Article

Drawings as a Means to Elicit Streams of Caring Masculinities Among Male Foundation-Phase Teachers

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Abstract

Using drawings as a method of data generation in participatory visual methodologies, this article explores the ways in which male foundation-phase teachers construct caring masculinities within the "feminised" foundation-phase schooling context. The study examines intersections between professional identities, cultural practices and evolving gender norms. Through thematic analysis, we found that male foundation-phase teachers actively negotiate caring masculinities by blending traditionally masculine lived experiences to facilitate nurturing pedagogies in and around their classrooms. The article highlights the way of exploring cultural practices, such as *ulwaluko*, a traditional Xhosa male circumcision (rite of passage), to inform and enrich these nurturing approaches. Significantly, participatory visual methodologies, such as drawing, facilitated open, vulnerable discussions about masculinities and teaching, which created safe spaces for the participants to articulate complex aspects of their identities and experiences. This article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of male foundation-phase teachers' experiences in South Africa by revealing how caring masculinities can be explored effectively through visual methodologies. The study advocates broader adoption of participatory visual methods in future gender and education research, both in South Africa and internationally.

Keywords: male foundation-phase teacher; caring masculinities; nurturing practices; participatory visual methodologies

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Introduction

In South Africa and globally, increasing the participation of men as teachers of children in the early years, specifically those aged 5 to 9 in grades R to 3, is a strategic priority that would diversify the workforce and address labour market inequalities (Kagola & Khau, 2020; Moosa & Bhana, 2023; OECD, 2018; Warin & Adriany, 2017). The presence of male teachers in the early years would disrupt the discourse that essentialises gender and constructs men as unsuitable to teach young children (Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Msiza, 2022; Warin, 2018). According to Elliott (2016) and Messerschmidt (2018), involving men in caregiving roles can promote a shift from toxic streams of masculinity to positive masculinities, which are characterised by collaboration, empathy, and a sense of community responsibility. Internationally, there has been a growing call for more men to teach children in the early years, with the aim of providing learners with diverse learning experiences and of promoting gender-flexible pedagogy (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024; Warin, 2019). The concepts of care and doing care work are largely contested in the teaching profession; men continue to be socialised into seeing care as outside their realm of manhood (Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Plank, 2019). In schools men are often understood as "best teachers" not because of their nurturing abilities but because of such conventional masculine characteristics as athletic prowess, strength and discipline (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024).

However, teaching in the early years inevitably requires men to provide care, while the literature has indicated that men distance themselves from care work and its associations. For instance, Msiza (2022) found that men in foundation-phase (FP) grades prefer teaching upper grades (such as grades 2 and 3) based on the assumption that grades R and 1 require intensive care work. In addition, men have long been found to be also avoiding tasks that are categorised as feminine, such as house chores (Kagola, 2024; Ratele et al., 2010). When it comes to chores that include caring activities, men typically state that they do not do the chores but only assist women. Instead, men gravitate towards activities that are traditionally linked to their masculine identities (Ratele et al., 2010; My, 2023). In addition, Msiza (2024) found that male FP teachers are willing to provide care and manage learner incidents such as those in which learners may have accidentally urinated; however, men do this in ad hoc ways. Although the work on male teachers in the early years has been a subject of scholarship for over a decade globally, there appears to be no research that has addressed the cultural and social attitudes about male teachers and care work in FP grades (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024). In conducting this work, given that some men may be reluctant to discuss the concept of care directly, we here argue that arts-based methods offer an important avenue for exploring diverse expressions of care.

According to Barry and Weiner (2019) and Moosa and Bhana (2022), exposing men to occupations that are traditionally constructed as outside the realm of men and predominantly undertaken by women has the potential to disrupt gendered constructs of teacher identities and systems of power. This offers the possibility of addressing the

inequalities that comes with the gendering of care, but the participation of male teachers in FP is still largely influenced by hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy (Scambor et al., 2014). Some men who have entered the profession find themselves in a position where they need to perform nurturing and caring tasks while they simultaneously feel compelled to conform to the gendered scripts of hegemonic masculinities. In the context of South Africa, different versions of masculinities have been theorised by, among others, Morrell et al. (2012), Mfecane (2016, 2018, 2020) and Ratele (2016).

The study reported in this article was conducted in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, a region predominantly inhabited by the amaXhosa ethnic group. The construction of masculinities in this province is primarily driven by the traditional rites of passage, whereby young men spend approximately three to six weeks in the mountains where they undergo traditional male circumcision, which is called *ulwaluko* in isiXhosa. During this practice, boys are initiated, and they transition from boyhood to manhood (Mfecane, 2016). While there for the duration of six weeks, they are under the care of a male traditional caregiver called *ikhankatha*[1] in isiXhosa. The understanding of masculinities by some of the men in the ethnic group is centred on stoicism and strength; young men are expected to endure pain to prove bravery (Mfecane, 2020; Siswana & Kiguwa, 2018). Such understanding of masculinities is centred on patriarchal ideology, which teaches men that masculinity should be demonstrated through emotional suppression, for instance, "real men" feel no pain, nor do they cry (hooks, 2004).

Patriarchal masculinity is a sociopolitical system that conditions men to derive their identities and purpose from the exercise of dominance over others (hooks, 2015). Also, this ideology permeates cultural values and socialises both men and women, reinforced through multiple spheres of society such as religion, schools and culture (hooks, 2004). The concepts of traditional male circumcision and enduring pain (an example of patriarchal ideology) are deeply entangled, such that men who have been circumcised and sutured are not regarded as real men (Mgqolozana, 2018). Men who have been circumcised in hospitals are, according to Mgqolozana (2018), called Betadine men (referring to an antiseptic ointment) with "medicalised" penises (Mfecane, 2016), because hospital circumcision does not produce an "authentic" Xhosa man (Dlamini, 2020). It therefore remains interesting to understand how male FP teachers are located in such a context, and how drawings can serve as a means to elicit different expressions of caring masculinities.

The framing of this article draws from a broader theory of masculinities by Connell (2005). Connell (2005) asserts that masculinities are configurations of gender practice; they are hierarchical, multiple and are contextually as well as culturally constructed. Building on the note that masculinities are multiple, there is significant scholarly focus

1 A male caregiver, guardian and instructor who looks after the initiates while they heal from their circumcision wounds, and who teaches them about manhood (see Mgqolozana, 2018).

on caring masculinities, which is somewhat synonymous to what scholars refer to as positive masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2018). Caring masculinities are conceptualised as a type that rejects violence, domination and power over other men, women and children (Elliott, 2016). The concept of caring masculinities is particularly advanced in European countries as appropriately suited to shape the pursuit of gender equality (Scambor et al., 2014). South African scholars, such as Morrell and Jewkes (2011) share a similar view and argue that the shift of care from women to men has the potential to unlock in men the desire to nurture, love and care. Men in this type of masculinity "embrace the affective, relational, emotional and interdependent qualities of care" (Elliott, 2016, p. 252). In the context of FP teaching, in particular, men who join the field and embrace nurturing and caring practices are disrupting the gender binary (Jordan, 2020). Involving men in the early years also serves as a significant mechanism for challenging persistent gendered conceptualisation of FP teaching as inherently feminine work (Moosa & Bhana, 2020).

In understanding our participants, we also draw from African masculinities scholars such as Mfecane (2018) who argues that men should be studied from their specific contexts. We adopt Ratele's (2016) position that, when studying theories drawn from the Global North, as researchers we should avoid othering ourselves and the men we are studying. In this study, we therefore employ caring masculinities to explore how the use of drawings serves as a means to elicit different expressions of caring masculinities among male FP teachers and to deepen understanding. In the next section we unpack the methodology that was followed in the study.

Methodology

We adopted participatory visual methodologies (PVM) within a qualitative approach as the research design. Scholars argue that researchers use a qualitative approach with the aim to explore participants' lived experiences or phenomena using a variety of methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Grove et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2017). Exploring the participants' lived experiences can be explored through both verbal and non-verbal communication using participatory visual methods such as collages and drawings (see Mitchell et al., 2017). In the process of using participatory and visual methods, the researcher(s), together with the participants, may further interpret what they hear, see and understand regarding a particular phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2017). According to Mitchell et al. (2017) and Yamile and De Lange (2023), PVM is a hands-on methodology that promotes courageous conversations among a particular group of people to reflect and think of ways that promote social change concerning the phenomenon under study. In alignment with the study's research design and approach, we adopted a transformative paradigm. According to Mertens (2010), researchers who work in this paradigm aim to foster a particular change, be it in the participants or the researchers of the study.

In this article, we aim to explore the ways in which drawings serve as a means to elicit different expressions of caring masculinities among male FP teachers and to enable deeper understanding. Through courageous conversations and visuals, the participants reflected on their practices and their implications for their personal–professional identities. Reflections and conversations of this nature may lead to a paradigm shift in how the participants and we understand and enact caring masculinities.

We enrolled six male FP teachers within the context of primary schools in the Eastern Cape. The participant's ages varied from 30 to 36 and their work experience was between three and five years of FP teaching at the time of data generation. Owing to the low numbers of male FP teachers in schools across the country and, in particular, the Eastern Cape, we used a snowballing method to recruit participants, which is a method based on a referral system. According to Cohen et al. (2011), scarce population members often know each other, thus snowball sampling was a suitable method for the study. The study forms part of a larger qualitative research project that adhered to ethical protocols, with research permission granted by the University of the Free State (approval number: UFS-HSD2021/1447/22). The Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Basic Education granted permission to conduct the study in the province. To generate the data, male FP teachers gathered in one place to create and share their drawings guided by the prompt: "Draw something that best represents your understanding of nurturing within the context of FP teaching and learning and put a curatorial statement on it." The session lasted for about five hours.

According to Mitchell et al. (2017), drawing as a method of data generation can be explained as a process in which the research participants make graphic representations or illustrations and then explain the meaning of the illustration to others. Hartel (2014) states that drawings are powerful in their ability to extract personal, intuitive and subconscious thoughts and are a means for participants to express an idea on a topic being researched. In addition, scholars have argued that drawings can facilitate the sharing of hidden meanings and provide the research participants with imaginative ways of reviewing their understandings and lived experiences of a phenomenon (Hartel, 2014; Mitchell et al. 2017). Mitchell et al. (2017) posit that PVM methods such as drawings enable participants to present and discuss each other's drawings while sharing the meanings they attribute to their creations. This is a process that constitutes the first layer of data analysis. We noted the common issues the participants raised as they engaged with each other's drawing. Before the presentations, we gave the participants the following questions to think about while others shared their drawings: "What do we see?", "What does it mean?", and "What is common among their drawings?" The above questions helped the participants to critically reflect on their understanding of nurturing and how it translates into their practices in and around their classrooms.

During the data generation process, we encouraged the participants to use any language they were comfortable with. The participants then code-switched between English and isiXhosa as they conversed about how they understood nurturing within the FP context

and what their drawing meant. The data were then transcribed and translated into English.

The data thus generated were analysed using thematic analysis, following a systematic approach of three stages (Tuckett, 2005). We followed three stages of systematic data analysis (Braun et al., 2015). First, we read the transcripts and familiarised ourselves with the data and generated initial codes. Second, we started reviewing the codes in search of themes. Third, through a rigorous process by both of us of going back and forth to understand the data, we also used member checking, whereby the transcripts were given to the participants to verify if the transcripts represented a true reflection of their thoughts. We categorised the codes into themes that will be discussed in the section that follows. In aligning this article with the special issue theme, "Alternative forms of research and knowledge production that disrupt and destabilise mainstreams approaches to studying gender and sexuality", we focused on the two drawings of Wandile and Aphelele[2] (see Figure 1). In addition, noting the substantial volume of rich data that was generated, we selected the data that responded to the key research question of this article and aligned with some of the themes in the special issue. The next section focuses on the findings.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings from a conversation among male FP teachers that focused on their drawings related to their understanding of nurturing in and around their classrooms. In this article, we first present two of the five drawings (Figure 1) that sparked the most challenging conversation among male FP teachers. We then discuss the curatorial statements in conjunction with the courageous conversation extracts under the following two themes: male FP teachers' understanding of nurturing in and around their classrooms and drawings as a means to facilitate sensitive conversations.

2 We used pseudonyms throughout the study to ensure the participants' anonymity.

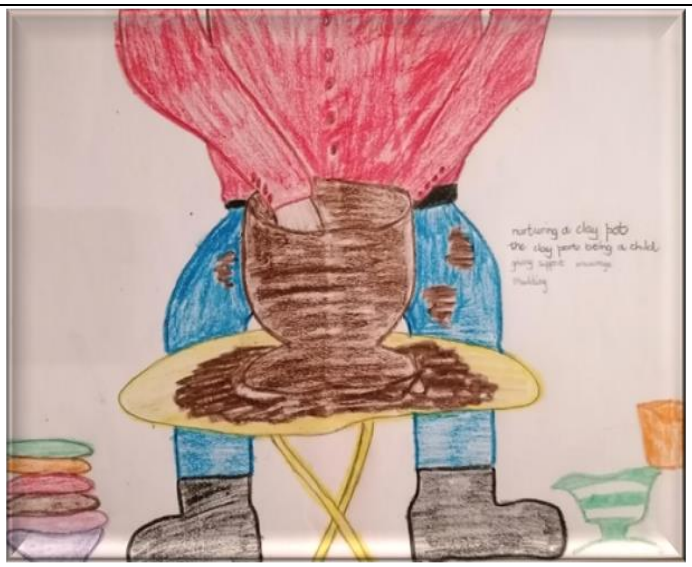
Drawings	What do the drawings mean?
	Nurturing for me refers to moulding, what came to my mind was moulding a clay pot which in my case could symbolise how I develop the learner in my classroom . . . similarly to how I was raised . . . being loved, cared for and softly co-constructed. (Wandile, grade 2 teacher)
	To me nurturing is like a process or a journey, which means you will have to sacrifice your well-being sometimes and take care of your child or learner. An example of nurturing would be how I holistically develop learners in our classes. I also think it's modelling good ways of being a person, like how to be kind, caring and show empathy to others. (Aphelele, grade 3 teacher)

Figure 1: The drawings done by Wandile and Aphelele

Theme One: Male FP Teachers' Understanding of Nurturing In and Around Their Classrooms

When the participants shared their drawings, an intense discussion emerged from the two drawings and their meanings, which sparked much conversation among the participants about how they understand the concept of nurturing and how it plays out in and around their classrooms. Looking at the excerpts, they potentially touched on expressions of caring masculinities in both Wandile's and Aphelele's drawings. Lazola, one of the participants, asked Wandile and Aphelele a question regarding their drawings. He asked: "What do you mean by care, love and show empathy? . . . You guys are men." Lazola seemed not to comprehend what Aphelele and Wandile were saying. In the excerpts that follow, the two participants expand on and explain what they meant.

The data in the excerpts below indicate that both Wandile and Aphelele are aware of the socialisation of boys and men tied to hegemonic forms of masculinities. Wandile acknowledges that, as a man, he was taught stoicism and to avoid expressing emotions. He also believes in an essentialising gendered belief that women are inherently emotional beings. What is different in his argument is that he also believes that men, too, can be emotional and should be, a practice that he encourages in his classroom with the grade 2 learners. Wandile's excerpt suggests that changing the will of men to care requires a disruption of historical socialisation of gender binary. In addition, Plank (2019, p. 119) argues that "emotional vulnerability is not a sign of being weak". Wandile stated:

> Yes, bra, we are men, and I understand we as men are raised in a way that we should not show emotion and all but I do . . . It's a woman's thing to show emotion and all but I think men can also . . . I think it is part of my nurturing, for example, in my class, I tell my learners boys or girls to always make their feelings known . . . it is difficult for some boys, but by the time they leave my class at the end of the year they all know how to express their feelings . . . in this way I teach them to love, care and show empathy.

Aphelele uses an example of what is often considered sacred among men who have undergone traditional rites of passage. Speaking about what happens or any form of details relating to *ulwaluko* is, as in many other cultures, a taboo. However, from a positive perspective, Aphelele's caring needs were largely and meaningfully fulfilled during his time in the mountains under the guidance and care of an *ikhankatha*. Aphelele's drawing shows two men walking together in what he refers to as a journey. It appears the reflection of Aphelele's experience in the mountain, elicited by the drawings, informed his understanding of care in and around his classroom. The excerpt suggests that Aphelele was struck by the degree of care that he received from another man as his traditional caregiver. He is therefore associating the slow-paced healing of his circumcision wound[3] with the compassion of care he has towards his learners.

3 Once the penis was circumcised, the initiates had to stay for six weeks in the mountains, during which the surgical wound was cared for with the assistance of the *ikhankatha* (the male caregiver).

Aphelele's comment about his experience during the *ulwaluko* provides a rare perspective on how heteronormative traditional practices can inform nurturing behaviours in the classroom. This, therefore, is an example of the emergence of caring masculinities, albeit requiring further study and interrogation. Aphele (grade 3 teacher) stated:

> For me it's more personal, you see in my drawing the man walking with the child, that is me walking with my *ikhankatha* . . . he modelled good ways of being a person, and showed me kindness, cared for me and showed empathy when my wound was not healing as fast as other guys' wounds were. He was patient and gentle, and when others were mocking me he stood up for me . . . in my school, I think I am more patient with my learners those who are slow and I teach my learners that everyone is different and they should respect, love and show empathy to others . . . just like me when my wound was not healing . . . so, yes, I am a man, but I do care, love and show empathy.

Lazola (grade 1 teacher), having heard Wandile's and Aphelele's experiences, also shared some of his experiences during the *ulwaluko* and linked them to his nurturing practices in the classroom. He was particularly affected by Aphelele's drawing. Essentially, the traditional caregiver engaged in activities that transcended traditional notions of masculinity. His traditional caregiver provided an opportunity and space for Lazola to be emotional and process his grief. He said:

> You have touched on something sensitive to me, my father died while I was at the mountains and my *ikhankatha* broke the news to me. I felt like my life was over because my father was my best friend and all of us at home relied on him . . . my *ikhankatha* was there for me even after we were reintroduced to society as real men . . . he always called for us to have conversation asking how I am feeling and how are things at home . . . he made me feel like I am seen and loved . . . and this is what would also like my learners to feel seen and heard . . . for them to feel safe around me.

The participants' excerpts all show interesting dynamics that are elicited by drawings and courageous conversations, in which the men demonstrated consciousness of the existing and dominant constructions of masculinities that expect all men to be tough and non-caring. They were also recognising that men, too, are able to provide care despite the gendered beliefs. The participants' accounts of receiving care during the *ulwaluko* and its influence on their classroom practices demonstrate the potential for seeing traditional practices in a different light. Especially when such practices are administered by progressive individuals, they can foster more reflections on caring masculinities, and build an egalitarian society and a gender-diverse teaching workforce in FP teaching.

Theme Two: Drawings as a Means to Facilitate Sensitive Conversations

Research on the inclusion and experiences of male FP teachers in an occupation perceived to be "feminised" has mainly been conducted using conventional qualitative research methods (see Moosa & Bhana, 2019; Mashiya et al., 2015; Mncanca et al., 2021; Msiza, 2022). Although the existing research has made a significant contribution

to the scholarship, especially in countries such as South Africa where the scholarship is still emerging, the methods may not always facilitate deep and nuanced conversation about men and care. In this theme, we present data relating to the participants' experiences of using drawings and courageous in-depth conversations. Aphelele and Lazola highlight the important ways in which arts-based methods, such as drawings, elicit data that conventional methods cannot access. Aphelele stated:

> You know I have been a research participant before but, in those studies, we were interviewed. Today's way of collecting data is different . . . I got to share with strangers my most embarrassing memory about my initiation . . . the drawing made it easy for me to talk about it . . . I think we need more fun ways of research like this.

Aphelele's openness about his challenging experiences of the *ulwaluko* illustrates a different masculine ideal that elevates emotional expression over suppression, which makes a visible shift from traditional streams of masculinities. Messerschmidt's (2018) work helps us to understand how embracing vulnerability can develop alternative expressions of masculinities and identities. Aphelele's excerpts demonstrate the power of studying men differently, especially using arts-based methods to elicit deeper insights, as well as the intrinsic drive for men to embrace alternative masculinities. However, there is a different aspect to consider, Mfecane (2016, p. 210) argues that "the most subordinated forms of masculinity in Xhosa gender order are uncircumcised adult men and medically circumcised men". Mfecane (2016) argues further that, in theorising Xhosa masculinities, the body should be the main focus since the hegemony in hierarchies of masculinities is achieved through it. This, therefore, brings into focus a different perspective. Could this mean that is why the participants were easily accepting of embracing caring masculinities? We are aware that the present study cannot respond to this question; however, it is worth asking.

Lazola shared a similar experience with the data generation method; however, what seems to be different with him is a competitive urge he had during the data generation. He stated that in the process of making the drawings he felt he was competing with the other participants. He said:

> For me, I agree with Aphelele that the process was different, but it was challenging… in that, I felt like I was competing with you guys, especially you, Wandile . . . in terms of the drawings themselves . . . but when we discussed what they meant . . . I was more relieved and comfortable as I realised it's more about the meanings . . . which is nice.

Wandile also shared how the participatory method made him experience what his learners felt when they were tasked to draw in his classroom. It assisted him in reconnecting with his pedagogical practices in the classroom and the excitement that the learners experience. Wandile stated that the visual method enabled him to share his nurturing experience in and around his classroom, he said:

> Ha ha ha . . . for me it was fun man . . . you see mine is colourful neh . . . I think when the researcher said we going to draw it took me back to my classroom . . . I always see how my kids are excited when they draw . . . so I felt like that too, and it helped me visualise my understanding of nurturing, which made it also easy to talk about my nurturing practices in my school as a whole.

These male FP teachers' responses indicate that the drawing process created a space for male teachers to express vulnerable aspects of their masculinities and experiences that may be difficult to articulate verbally (Mitchell et al., 2017). For instance, Aphelele's reflection on his "most embarrassing memory about his initiation" demonstrates how the drawings as a participatory method facilitated the creation of a safe space for sharing personal experiences that are sometimes perceived as sensitive. Lazola's initial discomfort with and competitiveness regarding drawing skills reflect enduring masculine norms of comparison and achievement. However, his shift to valuing meaning over technical skill demonstrates a shift in his masculine identity by adopting a non-competitive approach. The constant negotiation between hegemonic masculinities and the emergent caring masculinities is important as it demonstrates a shift towards positive masculinities.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex relationship between masculinities, nurturing practices, and innovative research methods among male FP teachers in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The use of caring masculinities as a theoretical framework and participatory visual methods such as drawing together provided insights into how visual expressions can elicit different manifestations of caring among male FP teachers. The method created a safe space for the participants to explore complex aspects of their lived experiences and identities. As discussed earlier in the article, conversations about traditional male circumcision (rite of passage) are considered sacred and a sensitive topic for ethnic groups who still follow the practice. Be that as it may, the practice in itself and the manner in which the participants received care from their caregiver (*ikhankatha*) contributed positively to the participants' understanding of providing care, nurturing and embracing humanity.

This is an important observation and a contribution to the scholarship of masculinities in South Africa, wherein for centuries the traditional rites of passage have always been associated with poor health practices, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinities and heteronormativity. In addition, men are mostly viewed as a difficult group to engage with on matters of care. On the contrary, the opposite is true for this study; the appropriate and creative methodologies facilitated meaningful participation and proved to be effective in gathering detailed and nuanced data. This was particularly evident when the participants themselves alluded to the fact that they were able to be vulnerable in times of grief and pain, such as losing a parent. They were also able to revisit their lived experiences and reflect on the approach of care they ought to use as FP teachers.

Based on these findings, we recommend wider consideration and use of participatory visual methods in studies of gender and sexuality in education.

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