International Conference on Education, Business, and Social Development (ICEBSD)
30 – 31 October 2026, Novotel Canberra, Canberra, Australia

Early Career Teachers' Lived Realities of Mentorship in Selected South African Learning Ecologies: A Collaborative Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Facilitating a structured shift from higher education to the ground realities of a classroom and whole school context with reference to mentorship relationships (mentor-mentee) remains a matter of concern in a country like South Africa. This is especially in rural schools, which are characterised by infrastructure deficiencies such as limited specialized facilities like libraries, science and computer laboratories, and continuous professional teacher development and training opportunities. Mentorship is central to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom instructional dynamics, as it provides pedagogical direction, professional integration and psychological support. Thereby, building confidence, competencies and transforming learning and teaching into a streamlined educational context in shifting landscapes. Memory drawing, an arts-based research method, is a creative and innovative mechanism of learning, researching and reflecting about past and present experiences. This paper examines how memory drawing can act as a catalyst of/for/in learning about the complexities of mentorship. It critically discusses a study that was conducted by recently qualified school teachers, as they scrutinize on the narratives of the complexities they faced as rural teachers in a country like South Africa, as they were transitioning from urban post-school to rural school destinations. The research findings reveal how memory drawing can uncover interconnectedness between formal and informal educational experiences and the recovery of mentorship relationships in lower-ranking school quintiles (1, 2, and 3). The paper also reveals how memory drawing as a learning, researching and reflective tool, can help new teachers to renegotiate and reclaim their spaces in their respective margins in teacher education.

Keywords: Early career teachers, collaborative narrative inquiry, lived realities, mentorship, South African learning ecologies.