

SCHOLARLY PAPER

Decolonising research: The use of drawings to facilitate place-based biographic research in southern Africa

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Abstract

This paper advocates for the value of research into rurality in southern Africa as a means of contributing to the reversal of the geopolitics of knowledge on teaching and learning in higher education, which traditionally favours the global North. A strong qualitative research method facilitating this exploration is the use of drawings in a method known as participatory learning and action, which is appropriate in resource-constrained environments such as those found in southern Africa. We first discuss literature on rurality and the use of drawings as research techniques, after which we consider the research settings (southern African higher education), with a short comparison between conditions in various countries. We conclude with a detailed presentation of an experiential session with five members on the use of drawings, providing examples of the value as well as the challenges of this participatory research method.

Keywords: rurality, higher education, participatory learning and action, drawings, geopolitics, decolonisation, southern Africa.

Introduction

Our current range of research epistemologies – positivism to post-modernisms/poststructuralisms – arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race ... these epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that social group ... and this has negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular. (Scheurich 1997: 141)

This paper contributes to efforts to shift the paradigms of reason on matters concerning social justice and higher education, namely repositioning the focus from the global North by concentrating instead on a lesser-discussed region: southern Africa. In doing so, we highlight the value of the use of drawings, or, as known in participatory research literature, participatory learning and action (PLA) techniques in place-based geographic research which, we argue, fits within the band of 'socially just' and 'decolonising' research methods. The thrust of this paper is that northern research methodologies exclude from

knowledge production the formerly colonised, historically marginalized and oppressed groups, which today are most often represented ... [by] broad categories of non-Western, third world, developing, underdeveloped, First Nations, indigenous peoples, third world women, African American women, and so on. (*Chilisa 2012: 1-2*)

Decolonising research techniques such as Indigenous research methodologies attempt to reduce the influence and current flow of research from domination by the north, as well as what Radcliffe (2017: 330) refers to as the influence of the 'white and neoliberal universities' on the 'prevailing political economy of knowledge production'. The southern region's decolonising research methods are based on ethnophilosophy – a collective worldview(s) encoded in folklore, language, myths, metaphors, taboos, rituals, stories, autoethnography, and community of practices as ways of knowing (Chilisa & Preece 2005). Barnes (2018: 379) notes that 'decolonising methodologies bring together, among others, Indigenous, transformative, liberation, feminist, and [critical methodologies] to strengthen decolonising research'. He further notes that 'innovative and creative research methods have gained traction, including photovoice, autoethnography, visual methods, story telling, and participatory approaches to strengthen decolonisation scholarship' (Barnes 2018: 379). Accordingly, 'decolonising methodologies' involve the inclusion of the 'researched' as 'researchers', giving them a voice. Further, these methodologies ensure that the research is a '[c]ollaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders' and meets both 'scientific and cultural' rigour (Esgin, Hersh, Rowley, Gilroy & Newton 2018: 4). The Indigenous research methodologies which are 'decolonising' in nature are flexible and based on the views and stories told or retold by Indigenous people themselves. Kovach (2010: 42–43) refers to this method of data collection as a conversational method which

is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core.

We use the decolonising method in this study to hear the stories of the five researchers through pictures depicting their way of looking at their educational journeys through their own eyes rather than through the eyes of another person, thus bringing to the fore their own experiences and interpretations.

Theoretical framework of geopolitics, critical race theory, storytelling and the production of knowledge in the south

Several factors contribute towards the power differential between different global regions, particularly the ex-colonies, often referred to as the 'global South', and the north–west axis. The flow of knowledge from the 'empires of knowledge' (Fahey & Kenway 2010) in the north, where powerful and hegemonic knowledge is produced in abundance, to the south is linked to the history of colonisation and development, and is currently reflected in the fact that the publishing industry (as well as the reading public) is concentrated in the north. Rewards, incentives and quality regimes deployed to increase research productivity are greater in the north, and the standards for knowledge production are set in the north. An interesting example regarding standards is provided by Alex de Waal (2016) in his keynote address to the Next Generation in Social Science in Africa fellowship held in Ethiopia, and summarised in *The Conversation* on 10 March 2016. He demonstrates how the frames, procedures and scholarly norms of the north set standards which other scholars have to adhere to, for example using large country-level datasets to infer causal inferences, but that scholars in Africa do not have access to.

The influence of this knowledge/power differential is evident in the tendency for ideas and schemas from the north to have more prestige and to be applied uncritically or in a decontextualised manner in the south (De Waal 2016; Guzmán-Valenzuela 2017). Writers in Africa direct their work towards readers in the north and serve the theoretical needs of the north, a stance Hountondji (2009: 8) refers to as 'extraverted'. When research in the social sciences and humanities is conducted on or in the south, individuals, communities and institutions tend to be the objects rather than the subjects of the knowledge production (Makgoba & Seepe 2004). A useful term to depict production and the exploitation of raw products in the colonial era is 'extractive' (Ndebele 2016). Ndebele observes that many African states such as South Africa perpetuate an extractive, rather than an inclusive, dispensation. This term is particularly apt to describe the conditions of research and knowledge creation in relations between south and north, and the predatory conditions which exist in the south. Researchers in the south may even conduct research on the 'other', for example students, for the advancement of their own interests and careers.

Whilst positing a north–south distinction and arguing for attention to scholarly activity in the south, we are not unaware of the dangers of such distinctions, and the many nuances and ironies they might gloss over. For instance, Fahey and Kenway (2010) depict Australia as on the 'edge of empire' (citing Jacobs 1996) and as geographically isolated. However, in South Africa, academics have borrowed heavily from higher education schemas and concepts emanating from Australia, and Fahey and Kenway themselves write from Monash University, which has a satellite campus in South Africa. These authors acknowledge that this north–south dualism is not unproblematic in the current era. It is ironic that the first author of this paper was a white South African, and thus enjoyed a certain degree of privilege in relation to education in that country. Two of the authors are South African, and, in relation to the geopolitics of knowledge, South Africa can be described as the 'north in the south' in terms of publishing infrastructure and incentives and rewards. By way of example, South Africa produces 50% of Africa's research articles annually, Nigeria 16.5%, Kenya 8.1% and Namibia 0.9% (Mngomezulu & Maposa 2017: 183). Furthermore, with regard to

international research about Africa, research about South Africa predominates. It is against this backdrop of the geopolitics of knowledge about higher education that a research project on rurality in higher education emanated. This backdrop provided encouragement for a network of academics working on teaching and learning in higher education in southern Africa to conduct research into local conditions, and, in so doing, strengthen their own research capacity.

Rurality in relation to higher education

The topic under investigation in the southern African study that gave rise to this paper is that of rurality and how it influences the trajectories of students from rural areas through their university studies. The university, whether located in a rural or an urban area, is associated with modernity and with training bureaucrats and elites for the modern nation state (Santos 2016). The 'western' or 'northern' university promulgates a Eurocentric epistemology that is primarily western and masculine (Grosfoguel 2016). It is also strongly associated with global economic rationality and bureaucracy (Mbembe 2016), in other words, neoliberalism. We approach the subject of rurality in southern Africa as it intersects with colonialism, poverty and dispossession (HSRC-EPC 2005; Leibowitz 2017; Mgqwashu 2016). The logic motivating this research is that rurality is but one of a broader range of issues of difference that feed into the challenges of inclusion and decolonisation. Thus, understanding rurality would provide a useful means to explore matters of social justice in higher education. Finally, a focus on rurality allows for attention to place, context and the devaluing of local knowledges by formal institutions (Engel-Di Mauro & Carroll 2016).

There is no one absolute definition of rurality. Significant for this paper and its emphasis on place is that rurality is spatial, geographical and contextual (Green & Reid 2014). Indices of rurality include: proximity to resources and availability of infrastructure, including information and communication technologies; socioeconomic conditions; culture; affiliation with being rural; and, certainly in southern Africa, conditions of dispossession, especially with regard to land (a fuller range of definitions and indices is discussed in Leibowitz 2017). It is also the case that one should guard against overly homogenising or essentialising conditions of rurality, of treating it as a condition of deficit or victimhood (Moletsane 2012), and, conversely, of romanticising it (Cuervo 2016).

Drawings as a participatory research method

A strong motivating factor for using drawings as a method of data collection in this research was that drawings were used effectively in a project in which the first author of this paper was involved, called the Community, Self and Identity project, or CSI (Leibowitz, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen, Nicholls & Rohleder 2012). In that research project, fourth-year students at the universities of Stellenbosch and the Western Cape in South Africa created drawings which served as a catalyst for further discussions about identity and community. These drawings, along with the discussions that accompanied them, served as valuable research data and at the same time created the opportunity for an impactful learning experience for the students who participated in the research. One of the CSI researchers wrote an article about the use of these mapping and drawing activities. She traced their use back to PLA techniques which featured in Africa and South America in the 1970s. Her

comment about PLA research as ‘decolonising’ is significant for the research on rurality as she argued that it enables ‘people to reduce or redress the subject-object disparity in traditional forms of research’ (Bozalek 2011: 471). She argues that the drawings in themselves (the product) are not what is important; rather, what is significant is the process, the meaning attributed to the drawings and the actions that follow the drawings. The drawers can be seen as ‘co-interpreters,’ explaining with text the meaning of a drawing (Malindi & Theron 2011). PLA provides for an externalised, mediating artefact, in this case the drawing, to engage with critically in discussion with others about one’s own biography.

The use of drawings in qualitative research in the social sciences in the north, especially with adults, is comparatively limited in comparison to the more traditional techniques of the one-on-one or focus-group interview. However, it has been promoted in participatory research in South Africa in relation to topics such as health, especially HIV and AIDS, education and street youth (e.g. De Lange, Mitchell & Stuart 2007; Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith & Campbell 2011). Mitchell et al. (2011) maintain that drawings are useful in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as elsewhere, because they encourage participants to engage with what is important to them. They also encourage engaging with multiple audiences, and in this manner effect social change. Drawings have furthermore been used outside of a specifically participatory research approach. For example, in Finland, Nevgi and Löfström (2014) and Löfström and Nevgi (2014) collected and analysed drawings created by academics who participated in professional development courses. They found the drawings to be useful in eliciting emotions, and also that this more unconventional mode of expression freed the lecturers from the strictures of more academic writing. Through drawings, the lecturers were able to express the kinds of artefacts, symbols and images they associated with their teacher identities. Also in the field of higher education, McLean, Henson and Hiles (2003) used drawings with students to evaluate an undergraduate health science module.

An important facet of drawings is that they capture that which is difficult to put into words, especially amongst the socially vulnerable (Malindi & Theron 2011), and are useful for allowing a swift and apt way of articulating and expressing memories and feelings (Mitchell et al. 2011). They are easy and low-tech, which is particularly useful in resource-constrained contexts such as southern Africa. They promote active engagement and collaboration and are thus a participatory research method (Mitchell et al. 2011). Drawings are useful for exploring place-based biographical research because they share how individuals experience the world through ‘material space’ (Reavey & Johnson 2008: 299) and help to structure our recollections of the past in relation to the present (Reavey & Johnson 2008). These features are particularly relevant for place-based biographical research.

There is a measure of agency in mapping one’s lived reality. There is also an interesting intersection between drawings as narratives and as indicators of space/place. A drawing’s meaning relies partly on the sociocultural context, but, according to Mitchell et al. (2011: 31), it is not always the case that the producers of the drawings ‘take into account broader social constructions’.

Thus, drawings provide research participants with a measure of agency, they require little funding and effort to prepare, they encourage critical dialogue and they link well with issues of the past in relation to the present, and to issues of space, distance/proximity and relations between people, objects and spaces. They appear to be an appropriate data-gathering method within a broader participatory research strategy.

Research setting

The project during which the drawing session took place involved research being conducted in nine southern African countries (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of indicators for countries in southern Africa

Country	Population size (millions)	% of population rural*	Gini-coefficient	GDP per capita (PPP)** In international \$	Number of public HEIs	Teaching and learning network
Botswana	2.25	42.29	0.61 (in 2014)	17 919	2	–
Lesotho	2.24	72.16	0.54 (in 2010)	3 752	1	–
Malawi	18.09	83.55	0.45 (in 2015)	1 178	4	–
Mozambique	28.83	67.49	0.46 (in 2008)	1 200	3	–
Namibia	2.48	52.38	0.61 (in 2014)	11 839	2	–
South Africa	55.91	34.70	0.66–0.69 (in 2015)	13 409	26	yes
Swaziland	1.34	78.68	0.52 (in 2010)	9 897	1	–
Zambia	16.59	58.62	0.58 (in 2014)	3 982	3	–
Zimbabwe	16.15	67.72	0.43 (in 2011)	2 003	9	–

Notes: * <https://tradingeconomics.com/>;

** <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/countries-by-projected-gdp-capita.php>

Conditions vary in each country. For example, the percentage of the population living in rural areas ranges from 34.7% (South Africa) to 83.55% (Malawi). One of the most noticeable features of the region is inequality, with South Africa displaying the highest Gini coefficient (distance between poorest and richest) in the world, and Namibia and Botswana following closely behind. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita varies significantly, with the highest being in Botswana and the lowest in Malawi. Population sizes also vary, with South Africa having the largest and Swaziland the smallest. There is great language diversity in the region and in specific countries. For example, in Namibia, 11 indigenous languages are used¹ whereas in Botswana the majority of people (78%) speak SeTswana.² The dominant colonial language in the region is English, with Mozambique

1 <http://www.gov.na/languages-spoken>

2 <http://www.studycountry.com/guide/BW-language.htm>

being the only country colonised by the Portuguese, and thus having Portuguese as the dominant official language. Namibia was colonised by Germany and later administered by South Africa, and consequently has German and Afrikaans within its menu of dominant colonial languages. Despite the fact that English is spoken as a first language by at most 3% of the population in Namibia, it is the official language.

The number of public higher education institutions (HEIs) is generally low, varying from one in Lesotho and Swaziland to 26 in South Africa. Perhaps due to the large number of universities or to various socioeconomic factors, South Africa is the only country to have a teaching and learning network: the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA). Scholarly output in Africa has generally been low. Mngomezulu and Maposa (2017) attribute this to low funding, government interference, globalisation, brain drain and university autonomy. With regard to autonomy, in Botswana, Malawi and Zimbabwe, for example, principals (vice chancellors) of universities are appointed by parliament or government, and are seen as essentially political appointments.³ This is not the case in South Africa.

The research project

Against this backdrop of a lack of resources to support teaching and learning in southern African higher education, the International Consortium of Educational Development worked with HELTASA to set up, in 2014, what has now become the Southern African Universities Learning and Teaching (SAULT) Forum. The forum is an informal association linked to HELTASA and generally meets once a year to share ideas about teaching and learning. A need for funding and for capacity building led to the development of a research proposal on rurality in higher education in southern Africa. This proposal received only minimal seed funding, and colleagues in the SAULT Forum agreed to proceed without substantial support from funding agencies. To date the forum has produced several draft concept documents and nine draft country papers. It has had several meetings to prepare for the research. One of the more challenging aspects of this preparation has to do with the forum being theoretically and epistemologically broad-based, comprising colleagues from faculties of education as well as teaching and learning units. Members of the forum are united by their commitment to education and teaching and learning in higher education, rather than to a single epistemological or theoretical tradition. Colleagues differ in terms of their exposure to the research methodology and the time available to conduct research. The proposal which serves as the base document for this research contains a qualitative and, to an extent, participatory research paradigm, which colleagues schooled in quantitative as well as more positivist approaches have found challenging.

Alongside this research process, a parallel one involving colleagues in the United Kingdom and South Africa was set up – called Southern African Rurality in Higher Education (SARiHE)⁴ – with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the National Research Foundation (NRF). A small number of colleagues in South Africa are in both projects. The SARiHE

3 This information was provided by members of the Southern African Universities Learning and Teaching (SAULT) Forum.

4 See <http://sarihe.org.za/> for more information.

team used similar concepts and research approaches, but, due to a successful funding application, was able to start the empirical work more speedily. The SARIHE proposal included plans to share its research design with SAULT at two regional meetings. At the first meeting, attended by 35 participants, various data collection techniques were shared on an experiential basis. One of these was a data-gathering method SARIHE used in its meetings with rural students: the use of drawings to generate critical dialogue and to concretise learning about students' academic biographies. At this meeting, groups of five delegates from various geographical locations were formed. They were given the instruction to draw their rural (or urban or peri-urban) learning world, although they could use the odd word or phrase. They were given pastels rather than felt-tip pens with which to draw, as previous experience with adults and drawings has been that felt-tip pens encourage more schematic and text-laden approaches. After drawing, individuals had five minutes to share their drawings with others in their group. A plenary ensued, where colleagues commented on the experience of doing the drawings and on what was learnt about rurality.

All the drawings were photographed and stored electronically but participants were not asked for permission for their drawings to be used for a research report. For this reason, the facilitator of the drawing session and one of the groups which produced and discussed their drawings agreed to co-author this paper, using only their personal experiences of the session. Due to time constraints and the stress of facilitation, the facilitator (and first author of this article) did not actually participate in a group and did not produce a drawing, as would be considered good practice in much participatory research.

In the next section we provide the participants' descriptions of their drawings, before presenting their experiences of and reflections on the drawing exercise.

The drawings

In the discussion that follows, the participants provide the kind of information that they shared with the other participants in their group.

Emmanuel, South Africa

It all began in church, one kilometre from my home. I was seven years old, a month after my grandmother's death. She's the one who began it all – grabbing our hands every Sunday, off to



church, but a different church – a church we needed to take a mini-bus to attend. Once my grandmother was gone, no one bothered with keeping the tradition. For me, the tradition had to go on somehow – and so a church a few blocks away from my home was the solution. I grew in stature and at age 12 became a Sunday school teacher and a pseudo secretary for the church. While the former meant I needed to be ahead of my Bible students in terms of the knowledge of

the text, the latter brought to my attention the affairs of the church not many people (including the majority much older than I was) were ever going to be aware of. Church finances, individual internal family feuds, tensions among church members, to name a few, became my initiation into all forms of literacies – reading, writing, counting, problem solving, diplomacy, the list goes on. In a family of nine siblings, such literacies somehow enabled me to be some kind of a ‘glue’ among my brothers and one sister. The same literacies became handy when I became a herd boy, looking after my uncle’s 14 cattle. Punctuality, counting, accountability, sharing and such like, were necessary survival skills when I entered schooling, and later, university. I am not surprised that immediately after I joined the university, I became actively involved in student politics, eventually becoming the University Joint House Committees president (14 residences) and the SRC representative for all residence students in the university. The literacies from home carried me through to becoming a university student, graduating within the record time (four years) and having my loan converted into a bursary. Revisiting and retelling my story through the above drawing was much easier, effective, and enabled me to remember and capture complex aspects of my life simply through the drawing.

Choshi, Zambia and Namibia

With respect to my journey, here are a few memories of my earlier school days. First and foremost I grew up in a mine township. The mines took care of the housing for their employees (black and white) and took responsibility for the upkeep of the surrounding areas. What I remember most were



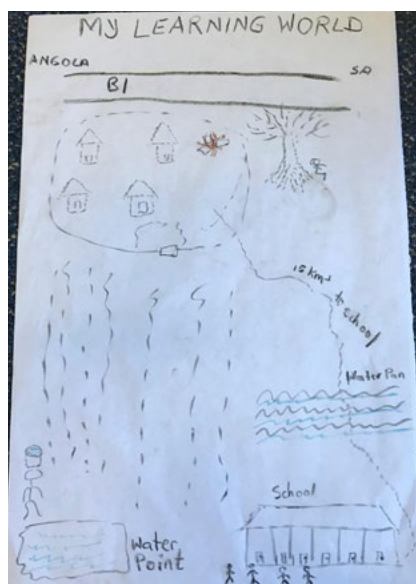
the houses – all of them two-bedroomed – with a kitchen and sitting room and a toilet attached to the house outside, all in rows with adequate space between each house for setting up a garden. The abundant spaces left sometimes without a house were used for children to play soccer and other activities and as thoroughfares. The primary school I went to was located four houses from our house. Accordingly, I did not have to walk far to reach my school. In fact, it only took less than five minutes. All I had to do was cross the main

road and I would be in the school yard. During my seven years at the school I encountered teachers who were bent on inflicting as much pain on learners as they could possibly do. One male teacher always used an electrical wire for beating us, whether girl or boy; the ‘bum’ was his favourite place and his lashes were always above four for whatever offence. Looking back, one is right to regard him as a sadistic teacher, deriving pleasure in the pains of his learners. Another teacher who made much impression on my academic journey was my grade seven teacher. Most of us boys aspired to be like him. He was pleasant, but firm and brooked no nonsense. In fact, most of us boys fell in love with golf shirts because he always wore those and looked very smart. Come to think of it, he must have been doing exercises and we were not aware of it (actually did not know), since his muscles showed under the golf shirt. He is the one who instilled hard work in all of us as his students and in fact almost all of us in his class managed to pass our grade seven national examinations for entry to secondary school.

He laid the foundation for me to work hard at secondary school and later tertiary education and made my academic journey to becoming a teacher possible.

Kavena, Angola and Namibia

I was born in a village that is seven kilometres from Angola, but at the age of 18 months I migrated with my aunt to the capital city, Windhoek, in Namibia. However, I had to return to the home village of my mother at the age of ten years. I was happy to go back to visit the village for a Christmas festive



season with my aunt. Then while visiting as a girl from the city, it was detected that I did not know how to do village household chores, and that was my fate. My aunt, who had kept me in the city since I was a toddler, dumped me in the village life at the age of ten. It is against this background that the drawing depicts rural life in the two years serving [as] my punishment to get to know how to perform village household chores. The punishment entailed a list of things to get to know before I move back to the city. These were as follows: hoeing, pounding *mahangu* [millet], cooking at the three-stones open outside fire (*ediko*) and making a fire, especially after it has rained, preparing *oshikundu* (Oshiwambo nutritional drink), making *omalodu* (Oshiwambo drink for celebrations), squeezing marula oil (*okuyenga*), preparing beans for a traditional soup (*oshingali*). These were all challenges for me, because in the eyes of the villagers I was over-aged not to know some of the village household chores. The drawing

therefore shows the homestead where we settled when we left the city. The homestead was next to the B1 road that runs from South Africa, through Namibia to Angola. It was in 1972/1973. There were things I needed to do every morning. First, I had to fetch water every morning, therefore my picture shows a water point. Second, I needed to do some hoeing for the initial preparation of the land before sowing or at the time of weeding, therefore the drawing shows a ploughed land, then I would run to [a] school that was more than 15 kilometres away, and after school I would sit in a very good shade from a tree next to the B1 main road, watching the Angolans migrating from Oshikango into Namibia with big trucks filled [with] their possessions. At the same time I had to keep an eye on the grazing livestock to ensure that they did not destroy our crops. Because of the duty of watching the livestock, I was not allowed to go to school for two consecutive days. I needed to take turns with my cousin who was also raised by the same aunt. The road to school had its own challenges. During summer, one would suffer from the heat of the sun; during the rainy season I would enjoy arriving home with wet clothes as it helped me to get a moment of rest sitting next to the fire to get my body warm, and during winter I greeted the morning breeze with its cold waves. One unforgettable memory on the school journeys is crossing the waterpans that are full of waters during the rainy season. My height was almost the same as the water level so that I had to keep my ahead above the water and ensure

that I took my paths where there was grass to hold onto and to make sure I was not going into the holes or pits in the waterpans.

The drawing also shows the moments I had sitting under the tree next to the B1 main road. While sitting under that tree I did a lot of thinking about my life and my future. I therefore could not miss to draw those teaching and learning moments in my drawing. Additionally, the drawing depicts me carrying a jerry can from the water point. That was the time I would meet neighbours and a lot of other people from nearby villages. Some would make sure they fetched water at the same time that I did, making it a point to meet me, because I had no other life than doing household chores and going to school or church. At least, school was the place for my 'happy hour moments'. As I was drawing, those moments felt like yesterday. In the drawing of the homestead, one would see the fireplace with three stones, *ediko*. That is the place where I needed to learn to cook on an open fire.

Whenever I visit that place today, I have a special attachment to it. I feel that I am what I am today, an urban-rural-urban girl, with all exposures reflected in me. However, it is painful that deforestation has destroyed most of the trees that created the bush for me to fetch wood but still it remains a special place to me. But how could I draw a life that is so super-complex in a simple drawing like that? That was just a glimpse of it! Yet it made me retrieve a lot from my memories! I thank the opportunity.

Violet, Zimbabwe and Botswana

My learning journey was a truncated and fluid one, one characterised by migration, transience and fuzziness. Before I could connect with a school meaningfully, I found myself in a new school. I hardly stayed at one school for more than two years except one mission school, which emerged as part of

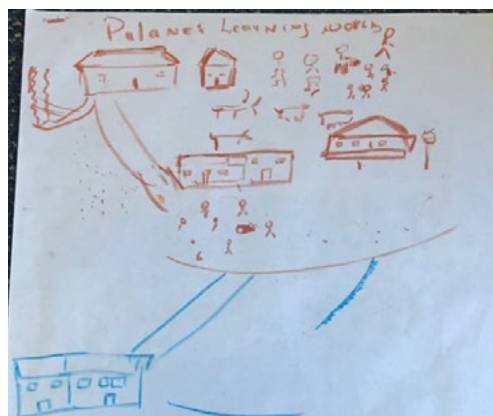


my drawing. Apart from university education, this Salvation Army mission school was the school I attended the longest and therefore it became the centre of my drawing for my learning journey. Although images of other experiences at other schools emerged, there was nothing specific and concrete which grabbed my attention as much as the school I chose to focus on. Once I had focused on a school and started drawing the buildings, the rest of the story emerged. Remembering or memory has its challenges, however. Whatever emerged in my consciousness became the driving force of my drawing. I made lifelong friends in that school. I had mostly pleasant experiences in the school yard. Some of the books that changed my life, I read while I was at that school. I developed a deep love for reading there. There were many books and we had a lot of time in the evenings to read. The picture depicts girls walking to the

library and holding books in their hands. There are four long buildings which form a courtyard in the middle. The courtyard formed a barrier from the wind and psychologically one always felt safe in the classrooms and courtyard as the school was situated in the middle of a forest and farms. You did not need to walk far to the next building. I enjoyed that sense of convenience and comfort. Besides, the teachers were like our 'parents' in the absence of our real parents. Although they occasionally spanked us, it was unlike the corporal punishment meted out at my primary school by angry and uncaring teachers who were quick to spank for the slightest misdemeanour, causing me to loathe some subjects. Beyond the classrooms was a church, which was another safe zone and place of contemplation. The church is not in the drawing but it is at the back of my consciousness in the backdrop of my memory. I could not insert it here because my drawing skills could not allow a complicated, spatial, three-dimensional drawing.

And so what is shown here is a tip of the iceberg. The dormitories are not in this drawing, but the memory of them is still clear. The 'dorms', as we called them, felt far away and isolated from each other. They never felt as safe as the classrooms and library and church. There were no adults there, except students. We felt safety in numbers but at night it was a different story. Intruders often made their way inside the dorms. One night an intruder, who we later learned was a farm labourer, 'strayed' into my dormitory and made straight for my bed into my blankets. I was woken up by hands fondling my body. With a scream, the man disappeared, never to be caught. I managed to repress this experience for a long time. However, writing and talking about it over the years have given me a sense of closure. As I drew this picture and focused on the courtyard and the sense of comfort, I could not help but think about the war that was raging in the country and a subconscious fear of an impending attack. A year after I had left, two of our missionary teachers were shot and killed by the guerrillas or freedom fighters.

The two colours in my drawing were meant to depict the very different settings, the village, mainly the home background and the school. There were no modern facilities such as running water, toilet and electricity in the village. The school had running water but no toilet facilities nor electricity.



Pulane, Lesotho

My growing up in a village means many lessons that I fondly value. My father had two wives. The two women never met: the first wife left after bearing three children (a girl and two boys) and my mother left after having had two. My mother also moved out of this marriage and like the first wife went to work as a household worker in South Africa while our father worked in the South African mines. There was no mother figure in this home and this also means as siblings, we looked after each other. Many lessons were

learnt from staying in the houses that appear in the picture, including learning to do numerous household chores.

Our education and social needs were taken care of by our grandfather, who, because of an accident he encountered while working in the South African mines, received payment from the mining industry. He paid for all his grandchildren's primary education and the fee was five shillings a year. It seems he valued education even though he never went to school himself. The picture captures animals as well. I grew up in what was then considered a very rich family. My grandfather reared different types of animals. Looking after animals was our (both boys' and girls') responsibility. This practice was one way of teaching children to be responsible. The interesting part was an ability to tell just by looking at sheep gathered outside a kraal that one sheep or more were missing. The counting skill came naturally. The village life was about sharing responsibilities, taking care of each other and socialising. For example, hoeing during its times was a typical practice whereby families supported each other to hoe one field, finish and move to the next up to the end of the season.

Although we shared a common understanding of village life, religion separated us in this village and I assume in most villages in Lesotho. We had to attend our church school which was 15 kilometres away from the village yet there was another church school right in our village. We had to attend the Roman Catholic Church school and learn its ideology, tradition and practices while following the national curriculum. The distance we walked between school and the village meant exposure to harsh conditions: being bullied by boys from nearby villages; experiencing harsh weather conditions, including exposure to extreme cold winter seasons, rain and thunder storms as we walked either way. Reflecting on [these] experiences, one wonders how we survived. I argue that I persevered because I managed to complete my primary education under extremely difficult conditions which were compounded by teachers who practised corporal punishment. We were beaten bitterly for coming late to school or getting assignments wrong and failing to do homework. A majority of the children from my village dropped out of school.

My primary school journey was characterised by perseverance. The circumstances both at home and at school could easily push one out of school. Reflecting on my primary education, there seems to be a share of common cultural practices regarding school and village lives. I am gratified for having completed primary education within two cultures: the village life and the school.

Experience of doing and discussing the drawings

In this section we reflect on the experiences of doing the drawings, and, for the facilitator, of leading the session.

Emmanuel: The use of the drawing to reflect upon our personal experiences as we were growing up, first from home to formal education, offered us the opportunity to provide our personal life histories, and ways in which each aspect contributed to who we are. In Samuel's (2002: 1) words, 'Life history research is neither a "soft option," nor irrelevant to policy development in our reconstructing society.'

In the context of constructing our drawings, we were attempting to indicate the extent to which, as Hartshorne (1992: 1) asserts, 'each of us is shaped by all the influences exerted upon us, by the way in which we have responded to them, and by what we as individuals decided to do as a result'. Personally, constructing my educational experiences by means of this drawing confirms what Jansen (1991: 189) regards as the 'power of an alternative' research methodology, which is how he sees autobiographical research.

The articulation of such an unevenly marked journey is problematic. One of the challenges is deciding which experiences to highlight or foreground and which ones to background. Secondly, there were no criteria provided to direct the drawing. While everybody else immediately got on with their drawings, I found myself in some deep thought as nothing stood out immediately for me as a point of engagement. So while drawing may not allow for linear narration and understanding of events, it helps in the excavation of subtexts that have shaped and continue to shape us and helps us harness the complexities of our learning journeys. Drawing also allows for connections to be made, which speech may not have the capacity to achieve. Drawing, in particular the sharing, allowed me to stand at a distance from what I had drawn and examine my fuzzy memories and attempt to give them shape and meaning. I was able to stand on the outside and attempt to interpret my own deep, lived experiences in playful ways. What was more enlightening was listening to other stories. Some of the stories were deeply personal and sensitive. After hearing these stories, I asked myself the question, what does one do with this information? The responsibility and burden of knowing. I initially hesitated to give an explanation of my drawings as I felt vulnerable in sharing my story, the fear of disclosure and not knowing who was listening and the potential for harm that accompanies certain kinds of disclosure, more like a coming out. However, there was a sense of sharing and connection that is established by the drawing activity. I felt like there was something common and human in our drawings and in what we shared. In spite of my concerns, the drawing held a promise for togetherness and interconnectedness, both in a literal and figurative sense. After the initial discomfort of drawing, the sharing of crayons stands out to me and remains vivid in my mind, more than the actual stories told by the individuals. Listening to the stories and explanations at the end, it was not bad after all, it sounded like one common story. We had created a tapestry together, drawn from separate stories and journeys.

Choshi: This was the first time that I had to sit down and think through my education journey. It brought to mind a number of pleasant and not-so-pleasant experiences. It was also good to hear about other colleagues' education journeys and it showed that we have all gone through varied journeys to where we are now. For some colleagues in the group, it was a hard road, they had to walk long distances and had to cross flooded rivers, look after cattle and other life-changing experiences. Some of us did not experience that hardship and one might say we had it easy. This made it all special and helped us appreciate where we were coming from and look afresh at the colleague sitting next to you. We understood a little of our colleagues and placed, rightly or wrongly, what they said in the backgrounds they were coming from. In fact, it was apparent that some colleagues still carried bitterness against some teachers who belittled them and made them hate the subject up to now. Nonetheless, the sharing of our experiences brought us closer to each other.

Kavena: My experience of drawing as part of a group activity was a therapeutic moment. Many teaching and learning moments ran into my head, and they are all part of my learning world. I had so many stories to tell. I did not know which one to draw. Moreover, my learning world is complex, yet I needed to draw it in a very simple sketch. It made me think. In fact, retrospectively, I started visualising my rural life, my experiences, my exposure, my battles, my success and my escape. By the time that I started drawing, I was in the mood of a winning attitude. I knew I conquered that battle. I needed to think smartly and wisely. I retrieved the complexity of my story. I shared a bit with my group, but the question was 'where do I start?' and 'where do I end?' It is a long story with a lot of bumps, but thank God I pulled through. As of today, I can say it is a story that ended with joy. So shall it be!

Violet: I do not dislike drawing although my experiences with drawing always leave me with a sense of discomfort. I attribute this awkwardness to the fact that my drawings never looked great; it did not matter how much effort I had put in. Drawing after drawing left me with a sense of futility. After a while, I gave up on drawing. Memories of drawing include childhood years when all my attempts at drawing were futile endeavours, often leaving me feeling frustrated. Initial encounters with drawing include scribbles on my thighs and sometimes arms with dry sticks and grass. These often left inflamed and often slightly painful marks on my limbs and sometimes spots of blood on cracked lines on my bare skin. A little saliva smeared on the skin made the experience more bearable. A less painful scribbling of huts, stick men, women and children, dogs and cats was one which was done on the dark brown creamy mud after the rains. I preferred writing stories. The invitation to draw our learning journey triggered all sorts of emotions in me. First, I had not expected drawing to constitute the deep intellectual experiences we were having in Lesotho at an academic conference on research on rurality. My uneasiness could have also been a result of what I considered to be the trivialisation of a serious pedagogic moment. Being asked to draw felt rather unnatural and even uncanny for me. Part of the dilemma I guess was in the uneasy relationship I have with drawing. This was an invitation into one of my discomfort zones and a moment of disclosure of my inadequacies as an artist. The sense of discomfort was not only in the invitation to draw, but in the complexity of the subject of focus. I was being asked to capture unclear historical moments which had been [for] the most [part] discontinuous and transient, as my parents were constantly on the move from place to place, urban to semi-rural and mission schools and semi-urban, doing their priestly duties. The contemplation of the task to trace my literacy trajectory through drawing inserted me temporarily in some kind of agitation.

Pulane: Participation in the drawings task helped me to deeply reflect on my own story of growing [up] in a village setting and then walking the education journey. I am not sure about using pictures at this level. I have used drawing with primary and secondary school students. I do not think it was instructive. It is good in that the description just follows when one is writing about something very familiar and for which one may have never thought about writing stories.

Brenda: My experience was as facilitator rather than as participant. I have facilitated and participated in sessions using drawings in educational settings with students and academics many times, with some being more impactful and productive than others. I think this was one of the best. The session seemed to be very powerful. At the end of this exercise there was a hush in the room, and one of the colleagues

least familiar with qualitative methods remarked, 'That was deep.' We did not tape-record the plenary discussion that ensued, as this was not meant to be a research exercise. However, I was taken aback at the depth of the discussion and at some of the more analytic comments that participants made on the basis of the drawings and discussions. For example, one participant used her drawing to discuss the gap between herself and the educational institutions, pointing to a real dislocate between formal schooling and life in rural areas. If it worked so well with this group, why would it not work with students?

Discussion

The five drawings provide a sense of the potential of drawings as sources of data on themes associated with rurality. Of the five drawings, three show distinctly rural settings. The inclusion of non-rural or peri-urban settings as sources of data is useful, as it demonstrates that many of the experiences of rural students are similar to those of students in non-rural contexts, and thus, once again, one should guard against making hard and fast generalisations about rurality. An example of a common experience of schooling in both rural and non-rural areas is treatment by some teachers that is so harsh as to discourage intelligent young people from engaging in learning, leaving a long-lasting negative impression on them. The drawings both confirm and disconfirm the literature on rurality, and at the same time give a distinctly southern African flavour to the topic. One example of this is the theme of transitions, evident in the drawings and discussions of Violet and Kavena in particular, where, as young children, they moved between rural and urban settings and even between countries. This degree of movement is typical of much biographical literature on rurality, as exemplified in McIntosh Polela's (2011) moving biography of growing up in urban and rural contexts in three provinces in South Africa.

An interesting observation made possible by these drawings is that wealth and comfort are relative within a specific setting. Pulane, for example, says her family was better off than their neighbours, and yet her father and grandfather went to work in the mines in the iniquitous apartheid migrant labour system, and her mother went to work in South Africa as a domestic worker. Her account demonstrates the extent to which narrative summons up and connects with large-scale historical events, bringing together as it does three important elements required for understanding the human condition: history, biography and society (Mills 2000). A third and important theme for the future exploration(s) of our research is that of indigenous or local knowledges in relation to formal school or university knowledge. Pointers in this direction are indications from the drawings and the explanations of Pulane and Emmanuel that as a child in the rural areas, one learns about counting while herding cattle. This goes some way towards counteracting the notion that children in rural areas are drawn away from schoolwork, at their cost, to conduct physical chores. This debate is discussed in more detail in relation to rurality in South Africa in the HSRC-EPC (2005) report. These chores can lead to learning that could contribute towards school learning, if built upon more effectively.

A salient theme common to drawings from the rural settings as well as similar drawings captured in the SARIHE project is the journey to school, which is often beset with challenges and dangers, whether from criminals, bullies or, more often, natural phenomena such as rivers or the weather. However, sometimes these journeys include opportunities to socialise and relax. In a study on rural youth in Lesotho and how they navigate journeys to school, Morojele and Muthukrishna

(2012) demonstrate how young people utilise agency to navigate and interpret activities such as the long walk to school. In other words, a single activity is interpreted in divergent ways. This has significance for interpretation of the data.

Conclusion

The method of using drawings for data collection has both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that the subsequent group discussions are a social activity, encouraging understanding amongst participants about their pasts. The drawings summon up memories that might be considered random, but at the same time they lead research participants to reflect upon their thoughts and assumptions. Sometimes only fragments of memories are captured, but as Violet points out, these are allied to a host of further thoughts and recollections.

Clearly, there is some hesitancy about using drawings as a qualitative research method, as Pulane in particular notes. This could point to the need for more sensitisation and training in order to use this method. Based on the descriptions of the experience of using drawings, two constraints or challenges require more attention. The first is the sense of discomfort brought about by some participants' feelings that they cannot draw. The second is the sense of insecurity, risk and potential formlessness of the exercise, as opposed to the familiarity and security of, for example, one-on-one interviews. We believe, however, that these challenges are counterweighed by the advantages: the social nature of the exercise and the strong measure of agency and freedom the participants enjoy whilst sharing experiences. The method has a distinct advantage in that it summons up memories from the past that are once again renegotiated and reworked in the present. The spatial orientation of a drawing on a page provides coordinates for time, space and transition, in other words, a sense of the journey an individual takes from a childhood in one setting to being a student in another.

Finally, we were able to conduct this activity with no more than paper and pastels. The method is indeed appropriate for resource-constrained environments, and is a useful mechanism for facilitating research from the south, although this does not preclude it from being utilised in less constrained settings.

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