 17*(2), 112-127.

Kenway, J., & Lazarus, M. (2018). Elite schools, class disavowal and the mystification of virtues. *Social Semiotics, 27*(3), 265-275.

Khadiagala, G. M. (2018). *New South African review 6: The crisis of inequality.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Kimmel, M., Shapiro, H. S., & Purpal, D. E. (2005). What about the boys. *Critical social issues in American education: Democracy and meaning in a globalizing world*, 219-227.

Kitson, A., & McCully, A. (2005). You hear about it for real in school. Avoiding, containing and risk-taking in the history classroom. *Teaching History, 120*, 32-37.

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education, 6*(5), 26-41.

Klopper, H. (2008). The qualitative research proposal. *Curationis, 31*(4), 62-72.

Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 39*(1), 127-132.

Lambert, J. (2004). Munition factories … Turning out a constant supply of living material: White South African elite boys' schools and the First World War. *South African Historical Journal, 51*(1), 67-86.

Lambert, J. (2009). An unknown people: Reconstructing British South African identity. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 37*(4), 599-617.

Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 20*(2), 195-207.

Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(33), 1-15.

Lombard, M. (2020). *The cultivation of the racial identity of an Afrikaner juffrou: A*n *autoethnography*. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria.

Loughran, J. (2013). Pedagogy: Making sense of the complex relationship between teaching and learning. *Curriculum Inquiry, 43*(1), 118-141.

Macaluso, M. (2016). Reading pedagogy-as-text: Exploring gendered discourses as canonical in an English classroom. *Linguistics and Education, 35*, 15-25.

Malcolm, J., Hodkinson, P., & Colley, H. (2003). *Informality and formality in learning: A report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre*. Learning and Skills Research Centre.

Malcolm, J., Hodkinson, P., & Colley, H. (2003). The interrelationships between informal and formal learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 15*(7/8), 313-318.

Maree, K. (ed.). (2016). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Marom, L. (2016). A new immigrant experience of navigating multiculturalism and indigenous content in teacher education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 46*(4), 23-40.

Martin, J. L. (2014). Critical Race Theory, Hip Hop, and Huck Finn: Narrative Inquiry in a High School English Classroom. *The Urban Review*, *46*(2), 244.

Martin, S. D., & Dismuke, S. (2018). Investigating differences in teacher practices through a complexity theory lens: The influence of teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 69*(1), 22-39.

Martin-Lindsey, B. D. (2021). *Virtual high school educators' perceptions regarding integrating culturally responsive teaching into a virtual learning space: A qualitative case study with autoethnography*. PhD thesis, University of Houston.

Martino, W. (1995). Deconstructing masculinity in the English classroom: A site for reconstituting gendered subjectivity. *Gender and Education, 7*(2), 205-220.

Martino, W. (2008). Male teachers as role models: Addressing issues of masculinity, pedagogy and the re-masculinization of schooling. *Curriculum Inquiry, 38*(2), 189-223.

Martino, W. & Meyenn, B. (2002). 'War, guns and cool, tough things': Interrogating single-sex classes as a strategy for engaging boys in English. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 32*(3), 303-324.

Mason, M. (2008). What is complexity theory and what are its implications for educational change? *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 40*(1), 35-49.

Matthews, S. (2012). White anti-racism in post-apartheid South Africa. *Politikon, 39*(2), 171-188.

Matthews, S. (2021). Decolonising while white: confronting race in a South African classroom. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *26*(7-8), 1113-1121.

McAvoy, P. & Hess, D. (2013). Classroom deliberation in an era of political polarization. *Curriculum Inquiry, 43*(1), 14-47.

McCarthy, M. (2010). Experiential learning theory: From theory to practice. *Journal of Business & Economics Research, 8*(5), 131-140.

McCormack, M. (2013). *The declining significance of homophobia (sexuality, identity, and society)*. Oxford University Press.

McCully, A. (2006). Practitioner perceptions of their role in facilitating the handling of controversial issues in contested societies: A Northern Irish experience. *Educational Review, 58*(1), 51-65. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910500352671

McPhail, G., & Lourie, M. (2017). Getting real: Is realism a blind spot in research methodology?. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 52*, 285-299.

Meissner, B., Bantjes, J., & Kagee, A. (2016). I would rather just go through with it than be called a wussy: An exploration of how a group of young South African men think and talk about suicide. *American Journal of Men's Health, 10*(4), 338-348.

Misco, T., & Patterson, N. C. (2007). A study of pre-service teachers' conceptualizations of academic freedom and controversial issues. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 35*(4), 520-550.

Moffitt, U., Rogers, L. O., & Dastrup, K. R. (2022). Beyond ethnicity: Applying Helms's white racial identity development model among white youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 32*(3), 1140-1159.

Moore, A. (2012). *Teaching and learning: Pedagogy, curriculum and culture*. Routledge.

Mordaunt-Bexiga, M. (2011). Rugby, gender and capitalism:'Sportocracy'up for sale?. *Agenda, 25*(4), 69-74.

174

Morrell, R. (2002). A calm after the storm? Beyond schooling as violence. *Educational Review, 54*(1), 37-46.

Morrison, K. (2008). Educational philosophy and the challenge of complexity theory. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 40*(1), 19-34.

Morrison, K. (2012). *School leadership and complexity theory*. Routledge.

Motala, S., & Dieltiens, V. (2008). Caught in ideological crossfire: Private schooling in South Africa. *Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production, 14(*3), 122-136.

Ngunjiri, F. W., Hernandez, K. A. C., & Chang, H. (2010). Living autoethnography: Connecting life and research. *Journal of R*esearch *P*ractice*, 6*(1), E1-E1.

Ohito, E. O. (2019). Thinking through the flesh: A critical autoethnography of racial body politics in urban teacher education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 22*(2), 250-268.

Pace, J. L. (2019). Contained risk-taking: Preparing preservice teachers to teach controversial issues in three countries. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 47*(2), 228-260.

Pace, J. L. (2021). *Hard questions: Learning to teach controversial issues.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Parker, W. (2010). Listening to strangers: Classroom discussion in democratic education. *Teachers College Record, 112*(11), 2815-2832.

Parker, W. C. (2003). *Teaching democracy: Unity and diversity in public life*. Teachers College Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative S*ocial *W*ork*, 1*(3), 261-283.

Payne, S., Swami, V., & Stanistreet, D. L. (2008). The social construction of gender and its influence on suicide: A review of the literature. *Journal of Men'*s *Health, 5*(1), 23-35.

Pennington, J. L. (2007). Silence in the classroom/whispers in the halls: Autoethnography as pedagogy in White pre‑service teacher education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 10*(1), 93-113.

Pennington, J. L., & Brock, C. H. (2012). Constructing critical autoethnographic self-studies with white educators. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(3), 225-250.

Pham, L. T. M. (2018). *Qualitative approach to research a review of advantages and disadvantages of three paradigms: Positivism, interpretivism and critical inquiry*. University of Adelaide.

Pitard, J. (2017). A journey to the centre of self: Positioning the researcher in autoethnography. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 18*(3), 20. DEU.

Pretorius, D. (2019). Bricks in the wall or the spice of 'good life'? Independent schools in South African law. *South African Law Journal, 136*(4), 605-649.

Randolph, J. (2009). A guide to writing the dissertation literature review. *Practical A*ssessment, *R*esearch*, and E*valuation*, 14*(1), 13.

Rehman, A. A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations, 3*(8), 51-59.

Rogers, A. (2013). *HIStory: masculinity and history in an independent boys' school* (Doctoral dissertation).

Rothmann, J., Antonie, K., Nell, W., & Ellis, S. (2023). Students' perceptions about inclusive and orthodox masculinities in contact sports at a South African University. *Journal of Homosexuality, 70*(9), 1890-1910.

Russell, T., & Loughran, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Enacting a pedagogy of teacher education: Values, relationships and practices*. Routledge.

Shaheen, M., & Pradhan, S. (2019). Sampling in qualitative research. In *Qualitative techniques for workplace data analysis*, (pp. 25-51). IGI Global.

Shefer, T., Kruger, L. M., & Schepers, Y. (2015). Masculinity, sexuality and vulnerability in 'working' with young men in South African contexts: 'You feel like a fool and an idiot… a loser'. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 17*(sup2), 96-111.

Short, N. P., Turner, L., & Grant, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Contemporary British autoethnography*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Soudien, C. (2010). Some issues in affirmative action in higher education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *24*(2), 224-237.

Soudien, C. (2023). Race, class, and the democratic project in contemporary South African education: Working and reworking the law. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 31*.

Southall, R. (2022). *Whites and democracy in South Africa*. African Sun Media.

Spinazola, L. P., Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2021). Evocative autoethnography–Evoking is as evoking does. In *Autoethnography for Librarians and Information Scientists*, (pp. 33-48). Routledge.

Stefancic, J., & Delgado, R. (1996). *No mercy: How conservative think tanks and foundations changed America's social agenda*. Temple University Press.

Steyn, M. (2005). White talk": White South Africans and the management of diasporic whiteness. *Postcolonial whiteness: A critical reader on race and empire*, 119-135.

Sullivan, S. (2012). On the need for a new ethos of White antiracism. *Philosophia, 2*(1), 21-38.

Tanner, S. J. (2019). Whiteness is a White problem. *English Education, 51*(2), 182-199.

Teherani, A., Martimianakis, T., Stenfors-Hayes, T., Wadhwa, A., & Varpio, L. (2015). Choosing a qualitative research approach. *Journal of G*raduate *M*edical *E*ducation*, 7*(4), 669-670.

Thomas, E. E. (2015). "We always talk about race": Navigating race talk dilemmas in the teaching of literature. *Research in the Teaching of English, 50*(2), 154-175.

Thompson, P. (2001). Schools, Sport and Britishness: Young White Natal, 1902–1961. *South African Historical Journal*, *45*(1), 223-248.

Throne, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Autoethnography and Heuristic Inquiry for Doctoral-Level Researchers: Emerging Research and Opportunities*. IGI Global.

Twine, F. W., & Gallagher, C. (2008). The future of whiteness: A map of the 'third wave'. *Ethnic and racial studies, 31*(1), 4-24.

Van Bavel, J., Schwartz, C. R., & Esteve, A. (2018). The reversal of the gender gap in education and its consequences for family life. *Annual R*eview *of S*ociology*, 44*, 341-360.

Vandeyar, S., & Killen, R. (2006). Teacher–student interactions in desegregated classrooms in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development, 26*(4), 382-393.

Vice, S. (2010). How do I live in this strange place? *Journal of Social Philosophy, 41*(3), 323-342.

Walker, L. (2005). Men behaving differently: South African men since 1994. *Culture, H*ealth *&* *S*exuality*, 7*(3), 225-238.

Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International J*ournal *of Q*ualitative *M*ethods*, 5*(2), 146-160.

Wall, S. (2008). Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 7*(1), 38-53.

Wassermann, J., & Bentrovato, D. (2018). Confronting controversial issues in history classrooms: An analysis of pre-service high school teachers' experiences in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, pp. 72-90.

Watson, A., Kehler, M., & Martino, W. (2010). The problem of boys' literacy underachievement: Raising some questions. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(5), 356.

Wilké, J., & Osman, F. (2018). Dress codes in schools: A tale of headscarves and hairstyles. *Obiter, 39*(3), 585-601.

Williams, M. (2000). Interpretivism and generalisation. *Sociology, 34*(2), 209-224.

Williams, N. (2021). *Autoethnography: A decolonizing research methodological approach*. (Ser. Sage research methods cases). Sage.

Winkler, I. (2018). Doing autoethnography: Facing challenges, taking choices, accepting responsibilities. *Qualitative Inquiry, 24*(4), 236-247.

Wood, C. A. (2017). My story of Sal: A critical self-reflective autoethnography revealing whiteness in the classroom. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 19*(1), 41-59.

Yuan, R., & Yang, M. (2022). Unpacking language teacher educators' expertise: A complexity theory perspective. *TESOL Quarterly, 56*(2), 656-687.

Zembylas, M., & Kambani, F. (2012). The teaching of controversial issues during elementary-level history instruction: Greek-Cypriot teachers' perceptions and emotions. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 40*(2), 107-133.

Appendices

Appendix A - Mom's Letter of Verisimilitude

Letter of verisimilitude from ███████████   28 November 2023

Dear Callan

I feel privileged to have read your study and thank you for the opportunity to do so. As both your mother and former colleague, I believe that it meets the requirements of verisimilitude. Whilst we have often discussed many of the issues you have raised, your writing gave me fresh insight into your personal experience. At times, in this letter, it may feel as though I am trying to defend some of my decisions or actions, that is not my intention. I only wish to shed further light on some of your experiences.

Your early childhood experience of moving to a private boys' prep school was difficult to read as it brought to mind a trying period of time in our lives. I was teaching at a private girl's school (the sister school of the boys' schools that you attended) and when we initially moved to ███████, you went to a local government school. The experience was so different to the small monastic school in George where you began your formal school journey. It was impersonal and it felt as though you were lost amongst the thousand or so other children. The standard of education was also noticeably inferior to that which the girls were receiving at the private institution at which I taught. Our holidays were different too and I wanted us to be together for family holidays away. I thought that whilst the move to the private school would be heavily financially taxing, you would receive a better quality of education and the quality of education that my children would receive, has always been exceptionally important to me. I did not, however, anticipate many of the social aspects that would come into play.

While I was aware that you struggled to go to the new private school, I did not know that the boys were calling you gay or that you found the entrance test so difficult. Your anxiety manifested in your seemingly being ill and when I eventually took you to the paediatrician (after several visits to the GP), he indicated that there was nothing physically wrong with you. I knew that you found the work difficult, and I do not just say this as your mother, but I have always known that you were exceptionally bright. The work was way more advanced than that which you had already done but you soon began to catch up, and were awarded the improvement prize at the end of your Grade 6 year. I believe that these difficulties in academics better prepared you for the High School which you were going to attend. You managed to make friends, two of whom are still your best friends today. I was not aware, however, of the extent of the bullying and found it heartbreaking to read your account of this. Your experiences on the sports field were not surprising as you had not received the same level of coaching as the other boys. At your school in George, the mums used to help with the coaching.

The recount of the difficulties that you experienced as the child of an alcoholic brought about raw, visceral pain in me. Life at home, and often in public, was unpredictable, chaotic, a tremendous strain and filled with anger, frustration and embarrassment. I was focused on trying to keep things together and did not pay as much attention to you and your siblings as I would have if we were not living with an addict. It must have been so hard for you.

As a parent, I often felt imposter syndrome at your school. Most of the other mothers did not work and I did not, nor did I want to, belong to their social circle. It was more than just being of a different social class though. They had different values to me, they would often want to gossip about the school where I taught because many of their daughters attended it and I was embarrassed about your father's behaviour at certain school events.

You went on to High School and as with most teenagers, provided little insight into what was happening there. You had friends, and began to behave in ways that were concerning to me. Our relationship was quite fraught. We even consulted a psychologist who drew up a "contract of behaviour" to which you agreed. I remember having to go to the bank one day during a time when I was not on invigilation duty at school and was wholly surprised to find you and a group of friends "bunking". You had finished your exam but were meant to be at school. I remember catching sight of you as I was going down the escalator. You froze and your friends promptly deserted you. You also admitted, once you had finished school, to experimenting with Marijuana during that time. Your marks were very low and once or twice you hid your mid-term report from me and I had to request it from the school. Those were the years where life at home, living with active alcoholism, had become untenable and whilst teenagers often rebel, I am sure that much of your behaviour and poor performance at school could be attributed to your home circumstances.

You quickly adopted the "code" of masculine behaviour that was modelled and espoused at an all boys' senior school. I remember you yourself making homophobic remarks about certain behaviour being "gay". I felt fortunate that in those early years, you had an understanding Housemaster with whom I had quite regular contact. I felt that he modelled positive masculinity and that at least you had a good, firm role model in him. You participated wholeheartedly in sport and even though you played in the lower teams, gave of your best. I accepted a post at the school which you attended as their rebate on school fees was a hundred percent and two thirds at your siblings' schools. It eased some of the financial burden. That said, there were many extras such as expensive uniforms, sports tours and equipment which sometimes proved difficult to finance. We were not able to give you pocket money and I think this affected your social life. You did not have a phone, the latest clothes, shoes and electronic games. Overseas tours were not within our means.

Once I began teaching at the boys' school which you attended. There was a marked improvement in our relationship. We could discuss events and people at school. This also coincided with your father sobering up. I knew many of your friends and had positive relationships with them too. Your confidence began to grow and you started improving academically. You were involved in the school musical, the production of which I took part. Often you would come straight off the rugby field and go into dance rehearsals. You also began to achieve on the sports field. Once you reached Matric, you seemed unstoppable in your achievements. It felt as though at every assembly you achieved an award. You attained five of the six ties which boys could get. The only one you did not get was the Head Boy's tie. You were a College Prefect and were awarded General Honours. We were immensely proud of you but I felt more happy for you than proud. Your father and I loved you wholeheartedly and unconditionally. You seemed more comfortable in your own skin and confident. I noticed that although you were a part of the First Team rugby "jock" crowd, you never stopped being friends with those whom you made at prep school. Boys often confided in you too as head of the College Support Programme.

Once you left school and all the recognition, boys' school rules of engagement and success were no longer a part of your life, things changed. You became withdrawn, depressed and had a serious eating disorder. You exercised obsessively doing hundreds of burpees before the sun was even up. You lived on butternut, tuna and brown rice. This too was incredibly difficult to see. It was difficult to know how to support you.

Our journey together as colleagues at the school which you had attended was very special. I was your first boss and we exchanged many ideas and thoughts about teaching controversial issues. As an English Department, we made it our aim to select texts that would evoke debate and discussion. Teaching in the same environment, I experienced a lot

Appendix B - Bishop's Letter of Verisimilitude

30 November 2023

Dear Callan,

I trust this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for the authenticity and genuineness that has characterized our interactions and collaborations. Thank you for inviting me to participate in your research, many things we have shared have been helpful and has been an eye opener for me as I continue to navigate the space we find ourselves in working in privileged schools.

In a world often marked by superficiality and pretence, it is truly refreshing to encounter an individual who embodies truth in both their words and actions. Your sincerity and honesty have not gone unnoticed, and I am grateful for the transparency and authenticity you consistently bring to our relationship and our work place.

Your commitment to truthfulness has not only fostered a sense of trust but has also created a foundation for meaningful and genuine reflections and connections. In a landscape where culture, language and the colour of our skins can sometimes be overshadowed by expediency, your dedication to authenticity stands out as a beacon of integrity.

I believe that your study serves as a source of inspiration, reminding us all of the importance of staying true to our principles and beliefs. Your topic also reminds us that each individual is important and must that we must take to learn about our differences in order to grow. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to engage with someone who exemplifies such a commendable dedication to sincerity.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to challenge the status quo. It is a quality that not only enriches our interactions but contributes to the creation of a more authentic and meaningful shared experience.

Wishing you continued success and fulfilment on your journey marked by truth and sincerity.

183

Appendix C - Jack's Letter of Verisimilitude

Dear Callan

It was indeed a pleasure to participate in your master's thesis interviews, which offered me a valuable opportunity for reflection and a deeper understanding of the school context you so vividly describe.

Upon reading your narrative, I was immediately struck by an emotional response. Your vulnerability and adeptness in weaving together your personal struggles with the broader challenges of the educational system were profoundly moving. It's this level of introspection and connection that makes your work not only compelling but deeply resonant.

Your portrayal as an educator, one who challenges the status quo and brings a necessary calibre to a boys' school in modern times, particularly impressed me. It's evident that your experiences, including navigating endemic bullying at the schools you attended, have profoundly shaped your character and professional outlook. These recollections not only provide insight into your resilience but also highlight the complexities of such environments.

Your narrative's reflection on personal family dynamics, particularly dealing with your father's alcoholism, adds a poignant layer to your story. It speaks volumes about the internal conflicts and emotional strength required to navigate such challenging personal circumstances.

Regarding our shared experiences, I found your recollection to be authentic and in alignment with my own memories. Specifically, your account of the staff development session where we confronted our biases is vivid and resonates deeply with me. I recall it as a transformative experience, one that echoes through your narrative with great clarity.

Furthermore, your descriptions of the toxic behaviours prevalent among adults in the educational context are strikingly accurate and reflective of my experiences. They serve as a reminder of the ongoing challenges and the imperative to confront these issues head-on.

Your narrative, Callan, not only elicited an emotional response, often moving me to tears, but also reinforced the importance of boldness and courage in the face of adversity. The vividness and realism with which you've presented your experiences and observations are commendable.

I affirm without reservation that your narrative meets the essence of verisimilitude. It not only appears realistic and truthful but also captures the essence of the experiences and the emotional landscape of those involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to review your work and for including me in this significant study. Your contributions to the field and to the broader conversation around education are invaluable.

Regards

█

Appendix D - Felix's Letter of Verisimilitude

<u>30 November 2023</u>

Dear Callan (Mr. Moore)

I have much enjoyed reading the draft you provided me with. Seeing our interactions through another light, one of attempting to teach controversial issues, has provided me a completely different interpretation of our interactions. I can now see the reasoning that you were tackling the interactions with, and the value set you were trying to teach us as learners. This was clear, in some part, in the moment, but not to the extent, or breadth provided by the extensive recounting of said events, and why you handled them in the manner that you did.

The time of those school days feels significantly far away, though it was only a year ago, but in so far as my memory is correct, the interactions are correctly recounted. I remember our debates around controversial issues, and your fatherly attempt to guide them. Especially with regards to the AP English class wherein I distinctly remember my debates with Jayden that you referred to. In particular, around the issues of meaning in life, and how one should pursue it, be it through monetary means or enjoyment. The particulars may not be relevant here, as we had many such interactions in your classroom, but as an overarching theme, I can distinctly remember the way you handled said issues. Namely, in the way you characterized in your masters. As the 'village schoolmaster' who was guiding us towards new perspectives. This might not always have been successful, but I can necessarily say I always felt like the sentiment was there.

I remember always approaching the classroom, hoping for one of 'those lessons'. The ones in which we would not have to read Atwood, though I enjoyed her very much, but were rather able to lose ourselves in endless conversations. I also remember the difficulties you mentioned around achieving participation from all corners of the classroom. Though I think us being teenage boys, presupposed these sorts of apathetic interactions. What I can say is that I know for a fact, that many of the boys recognized your efforts to teach in a 'different manner' and were appreciative thereof. For teenage boys often discounted, at face value, as rowdy and impossible to tame. For the first time, many of us, felt treated like adults, by extension forcing a maturation on our parts. To this end, one of creating men able to tackle controversial issues, with critical thinking skills, I cannot say you were wholly successful, but on my part at least, you were significantly influential.

I can affirm your attempts to be a positive male role model to the boys. I, as you know, felt significantly more comfortable to share personal things with you. And being able to do so, helped me to get through a lot more than I would of otherwise. For this I am endlessly appreciative and cannot say so enough. Evidence of this, is the fact that I still feel comfortable sharing personal writing pieces with you to this day.

I also found your thoughts about your tackling of LGBTQ+ issues to be interesting. Systemically, being a South African boy's school, I believe they were under-addressed, and could have benefited more from the same critical debates being applied to them. Alas one must acknowledge that many people have deep rooted beliefs about sexuality, that would not be conducive in a classroom debate. Regardless, I do agree that in comparison to issues of race and gender, there seemed to be an attempt to skirt around LGBTQ+ issues.

Yet overall, I can say that your recounting of the actions is correct, and I do not have much to add outside of that, with regards to the tackling of controversial issues in your classroom. I left high school, a better person than most other possible iterations, primarily because of my skills around debating controversial issues, and the new perspectives imparted on me by said skill.

I hope this is in line with what you needed from me,

All the best

186

Appendix E - Jason's Letter of Verisimilitude

4 December 2023

Dear Callan

I hope this letter find you well. I am currently writing this extract with tears in my eyes, overwhelmed by emotion. As I e scoured over the pages of your work, no, your masterpiece, I was able to vicariously traverse my own history. I too was able to , once again, walk down the corridors of a small independent private school and reflect on my own experience. This letter serves maybe more as act on gratitude than anything else.

I believe that there are few individuals in this world who are committed to the pursuit of truth, In particular truth that is found in one's history. Humanity tends to think of the past as a fleeting memory, nothing more than a event that needs to be looked at with rose tinted glasses. However Callan, in reflecting on your own experience and simultaneously taking me , a former learner, on this journey with you have provided not only a piece of academic work which glows as a beacon of truth but opened an avenue of healing in my own heart .

It has moved me immensely that you value, not only truth but the truth of those who have formed part of your teaching experience. Not many stare the dragons of controversy in the face, yet your work does so with a level of elegance, grace and honesty which is truly remarkable. You have illuminated the truth about the controversy of sexuality, race, culture, and creed in a manner which deserves the highest level of praise.

On a more selfish note ,I can only speak for myself and my community, but in terms of being colored there are not many people who have immortalized or captured our history in the way that European history has been preserved. I write that letter with a immense sense of gratitude. Thank you, sir, for not only capturing your own story but bringing myself as a former student along with you. Your preservation of the past and all its pain as well as its joy is a true act of service.

In conclusion I would like to quote a section of your work and say " to continue what you are doing" your exploration of truth and all its facets is bigger than the exploration of knowledge but this piece of work acts as a vessel of healing and light for many to come.

Masters C Moore

ORIGINALITY REPORT

2%	**1**%	**1**%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1 hdl.handle.net
Internet Source
<1%

2 Dotger, Sharon, and Vicki McQuitty. "Describing Elementary Teachers' Operative Systems : A Case Study", The Elementary School Journal, 2014.
Publication
<1%

3 Michalinos Zembylas, Froso Kambani. "The Teaching of Controversial Issues During Elementary-Level History Instruction: Greek-Cypriot Teachers' Perceptions and Emotions", Theory & Research in Social Education, 2012
Publication
<1%

4 www.tandfonline.com
Internet Source
<1%

5 "The Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research", Wiley, 2017
Publication
<1%

6 dokumen.pub
Internet Source
Johan Wassermann
<1%

188