

Conversing at the Intersection: Religious Identity and the Human Right to Gender Equality in a South African Teacher Education Context

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Abstract

This article argues that it is essential to explore conversations at the intersection between personal religious identity and Human Rights issues in an attempt to bridge the gap between policy and practice. To facilitate this exploration an empathetic-reflective-dialogical approach was adopted to engage with pre-service teachers in a South African Higher Education Institution. Selected pre-service Religion Education teachers were encouraged to engage in self-dialogue and to write their self-narratives. Participating in Communities in Conversation, Communities in Dialogue and Communities for Transformation provided the opportunity for empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying to take place. This restorying has the potential to address the possible disconnect between the individual's personal and professional identities when considering Human Rights issues, and in this case, gender equality in particular. Conversing at this intersection has the potential to increase the individual's identity capital and to transform classroom practice to classroom praxis and this can possibly impact the wider society.

Keywords: Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying, Communities in Conversation, Communities in Dialogue, Communities for Transformation, Human Rights

Introduction

As underpinned by the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996), Human Rights issues are embedded in the 'Policy of Human Rights Across the Curriculum' (2003) (Department of Education 2003a). The teaching-learning (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe 2011) of democratic values is outlined in the 'Manifesto of Values, Education and Democracy' (2001) (Department of Education 2001). In the school curricula and, in particular, in the Life Orientation curriculum which focuses on the social, personal and physical development of the learner, there is space for the exploration of human rights related issues, including that of gender equality. Life Skills (Grades 4 - 6)/ Life Orientation (Grades 7 - 12) is a compulsory subject in the South African school curriculum that focuses on the holistic development of the learner. Religion Education is an integral inclusion in this curriculum.

The Religion and Education Policy (2003) (Department of Education 2003b), promoting as it does, a co-operative model when dealing with religious diversity, encourages intra- and inter religious dialogue not only about religion per se, but especially about the articulation of religious discourse when addressing social issues and in particular human rights issues. When looking at gender equality as a human right, religion, and the associated dominant discourses which influence social intercourse, can play a central role in maintaining patriarchal mores, this, in spite of a very progressive Constitution. Religion can either support the promotion of human rights or present a barrier to the same. There is often disagreement even within the same umbrella religion. This signals clearly the need for reflection, both on the part of the individual, and for the collective.

Religion Education can draw on social intersectionality (Crenshaw 2003; Shields 2008) and affect the whole teaching-learning space. Central to any human rights conversations is the individual's substantial (personal) and situational (professional) identities (Nias 1989). According to Roux (2012:41) 'teachers cannot mediate or facilitate knowledge and skills pertaining to human rights without understanding their own position, identity and beliefs'.

In this article the conventional approach to Religion Education is troubled. This is done by focusing on a human rights issue and, in particular, the human right to gender equality is explored. This takes places in a South African Higher Education Institution and with a view to possibly being a catalyst for social transformation in a country that continues to struggle in

reality with an unequal society, not least when it comes to gender equality.

The voice of the Religion Education teacher can either entrench gender inequality or promote gender equality. Drawing on Wetherell (1996), it can be maintained that while pre-service teachers are born into specific religious contexts, each individual has the power to design his/her own religious identity. If pre-service Religion Education teachers have not engaged in self-reflection and negotiation of their own religious identity, it is reasonable to assume that when human rights issues are addressed in Religion Education lessons, there is the potential to create less than the intended outcome as expressed in the Religion and Education Policy (2003) (Department of Education 2003b).

The Religion and Education Policy (2003) (Department of Education 2003b) and the implementation thereof in the Life Orientation curriculum has presented both challenges and opportunities with regard to Religion Education teachers' policy image (their situational identity) and their personal (substantial) religious identity.

In this article we engage pre-service teachers who will be teaching Religion Education and we consider how their religious identity¹ intersects with the human right to gender equality. Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying as an approach to teaching-learning (Jarvis 2013a; 2013b; 2018) is presented. In this context, we used this approach to demonstrate a method for generating data while simultaneously requiring pre-service teachers to engage with their substantial as well as situational identities. Drawing on self-dialogue and self-narrative, empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying has the potential to transform Religion Education classroom practice into praxis² (McCormack & Kennelly 2011).

Empathy refers to the capacity of individuals to understand and respond to others with an increased awareness of the other person's thoughts and feelings and that these matter (Abdool & Drinkwater 2005). Drawing on McCormack & Kennelly (2011) we define reflection as the examination of responses, beliefs and premises resulting in the integration of new

¹ Referring to the religious identity of these pre-service teachers includes those who perhaps have no specific religious persuasion and who might consider themselves to be atheistic or agnostic.

² While classroom practice refers primarily to a technical skill, classroom praxis refers to the teacher's ability to be reflective and to engage with new knowledge so as to inform new knowledge.

understandings into experience. Dialogue refers to the search for meaning and understanding, recognising that each person has something of value to contribute (Allen 2004). It is about opening up to the possibility of learning from the other (Ipgrave 2003).

Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying provides Religion Education teachers with the opportunity to reflectively engage with their own religious identity by way of self-dialogue and then to express this through self-narrative. They are also provided with the opportunity to empathetically search for meaning and understanding of perspectives which are different from their own as they engage in Communities in Conversation (CiC) (Roux 2012; De Wet & Parker 2014) and Communities in Dialogue (CiD) (Roux 2012). This has the potential to be emancipatory and transformational. This approach reinforces and facilitates Nicolescu's (2012) theory of the Included Middle which conceives 'of people moving to a place where they become open to others' perspectives ... valu[ing] premises and belief systems ... letting go of aspects of how they currently know the world' (McGregor & Volckmann 2013:62).

A space for dialogue and knowledge generation was created. For this empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying to be effective, this needed to be a safe space (Du Preez & Simmonds 2011; Roux 2012) where substantial and situational identities could intersect. This safe space does not only refer to literal or physical safety, but rather, denotes the figurative and discursive use of the notion (Du Preez 2012; Redmond 2010; Stengel & Weems 2010). In this space, pre-service Religion Education teachers engaged in a Community in Conversation (CiC) and a Community in Dialogue (CiD). As they engaged with human rights issues, the strength and potentialities that emerged from these encounters had the potential to be transformative (McGregor & Volckmann 2013). This was further explored in a Community for Transformation (CfT).

Theoretical Framework Underpinning Empathetic-reflective-dialogical Restorying

The following bricolage provides the framework for empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying. The theories are drawn from a fairly recent study (Jarvis 2013).

Dialogical Self Theory

The dialogical self provides a link between self and society. Hermans' (2011) Dialogical Self Theory advocates that individuals live not only in external spaces, but also in the internal space of their society-of-mind. Possible identity re-creation can result from the dialogical self in action. This occurs when the individual moves from one *I* position to another in the self as a way of gaining understanding about the self in relation to the world (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010). An example of this, when engaging with the human right to gender equality, would be the adoption of a counter-position to both individual and collective dominant voices in the individual's society-of-mind that promote male hegemony.

Self-narrative

Self-dialogue can be expressed through self-narrative. Various scholars (Gonçalves & Ribeiro 2012; Nothling 2001; Nuttall 2009; White 2012) make the link between narrative and agency, arguing that self-narration can help individuals to make sense of their lives, past and present. Self-narrative has a role to play in enabling individuals to discover the degree to which they are entangled with their other (in this case, men/women) and, furthermore, the extent to which it might be possible to become disentangled from their other (men/women) and thus be freed to build new identities (Nuttall 2009). In this sense the self-narrative can be emancipatory and empowering in addressing male hegemony, fragmenting and re-interpreting dominant discourses (Lawler 2008). The articulation of this agency however, depends greatly on the extent and strength of a teacher's identity capital.

Identity Capital

The basic assumption in the concept of identity capital (Côté 1996; 2005) is that every person has it to some extent. 'Identity capital' refers to the stock of resources, or 'set of strengths' individuals have when constructing, framing and presenting their identity in social circumstances (Côté & Levine 2002:164). Identity capital comprises two assets, namely tangible resources such as social group membership and intangible resources which could include the ability to reflect, and negotiate self-identity. The accumulation of successful identity exchanges, namely the social interaction of an individual

with others, increases an individual's identity capital. Hermans (2010; 2011), in his Dialogical Self Theory, contends that it is in his/her mind that the teacher possibly finds agentic power by voicing implicitly or explicitly, and/or practising, a counter-position to gender discrimination in his/her personal, social and professional domains. It is the extent and the strength of identity capital that is at stake in concrete situations. It can be argued that as a teacher's identity capital increases, he/she will be able to voice and practise in increasing measure and with increasing confidence counter-positions to male dominance in his/her society-of-mind. Increased identity capital can constructively inform his/her classroom practice/praxis.

Restorying

It is the contention of Ter Avest (2011) that stories which have the greatest potential to transform readers are open space stories which allow hearers/readers sufficient space to deconstruct and reconstruct what they receive. The possibility then presents itself that as pre-service Religion Education teachers engage in open conversations they might restory what they know, as new interpretations are applied in the light of clarified or new understandings of dominant discourses (Thomas & Stornaiuolo 2016; Foote 2015; Slabon, Richards & Dennen 2014; Willis 2009). This can potentially lead to the co-production of new knowledges as individuals previously locked into their religious traditions, embark upon personal journeys of restorying. In this project, the restorying takes place in and through the following conversations.

Community in Conversation (CiC)

A Community in Conversation (De Wet & Parker 2014; Roux 2012) provides the opportunity for an informal sharing of information in conversation in a safe space. In the case of gender equality for example, men and women meet separately. This conversation is referred to by Green (1999) as negotiation and collaboration. Informally exchanging perspectives and personal experiences, can foster respect, trust and tolerant understanding as 'divergent ways of thinking and speaking' (McCormack & Kennelly 2011:522) are reflected upon. This reflection entails the examination of responses, beliefs and premises resulting in the integration of new understandings into experience (McCormack & Kennelly 2011). This process of reflection is very relevant within CiCs

where it is anticipated that as men and women, separately but reciprocally, share their self-narratives they will reflect on the position of men and women (and their others) in their religious discourses. Their intersection with other organizing principles in society (Wetherell 1996) could also be considered.

Community in Dialogue (CiD)

A Community in Dialogue (Roux 2012) fosters the opportunity in which the other is disclosed to his/her other (women/men) in a dialogue which includes a rhetoric that questions and a rhetoric that reveals respect, and inspires reciprocal exchanges with tolerant and empathetic understanding and collaboration initiatives for transformation. Conversations could be designed around unpacking religious discourses and the lived experience thereof and the implications for gender equality as expressed in the 'Bill of Rights' (Republic of South Africa 1996) and the 'Gender Equality Act' (Ministry of Children and Equality 2013). The aim of the CiD would be to understand self-respect and own positionality and inspire reciprocal exchanges with empathetic understanding.

Community for Transformation (CfT)

A Community for Transformation (Jarvis 2013; 2018) aims to explore how, in this case, new knowledges about substantial and situational identities and the human right to gender equality could inform teaching-learning about human rights for transformative classroom praxis. The CfT could identify challenges and possibilities for constructive engagement that could lead to new layers of consciousness (White 2012) which has the potential to lead to action.

Self-dialogue (to an internal audience) is expressed as self-narrative (to an external audience) in the spaces created by a CiC, CiD and CfT. As pre-service Religion Education teachers explore how their religious identities intersect with the human right to gender equality, the possibility exists for restorying to take place.

Methodology

This article draws on what emerged from a qualitative small-scale project that employed a narrative research design, conducive to the exploration of the ways

in which the participants construct, interpret and give meaning to their subjective experiences with regard to gender equality. It also provided the space to describe and explore how people are similar to, but also different from, one another (Newman 2011; Silverman 2010).

Narrative inquiry as a methodology within narrative research (Chase 2010; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr 2010; Luttrell 2010; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou 2008) and with a strong representation in the field of education (Clandinin 2007), refers to ‘the authentic accounts of real life experiences’ (Nothling 2001:153). Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008:4) add to this idea of narrative contending that it is ‘always multiple, socially constructed and constructing, reinterpreted and reinterpretable’. Narratives can be used to maintain the status quo, but can also have an emancipatory function, transforming individual lives and the broader culture (Plummer 1995).

The project was located at a South African University in the College of Humanities and more specifically in the School of Education.

Participants

Twenty-four Religion Education students registered for a Bachelor of Education Honours degree, and more specifically a module called ‘Contemporary Issues in Life Orientation’ agreed to participate in this project. It so happened that there were twelve men and twelve women ranging from their mid-twenties to fifty years of age. The ethical code of conduct and requirements set for narrative research by the tertiary institution’s ethics committee was adhered to. Participants signed consent forms and were assured that their anonymity would be protected and that pseudonyms would be used when citing their responses.

The Life Orientation module focused on various components of the research process. Students were tasked with choosing a particular topic from a broad list of Life Orientation related topics including human rights related issues. They read about their topic, or a particular aspect thereof, presented their substantiated perspectives to the class, and submitted an annotated bibliography. Students were then required to design a mini-proposal for a small-scale project that would further research the topic presented in class. The literature review constituted a separate assignment for assessment. In a discussion about research methodologies, empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying served as a demonstration of a data collection method.

Empathetic-reflective-dialogical Restorying

Students were informed that while empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying (Jarvis 2018) can be used to engage with numerous human rights issues, for the purposes of this module, it would be used to explore how the religious identities of the participating Religion Education students intersect with the human right to gender equality. Their self-dialogue and self-narrative contributed to their engagement in a CiC, CiD and CfT. The researchers who co-teach this module explained the process, locating it within the theoretical framework outlined previously. They introduced and asked the students to consider three questions at levels 1 and 2. A female and a male participant were asked to lead the separate CiCs on level 3. Levels 4 and 5 were guided by the researchers. Audio recording, with the consent of the participants, was used in levels 4 and 5. The table below (table 1) presents the 5 levels and what took place in each.

**Table 1: Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying –
5 levels (Jarvis 2018)**

Levels	Process	Audience	Result
1	• Self-dialogue	Society-of-mind Internal Audience	Negotiation of various I-positions and re-positioning of voices in the society-of-mind
2	• Self-narrative written text	Male and female Religion Education pre-service teachers	Production of own meaning and knowledge

Religious Identity and the Human Right to Gender Equality

3	• Self-narrative shared with an external audience • Community in Conversation (CiC)	External audience. At this level male and female pre-service teachers are separated and in a CiC they share their self-narratives exchanging perspectives and personal experiences in a space comprising their own gender.	Co-production with writers/ storytellers
4	• Self-narrative shared with an external audience • Community in Dialogue (CiD)	External audience. At this level male and female pre-service teachers share their self-narratives with one another.	Co-production with writers/ storytellers
5	• Group narrative • Community for Transformation (CfT)	External audience. Male and female pre-service teachers.	Co-production of possible new narrative for transformation

On the **first level** the participants were given the opportunity to consider the dominant individual and collective voices informing the internal *I* positions which they hold in their society-of-mind with regard to the position of men and women in their religious discourses. They were asked to consider the following questions:

- How would you describe your religious identity?
(Gender equality has been defined by Subramanian (2005) as women and men being equal to one another in quality and identical in value with women and men having the same rights and opportunities.)
- Do you think your religious identity affects the way in which you view the Human Right to gender equality? Please explain.
- What does your religion say about your position as a woman/ as a man?
- What does your religion say about your role and responsibilities as a woman/as a man?

It is on this level that the participants negotiated their self-dialogue and considered or adopted counter-positions to male hegemony as they engaged their dialogical self in action (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010). Their self-dialogue would find expression in level two where they wrote their self-narratives.

At **level two** both female and male participants, in response to the above questions, were required to write their self-narrative. According to Gonçalves and Ribeiro (2012:302) this self-narrative is 'the outcome of dialogical processes of negotiation, tension, disagreement, alliance and so on, between different voices of the self'. Ellis (2004) contends that the self-narrative or writing for the self, can be therapeutic as it causes the individual to pause and to think about their positionality in relation to gender equality. This can also be empowering as their writing exposes a new sense of consciousness and a greater sense of control in the present and for the future (Paul, Christensen & Frank 2000).

At **level three** the participants were separated into two groups, one for the men and the other for the women. In each group or CiC they were afforded the opportunity to share their written reflections orally in response to the questions below. Sharing their self-narratives provided the opportunity for them to individuate as 'equal ... dignified partner[s] in constituting reality and

constructing the world' (Becker 2012:89).

- What does your religion say about your position as a woman/man?
- What does your religion say about your role and responsibilities as a woman/man?
- What does your religion say about possible privileges that you have as a woman/man in your personal, social and professional domains?
- What does your religion say about possible expectations of women/men in their personal, social and professional domains?

At **level four** the participants together enter into a CiD. This fostered the opportunity in which the other was disclosed to his/her other (woman/man) in a dialogue which includes a rhetoric that questions and a rhetoric that inspires reciprocal exchanges with tolerant and empathetic understanding. The researcher facilitated the responses of the participants who were asked to discuss their responses from the CiC with their other (woman/man), using the following headings:

- Gender based roles and responsibilities
- Gender based privileges
- Gender based expectations of the other
- Understandings of the position of men and women, based on religious identity, and the possible impact of this on the way in which gender equality would be approached in professional spaces, namely, the school and more specifically the classroom.

At **level five** a whole group discussion as a CfT took place with the aim of exploring how their substantial identities and substantial attitudes towards gender equality inform their situational or professional practice. Constructive engagement such as this, has the potential to lead to new layers of consciousness (Ritchie & Wilson 2000; White 2012) as the participants consider self-respect and own positionality and inspire reciprocal exchanges with empathetic understanding. This could potentially lead to the emergence of collaborative initiatives for negotiating entrenched positions, disentanglement from their other, and restorying for transformation.

The researcher guided the discussion at level five with the following questions:

- How has empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying impacted your understanding of gender equality in terms of experiences, roles and responsibilities, privileges, and expectations?
- As a Religion Education teacher how has the dialogue impacted your perspectives of teaching-learning about gender issues and promoting gender equality in a Religion Education class?
- Evaluate the efficacy of empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying for the transformation of attitudes towards gender equality and for better understandings of the other in society.

Findings and Discussion

Drawing on the work of various scholars (Chase 2010; Gubrium & Holstein 2009; Luttrell 2010; Silverman 2010), narrative analysis was employed as a tool of analysis. All five levels of empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying are implicit in the discussion which follows. The written responses (level 2) and audio recorded conversations at levels 4 and 5 were crystallized (Maree 2007) to lend authenticity (Newman 2011).

Various threads emerged on how the situational and substantial identities of the participants intersect with the human right to gender equality.

Disconnect: Policy Image and Substantial Identity

The participants have a cognitive understanding of Human Rights Education and the South African Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa 1996). However, there is a disconnect between the demands placed by this understanding on their situational identity as professionals, as Religion Education teachers, and their substantial identity as informed by their religion. This is expressed by one of the men as follows:

... for me, human rights and gender equality are just there on paper and in policy documents ... not a reality (male).

These students' self-dialogue is informed by both individual and collective dominant voices reinforcing entrenched attitudes of male hegemony. This finds its way into their written self-narratives as shared in the CiC and as discussed with their other in the CiD. It became clear that gender based roles,

expectations and responsibilities are deeply entrenched. The man is recognised as the provider, controller of finances, head of the family and the protector of the family. He is regarded as superior to women and deserving of privileges. What follows is a selection of comments illustrating this firmly held position of gender inequality.

A man is the head of the family (female).

Men are entitled to privileges - being a man is a privilege on its own. Respect for men is one of the privileges. Also the privilege of power where as a man I hold the family name. (male).

Men must be married ... men are superior to women even if a women are career woman but 'they' can go to work and come back and cook and wash for me because of my position as a man. This is also practiced in religion where I hold and carry a family name and my religion name and when we get married she has to follow my religion. (male).

The responses from the men demonstrated a sense of pride, superiority and power. The women were made to feel that they were inferior and had less value than their male counterparts. What the men highlighted as privileges, roles, and responsibilities to protect and provide for women, seemed to be in conflict with a respect for equal rights. On the contrary what was demonstrated was male hegemony. The men stressed that they are expected by society to behave like 'a man' failing which they are discredited as men in their communities.

When it comes to religion, the women were of the opinion that they have to do what their religion prescribes. One female participant said this about her position:

I am a proud African woman and believe that in... religion there are no gender equality and human rights considered... In my position as a woman, I have to respect and serve my husband and take care of him and the whole family even members of the extended family. There is no room for gender equality and human rights for us women since men are viewed by society as heads or leaders in the family. (female).

This endorsed submissive behaviour in women who are not supposed to question religious discourses. They have not had the opportunity nor a safe

space, in which to voice concerns, needs and expectations. The collective response from women in level 2 & 3 with regard to expectations and privileges can be summed up as follows:

We felt that as women we are supposed to serve men. We tried to identify a few privileges but we agreed that we do not have much as men do. As a woman you are not seen as going out and having a job ... but looking after the man's and family's needs. Even in church we do not have privileges; we have to do everything...For men is that they provide for us ... everything. (females).

The majority of the men were resolute that women should submit to them as the providers. In the CiD the women responded to their other (men) saying that providing for the family does not exonerate the men from sharing in the household chores. The women openly expressed their frustration that when they, as women, are the main providers in the family, they are not given recognition and the respect they deserve. They are expected to go out to work to earn money and to return home to manage the housework and the children. Both the male and female participants were of the opinion that while Human Rights calls for gender equality, this is not manifest in practice as far as roles and responsibilities are concerned. Gender equality is also not promoted in their religious discourses.

Intersecting in a Safe Space

The CiD provided the opportunity for the participants to engage with one another in a safe space and to challenge gender inequality and to explore how attitudes and positions shaping substantial identities are socially constructed. Women and men were provided with the space in which to respect their inner voices and to express this in order to bring about change. One male participant commented positively about how his experience made him consider his other (women).

How does the other party feel about my action...leads to reflection ... appeal to feelings The strategy could work in the teaching of debates e.g. SA context issue of gender (male).

The findings show that it is important for both men and women to be secure in their personal (substantial) identities so as to be able to acknowledge their other as having equal value. One of the male participants said the following:

As man we need to start by acknowledging women as integral part for us so that they recognise us as their husbands, we should do everything for them so that...The implications for that will be that in the working space we get to recognise and respect those young girls as much as those young boys. This implies that in order to stop perpetuating and contributing to gender inequality both men and women have a responsibility to engage in conversation and dialogue [in a safe space] so as to forge a way forward that is transformative for society. (male).

The participants also acknowledged that it is essential for both pre-service and in-service Religion Education teachers, to work through areas of disconnect between their substantial identities (as dictated by their religion) and situational identities (as Religion Education teachers informed by the curriculum). By doing so there is less chance of a hidden curriculum undermining Human Rights as embedded in the school curriculum.

As they engaged in their CiC the identity capital of individual women increased as they drew on the tangible asset of their membership of a social group of women. This identity capital was consolidated as they reflected upon and negotiated their self-identity, adopting definite counter-positions to male hegemony. They brought this with them into the CiD. The accumulation of successful exchanges in the CiD with their other (men) continued to increase their identity capital. This became clear in the way in which they interacted confidently with their other (men) and voiced in increasing measure and with increasing confidence counter-positions to male dominance. This increased identity capital could possibly constructively inform classroom praxis.

Efficacy of Empathetic-reflective-dialogical Restorying can be Transforming for the Individual and for the Classroom

The efficacy of empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying was discussed. All the participants in this project, having participated in empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying, were far more aware of their self-dialogue (level 1) and

the dominant voices in their society-of-mind that impact their self-narratives (level 2). They were also sensitised to the possibilities of their dialogical self in action as they adopted counter positions to the dominant voices (drawn in the main from religious discourses) promoting gender inequality in their society-of-mind. The CiC, CiD and CfT provided the opportunity for the participants to think critically about processes of socialisation and the possible disconnect between policy and practice and the individual's response to this in his/ her own practice.

The CfT (level 5) provided the opportunity to discuss and begin the process of deconstructing socialisation and unpacking the disconnect between substantial and situational identities. Participants were made aware of how their substantial identities impacted their situational identities and the expectations of them as professionals (policy image) to implement gender equality.

The disconnect between human rights and the implementation thereof at the intersection with substantial identities became very clear in the discussion. One of the younger male participants said the following:

For me I think the strategy has made me realise something very important about human rights and gender inequality. It is very helpful and as I was raised by a single woman, and I respect women a lot. However, as we were discussing as men I realised that we have a lot of privileges that we are not aware of. I have never considered the amount of effort that my mother and other women put in The strategy has taught me to listen to my inner voice, reflect about how others feel about my actions and decisions and to change the way I do and see them ... and I therefore see the strategy as transformative. (male).

The CfT (level 5) provided the opportunity for the participants to think critically about processes of socialisation, and to discuss and begin the process of deconstructing the same.

Male and female participants collectively, agreed that this strategy could be an effective tool to employ in their professional space, namely, their Religion Education lessons, to enhance teacher/learner relationships. Their views included the following:

... this strategy stimulated the mind, gives us many possibilities ideas

leading to critical thinking and to question yourself for better understanding and the probing questions assisted...it has a potential to be transformative. (female).

I found this strategy to be helpful especially in level 1&2 where one had to listen to different voices before one takes a decision...it gives you possible ideas to question yourself to say: What can you change? How can you do that? Why should you act in that particular way? (male).

Acknowledging that the strategy allows one 'a personal space' as indicated above, one male participant said that, in addition, he found it most helpful to hear women express their perspectives about their other (men) as well as men about their other (women). While the participants (both men and women) were aware of how their particular contexts can shape their behaviour, engaging in this strategy assisted them to see that they can be agents of change. The strategy opened up a space for constructing a narrative in which they have some ability to direct future-oriented action.

In the classroom, empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying has the potential to assist, in this case, Religion Education teachers, in the teaching-learning process with regard to Human Rights Education. Participants suggested that empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying could be used to engage with various human rights issues in the Religion Education classroom. At the time when the data collection took place, xenophobic attacks were rife in South Africa. The participants specifically mentioned how this teaching-learning approach could effectively be used to engage with issues of racism and xenophobia.

Conclusion

Higher Education Institutions responsible for teacher education are professionally bound to create safe spaces for pre-service teachers to explore conversation at the intersection between their substantial and situational identities and more particularly how these intersect with human rights issues. Empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying as a teaching-learning approach creates opportunity for self-dialogue and self-narrative to be communicated in a safe space within a CiC, CiD and CfT. Facilitating as it does the intersection between substantial and situational identities and human rights issues, this

approach encouraged the pre-service Religion Education teachers participating in this small-scale project ‘to see the world through the lens of others ... providing space within which to grow peoples’ capacity to communicate across boundaries’ (McGregor & Volckmann 2013: 62-63). In particular the approach led to restorying which has the potential to address the possible disconnect between the individual’s personal (substantial) and professional (situational) identities when considering Human Rights issues, and in this case, gender equality in particular. Increased identity capital, especially on the part of the women has the possibility to be personally and socially transformative (Hampson & Assenza 2012). In the classroom empathetic-reflective-dialogical restorying has the potential to transform classroom practice to classroom praxis, replacing as it does, a technicist approach to teaching-learning, encouraging learners to be both reflective and reflexive in their thinking.

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Religious Identity and the Human Right to Gender Equality

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