Journeys to self-knowledge: methodological reflections on using memory-work in a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators

Lungile Masinga

Abstract

This article draws on aspects of my participatory PhD research study, *Journeys to self-knowledge of teachers as sexuality educators*. In the article, I share and reflect on the methodological experiences of the study, with particular focus on working with memory related data generation activities. I explain how story-telling, audio-recording of sessions and keeping a reflective journal were used as methods to reach the stories that would best assist us come to some understanding of who we are as sexual beings. I also reflect on some dilemmas and discoveries I experienced when using memory work to generate data for the research. The article highlights that memories and stories are an integral part of our existence as they give meaning to our past and influence our future actions. It also shows how, through collective examination of our stories, new perspectives and meanings can be given to the stories to allow learning and reflection to take place.

Introduction

"Memory-work enables people to make explicit the ways in which experiences and identities are constructed within particular socio-cultural settings" (Hamerton, 2001, p.414). It is within this context that the PhD research study, *Journeys to self-knowledge: a participatory study of teachers as sexuality educators* (Masinga, in process) I draw from was conceptualised. For the purposes of this article, I draw on aspects of the research that has been done, to share and reflect on the methodological experiences of the study, with particular focus on working with memory related data generation activities. I first outline the purpose of the study and describe the participants. I next discuss how story-telling, audio-recording of sessions and keeping a reflective journal were used as methods to reach the stories that would best assist us come to some understanding of who we are as sexual beings. I then reflect on some dilemmas and discoveries I experienced when using memory work to generate data for my research.

The 'journeys to self-knowledge' study

In the study, I was a co-participant as well as a researcher. I worked with eight other Life Orientation teachers within the Intermediate phase (grades 4 to 6) and Foundation phase (grades 1 to 3) in black South African schools. Life Orientation is one of the eight learning areas that were introduced to schools as Curriculum 2005, with sexuality matters being part of the content taught (see Department of Education, 2002). The participants are all black female teachers ranging between 30 and 39 years of age and are all working within the townships around the Durban area. The intentions of the study were to engage in a process of collaborative inquiry (see, among others, Bray, 2002; Kasl and Yorks, 2002; Zelman, 2002) and self-study (see, among others, Loughran, 2007; Mitchell, Weber and O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005) with the teachers to explore how we saw ourselves as sexual beings and how that self-knowledge might translate into how we interpreted and taught sexuality education and related to the learners. We aimed to explore how our personal histories affect the kind of teachers we become as we engage with the curriculum of the day, in particular, with sexuality education within Life Orientation. As suggested by Kehily (2002, p. 215), "teachers' biographies and personal experiences play a significant part in shaping and giving meaning to the pedagogic styles they adopt". Thus, we wanted to also engage in a journey of increased self-knowledge within the context of sexuality, thus leading to beginning a process of changing what needs to be changed to become effective teachers of sexuality education.

To achieve these aims, the method of memory work (see Ovens and Tinning, 2009; Balli, 2011) was employed through various activities that saw us engaging with our past 'selves' to reach those memories that are part of our existence and history and have contributed to shaping the present self that we know ourselves to be within the context of sexuality.

Methods for memory-work

Story-telling as a tool for memory-work

In attempting to answer a critical question in the study, 'How can teachers better understand their own sexual identity?' we employed storytelling as means of memory-work to re-experience and reflect together on our

experiences. We started with the notion that "subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed play an important part in the construction of self" (Onyx and Small, 2001, p.774). As means to introduce stories and explain how they would be used within the study, I started us on a walk down memory lane, to reminisce on the time when we were little girls. We talked about how stories have played a part in our lives as black people and also as women, growing up within a black culture that is rich in folk-stories that have been passed on from generation to generation. Together we reminisced about what happened when we received our first periods (menstruation). What did our parents (particularly our mothers) do? We spoke about how most of us were sent to our grandmothers for the 'talk'. We all told of the stories that some of our grannies related to us, to teach and make us understand what was happening to our bodies and what it meant to how we related to the opposite sex. We had some great moments of laughter and coming to a common understanding that, although some of the stories may have sounded ridiculous, the way they were told made us understand what message they were intended to convey. However, we were not saying that we remembered any of those teachings when we had to.

We discussed how stories actually played a role in the passing of educational messages in our black culture and have been a part of our lives and history. We talked about how we learned to understand the world, respect and people through stories that were told. We spoke of what role stories might play in today's world in educating young people and coming to understand life as we live it. This process was intended to bring the participants to understanding what role stories can play when one intends to relearn and try to understand the past and its meaning and also understand the world we live in. However, for the purposes of the research, it was our own life histories that become the source of information for the stories we were about to tell.

This was crucial to the process, to make us understand that as we live life through experiences, we are creating our own stories, which have some valuable lessons to be learned for us and those around us. I felt it was important to discuss as participants how we felt about putting our own lives into stories to be told. In my view, it is sometimes easier to talk and relate to the story that is not your own as you can be objective. While, when it is your own story, subjectivity may become a problem. To give participants a chance to come to some understanding of the implications of the story to be told, we first wrote the stories in our journals and engaged with our own inner selves

and judges that we knew ourselves to be when it came to our own actions. It was important to allow us the opportunity to reconnect with the emotions that may go with the story and be able to come to terms with them. A common feeling, as related by one of participants in one of our reflection discussion was:

> It took me longer to complete . . . in fact, I completed the story the day before . . . not that I have not been trying to write my story . . . it just felt . . . I don't know guys . . . wrong. Revisiting the past . . . looking at my past experiences . . . felt like I was writing my own movie . . . me being the bad character. I have done things that were stupid in my life . . .going to those stories now . . . just . . . it's uncomfortable.
>
> (Azande, discussion, 10 September 2010)
> (all names of the participants have been changed for anonymity)

This feeling of discomfort had to be discussed and we related and re-emphasised that only those stories we wanted to share would be told and those that we did not want to talk about, but were willing to write about, would remain in our journals for only the researcher (me) to read. That seemed to work for the participants, however, in the end all the stories were told due to what I believe was the positive atmosphere that was created every time we met. I believe that it was also due to the genuine feeling of caring and understanding that appeared to be always present in the sessions.

Something that became interesting about the teacher stories was that the issue of discomfort never materialised when they were asked to relate their classroom experiences as teachers of Life Orientation. There was a sense of disassociation from the causes of the problems. There was a lot of outside blame that went with the stories that they told. This included learner behaviour in the classroom when specific topics were discussed which rendered the teachers to lose control of the class or feel so embarrassed that they never touched on the topic again. As one of the participants recounted in some parts of her story:

> I stood in front of that class frozen …. You know I have never wanted to smack somebody so badly in my life. . . mantombazane (girls)!. . . you know that boy looked at me and asked how many times do I remember to use a condom?. . . or . . . do I even use one. . . Of course there was laughing in the class as he asked . . . remember these are grade 9s and some are way older in their age to be in a grade 9 class. . . you know lezizingane (these children) that were not taught by their parents not to talk anyhow about such things…
>
> (Lihle, discussion, 10 September 2010).

We asked ourselves questions such as what had been significant events in our lives that in one way or the other may have influenced us. We needed to look deep into what underpins our beliefs pertaining to sexuality. On what or on whom do we model our lives and beliefs resulting in our actions towards certain issues we have to deal with in our lives and as teachers of LO? Through talking and discussion we came to some realisations about the impact those events had in our lives. We realised that we had blissfully glided on with life, not admitting we have issues that may one day need to come out to allow us to continue living in awakened state. Thus, we are now conscious of what was then hidden.

To start us off on writing these stories I would, while we were home, send each participant triggering reminders through sms (short message service), such as:

> Thought for the day: How did I come to know my sexuality? Hey girls, what is that one thing that we will never forget that changed the way we look at ourselves as sexual beings? THINK HARDER GIRLS! Night.

These messages gave us an idea as to what we needed to think and write about. We wanted to use the privacy of the home and the duration of the time that was within the sessions that we held to write the stories. During that period each participant would battle with her own thoughts and memory while she went into her past life to look for that story that would best relate to the set task for that period. The session that followed would see each participant that was willing to share her story retelling the story in an oral form while others listened and made interjections through questions to get more understanding of the story that was being told. This rendered an opportunity for a "collective examination of the memories in which the memories are theorised and new meanings result" (Onyx and Small, 2001, p.775).

To illustrate the type of stories that were told, I will use Zama's story, which was taken from the recorded storytelling:

> The big incident happened one day I got home, I had bought some veggies which I forgot to take out from the car. When I needed to cook . . . I remembered the veggies. I said to him, "I am going to the car to get something." He looked at me and said "You are going nowhere" I said, "Ok go and get it then." He said "No . . . We are all staying in the house today, nobody is going anywhere" . . . I just said "Fine . . . I will cook something else . . . later I asked him if he will eat . . . that day he said yes. I had started a habit of asking him . . . as every time food was dished out for him . . . he would not eat.

That day he said "Yes . . . I will eat 'cause I'm eating for the last time today." As he said it, it did not record in my mind what it meant . . . oh . . . I sat down to watch TV and Generations [a local soap opera] highlights came on and I laughed. He said, "What are you laughing at? I said I am laughing at what I saw on TV. He said "You are laughing with your men . . ." I was amazed. . . I would have understood if I was speaking on the phone with somebody . . . I asked, "What men?" He said, "You are thinking about them . . . you are making a fool out of me! . . .you start by giving me food . . . let the idiot eat while you are busy laughing" That went on for a while. . . Then he started other things . . .such as, "Why did you use my phone yesterday . . . Why didn't you ask for it?". . . I just said, "What is wrong?!". . .Do you want to pack?!". . ."I will help you this time!" I went to the wardrobe and started pulling down his clothes. At that time I was also very angry . . . and shouting . . . pulling down clothes . . . at that time he is pushing me and trying to throw me down . . . you know . . . that day I got a punch in the face that I have never received in my life . . . we lived on the 6th floor . . . he dragged me to the window trying to throw me out . . . I fought him and held on the frame of the window . . . He is a small built man, so I was able to struggle him to the floor.

Both my kids were in the other room. . . He said, "I am finishing everything today". . . He said, "I will start with you". . .meaning me . . . Then he pointed at the direction of my eldest daughter . . . "Then end with you". . . he said pointing at the baby, "Then kill myself . . . I will finish all today." When he said that, he pulled the footstool to reach to those top shelves . . . I knew there was a gun on top as there was a safe. He pulled the stool and started climbing up. I started trying to push the stool as he climbed to stop him getting the gun . . . and reaching for it . . . until he managed to get his gun.

I jumped on him and there was a struggle . . . We fought pushing and pulling . . . During that time my eldest daughter . . . was busy trying to open the door by breaking it with an iron . . . The keys to the flat and the car . . . he had already thrown them outside the window to the streets . . .by that time . . . the door was already open . . . I could not see that . . . She managed to open it . . . and . . . she ran out with her baby sister . . . him and I were still at it. I was trying to get hold of the gun, it went off three . . . four times hitting the ceiling . . .We both were shocked . . . the gun flew to the floor and went under the sofa . . . as we had made our way to the opening leading to the sitting room. He dived trying to get it out . . .it was one of those low ones . . . and it was heavy . . . as he was trying to reach for the gun . . . I saw the open door and I ran outside . . . my clothes were all tore out . . . outside people were all over the place . . . people were shouting . . . some went inside the house . . . they grabbed him . . . I ran to the nearest police station, with my clothes all tore up . . .

It was important that we listened as the story was being told so we could assist in the telling of the story. As we asked questions, the memory of the story was assisted and that allowed coherence of the story for the listeners to take place. For example, with the above story, questions and interjections were made such as:

Participant 1: *"It never occurred to you that he was a little bit disturbed?"*

Participant 2: *"What did his family think of this whole thing?"*

Participant 3: *"But what does it have to do with you changing boyfriends as you say you now do?"*

As we listened, questioned and related some reasoning as to how we understood the story, the teller of the story gained the opportunity to see the other side of the story and meaning.

As Lapadat, Black, Clark, Gremm, Karaja, Mieke and Quinlan (2010, p.78) explain, "the telling of one's story is both a construction of self and a performance of self, in which the listener/reader/ viewer is implicated as witness, audience, collaborator, and co-constructor". Hence, as we reconstructed our own history, we became the actors while the other participants became the listeners with views and opinions on what they are listening to. In memory work, personal experiences "are theorised as a cross-section or example of common (social) experience" (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton, 1992, p.49). As Crawford *et al.* explain:

> What is of interest is not why person X's father did such and such but why fathers do such things. The aim is to uncover the social meanings embodied by the actions described in the [individual accounts of personal experience] and to uncover the processes whereby the meanings – both then and now – are arrived at (p.49).

Hence, another crucial reason for using stories was to find a tool that would allow the generation of common themes for the study that would have evidence embedded within them, as they were stories that were written by us, the people who had lived through the experience (Steiner, 2007).

Audio recording of sessions

All sessions were recorded for the purpose of data storing and reflection purposes. There were times when we replayed what had been said, which played a crucial role in the discussions and clarification of what individuals intended to say. Recording the sessions also became my third ear, which became crucial for me. Being a participant in my own research left me wondering at some points about how much I was missing as I too became involved in the process of finding my own self in self-study within the research. I was able to replay the recording of the sessions after each meeting; in this way I gained more insight into what was happening and further analysed the responses and the discussions that took place. I learned that voice changes as participants spoke also gave clarity as to the emotions that were involved that I may have missed in the process.

As a participant who is also the researcher, I wanted all the voices to be heard and believed that mine did not have to lead all the time. Through listening to the recordings, I could keep myself in check and realise when my opinions might change the flow of the session as the participants seemed to think my opinion mattered more, which should not be the case in a collaborative study. I was also able to gain further insight into the entire process as I went back and listened to how we engaged with each other and the manner in which we responded to the situations that arose within the process of the sessions.

Reflective journal writing

 "How often in humanness, do persons replay situations or events in their minds? Thinking back on what occurred; reviewing relational aspects of encounters, maybe even second guessing what was said or done"(Epp, 2008, p.1380). It is within this premise that keeping a reflective journal was employed as a methodological tool. Each participant kept a reflective journal. This provided moments of reflection and interpretations of all aspects of the experience gained from each session. Since the aim was for us to learn from the experience, keeping of the journal assisted us in making each session more educative (Taggart and Wilson, 2005). It rang true to us as participants that "learning is derived more from reflecting on an experience than from the experience itself" (Taggart and Wilson, 2005, p.77). This can be seen through such stories as Zama's story of spousal verbal and physical abuse (Zama, recorded conversation, 29 September, 2010). In this instance Zama came to the realisation of how her current actions and relationship with men has been changed. Her 'private hell' as she called it in her story was instrumental in her new self. It has contributed to the 'revised' self-identity she has created for herself and chooses to represent herself for all to see. It was truly in that private moment of remembering through journaling that she was able to learn about herself as she reflected on the past through the story.

Through journaling, we learned that the process of reflecting is a difficult one, as it required us to bare our soul for all to see if we were to learn and deal with the implications of what had been reflected on. It prompted moments of true thinking on the part of the participants as we battled with what we needed to write about and how much of our souls we were willing to share and face in the presence of others who may not understand. As one participant reflected during the discussion phase:

> I first wrote it until I said to myself . . . you know what, this is not true. . . All what I have written is not true. I am only reflecting the positive as if my life and experiences have been great. I had to do it all over again . . . Until I realised that now I was hurting as I had to bring my past back. The one I have told myself I am past it. As a result I could not finish, I will have to go back to do it again although it is not easy.
>
> (Zama,10 September 2010)

Through journaling, participants gained the opportunity to be true to themselves and how they chose to remember their past as we were forced through writing to 'keep it real'. Through journaling, we got an opportunity to 'get hold of' the experiences that we had inside, be they positive or negative. Through collaboration as a group, we were able to express those experiences in ways that allowed the other participants to share in the feelings, the experiences and maybe the understanding of the implications of that which we had shared (Beveridge, 1997).

Through journal writing, we came to understand how some of our memories were linked to and interdependent with the emotions experienced during the time of the event. For some of us the pain we had felt during that time was easier to remember and relate than the event itself. Hence the question asked by Onyx and Small, "does the method [of memory-work] always have the potential to liberate?" (2001, p.781). The answer for us had to be no, as we realised through listening to Buhle's story, as she related how she is not yet able to allow herself to remember her early years as they were too painful to remember. As she related in our reflection time:

> I wrote nothing about my early years. I could not do it . . . I started allowing myself to remember when I was a teenager. . . .everything early is too painful . . . maybe I will go back there later . . . for now . . . Now that I am older I am realising who I am . . . this is the real me. I must stop pretending to be what I am not. That is when trouble started for me. . . . again . . . over my choices with my sexuality. I had family members calling meetings. . . .i realised that was when I needed to be strong . . .
>
> (Buhle, recorded conversation, 10 September 2010)

We started to get a feel of how we had lived and acted as sexual beings and how we were maybe oblivious of those consequences in our present self. We were able to find means through writing a journal to ultimately find "a way of getting feedback from ourselves, in so doing, it enabled us to experience in a full and open-ended way, the movement of our lives as a whole and the meaning that follows from reflecting on that movement" (Janesick, 1999, p.509).

Dilemmas and discoveries experienced in memory-work

Which hat am I wearing now?

For the purposes of this study, I worked with two methodologies, collaborative inquiry and self-study. When I conceptualised this in my head it all seemed feasible. Both methodologies aimed at finding some solution to a specific problem in collaboration with others. And there were many other attributes that made them compatible. However, there were many times when I was not sure which hat I was wearing or expected to be wearing throughout the sessions. At what moments was I to wear the researcher hat and that of a full participant who was on equal footing with the rest of the other participants? These are some of the reflections that I entered in my journal as I engaged in the process:

> Today I don't know how many times I had to halt and explain to the participants that my opinion was not that important! It's what we all agreed should happen that matters. My opinion should be considered in the same manner as that of the other participants. However, I am not sure what I should do when the researcher in me feels we are going way off track. When I try to bring the session on track through a statement or question am I manipulating the flow of the process to meet the needs of the researcher or is it the participant in me that is talking?
>
> (Lungi, Journal, 10 August, 2010)

> Wow! I just listened to the tape of yesterday's session. Boy did I talk a lot in this session. I think for most part of the session I forgot that I was the researcher. I really had strong opinions over a lot of things today. I wonder what damage that made to the process. I need to listen to the tape later and work out how my talking a lot influenced things. I am a participant; I know that, I also know that I'm a very opinionated person in general.
>
> (Lungi, Journal, 7 September, 2010

As a participant, I needed to stay true to my own journey of my memories, my experiences as both a sexual woman and a teacher. When journaling, I needed to reflect on both my journey and also what I observed and thought of the process and other participants' journeys. It was not an easy task. At some point I realised I would never achieve the perfect balance. Hence, I spent most of the day after the session reflecting on the process and later on my journey. This was crucial because, as a participant the writing of field notes was not always possible, due to my own participation.

It also did not escape my attention that I too experienced my own emotional roller-coaster together with my fellow participants. I had not envisaged my

own emotional attachment to the stories related by other participants. I had not anticipated that as a researcher I too would experience emotional attachments and empathy for the stories I would hear. Thus 'self-care' became an imperative tool for me (Rager, 2005). I used various methods to put my experiences into perspective for me. The immediate act of journaling after each session was very therapeutic.

Whose turn is it to talk?

When does one say a person is talking too much? I wondered that often in the sessions. I knew from the beginning that I had one participant who spoke a lot. She always seemed to find difficulty in listening to others or letting an opportunity for her views to pass by. This was a fact that I mulled over a lot in the planning phase when I decided to ask her to be part of the session. I worried for the other participants who were not familiar with her, that they might find her frankness and talkativeness unbecoming. I was also aware of the kind of input she would bring into the sessions and that with her attitude she was bound to provoke responses from the participants which would make for interesting conversation.

In a collaborative environment, equal opportunity for participation is crucial, and all opinions are to be valued and considered. In an environment that had a particular participant that seemed to do the opposite was not easy. In the first session, I really worried when my worst nightmare seemed to be realised as from the start she seemed to set the pace and the tone of the session. However as the session progressed, I realised it was in a good way for me and the type of data that I managed to collect for that day. Her almost 'out of line' use of language (as the other participants seemed eager to let her know) lead to interesting debates. I also under estimated the ability of the other participants to hold their own. My observation on the issue for that first session as written in the journal was:

> Oh my! I knew Jaz has the ability to say anything. I was also shocked when she volunteered to read her definition and the explicit use of words. I saw Zama's eyes almost ready to pop out! I'm glad that she did, it seemed to get all talking except for one. That was expected, I know there is a lot that will be discussed that she will not take very well with her strong religious views. This is going to be interesting.

> (Lungi, Journal, 10 August 2010)

Who decides when an issue is deemed sensitive?

Another area that I found interesting in the process of the study was the issue of sensitive topics. In research literature that I had read, issues of sexuality had been identified as sensitive, thus needing extra care of the participants. This was even more so when dealing with memory, where participants will have to revisit certain parts of their past that may have been painful. As the process progressed, I started to wonder, what do sensitive issues mean and for whom is the issue sensitive? Is it for the person talking about the issue or the one listening and imagining that if it were them then it would be sensitive? What does it mean to some participants when I say, "I will provide you with the necessary assistance when the need arises that you as a participant may find wanting of such assistance."

In my understanding of what could make an issue sensitive, is when one speaks of death, abuse, violence in relationships and so on you cannot help thinking of the traumatic nature of those issues. My assumption was that when a participant was retelling that kind of story she would experience a certain level of negative flashbacks that might be harmful to her current mental stability. However, that has proved to not be the case for all participants in my study.

I found myself in the predicament that sometimes it is difficult to understand the complexities when trying to identify issues deemed sensitive. However, I found, that "what is sensitive to one person might not be the same for another" (Hyden, 2008, p.122). Hyden makes the claim that "what is a sensitive topic and what is not is due mainly to rational circumstances, that is, the relationships between the teller and the listener" (p.122). In our case the nature of the environment that had been provided by collaborative participation, and the development of trust and care for all may have lessened the impact of the story. There is also the nature of the "cultural and contextual circumstances and the personal views held by the people involved" (p.122). Some of the stories shared by the participants seemed to fall within the 'sensitive category' such as when Malindi related her story of how her boyfriend shot her and her mother. The intensity and the details of the story, including the responses and questioning by other participants would have made some break down. However, she could not understand why we would think it would be difficult for her to relate the story. What we failed to realise was that for her, talking was what she saw as a beginning to healing. As

expressed by Hyden (2008, p.123), "talk about a traumatic experience, has the potential to pose a threat and even has the potential to re-traumatise the traumatised, but such talk can just as well have the potential to heal". For me, much depends on the environment in which the conversation is being conducted. The sessions were a safe haven for us all. What could have been the re-traumatisation of the narrator or the listeners became instead a healing tool for all.

Laughter and humour: are we serious?

"Are these people for real!?" I mean really! can we for once focus on what we came here to do and maybe be able to get what needs to be done on time" (Lungi, journal, 6 September 2010). During the sessions we laughed so hard that the researcher in me stated to panic because each time we laughed time was consumed and getting back to the point was difficult. There were times when we laughed at a story that should have been making us cry or feel sad. The tellers of these stories always seemed to lead in finding humour in the horrific stories they were relating. It was in my own private moments as I wrote in my journal:

> It worries me that we laugh so hard. When Zama related her story of how her husband tried to kill her and her two daughters, she found humour in some of the things that took place. Her laughter, although I was grateful that it relaxed the atmosphere that was already beginning to take place as the other participants realised where her story was going, was of concern to me.
>
> (Lungi, Journal, 02 September 2010).

It was in that moment again as I wrote that entry in my journal that this realisation came to me:

> People deal with issues differently. Laughter was the healing tool that was working its magic in all of us. Zama laughed at her story, not that there was real humour to what had happened to her. She however used it to make herself better able to get through the story. In telling the story she was reliving it, she found a way that will make the memory less painful for her and also gave her the ability to have control over how the story will affect her. That's what therapy does for the person, it helps us heal, and that she found in her laughter.
>
> (Lungi Journal, 2 September 2010).

During the session, I had typically offered her the use of the available resources such as a private session with the woman counsellor working in the trauma centre as had been offered to them, to assist her. However, she flatly refused saying:

> I am getting it now . . . you know I have not really told the full story to anybody before . . . I have always thought I would break down and cry when I did . . . but I'm fine . . . this is good . . . for me . . . I needed to do this . . . what we are doing here is good . . . besides . . .therapy . . . not my thing.
>
> (Zama, recorded conversation 2 September 2010)

It is then that I realised the important role that collaborative memory-work as a tool of inquiry has the ability to give back to the participants. Little did I realise the importance of those moments when the session seems to be chaotic and not starting well. It was then that the participants' bond was re-emphasised as they caught up with each other and laughter seemed to be the order of the day. It was then true in our circumstance that humour had the means of reducing the levels of effect that any form of anxiety we would have experienced. As humour and laughter could be understood in different forms and relevance to our situation as we got down to the issues (Mallett, 1995).

Conclusion

In this article, I have shared and reflected on the methodological experiences of working with memory related activities to elicit data for my PhD study on teachers as sexuality educators. I have discussed the use of story-telling, audio recording of sessions and reflective journal writing as tools for memory-work. This was followed by a discussion on the dilemmas and discoveries I experienced in working with memory. This article highlights that what is in the past cannot always stay in the past. Our present actions are sometimes linked to our past actions and experiences. Working with memory has potential to evoke reflection for us to be continuous learners within our own different roles and fields.

Important issues to be highlighted in this article are how past stories can be an integral part of our lives as they influence how we are at present-self. That participant can give direction as to how they want to relate their past. For the participants in this research it was the oral form of telling that found favour amongst them. The collective examination of the memories gave new meaning to the memories that rendered some learning opportunities for all. Another issue is that Journaling as a research tool, proved not to be an easy journey for all. It offered a battle of emotions as we tried to reflect on our thoughts.

The process again offered some dilemmas and discoveries for the process. Such as being a researcher–participant is not an easy task. It requires constant reconnection with yourself, through reflections. As you ask yourself 'Am I keeping a balance between the two?' although staying true to your own journey of memories it important; it should be noted that one may have to make peace with the Fact that you may never find the perfect balance. Again the issue of what renders an issue sensitive? I have realised that sensitive issues are subjective. People sometimes choose how and what they would allow to affect them. Also what they want to do with the issues, something that we as researchers; can never be fully be prepared for.

I have found it true that not all find comfort in tears. Laughter has found a way to have the ability and strength to see us through a lot in life. The trick, I have found, is allowing the owner of the memory to choose how it will play out in the telling of the story.

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Lungile Masinga
University of KwaZulu-Natal

relungile@yahoo.com