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## **Possibilities for Using Visual Drawing With Student-teachers: Linking Childhood Memories to Future Teaching Selves**

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## Research paper

## Possibilities for using visual drawing with student-teachers: Linking childhood memories to future teaching selves



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## H I G H L I G H T S

- Visual drawings of childhood memories can elicit new dimensions on learning to teach.
- Childhood memories are connected to perspectives on future teaching-selves.
- Reflecting on childhood experiences can give reason to pedagogical desire.
- Teacher subjectivity should be central to teacher education.

## A R T I C L E I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

Drawing from memory-work, this study examines the relationship between childhood and the pedagogical perspectives and practices of 16 pre-service student-teachers enrolled at one large university in the United States. In an analysis of their visual drawings and written narratives of childhood memories, student-teachers link childhood pasts with teaching futures in three distinct ways: 1) intimate connections with former teachers, 2) difficult life circumstances involving loss or trauma, and 3) the primacy of family and culture. Each set of memories is tied to a range of responsibilities that student-teachers vow to uphold, leading towards more reflexive practices in teacher education programs.

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This is a study on childhood memories and the pedagogical perspectives and practices of 16 pre-service student-teachers enrolled at one large university in the northeastern corridor of the United States. To better understand how traces of the past appear in the making of the imagined future teacher, drawings of childhood are analyzed alongside written narratives with a focus on the hidden complexities of childhood and its pedagogical significance to those learning to teach. The autobiographical stories that teachers bring into their practice are what Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) calls “ghosts in the classroom” (p. 3), the unseen forces of experience that shadow the thoughts and behaviors of teachers. The great paradox of teacher education, then, is that as new teachers learn to teach they begin by reaching back into their own childhood experiences. As “insiders” (Pajares, 1992) into their own profession, teachers often replay past memories of school, with

idealizations of the teacher revived through the unearthing of childhood emotions, such as breakdown or gratification (Britzman, 2007). The lingering presence of such felt memories, both of joy and pain, both in and out of school contexts, rise up from embodied pasts and settle onto the hopes and desires of those learning to teach.

Yet, links between childhood memories and the teaching self are not without their own conflicts. Lisa Farley (2018) demonstrates how the adult’s overfamiliarity with children, from having once been a child, presents a difficult and unique space between the symbolic child and the actual child, an intermingling that may stand in the way of teachers’ abilities to examine their own conceptions of childhood and its relation to their pedagogical practice. Just as a teacher’s concern with childhood innocence may hint at deeper emotional and racial investments (Garlen, 2018), including the construction of childhood as bereft of experience (Garlen et al., 2020), or the way risk-aversion may signal an adult’s own fear of vulnerability (Todd, 2003), a reflective study into teacher childhood

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memories can serve to illuminate much about the beliefs teachers have and the choices they make in the classroom.

Efforts to explore and examine childhood memories of teachers return the teaching subject back to the teaching profession (Ritchie & Wilson, 2018). This must be noted. Over the years, many teacher education programs have shown increasing deference to models, frameworks, and standards of teaching that not only flattens the subjective experiences of teachers, but aims to remove them from the educational experience altogether (Biesta, 2013; Lewis & Holloway, 2019). In these programs, it seems a new pedagogical relation is afoot, one that transforms the teacher into a perpetual executor of data collection, evaluation, and evidence-based learning strategies, creating what Peter Taubman (2017) calls “psychic dead zones,” spaces bereft of emotional complexity, imagination, and continuity with history. In response to cases when effectiveness takes priority over exploration, this study focuses on the complicated sense of hope and commitment that fledgling teachers bring to their studies and through this project, seeks to recover specificity, contradiction, and “a necessary uncertainty” (Mitchell & Weber, 2005, p. 1) to the intersubjective work of learning to teach.

In my work as a teacher educator, I am continually reminded that pre-service teachers carry a range of complex experiences that are drawn upon in their work with young children, aspects of the self that should not be disregarded, but rather put to use in better understanding the teaching self (Sonu et al., 2020). With this in mind, I am guided by Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt (1996) who similarly query: how do the childhood memories of pre-service teachers seep into their perspectives of what it means to be a teacher? If memories are partly drawn to explain the present, what do their ties to the past tell us about the kinds of teachers they desire to be? What implications for teacher education might this present?

Methodologically, I am inspired by Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999) who for decades have explored how factoring the visual into memory work helps bring to light a world that is often implied or overlooked (see also Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Extending differently from the semi-structured interview, the use of drawing in research not only loosens an over-reliance on language as the sole portal into experience, but opens up a multi-modal space that acknowledges metaphor and other representational forms, allowing for more inclusive interpretations and insights (Tidwell & Manke, 2009). In analyzing drawings made by pre-service teachers, symbolic and schematic visual representations amplify how traces of the past become manifest, emotionally and affectively, when imagining what is desired from the profession of teaching.

In the following sections, I present a review of several studies that link childhood memories to teacher education, and moreover those that utilize drawing as a method for reflection. In my analysis, I find that as participants reach into their childhood memories they ignite a dynamic imagination of what kind of teacher they hope to be. Although far from direct and determined, childhood memories offer subjective grounds upon which pre-service teachers make commitments to cultivate classrooms of safety, care, and cultural diversity. To end, I conclude with implications for how this project may serve a reflexive purpose in teacher education programs.

## 1. The limits and possibilities of memory-work

Building on the initial work of feminist sociologist and philosopher Frigga Haug, the evolving field of memory-work has grown to include a variety of approaches to the study of self-as-teacher (see Mitchell, 2011; Theron et al., 2011). As a process of sense-making more than an unearthing of truth, memory-work operates, not as a window into the past, but a reconstruction, even

reconciliation, of experiences that brings into view links between what is remembered and what could be. This act of remembering responds to both the demands of the current context as well as to the visions for a desirable future, at once constructing while navigating through complex temporal narratives. At the same time, remembered narratives are also an admittance to the partialities, gaps, and limits of our memories. As the connective fiber between the past and present, memories are continually unsettled by ruptures and discontinuities, reminding us of the fragility of any unified sense of self (Keightley, 2010). Instead, it is precisely within these limits that we are able to reflect on old meanings and relationships and reformulate them with an affirmative new.

Memory-work is also intersubjective in that the seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life can be emblematic of the ways that we are socialized and discursively constituted within broader socio-political contexts (Silova, 2019). What seems individual and private actually says mountains about public discourses, collective meanings, and relations of power. For example, in *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers*, Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999) show how memory-work can be read in multiple ways including how playing school as children are keen observations into the way authority works in the classroom; how painful incidences can interrogate humiliation and abuses of teacher power; and how recalling a range of teachers can be systematically used to explore the desirability of our own teaching practices and selves. From this perspective, memory-work is “a transgression of boundaries” (Silova, 2019, p. 4), collapsing the distinction between past and present in ways that allow us to experience, relate to, and rearticulate interpretations of our own past experiences, yet also indicative of how these interpretations are indivisibly situated and in relation to shifting social and cultural contexts.

## 2. Studies of memory in teacher learning

Scholars of psychoanalysis show how a teacher’s work with children can return them unconsciously to their own subjective selves (Britzman & Pitt, 1996; Chang-Kredl and Kinglsey, 2014; Farley, 2018). This makes knowledge and reflection particularly difficult for teachers, as memories can be imbued with fantasies about what has occurred in the past, bonded by desire and hate, or with an effort to transform the imagined self into the present moment. Empathetic to the hurt child, teachers may perhaps over-determine a child’s pain or secure their innocence as a means by which to resist their own traumas, constructing and reconstructing their identities from the “bad student” to the “good student” or the “helpless learner” to the “demanding teacher” (Phillips, 2010). When teachers try to protect children, they may actually be protecting themselves from acknowledging their implication in unjust power relations, particularly as innocence is tied to the installation of European middle-class values (Walkerdine, 2009). Yet even while new situations are seen through the imperatives of older conflicts, in their narration Pitt and Britzman (2003) find that participants tend to construct stories that simplify the overlaps of past and present while excluding and resisting their own interpretations. Memories of learning, they suggest, can be closely tied to refusals of learning, especially when childhood memories of school are symbolically equated with demand and punishment.

In their work, Kyle Miller and Rena Shifflet (2016) examine how specific memories of elementary school drive conceptions of feared and desired teaching selves, demonstrating how “familiarity pitfalls” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983) can lead to an uncritical idealization of good or bad teaching (Lortie, 1975; Levin & He, 2008). Similarly, Sandra Balli (2014) draws a relation between handwritten narratives of “excellent teachers” remembered by 148 pre-service teachers and their individual beliefs about good teaching.

Unsurprisingly, memories shape classroom management approaches (Balli, 2011) and views on parental involvement (Winder & Corter, 2016). A critical study conducted by Chang-Kredl and Wilkie (2016) uses memories of 41 early childhood teachers to examine their conceptualizations of childhood along two trajectories: the influence of teacher memories and the profession's built-in association with childhood. By coupling Foucault's concept of heterotopia with psychoanalytic approaches, they argue that teachers need to distinguish between nostalgic versions of childhood and the children with whom they work, maintaining a vigilant eye over when adults assume to know the subjective experience of children and disentangle, when possible, the "unexamined child within" (p. 318).

Such entanglements also appear in a co-authored series of studies that examine the childhood memories of 116 undergraduates enrolled in teacher education and childhood studies programs across four sites in the United States and Canada. In this body of work, childhood innocence is consistently upheld against the realities of experience, leading teachers to shield children from difficult life circumstances (Garlen et al., 2020). Childhood memories that included harsh punishments or public humiliation tended to be located within schools, while moments of playful antics and getting into trouble were outside of the classroom; while the latter were laced with descriptions of freedom and curiosity, the former haunted participants with an enduring sense of shame and trauma (Farley et al., 2020). Importantly, teachers who linked moments of punishment to social contexts of inequity were more readily able to critique schooling structures and imagine education otherwise. Moreover, when parental figures play pivotal roles in childhood memories, happy and joyful experiences tend to inspire emulation, while the loss or absence of parents as a child leads to empathy directed at children in similar circumstances (Chang-Kredl et al., 2021). While research shows that teacher thinking is greatly influenced by the beliefs they hold from past experiences and memories, according to Barbara Levin and Ye He (2008), fewer studies focus on the sources of these beliefs. This study links childhood memory to teacher subjectivity as one way to unearth such source

### 3. Using drawings with pre-service teachers

As this study uses drawing to examine the childhood memories of student-teachers, it also builds upon an existing body of scholarship in the area of memory-work and visual arts-based methodologies (Theron et al., 2011). Offering a framework to think about visual research, Luc Pauwels (2010) argues that heightened interest in the visual runs parallel to its pervasiveness in contemporary society. Attempting to develop a unified conceptual and methodological framework, he discovers a vast and expanding range of visual data sources, their uses, and analytical possibilities, including the integration of oral histories and autobiography with forms of media such as art or film. While conventional interviewing typically privileges language as the mode of communication, the inclusion of visual mapping can open access to symbolic forms of representation (Gillies et al., 2005; Guillemin, 2004), enhancing reflexivity and "attention to bodiliness" (Csordas, 1999, p. 147). Over the years, concerted attention has been directed towards interpretive and ethical concerns around *how* to study the self through visual methodologies (LeJevic & Springgay, 2008; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014; Restler, 2018), leading to suggestions for shared analysis (Luttrell & Chalfen, 2010), collaborative seeing (Luttrell, 2020), and other inventive practices that resist pure representation and insist on more contextual, relational, and affective understandings of research.

Specific to drawing, Catherine Derry (2005) argues that drawing

as a research tool returns the domain of the body to teacher education. As a challenge to the Cartesian split of knowledge as mind, this method of producing "not time-limited" artifacts (Temple & McVittie, 2005) can facilitate the expression of moments that are charged with emotion or sensitivity, surfacing new kinds of knowledge production and bringing to light spaces that are otherwise hidden or obscured (Antona, 2018; Copeland & Agosto, 2012). In their study of women's visual narratives of migration, Brushwood Rose and Low (2014) note the aesthetic choices, or "craftedness," made by participants as they created their visual stories. While drawing does not guarantee any truth to the qualitative project, I do see drawing as a particular kind of narrative process that privileges emotion, context, and setting, one that offers a unique entry into the aesthetic realm, particularly as meanings take the form of metaphor. In their research with young people, Valerie Futch and Michelle Fine (2014) demonstrate the various ways that mapping is taken up as a tool to explore the oft-times contentious negotiation of embodied identities. With a focus on symbolism, their work highlights the complex work of conflicting self-representation and the possibility of using art to assert oneself in the political world.

Not to be enamored by the novelty of "doing research differently" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 204), the use of visual images may set up additional obstacles for participants. While visual research may offer a modality more aligned with some participants' own preferences, for others, artistic engagement may surface inhibitions that come from a sense of inadequacy and comparison. Additionally, participants may have cultural frameworks that do not see themselves as at the center of a relational world (Bagnoli, 2009). They may carry various conceptualizations of memory, as chronological through time, as a series of particular incidences, or centered around one pivotal moment, alone or in relation, with varying degrees of contextual detail. As with the interview process, researchers may encounter participants who construct visuals that appeal to what they project as the researcher's expectations for correctness.

### 4. Methodology

This research study uses childhood memories as a way to explore pre-service teachers' perspectives on teaching. Such an orientation values embodied knowledge for both its situatedness in "an unfolding life story" and for its capacity to inform reflection and action (Pithouse, 2011, p. 178). With the assistance of a third-party doctoral student research assistant, I worked with drawings as I would other forms of qualitative data and underwent the development of interpretive codes and thematic categories, taking particular interest in emotional states, complex relationships, and the use of color and form (Pauwels, 2010). Different from photography or object study, drawings were elicited as representations of childhood experiences, perhaps similar to research that includes concept maps (Prosser & Burke, 2011) or storyboards (Mitchell, de Lange & Molestane, 2011). The content of their drawings, alongside brief narrative descriptions, became the main source of data and the focal point for my analysis.

### 5. Participants

This study was undertaken with pre-service teachers during their final semester of a two-year, master's degree program in childhood education in a large urban metropolis of the Northeastern United States. The cohort under study comprised 18 student-teachers who ranged in age from 23 to 39 years. Fifteen identified as cisgender women, three cisgender men, and none as non-binary or transgender. Two students were of Hispanic descent,

three were Asian-American, 13 were white, and all were born in the United States. Some had minor experiences working with children prior to entering the program (e.g., camp counselor, tutoring, babysitting). Still for all, this program was their first experience working in a public classroom setting. Additionally, the majority of participants grew up during the same time period and all were from the same city, except for two who commuted by train from about an hour away. This created a sense of cohesion around certain social, cultural, and educational experiences. For example, most students grew up as children with the internet and social media and could talk about the Common Core State Standards<sup>1</sup> as an integral part of their collective schooling.

## 6. The prompt & research activity

With permission from the course instructor, the research assistant recruited voluntary participants from one student teaching seminar, obtained consent,<sup>2</sup> then gathered drawings and written narratives during a research activity conducted at a nearby school site away from the university campus. Out of 18 students, 16 consented to participate. The assistant asked student participants to draw a visual of their most formative childhood memories, including, if they chose, significant schooling or educational experiences, and to write a brief accompanying narrative describing the drawing and the ways it may or may not speak to their teaching experiences. As advised by the literature, participants were provided the prompt both orally and visually (Galvaan, 2007), offered reassurance that their ability to draw was unimportant, and were provided a variety of drawing materials and colors. They created their images in familiar company with classmates they have known since the beginning of their program. Although they began their drawings together at the research site, they were intentionally given one week to think carefully about which memories to include and could complete them independently (Keightley, 2010). Those who took additional time emailed photographs of their drawings and accompanying narratives to the research assistant.

Student-teachers were reminded that their participation was voluntary and had no bearing on their course grade. There were no additional parameters to the study, so participants had free reign to determine what shape or progression their visual would take, including the use of symbolic imagery, explanatory text, or other clarifying details. There were no requirements as to the number of childhood moments or the overall length of the narrative. In the end, all of the narratives ran 1–2 pages, double-spaced. The final decisions about the overall “look” of the drawings revealed a great deal about the students’ views of their own learning.

## 7. Data analysis

Once collected, the research assistant redacted any names and identifiers to ensure anonymity. The research assistant and I read through all the drawings and narratives individually, drew preliminary codes and themes, and created a table to highlight exemplary quotes and examples as connected to these themes. Here, we paid close attention to how we, as the audience to these images and stories, carry with us our own particularized and highly contextualized position as researchers (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson,

Pithouse & Allnutt, 2011). Given this, we came together on multiple occasions thereafter to discuss the various shifts occurring in our observations. During these meetings, we collaborated to develop shared understandings of what the data suggested about participants’ childhoods and their perspectives on teaching. While the visuals were used as complementary to the narratives, in the analysis, they stood out as particularly useful in seeing how various kinds of splits were constructed and drawn (e.g., good and bad), as well as the emotional weight of the memories themselves.

Due to the constraints of the course, we were not able to conduct interviews with the participants, nor was there an opportunity for shared analysis. I acknowledge this as a limitation to the reflexive possibility of the study and in hindsight would have proposed a research design that included greater collaboration with participants. Perhaps then, this study serves as just one part in a greater effort to explore drawing as a reflexive method in teacher education. However, in analyzing the drawn and written memories, we did notice strong reverberations and commonalities in the material data alone, such that one participant’s drawing could cross into multiple others and took notes on the kinds of overlaps and themes they presented in relation to the entirety of the data set.

From this analysis, formative childhood memories, as expressed by the participants, fell into three general categories: 1) six that revolved around intimate experiences with teachers, 2) six that drew from broader life circumstances of loss and trauma; and 3) four that spoke to the primacy of family and culture. Each of these led to distinct modes of address through which participants translated their memories into their hopes as teachers, their empathy with students, and their relationship to diversity and parents.

## 8. Memories of our own teachers: from character to context

It may be unsurprising that childhood memories of pre-service teachers include a range of learning experiences that occur within the confines of school. In the six memories that emphasize the role of the adult-teacher in their childhood memories, participants often created a curious oppositional split between the “good” and “bad.” For example, in a drawing she calls “kind of crazy, but with a lot of meaning,” Sarah<sup>3</sup> creates a jagged timeline, reminiscent of a line graph, with a colorful exploding burst at its end. The up and down formation symbolizes, in her words, the “positive and negative journey” with the top half of the map reserved for “all the reasons for why I want to be a teacher” and the red writing at the bottom representing “confusion” and “what I do not want to do in my own teaching.” Throughout, Sarah draws upon her childhood experiences with a range of teachers in order to determine what she desires of herself as a future educator.

While her second-grade teacher was an older, very strict woman with more traditional ways of teaching, her favorite fourth-grade and high school drama teachers taught her “that what they did was much more than just teach.” To “recreate all the joy brought to our class,” Sarah aspires to be an educator committed to “the pursuit of passion,” determined to be “the complete opposite” of her second-grade teacher. About her more distressing school memories, she writes, “Those moments really stuck with me because I was so confused as to what I was always doing wrong, when I just meant to be good.” In her visual and narrative, Sarah builds on her memories with individual teachers to determine the kind of educator she longs to become. The descriptors of her own teachers

<sup>1</sup> The Common Core State Standards is a federal initiative that details what K-12 students (ages 6–18) in the United States should know in literacy and math. These standards were accompanied by a regime of exams that measured the progress of both students and teachers and were often lauded as a system of rigorous accountability.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Participants Review Committee at Hunter College (#2017–0694).

<sup>3</sup> All names and identifiers have been changed to ensure anonymity.

as well as her developing sense of self pivot on her desire to create a classroom imbued by safety, comfort, and joy.

As argued by Ahmet Saban (2003), prospective elementary school teachers carry negative experiences with teachers long into their adult lives and often transform negative encounters into standards for how they themselves hope not to be as teachers. We see this with Sarah but also with others, including Chloe, who describes in great detail feelings of being belittled or demeaned in the face of her teacher. Describing her elementary school as “a frightening place,” Chloe draws a set of scenes (Fig. 1) from her schooling experience, depicting her own face in various states of emotion, including confusion, fear, and as a witness. The central figure of her map is an angry principal with furrowed brow and arms wildly flailing. Next to his face is a quote, “I’m big, you’re small. I’m smart, you’re dumb. I’m right, you’re wrong. And there’s nothing you can do about it” [original emphasis]. This illustration and accompanying text reflects the unflappable, authoritarian adult that Chloe remembers from her educational life and her sense of vulnerability and impotence in relation to him.

In her writing, she elaborates on one particularly difficult relationship with a teacher, one that she claims continues to haunt her as an adult:

It wasn’t that she yelled all of the time, but it was more that it always felt like she was being sarcastic or talking down to you. She made me feel like I was always wrong, or everything I did was never good enough. I remember on many occasions going home crying because of how I felt. Even though this was a very negative educational experience, I learned a lot about the type of teacher I hope to be. I never want my students to feel the way I felt.

Like Sarah, tensions between participants and their teachers arise when attempts to express themselves or obey seem to backfire. In this tension lies the vulnerability of the child, which Chloe names as “trying to please an adult with impossible standards.” Whereas descriptions of the “good teacher” were mostly attributed

to certain identity characteristics such as “fair” “kind” and “fun,” the “not so great” teachers (participants never used the term ‘bad teacher’) were described by much lengthier and more detailed descriptions that included actionable offenses, such as “yelling,” “being sarcastic” or “talking down” to children. This finding may imply the need to work with pre-service students on dissecting when teachers are seen as inherently “good” by virtue of their character, or the alternative based on their use of language or punishment. Similar to findings by Farley et al. (2020) both stances tend to remember and interpret the teacher figure as acting apart from the contexts and structures of schooling, leaning instead on individual traits and behaviors for explanation rather than questioning the conditions that may enable such incidents to occur.

Another participant, Cinthia, begins her map from the top and draws a bright sky-blue cloud containing the words “second grade.” From it emerges a winding pathway, connecting six other clouds, finally to end at the bottom. The last cloud she draws at the end of the path encircles the words “student teaching.” The “first person that comes to mind” when Cinthia thinks about why she is pursuing teaching is her second-grade teacher, who she recalls checked in with her each morning to ensure she was comfortable enough to start school. In contrast, a grey rainy cloud encircles fifth grade, “a very negative educational experience” in which her teacher, “having little patience for young children, yelled at me and my classmates constantly.” Similar to Chloe, her description of the not-so-great teacher was enshrouded in a kind of confusion, a sense that the child participant was doing something wrong but not quite sure exactly what that was. Looming dark clouds, colorful bursts, lines and arrows provide metaphoric significance to the drawings of childhood (Tidwell & Manke, 2009), widening interpretive possibility to include movements, blockages, and various states of emotion.

In each of the drawings described, symbolic forms and written texts describe direct encounters with teachers, both positive and

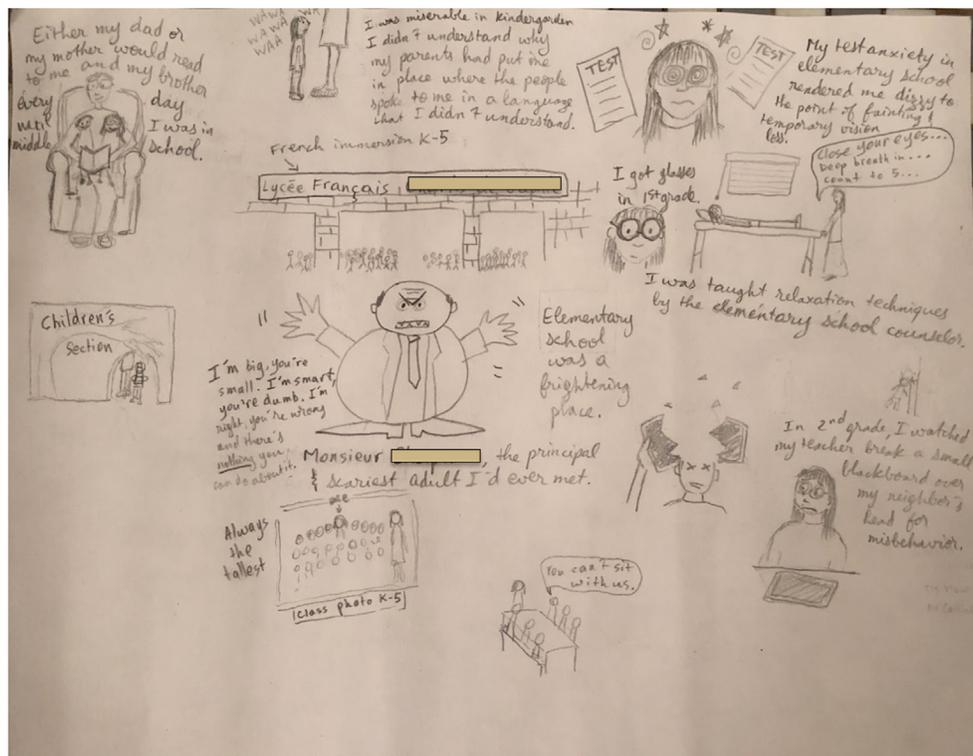


Fig. 1. Chloe.

less so, as vital to the kinds of teachers they wish to be, or not to be, in the future. Sarah, Chloe, and Cinthia each honed in on particular educators that stood out in their childhoods, and used them as sources of inspiration for their own developing teacher-selves. The contrasting themes of the vulnerable child beholden to the decisions of their adult-teacher thread powerfully throughout their drawings and narratives. Each student-teacher transformed their childhood memories of fear and confusion in school into a kind of vow to make children in their own classroom feel comfort and joy. Certainly, the activity asks the student-teachers to recall themselves as children, and so the memories are told through this lens. Yet there may also be a fruitful possibility in considering how the teacher figure is constructed in these memories of childhood, perhaps even encouraging a more empathetic stance that contextualizes the oft-times difficult work of teaching and draws connections between the challenges that might be shared between student-teachers and the teachers of their own childhoods.

### 9. Tending difficult life circumstances: refusing the innocence/experience binary

Six of the drawings express difficult life circumstances as a driver of teacher ambition. In a similar split as Sarah, Rosilyn cuts a horizontal line directly through the middle of her map (Fig. 2) and covers the upper first half with difficult life events and the bottom with feelings of “comfort” and “patience.” Still pained by the leaving of her father, she writes about the life circumstances of her childhood that led to her feeling “so alone and terrible.” Compounded by the loss of her uncle and her best friend moving, she recalls it all converging on Father’s Day when her teacher had students make cards and paint pictures. About this she writes, “I would never want my students to feel upset or isolated because of a dumb hallmark holiday.” The use of arrows in her map signals powerfully to these deeply challenging life changes. On the left corner is an arrow pointing to the left, as if against time, and above it is written, “1999 dad.” In the middle of the horizontal line is a notch labeled “3rd grade” with a jagged arrow pointing downward, nearby three bullet points: “confused,” “not home,” and “uncle.” Another arrow appears at the title of her map. Enclosed in a

squiggly cloud is her name “Rosilyn” with an arrow pointing right towards the word “Teacher.”

In their study of pre-service teacher memory, Chang-Kredl and Sarah Kingsley (2014) find that personal and professional identities often merge in ways that make teaching a site for both fulfillment and vulnerability. As life histories become animated, a teacher’s past, present, and hopeful future fold into professional and pedagogical beliefs in myriad ways. Rather than identify a particular teacher, participants such as Rosilyn recall life circumstances that made school difficult and sought to ensure that their own students do not feel the same struggle. This commitment is also echoed by Ethan, who grew up in “a small conservative town where being gay was a sin.” In his written narrative, he speaks of the deep pain he experienced once classmates began to notice his difference. “I would have people ask me, ‘Are you gay?’ ‘Why do you wear those clothes?’ ‘Why do you hang out with girls?’ These questions tortured me. Even though I knew I was gay, I would respond by saying that I wasn’t.” While a series of questions can open up learning, in this childhood memory, they foreclosed on Ethan’s ability to be accepted within the dominance of heterosexual normativity. Divided into three sections, Ethan’s drawing shows the connection between childhood, middle school, and his commitment to teaching; each section, moving clockwise, includes respectively: 1) two stick figures of him and his best friend; 2) a list of the questions above; and 3) the words “acceptance,” “inclusion,” and “sensitivity.”

An empathetic stance towards students may be accentuated as beginning teachers enter the familiar place of classrooms and teach children who remind them of themselves. Rather than a desire to emulate or repair their experiences with their teachers, Ethan and Rosilyn describe the links between childhood memories and teaching through a determination to make sure their own students never feel the way they did. These drawings and narratives demonstrate that when pre-service teachers have experienced pain or trauma as young people, they may arrive at an awareness that children do indeed carry hardship in their lives. This is in contrast with early-childhood educators in particular, who tend to view childhood through the lens of innocence, failing to understand or acknowledge the intricate capacities and struggles that children may experience (Garlen et al., 2020). Yet as Jonathan Silin (2013)

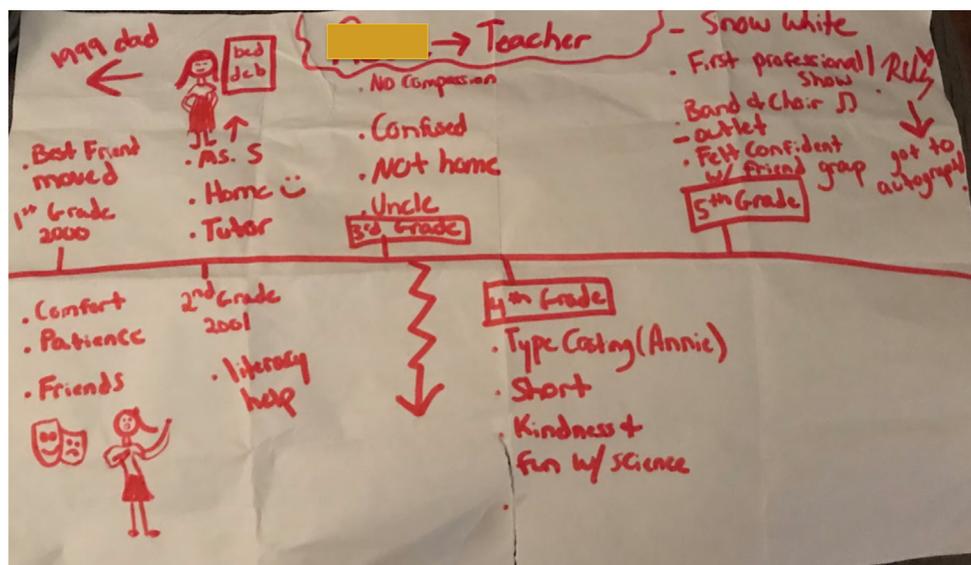


Fig. 2. Rosilyn.

shares, an imperative to remove loss, grief, and trauma from the lives of children is not only impossible, but may disengage us from seeing the ways that children use play, spoken language, and other means to find solace during moments of abandonment. As he argues, learning lies at the heart of such loss and a swift move to protect the child may prevent them, as well as our adult selves, from confronting times when our hopes and ambitions are left unfulfilled. Difficult life circumstances can force us to face the vulnerabilities of our pain and to generate new and different kinds of re-engagements with the world and others.

The transformation from pain to protection is similarly seen in other participants, including one whose drawing was a winding yellow brick road from the film, *Wizard of Oz*. In her narrative, she writes of the multiple school transfers she experienced after her grandmother's death, being "treated differently" for not having a school uniform, the hostility that turned into "bullying" and yet another move to a new school. Since her "teachers didn't do much about bullying in the classroom and didn't focus on our feelings as people" she aspires to create a "safe community" where children are protected and honored.

While all participants in this category shared difficult life moments as grounds for their empathy with students, one in particular transformed this into proclamations of love. In her narrative, Elizabeth writes:

Children are \*so\* much better than adults about all the most important things. I love being around them and hearing how they think and what they believe and I want to nurture that and prevent them from turning out like the rest of us! [original emphasis].

In her visual, she draws three circles, each one carrying a narrative of distrust and betrayal at the hands of adults: her fourth-grade teacher's broken promise of a field trip; the authoritarian grip of her mentor teacher; and her "lighter bonds, more invisible bonds: her parents" of which she writes, "not that great, no affection, inconsistent, unreliable." As she writes, the distinction between adult and child are certainly split, but at times contradictory and blurred. At one point, she writes, "I consider all humans equal" and questions "why do we think of kids as some other species," while in the same turn, she declares, "I would never go back to being a kid ever!" [original emphasis]. The lines are messy, perhaps not even lines at all. It is not unusual for teachers to step up their care for students who they deem as unsheltered and vulnerable. Alternatively, it may be common for teachers to perceive the lives of their students in ways that justify their own rescue. This is seen as Elizabeth describes her current field placement as a "torture chamber" and proclaims her role as someone who "needs to protect [the children]." In all of these memories, participants recall times of painful trauma and vow to be the kind of educator that is open to their own students' struggles, in some cases ready to protect them from bullying, humiliation, and harm.

In this subset of drawings and narratives, the participants resurrect their struggle with the real pain they experienced as young people and the lack of support they felt from the adults around them. As with the other memories, this speaks to both the vulnerability of the child and the perceived power of adults. In the stories here, there seems to be a great distance between the two; adults are seen as largely unaware of the angst the children are experiencing in their care. In response, the student-teachers reproduce both the false myth of an innocence/experience binary (Garlen et al., 2020) and the role of the adult in regulating such experiences, particularly if they signal familiar forms of hardship and loss. Such a commitment may reflect how our own needs for repair play out and are worked through the relationships made with children, as well as the child figure who is symbolic of our own hopes and desires. Although it is hard to argue against an empathetic stance towards children, teacher education can make efforts

to better examine the tension between the duality of protection and adversity, innocence and experience in childhood education, querying into the role of the teacher during times of loss and pain and the lessons learned from the vulnerabilities of these moments.

## 10. Family and cultural difference: from relationships to analysis

While some memories focused on formidable teachers or painful past lives, the remaining four spoke to the place of culture and family in shaping perspectives on teaching. This was notably present for Rachel, who describes growing up in "a White, Jewish, well-off neighborhood" where in elementary school "everyone looked the same, spoke the same, had a house to go home to." Her placement in one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse elementary schools in the city ignited in her a latent desire for cultural richness. She mentions twice, "there are many times when I wished I was exposed to much more" or "I wish I was exposed to this type of diversity when I was a child." The contrasting field against which Rachel names her student teaching experience is that of her own childhood experience and, in a curious turn, she begins to craft her past through the lens of her present observations. Rather than follow a linear developmental line from childhood to adulthood, Rachel unearths what she now sees as missing from her past and propels this forward as a reason for teaching in culturally responsive and sustaining ways. The mutually constitutive nature of the past and present emerges as Rachel works to establish a new relationship to cultural difference, both in her recollection of the past and her desires for the future.

By constructing a childhood map that juxtaposes her memories with the "uniqueness and specialness" of her "different" students, she first stakes claim to herself as a White Jewish woman from a well-off upbringing. Such a division reinforces a self/other that both acknowledges differences in skin, language, beliefs, social class and privilege, but also separates in ways that reflect a common relationality in schools— that of teacher and students. Even though she writes about an upsetting time when her college professor assigned work on the holy holidays of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, Rachel does not see herself here as a cultural being, nor does she insert herself as a figure of diversity in commune with her students. Rather, she idealizes them as embodiments of the exposure she wished she had as a young child with the promise that she will "have the same expectations for all students," that she "will not judge ANY student based on his/her background" [original emphasis].

As frequently found in education, diversity is used in a myriad of ways that often describe a student population with less than noticeable white students. Perhaps at the risk of oversimplifying human complexity, Rachel adopts the institutional appeal that accompanies the language of diversity (Ahmed, 2012) and applies the terms even as it may essentialize the students against the singularity of herself as the teacher. In her acknowledgment that "diversity" as race and ethnicity can have material effects on classroom practice (e.g., low expectations), teachers such as Rachel vow to challenge such harmful pedagogical encounters in their own practice, mindful of how a history of discrimination and bias can work its way into a legacy of uneven teaching practices.

While for Rachel, culture comes in the form of the other's ethnicity, others see cultural activities and expectations through memories of their own families. One participant writes about attending the same elementary school where her grandmother worked, "practicing reading and spelling words with my grandmother [as] one of the first memories related to my education." Other students recalled memories of "special time" or reading with and being read to by parents. While many familial descriptions

were of comfort, Amy, a Chinese-American, spoke at length about the stresses of maintaining family expectations. About this, she writes:

My family stressed school, so I had school and afterschool during the weekdays, Chinese school and tutoring school during the weekends ... I didn't have a lot of breathing space. I understood that as a first generation child in a new country, I was supposed to act as a liaison between the teachers and my parents. 竹升, pronounced Jook-sing, is someone who identifies strongly with the Western culture rather than Eastern cultures, and as such, these individuals are looked down at by even their own family members.

"Caught between two worlds, two beliefs, and two ideals," she describes a busy childhood, devoted to learning, without a lot of room for play. But rather than feel resentful, she empathizes with the position of her parents and understands their pressure as a direct result of their tenuous status in this new country. Her map (Fig. 3) begins with a detailed and colorful image of herself as a child working at a school desk. From its right emerges a trail of footprints, leading first to an award ribbon and then to a picture of a graduation robe and rolled up diploma. But from there, the footsteps begin to scatter, pointing in multiple directions at once. They meet a doctor's robe and an oversized syringe, then straighten up again as they head toward a large desk topped with a stack of books. At the end of this footprint trail is a stick figure, much smaller and less detailed than her childhood self. The stick figure reaches out with one arm toward a bright yellow star.

In her own analysis, a strong connection with school seems to be underscored as integral to Eastern culture, but Amy makes her own choices in this narrative, deciding whether to be "Jook-sing" and depart from her own family's expectations, or remain committed to her Eastern roots and please her family. As Eng and Han's (2019) work reveals, assimilation requires cultural losses in favor of a white majority. In the tenuous struggle of losing both loved objects of home and assimilation, Amy's drawing demonstrates the role of school in negotiating broader appeals to citizenship, family, and culture. Here, the importance of school, transmitted by her family, is both helpful to Amy, as she finishes her degree and works to

become a teacher, but it also acts as a source of conflict from which she must "break away" and "find my own voice" from "a culture that had gripped me so strongly." Amy does not divulge what led her into teaching, but she does write about her desire for parents "to understand that every individual feels differently." Instead of directing her pedagogical gaze toward herself as a teacher or on behalf of students and their struggles, she decidedly points to what parents can do for their children, perhaps a projection of what she would like to say to her own.

While Rachel constructs diversity as an attribute of the other and Amy confronts the complexity of students who straddle two (or more) worlds, both are beginning to understand the need for classrooms to harbor multiple viewpoints and perspectives. Rachel reflects on missing out because of her largely homogeneous school community and Amy contends with her upbringing as one that straddles two very different cultures. Intertwined in the vision of a diverse classroom is, of course, the teacher, who can both lead with awareness of the traditions, expectations, and realities of children's lives while also helping them to navigate those complexities in the context of the United States. It is her responsibility as the teacher, Rachel implies, to know when students observe certain holidays, or in the case of Amy, to facilitate student/parent interactions during times when expectations may conflict. While for many beginning teachers the immediacy of classroom practice sits at the forefront of their concerns, these memories also show a need to push beyond the classroom into an analysis of why schools and neighborhoods are so racially segregated and how this impacts education and society at large. Further possibilities for teacher education are to take such childhood memories and use them as analytical tools to construct a more critical understanding of school systems, race, and inequity.

## 11. Implications for teacher education

Childhood memories demonstrate the need to attend closely to our inner experiences as one way to detect and perhaps challenge conscious and unconscious links with the pedagogical present. The

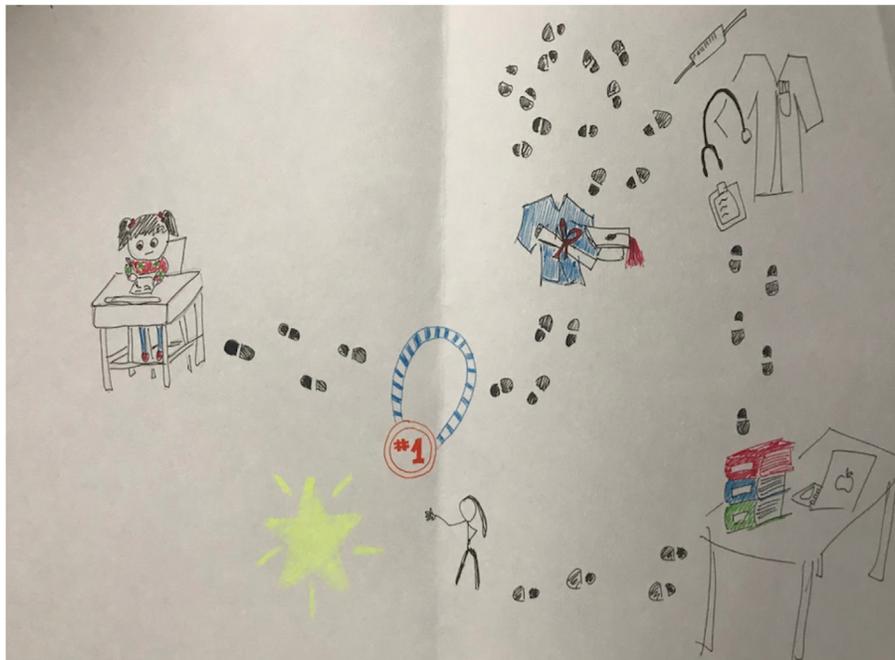


Fig. 3. Amy.

common euphemism that one knows how to teach simply by virtue of having been a student could not be further from the complexity that must be acknowledged in the name of teacher education. For as Britzman (2003) writes, histories of learning are “shards of experience that return when least expected” (p. 3) and are often masqueraded by our desire to be loved and remembered, or our need to forget and move on. As found in this study, participants pursue the work of elementary school teaching for a variety of reasons: to reproduce the “good,” to refuse the “bad,” to transform feelings of mistrust, to protect and defend, to navigate the complexities of culture, to be exposed to the new. At the same time, participants took up the binary between “good” and “bad” or “student” and “teacher” a little too easily (Chang-Kredl and Kinglsey, 2014). Such recurring tropes often establish idealizations of the teacher as a figure that rescues children from what is perceived harmful, or protects them from the very feelings they recall as too difficult.

If given more time, this could be a fruitful place of exploration in teacher education. As Mitchell and Weber (1999) suggest, popular and often romanticized tropes around the teacher, whether through film, media, or our own experiences, play powerfully into our own internalizations of teaching. Teacher educators may find value in juxtaposing students’ remembered constructions of the teacher with those found in the public imagination, uncovering possible sources for their similarities and departures. For sure, these are not linear causations, but places to query what happens when a teacher’s desire to rescue, or be rescued, by students are entangled with a validation of good teaching (Taubman, 2006), or when the claim to protect children constructs the child as an infallible figure in which adults can fulfill their desires or longings (Castañeda, 2002). For certain, each memory analyzed here reflects some version of the vulnerable child and the powerful adult, despite the very different forms each memory took. In each set of memories, teachers expressed a genuinely deep sense of care for children, locating their commitments within the relationships they imagine they will forge in their future classrooms. It seems, however, that student-teachers could also be pushed to think more critically about the historical and contemporary conditions of schooling and the way particular demands on teaching reinforce different kinds of relationships.

Judgments on good or bad teachers can lead to questions into the nature of schooling that sometimes demands efficiency and accountability over the child’s well-being, pace, or preferences. Additionally, sheltering a child from distress may present its own issues, reinforcing notions of childhood innocence and bliss, refusing their lived experiences and the lessons learned from engaging with difficulties. The teacher-student binary can construct an idealization of the student as a homogenous population against the singularity of the teacher; diversity and difference can be understood as both a love of culture, but also as a way to manage individuals that then produces its own particular kinds of inequities. The findings of this study can be read as specific questions teacher educators can pose to those intent on working with children: how does your narrative of childhood reflect common tropes about the role of the teacher? In your memory, what is the relationship between the adult and child? How do our own vulnerabilities as children appear in our perspectives on teaching and what opportunities and shortcomings might this present?

## 12. Concluding thoughts

In this study, the focal point of childhood memories—whether they centered teachers, children, culture, or parents—can help teachers interrogate their pedagogical role in the lives of their

students, cultivating awareness of how some aspects of teaching might be more privileged over others and to strike a balance among the multiple responsibilities that come with the work of teaching. Juxtaposing multiple and diverse childhood memories and maps drawn by student-teachers can be a useful way to complicate and see what is hidden behind the common generalities of good and bad, serving as a catalyst to “resist confining cultural narratives and to write new narratives of teaching” (Ritchie & Wilson, 2018, p. 14). Assignments that utilize visual drawings and written descriptions of childhood are pedagogical tools to excavate the very ideals to which we attach, serving as one method to explore the affective and emotional dimensions of responsibility, obligation, forgiveness, vulnerability, and the symbolic binds that hold teachers together with their students.

Moreover, each memory, perhaps due to its visual accompaniment, was especially charged with emotion. Narrative writings included a generous use of underlining, capitalized words, and exclamation points; maps had explosions, arrows, raining clouds, metaphors of development, detours, and split constructions. As a researcher, I was drawn to this affective power and felt a heightened sense of connection when reading and viewing them. Through this project, I have come to understand that crafting visuals does indeed tap into the realm of metaphor, allowing students to express emotions in ways that interviews and text are limited to portray on their own. The power of the visual, here as drawn images, provokes entry into the study of the afterlife of childhood, demonstrating how such work can produce a space in which individuals work reflexively to re-imagine their teaching selves. However, this study could have been greatly enhanced through a more continuous process of co-constructing knowledge with participants. Further discussions can encourage teachers to use their drawings as tools to critique social class, gender, race, and culture in the work of learning to teach, to speak back to their drawings as a place for re-invention.

Again, this project does not unproblematically privilege one interpretation over the other, nor does it attempt to provide any one best practice when unearthing the past. Yet, activities such as these can turn our attention to teaching as a practice of relationality (Philips, 2010). Memory-work, as subjective grounds upon which to interrogate assumptions about ourselves, offers an important and often lacking reflective space to analyze the role we play when working with children in the classroom. Central to learning how to teach are questions about how our childhood selves live within us, the complex movements through which we come to exist, and how we are emergent through the act of telling that story (Davies, 2014). Engaging with drawings has shown that underneath our memories lies a constellation of frameworks that metaphorically express how ways of seeing and knowing are constantly being made. We can think of education in ways that are more expansive than the determination of what is learned and meant to be learned; we can consider education as work that is both personal and connected, fragmented and uncertain. We can conceive of learning to teach as a complex practice that continually leads to new constructions and experiences, not just with others, but also in the relationships we have with our own childhood selves.

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