An ethnographic study of the learning practices of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape: a sociological perspective

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BY

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ABSTRACT:

This ethnographic study is set against the backdrop of underachievement in South African Primary Schools. Approached from a sociological perspective, the research focus of the study concentrates on the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape. The study combines the lenses of 'space' and 'learning' to investigate the learning practices of four Grade 6 students against the background of two lived spaces. These spaces are: the environmental space of their township community and home, and the institutional space of their township school and classroom. A critical analysis of the intersecting dynamics between these spaces that constitute the learning practices of these students is offered. I focus on how schooling and learning are lived and how these students' livelihoods articulate with the learning and pedagogical processes inside and outside school.

The study's main starting premises is that there is a disjuncture between the rich educational engagements of these students in their environmental space and how their learning practices are framed, informed and positioned in the institutional space. My study is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm in terms of which I set out to describe and understand the meanings that the student respondents assign to their learning practices when they are involved in discursive practices of speaking, knowing, doing, reading and writing. Qualitative research instruments: field notes, participant and non-participant observations and formal and informal interviews were used in order to answer my research question and achieve the desired research aims of this thesis. The findings are presented in a narrative format after deriving at categories and themes using narrative analysis.

Finally, my research shows how these students are positioned in and by their lived spaces (whether environmental or institutional) in specific ways, and they, based on their own resources, networks and interactions, and by exercising their agency, actively construct their own spaces of learning. I describe these active constructions by these students as their 'conceptual space of learning' to highlight the complex ways in which they go about to establish their learning practices in their lived

spaces. The study provides an analysis of the basis upon which each of these four students go about constructing their learning practices.

DECLARATION

I declare that, *An ethnographic study of the learning practices of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Lucinda Lucille Du Plooy (Mocke)   May 2010

Signed: …………………………

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to this study

My interest in this research field is derived from two sources: my own personal experiences and my exposure to recent readings on this issue, especially Brahm Fleisch's book (Fleisch, 2008), "Primary Education in crisis: Why South African school children underachieve in reading and mathematics".

I taught at a township secondary school for a period of 19 years. What I found extremely puzzling about my fellow teachers discourses was that student performance, whether they are achieving or underachieving according to normative standards, as set out in policy documents, is not a priority at staff meetings. This is so, despite the fact that we are faced with a high percentage of students not attending school regularly, unable to read with comprehension and insight, lacking in motivation and with high drop-out and failure rates. I often hear teachers blaming students' poor performance on the latter's inability to read, write and engage with texts. These teachers opt to blame parents for their lack of involvement in their children's schooling and primary school teachers for their apparent ineffectiveness in preparing the students for high school.

On reading Fleisch's book (2008), I gained valuable insight into various patterns of underachievement amongst disadvantaged school children in South Africa: long-term health problems, poverty, learning in an additional language, use of poorly-planned code-switching, the socio-economic background of parents, inadequate access to and use of classroom resources, and the lack of teachers' conceptual knowledge. According to Fleisch (2008:139), "We do not know the extent to which each of these factors contributes to school failure and in which combinations". I discovered that even though various researchers identified the possible causes of underachievement, not many have established the specific ways student learning should be understood. In other words, in-depth explanations of the underlying causes and issues that determine student learning in South

Africa's primary schools are lacking. My research at one township school is an attempt to offer a modest account of how student learning happens in a localized context.

My research unit, a group of Grade 6 students is in the intermediate phase of their schooling. I chose the intermediate phase (Grades 4, 5 and 6) deliberately because I believe it is at this level that students make the shift from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. In other words, it is here that they make the shift from basic decoding of written symbols into language, moving from alphabetical and phonemic awareness to comprehension (Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005:139). Comprehension, according to Pretorius and Ribbens (2005:139), refers to the overall understanding process whereby meaning is assigned to the whole text. When students make the shift to 'reading to learn' they need to acquire an array of cognitive-linguistic accomplishments, which include the use of prior knowledge, grasping text structure, inference and integrated skills to construct meaning (Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005:139). Even more interesting is the fact that when students move from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn,' the nature of their literacy changes. As Mcdonald notes (2003:127), "the nature of literacy changes as children move from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' expressing why it is necessary for children to read far beyond their textbooks in order to gain the benefits from incidental learning and thus consolidate their formal classroom instruction". On reading this, I realised that in order for me to understand the complexities of student learning, I needed to uncover the underlying causes and issues that inform the learning practices of students. This would include the nature of students' learning practices and why they experience learning in the way they do. The focus for me is thus on how the learning practices of students are lived, positioned and experienced within this context.

I used ethnographic research as a method of exploring how the learning practices of students are framed in the context of a school in one Cape Town township, by experiencing schooling as the students experience it. At the same time I had to overcome my own biases and the assumptions I held as a former teacher, by, for example, not pre-empting the way data for the study was generated. The answers that I sought were to be revealed in the research process and the valuable lessons that I wanted to learn had to unfold during this process. From a theoretical perspective, it was therefore important for me to critically analyse the intersecting dynamics that played out in and around school,

which I believed an understanding of which was possible through prolonged ethnographic engagement within the social spaces of the students' lives and school going.

1.2. Research questions

My study is informed by the following research question: What are the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape?

 I divided the research question into the following 3 sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the learning practices of students in the environmental space, ie. the space of the township community and home?
2. What is the nature of the learning practices of students in the institutional space, ie. the space of township school and classroom?
3. How do the dynamics inside each of the interlocking physical spaces lead to an understanding of how student learning practices are framed, informed and positioned?
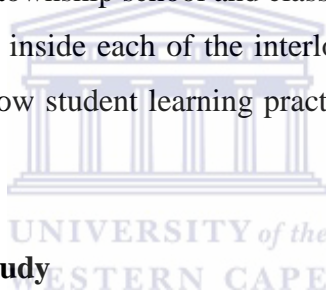
1.3. Pin-pointing the research study

As suggested in the research questions presented above, this study is an attempt to foreground the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school against the background of two interlocking spaces: the environmental space (community/home factors) and the institutional space (in-school/classroom factors). The conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure-1, which illuminates student learning practices across their 'lived spaces,' is based on an application and adaptation of various theories. These theories are explored in Chapter 2.

The following diagram presents an illustration of the conceptual framework of the study:

FIGURE 1:

Conceptual construct

Environmental
Space

Institutional
Space
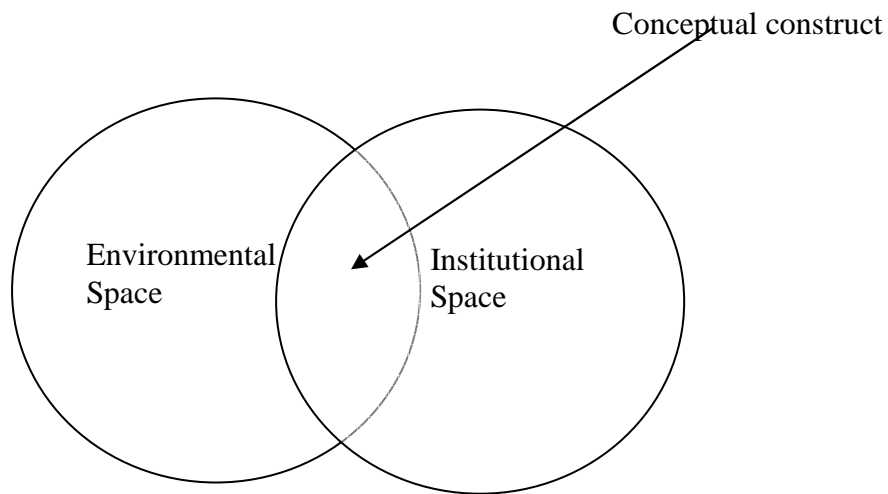
I want to argue, that student learning practices converge in the interlocking space, as students are involved in various discursive practices such as speaking, knowing, doing, reading and writing. I refer to the interlocking area as a conceptual construct. Students conceptually generate and construct meaning by drawing on the discursive practices from both physical spaces. The focus of this study is therefore on the social context of their learning. In other words, how these students live their social context, how they are positioned to learn and how they navigate that learning positioning. It is therefore fundamentally on how they acquire their learning practices across the spaces of their learning.

This study attempts to move away from deficit ways of viewing township communities, their families, their schools and their students, by offering alternative ways of understanding the multiple causes and issues that surround their learning practices across the spaces of their learning.

1.4   Research aims

This is an ethnographic inquiry into an urban township primary school, which seeks to unveil the multiple and underlying causes and issues which determine student learning, by focusing on the learning practices of students as they navigate their way through two interlinked social spaces.

The research objectives are:

1) To understand the nature of student learning practices and how they hinder or enhance their learning.
2) To unveil the social-spatial dynamics which play out in and around the school in order to understand how children's literate lives and experiences influence their learning practices.
3) To investigate classroom pedagogical practices in order to understand student learning practices.
4) To identify student-centred (certain inherent personal traits) factors that influence how they acquire their learning practices.

1.5.   Delimitation of this study

An ethnographic study that foregrounds learning practices against the background of two interlocking spaces, might seem like an enormous project for a M.ED. level study. I therefore had to delimit my study by focusing on one urban township school in the Western Cape. This study is delimitated conceptually by focusing on relationship and interaction between 'space' and 'learning'. The spaces on which I focus in this study are the four student's environmental space (township community and home) and their institutional space (school and classroom).

My research unit is limited to four Grade 6 students. The transcribed interviews were limited to one interview per student, one focus group interview and one family interview. I spent most of my time observing the class teacher and only observed three other teachers classroom practices during the study. The reason for this are explained in the chapter dealing with methodology.

1.6 The structure of this thesis

This study will be presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 is this introductory chapter. It contains the background to the study and a rationale for this specific research focus. The research question and subsequent sub-questions, on which this study is based, are

outlined. I pinpoint the research study by briefly introducing the conceptual framework on which it is based. This is followed by delimitation of the study and a chapter outline.

Chapter 2 is the Literature Review chapter, which reviews international and national literature pertinent to this study. The literature that I drew on is varied and interdisciplinary, drawing on literature that captures the conceptual lenses of 'space' and 'learning,' to critically analyse the intersecting dynamics that play out in and around schooling in South Africa. Chapter 3 is the Research Methodology chapter, which describes the methodological aspects of the study. It offers a rationale for adopting a qualitative methodological paradigm for this study and for choosing ethnography as the most appropriate research design for answering the research question and subsequent sub-questions. Chapter 4 is the first data presentation chapter, focusing on the learning practices of the four students in the environmental space, which includes the township community and home space. This is followed in Chapter 5 by the presentation of data on the students' learning practices in the institutional space, which includes their school and classroom. Chapter 6 is the analytical chapter, while Chapter 7 presents the overall conclusions of the study and recommendations for further academic enquiry.
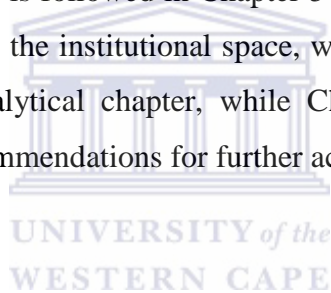
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of this review is to focus on the international and national literature that is relevant to my research question, which deals with the way the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students are framed, informed and positioned within the context of an urban township school.   The literature that frames this study is varied and interdisciplinary. It draws on sources from psychology, history and politics, sociology, anthropology and linguistics. It is an attempt to understand the multiple causes and issues that surround student learning practices across the spaces of their learning.

The literature in this review is organised and approached thematically to cover a number of areas that surround my research study. In the first half of the review, I survey literature that concentrates on the way student learning practices within the context of an urban township school could be framed and understood. I problematize student learning and the role of schools and more specifically township schools, in the overall reproduction process. In the second half of the review, I go on to contextually locate this study within the broader reform context of South Africa, by offering a historical overview and location of this study.

This is followed by the conceptual framework employed in the study.   This chapter provides me with the 'conceptual hooks' and analytical lenses to understand the nature of student learning practices in the context of a primary school in a Cape Town township.

2.2 Student performance

In this section, I problematize student learning, by placing emphasis on literature that concentrates on student performance and underachievement. I draw on the seminal views provided by the Coleman Report (1966), Christie (2008), Fleisch (2008), and the more recent work of Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen, (2009).

The 1966 Coleman Report on Equality and Educational Opportunity provided contentious findings based on an investigation of the poor learning performance of African American and minority students on school achievement tests in the United States of America. One of the most contentious findings of the report was that schools do little to alter a students life chances. In fact, Coleman and his colleagues found that schooling perpetuated and even exacerbated inequalities between children. They attributed poor academic performance to the personal and family characteristics of the students, to social background and especially to inequalities imposed on children by the socio-economic environment of their home and neighbourhoods. In the words of the Report:

> Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement
> that is independent of his [or her] background and general social
> context….the inequalities imposed on children by their home,
> neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to
> become inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end
> of school (Coleman et al., 1966:325).

Christie (2008) draws on the findings of the Coleman Report but takes the argument a step further. She argues that instead of viewing individuals and whole groups as having no choice but to live out their predetermined social fates, one should not ignore the deeply entrenched social patterns that limit free choice (2008:171). Contrary to the Coleman Report, she notes that what happens inside schools, especially in terms of teaching and learning, may make a difference for disadvantaged students (2008:180). Fleisch (2008) reiterates this view in his book when he offers a meta-analysis based on a substantial body of research on schooling in South Africa to outline the multiple reasons why students, especially those from working-class, disadvantaged areas, underachieve. Fleisch (2008) notes that the majority (between 70 and 80 per cent) of primary school children, overwhelmingly from disadvantaged schools, "are completing their primary education without being able to read fluently in their schools instructional language," (2008: v). These children also only acquire "a very rudimentary knowledge and understanding of mathematics", (2008: v).

Fleisch (2008: v) attributes underachievement to a number of factors: long term health problems, poverty, learning in an additional language, use of poorly planned code-switching, socio-economic background of parents, inadequate access to and use of

classroom resources, and teachers' lack of conceptual knowledge. Although Fleisch's meta-analysis exemplifies most of the reasons for poor educational achievement, Bush et al. (2009:6) argue that he gives little attention to one major factor, that of, school leadership and management. They attribute principals' weak grasp of teaching and learning and their inability to use the scope they have to improve learner achievement as a major reason for underachievement.

The above discussion illuminates the complexities of understanding student performance and shows contesting views on how it could be understood. Where the Coleman Report (1966) attributes poor school performance to students' social backgrounds, Christie (2008) attributes it to what happens in schools and classrooms. Fleisch (2008), however, sees what teachers and learners do inside the classroom as the major source of underachievement, whereas Bush et al. (2009) found that the lack of effective leadership and management was the overriding cause of poor performance.

Although these researchers have identified the possible causes of underachievement, not many have established specific ways in which student learning should be understood. My research at one primary school is a modest study that sought to provide an analysis that explains how student learning happens in a localized context, by focusing on their learning practices across the spaces of their learning. One way to proceed is to look at literature that surrounds the complexities of how children learn.
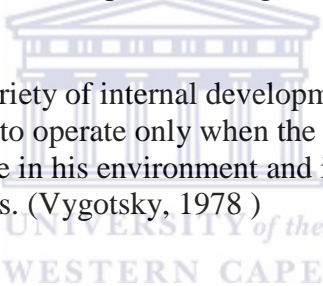
2.3   Learning and learning practices

The issue of learning, and more specifically how children learn, is complex and contentious. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to enter into a full and critical discussion on this topic or to analyse or critique the various views on learning. Rather, this section aims to capture the essential and core debates around learning. I proceed by discussing two well-known theorists, Piaget and Vygotsky, on how children learn. I do this to acknowledge the contributions made by these theorists, more particularly Vygotsky who favours a social constructivist view of learning.

Bennett and Dunn (2001) note that there is little argument among theorists that learning involves the construction of knowledge through educational experiences whether inside or

outside instructional environments such as classrooms. They point out that there are disputes about the conditions under which learning is optimized, in other words whether learning is individual or social (2001:52). For Piaget, learning resides in individual children, who construct knowledge through their actions on the world. He regards the child as a 'lone scientist' or 'active scientist,' constructing hypotheses about the world, reflecting upon experience, interacting with the physical environment, and formulating increasingly complex structures of thought (2001:53). Piaget's focus is on the growth of knowledge and the development of logical thinking. For him, the development of intelligence and thinking should be understood as the individual's biological adaptation to the external world (Sjoberg, 2007:4).

In contrast, Vygotsky views the child as a social being and learning as a social activity (Cole and Wertsch, 1996:250). I am particularly interested in the way Vygotsky assigns significance to the social environment compared to Piaget:

> Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting- with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. (Vygotsky, 1978)

As Bennett and Dunn (2001:53) point out, for Vygotsky social interaction is assigned a central role in facilitating learning. He maintains that 'making sense' is a social process, i.e., it is an activity that is always situated within a cultural and historical context (2001:52), which connects to my study's focus on student learning practices that are situated within specific social contexts and practices.

There are two main contributions made by Vygotsky that will be of interest to this study. The one is his concept of the 'zone of proximal development' and the other is the role of language as the foundation for learning. The 'zone of proximal development' refers to the gap between what an individual can do alone and unaided, and what he or she can achieve with the help of more knowledgeable others. The 'more knowledgeable others' can include peers, siblings, the teacher, parents, grandparents and so on (Bennett and Dunn, 2001:53). For Vygotsky, the foundation of learning and development is co-operatively achieved success, and the basis of that success is language and communication (2001:53). According to Cole and Wertsch (1996: 252), language is the form of mediation that

preoccupied Vygotsky above all others. For Vygotsky (1978), language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Although this study is not about language *per se*, the Vygotskian notion that students move from their everyday understandings towards more advanced school learning through good mediation and through the use of language and communication is crucial to understanding the nature of student learning practices.

Both Vygotsky and Piaget point to the fact that children do not come to any lesson empty-headed, what they learn in the classroom largely depends on what they already know (Bennett and Dunn, 2001:51). They point out that, irrespective of their age, children will have some knowledge and some conception of the classroom topic they are faced with, which they will have acquired from books, television, talking to parents and friends, visits to places of interest and previous work done in school. Although their intellectual conceptions, or 'schemata' as they are generally known, are likely to be incomplete and different, the fact that schemata are often shared has implications for how we view learning in this study. While Piaget was more interested in epistemology and knowledge, Vygotsky was more interested in understanding the social and cultural conditions for human learning (Sjoberg, 2007). For the purpose of this study, drawing on Vygotsky's seminal views, the learning practices of the students will be understood as arising from the dynamic interaction between their exigencies as social beings and their individual learning. These learning interactions occur in the light of their everyday social practices.

Pollard takes the argument on how children learn in a new direction (1990, in Ball, 2004) when he argues that, as our understanding of the social world becomes more sophisticated, it is increasingly apparent that the validity of the study of many issues cannot be maximized unless an interdisciplinary approach is drawn on in sustained study (2004:285). For this reason we cannot view learning only from a psychological perspective without considering the sociological aspects that impact on it. Helen Haste (1987:175, in Ball, 2004:287) in her model of 'intra-individual', 'intrapersonal' and the socio-historical factors affecting learning, provides such an alternative view. She combines the disciplines of psychology and sociology to understand factors that affect learning. The intra-individual domain is the province of the cognitive psychologist, which refers to insights into the ways in which individuals assimilate experiences and construct understanding. In other words, the child experiences concepts in social practice and social

negotiation of meaning, similar to Vygotsky's notion of learning. Like Piaget, Haste notes that the child would also bring to the encounter his or her own level of complexity.

The intrapersonal is the domain of social interaction that is to the area in which meanings are negotiated and through which cultural norms and conventions are learned. Here the child learns through media, parents, teachers and peers, from social practices and through social mediation, and brings his or her own level of complexity to the encounter (Pollard, 2004:287). The socio-historical aspect refers to the domain of culturally defined and historically accumulated justification and explanation. Haste (1987:175) notes that the socio-historical domain is the socio-historical resource for both the interpersonal interaction and intra-individual reflection. This model allows us to move away from mainstream discourses about how learning should be viewed and paves the way for alternative ways of understanding student learning practices. In other words, intra-individual learning has to be understood with reference to both interpersonal experiences and socio-historical circumstances (2004:288).

This approach to learning provides useful lenses for viewing learning practices. The combination of psychological and sociological (social interactionist) points the spotlight to how children learn their embodied contexts, focusing on the 'why factor.' Thus it promises, as my study will attempt to do, to "provide a more detailed and incisive account of the dynamics and constraints of the context in which learning takes place", (Pollard, 2004:288). The focus on the 'why factor', more specifically the dynamics and constraints of schooling, leads us into the next discussion on the role of schools in the social reproduction process.

2.4 Schools and the social reproduction process

Casmar (2004:2) argues that the theory of social reproduction maintains that existing class structures and social inequalities of individuals in a capitalist society are reproduced by society. He further argues that schools are one key arena where social reproduction plays out. This stance is reiterated by Butler and Robson (2006:2) when they argue that schools are central in the production and maintenance of social inequality and that social class is the crucial axis along which such social disadvantages and privileges are continually reproduced. Butler and Robson (2006) draw on the seminal work of Bourdieu to emphasize

the way in which schools reproduce social divisions based on wealth, privilege and power. Bourdieu conceptualizes these social divisions by using his signal concepts of 'habitus', 'field' and 'symbolic capital' (2006:7).

According to Bourdieu (1998: vii), the cornerstone of these concepts is the two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of habitus). As pointed out by Lingard and Christie (2003), Bourdieu's concept of habitus addresses how social agents operate in ways that are compatible with their social situation. In other words, habitus are socially constituted dispositions or mental structures on the basis of which people habitually act. As they point out, growing up in a working-class family develops particular kinds of class-based habitus, or certain embodied ways of being in the world (2003:320-322). Thus, people in a sense 'anticipate their destiny' since as Bourdieu (2000:14) asserts, 'their dispositions are attuned to the structures of domination of which they are a product', (cited in Lingard and Christie, 2003: 322).

Bourdieu views fields as socially constituted areas of activity. These fields, be they economic, political, educational or the specific field of the school, have their own structures, interests and preferences; their own 'rules of the game'; their own agents, differentially constituted; their own power struggles (Lingard and Christie, 2003:324). According to Lingard and Christie (2003), fields have different forms of capital – economic capital (money), cultural capital (three forms: embodied capital, objectified capital and institutional capital) and social capital (linked to social networks and relationships). Social space is conceived as a kind of field, distributing and differentiating individuals by 'economic capital and cultural capital' and the habitus represents the embodiment or incorporation of this relational structure. In the words of Bourdieu:

> …. when perceived through these social categories of perception,
> these principles of vision and division, the differences in
> practices, in goods possessed, or in the opinions expressed
> become symbolic differences and constitute a veritable language
> (1998:8)

Bourdieu uses the concepts of capital and habitus to theorize the ways in which educational systems (like schools, which constitute a field), reproduce inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The relevance of Bourdieu's statement to this study is that it explains why student learning practices are positioned in schools in deficit ways, merely because, as Bourdieu argues that schools often 'misrecognize' the gap between the habitus of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the habitus explicit in the curriculum and pedagogies of schooling (Lingard and Christie, 2003:324).

Yosso (2005), notes that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has often been used to assert some communities as culturally wealthy and others as culturally poor. This type of interpretation according to Yosso, of Bourdieu, views white middle- class culture as 'standard' and therefore other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'. He notes that the capital that middle- class students possess is normally valued in schooling, whereas the cultural knowledge that working-class students bring to the classroom does not seem to carry the capital needed in schooling (Yosso, 2005:76-77).

Yosso (2005) challenges interpretations of Bourdieu's theories, by expanding on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and introducing the concept of community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth is forms of capital that draw on the knowledges that students bring with them from their communities and homes into the classroom. It comprises six forms of capital: aspirational capital (resilience or ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers); linguistic capital (multiple languages and communication skills, storytelling traditions and ability to communicate via visual art, music, poetry etc); familial capital (strong kinship ties which inform emotional, moral and occupational consciousness); social capital (social networks, contacts and community resources); navigational capital (navigational skills which help one to manoeuvre through social institutions); it acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints) and resistance capital (ability to engage in behaviour and maintain attitudes that challenge inequality) (2005: 79-80). These forms of capital or cultural wealth will be used as analytical lenses to show how student learning practices are framed, informed and positioned in localised settings or across the spaces of their learning.

Fleisch (2008:1) paves the way for understanding how social reproduction works in education in South Africa by reminding us that South Africa has not one but two education 'systems'. The 'first system' is well resourced, consisting of mainly former white and Indian schools, and a small but growing independent sector. This 'system' does a good job of ensuring that most children in its charge acquire literacy and mathematical competencies which are comparable to those of middle-class children anywhere in the world. It also produces the majority of university entrants, enrolling children of the `elite white middle-class and the new black middle-class (2008:2). The 'second system' enrols the vast majority of working class and poor children. This system, according Fleisch (2008:2), struggles to ameliorate young people's deficits in institutions that are themselves less than adequate. He notes that:

> Children in the second system do learn, but acquire a much more restricted set of knowledge and skills than children of the first system.These children 'read' but mostly at very limited functional level; they 'write', but not with fluency or confidence. (2008:2)
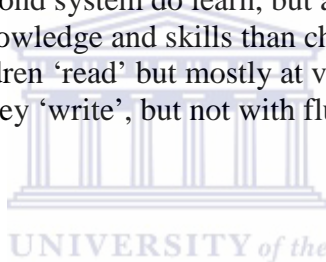
I would like to highlight two other models which develop on Fleisch's notion of two education systems. The first system can be likened to 'functional' schools, as put forward by Fataar and Paterson (2002) and the 'fortified sites' of Teese and Polesel (2003). The second system can be likened to 'dysfunctional' schools suggested by Fataar and Paterson (2002) or the 'exposed sites' as put forward by Teese and Polesel (2003).

These models consider the link between a school's material context and its institutional culture. I will use aspects of these models to help me understand how a school's institutional dynamics position and frame learning practices of the students I will study. The study is based on the view that the environments in which schools are located have a crucial formative impact on shaping the learning practices of the students.

According to Teese and Polesel (2003), 'fortified sites' are schools that serve rich communities, whereas 'exposed sites' are normally associated with working class and poor communities. Fortified sites are described as

> Schools where parents of high economic status will choose schools to maximise the advantage for their children. They employ highly qualified and experienced staff, have well-stocked libraries and extensive electronic data resources; they employ remedial teachers and counsellors, train their students in exam techniques, provide smaller classes, filter and stream intakes, and offer optimum teaching conditions (2003:197)

In contrast to 'fortified sites', they view 'exposed sites' as schools

> where students struggle with the demands of the curriculum. Schools are marked by multiple disadvantage- poor language skills, fragmented family lives, poverty, low levels of parental education, lack of facilities, leisure that is distracting rather than supportive of school. Effective learning depends largely on the capacity of teachers to make up for the gap between what the curriculum assumes about students and who students really are. (2003:123)

Teese and Polesel (2003) use a grid, which they refer to as the institutional geography of school, which shows how far apart schools serving poor communities are from rich schools in terms of social levels and academic achievement. This notion of 'institutional geography' lifts out the relationship between a school's socioeconomic status and the levels of academic achievement of students attending these schools. In similar fashion, Fataar and Paterson (2002) employ the construct 'functional-dysfunctional continuum' as a way of analysing a school's functionality. They use it to clarify how, on the basis of their institutional characteristics, schools may react differently to change emanating from the policy environment (2002:15). Fataar and Paterson (2002) refer to functional schools as schools

.... that possess the organisational resources, the managerial and leadership capacity and a sufficiently motivated teacher corps to respond with creativity to change. The learning environment in such schools are shaped by systematic order and a universally set of rules and obligations. Teachers at these schools are not unaffected by stress brought about by policy changes, but they operate in terms of an institutional culture and leadership structure which enable adaptation, and the incorporation of innovation…. (2002:16)

Dysfunctional schools differ considerably from functional schools. They describe these schools as

.... characterised by disorderly, if not chaotic environment. Teachers are faced with the daunting task of having to innovate and implement system change against the background of numerous socio-economic problems. The school is characterised by what has been termed 'the lack of a culture of teaching and learning' (Chisholm & Valley, 1996). The impact on the school of youth and gang subcultures operating in its immediate external environment distracts attention from the school's primary function as a learning institution. The school is confronted with having to deal with student welfare concerns emanating, for example, from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances or disrupted family structures. Through a combination of historical disadvantage, and the impact of working class and youth cultures, teachers in dysfunctional schools are caught up in the daily grind of survival (2002: 17).

Fataar and Paterson acknowledge that there is no particular school that exhibits the exact characteristics of either the 'functional' or the 'dysfunctional' type. According to them, these are ideal types at the far ends of a continuum. They use this model as a means of clarifying how, on the basis of their institutional characteristics, schools may react differently to change in the new policy environment (2002:15). Key to their model is the link between the school's environmental dynamics and its functional culture. A school's culture can be understood to the extent that it is positioned by the environmental flows into the school and the ways in which it's functioning is affected. They suggest that

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working-class environments are more likely to impact a school negatively compared to middle class environments, although they suggest that this still depends on the way schools work with these dynamics. I will use their model as a means to understand how students' learning practices are enhanced or constrained in the light of the school's environmental flows and its functional culture.

We must keep in mind that there are certain elements of functionality even in certain dysfunctional schools. This is reiterated by Christie (2008:177) when she points out that single schools may jump out of line in terms of achievement, breaking the pattern of their institutional geography, but this is unlikely to happen on a large scale. If learning practices are to be viewed as situated social practices and if we aim to move away from deficit thinking, then it is imperative to study the institutional context in which students' learning practices are positioned, as this study does in context of a township school.

2.5 Township schools and the social reproduction process

Fataar (2008:10) argues that township schools can be regarded as social reproduction incubators that entrap young people in place. He further points to the fact that these schools play a deficit role in the reproduction process, adding that township schools are highly unstable and precarious environments. Christie (2008) on the other hand notes that schools are not similar to each other and do not offer the same learning experiences to the communities they serve. She points to the fact that the schools that students attend can make a difference to their learning experiences (2008:179). In light of this it is important to consider the way township schools function so as to understand how the learning practices are positioned, valued and experienced by students in these schools.

Borrowing from my earlier discussion on schools, it could be argued that township schools can be been equated to those schools described as dysfunctional (Fataar and Paterson, 2002) and as exposed sites (Teese and Polesel, 2003) or as part of the 'second system' schools (Fleisch, 2008) normally associated with working-class and poor communities. Fataar and Paterson, (2002) deepen the discussion by conceptualising operations within dysfunctional schools and throwing the analytical spotlight on how

school cultures work inside schools. They employ the concepts 'moral minimising' and 'moral diffusion' to refer to teachers' and school managers' behavioural responses in impoverished contexts. They employ the concept of 'moral minimising,' in reference to the processes by which teachers develop a specific identity, one which is rooted in the helplessness they feel about being unable to change the schooling context in which they work. These teachers end up acting in ways that diffuse moral responsibility, and use the constrained circumstances in which they work to justify their minimum participation in schooling processes (2002:18). Moral minimising therefore represents a coping or defence mechanism, which they adopt to deal with the dysfunctional environment in which they work. The individual coping response, according to Fataar and Paterson (2002:19), is reinforced by an institutional coping response of moral diffusion. They argue that moral diffusion occurs where the management of the dysfunctional school cannot muster the moral authority to recruit teachers into a process where the staff as a whole may collectively engage with a vision for their school (2002:19). Although both these concepts offer a useful way of interpreting the actions of the principal and his staff, they could also be a useful framework in which one can begin to make sense of how the learning practices of students could be understood within a township school environment. It will be especially useful for understanding the multiple causes and issues that surround student learning practices in the context of a township school.

Clarke and Linder (2006) and Weber (2006) offer compelling studies of how the effects of township context, school conditions, and the challenges brought into school by students impact on the work of teachers. Clarke and Linder (2006:39) describe the township schools that they studied as having reached collapse of their learning environments. Chisholm and Vally (1996) attribute this 'breakdown' of the learning environment to a range of factors: resource constraints; fractured and adversarial relationships between principals, teachers, students and parents; a lack of coherence in school leadership; and the disadvantaged socio-economic context and location of schools.

Clarke and Linder (2006:62) observe that teaching in such circumstances "can be a profoundly debilitating experience" for most teachers. In the same way Weber (2006:129-156) observed how the work of teachers is impacted by their school's surrounding context and by teaching conditions within the schools. Where these researchers focused on the complexities of the environmental dynamics in and around schools and their impact on

teachers, my own research will focus on the effects on students and more specifically how the learning practices of the students under study are shaped within this context.

2.6   Township schools and working class students

Buendra and Ares (2006) state that "a great deal of variability can be found in the educational experiences of residents who live in different parts of metropolitan areas, into encountering particular educational resources, curriculum pedagogies or peer groups". They also found that "low status knowledge, knowledge of little exchange value is taught to children of colour, who are poor" (2006:2). This sentiment is echoed by Fleisch (2008:106) who states that teachers tend to focus on lower-order cognitive tasks as a way of managing children's lack of mastery of language. Christie (2008) agrees with these sentiments when she notes that "students have very different experiences of learning in classrooms in South Africa." She backs this up by saying that in some classrooms there is active instruction by teachers who have strong content knowledge, and a range of pedagogical skills and resources. At the other extreme, there are classrooms where teachers are absent and students' copy notes from the board and from each other, in routines that have very little substance or content (2008:184).

My interest will be on the pedagogical practices to which students are exposed in one township school and how this frames, enhances or constrains their learning practices. I attempt to understand which deep-rooted classroom practices continue to marginalize children of particular cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Boyd & Brock, 2004). One lens to view social class differences in schools is through patterns of differential treatment in everyday classroom practices. Here the work of Panofsky (2003:417-427) is of cardinal importance to my study. She did an in depth study of three key theorists, Rist (1970/2007), Wilcox (1988) and Collins (1986) who speak directly to how social class works in schools and classrooms.

Rist (1997/2007) shows how Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic violence' is manifested in social relations between students and teachers. He observed how teachers appear to favour

students who are located similarly to her in social field, displaying a habitus that reflects similar cultural and economic capital (in Panofsky, 2003:419).

Wilcox (1988) argues that social class differences are manifested in classrooms through differential teacher expectations. In her ethnographic study she observed qualitative differences in the ways teachers verbally controlled higher and lower status children. She found that the social class level of the neighbourhood was a very salient characteristic for staff at both schools. Views of the neighbourhood generated general levels of expectations for children in each neighbourhood which could be seen to influence the behaviour of teachers in the classroom (1988:298). She found that children in the upper-middle- class group who experienced learning problems, would receive multiple forms of assistance until the problem was solved, whereas a lower-middle-class child would receive no assistance because the problem was seen as what is 'to be expected' (1988:298).

Collins (1986) then shows how patterns of differential treatment such as those identified by Rist and Wilcox become translated into differential instruction (Panofsky, 2003:422). My interest would be on how differential treatment either constrain or enhance learning practices of the students under study, since according to Panofsky (2003:424) the findings of the three studies mentioned above, "strongly suggest that differential treatment in the process of schooling itself is of central importance to the development of a student's sense of identity and agency".

Christie (2008:191) takes this argument in another direction by noting that there are many documented views on which classroom practices best support student learning. Yet there is general agreement that good classroom practice is about quality of the interactions between students and the teachers, and the optimal use of resources and time (2008:191-192). She draws on research in some schools in Australia to offer an example of classroom practices that focus on improving learning outcomes for all students (2008:195). This research highlights four dimensions of classroom practice that have made a difference to students' learning. I applied these dimensions as a guide to my

observations that would help me understand how students' learning practices are lived, experienced and valued in the classroom.

Christie briefly explains the four dimensions as follows:

- Intellectual quality: this refers to lessons that are high in intellectual quality, and engage students actively and critically with knowledge, including disciplinary knowledge and problem-solving approaches. They provide students with opportunities to learn about important concepts and processes in depth rather than superficially, and use these in ways that shift their meaning (rather than simply reciting them). She notes that, for this to happen students and teachers should engage in substantive conversations. Some of these are conversations about how language works.

- Supportive classroom environments, which refers to pedagogies that are supportive, where students feel safe to take intellectual risks. They are able to regulate their own behaviour and stay on task. The teacher and students are respectful of others.

- Engagement with differences involves pedagogy which engages with difference, drawing on the beliefs, languages and ways of knowing of different cultures. There are deliberate attempts to increase the participation of different students, and build inclusive classrooms.

- Connectedness to the world beyond the classroom, where pedagogies are linked to students' background knowledge and to events beyond the classroom. In doing this, however, they move to significant knowledge and concepts, thus moving beyond the level of the everyday (Christie, 2008: 195-196).

These four dimensions provide a means of talking about pedagogical dimensions that make a difference to student learning outcomes (Christie, 2008:198). They open up a window through which to analyse and understand the way working class students' learning practices are mediated within the classroom.

An issue worth exploring is how the learning practices of students are positioned in the multilingual classrooms of South Africa. The issue of language and communication dovetails with Vygotsky's notion, which views the child as a social being and learning as a social activity. We cannot dispute the role that language and communication play in the way children 'make sense,' since as noted before they use language to move towards more advanced school learning. Multilingualism or multiple languages, according to Heath and Street (2008), are likely to be a daily reality in the lives of students, where they blend and borrow from two or more languages when engaging in various learning practices. Dyers (2007) alerts us to how what she terms 'truncated multilingualism' operates in schools. Truncated multilingualism is defined as 'linguistic competencies, which are organised topically, on the basis of domains or specific activities' (Dyers, 2007:5). In other words, people draw on different languages in different spaces. Dyers (2007), however, points out that this does not mean that people are fully competent in the different languages they use. Instead, their linguistic competencies may vary greatly across different domains. Expressions of truncated multilingualism are often influenced by a range of factors, such as language attitudes, levels of literacy, access to quality education, social class, level of income and especially location (2007:6). For the purpose of this study it would be interesting to see how multiple languages are used to induct students into learning practices in learning events in the classroom.

One of the subsidiary issues I will be addressing is what Ogbu (2003:23) refers to as student-centred factors. In his study of academic disengagement, he speaks about 'low effort syndrome' in reference to situations where working class students are not highly engaged in their schoolwork and homework. 'Low effort syndrome' is a kind of 'norm of minimum effort' in terms of which students themselves recognise and explain both their academic behaviours and their low academic performance. The children in his study gave various reasons for their low academic performance, including negative peer pressure (not wanting to appear 'smart' during lessons), poor study habits, the inability to focus on tasks, inadequate teachers and other priorities that derailed academic effort (2003:37). I will be referring to 'low effort syndrome' as a way of understanding the role that students play in enhancing or constraining their learning practices across the spaces of their learning.

2.7 Contextually locating my study

My study is located within the broader reform context of South Africa. There are manifest inequalities between working and middle class schools in South Africa, 15 years after the formal end of apartheid (Fleisch, 2008: 1-3). I am cognizant of the fact that we cannot divorce macro-political and economic debates from educational reform at the level of implementation. I attempt in this study to move from the macro-political to provide an analysis of the complexities of school reform, and teacher and student cultures as they play out amidst everyday realities. I will attempt to illuminate the multidimensional and sociologically informed reasons for understanding how the learning practices of a group of young students are framed within the context of a township. I will show how policy reform after 1994, influenced by global trends, did not positively alter the localized conditions of schooling. I intend to demonstrate what happened to policy-mandated reform as it is taken up in local terrain. I do this in order understand the multiple and underlying causes and issues associated how students learn.

Commentating on the impact of globally-driven influences on education in South Africa post-1994, Nzimande (in Kallaway et al, 1997) points out the coincidence of the onset of the post-cold war era and South Africa's transition to democracy and suggests that one cannot enter into any discussion on social and educational transformation without understanding the impact of global influences. This view is reiterated by many other education academics (Kallaway et al, 1997; Fataar, 2001, 2007; Christie, 2008; Jansen 1999a, 2002). As noted by Christie (2008), 'South Africa's political transition took place at a time when the world economies were almost all capitalist and neo-liberal ideology was paramount' (91). Fataar explains that the conservative turn in both socio-economic and educational policy was the outcome of the South African government's choice of a macro-economic framework that targeted the country's economic entry into the global economy as the principal and overarching policy ideal of the post-apartheid period (2001: 20).

In 1994 the Government of National Unity (GNU) adopted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to address the injustices left by apartheid through a transformative approach. The RDP, informed by principles of redress and redistribution was, according to Christie (2008:91), an integrated and coherent strategy for national

development. However, by the end of 1996 this redistribution orientation had faded from the state's agenda, signposted by the adoption of a new macro-development policy, namely GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy), which emphasised the primacy of economic growth (Christie, 2008; Fataar, 2001 and Jansen, 2002).

Commentators pointed out that this shift was in line with the neo-liberal politics of the West, which called for stricter fiscal restraints, resulting in cuts in social spending. Fataar, (2001:20), states that the choice of GEAR to replace the RDP was a clear preference for a 'growth first' strategy on the basis of which redress and redistribution would depend on a trickle-down type of economic policy. GEAR, a neo-liberal macro-economic programme of deregulation, privatisation and fiscal restraints focused on economic growth along lines that would be attractive to international and domestic investment. By 2000, the government had taken a further step towards a neoliberal global framework through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an agreement spearheaded by the leaders of South Africa, Algeria and Nigeria. NEPAD committed itself to African development through integration in the global capitalist economy and partnerships with the international community and highly industrialised countries (Christie, 2008:90-91).

Kallaway (1995) outlines the challenges of this global influence operating in the post-apartheid period: on the one hand there is the commitment to a 'social democratic' project of transformation (as envisaged by the RDP) which highlights issues of equality, social justice and redress. On the other hand is the politics of 'free markets' (as envisaged by GEAR), the legacy of reforming the apartheid state, with the added weight of global economic pressures brought on by global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. According to Kallaway (1995) the influence of these institutions is clearly visible in educational reform policies post-1994; for example, it can be seen in many initiatives adopted by the new government: school governance (decentralisation), curriculum reform (OBE), and qualifications (National Qualification Framework).

Jansen (2002:43) refers to the above trends as 'policy borrowing,' of which the OBE-based school curriculum is a prime example. He point out that OBE evolved out of influences from Australia whilst the NQF relied heavily on New Zealand's education policies. Based on his analysis of the effects of educational policy since the first

democratic elections in 1994 and the implementation of GEAR in 1996, Jansen argues that the record is clear: the distance between privileged schools (mainly but not exclusively white) and disadvantaged schools (mainly black) has in fact increased (2002:45). This notion is expanded by Fleisch (2008:1) with his two education systems explanatory approach. This type of analysis that underscores vast inequalities in schooling in South Africa has been fully explored in Section 2.3 of this chapter.

My study is based on moving the analytical focus beyond political explanations provided by academics such as Jansen, Fataar and Kallaway to a purview that brings the underlying causes and issues of schooling and learning processes in community context into view. The macro-political perspectives that I provide form a conceptual backdrop, that allows me to go a step further, into the heart of educational functioning; in my case it is the learning practices of young people in a specific township context. My study is a direct response to the call by Fleisch (2008) to shift the analytical focus to the study of schooling outcomes in their complex learning contexts.

Research done by Fataar (2007, 2008), Fleisch (2007), Blommaert et al (2006) and Dyers (2007) frames the way I broadly approach student learning practices. Fataar (2008:5) throws the spotlight on the variegated trajectories of educational reform in order to understand what happens to them when they enter local terrain. He combines the lenses of 'space' in particular 'lived space', with 'networks' and 'flows' in order to understand life in the township, and the relationship between nationally mandated policy reform and the school processes that are set in train as a result of these reform enunciations. Fleisch (2008:v) goes a step further to discuss various reasons for the brute inequity in primary school achievement, by highlighting health, nutrition and welfare as constraints on learning. He also looks at the alignment of children's language repertoires, and at the language of learning and teaching in schools. He provides a perfunctory discussion of the influences of family literacy practices on student learning.

Blommaert et.al. (2006) uses the term 'peripheral normativity' to explore literacy practices in township secondary schools where they suggest a local level of organisation in which different solutions are developed to local problems (2006:3). They view townships as peripheral communities isolated from inner cities and suburbs and plagued

by a variety of social and economic difficulties, allowing us to view learning not as a uniform object, but as an ecologically and economically localised one. This is an important first step in analysing learning practices with more sensitivity to local context, use and function, as this study will attempt to do. Dyers (2007), drawing on the work of Blommaert et al. (2006), moves closer to the way I would attempt to understand the nature of student learning practices by introducing the concept of 'truncated multilingualism', which was touched on earlier in this chapter. They throw the spotlight on languages and how they vary in different domains much in the same way that I will attempt to understand learning practices across different spaces, as will be become evident in the next section.

2.8   Conceptual framework that underpins this study

The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1, Figure 1, explains how this study will foreground student learning practices, i.e. against the background of two interlocking spaces: the environmental space (community/home) and the institutional space (school/classroom). A focus on students would help us understand how their learning takes place, since it is here that 'meaning making' takes place. Students draw on knowledges which are gained from both 'lived spaces', they construct and reconstruct knowledge, which is then manifested in the way they speak, think, do, read and write. It is for this reason that I start this discussion by first conceptualizing space and then get into the theories that support the conceptual framework on which this study is based.

Fataar (2008, drawing on the work of Harvey, 2006) speaks about 'lived space' as a way of referring to how people live in particular sites, how they are wired into their geography, and how they transcend this geography. He suggests that lived space throws the analytical spotlight on what people become when engaging their geographies, how they appropriate their space, and invent new practices (2008:1). My interest in 'lived space' lies in how the environment in which these children live influences the way their learning practices are framed, informed and positioned within these spaces.

Nespor (1997) offers us a lens through which to understand the relationship between children and their neighbourhoods. He uses the categories of embeddedness, displacement

and mobility as 'analytical conveniences' that connote the relationship between children and their neighbourhoods. When children live all their lives in the same neighbourhood, they are embedded in neighbourhood routines and city-based activities. Others who move into the area seem displaced, since they still feel as if they belong to their former neighbourhoods, and mobile students move so often that they feel no real attachment to their neighbourhoods (1997:xvii).

Fataar (2007) reiterates Nespor's view by speaking about 'townships on the move' when he attempts to capture a key aspect of the social dynamics of townships by emphasising the mobility of people in light of fluid and ephemeral circumstances (2007:6). Fataar, alludes to the fact that many people who reside in townships are ephemeral and desperate (2007:17). From his ethnographic work in a township, he points out that conditions of townships and people's livelihoods are important in so far as they contribute to certain families' detached attitude to the township in which they reside. He further notes that even though conditions in townships might appear dismal, marked not only by poverty and unemployment but also by high crime levels and violence, their residents normally construct viable and productive livelihoods. They do this by becoming involved in various social, economic and religious activities, which render townships exciting and viable places in which to live (Fataar, 2007:13).

This study therefore attempts to shift the research lenses away from deficit views of students, their homes and communities and focuses on illuminating an array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups which often go unrecognised and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005:69).

Earlier in this review I drew on Bourdieu's notion of habitus, field and capital as a way of understanding why student learning practices are the way they are. I then introduced Yosso's notion of community cultural capital throwing the analytical spotlight on alternative ways to understand student learning practices across the spaces of their learning. These concepts form the core lenses on how this study attempts to view student learning practices in localized settings.
Moll et al (1993) who speak about 'funds of knowledge,' referring to cultural heritage and concepts that parents bring to their children's learning practices, and draw our attention to activities that should be valued in these communities and homes. This

approach recognises how every home builds literacy practices (or as in my case its learning practices), on the basis of its identities, dispositions, stories, objects, artifacts, memories, language and resources (in Pahl and Rowsell, 2005:54). Nespor (1997:169), however, states that by focusing only on household funds of knowledge, we could ignore the funds of knowledge that children draw on that seem to be central to how they make sense of themselves and their environments. He refers to popular culture and 'kids-based funds of knowledge', which he sees as made up of heterogeneous networks of people (adults and peers) and things (representations and technologies). These funds of knowledge should not be ignored when one looks at the learning practices of students since these funds of knowledge or networks and relationships shape their Discourses.

The concepts of 'household funds of knowledge' and 'kids-based funds of knowledge' dovetail with Crompton-Lilly's notion of alternative Discourses (Crompton-Lilly, 2003:22-26). Alternative Discourses are ways of understanding and describing the world that are grounded in people's 'lived experiences'. She argues that alternative Discourses are not merely phenomena or instances of exotic cultural practices but represent people's lived realities and their essential understanding of the world (2003:22). I therefore attempt to move away from deficit ways of viewing township communities, their families, and their students by using the 'conceptual lenses' offered by Bourdieu (1998), Yosso (2005), Nespor (1997), Fataar (2008) and Crompton-Lilly (2003), which will become apparent in the ensuing chapters. These conceptual lenses form the basis for my conceptual framework, which I discuss next.

My conceptual framework was adapted and adjusted from 'Third Space Theory', used in Pahl and Rowsell (2005:13) to understand how student learning practices are framed, informed and positioned in localized context. Third space is a hybrid space, where people draw on multiple funds or resources to make sense of their world (Pane, 2007:79). Here Pane alludes to the fact that 'third space' merges 'first space' (marginalized space) of people's homes, community and peer networks with the 'second space' (privileged or dominant space) of Discourses they encounter in more formalized institutions such as schools. Third Space originated from the work of Bhabha (1994) and Soje (1996).

Bhabha (1994) views third space as a productive, hybrid, cultural space rather than a psychological space, whereas Soja (1996) sees it as an 'in-between' space explicitly

emphasizing the role of the physical, as well as the socialized space in which people interact (cited in Moje et al., 2004:39-43). Both Bhabha and Soja's perspectives of third space lead us to view this space as a physical space where new knowledge will be generated. Guitirrez et al (1999), who take a more educational view of third space, agree that third space is a hybrid space but take this argument in a new direction by stating that in this space new knowledge will not necessarily be generated; instead it can be used more like a scaffold or mediation tool to move students through zones of proximal development towards better honed academic or school knowledges (cited in Moje, et. al., 2004:43). They see third space as a 'bridge' between community or home - based Discourses and school-based Discourses. In this study, borrowing from these theories, I see the area between the environmental space and institutional space not as a physical space but as a conceptual space, which is constructed by these students as they are involved in the discursive practices of knowing, thinking, doing, speaking, reading and writing.

2.9 Conclusion

The literature drawn on in this review provided me with tools for understanding student learning practices within the context of a township school. I have explored a wide range of international and national literature to bring me closer to understanding the issues surrounding my research topic and to be used as a backdrop to the findings in later chapters.

I started this chapter by problematizing student learning, displaying literature that focused on student performance and underachievement. I then drew on literature, which combined the disciplines of psychology and sociology to understand the issues and gain ideas on how children learn. This interdisciplinary approach provided me with useful lenses to understand how children learn their embodied context focusing on the 'Why factor'. This was followed by literature illuminating how power operates in schools and how schooling reproduces inequality, based on sociocultural theory and critical race theory. Literature that locates this study within the broader reform context of South Africa then follows. Here I highlighted issues relating to the neo-liberal influence on policy formation in order to move the analytical focus away from political explanations to a purview that brings the underlying causes and issues that surround student learning practices in context into view.

I ended this chapter by providing literature that helped me construct the conceptual framework that underpins this study, which combines the conceptual lenses of 'space' and 'learning', to understand the nature of student learning practices within a localized context.

The next chapter discusses the methodological issues that I have pursued in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological aspects relating to my study. It offers a rationale for adopting a qualitative methodological paradigm for this study and for choosing ethnography as the most appropriate research design for answering the research question and sub-questions.

My study has a dual purpose: on the one hand I wanted to delve into the nature of student learning practices across two physical 'lived' spaces (as discussed in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2, and within the conceptual framework set out in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.7). On the other hand, I wanted to understand the ideologies, values and attitudes that surround these practices within the context of a township community, home, school and classroom. Probing into the nature of these settings gave me clues on how the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students can be framed or understood within the context of an urban township school within the Western Cape. It illuminated what these learning practices are, how they are used, lived, valued and experienced by students within the spaces of their learning.

This study is therefore qualitative in nature in that it explores an academic problem, which is imbued with social dimensions (Kirunda, 2005:126).   I introduce the chapter with a brief overview of two dominant methodological paradigms. I then proceed by situating my study within a qualitative research paradigm and offer reasons for why the study is underpinned by an interpretivist theoretical paradigm. An explanation of the research design, methods and procedures used in collecting and analysing the data follows. The issues of validity and reliability as well as the ethical considerations pertaining to this study are also discussed.

3.2 Methodological paradigms

The term 'methodological paradigm' includes not only the actual methods and techniques that the social researcher will use but also the underlying principles and assumptions regarding their use (Babbie and Mouton, 2006:49). In this section I briefly illuminate two dominant methodological paradigms: the quantitative methodological paradigm and the qualitative methodological paradigm. I then proceed to the next section by showing why my study is situated within a qualitative methodological paradigm.

Both paradigms are based on assumptions about knowledge and ways of assessing it (Chilisa and Preece, 2005:182). However, they come from different epistemological starting points. I take cognizance of the fact that these paradigms present different ways of viewing the world. Quantitative research is about numbers and statistical analysis. The research is based on scientific methods, is more highly formalised and more explicitly controlled. In contrast to this qualitative research is about words and a search for contextual understanding. The research questions, which define the topic of investigation, are less formalised and more open-ended (Chilisa and Preece, 2005:183). Quantitative research is more concerned with the big picture. It does not explore the 'why factor', or define how and why something happens. Based on statistical representations founded empirical regularities, it says little about how and why something happens.

In my study the emphasis is on understanding learning practices in the context of one township, across two social spaces, as explained previously. I do this by gaining an in-depth understanding of the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in a township school in the Western Cape. I set out to explore their interpretation of their social reality and to understand the underlying reasons for it being the way it is. In this way I pay close attention to the 'why factor', thus positioning this research within a qualitative research paradigm. In the next section I present more compelling reasons for situating my study within a research methodological paradigm.

3.3 Situating my study within a qualitative methodological paradigm

Henning (2004:3) notes that the reason for framing one's study within a qualitative framework lies in the quest for understanding and for in-depth inquiry. In other words, we undertake qualitative research to find out not only what happens but also how it happens and, more importantly, why it happens the way it does. This dovetails with the purpose of my research study as set out above. Using qualitative research not only allows me to examine the phenomenon (student literacy and learning practices) but also enables me to better understand and explain why it is the way it is (exploring the social dynamics embedded in these practices). Like Henning, Cresswell, (1998:15) views qualitative research as an inquiry process but goes further by stating that in qualitative research the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. Denzin and Lincoln (2005), on the other hand, offer a more generic definition of qualitative research by stating that:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including, field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memo's to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (2005:3).

Taking into account their views and the fact that this study took place in the natural setting, it becomes clearer why the study falls within a qualitative methodological paradigm. Learning practices are situated social practices and to understand the dynamics that surround these practices, I needed a research methodology that would capture the participants 'lived experiences', a naturalistic approach to the world. The focus was therefore on people's interpretation of their own social reality in a given situation.

In the following table I show why this study falls within a qualitative research paradigm, by using the main features of qualitative research as suggested by Babbie and Mouton (2006: 271-273) and the features encompassed in the definitions presented above.

TABLE: 1   Features of qualitative methodological paradigm

Features of qualitative research	Features of my research study
Research is conducted in the natural setting of social actors	My study illuminates the nature of the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in the natural setting in which these practices occurs. Research is conducted in the township community, in the family home, in the township school and inside a township classroom.
A focus on process rather than outcome	I spent approximately 9 months on site. Through prolonged engagement in the field I was able to study the social phenomenon (student learning practices) over time, enabling me to study events as they occurred (their lived experiences) rather than in retrospect.
The actor's perspective (the insider or emic perspective) is emphasized	To understand how the participants in this study live, experience and value their learning practices I attempted to immerse myself in their culture, to see things the way they see them and understand their actions from the standpoint of their unique context and background.
The primary aim is in-depth ('thick') descriptions and understanding of actions.	In my field notes I attempted to use 'thick' descriptions or detailed descriptions of specifics or what I observed, using categories and concepts used by the four respondents so as to stay true to the meanings of the participants themselves.
The main concern is to understand social actions in terms of its specific context (idiographic motive) rather than attempting to generalize to some theoretical population.	I aimed to describe and understand students' learning practices in the context of an urban township, in an urban township school and in an urban township classroom. In using a contextualist or holistic research strategy I aimed to understand events within the concrete, natural context in which they occur (Babbie and Mouton, 2006:272).
The qualitative researcher is seen as the 'main instrument' in the research process	I realised that in order to generate legitimate and truthful 'insider descriptions' of the events under study I had to remain unbiased in my descriptions and interpretations of the events under study.

The purpose of this table is to capture the features of qualitative research and show how my study fits within this methodological paradigm.

Table 1 clearly captures the main features of my study and how it fits into the qualitative methodological paradigm. It also shows why a quantitative methodological paradigm, which is too focused on finding causal relationships, is ill suited to capturing the lived experiences of the students in my study. Quantitative research fails to take into account the complex and multiple contexts in which my study occurs. As pointed out by Chilisa and Preece (2005:142) qualitative research is value laden and context dependent. This view is reiterated by Clarke, (2008:2) who notes that qualitative research, which is underpinned by an interpretivist theoretical paradigm is normally context bound and not universal. It offers a more holistic approach by taking into account people's experiences, insights and perspectives, and by studying them in the setting within which they occur.

Qualitative research is not without criticism. It is seen to be too unstructured, less rigorous and not easy to generalize. However, Clarke (2008:5) notes that the fact that findings cannot be generalized should not be seen as a limitation. In his research he places emphasis on what is actually happening rather than on what ought to happen. He further notes that "studies which are able to document in rich contextual detail individual experience, should surely cast light at the 'chalkface', in ways which can play a powerful role in informing policy, particularly at the crucial phase of classroom implementation" (2008:5).

3.4   Metatheoretical framework that underpins this study

In the previous section I positioned my study within a qualitative methodological paradigm. In this section I delve into the metatheoretical framework that underpins the study. In other words, I offer a motivation for positioning my research within a particular theoretical paradigm. Henning (2004:17-25) presents three theoretical paradigms in which one can position one's study viz. positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms. She associates certain key verbs with each paradigm. The verbs 'predict' and 'test' are normally associated with the positivist theoretical paradigm. The verbs 'understand' and 'construct' assume an interpretivist theoretical paradigm, while the verbs 'improve' and 'change' hint at a critical paradigm (2004:16).

As this research endeavours to understand the nature of student learning practices in the context of a township primary school, an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm is required. According to Sherman and Webb (1988:7), interpretive research implies:

> …. a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'….research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or live it (1988:7)

Studying the participants in their naturalistic setting, expressing their views about the setting in which they find themselves, ultimately places this study within an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivist research is fundamentally concerned with meaning; it seeks to understand social members' definitions and understandings of situations (Henning, 2004:21). I therefore took the 'insider' or 'emic' perspective immersing myself in the culture of the participants under study and trying to understand their actions, decisions, behaviours, practices, rituals and so on, from their own perspective (Babbie and Mouton, 2006:271). The following table sums up the main features of the three paradigms as based on the work of Babbie and Mouton (2006) and Henning (2004):

TABLE 2:   The main features of three metatheoretical paradigms

Main features	Positivist paradigm	Interpretivist paradigm	Critical paradigm
How they operate/view the world	They operate by laws of cause and effect that researchers can detect by means of scientific analysis	They attempt to understand the social phenomena through the meanings people assign to them	They seek to bring about change through the deconstruction and reconstruction of the world
Role of researcher	**Etic or outsider perspective**. Aim is to control the investigation never letting emotions, feelings or thoughts influence the object of the research	Emic or insider perspective Aim is not to control the research process but to be a co-creator of meaning	Participatory perspective Aim is a collaboration between the researcher and the subject. They work as equal partners in the research process
Methodological paradigm it is associated with	Quantitative paradigm	Qualitative paradigm	Participatory action paradigm

I have already established from Table 1 that my study is situated within a qualitative methodological paradigm. The features of the interpretivist approach, as opposed to positivist and critical theorists as set out in Table 2, further proves why my study should be underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm. By taking into account the multiple perspectives of the players in the social setting, eg. the community, home school and classroom, an interpretivist paradigm is well suited for giving voice to the participants in my study. In this way I could capture and interpret the meanings they assign to their learning practices when they are involved in discursive practices of speaking, knowing, doing, reading and writing.

3.5 Research design

The qualitative research design that I selected for my study is ethnography. In this section I present various views on what ethnography entails with the purpose of deriving the main features of this design. I also explain why I opted to use ethnographic research as the most appropriate research design in my study.

3.5.1 Origin and approaches to ethnographic research

'Ethno' means people or folk and 'graph' means to describe or write. Ethnography refers, then, to social scientific writing about particular folk (Silverman, 2003:43). According to Silverman (2003:43), the origins of ethnography are in the work of nineteenth-century anthropologists who immersed themselves in different cultures in order to understand the world 'first hand'. Today, ethnography encompasses a much broader range of work, from studies of groups in one's own culture to experimental writing to political interventions.

Sandy (1979), (cited in Myers 1999:7-9), divides ethnography into the holistic, semiotic and behaviourist schools of thought. Each of these schools of thought approaches ethnography differently. The holistic school emphasises that empathy and identification are needed with the social grouping being observed. This way of doing ethnography was adopted by anthropologists who 'go native' and live just like the local people. According to Myers, they become like a blank slate in order to fully understand local, social and

cultural patterns (1999:7). He further likens, 'going native' as becoming like a sponge, soaking up the language and culture of the people under study.

Clifford Geertz, who is the 'foremost' proponent of the thick description (semiotic) school, points out that it is possible to describe and analyse another culture without empathising with its people. According to him ethnographers need not have empathy with their subjects. They have to search out and analyse symbolic forms: words, images, institutions and behaviours with respect to one another and to the whole that they comprise. He argues that one needs to understand the 'webs of significance', which people weave within the cultural context (cited in Myers, 1999:8). These 'webs of significance', can only be described and communicated through thick descriptions of the situation and its context.

Myers (1999) points us to another approach to ethnography, called 'critical ethnography'. This approach sees ethnographic research as an emergent process, involving a dialogue between the ethnographer and the people in the research setting. He further points out that critical ethnographers also tend to "open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain" (1999:8).

In this study I gravitated towards Clifford Geertz's approach to ethnography by using thick descriptions to describe and analyse the learning practices of four students in an urban township school. I certainly cannot claim to have gone 'native' since I entered the township, moved with these students through school, visited them in their homes and then left to go back to my middle- class suburb.

3.5.2   Main features of ethnographic research

There are various views on what ethnography is. Creswell (1998:246) defines ethnography as the study of an intact cultural or social group (or an individual or individuals within a group) based primarily on observations over a prolonged period of time spent by the researcher in the field. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) state that ethnographic research has as its primary task to

> uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular
> settings come to understand, account for, take actions, and

> manage their situation as well as the problems and difficulties
> they encounter (2005:193).

Myers (1999) on the other hand notes that we should not confuse ethnographic research with a case study. The main difference between a case study and ethnographic research is the extent to which the researcher immerses her- or himself in the life of the social group under study. This view is reiterated by Yin (1994:4) who states that ethnography usually requires the researcher to spend a long period of time in the 'field'. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) and Spradley (1979), note that the concept 'culture' is a central concept in ethnographic research. According to Gall et al. (1996), ethnography is used to reveal cultural patterns in the naturalistic setting. Spradley, (1979) states that we can define 'culture' as behaviour patterns associated with particular groups of people, that is, their customs, or with people's 'way of life'. However, he adds that to define 'culture' in this way is helpful for some purposes but obscure the crucial distinction between the 'outsider' and 'insider' points of view. For him, 'culture' can be described and interpreted from more than one perspective. The goal of ethnography should be to 'grasp the native's point of view' (Spradley, 1979:5). Thus he advocates that one should take the emic (insider) perspective when doing ethnographic research.

These various views on ethnography are crucial because they bring us to the main features of ethnographic research. I want to highlight three key aspects: 1) immersion in the field, 2) the role of the researcher and 3) the time spent in the field, as they pertain to the way I went about my research. Firstly, there is the issue of 'immersion in the field'. Spradley (1979) identifies three types of immersion, total immersion, partial immersion and spot observations. Total immersion refers to 'living the research,' where ethnographers who live and work among the people they study are totally immersed in the research. Partial immersion is appropriate when being an 'insider' is not crucial to data collection. According to Spradley, one can still become familiar with the setting and develop a rapport with people without total immersion (1979:187). He goes further to state that reliable data can still be collected without 'living the research'. Spot observations are single episodes of observing. In this study I was partially immersed in the culture of the township under study, since I cannot claim total immersion. Even though I spent over a year at the research site, I did not fully 'live the research'. I travelled in and out of the township area where I undertook the research, spent considerable time observing the

complexities of living and going to school in the township, but I do not claim to have been totally immersed in the field.

Secondly, the role of researcher in ethnography is an important feature since it sets it aside from other qualitative research designs. Qualitative field researchers can be classified as either participant observers or non-participant observers (Spradley, 1979:192). Participant observation is normally associated with ethnography. The participant observers are actively engaged in the life of the setting they study. In addition to observing they perform functions and enact roles that are meaningful to the people in the setting. Thus, the researcher is not only the instrument of data collection but also an actor in the social scene she or he is studying. In non-participant observation, on the other hand, the researcher only has one primary task, that of observation. One therefore remains an 'outsider' in the research process.

Over the course of my time in the field my role gradually changed from being a non-participant observer (an outsider) to becoming a participant observer (insider). Initially the first few months I took the role of non-participant observer to gain a holistic picture of my surroundings. As Spradley (1979:195) points out, being a non-participant observer is advantageous for maintaining social distance from those being observed. I review the strengths and weaknesses of being a participant observer later when I discuss the data collection process.

A third key feature of ethnography is time spent in the field. This sets it aside from other qualitative research designs. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:137), in an ethnography the researcher looks at an entire group, more specifically a group that shares a common culture, in depth. The researcher studies this group for a lengthy period of time, often several months or years, in its natural setting. Prolonged engagement in the company of the participants under study and across the spaces in which they acquire their learning practices was crucial to the outcome of this research, which is captured in the subsequent chapters. It gave me time to observe and record processes which would have been almost impossible to learn by using any other approach. No research design is without benefits and limitations. In the following section I discuss the main benefits and limitations associated with doing ethnographic research.

3.5.3 Benefits associated with ethnographic research

One of the most valuable aspects of ethnographic research is its depth (Myers, 1999:6). Through prolonged engagement, over a period of 9 months, I was able to partially immerse myself in the school and its surroundings. I gained an in-depth understanding of the people, the organisation and the broader context on which this study is based. As Grill (1998b, cited in Myers, 1999) points out, by going to 'where the action is' the field researcher develops an intimate familiarity with the dilemmas, frustrations, routines, relationships and risks, that are part of everyday life. Time spent in the 'field' also enabled me to question aspects normally taken for granted. Gall et al. (1996:786) states "no other research tradition matches the ability of ethnography to investigate the complex phenomena known as culture." This is possible because ethnographers are able to immerse themselves in the daily lives of people and describe their way of life, their cultural patterns and perspectives, in their natural settings.

3.5.4 Limitations associated with ethnographic research

I came to realise that ethnographic research takes a lot longer than any other kind of research and is normally done for doctorial studies. Myers (1999:7) notes that when doing ethnographic research it takes longer to do fieldwork, analyse material and write up the text. Another limitation of ethnography is that it does not have breadth, in that one is studying only one culture, in one particular context. This, as Myers, (1999:7) points out, is a common criticism of ethnographic research. As a result, findings cannot be generalized.

De Vos et. al. (2005) allude to the fact that ethnographic fieldwork is not a straightforward, unproblematic procedure whereby the researcher enters the field, collects data and leaves the field unscathed. They equate ethnographic fieldwork to "a minefield riddled with potential moral and ethical pitfalls" (2005:231).

Regardless of these limitations, ethnographic research is still a very 'productive research method' considering the amount and likely substance of the research findings (Myers, 1999:7). Even though findings cannot be generalized, we must keep in mind that the purpose of any qualitative study is not to generalise findings, but to describe each setting

in its uniqueness, leaving the reader to decide whether what is described is transferable to other settings (Chilisa and Preece, 2005: 142).

To overcome the limitations associated with doing ethnographic research, I had to prepare myself emotionally and physically. I kept in mind that to answer my research questions using ethnographic research meant an enormous time commitment, a deep personal involvement, commitment and the courage to face and deal with dangerous situations. The ethnographic research processes followed in this study are described next.

3.5.5   Doing the ethnography/qualitative research instruments used

In this section I describe the research instruments associated with ethnographic research and how I used these to collect my data, drawing largely on the work done by James Spradley (1979).

Data collection methods across the two spaces (see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.3) included: observations (non-participant observation and participant observation) recorded in field notes; interviews (unstructured and structured interviews, individual and focus group interviews) conducted in various settings in the community, home and school; photographs of particular spaces (township community, home and school space); and documents and artifacts (policy documents, worksheets, notices to parents, student profiles, texts produced by students). I end this section with a summary of my research questions and the data collection procedures used in each case.

3.5.5.1   Field notes (as non participant and participant observer)

According to Spradley, field notes are the primary source of questions, speculations, and reflections in ethnographic research, and they function as the basis for generating theories (1979:192). I agree with this statement since I found my field notes to be absolutely indispensable in doing site-based fieldwork. Initially, the field notes were written up whilst doing non-participant observations. When I first gained access to the site (gaining access will be discussed later in this chapter) I needed to find a holistic picture of the dynamics that played off in and around the school. In order to do this I limited my researcher's responsibility to one primary activity: observation. Spradley notes that this is

useful in that it not only facilitates data collection but, since the observer is an 'outsider' makes it easier for people to talk (1979:196).

I wrote up the field notes in chronological order, noting that everything I observed constituted potential data: words, behaviour, events and self-reflections. I divided my notes into two sections: one to describe everything as it was and the other to write up my reflections. The latter included my impressions of what I was observing and the hunches, and questions that emerged. This I would later write up in the form of an analytical memo or conceptual memo. According to Hammersly and Atkinson (1983), analytical memos are periodic written notes whereby progress is assessed, emergent ideas identified, and research strategy sketched out, (cited in Myers, 1999:9). I found this of great use whilst doing this study since it afforded me the chance to link what I observed with theory. Thus I kept in line with most ethnographic research work by doing data collection, reflection and analysis simultaneously.

Later, as my role as researcher changed from 'outsider' to 'insider', or from non-participant observer to participant observer (defined earlier), writing up the field notes became more detailed. Being drawn into the lesson by a teacher, taking over reading periods every second day, being drawn into arranging the catering for a function or being invited to staff functions held at the school, placed me in a participant observer position. There are some advantages attached to this way of collecting data. The potential for being intrusive and inhibiting ordinary behaviour is minimized when the researcher is perceived as an 'insider' (Spradley, 1979:192). A further advantage is that it affords opportunities for interactions with members of the setting that are not available to someone who is just observing (1979:192). My experience in taking over the reading period during the first term, gave me the opportunity to interact with the students under study, which would not have been the case had I been merely observing the teacher. Not only did I become familiar with the norms and routines of the place first-hand, but I also got to know the participants on a more personal level. Spradley, however, warns of the limitations involved in being a participant observer (1979:193). According to him, over time close relationships between the researcher and participants are inevitable as people confide in the observer, relate intimate details of their lives, or simply interact from day to day. On the flipside, some experiences can be offensive and distasteful, like the treatment of children in certain classrooms, which I will illuminate in the findings chapters. Here he

suggests that one takes periodic 'time-outs', which I found useful to re-establish perspective and to do some self-reflection.

3.5.5.2   Interviews in ethnographic research

Ethnographic interviews are described as a 'particular kind of speech event' which is used to gather cultural data (De Vos et al., 2005:297). In ethnography research interviews can be unscheduled, off-the-cuff interactions which occur informally as part of everyday life in the natural setting.   They can also be scheduled, formal arrangements with specific people for particular purposes (Spradley, 1979:199). He goes further to suggest three main types of questions:

> ➢ Descriptive questions allow the researcher to collect a sample of the participant's language
> ➢ Structural questions discover the basic units in cultural knowledge
> ➢ Contrast questions provide the researcher with the meaning of various terms in the participant's language
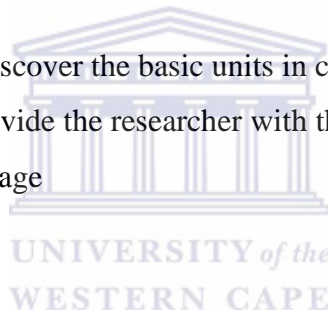
Informal interviews are not prearranged; they involve asking questions about an event or interactions immediately after these occur to check the participant's perceptions against the researcher's. Formal interviews involve some planning, including designing an interview schedule in order to cover topics or specific questions that need to be explored. I used both informal and formal interviews in my study. The informal interviews were normally conducted in and around the school, in classrooms, in corridors, in the office or any space in the natural setting.

On first entering the field, I shared an office with a senior teacher who was a valuable resource during my research study. I regard our morning chats about events at school or his perceptions about life in the township as crucial to my research. Most informal interviews were not tape recorded since I wanted the participants to feel at ease. I did, however, make notes with their permission, which I would clarify and elaborate on, on completion of the interview. Smit et al. (1995:17, cited in De Vos et al., 2005), mention that a tape recorder, permits a much fuller record than notes and also allows the

researcher to concentrate on the proceedings, but has the disadvantage that the participants may not feel happy being taped, and may even withdraw from the study.

Informal interviews were undertaken with the Principal, informants, members of the community (police officers, social workers, community workers, church leaders) to get their perspective on what it is like for children to acquire their learning practices in the context of an urban township. It also gave me insight into the socio-spatial dynamics of this township community.

Five out of the six teachers responsible for 6A completed a questionnaire (a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A). The sixth teacher, who did not complete the questionnaire, claimed that he had too much administrative work and did not have the time. Only three teachers participated in a formal interview, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes in school after teaching hours. The questionnaire was used as a basis to formulate questions for the formal structured interview (A copy of the teacher interview schedule can be found in Appendix B). Their perspective on the dynamics of teaching in a township school was crucial to the findings in Chapter 5.

I conducted a family interview (of 45-60 minutes) in the homes of each of the six students who made up the initial research unit for this study. The family interviews were important for gaining insight into the home life of these students so as to elicit the learning practices in the home space (Interview schedule in Appendix C). Only four students were selected to form the research unit for this study.

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with the research unit (a group of four Grade 6 students). A number of unstructured focus group interviews were conducted with the research unit. This was useful in that the students spoke more freely when in a group. It also revealed different kinds of learning practices and provided me with direct observation of "peer funds of knowledge" (Moje et al, 2004:39), a conceptual hook in understanding student learning practices.

One formal individual interview was conducted with each of the four participants. All four received the same general initial interview, which was not taped recorded. The transcribed interview was used to compile the student profiles (Appendix D), which I

elaborate on later when discussing sampling issues (in 3.6). The second interview followed the family interview and classroom observations to illuminate the student perspective of their learning practices. The interview schedule was therefore compiled from home interviews, classroom observations and student diaries, which they kept whilst on holiday. It tried to stick to predetermined questions, most of the time the interview would follow the lines of conversation that the students initiated. The children in their innocence described their views on various issues surrounding their learning practices.

3.5.5.3   Documents, photographs and artifacts

Documents relating to student learning practices in school and artifacts (texts, posters, cards etc. produced by students) were collected over time. Photographs of school events, the school building, surrounding areas (the township community), and the homes where the students under study reside were taken to capture the dynamics of the spaces in which these students acquire their learning practices. I also drove through the township on many occasions to understand the physical space that is available to these students and in a way to position myself in that space. Here I found the photographs useful since each photograph had a story to tell in that it captured the kinds of businesses, homes and public spaces in this area (these photographs can be found in Appendix E

3.6 Summary

TABLE 3: Research questions and the data collection procedures used in this stud

Research questions	Type of data Collected	Data collection instruments used	Source of the data collection
1. What is the nature of student literacy and learning practices in the environmental space?	Qualitative	Observations Photographs Artifacts Unstructured interviews	Community members Police Social workers Life choice workers Parents
2. What is the nature of the literacy and learning practices in the school space?	Qualitative	Nonparticipant observations Participant observations Formal interviews Informal interviews Documents Artifacts	Principal Teachers Life choice reps. Informants Research unit
3. What is the nature of the literacy and learning practices in the classroom space?	Qualitative	Nonparticipant observation Participant observation Formal interviews Informal interviews Focus group and Individual interviews Photographs Artifacts	Teachers of the Grade 6 class Research unit

3.7 Sampling procedure

In this section I discuss the sampling methods that I used and elaborate on the process of gaining access to the school (school sample) and selecting the research unit (learner sample). De Vos et al. (2005: 328-330) suggest six types of sampling to be used in qualitative research: purposive, theoretical, deviate case, sequential, snowball and volunteer sampling. I describe two common sampling techniques used in qualitative research and then indicate which one I found more appropriate to my study.

Purposive sampling- The researcher must first think critically about the parameters of the population and then choose the sample case accordingly. Clear identification and formulation of criteria for selection of respondents is of cardinal importance. In this case, the researcher not only keeps clear criteria in mind but also provides a rationale for her or his decisions. 'The search for data must be guided by processes that will provide rich detail to maximise the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about that context' (2005:329).

Theoretical sampling – In this case an increasing interest in the emerging theory guides the selection of the sampling cases. According to De Vos et al., in this case the qualitative researcher pays less attention to statistical sampling and more attention to her orhis emerging theoretical framework (2005:329).

In this study I used purposive sampling as a means to select the research site and the research unit, since the purposeful selection of key participants is a key decision point in any qualitative study. I based my decisions on distinct criteria since I wanted to gain maximum information about data relevant to my research question from the sample. The way I used purposive sampling is evident in my discussion on the school sample (3.6.1) and the learner sample (3.6.2) that follow.

3.7.1   School sample/gaining access to the site

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:137) 'site-based fieldwork is the *sine qua non*, the essence, of any ethnography'. Doing site-based fieldwork over a prolonged period of time

afforded me the opportunity to observe and record processes related to the cultural group, which would have been impossible to learn using any other research design.

The first step in any ethnographic study, I came to learn, is to gain access to an appropriate site for answering ones research question and sub-questions. The site I would eventually select had to address my research problem, thus it had to have certain features. It had to be a school situated in an urban township area and one serving underprivileged children. Not only would I be able to gain the most benefits for my study from this site but it was also a requirement of my sponsors, Maskew Miller Longman Foundation (MML). My research, although independently done, would benefit MML's work in improving literacy and numeracy levels in underprivileged schools. The school I selected would in turn benefit through this partnership with MML by allowing me to complete my research at the school. Thus gaining access to the site was not as difficult as expected.

I initially interviewed two principals (the gatekeepers) to get a broad overview of the area and the two schools. My final decision was based on choosing the school which would benefit the most from a partnership with my sponsors since both schools fulfilled the initial criteria for my study. Once the site was selected I proceeded by establishing rapport with the Principal, staff and students. I needed to gain their trust and become familiar with the day-to-day functioning of the school. At first I used a 'big net approach' as suggested by Fetterman (1989, cited in Leedy and Ormrod, 2005:137), intermingling with everyone and getting an overall sense of the cultural context. The next step was to identify key informants who could provide me with insights relevant to the research question and who could facilitate contacts with other helpful individuals. I then proceeded over time (the first three months) to select the research unit.

3.7.2   Student sample/ selecting the research unit

The research unit consisting of four Grade 6 students', was selected on the basis of two unstructured interviews and after the students had completed two small assignments based on the work done by Blommaert et al (2005a). The purpose of doing the two assignments was to determine the final unit of analysis based on purposive sampling.

Assignment 1:   LANGUAGE SPIRAL

Students had to draw and complete a language mind map. I used this as a tool to discover the different languages they used in different spaces. The results were striking; noting that although these students are registered with English as their first language and regard English as their mother tongue, they speak and interact in multiple languages depending on the physical space they occupy. This is explained in the next two chapters.

Assignment 2:   LIKES AND DISLIKES

This was a written assignment. Students were given a series of questions to help me discover more about them: how they felt about reading and writing, what they did in their spare time, how they felt about the school, what their favourite subjects were, their hobbies, etc.

Interviews to determine the research unit

Two unstructured group interviews were undertaken. The first one was with the entire Grade 6 class consisting of 34 students. I interviewed them in groups of eight. These group interview sessions were helpful in making the students more comfortable to talk to me. They spoke more openly and freely in groups than alone. Questions covered in this session, aimed to determine the family dynamics of the students and their location in the township: where they lived, who they shared their homes with, their parents' occupations, the students' ages and the ages of siblings sharing their homes, whether they travelled outside the township and what they wanted to become when they finished school. I then used the results from the two assignments, as well as the outcome of the unstructured interview, to compile the final student profiles and arrive at the preliminary choice of six students who would be the research subjects for the study.

The second unstructured interview was conducted with the group of six Grade 6 students. The aim of this interview was mainly to confirm issues discussed in the previous interview and to inform the students that they would form part of my research unit. The final research unit, consisting of four Grade six students, was selected on the basis of purposive sampling, after the data collection process. These students, three girls and one boy, provided me with the maximum information relevant to answering my research

questions. Their rich narratives provided me with the means to answer the research questions and to achieve the aims of this study.

3.8 Data analysis

I sought to use a narrative approach in this thesis since it is not only an accepted mode of qualitative research, but also seemed the most appropriate means of relaying the lived experiences of the four students across the spaces of their learning. I am reminded of Richardson's words:

> How should we write? If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we should value the narrative (Richardson, 1995:218-9).

Clarke (2008:5) notes that in literature, the term *narrative* is employed to signify a variety of meanings, although more recently qualitative researchers have attended to a more limited definition in which narrative refers to a particular type of discourse- the story. Drawing on the work of Polkinghorne (1995), Clarke further notes that in narrative analysis a researcher collects descriptions of events and happenings and synthesizes or configures them by means of a plot into a story in this way the purpose of narrative analysis is to produce stories as the outcome of the research. In other words, the narratives expressing the learning practices of the four students in both the environmental and institutional spaces can be seen as both, the process and the product, the phenomenon and the method of the research. Like Clarke, I was strongly influenced by the work of Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, who described their approach as follows:

> Narrative, for us, is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in future. Deliberating storying and restorying one's life or a group or a cultural story is therefore a fundamental method of personal growth and social growth: it is a fundamental quality of education (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:24).

Narrative inquiry as conceptualised by Connelly and Clandinin, is a process of data collection, mutual narrative interpretation by practitioners and researchers, more data collection and further narrative reconstruction (Clarke, 2008:6).

The analysis took place on two levels. I started with the data collection whilst doing observations, with reflections in the form of analytical memos. I found transcribing my own interviews extremely useful in the analysis process since I could record common themes and categories that emerged during this transcribing process.

3.9 Objectivity, validity and reliability

According to Nieman et al. (2000), objectivity in quantitative research is regarded as the absence of bias and subjective opinions. In qualitative research researchers acknowledge their own subjective opinions, while allowing the object being studied to 'speak for itself', or as Leedy and Ormrod (2005:139) put it, 'ethnographers give their participants voice', that ensures that the data gathered is objective and unbiased.

Macmillan and Schumacher (2001:408) summarise strategies that can be used to enhance design validity in qualitative research, as in Table 4:

Table 4: Strategies used in this study to enhance validity

Strategy	Description
Prolonged and persistent fieldwork	Allows interim data analysis and corroboration to ensure the match between findings and participant reality
Multi method strategy	Allows triangulation in data collection and data analysis
Participant language; verbatim accounts	Obtain literal statements from participants and quotations from documents
Low inference descriptors	Records precise, almost literal and detailed descriptions of people and situations
Mechanically recorded data	Use of tape recorders and photographs
Participant researcher	Use of participants recorded perceptions in diaries for collaboration
Member checking	Check informally with participants for accuracy during data collection, frequently done as participant observer
Participant review	Ask participants to review researchers synthesis of all interviews for accuracy of representation

The above strategies were all used to ensure validity in my study. I fully allowed for triangulation in data collection and in doing my analysis used the multiple strategies as suggested in Table 4.

According to Krathwohl (1998), triangulation is the most common method used for enhancing validity in qualitative research. He defines triangulation as 'a process of using more than one source of information, confirming data from different sources, confirming observations from different observers and confirming information from different data collection methods', (1998:276). He further expands on three types of triangulation: data, investigator and method triangulation. Data triangulation involves using multiple sources of data. Investigator triangulation involves using multiple investigators (more than one researcher) to collect data at the same site. Method triangulation refers to using multiple sources of methods to collect data. The information I give in Table 3 provides evidence of both data triangulation and method triangulation as used to validate this study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Written permission to conduct the research was requested from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) via MML to conduct research in the school (refer to Appendix F). I was also granted permission by the Principal and staff during a staff meeting in September 2008; this was imperative because of my prolonged stay in the school. All participants involved in the study were assured of anonymity and all information was handled with confidentiality. As noted by Clarke (2008:14), ethical considerations particularly when engaging in life history and narrative work, is one of the major issues in this kind of research. I was especially mindful of the vulnerability of the minor children used in this study. It was important for me to build trust with them and ensure their safety. Consent forms where signed by parents or guardians before interviews took place (refer to Appendix F). As pointed out by Hatch and Wisniewski (1995), the vulnerability of subjects is a real concern since exposing one's self to another in the research process involves issues of trust, truthful-telling, fairness, respect, commitment and justice. My research sought to be a trust-based, open and a consultative process (Karlsson, 2009). It was crucial for me to gain the trust of the students by allowing them to understand that I meant them no harm or discomfort and that they could withdraw at any time during the research process.

CHAPTER 4

The nature of student learning practices in the environmental space

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that focus on the nature of the learning practices of four Grade 6 students in the environmental space, and to understand how their learning practices are framed, informed and positioned within the space of the township community and their homes. The chapter covers the following: firstly, I draw on the extensive work done by Millstein (2007) and Fataar (2007), to offer a description of the township on which this study is based. I do this to illustrate the socio-spatial dynamics of this township, which serves as a platform for understanding the underlying causes and issues that inform these students' learning practices.

I then proceed by using the 'analytical conveniences' of embeddedness, displacement and mobility suggested by Nespor (1997), to show the relationship between these students and their neighbourhood. I present findings that suggest that, although these students reside in the same neighbourhood they appear to experience it differently (1997: xvii). I will be using these lenses not as a means to mark or code students in any way, only to show how they are positioned and how they navigate this positioning.

This chapter therefore focuses on their environmental transactions in their neighbourhood and their homes, which is crucial to understanding the nature of their learning practices within the environmental space. It aims to identify what the learning practices of these students are and how they acquire these learning practices in the way they do.

A rich narrative of each student's 'lived experience' within the environmental space follows the description of the township. I use the following themes that emerged after coding and categorizing the data: each student's socio-spatial context, use and availability of resources, parental involvement, social networking and linguistic proficiency. At the end of each narrative I will pull together the various strands emanating from each student's story with the aim of linking them to the research question, which is: What are the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape?

4.2 Socio-spatial dynamics of Dawood

Dawood (pseudonym) is an urban township in the Western Cape, originally planned as a 'coloured' residential area. Fataar (2007: 11) notes that housing was used by the apartheid state to garner support among subordinate groups and to help reproduce Cape Town's racial geography. According to Millstein (2007:35), after 1994 the housing development in this area was used as a tool for racial integration, in which 50% of housing was allocated to 'coloureds' and 50% to 'blacks'. She notes that government, donors and private developers operating in Dawood tended to see the area as a racially divided community fuelled with conflict, but failed to see how this cultural diversity might be a potential for community empowerment (Millstein, 2007:35). Like Millstein, I observed how members of this community work together through informal social networks; they talk to each other, work together and support each other on a daily basis (Millstein, 2007:35). The reality is that this community faces harsh and violent crimes daily especially against woman and children, people live in poverty, and there are high levels of unemployment. Nevertheless, although the situation may seem dismal, this culturally diverse community constructs viable and productive livelihoods through its involvement in social, economic and religious activities (Fataar, 2007:13). The township dynamics are captured by one parent [Lebo's grandmother] during our interview session:

> ....it is really upsetting sometimes really because here just in this
> area, here in this area it is mixed up, because there's very coloured
> people, black people just come together at the same time but the
> situation in this place is not good anyway. There is 'tik', lot of
> drugs, lots of stuff happening.

The lack of economic development and few job opportunities had raised unemployment rates to around 56% (Statistics South Africa, Census 2005). The principal of the school estimates this figure to be much higher, at between 75% and 90%, especially with reference to the community that his school serves. This causes many people to either look for casual work, or open survivalist businesses, or even turn to unlawful ways of doing business, such as drug and liquor trafficking (shebeens or taverns are flourishing businesses in most township areas).

The area has a high mobility rate which places extra strain on housing, schooling and other social services in the area. In an interview with me the principal noted that "in the morning on my way to school I would see them laying five slabs on the sandy plots allocated for houses and by the end of the school day there would be a house standing there." He also noted that city planners failed to consider that these houses would be occupied by families with school-going children and that this would place an extra burden on schools in the area. There are 14 schools in the area and only one library, one police station and one day care hospital. The houses, which vary in size, are boxed together and are of a poor quality. The following extract is taken from my field notes dated September 2008 and provides some insight into life in the township:

It is 7.30 am and the township is abuzz with activity. It is a windy day, sections of the road are covered in white sand. Dawood is known for being a very desolate and sandy area. Hawkers are packing out their goods for the day; the main road is lined with various container businesses owned mostly by 'foreigners' from neighbouring African countries who moved to South Africa in search of a better life. This minority group owns most of the container- run businesses ranging from hair salons to spaza shops. People are streaming in and out of the township, mainly being transported by mini- buses or taxi's, as they are known here. I notice many school- going children, either waiting at various stops to be transported out of the township to schools in more affluent areas or walking to schools in and around the township. I travel down the main road noticing the free- standing homes built on sand, with no foundation, and much smaller than the home I left this morning to get here.

It takes me quite a while to reach the school because of the amount of traffic on the main road but as I am driving I notice children streaming into the high school that is completely fenced in, with three or four security guards at the entrance of the school reminding me of a prison. I pass more container businesses and a few house shops and as I take the turn into the road where the school is situated I notice a community centre, a mosque, a church and houses smaller than the ones further up the road. The houses, which are practically built on the doorstep of the school, remind me of the container businesses, small and boxed together. At different points along the school fence are packets containing chips and sweets, hanging on the fence like washing on a washing line. I later discover that these survivalist businesses are common to the area and are normally operated by unemployed parents who are trying to make a living for the day.

The extract above dovetails with the aspects previously discussed with regards to life in this township and what these children experience on a daily basis (Photographs depicting this experience can be viewed in Appendix E). I will now proceed to use the 'analytical tools' of embeddedness, displacement and mobility, suggested by Nespor (1997) and developed in

Chapter 2 (Section 2.8), to illustrate the relationship between each student and the township.

According to Nespor (1997: 94), we cannot regard space as static since it is constantly lived, experienced and reordered by those who move through it. He further notes that kids living in the same neighbourhood tend to experience their spaces of activity differently (1997: xvii). Shafiek could be seen as embedded in his spatial environment, in that he occupies this space fairly routinely: moving between home, school and maddrassa on a daily basis. He is connected to his neighbourhood through family relationships, but his movement is fairly restricted due to his knowledge of the township. He lived in this township most of his life. His mother noted that: "I'm constantly aware of where my children are. They only allowed to play in front and next door by my sister".

Bongiwe, in contrast to Shafiek, still shows a strong sense of identification with her place of birth. She would therefore be regarded as a 'displaced' student, moving only in the immediate vicinity of her home (Nespor, 1997:94). Bongiwe lives a fairly isolated life, with limited friendship networks. This appears to be as a result of her strong attachment to East London where her extended family resides. She expresses these feelings of isolation: "There [referring to East London] are open spaces there, here it's small and boring. There my cousins live but here I'm alone". This detachment from her neighbourhood space explains why she finds it difficult to re-establish spatial routines (Nespor: 1997: xvii). I elaborate on this later on in this chapter.
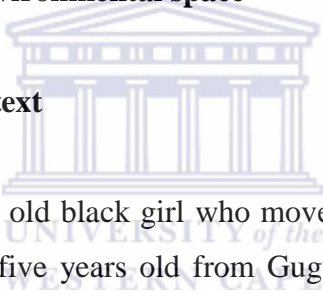
In contrast to Shafiek and Bongiwe, Lebo and Tasneem can both be regarded as mobile students. I would regard Lebo as 'spatially-dislocated' in that there appears to be a disconnection between her and her environmental space, which is manifested in the way she denounces her culture. This can be attributed to what Fataar (2007:14) regards as 'spatial-hopping', which I take a step further to suggest that her identity shifts in accordance to the space she occupies. Her constant movement from the township to more affluent areas in the Western Cape and her relationship with a white family, which I describe later in this chapter, is evidence of this practice. She therefore feels no real attachment to any neighbourhood, her culture or her language, as she proclaimed: "My culture and language is just something, something I don't care about".

Tasneem's, mobility status can be attributed to the fact that she appears to be aware that here academic abilities affords her access to opportunities which could lead to upward mobility. She uses hardship and setbacks as a platform to push herself forward and does everything in her power to ensure that she does not suffer the same fate as her mother. This will become apparent in the discussion later in this chapter and will be taken further in Chapter 5.

The discussion above is crucial to understanding each student, especially with regard to how they negotiate their learning practices in both physical spaces. There appears to be a connection between their complex childhood trajectories and how they experience the township. This connection becomes clearer in the rich narratives of each student's 'lived experiences' in their environmental space, which I now go on to describe.

4.3 Student 1: Lebo in the environmental space

4.3.1 Her socio-spatial context

Lebo (pseudonym) is an 11 year- old black girl who moved to the racially integrated part of Dawood when she was about five years old from Gugulethu, a black township in the Western Cape. She lives with her grandmother and ten children: two siblings, six young cousins and two Muslim children in one house. Lebo and her two younger sisters were placed with their grandmother because their own mother is HIV positive and could not provide for them. Her cousins, a 19 year-old boy who is currently doing his first year at college, and his 16 year-old sister who is at the neighbouring high school, also live in this house. Three younger girls, cousins, who also attend Dawood Primary School, were placed with the grandmother after their parents died in a car accident. The two Muslim children were placed with the grandmother because their parents had been jailed for neglect and drug trafficking.

Lebo's home is situated in a narrow street in the newest part of the township at a distance from the school. On approaching the house I noticed many people sitting out in front of their homes on crates and old paint buckets. This is a phenomenon in most townships, which often gets misinterpreted as residents 'lazing' around with nothing to do. I soon discovered that the reason for this was the limited space in the small houses. Her 64 year-

old grandmother met me on the first day when I visited Lebo's home. She is the head and only breadwinner in this small box like home, not more that 5x4 metres in size. The grandmother describes it as: "My house is such a small house it's like a poppiehuis (doll house) and then we just push and sorry and there's no way, there's just one way in and one way out, that is the point" (Photographs taken in her home can be found in Appendix F).

 The house only has one room which is partitioned into two bedrooms by suitcases stacked up to the ceiling, and a kitchen with a neat kitchen sink and a neatly stacked cabinet containing cups, bowls, plates and other crockery. The walls are not plastered or painted and the asbestos ceiling is a health hazard, especially for Lebo who suffers from asthma. On the walls are large A3-sized religious posters. A small clock radio that plays religious songs echoes through the house. Religion plays an important part in this extended family's life. Everyone in the house, except the Muslim children who attend mosque, attends the Presbyterian Church. The family is very involved in religious activities especially on a Sunday when they attend church and become involved in various activities, like the Sunday school and the choir.

On the left side of the room are two tables (an old school desk and dressing table) and a double bed. The tables serve two purposes, one as a surface on which to prepare and dish food and the other as a desk to do homework. There is no place to sit down since the granny informed me that the plastic chair had just broken that day, so they now use old paint buckets to sit on. There are also two large fridges (second-hand fridges that they received from the grandmother's employer) and a small portable television set, which at the time of my visit did not work. The door next to the kitchen opens into the bathroom that only contains a toilet, buckets used for bathing and more suitcases and clothing. The home is fairly dark since it only has one small window above the kitchen sink. To illustrate the dynamics of this household I draw on an interview with Lebo. She says:

> We sleep and wake up at different times, starting at 5 o' clock. Some
> wake up at 6.30 and others later. We wash ourselves in a bucket so
> we must wait. We take turns, two at a time, to wash because we can't
> all wash at the same time. Then we all eat porridge which granny
> makes. We all have our own cups and bowls. My cup no one uses
> only me [ownership of this cup seems important to Lebo]. We got
> this from granny's white people, [referring to the old British
> employers for whom Lebo's granny has been working as a domestic
> worker for over 21years].

The above extract gives us an insight into the harshness of growing up poor and having limited space in which to move. It also provides us with the background to understanding why Lebo is regarded as 'spatially dislocated', a term explained previously in Section 4.2. and which I explore later in this section.

4.3.2   Availability and use of resources

A few of the suitcases serving as a partition contain a variety of storybooks and magazines that the granny received from her employers. The granny informs me that the lady for whom she works owned a day-care centre for children, and most of the educational toys and books they have, she received after they closed down, which are used by Lebo and the other children. She got so many books that she had to share them with Lebo's school because there was no space to keep them all. Besides these books, the children also bring their textbooks home, which they use to do their homework. There are newspapers and magazines in the home, which are used for collecting articles in preparation for class discussions or tasks and for gathering material for scrapbooks. The children take great pleasure in cutting out pictures of fashion, celebrities and fancy houses and pasting them in books. They also use this as a basis for storytelling and for things that they hope to have one day. The desk, which doubles as a dinner table, contains files of the children's work as well as writing material. In response to a question about whether she read the books that are in her suitcase, Lebo commented: "Saturdays and Sundays. My favourite book is Princess Bell. I like to read feel good stories".

Lebo also shows me the package, which she received from her British friend, which contained stationery, a calculator and a dictionary, which Lebo uses when doing homework. These are precious commodities to Lebo. When she's not using them they are packed away in the huge brown package in which they were delivered, expressing a form of ownership. She does not take them with her to school for fear that the other children would steal them.

During certain school holidays and some weekends, Lebo and her sisters would spend time in Khayelitsha, a black township, with their mother. Here they are seldom allowed to play outdoors and therefore spend most of their time indoors watching religious DVDs, reading books and doing school-based activities.

From the above discussion it is clear that Lebo has access to a variety of resources, which she gained through the connections she has formed via her grandmother's workplace. This connection I will explore later in this chapter since it appears to have a profound connection to how she 'lives' her learning practices in this space

4.3.3   Parental involvement

Her grandmother is quite informed about Lebo's educational progress over the years. If she cannot make the school's meetings, because of working late, then she sends her oldest grandson to collect the progress reports. This is a common practice in this township since most parents are single working parents and older siblings or neighbours are often involved in this process of collecting reports. She then studies each child's report and is totally aware of each child's strengths and weaknesses. She communicates to me in the interview session that since Grade 1 Lebo has performed excellently because of the strong foundation laid by the family for whom she works. As I mentioned before, Lebo has been spending time at her grandmother's workplace since she was three months old and it is here that she has been gaining exposure to English and the educational toys that were in that family home. This was confirmed by the grandmother when she said that Lebo,

> grew up playing with their children and at the same time they helped
> her with books and so on from the library. I tried to put her into
> school but that did not work you see we moved from Guguletu up to
> Dawood that is where now she is at the Dawood Primary school
> because she couldn't speak Xhosa language, my main language but
> she can speak English and picked up Afrikaans here.

The grandmother explains Lebo's progress in school and her confusion about the drop in her results in Grade 6:

> She was good like in two years Grade 5 and Grade 4. She was
> showing good progress the best in her class. I used to get good
> results, but then now that is when now in Grade 6 I become a little
> confused. The problem is the teachers they teach in and out
> [referring to teachers being absent] they don't get a regular teacher
> to push them forward. No teacher for two months. That is a
> problem you see. I think now she's getting a bit of delay from
> teachers….

From this extract it can be deduced that Lebo's grandmother values education; besides being aware of Lebo's progress this also shows in the fact that she works long hours to provide for the children, that she gets up early to see to it that they are fed before school, and then takes them to school personally to ensure their safety, despite the fact that she needs to get a taxi in a different direction. At the age of 64 she still continues to work, which she does since her pension will be used for the children's education. According to Crompton-Lilly (2003:64), such efforts often go unrecognised and unacknowledged by teachers when they assume that the parents are simply uninformed, uninterested, and uninvolved.

4.3.4   Social networking

What is apparent is the strong connections Lebo forged via her granny's contact with the latter's British employers on the other side of the city. Because of this contact Lebo was able to learn to speak English, since she grew up visiting at her granny's workplace from three months old. Here she interacted with the employer's children. She did not attend crèche or pre-school but was exposed to English and because of this exposure was able to attend social functions and spend holidays in more affluent areas. She often refers to the wedding she attended in Greyton, where she was able to communicate in English. This, in turn, forged a new social contact, her newfound friendship with a 12 year old British girl, Jade, who came from England to attend the wedding. What I found fascinating was the 'web of networking' going on as a result of this friendship. Lebo writes letters to Jade, which are then taken by the granny to work from where the employer emails the letters to Jade. In return, Jade sends letters and resource packages to Lebo with the aim of supporting Lebo's schooling. Lebo also spends holidays with one of the employer's family members and here she is able to experience life outside the township. These strong social ties provide Lebo with access to economic resources, which her grandmother is unable to provide. Besides Jade, her friendship with 12 year-old Emma is a further example of these social ties/connections as Lebo explains: "It's the same family of my granny's work, family of theirs. They live in Hout Bay in a big house and they have one child, my friend Emma (pseudonym)". Her friendship with Emma exposed her to new experiences, which differs considerably from her life in the township. This difference in life-style is expressed by Lebo in the extract which follows:

I sleep in my own bedroom in my own bed. We plan to do things. We are throwing a party in the September holidays for fun. Then I will meet all their friends. We designed invitations on computer, then we print it or her daddy will email it. Her mommy showed us how to design invitations .... I like watching movies and we like to go to the video shop. We just ask for the credit card and just say: "Can we have it?" Then they give it to us. When I'm there we can buy anything.

It is evident from the above extract that Lebo's friendship with Emma had immediate use value in terms of providing inclusion and belonging (Devine, 2009:528). It also exposes her to middle-class practices, like the use of a credit card, which differs somewhat from her working-class experiences in the township. Bourdieu (1986) noted that children accumulated social capital through an 'unceasing effort at sociability, in which recognition is affirmed and reaffirmed' (in Devine, 2009:528).

4.3.5. Linguistic proficiency

Lebo is able to converse in isiXhosa, and to read and write in English and Afrikaans. She enjoys telling stories about her childhood and the holidays that she spends with the white family. It became clear from our interview sessions that Lebo placed greater value on speaking Afrikaans than speaking English, which she attributes to the fact that "Afrikaans, the way I learnt to speak it was the happiest time for me because I can do it well and I can speak to all my friends". Being proficient in Afrikaans enables her not only to communicate with the coloured children at her school but to 'fit in' with this environment, which is still predominately Afrikaans. This is clear from the language spiral she was asked to complete, indicating the types of language used in different domains. Here Lebo indicates that she speaks Afrikaans in church, in school, to her parents, in the street, when at the shop, and to her siblings as well as to her friends. She only speaks English in class and on the playground. Lebo chooses to speak isiXhosa only on occasions when her grandmother speaks to her or when she requires it to code-switch to explain the content for weaker isiXhosa learners in her class or when her mother cannot follow Afrikaans programmes on television. Other than this, as she very innocently noted: "I don't like speaking my language because I grew up at granny's work and I couldn't speak isiXhosa, my granny taught me".

She later confirms her detachment from her language by saying "My language is just something, like something I don't care about".

In Section 4.2, I described Lebo as being 'spatially dislocated', since there appeared to be a disconnection between her and her environmental space. This disconnection becomes clearer in the above narrative-based account of Lebo's lived experiences within the environmental space. We see it in two areas: firstly, through what I describe as 'class hopping' and secondly in her attitude towards isiXhosa and in turn her love for Afrikaans. Her social interactions with Jade and Emma offer an explanation of how her learning practices are acquired, negotiated and positioned in this space.

4.4 Student 2: Shafiek in the environmental space

4.4.1 His socio-spatial context

Shafiek (pseudonym) lives in a more stable section of Dawood, in a predominantly coloured area. He is a 12 year-old Muslim boy who shares his home with his parents and four siblings: two brothers aged 24 and 19 and two sisters aged 10 and 5. Unlike Lebo, he lives in a free-standing home consisting of a lounge, two bedrooms, a bathroom containing a bath, washbasin and toilet, and a fully equipped kitchen. Although the living spaces are small and there is limited room to move around, his home is neat and well looked after. The family came to Dawood long before he was born. Although they own a car, the family does not seem to be very mobile, since they confine most of their daily living and activities to the home, interacting only with the cousins and an aunt who live next door to them. Shafiek speaks at length about his interaction with his cousins, two boys similar in age, who he considers his best friends.

The family travels out of the township but only to visit family in Mitchells Plain a few kilometres away. Most of their life is spent in and around Dawood. His father, a welder, is currently unemployed and his mother is a housewife. Both his parents had formal schooling, his father until Grade 9 and his mother until Grade 10. His mother had worked before, first in printing, then at an electrical company. She also worked for a jeweller for some time. On entering their home it is clear that the family has far more possessions than Lebo's family, in that they have a 75cm television set, two video machines and a

Playstation game. In Shafiek's room, which he shares with his two brothers, is a double bunk and a chest of drawers which doubles as a computer table, containing a computer, speakers and printer. On the wall is a single chart containing the multiplication tables. The only other wall hangings in the home are pictures of Muslim prayer scripts, which are neatly framed in the lounge and clearly visible as one enters the front door. This family places great value on religion and their involvement in religious activities. In both of my interviews with him and his mother they speak about Shafiek attending Muslim school, madrassah, from an early age. He brings his Islamic learning into the classroom when he shares his experiences with his Christian friend, Angelo. This fascinating inter-religious mix is expressed in the following quote made by Shafiek:

> I was going to do my task on Moses. He saved the people from the
> evilness and cruelness of Pharaoh. I read about it from the Holy
> Qur' an. I went to the Imam and asked him questions on Moses. My
> friend Angelo tells me about the Christian religion. He shares with
> me the Christian version and I tell him about the Muslim version. I
> saw the movie of Moses. We have 12 commandments but the
> Christian religion only has 10 commandments. We have the cartoon
> Christian version of Moses and the Muslim cartoon of Mohammed.

His mother notes that he does very well at Muslim school, which he attends diligently every Friday after school.

One activity crucial to understanding Shafiek and how his learning practices work in the environmental space, is his keen interest in Playstation games. The urgency with which he plays has an impact on how he learns. Prensky (2001:1) observed that children who are exposed to these games and whom he refers to as 'digital natives' (a concept I will explore in the analysis chapter) receive information really fast, and like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer graphics to text, thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards, and in most cases prefer games to 'serious work' (2001:3). Shafiek can in all senses of the word be considered a 'digital native'. He owns an extensive range of Play station games (refer to the photographs in Appendix F). In our individual interview sessions I picked up on his passion for these games

> I spend most of my afternoons playing games, watching movies like
> Ben 10 and Tom and Jerry. If I'm bored I clock the game, I finish
> the game. I went through all the levels. I do this to get the cheats,
> they show it to you which makes the game easier. I clock it in hard

mode then I get the cheats and they show me mini games then you
can play two players. Then I can play with my cousin.

I later discovered from our sessions together that he 'clocks' (finishes all the levels of a game) difficult games, and that in four days he could clock games that would normally take four weeks to clock. In fact, he does this for two reasons; firstly to get the cheats, which are short cuts to various levels in the game, and secondly, for economic reasons. He sells the cheats to family and friends for a small fee. As related by his mother:

He finishes task quickly like the games I buy there's many a big men
they come here and ask him "Shafiek how do we go past this stage?"
then he must show them how. He even gets them cheats, he give the
children the cheats so that they can go past the difficult stages.

The way he approaches 'clocking the game' spills over into the way he handles tasks at school. In my observations I found him completing tasks very quickly only to become bored. The effects of this are often a pain for his teachers as will become apparent in my discussion of him at the school and in the classroom.

Shafiek seems to benefit economically (selling of cheats), socially (sharing what he has learnt with his cousins and friends) and educationally (using new words that come in handy when writing spelling tests) from playing these Playstation games. He shares his thoughts on how he learns in the following extract:

I'm a quick learner, if I play a game it's almost like within 20
minutes, I know everything about that game. I know what's the
story, what to do, what's the specials [referring to the special
features the game has to offer]. I just read the instructions; they
show it on the game. I read and sometimes there's a word that I
didn't see before then I look in the dictionary then I know what it
means and I can move forward in the game.

I explore the effects of playing video games, on children and the impact on their learning, in the analysis chapter.

4.4.2 Availability and use of resources

The family computer serves as the main resource in the home. As his mother noted during the home interview:

> There is the computer in their room, his mostly on the
> encyclopaedia programme Encarta. We have the adult one and the
> student one. If he can't find enough information there then we will
> go to the library.

According to Shafiek, most of the things he knows he accessed on the computer, especially the Encarta programme where he learns about various insects, Greek and Egyptian Mythology and the journey's of Marco Polo.   In our contact sessions I learned that he tends to learn new things through 'trial and error' as he did when he first came into contact with a computer: "I learned myself how to use it. I first catch on nonsense on the computer and then afterwards I think and try to fix it and then I get use to using it". He also learns through observation for example with his older brother: "I watched my brother, the way he holds his pen then I do the same and began to write my name and the alphabet".
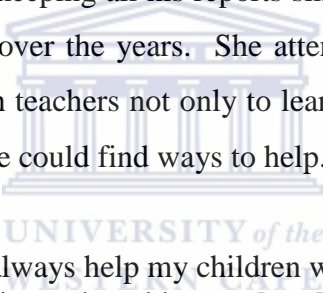
Shafiek speaks at length about insects and planets, which he learnt either by 'messing around' on the computer or from the National Geographic magazines that his father was able to get from his workplace. With this knowledge about insects he is able to indicate to me which insects are poisonous and which are not. This information is valuable not only when he does assignments for school but also when he teaches his sisters and cousins about the dangers of certain insects. This is confirmed by him in the following extract:

> If they [referring to his cousins] see a lizard they come and ask me
> questions about it then I can answer them. So if they say, "What kind
> of lizard is that?" then I say: "a chameleon because it changes colours
> so that it keeps away predators" I also love planets, I find it very
> interesting. I first saw it from a magazine, National Geographic
> magazines, which my daddy brings from work. I ask him to bring it
> for me then I read about the planets and stuff then I say, "Does that
> really happen". I know about global warming. In Grade 5 I wrote a
> double folio page on pollution, how it changes the atmosphere."

Shafiek's access to various commodities, like his Playstation, the family computer and DVD's, clearly relates to how his learning practices are acquired within this space. The fact that he learns through 'trial and error' and through observation becomes important when I describe how his learning practices are negotiated in the next chapter.

4.4.3 Parental involvement

Shafiek's parents, especially his mother, expressed a great deal of interest in her children's schooling. She strongly believes in their academic abilities and offers support on various levels to ensure this success. This urgency to see to it that her children succeed she gets from her mother, as she explains: "My mother was also very strict on us regarding our school work and I think I'm the same, I get it from her". It is for this reason that she is a stay-at-home mother (housewife) and that she feels that she needs to be aware of where her children are; for example, the younger children are only allowed to play in front of the house and next door at her sister's home. Besides supporting Shafiek by getting him information from the library and helping him with school-based activities, she also values and acknowledges his success by keeping all his reports since Grade 1. In this way she has been able to monitor his success over the years. She attends all parent-teacher meetings, where she comes into contact with teachers not only to learn about his progress but also to find out about problem areas so she could find ways to help. In her own words:

> I was very, you see I always help my children with their school
> work, even him [pointing to her eldest son] .... I'm very much
> interested in what they do so if he comes and tell me his interested
> in welding, then I will get books on it, like I did for all the others.

His father, although not actively involved in his education, plays a different role by always encouraging his children. According to his mother: "His father also speaks a lot about education and will always encourage them and speak to them to go for what they want". It is often this sort of motivation and encouragement that teachers fail to recognize as a form of parental involvement.

4.4.4 Social networking

There is a strong network of social and material relations that structure his learning experiences in the environmental space, especially in the home space. He works these networks for his own benefit. There is his grandfather who helps to do assignments, his aunt who is willing to pay for further studies one day if he is successful at his schooling, his

father who was able to bring him the National Geographic magazines from his workplace and his mother who is instrumental in obtaining games from which he derives economic benefits. Nespor, (1997:167) refers to parents being 'instrumentalities' for their children in obtaining toys and games.

Shafiek regards his eldest brother, who is studying to be an electrical engineer, as his role model. From a very young age (Shafiek was four years old at the time), he imitated his brother. As he explains: "I had books that my brother read. I was already four when I could say and read the alphabet. I watched my brother, the way he holds his pen then I do the same and I began to write my name and the alphabet".

It is clear from the above discussion that Shafiek's social interactions appeared largely family-based. In other words, his learning practices were acquired in his interactions with his family members, his mother, father, older brother, and in certain cases his grandfather. They are therefore instrumental in how his learning practices are informed and positioned within this space.
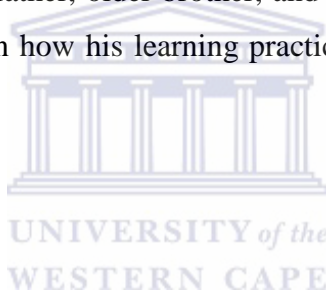
4.4.5   Linguistic proficiency

He speaks, reads and writes in English and Afrikaans, but admits that he cannot speak Afrikaans very well. He indicated that English is spoken in most domains: the classroom, on the playground, to parents and friends but he speaks English and learns to read Qu`ran-based Arabic in Mosque. He expresses his feelings about Afrikaans in the following extract:

I don't like Afrikaans but they [referring to his teachers] hit me a lot there [in the Afrikaans class] I can't speak like white peoples Afrikaans and they expect me
to speak like that 'Poena is koning' [Afrikaaner movie] Afrikaans.

He mentions this quite innocently as the reason for his getting a hiding in class. I observed him using Afrikaans slang, a type of 'Cape Flats argot, which is blended from English and Afrikaans when speaking to the boys in class, on the playground and to his older brother. This appears to affect the standard of Afrikaans used in the classroom, which is often frowned on by his Afrikaans teacher.

He has, however, picked up on other languages whilst playing Playstation games and watching 'animates' (3D animated movies). In one of our contact sessions he explains a

few Japanese and Spanish words. Although this has little exchange value in schooling, Gee (2004) has argued that children can easily learn specialist varieties of language and ways of thinking when these form part of their popular culture. Gee further states that teachers have a lot to learn from the skills that children exhibit when playing games (2004:3-4). Gee's input regarding games children play and the skills that they acquire in playing these games offers us alternative practices that could make a difference in the space of the classroom, which I will explore in the next chapter.

In Section 4.2, I described Shafiek as an 'embedded' student noting that he has spent most of his young life within the township. This embeddedness in physical spaces enables him to live this space fairly routinely. His learning practices are informed by his interest in playing games and by the hunger for information which he acquires via the computer. Shafiek's intensity of engagements with popular culture appears greater than his engagement with school-based activities (Nespor, 1997:164). We also discover the complex network of people (his mother, older brother, cousins and classmates) and things (the family computer, Playstation and Playstation games) that intersect in his interactions with his popular culture. His engagement with this popular culture explains how he goes about acquiring his learning practices in the environmental space.

4.5. Student 3:   Bongiwe in the environmental space
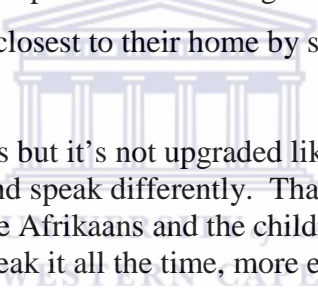
4.5.1   Her socio-spatial context

Bongiwe (pseudonym) is a 12 year-old black girl who, like Lebo, lives in the new deracialized part of Dawood. She lives with her parents, a father of 36 and a mother of 30 years old and her 3 year old brother. Both her parents are from the Eastern Cape where she was born. Her mother left school in Grade 9 when she fell pregnant. Her parents moved to Cape Town, which was the only place where her father could find work. He works for the South African Transport Services (SATS) as a mechanic. Initially Bongiwe remained in the Eastern Cape with her grandparents, where she attended crèche and Grade 1. She moved to Cape Town to be with her parents in Langa, an old township for Africans in Cape Town, in a dwelling which her mother referred to as a 'hokkie' (a shack) because of its size. Bongiwe repeated Grade 1 in Langa when she came to the city. The family moved from Langa to Dawood when she was eight years old, into a temporary house, which they occupied

without proper official authorisation. This area of the township saw a wave of illegal occupations by desperate people in light of contested local politics that questioned how people would be selected for houses. The family was provided with a permanent, legally acquired home by the time Bongiwe's mother fell pregnant with her brother, who is now three years old.

Bongiwe lives in the same area as Lebo, which is situated near a primary school. Bongiwe's parents did not enrol her in this school, which is practically on their doorstep. I was surprised that both Bongiwe and Lebo chose to cross the very busy main road to their school on the other side of the township. Her mother noted that: "I put her in Dawood Primary because of the Afrikaans because we're here in Cape Town. I want it to be easy for her to communicate because here they all speak Afrikaans." Fataar (2008:5) notes that school choice is determined out of a complex interplay among factors based on geography, racial re-inscription, and the cultural production of images of the school. Bongiwe's mother expresses her views on the school closest to their home by saying:

> they do have Afrikaans but it's not upgraded like lots of corruption. They black teachers and speak differently. That's why I like that school, the teachers are Afrikaans and the children are Afrikaans so there she can get to speak it all the time, more experience.

I gathered from our discussion that although this school, the one closest to their homes, is situated in the new deracialised part of Dawood, the majority of the teachers and learners are black. Both Lebo's grandmother and Bongiwe parents prefer sending their children to the so-called 'coloured' school further away from where they reside. Fataar (2008) describes this type of intra-township movement and displacement in his ethnographic work in a township. He notes that "these kinds of displaced school choice patterns, create an affective disconnection born of a disjuncture between their places of living and their spaces of schooling" (2008:2-3).

Bongiwe's home can be found on one of the narrow streets of Dawood. The houses here are similar to the container-shaped semi-formal businesses I saw in the main road: small and boxed together. The house next door to them is a shebeen (informal bar), which at the time of my visit was open for business. On the right in the narrow street, adjacent to their house, I noticed the municipal bins lining the sand covered street and a house-shop next to a wide,

open field. Bongiwe's mother runs two small businesses: during the day she sells 'vetkoek' (dough bun fried in oil) on a daily basis to neighbours and at the school opposite her home and at weekends she sells barbequed meat at the library. Her husband also holds a steady job. The family extended their home to include two spacious bedrooms. Bongiwe and her 3 year old brother share a room and the other room is occupied by her parents. It is clear from my observations in the home that her parents take great pride in keeping the home neat and organised. There are neatly stacked containers in the kitchen, a two-plate gas stove, and a kitchen cupboard, on which the microwave stands, and which serves as a partition between the kitchen and the lounge area. A large 25kg pack of flour stood ready to be used in the preparation of the next batch of 'vetkoek' for sale.

I interviewed Bongiwe's parents in the lounge, which has a large display cabinet with a television set, DVD player, a collection of DVD's, and a variety of different ornaments and family pictures. There was a stack of old newspapers in the corner next to the display cabinet. Bongiwe's father joined us for the interview even though he only responded to one question at the end.

4.5.2 Availability and use of resources

The neatly stacked Afrikaans (Rapport and Die Son) and English (Cape Times and The Voice) newspapers are bought regularly and kept by Bongiwe's mother. The newspapers serve as resource materials to help Bongiwe gain confidence in reading. Her mother reports that 30 minutes per day are set-aside for Bongiwe to read. Her mother normally creates opportunities for her to learn by first reading a short piece from the newspaper. She then asks Bongiwe to read the same piece. In this way they learn from each other, especially from Afrikaans newspapers. Bongiwe's mother admits that Bongiwe does not like to read so she needs to help where she can. She recalls: "I read the short stories then sometimes she cheats then I tell her she didn't read it because I did. In this way she learns."

Much of what Bongiwe does at home are school-based activities, ranging from homework, to doing assignments and reading. She seldom visits the local library unless accompanied by her mother or uncle. Her movement around the township is very restrictive which has an adverse effect on her ability to access resources from the local library. She expresses her

feelings about the area by saying that she feels unsafe: "There's lot's of violence and lot's of raping and the children can't get safe in this area. I can't move around safely".

There are old magazines, which she uses for reading and cutting out 'stuff'. Like Lebo, she collects pictures of fashion, homes and celebrities, which she pastes in scrapbooks. Scrapbooks are often used as a basis for discussion when the girls (Lebo and Bongiwe) interact with each other in school. According to Nespor (1997) kids used commodities, images and meaning systems borrowed from popular culture found in newspapers, books and on television to structure their interactions with one another and to give meaning to these encounters (1997: xviii).

4.5.3 Parental involvement

As noted from the previous section (see Section 4.5.2), parents often create opportunities for their children to learn, although many teachers do not seem to acknowledge these efforts. As one of the teacher at the school commented, "Parents don't care they just don't care". From my observations this certainly does not apply to the students' parents or guardians in this study. They are involved in some or other way in their children's learning.

Bongiwe's mother is an example of a parent who monitors and addresses the problems her daughter encounters at school. She seems concerned that Bongiwe is a 'struggling learner' or 'slow learner'. It is for this reason that she follows a rigorous routine in the home by 'staying on her' (Crompton-Lilly, 2003:64), as she confirms:

> She can change her clothes, watch T.V. for awhile, 30 minutes, sit
> with homework then she must read a book for at least 30 minutes
> then at 4 o' clock she goes with me to collect her brother at crèche.
> After supper she reads the Bible (in Xhosa). In exam time, like now
> in June, TV is not allowed. I want to help her so I will read the
> questions and then ask questions. I will help with maths and the
> coloured neighbour helps with her Afrikaans.

This might seem a strict routine to follow but as Crompton-Lilly observed, parents 'staying on children' demonstrate caring and high expectations for them. It also reveals the 'intensity' with which parents care about their children's learning (2003:64).

4.5.4 Social networking

Unlike Lebo and Shafiek, who managed to cultivate a number networks or connections in their environmental space and work these networks to their benefit, Bongiwe's situation differed to some extent. Bongiwe and her family lived a fairly secluded life in the township isolated from their family and friends in the Eastern Cape. She cannot rely on the tight kinship ties provided by having family close by. Bongiwe expressed her feelings about staying in East London when she noted: "In East London where my parents come from. There are open spaces there. Here it's small and boring. There my cousins live but here I'm alone."

As noted before, much of what she does at home are school-based activities. The crime in the area, coupled with the fact that they live next to a shebeen and the fact that most of her days are occupied by routine, often restricts her mobility. This mobility is limited to trips in and around Dawood, walking to and from school, taking trips with her mother to the library to set up the stand for their braai business and being involved in church-based activities. Other than that she does not mix often with the neighbourhood children because, as she expressed it, "People here gossip a lot I don't like it here".

Bongiwe's feeling of isolation and her strong connection to her place of birth is not uncommon, since, according to Dyers (2009:5), the conditions in the township, high unemployment and the high crime rate, make the rural heartland an idealised place with which the migrants strongly identify.

4.5.5 Language proficiency

Although Bongiwe is in an English class at school, English is not her dominant language. She indicated that she only speaks English in class and sometimes on the playground. She speaks Xhosa in all the other domains in which she moves; when reading the Bible, at church, to her parents and brother, in the street and at the shop, where she speaks either English or isiXhosa. She prefers speaking isiXhosa, as she explains, "because I was born speaking isiXhosa". Her limited exposure to English and Afrikaans, amongst other things,

which will become apparent in my discussion of the institutional space, could be the reason why her mother labels her a 'slow learner'. Bongiwe can communicate and read in isiXhosa but she cannot write standard isiXhosa. I will explore the issue of the effects of language proficiency and how it could impact on her learning in the next chapter. Her ability to speak isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans enables her to translate for her mother who is not as proficient in all three languages. This comes in handy when doing business or during their religious activities. The family are Jehovah's Witnesses and it is often required of them to do door-to-door visits to recruit new members. Her mother notes that Bongiwe would often do the talking at the homes of coloured people, which required conversing in Afrikaans. This gives her some practice in Afrikaans, with which she struggles in school.

Bongiwe's spatial practices are informed by her being seen as a 'displaced student' as described previously in Section 4.2. She struggles to maintain spatial routines, despite the fact that she has been living in the township for the past three years. This appears to have some effect on how her learning practices are acquired within this space. It also affects her ability to form strong social connections.

The disconnection between her dominant language in the home, isiXhosa, and the academic language required to function in school, could account for why her mother labels her a 'struggling learner'. Fleisch (2008) has found that for urban township children, language may be far more of a barrier to academic achievement, even if they have access to the English language as it is spoken amongst peers, at home, in the wider community and in the school itself (2008:119). The language issue will be explored further in the analysis chapter.

4.6.   Student 4: Tasneem in the Environmental Space

4.6.1   Her socio-spatial context

Tasneem is a 12-year old Muslim girl who lives with her extended family in a house made up of 15 members. The family home, which belongs to Tasneem's mother and stepfather, has been extended to accommodate this large family. There are seven adults and eight children. Tasneem's immediate family, her mother who is a housewife and her stepfather a panel beater, lives in the front house together with her 6 year-old brother and 3- year old sister. Her younger siblings are her stepfather's children. Her 21 year-old brother, his wife,

mother-in-law and three young children live in the Wendy house (wooden structure) adjacent to their home. Her grandmother, her mother's sister and her two young children live in the Wendy house attached to the main house. Yosso (2005), points out that being part of an extended family 'minimizes isolation' or feelings of aloneness (2005:80). On the other hand, her mother suggested that Tasneem, who is a private person, finds this overcrowded domestic environment intrusive and discomforting.

I recall my visit to Tasneem's house, which is situated in the old part of Dawood, still a predominately Coloured area, off the main road near the local shop. Although they live in a more stable part of Dawood they are also exposed to poverty and criminal and violent gang related activities. Despite this Tasneem's mother proclaims:

> There are opportunities for her in Dawood. It depends on the child herself but there's too many bad elements even when you walk with your child she isn't safe. If they close down all the shebeens, remove the drug lords then Dawood would be a perfect place. There's a bad element. A neighbour, who I walk past and greet, raped his own daughter for the past three years. I mean it's a neighbour! It depends on you to teach your child what's out there.

I noticed on my arrival at their home the large black gates that secure the entrance to their home. Her very security-conscious stepfather and her cheerful mother met me at the gate. Her mother directed me past a vicious-looking dog into the family home. Tasneem's grandmother and two children stood in the dark connecting passage at the entrance of the home. Her mother explained my presence to her grandmother and stepfather before we sat down in the open plan kitchen/lounge. I notice that the kitchen was fully furnished with built-in cupboards, with two bedrooms on the right. Tasneem shared one room with her two small siblings while the other belonged to her mother and stepfather. A large television set, two small couches and a cabinet containing glasses and ornaments were neatly displayed in the lounge. On entering Tasneem's room I noticed a single bed, a cupboard and a cot. Her school clothes hung neatly on the door ready for school the following day. There were no visible signs of any books, newspapers or magazines in her home. Her mother's biographical accounts of her life helped me understand the dynamics surrounding Tasneem's learning practices in this domestic environment.

Tasneem's mother was born in District Six. She was a victim of the then government's forced removal policy. Her family was uprooted when she was seven years old and they had to move to Ottery. Her first unplanned pregnancy in Grade 11 ended what she considered a very productive school life. She recalls with pride "I played hockey, swimming for my school, I used to play netball", but then she explains with disappointment "and it's just unfortunate that circumstances did not allow me to develop myself into a more, how can I say, independent, a strong woman." After 22 years in Ottery, the family moved to Dawood, where she met Tasneem's father. Her relationship with him was, in her words, "like a phase, a memory I want to erase because I was battling alone during pregnancy". It was for this reason that she took Tasneem and moved to Johannesburg (Gauteng) when Tasneem was three years old. She recalled: "I needed to break away from the situation here, which was complicated, which was making my life miserable." The tough times they experienced in Johannesburg did not deter her from sending Tasneem to the best middle-class, ex-model C school, which according to her mother "laid a strong foundation". She noted that from an early age Tasneem had no books or educational toys since she could not afford them, but her teachers were impressed with her progress and her behaviour in school.

They were forced to return to the Western Cape Province after learning about her grandmother's illness, when Tasneem was seven years old. Tasneem and her mother returned to Dawood. Her mother then entered into a very volatile relationship with Tasneem's stepfather. She spoke openly about the abuse in the home, which she suggests is the reasons why Tasneem is so determined to succeed in school. Both Tasneem and her mother are victims of domestic violence. Her mother painfully describes the physical and verbal abuse they encounter regularly:

> He is living in a cocoon. She's [with reference to Tasneem] more aware of life than he'll ever be. He is, even up to today, I struggle to get him out of his shell. He physically and verbally abuses her and me. Due to all this I thought maybe she'll slack down in school but to me it seems that's lifting her up more. She's more determined to better herself so she doesn't end up here in this situation.

Her mother constantly refers to Tasneem's tenacious commitment to her education. Tasneem, could be said to possess a 'set of inner resources' or 'social competencies', which she draws on to enhance subsequent functioning in school (Yosso, 2005:80). It is in light of these surrounding issues that we come to understand her attitude and commitment to her

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learning practices and her schooling. Her somewhat difficult domestic circumstances, seems to inform her resilience and commitment to her own learning.

4.6.2 Availability and use of resources

Tasneem regards her textbooks and old newspapers as resources in the home. Her mother notes that she was not exposed to books or educational toys whilst growing up simply because her mother could not afford them, but she recalls that:

> This child simply loves to sit with a book [writing book] and a pen. She never went to school yet, she was still a toddler, whenever she sees a book and a pen, she want it. That was her toys. She would simply scribble and would make like she could read. She'll take a newspaper or a magazine then she'll read the story or she looks at the picture then tells me, "Here they found a baby," things like that and she wasn't at school yet.

It seems that this practice spilled over onto her sister, since at the time of my home visit she was sitting quietly and scribbling with a pen in one of Tasneem's old school books. I asked Tasneem why she read her textbooks at home and she responded: "I like to read ahead so that I know what's going on and it makes the stuff easier to understand when the teacher explains the work".

Tasneem also informs me that she wants to become a forensic scientist. She reads books far beyond her age level, which her mother gets from the adult section in the library. She loves crime-type television programmes. She watches programmes like CSI, Law and Order and Cold Cases where they solve mysteries involving missing children. Tasneem notes: "I read thick books and if it is a book that interests me then I will read it in two days" She prefers reading privately in her room to playing with friends. This is confirmed by her mother who says that: "She hardly plays with children….She's very private all to herself." There is a productive link between her ability to read books meant for older children and adults and her excellent performance in all her school subjects.

4.6.3 Parental involvement

Tasneem's mother views education as a priority in that she sees it as 'a way out'. By constantly talking to Tasneem, reminding her of her fate if she does not work hard, she reinforces the importance of education. Her guidance in Tasneems upbringing takes place on three levels. Firstly, she feels responsible and committed to helping her child: "If she has to do research I will walk to the library through storms and the blazing heat. I'll do it even if I must use my bread money, I will do anything to help her with her studies…..Education is 150% important. I will say, get your degree be independent before you settle down, see that you have money in your own bank account.

Secondly, she uses her own life choices as a deterrent for Tasneem not to travel the same path. She does this by talking to Tasneem reminding her, "Look at me I don't have education I don't have work." Thirdly, she established a routine in her home for Tasneem's schoolwork. This is a practice I observed in all the homes. Tasneem normally comes home from school, eats and then does her homework. During examination time she is not allowed to watch television. Her mother involves herself in most school-related tasks, helping with assignments, although she feels Tasneem must do the actual assignment on her own, walking with her to the library to ensure her safety and posing questions when she is studying. Despite the fact that such parents support their children's learning by involving themselves in their learning practices, many teachers unfortunately still assume most parents are uninformed, uninterested and uninvolved in their children's learning (Crompton-Lilly, 2003:64).

4.6.4 Social networking

Tasneem is a fairly private person who often isolates herself from her extended family and friends by turning to books. Her network circle is largely school-based; she tends to form strong connections with her teachers, which I will explore in the following chapter. This differs somewhat from the other three students in this study, whose networks are family- or peer-based. Her discourse is fuelled by her quest for upward mobility, which results from her ability to make nuanced readings of the environmental space. She is determined not to end up like her mother and aunts who according to her, "can't go out there and make their own living".

4.6.5 Language proficiency

English is her dominant language. She converses in English in most domains: in school, on the playground, with parents and at the shop. However she speaks Afrikaans when she plays or walks in the street with her neighbourhood friends. Here she uses a patois variety of Afrikaans or 'Cape Flats slang', as a means to 'fit in'. Where Lebo uses this same Afrikaans variety as a means of gaining recognition from the coloured children, Tasneem uses it to avoid coming across as too smart or clever. One could say that Lebo's use of 'township slang' is racially enthused whereas Tasneem's is more class driven. She recalls that when she speaks English on the playground then the Afrikaans speaking students will comment: "Jy dink jy's kwaai" [you think you smart or clever]. Her use of slang does not affect her ability to read and write standard Afrikaans, as in the case of Shafiek who struggles to speak and write standard Afrikaans.

Tasneem, from my description of her in Section 4.2, could be regarded as a mobile student. She is entirely purpose-driven, which shows in her commitment to her education and her desire to break free from her domestic circumstances. Her resilience and commitment to her education helps us understand how she acquires and negotiates her learning practices within her environmental space. This also informs how her learning practices are taken up in the institutional space, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented data about the nature of the four students' learning practices in their environmental space and domestic spaces. It brought to the fore the multiple and underlying dimensions that surround their learning practices and which could help us understand how their learning practices are framed and negotiated within this space.

I started this chapter by capturing the socio-spatial dynamics of this township, showing that despite harsh social and economic circumstances (high unemployment rates and extreme poverty) the students who participated in this study and their parents still manage to transact their environment productively through various formal and informal social networks. I presented findings describing how each student 'lives' this space differently using Nespor's (1997: xvii) analytical lenses of embeddedness, displacement and mobility.

The data-based narratives I offered in this chapter bring me a step closer to responding to the research question on which this study is based, which is: What are the learning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape? It also directly addresses one of the sub-questions stated in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2: What is the nature of the learning practices of students in the environmental space, ie. the space of the township community and home? I discovered that these students engage in a hybrid of learning practices ranging from drawings, to writing and emailing letters, designing computerized invitations and compiling scrapbooks, which are used as a basis for peer discussions and storytelling. They also read newspapers and books far beyond the normal school readers. These learning practices are either school-based activities or peer-based activities, the latter being based on their popular culture.

Another commonality, and one that is still being informed by teachers' deficit discourses about township parents, is the issue of parental involvement. I described the endless efforts made by the parents, of the four students under study; to motivate, encourage and support their children's learning. I portray how these parents often create opportunities for their children to learn which can enhance their children's learning within the classroom, as will become apparent in the next chapter.

The categories that emerged from the data collection process; the context of each student, availability and use of resources, parental involvement, social networking and linguistic proficiency, used in this chapter, helped me understand the nature of their learning practices and how this hinders or enhances their learning. This dovetail with achieving one of the objectives mentioned in Chapter 1 (paragraph 1.4). I will use the same categories to describe the nature of their learning practices in the next chapter, in my presentation of findings that relate to the institutional space; that of the school and classroom.

CHAPTER 5

The nature of student learning practices in the institutional space

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings relating to the nature of the learning practices of four Grade 6 students in their institutional space, that of the school and classroom. I start by presenting the findings from my study which elicits the socio-spatial dynamics of Dawood Primary School. I show how the school's institutional identity is being shaped by its environmental context. In particular, the location of the school appears to have a crucial formative impact on the shaping of that identity. In turn, this would have an impact on how student learning practices are framed in this space.

I then proceed by drawing on Fataar's (2007) account of how principals enact their pedagogical roles as a basis for understanding how township principals read their environment to obtain credibility and authority. Here I provide a description of how the Principal of Dawood Primary inserts himself into beneficial networks in the community and how this appears to affect the way in which the four students under study acquire their learning practices within the institutional space. This leads into aspects relating to school functionality; I note, for example that township schools are often regarded as dysfunctional (Fataar and Paterson, 2002) or as exposed sites (Teese and Polesel, 2003). Here I will present findings that link the school's material context and its institutional culture. This will bring me closer to understanding the institutional dynamics of the school position and frame the learning practices of the students under study.

I then turn my attention to the teachers of Dawood Primary School, by presenting findings pertinent to understanding how these students learning practices are framed more specifically within the space of the classroom. I describe aspects relating to the pedagogical practices of the Grade 6A teachers and their relationships with these students, and describe the type of environment in which their learning practices are taken up. I do this in order to demonstrate how the environment hinders or enhances their learning. I also present the views that the teachers hold of their township school and of their students as a

means to understand the causes and issues surrounding these learning practices. Aspects relating to challenges facing the student population of Dawood Primary in general will also form part of this discussion.

This is followed by a presentation of the 'lived realities' of each student within the institutional space. The thematic categories followed in the previous chapter are again used: the spatial context of each student, the availability and use of resources, parental involvement, social networking and linguistic proficiency.

5.2 Socio-spatial dynamics of Dawood Primary School

This section has a dual purpose: Firstly, I will describe the socio-spatial dynamics of the school in order to show how the school's institutional identity is being shaped by its environmental context. Fataar (2007:607) uses the term 'environmental flows' to describe how the domestic fragility of the township impacts on the daily functioning of schools. He further notes that schools develop a distinct institutional identity because of the ephemeral nature of life in the township. I will describe this dimension of township life in an extract later in this section. Secondly, I present findings, which outline the school's functional status and establish the link between the school's material context and its institutional identity. I show how this impacts on the teachers' pedagogical practices and teacher and student relationship within the classroom.

Dawood Primary School is situated at the intersection of the new deracialised section of Dawood. It is one of fourteen primary schools in this racially mixed area. The school's population of 1307 students is predominately coloured: 80% of its population is coloured and 20% black. The school has a teaching corps of 37 teachers responsible for Grades R-7. They are all coloured.

Dawood Primary was established to address overcrowding in the primary schools in this township. This in turn was related to the high mobility rate caused by the influx of residents in and out of the township, which placed an enormous strain schooling provision in the township. Fataar (2007:606) notes that the twin features of incessant influx and overpopulation had an incisive impact on township schools, placing a heavy burden both on the functioning of schools, and on classroom processes. The school was started in 1992 in a prefabricated building as a junior primary school catering for Grades 1-3. The current school building was occupied in 1993, and was based on the government's newest design in which the school hall forms the centre of the building. The two pre-school classrooms, the offices of the SMT (senior management team) and administrative staff, and the teachers' toilets surround the hall. Four passages lead from the hall: an entrance passage into the foyer in the centre, a passage to the left leading to the classrooms housing Grades 1-3, one to the right leading to the classrooms occupied by Grades 6 and 7, and a fourth leading out to the back courtyard, which contains the Grade 4-5 classrooms. My study's respondents, four Grade 6 students, were selected from an English first language class consisting of 30 coloured students and 4 black students. Due to the lack of classrooms, the grade 6A class, which includes these respondents, occupied the teachers' staffroom. The school hall, which is used for various school functions and assemblies, often doubles as a classroom because of limited space due to the influx of children.

The following extract is taken from my field notes dated 22 July 2008, which I wrote up after my first visit to the school. It provided me with valuable insights into the socio-spatial dynamics, which play out in and around the school.

I enter the township for the first time around seven in the morning on my way to the research site to interview the Principal of Dawood Primary School. On my way to the school I noticed that the containerized businesses that line the main road are opened for business. School- going children dressed in a variety of school uniforms are making their way to schools in and around the township and others are waiting to be transported by one of the many minibus taxis to schools outside the township. I am reminded of how different things have become since the time when race was the determining factor limiting the choice of the school you attended. Now school choice appears to be class driven. As Fataar noted (2007:10) young people who choose to migrate out of the township to attend former white schools are influenced by their reading of the township schools' inability to facilitate their middle- class aspirations. My research in Dawood showed

how parents exercised schooling choice even between township schools viewing those closest to them as delivering work of an inferior quality.

I enter the school from the back gate and make my way down over the sandy makeshift driveway onto the paved parking area. I park on the far side of the parking area knowing that parking areas, staffroom chairs and many other school areas including classrooms are normally regarded as the teacher's possession and I did not want to violate this practice. I observe the desolated school terrain containing a few trees, shrubs and some grass patches. I sit in the parking area observing the children playing marbles, chase games and the little ones sitting around in the sand patches. This is a far cry from the lush playgrounds of the schools in more affluent areas. I remain sitting in the parking area watching the children and teachers streaming into the school grounds, some arriving way after the siren goes marking the start of a new school day. I notice that some children disregard the school siren and continue their game. They are then called to move 10 minutes later by one of the male teachers. Late coming seems to be a natural occurrence.

On entering the school building I am welcomed by a very vibrant secretary who alerts the Principal, Mr. Jansen to my arrival. The flamboyant Mr. Jansen welcomes me into his office for the start of the interview. He tells me that the bullet holes in the front doors, which I noticed whilst waiting in the foyer to see him, was as a result of a gang fight. According to the Principal, the school is situated between two opposing gangs and the school grounds often fall prey to gang fights and vandalism over the weekends. He explains that the school gates need to remain open for people to cross over from one area to the next, using the school as a gateway seemed more convenient because it is quite a distance if one walks right around. He would, therefore, rather leave the gates open, fearing that otherwise they will be forcibly removed. This is also the reason why parent meetings are not held in the evenings and why he fears putting computers in the school. He explained that, "We have a Khanya Lab but it places me under more stress I wish we did not have it because now my school becomes a target, we can have nothing new here you see. We had two attempts of car theft in broad daylight! People use the school as a path to different areas." To him the biggest challenges facing the school are the disintegration of family structures (75% of the parents are single parents) and social collapse. According to him, this makes it difficult to maintain discipline at school but at the same time makes the school a haven for children since they are safer in the school grounds (his words).

The above extract describes the dynamics of the school, in particular how the school's processes, the way it functions, are often determined by environmental flows. Gangsterism, impacts on certain school processes such as allocating time for parent meetings, considering whether or not to obtain valuable resources for the school, as well as issues surrounding school safety. These concerns relating to the socio-spatial dynamics of the school are reiterated by a teacher informant when he explains that, "we're expected

to teach these children about values, but they think we're mad. It's almost like, who are you to tell us, we live with violence and abuse in our home". He further points out that,

> There are many single teenage parents. Drugs and violence is rife in that the fathers want money to feed their addiction so they beat the women up. This is what these children deal with daily. It is a vicious cycle in which these students remain trapped. It's hopeless so we just go with the flow.

From the discussion on township dynamics in Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.2) we learned that domestic life in this township is fragile and unstable, plagued by a variety of social and economic issues, which my informant described in the extract above.

This brings me to the issue of how the Principal reacts to the domestic fragility of the school's social context. The school has had four different principals since its inception in 1992. Mr. Jansen   (pseudonym), the current Principal, has a gregarious disposition. His social alertness enables him to make strategic and nuanced readings of the school's discursive environment. Fataar suggests that principals that he studies in a similar context enact a number of spatially inspired performances, noting that they do this to establish credibility and authority. He further suggests that they manage to establish their pedagogical performances in full glare of an expectant community, always observing and respecting community sensibilities (2007:1).

 These strategic practices seem to be of cardinal importance to the productive functioning of Dawood Primary School. I observed the incessant movement of community workers, church leaders, police officers, organisations and other stakeholders in and out of the Principal's office on a daily basis. These visitors often occupied the Principal's time. Mr. Jansen opens up the school doors to churches to hold their services in the school hall on Sundays. He also makes the hall available for weddings and funerals, and gets the secretary involved in helping the residents with faxing private documents, filling in forms and arranging visits to the local clinic. He walks to school in the mornings so that he can interact with the residents, and small business owners surrounding the school. In this way he is able to establish credibility and popularity amongst the residents and strike up beneficial networks in the community, at the same time ensuring that the school does not

get vandalised. The following extract taken from my field notes dated 12th September 2008 highlights this practice:

This morning the Grade 4 class is left without a teacher. He's been called away to see to his alarm that went off at home. I hoped that this morning I would be drawn into the school programme after feeling isolated for more than a week. Maybe the Principal will allow me to supervise the class instead of dividing them up to go to their guardian teachers, placing an extra burden on these teachers' overcrowded classrooms. Instead, I am summoned into the office and drawn into a conversation with him and the head of police, responsible for the surrounding area, on issues regarding the incessant acts of vandalism that takes place over weekends. The officer informs him that he should speak to the residents in the immediate vicinity of the school, however, he did not know whether that would be helpful since the residents in that area are like "ostriches whose beaks remain in the sand" failing to report crime.

Although the networks, previously mentioned, appear to hold certain social benefits for the school, they seem to have impacted negatively on some dimensions of the Principal's management role, especially with regard to classroom visits, which he seldom does. The Principal often uses eccentric ways to monitor the teacher in the classroom. As he explained: "I go to the class to give messages and then ask questions, or stay to hear the lesson. So, before the teacher realises it, then a class visit has been done". Through my observations, however, I discovered that these class visits are insufficient and could have a constraining effect on student learning practices in the institutional space, especially within the classroom.

The issues' surrounding the appointment of the Principal are worth mentioning since they help us better understand this school's institutional make-up. Mr. Jansen's position as Principal of Dawood Primary was not always plain sailing, since he was considered an 'outsider' whose appointment was met by strong opposition from the highly unionized teachers at the school. He recalls his initial encounter with the teachers:

> I came on the first day to report for duty and no one was there to welcome me. I later heard that the teachers were in a meeting discussing my position at the school. Yes, it was very stressful I had to take off for two terms until one teacher came to beg me to return.

On his return he decided not to focus on those teachers who did not want him around but on those who had stood by his side and whom he had neglected. It appears that, although the he has struck up an accord with the school community and residents surrounding the

school, he still struggles to secure the full co-operation of his teaching staff: "I know I'm too authoritarian but slow people irritate me so I have to do things myself. Even today, I still can't get people involved." This sentiment was reiterated by one teacher informant who complained that the Principal is always meeting with non-governmental organisations, departmental people and welcoming all these visitors into the school but fails to get things done: "He gives you a portfolio but instead of leaving you alone he keeps on interfering and that is why things don't get done". This brings me to a discussion about the school's functionality.

Dawood Primary, according to the Principal, is 75% functional, which he attributes to the fact that, "it has all the structures in place" and that the school's systemic scores for numeracy and literacy increased by 16.5% between 2005 and 2007. The main area of concern is the school's numeracy scores which remain unchanged at zero. The Principal notes that, "schools that get a score of 95% are those which have resources and are not plagued by the same socio-economic circumstances that his school deals with." This is confirmed by a teacher informant who notes that, "district officials who come to the school are from Model C schools so they know nothing about how it works with these children. They are not around to see how we struggle to put marks together for these children."

From my own observations, Dawood Primary exhibits certain characteristics associated with 'dysfunctional schools' as described by Fataar and Paterson (2003), or 'exposed sites' as posited by Tease and Polesel (2003). The school has to deal with multiple disadvantages and socio-economic problems emanating from disruptive family structures and various other welfare concerns which spill over into school life, threatening to undermine the value of schooling and often detracting attention from the school's primary function as a learning institution (Clarke and Linder, 2006:39).

According to Life Choices, a non-profitmaking organisation working in the Dawood Primary, there are various social issues which are on the increase amongst the students at the school. These are: drug abuse, child neglect, young children being exposed to sexual violence or experiencing rape themselves, chronic absenteeism and poverty (refer to

Appendix I). They note that these social problems increasingly affect student behaviour in the classroom. The school has put structures in place where students can receive counselling. Working in this fragile environment, however, can be a "profoundly debilitating experience" for teachers (Clarke and Linder, 2006:62). This is clearly expressed by one teacher in the following extract:

> You saw how the classrooms look? Factors from outside plus things that went on around here made me despondent. The crime! There's burgalries often, everything is broken, lights ripped out, human poo on the floors in the class. I didn't care anymore and decided to leave everything unlocked so they don't vandalise too much. Teaching long enough in Dawood has drastic effects on one's health.

In my classroom observations I found that a few teachers made effort to decorate their classrooms with charts, pictures and posters showing aspects relating to their learning area but this was not the case in the majority of the classrooms I visited. As one teacher commented:

> It's sad to see the state of certain classrooms. The child comes from a dirty home, empty, no beauty, into a classroom that has nothing to offer. Some teachers don't have charts on the walls, the classrooms are dirty, even the doors are written on. They don't make the effort to make any changes. That is why no learning can take place. You see you need, as teacher, to create the learning environment.

She noted that when children entered her classroom their behaviour changed: "It's funny I don't know why, but these are the same children who are problems in other teachers' classes." The discussion above highlights some key aspects of the socio-spatial dynamics of the school, especially the role the Principal plays and issues surrounding the school functionality.

I now go on to present findings on what happens inside the classrooms, more specifically the Grade 6A classes, as a basis for understanding the attitudes that surround the learning practices of the four Grade 6 students in the context of the classroom. The following table was derived from the questionnaire completed by the teachers of Grade 6A and will be used to help us comprehend the classroom dynamics:

TABLE: 1   Grade 6 A Teacher Profiles

TEACHER	QUALIFICATIONS	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	HOME LANGUAGE	TEACHERS PLACE OF RESIDENCE
A	B.Tech	25	English	Lansdowne
B	H.D.E. IV	18	English	Kraaifontein
C	B.Ed (Hons)	21	Afrikaans	Strand
D	DE III	15	Afrikaans	Woodstock
E	BA (HDE) IV	8	Afrikaans	Blackheath

The teacher profiles in the table above provide me with background information pertinent to understanding issues surrounding these teachers' pedagogical practices. It was also a helpful in understanding why the learning practices of these students are framed and positioned in the way they are in the institutional space, especially in the classroom. Three of the teachers (A, C and E) previously taught at high school level. They had a different teaching style to those teachers who were trained at teaching colleges. Their teaching style was predominantly didactics, based on the "chalk and talk" method. They often sat at the table whilst children were doing work, gave few instructions on how to proceed with the work, and seldom walked around to check on whether the children were working or not. They also seemed to rely mainly on textbook-based instruction, i.e. reading and giving instructions from the prescribed textbook. They seldom used other sources to plan and present their lessons. This practice was explained by one of my student informants in a focus group interview session when I asked what happened in cases when the teacher did not explain the work: "He just give you the book (textbook) and says you must do that and if you don't finish it in class you must bring it tomorrow".

Certain members of staff teach in subject areas for which they did not have training. Teacher C was trained as a mathematics and science teacher and Teacher B specialized in physical education. According to the Principal this is not an uncommon practice: "take teacher X, he is qualified to teach natural science, which he does for the Grade 7s' but to make his quota full (he needs to teach an allocated number of periods) he has to teach something else". This common practice places enormous strain on the teacher, as Teacher B explained*: "*You see, I am a sports person, a physical education specialist, and that was

taken away from me and this added to my depression and made me despondent but I blocked it out".

Teachers often combated this feeling of helplessness by becoming involved in "other things" (words of Teacher B). The 'other things', to which Teacher B refers include taking on other responsibilities like pastoral work, becoming involved in committees or taking on a more administrative role, as I observed with Teachers B and E. This practice seemed detrimental to classroom performance since teachers often allowed 'other things' to interrupt their teaching time.

A third aspect which appeared to affect the teacher's pedagogical practices was their language proficiency. Three of the teachers' home language is Afrikaans. From my observations it seemed that they were not confident or proficient enough to teach an English first language class. They tended to struggle with certain concepts and in most cases opted not to explain or give detailed instructions. On entering the class for one of my observation sessions, I noticed that the board was filled with questions, which the students had to answer from the textbook. The teacher, however, failed to introduce the lesson or explain the work. As one student stated, when asked how learning could be made easier in the classroom: "If they explained the work and allowed us to try it and so on". I also noticed that teachers seldom engaged students in substantial conversations and left little room for critical deliberation by students of the taught content.

In order to understand the relationship between learning and social class I examined the teachers' own backgrounds and places of residence. Here I argue that the teachers who participated in this study reside in middle-class areas, and that their exposure to middle-class values and ways of doing things could result in a disconnection between them and the working-class children they teach. This could account for the way they treat these students and in turn have a constraining effect on how the children's learning practices are acquired within the classroom. Rist (1970/2000), supports this view when he observes that teachers appear to favour students who are similar to their class status, who display a habitus that reflects cultural and economic capital similar to theirs (in Panofsky, 2003:419). I present findings later in this chapter that show how certain students are

favoured by certain teachers and the effect this has on other students in the classroom. Panofsky's (2003) work on the relationship between learning and social class shows that such differential treatment translates into differential classroom instruction, which in turn is of crucial importance to the development of a student's identity and agency (2003: 424), issues that I will elaborate on in Chapter 6.

Parents and students from poorer socio-economic groups are often positioned as disinterested in schooling and often viewed in deficit ways. As one teacher expressed it, "parents put their children at a disadvantage." Another teacher noted that the lack of parental involvement in their children's schooling, "is like scabies. You cannot get rid of it". This teacher also went so far as to blame parents for their children's apparent laziness, noting that "laziness comes from the home." She also referred to the majority of the children she teaches as being "dyslexic, they're too lazy to write and 95% of them don't use the library". According to Crompton-Lilly (2003:2), parents often appear to be the logical culprits for the difficulties children face in school. The deficit ways in which these teachers view parents and children also show how racial and class notions are still informing teachers' discourses thereby perpetuating inequality (Felix, Dornbrack and Scheckel, 2008:103).

In this section I have presented findings relating to the socio-spatial dynamics of this school with the aim of illuminating the multiple causes and issues that surround student learning practices in this localized context. I did this while taking cognisance of Christie's words that: "students have very different experiences of learning in classrooms in South Africa", (2008:184). The narratives of the four students in my study seem to bear Christie's viewpoint. The rich narrative accounts of each student, of how his or her learning practices are acquired, informed and positioned in the light of the previous discussion will now be presented.

5.3   Student 1:   Lebo in the institutional space

5.3.1   Her institutional spatial context

Lebo enrolled at Dawood Primary School, in Grade 1, at the age of six, without any formal pre-school experience. As pointed out in Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.3.1) before she started school, she commuted with her grandmother daily from Gugulethu, a black township to the more `elite area of Wynberg where her grandmother is employed as a domestic worker. While Lebo did not attend pre-school, it could be said that she experienced a type of pre-school environment on the other side of the city. She was exposed to educational books and toys from an early age, which Lebo's extended family received after her grandmother's employer's day-care centre closed. It appears that her daily contact with her grandmother's employer's children and related family members exposed her to an English language environment. This exposure, lead to her embracing English as a language of communication, which in turn caused her to develop an attitude towards isiXhosa. She says about isiXhosa that, "my language is just something, like something I don't care about".

Lebo's refusal to attend a school closest to her home suggests a strong disconnection between Lebo and her Xhosa culture. She expresses her feelings towards this school in the following extract:

> I don't like it. I don't like a lot of my kind of people. The teachers
> and the children are black. Their culture is like rude, sometimes if
> they want to act, then they can do just what they want to do.

Her response could be seen as a tactic for surviving in this space rough environment. As Soudien (2007) has noted, such young people are conscious of how they are labelled and grouped. Many simply want to blend in. They just want to be normal (2007:83). Lebo's use of words, like 'their culture' and 'I don't like my kind of people', appears to demonstrate the disconnection between her and her culture. This disconnection is crucial

to understanding how she is positioned within this space and more importantly helps us to understand how she negotiates her learning practices.

Lebo uses the Afrikaans language to navigate her way across the spaces of her learning especially in the school space, which at times appears to be a racially hostile environment. The way she uses Afrikaans suggests a link between her affection for the language and her desire to adopt a 'coloured' identity as she reveals in the following extract:

> The way I learnt to speak it [referring to Afrikaans] was the happiest time for me because I can do it well and I can speak to all my friends. It makes me sound like them. If I could choose I would want to be a white person or a coloured person. I don't want to be an African.

Her skilful and nuanced readings of the institutional space, the school and classroom, enables her to 'fit in' and makes her seem like 'them,' as was pointed out by a coloured student: "Lebo talks nice Afrikaans, like us. She talks beautiful Afrikaans, proper Afrikaans, better than us". Dyers (2009:4) noted that 'children are often required to negotiate new spaces and their group and individual identity within it.' This brings me to a discussion of the relationship Lebo has with the coloured students in her class.

Lebo, seemed to forge strong bonds or friendships with the coloured students, the dominant group, in her class. To 'feel normal,' she takes on a 'coloured identity'. Soudien (2007), however, points out that such a quest to be normal is problematic since in order to feel normal one needs to adopt the dominant discourse and all its accompanying complexities with respect to colour and class (2007:83). Notwithstanding this, Devine (2009), notes:

> Friendships are important source of social capital, facilitating access to networks that provide relief from the demands of formal schooling, as well as support and knowledge when challenges emerge (2009:526).

I observe Lebo's friendships with her female classmates, in class and on the playground. She seems to adopt their way of speaking, a type of Afrikaans slang or engages in their activities: playing 'lappoppie' [ragdoll, a freezing game], gossiping, playing chase games

[chasing the coloured boys around the play ground] and sharing and exchanging ideas from their scrapbooks. For Lebo, being able to "speak like or better than them" [her words] is a form of 'symbolic capital' or willingness to be the same (Devine, 2009:528).

It is important to note that Lebo is one of only four black students in her class. The rest of the class of 33 students are coloured. These black students are seldom taken notice of or acknowledged by their teachers. I refer to them as 'ghost students'. I noted how certain teachers called on only the coloured students to run errands or answer questions, and provided them with developmental opportunities. Lebo confirmed this by saying that: "It's like they never call you to do stuff. They call other people except me, Bongiwe and Sipho".

Lebo is stronger academically than the other three black students and is therefore often called on to 'code-switch' from Afrikaans to Xhosa to explain to them when they do not understand the teacher's instructions. Bongiwe, who often turns to Lebo for assistance, confirms this: "Lebo is good in Afrikaans, she helps us in Afrikaans". Lebo's learner profile bears witness to her abilities. She scored on average above 60% for all learning areas, in Grades 4 and 5. However, her marks plummeted in Grade 6. Her grandmother confirmed this by saying: "She was good like in two years Grade 5 and Grade 4. She was showing good progress the best in her class. I used to get good results, but then now, that is when now in Grade 6 I become a bit confuse...." Lebo acknowledges that she finds Grade 6 more difficult and expresses her views in the following extract:

> It's difficult in grade 6. They [referring to teachers in grade 4 and 5] explain it to you, do it on paper for you and you then need to figure out the answers. His [referring to a Grade 6 teacher] only like explaining it twice, then he ask if you understand then he just give you things to write down.

It appears from the above extract that the change in her performance can be attributed to poor teaching. This is confirmed by other students in the focus group interviews who noted that some of their teachers seldom explained work and, spoke too fast. One teacher, in particular, did not explain at all, as one student described: "Sometimes Teacher X

explains too fast and I can't picture it in my mind". Another student felt that, "Teacher Y doesn't explain at all, all the time he just brags".

In this section we have noted how Lebo encounters the institutional space: the dynamics surrounding the nature of her learning practices in the school and the classroom. In the following section we take a more comprehensive look at how she lives and experiences her learning practices within that space.

5.3.2 Availability and use of resources

Like all the other students in her class, Lebo received a textbook for each learning area. It appears that in certain learning areas the textbooks are the dominant teaching resource, while in others the teacher relies heavily on worksheets. During one observation session, when the class was asked to read a section in their textbooks as introduction to the lesson, I watched how Lebo would turn to the other black students to show them what to read before reading herself. She seemed to enjoy the reading period but I did observe her pretending to read on occasion. This often happened when the teacher sat at the table doing administrative work after having instructed the children to read. There seemed to be no formal way of monitoring whether or not the books available were being read, except that the students are expected to record the books they have read in a hardcover book. Lebo told me that she read 35 books during 2008. There is however no proper monitoring system to establish whether she actually read each book, nor does it seem that the teacher is engaged enough to understand the depth and extent of Lebo's reading exercises.

The following extract taken from my field notes, illustrates how limited resources seem to have a constraining effect on learning within the space of the classroom:

The teacher explains that she prefers the practical lessons if only the children would bring the materials required for the lesson. She is cognisant of the fact that many children do not even have newspapers in their homes. It took her two weeks to get the students to bring paper, a hanger and stockings and some of them still did not bring them. I observe that only 9 students out of the 34 brought the hand-made globe with them, which meant that only 9 of them could participate in the lesson. The teacher instructs the 9 students to sit in the front row and continue by colouring in the oceans with blue chalk, which she supplied, whilst the rest of the class is excluded from the activity. There is only one globe present on the table, which makes this activity difficult to complete. Bongiwe and Tasneem have their hand-made globes but have to wait their turn to check the actual globe on the teacher's table, whereas Lebo and Shafiek are excluded from this lesson.

From this it is clear that limited resources exclude certain students from participating in the lesson. No alternative method was used by the teacher in this case to combat this apparent shortage.

5.3.3   Parental involvement
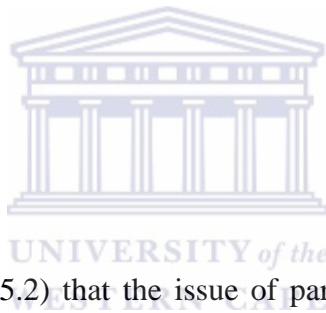
We explained earlier (paragraph 5.2) that the issue of parental involvement or the lack thereof is an ongoing problem in most township schools. The following comment, made by a teacher who participated in this study, is not unusual:

> Laziness comes from the home. Most are single parents and grandparents they try but there is a lack of interest in school work. There's a lack of discipline in the home. They just don't care, the majority just don't care.

Similar statements are expressed by most teachers in this context where parents are often blamed for their lack of involvement and interest in there children's schooling. I found the opposite to be true with the students I studied. Lebo's grandmother displays a keen interest in her schooling. Although her work situation does not enable her to attend parent meetings, she often checks on homework, discusses Lebo's progress with her, pays school fees and shows her support for the school. Her grandmother recalls, "Books, books,

books! I have books because that lady by my work was a teacher, I got books everywhere. I had too much books at a time I took it to Lebo's school to share with the class".

Lebo's eldest cousin often attends parent meetings on behalf of her grandmother. This practice is not unusual in township areas where older siblings, other family members or neighbours are present to receive the child's progress rapports each term. This might appear as the parent's lack of interest, however most parents, like Lebo's grandmother work long hours and therefore are unable to attend these meetings.

5.3.4 Social networking

Lebo's friendship ties to the coloured students' in her class appear to be important for gaining social capital in the institutional space. Where Tasneem uses her social network, or more specifically social interactions, to gain access to opportunities in this space and to ensure her upward mobility, Lebo uses her social interactions for recognition and affirmation. This she does by aligning herself to the coloured girls and by engaging in activities that they value, such as their games on the playground, as mentioned in paragraph 5.3.1. One other way to gain affirmation, besides her ability to use Afrikaans as a tool to 'fit in', is to do the tuck shop purchases for her friendship group. In this way she seems to gain their trust and is then allowed into their friendship circle, for example, when it comes to sharing lunch.

5.3.5   Linguistic proficiency

The language spiral completed by Lebo indicates that she speaks Afrikaans in most domains, even though she is in an English medium class. It seems that she prefers to speak English in class and on the playground, which she does fairly well. Her class teacher notes that, "she is growing in confidence and is very assertive," which could be attributed to her continuous exposure to English in her environmental space. Here I am referring to her friendships with Jade and Emma, both English-speaking girls. I do however hear her speaking a blended language, mixing English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa as

a form of township slang when engaging within her friendship circle on the playground. This does not appear to have a negative effect on her use of standard Afrikaans in the classroom, as noted by one of the coloured students: "She talks beautiful Afrikaans, proper Afrikaans...." The incorrect use of the word 'talks', is an indication of the effects of blending languages.

In concluding Lebo's engagement within the space of the school and classroom, we come to understand her positioning in this space and how she negotiates her learning practices in this space. Lebo is positioned as a "Ghost student". However, her desire and love for languages enables her to transcend this positioning. Lebo possesses what Yosso (2005:78) refers to as 'linguistic capital' meaning that she arrived at school with multiple language and negotiation skills. Hence she is able to navigate the apparent hostile environment, experienced in the school, and assimilate into the dominant culture with ease.
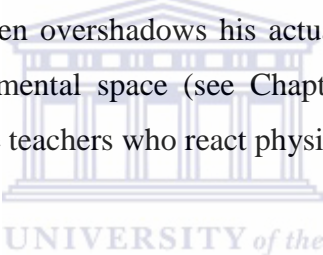
Black students, although it's seldom spoken about, are still confronted with racial slurs as Lebo recalled: "they like calling us names that is why I don't want to be African, names like 'kaffir' and 'darkie.' She then uses her linguistic skills to confuse the coloured children by speaking their language as she confirms: "I say them off in Afrikaans". Lebo uses her proficiency in Afrikaans not only to negotiate her way in this rough environment but also as an assimilation tool; for affirmation by the dominant group. She gains affirmation through certain learning practices; through conversing with friends and sharing scrapbook ideas. Lebo further uses her language and negotiation skills to survive in the absence of good quality teaching. Her linguistic skills, enable Lebo to tutor the other black students by code-switching instructions for them.

5.4   Student 2:   Shafiek in the institutional space

5.4.1   His institutional spatial context.

My first impression of Shafiek was of a student who appeared disinterested in school. I often observed him sleeping in class or lazing over the desk, looking rather bored and disengaged from classroom activities. His teachers variously describe him as someone who is playful, does not pay attention, does not participate in classroom activities, is lazy, talks a lot during teaching time, has a temper and is stubborn. His learner profile confirms this recalcitrant disposition. It contains his scholastic record from Grade 1 when he first entered formal schooling.

It could be said that Shafiek does not possess what Nespor described as a 'civilized' or 'school' body. Nespor (1997:128) noted that a 'civilized body' or 'school body' is one which stays silent, walks in line, keeps to itself and does not get out of it's chair. Shafiek appears to be just the opposite and it is this relentless behaviour that often gets him into trouble and makes him the target of his teacher's anger. It seems that his history of recalcitrant behaviour in class often overshadows his actual abilities and skills, that we came to discover in the environmental space (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1). Shafiek describes how he feels towards the teachers who react physically towards his behaviour:

> I'm naughty sometimes. Sometimes if I'm in a bad mood, I get angry and sometimes a little violent [remains silent then continues] It's my Sir, Miss when I stand up to ask for a ruler then he doesn't know why I'm standing then he shouts "Sit down! Sit down!" then he hit's a person. I don't feel like working there.

The way Shafiek is treated in school and more specifically in the classroom, plays a crucial role in how his learning practices are experienced and negotiated in the school and classroom. According to Mokhele (2006), before the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers were encouraged to use the cane as a method of keeping control. This changed after 1994 and teachers are now expected to relate to students in a friendly way and establish a more relaxed atmosphere in their classrooms (2006:148-149). This was reiterated by Hood and Hood (2001, cited in Mokhele, 2006:149) who recommended that teachers be aware of the need for a positive loving relationship if learning is to take place. Shafiek's experiences in most classes, is far from loving and supportive. In fact he gets

beaten on a lot and this has a disabling effect on his learning. He reacts to this type of mistreatment by saying, "I don't feel like working there".

I tracked his academic performance from the records in his learner profile and found that, like Lebo, he performed extremely well in Grade 5 obtaining 90% for mathematics and above 70% for his other subjects but that his marks declined drastically in Grade 6. He attributes this drop in performance to his own behaviour: "I think because I'm rude now the teachers they mark my stuff wrong. They write the rapports and maybe they gave me low marks".

Rist (2000 cited in Panofsky, 2003) notes that children often displayed disaffection with classroom activities, which manifests itself as either acting out through verbal and behavioural resistance to school work or apathy in the form of work not done, (2003:419). I want to suggest that in Shafiek's case, his disaffection with classroom activities could be linked to his learning disposition. In Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.3) I introduced Shafiek as a 'Digital Native,' following Prensky (2001), who noted that children who grew up with computer games, email, the Internet, cellphones and instant messaging, think and process information in ways fundamentally different from those of their predecessors (2001:1). One of Shafiek's teacher's told me: "He finishes a task in two ticks so that he can go and pester someone". Shafiek notes: "I'm a quick learner, if I play a game it's almost like within 20 minutes, I know everything about that game". He approaches his school work in much the same way in which he plays Playstation games. Despite the fact that he finishes tasks quickly, and is disruptive in the classroom, the teacher admits that he actually performs well on these tasks.

5.4.2 Availability and use of resources

Shafiek also received a textbook for each learning area but he seldom carries these books to school, which means that he often ends up sharing with a classmate or does not participate in lessons at all. I observed that Shafiek, like most students in his class is a 'pretend reader'. He has mastered the act of pretending to read since he knows that the

teacher will not check whether he has read or not. Shafiek seems to come alive in the Khanya Lab (computer lab), where he appears more relaxed, interested and alert. This is confirmed by his teacher, who recalls that: "In the computer room here he seems to concentrate and he is good in aiding other students when they get stuck with tasks".

The following taken from my field notes dated 21st May 2009 captures his behaviour in the computer lab:

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21/05/09

Khanya Lab: Today I accompanied the 6A's to the computer lab. I notice Shafiek pushing to the front of the line to enter the class first looking somewhat impatient. The moment we entered the boys raced inside towards the empty chairs, hoping to have a computer to themselves. Some of them had to share since there are only a limited number of computers. The Afrikaans teacher, who doubles as the Lab administrator, entered to tell me to see to it that they should not mess around. He informed me that this is not a free period and that one of the children stuck a lollipop stick inside the USB port so I must watch them. He then instructed the class, in Afrikaans, to work on 'fifi and fritz', a language programme or do fractions. The moment he left, Shafiek went on to the Encarta programme to research Marco Polo's journeys. I had read them the story of Marco Polo in reading class the previous period and he wanted to find out more about it. He showed Anthony how he found the information on Marco Polo and before long the entire group of boys were diverted from what they were supposed to be busy with. I checked him for not listening, reminding him about the teacher's instructions. He responded by saying: "This is more interesting, that maths programme is too easy".

</div>

This extract illustrates how Shafiek, using his knowledge of computers, lures some of his classmates out of the classroom and into thirteenth-century China into the travels of Marco Polo. Shafiek, in the absence of the teacher, draws on his own skills to learn about new things.

5.4.3   Parental involvement

Shafiek's mother plays a key role in his schooling and often expressed great interest in his progress. She has kept his report cards from Grade 1 to Grade 5 and is able to monitor his progress in this way. Like Lebo's grandmother, she supports him in ways which often go

unacknowledged by teachers, such as; like taking him to the library, helping him to gather information for projects and following a strict routine at home. Yet, township parents are often portrayed as unconcerned and disinterested in their children's schooling. His mother noted that: "I will take him to the library or introduce it to him if there is a newspaper article on it or on the computer. Then we will speak about it. I will give him ideas on how it works. His father and brother will get involved...."

Parents can easily access the school if they are experiencing problems, but they normally have to see the teachers after the school has closed for the children and with the permission of the Principal. Teachers seldom do home visits but Shafiek's mother notes that this did happen once "It is easy to access the school. Yes I go to them and I speak to the Principal. Then I wait in the foyer but during school hours you cannot go to the school....Mr X came to my home the other day to apologise for hitting him...." The parents who participated in this study felt they could easily access the school but from my observations I concluded that teachers seldom visited the homes of their students.

5.4.4   Social networking
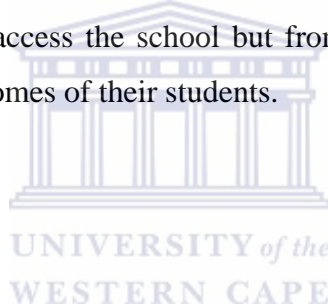
There is a remarkable difference between how Shafiek forms social relationships and networks in his environmental space compared to how he goes about forming them in the institutional space. In his environmental space we learnt that his social networks are more family-based. His mother and brother are 'instrumentalities' to him, which Nespor (1997:167) describes as ways of gaining access to popular culture, and in the same way they become beneficial to his learning. In the space of the classroom, his social relations are mostly peer-based. When asked what he liked about school, he replied: "My friends". It appears that, because he is shows disaffection for classroom learning and is often "hit on" [his words] by teachers, he does not regard teachers in a positive light.

His peers, especially the boys in his class, share his interest in planets, religion and computer-based activities. He often shares religious stories with Angelo: "He shares with me the Christian version and I tell him about the Muslim version." Shafiek often draws

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characters from the Playstation games he enjoys playing, as he explained: "I draw things from what I see and I modify them or upgrade it a little bit, make it fancy drawings, put weapons on it and stuff. I make it better and sell it to my friends. My cousin only pays R2,00 because he is my cousin". Here we see how games and the way he markets his drawings are used to shape his interactions with his peers and parents. Nespor (1997:168), notes that peers become information resources and sources, whereas parents provide the time, space and privacy necessary to master the game.

5.4.5 Linguistic proficiency

Shafiek's mother tongue is English and he is in an English first language class. He prefers to speak English in most domains. He speaks Afrikaans slang to his peers on the playground. A feature I found quite common amongst township children is the way they seem to change their tone and mannerisms when conversing in this type of grassroots literacy or slang. There appears to be a disjuncture between speaking colloquial Afrikaans and learning to speak standard Afrikaans. Shafiek equates standard Afrikaans with being abnormal, different from the Afrikaans he speaks: "I can't speak like white people's Afrikaans and they expect me to speak like that". Where Lebo uses Afrikaans, as a navigational tool essential to fitting into, what seems to be a racially hostile environment, Shafiek places no intrinsic value on learning Afrikaans.

In brief, the 'lived realities' in the above narrative allow us to understand the nature of his learning practices in the school and classroom. Shafiek is positioned as an 'uncivilized body' or 'problem student' because of his recalcitrant behaviour. He transcends this positioning, afforded him by his teachers, by drawing on his own networks and resources, which are stimulated more by his popular culture and less so by actual teaching. In other words, his learning can be seen in terms of networks and webs of association beginning and ending far beyond the boundaries of formal schooling (Nespor, 1997:169).

Shafiek engages in a variety of learning practices; sharing interreligious stories, marketing his drawings, using the computer to retract information and sharing his computer skills with his peers. This he does in the absence of a loving and supportive classroom

environment. In other words, his individual agency enables him to engage with learning despite the institutional constraints.

5.5   Student 3:   Bongiwe in the institutional space

5.5.1   Her institutional spatial context.

In some ways Bongiwe experiences this space quite similarly to Lebo, being one of the four black students in her class. She is uniquely wired into this space. Where Lebo is described as assertive and talkative, Bongiwe comes across as an introvert, shy and very quiet. She seldom speaks unless spoken to. Her teachers describe her as disciplined, stylish and neat, which shows in the way she looks and how she handles her books. According to her class teacher, she shows great respect for her work even though her performance is far below average.
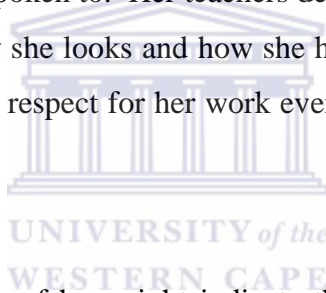
The description her teachers gave of her might indicate that she embodies the 'civilized body' or 'school body' that Nespor (1997:128) speaks about. She appears, like Lebo, to be a "ghost student" who is seldom called on to "do stuff" [Lebo's words], nor is she called on during questioning sessions in class. It seems worse for her since she is not as verbal as Lebo, so she seems invisible to most teachers. Clarke and Linder (2006:79) identified such students as passive receivers of knowledge, accepting themselves as uncritical and unquestioning. These authors recognise that there is a deeply significant socio-cultural context to teaching and learning in township classrooms (2006:79). One could attribute Bongiwe's silence to her cultural background but there appears to be other reasons. One overriding reason, according to her teachers, is the fact that English is her second language. This Clarke and Linder also found as a crucial factor since it does not allow for more active student engagement in the classroom (2006:79).

Bongiwe did not have the same exposure to English, as Lebo because she grew up in the Eastern Cape in a Xhosa-speaking environment. She was placed at Dawood Primary School when she was eight years old in an English speaking class, after having repeated Grade 1. Her learner profile reveals her poor performance since Grade 1. Her teacher attributes this to her being a "second language student" so he feels her poor performance "is to be expected" [his words]. This statement could suggest some form of differential treatment. Wilcox (cited in Panofsky 2003:420), speaks about low and high status students, finding qualitative differences in the ways teachers verbally control higher and lower status children. He found that a higher-status student with a learning problem would often receive multiple forms of assistance until the problem was solved, whereas a lower status student would receive no assistance since the problem was seen to be expected (2003:420). Bongiwe appears to be regarded as a low-status student.

One aspect that Bongiwe has in common with Lebo has to do with surviving in what appears to be a racially hostile environment, one in which she happens to be in the minority. She admits that she needs to speak Afrikaans in order to 'fit in': "In order to play, there are very little Xhosa children so I talk Afrikaans because of the coloured children, but they always want to be seen. The other day someone swore at me calling me a 'kaffir'." Bongiwe still shows a strong affiliation to her culture so she does not want to adopt a 'coloured identity' as we experienced in Lebo's case. It seems that she has a restricted social network at school and often feels isolated. This can affect the framing of her learning practices in this space. Her mother admits to placing her in Dawood Primary School so that she could get exposure to Afrikaans. Her mother explains that both English and Afrikaans are important for communication purposes but "she needs Afrikaans for here" [referring to the area].

5.5.2   Availability and use of resources

Bongiwe relies heavily on her textbooks in both the home and classroom space. The textbooks are also used in the home, mainly for doing school-based activities. In school they are used, as I observed, as a resource when Lebo is explaining what the teacher

expects them to do. Bongiwe would often turn to Lebo for assistance especially in classes where the teacher speaks too fast or does not repeat instructions.

She enjoys reading "I read a lot mostly school books but when she can my mother buys books mostly storybooks". She enjoys the reading period and selecting books from the 100 box project, which the department allocated to each grade for reading. In this period she is exposed to grade specific books, which leads to extra exposure to English. At home her mother sets aside 30 minutes per day for reading. These practices seem to have an effect on her results as she points out: "I'm always working hard because I passed in September. I failed maths but passed English and Afrikaans". Bongiwe's exposure to English and Afrikaans in the environmental space (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.3) appears to have had a positive effect on her results in school.

5.5.3   Parental involvement
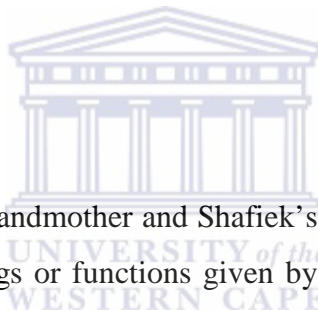
Bongiwe's mother, like Lebo's grandmother and Shafiek's mother, plays a vital role in her education. She attends all meetings or functions given by the school despite the fact that she operates a survivalist business selling 'vetkoek' to children during school hours. She is aware of Bongiwe's abilities and uses the school's parent meetings as a platform to discuss problems her child is experiencing, as is evident from the following:

> I want to be involved in her life. I want to know everything
> because if I don't know I want be able to help her so I want to hear
> from the teachers so I can help her or find help for her

I observed, however, that the intervention meetings do not appear to provide the platform that Bongiwe's mother requires to help her. At one of the meetings held in June 2009, I observed parents coming and going, some just to collect their children's rapports and others to hear a quick comment about the student's progress from the teacher.

The fact that Bongiwe's mother works long hours to see to it that her fees are paid, that she has school uniform and that she does her homework, is seldom recognised as a crucial point by the teacher. We learnt from the environmental space that Bongiwe's mother follows a strict routine at home and that she expects teachers to be strict so that Bongiwe will do their homework. Despite these efforts, according to Crompton-Lilly (2003:60) urban parents are typically portrayed as uncaring and unconcerned.

5.5.4 Social networking

Bongiwe's inability to make friends at home and in school appears to have an effect on her ability to establish valuable friendship networks in both spaces. She lives an isolated life at home. She is only allowed to leave home for religious activities and on occasion to visit Lebo. She seldom mixes with the coloured children in her class or on the playground. My observations reveal that she spent her breaks inside the classroom reading or conversing with Sipho, a black female classmate. This relationship appeared to ease the isolation she feels and affords her the opportunity to speak isiXhosa, which she is restricted from speaking in this space. During teaching times she relies heavily on Lebo, who tutors Bongiwe by explaining the work in isiXhosa.

Bongiwe's strong detachment from her neighbourhood and her school makes it difficult for her to build vital networks which could aid her in her learning. It also appears to be a constraining factor that affects the way her learning practices are acquired in this space. She admits to having strong attachments not only to Xhosa, her mother tongue, but also to East London, as she mentioned: "There are open spaces there. Here it's small and boring. There my cousins live but here I am alone".

5.5.5 Linguistic proficiency

Bongiwe brings to the institutional space the ability to converse in three different languages: English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, and this despite the fact that she is regarded as a 'slow or struggling' student. In her language spiral we learn that isiXhosa is the dominant

language, which she loves speaking and which she speaks in more personal domains such as: at home, to her brother, in the street and at the shops. She also indicates that she prefers speaking isiXhosa because she was "born speaking isiXhosa but at school I speak English".

The fact that she can speak three languages does not mean she is proficient in all three. Her teacher feels that her struggling in school "is to be expected because she is a second language student". Bongiwe appears to have grown in confidence through being involved in real-world literacy events (Yosso, 2005:79), thereby acquiring various communication skills. Her mother recalls her going from door to door to sell booklets in Afrikaans for religious purposes: "We use books all the time and she reads a lot because she needs to speak to coloured people". This exposure to real-world literacy events, especially to Afrikaans appears to have had an enhancing effect on her performance in school. Her Afrikaans teacher affirms this by labelling her an average reader, noting that Afrikaans is her third language.

In short, Bongiwe's spatial engagements are different compared to the other respondents of this study. According to Davies and Hunt (1994:389) "being positioned as one who belongs in or is defined in terms of the negative or dependent term, can lock people in repeated patterns of powerlessness". She experiences this space not only as a 'Ghost student' but also as a 'low status student'. Her response to this positioning is often observed as being 'powerless' which is key to understanding the nature of her learning practices in this space.

She seldom raises her hand to ask questions and finds it difficult to make friends. Bongiwe reads age-related books and speaks multiple languages. She does only what is expected of her to do.

5.6   **Student 4: Tasneem in the institutional space**

**5.6.1**   **Her institutional spatial context.**

In Chapter 4 (Section 4.2) I described Tasneem as a mobile student, who shows no real attachments to her neighbourhood spaces (Nespor, 1997: xvii). Letters her mother wrote to the school, which are contained in her learner profile, confirms this. Here we learn that they were evicted from one place and had to move, then the owner, which meant they had to move again, sold this place. We also learn about her mobility from aspects in the environmental space, especially that she completed her early schooling in Johannesburg as her mother recalls: "I remember preschool and the start of primary school. They [referring to the teachers] were very impressed with her since Grade 1. I never had a problem with her progress, behaviour or dress-code….being at that multi-racial school laid a good foundation". Her teachers at Dawood Primary School echo these sentiments. One teacher described her as: "excellent, always delivering her best, well balanced, disciplined and a pleasure to have in the class." Her scholastic record containing her results from Grades 4 and 5 also bears testament to this. She obtained results that were above the class average in all learning areas, achieving between 80 and 90%. I noticed, however, that like the other three students, her results also declined in Grade 6. She notes: "Some teachers teach too fast, like Sir X, he mumbles and only he understands". Despite this she still manages to perform reasonably well compared to her classmates.

Tasneem embodies what Nespor (1997) refers to as a 'civilized body' or 'schooled body. One of her teachers confirms this: "Tasneem is a notch above the rest, in that she hands in things on time, takes note of what is required and carries out instructions to the letter. Teachers often use her for important things". This is confirmed by Bongiwe who noted that, "It's always Tasneem do this, Tasneem go here, Tasneem bring your book! Almost like we not existing. We must just do our work." This form of differential treatment is also noticed by Lebo. She explains how she feels when the teacher does not call on her to do things by saying: "We feel sad at times because they don't see us they only see Tasneem. She's above us, she's like the star".

From an early age, Tasneem possessed the ability to successfully read the spaces of her learning by realising that working hard reaps certain benefits. Performing optimally in school brought with it recognition, which translated into opportunities to further herself. This is captured eloquently by her in the following extract:

> I was nominated by the teachers to represent the school. We went to UCT [University of Cape Town] for a workshop to learn about how to resolve conflict and other things. When children fight on the playground they can come to us and we will try and settle the dispute. We got training to do this.

She believes she was nominated as peer mediator because, as she states: "I'm hard working and I never get into trouble. The teachers normally ask me for my books and I get to do things for them". This apparent high-status image afforded to Tasneem by her teachers' sets her aside from the way Lebo, Bongiwe and Shafiek are viewed, suggesting that she rarely suffers the same type of treatment within the classroom space.
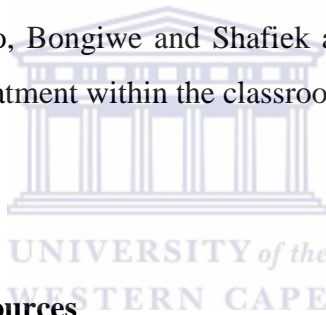
5.6.2 Availability and use of resources

Tasneem regards her textbooks as a valuable resource in both her home and classroom space. In her home she often reads ahead as she explains: "So that I know what's going on and it makes the stuff easier to understand when the teacher explains the work". In the classroom, after she had completed a task, one would often observe her reading her textbooks, which she corroborates in the extract that follows:

> When the teacher gives me work to do, I do it immediately. I first listen, then take it in. If I don't understand I read it up in the textbook and get started. If I'm in class and my work is done and I don't want to talk to my friends, then I read".

From my observations in the home, we discover that there is a productive link between her ability to read books, meant for older children and adults, and her success at school.

Despite this ability she seems to dislike the reading periods. This could be attributed either to the fact that the reading books are grade specific and she prefers reading more advanced books, or to the lack of discipline often displayed during these periods. This apparent lack of discipline is captured in the following extract taken from my field notes dated 17th February 2009:

17/02/09

The 6A class is with the class teacher for yet another 30 minutes of reading or as the teacher puts it "reading for fun." The children routinely march up to the box containing the readers, which sits on the front desk to select a book to read. The teacher sits at the table located in front of the classroom and calls Lebo to the table to read a piece from the prescribed English reader for assessment purposes whilst the rest of the class is told to read quietly. I observe only a few children doing what they were told to do. One student has her homework book inside the reading book and is doing her tables. The other is lounging fast asleep at his desk, on top of his reading book. A group of five students have congregated at the box and stay there browsing through the books but 15 minutes into the period they are still there. One boy took 5 books and sat paging through them pretending to read. The four boys who normally sit together in this class and who include Shafiek, are chatting away. As the noise level escalates the teacher becomes angry shouting: "Stop your nonsense! I told you how important this reading period is. Remember to record the title in your reading book [class work book] because we can check anytime what you have read." The class remains quiet for the next 5 minutes then continue to talk. While Bongiwe and Lebo are exchanging notes from their scrapbooks, Tasneem sits quietly reading.

Tasneem admits that she dislikes "rude children that is disrespectful" and she further notes: I don't want to sit and talk in class. If I get time I read instead".

5.6.3 Parental involvement

It appears from my observations in the environmental space that Tasneem's mother plays a crucial role in her daughter's education. They did not possess the economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to purchase educational toys or books normally valued in school but her mother's constant encouragement and motivation enabled her to achieve the required academic results. The fact that she 'stays on her' (Crompton-Lilly, 2003: 64) often goes

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unrecognized by teachers who tend to view township parents as disinterested in their children's schooling. Her mother recalls that even though Tasneem achieves 4's [normally given for outstanding achievement] this is not enough: "Tasneem this is not good enough for you, you can always do better", noting that in examination times she does not allow her to watch television and that she creates opportunities for them to learn by asking questions.

Her mother is always frequenting the school noting that the school is fairly accessible "I go to school on a regular basis where I wait until two to see the teachers, but I never have to worry".

5.6.4 Social networking

Unlike Lebo and Shafiek who formed social networks with their peers, Tasneem's social connectedness is with her teachers. She realises that working hard translates into beneficial opportunities, which in turn translates into upward mobility in school. We observe from the extract in paragraph 5.6.1 how she equates working hard with being able to do things for teachers and how this form of recognition will enable her to serve the school in future as she notes: "I'm a peer mediator and they interviewed me for leadership with Life Choices." The latter, besides being a welfare organisation, also identifies and works with students who have leadership potential.

Tasneem seldom connects with her peers, since according to her mother: "She's very private, all to herself". This could be because the other students feel she gets treated differently, or could be attributed to her feelings of detachment from both the environmental and institutional space as a result of her mobility in these spaces. She gives her feeling about safety in Dawood as the reason why she does not want to live here: "It's not safe even to go to the library. I tried once to go alone but they tried to rob me. My mommy wants to move to Johannesburg and I also want to live there".

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5.6.5 Linguistic proficiency

Tasneem's ability to read books far beyond her age level suggests a productive link between her reading and her proficiency in both English and Afrikaans. It is clear that English is her dominant language, which is spoken in most domains: in school, at home, on the playground and at the mosque. It is also the language that she prefers: "It is much easier for me to speak English because I speak it properly".

She, like the Lebo and Bongiwe, uses Afrikaans, more specifically in its colloquial form, as a means to 'fit in' but differs from them in her reason for speaking this type of township slang. Whereas in Lebo and Bongiwe's case it seems racially motivated, in Tasneem's case it seems class-based or a way of avoiding seeming 'smart'. Her mother recalls having to go to the school to reprimand a group of Afrikaans-speaking students because they had approached Tasneem, saying: "Jy dink jy's kwaai" [you think you smart or clever]. It is worth noting that her ability to successfully read this space by speaking like the others on the playground does not affect her ability to speak and write standard Afrikaans, as is the case with Bongiwe and Shafiek.
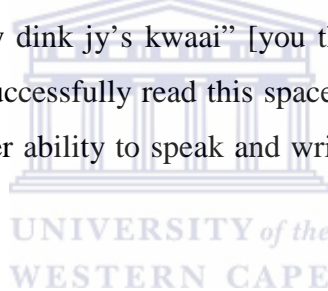
From observing her at school and in the classroom, I have concluded that she embodies all the qualities of a good student. Her learning practices are fundamentally positioned by the spaces in which she finds herself. In other words, the space of the school and classroom dictates what she must be and then she responds congruently to this positioning. In her case being a 'schooled body' (Nespor, 1997:128) gains her the recognition she requires for upward mobility.

Her learning practices are marked by her engagement with reading teenage and adult books, writing stories and her involvement in school-based organisations. Tasneem cannot rely on the rich connections or interactions, which Lebo and Shafiek engages with, so she often uses her reading skills to engage in productive learning.

5.7   Conclusion

This chapter presented data on the four students learning practices in the institutional space; that is, the space of the school and classroom. Here we clearly observe how the schools socio-spatial dynamics, including the surrounding context of the school, is plagued by social and economic difficulties. This appears not only to affect the functionality of the school but also the teaching conditions inside the classroom. We also find that each of these four students under study experiences life within this space differently. This in turn appears to influence the way their learning practices are framed, informed and positioned in this space.

We especially note in each of the four cases how the pedagogical practices of teachers and their inability to create supportive learning environments affected how these students learning practices were mediated, negotiated and valued in the classroom. I found cases of differential treatment not only in the way teachers teach but also in the symbolic messages they relay to these students which make it difficult for them to express themselves. These students bring to this space multiple abilities and skills and 'rich literacies' from their environmental space, which often goes unrecognised and unacknowledged within the institutional space. This is evident that certain teachers' discourses about their students' abilities are marked by deficit understandings of the complex navigations that these students make to engage in their learning.

Spatial positioning has a profound influence on understanding the nature of these students learning practices in the institutional space. Lebo and Shafiek experience the institutional space as a constraining space. Despite this they use their individual agency to navigate this spatial positioning. Lebo, on the one hand is viewed as a 'Ghost student', but she uses her affection for languages to negotiate her learning practices in this space. Shafiek on the other hand is viewed as 'unruly or uncivilized' but he uses his engagement with his popular culture to negotiate his learning practices in this space.

Bongiwe and Tasneem also experience schooling in constraining ways. Bongiwe experiences it as a 'low status student' and Tasneem as a 'high status student'. They, however, become what the space positions them to become.

The surrounding and underlying issues presented in this chapter dovetail with the fact that learning cannot be viewed as a uniform object but as an ecologically and economically localised one. In the following chapter I will offer an in depth analysis of the issues which surround and influence these students learning practices.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an analysis and discussion of the findings as presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4 I presented narrative accounts of the nature of the learning practices of four students in their environmental space: the space of the township and the home. In Chapter 5 I presented the findings of the four students learning practices in the institutional space: the space of the school and the classroom. The purpose of these chapters was to present narrative accounts of how student learning practices are positioned, informed, mediated and navigated across the two physical spaces. I present this chapter (chapter 6) in three parts: the first section is an analysis and discussion of the findings of the students' learning practices in their home and township environments, and the second concentrates on them in the institutional space of the school and classroom. In the third section of the chapter I offer an integrated analysis and discussion of the students' learning practices across the two spaces, with a view to show the specific and peculiar linkages that they make across these spaces. Here I suggest that it is the specific ways in which they encounter and navigate these, somewhat disjunctural linkages, which are definitive in explaining how their learning practices are positioned and defined in the context of their school in the township.

The literature that grounds me in this study was offered in chapter 1 (paragraph 1.1) where I problematized Fleisch's work (Fleisch, 2008); "Why South African school children underachieve in reading and mathematics". His meta-analysis illuminates five main reasons for underachievement: ill health, poverty, language competence, poor quality teaching and inadequate resources (2008:139). As pointed out in chapter 1, although Fleisch identified the possible causes of underachievement he did not provide an understanding of the specific ways student learning occur and could be understood. My research study therefore goes a step further by establishing how student learning happens in a localized context. I did this by foregrounding a group of Grade 6 students' learning practices against the background of two physical spaces: the environmental space, i.e. the

township community and the home and the institutional space, i.e. the school and classroom.

The narrative-based data that I presented in chapter 4 and 5 are analysed here in relation to the conceptual and analytical lenses I presented in Chapter 2 (see literature review chapter). I use the concepts of 'space' and 'learning', to focus on the relationship between spaces and how these students learning practices are framed, informed and positioned across the spaces of their learning. It is crucial at this juncture to understand that this study was not fundamentally about how children learn (cognitive processes or linguistic processes), neither is the emphasis on the practices of the teachers or management per se. Instead, the study has primarily emphasised the social context of the students' learning and how these are positioned and navigated by them in their living and school spaces. What this study does is show the relationship between these students social context and how they live that social context. The emphasis is therefore on how they are positioned to learn and how they navigate that learning positioning. In other words, what will be presented in this chapter is, how in this study, their physical spaces; the environment space and institutional space defines them in certain ways and how they navigate and transcend these spaces. It will show how these four students, based on their own resources, networks and interactions, 'agentially' construct a 'conceptual space', which relates to their learning dispositions. I explained 'conceptual space' in chapter 2 (paragraph 2.8), as reference to a figurative space, which is conceptually, individually and personally generated and constructed by students, in terms of which they are able to draw on discursive practices of both physical spaces relating to their learning, to construct their own learning practices. This is thus a space of conceptual construction, of how they go about actively living their learning in and through the spaces of their lives.

6.2. Analysis and Discussion of the Environmental Space

In Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.8) I introduced the notion of 'lived space' following the work of Nespor (1997) and Fataar (2010) that show, how people are positioned in their social spaces, and how they navigate and transcend their spatial positioning. Fataar (2010:4) borrowing from Lefebvre's (1991/1997) and Massey's (1994:3) conceptualization of space, states that there is a productive relationship between space and human agency. He points to the fact that 'lived space' is produced by human agency. Human action is

therefore constructed out of the dynamic interactions with the physical attributes of the environment (Fataar, 2010:4). Here the emphasis is on 'spaces of the body'- people's actual ways of moving through the world. Nespor (1997:119) uses the notion of 'bodies in space' –"the body rendered as a visual display or text readable to an outsider's gaze". He emphasises the recursive relationship between the body and space. According to Nespor (1997)

> bodies are inscribed with complex social markers, like gender, race and social class...Economic and political forces, along with organizational fields, shape bodies, instill in them certain dispositions, and most important, situate them in flows of activity that move them physically in certain ways and connect them to distant activities spread across space and time. In order to understand life as experienced through the body, then, we must look at the processes-some of them at least-that organize people in space and time (1997:119).

Here Nespor captures how children interact with the world through their bodies, similar to the way I captured the four students 'lived experiences' across the spaces of their learning. It is for this reason that I will look at how students inhabit space, by analysing their relationships to their neighbourhoods. I then look at how they engage with people and processes in their environment, noting that "bodily dispositions are formed in the flows of human activity in and across specific spatial environments" (Fataar, 2010:4). This is then followed by a discussion of how and on what basis these students engage with the literate world, in other words their engagement with educational literacies like knowing, doing, speaking, reading and writing. I do this in order to discover what these engagements produce.

6.2.1   How the students inhabit space.

According to Nespor (1997:94), space cannot be treated as static since it is constantly lived, experienced, reordered by those who move through it. Township spaces like Dawood cannot therefore be viewed as an empty and devoid of any human activity. The student respondents navigate this township space daily as a deeply constraining space. This township space could be described, following Brenner and Theodore (2002), as a neo-liberal space of deep constraints. The extract provided in Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.1)

and the Life Choices report, confirm how deeply constraining this township is. Fataar (2007:5) suggest that townships are "ephemeral and desperate" and see it as a "fragile and impoverished space". However, as Fataar suggests, despite the dismal state of the township, marked by extreme poverty, high unemployment and domestic fragility, the people in this community manage to live productive and viable lives. The narrative-based accounts presented in Chapter four bears evidence of the rich 'lived experiences' of the student respondents in this study. I am suggesting, therefore that despite the township being a constraining space, these students still manage to live productive lives depending on their spatial positioning in their environmental space.
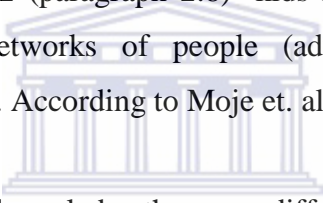
As mentioned before (see Chapter 4) these students live in the same neighbourhood but their experiences and interactions with their neighbourhood differ. Nespor (1997:94) uses the analytical lenses of embeddedness, displacement and mobility to describe the relationship between children and their neighbourhoods, which I illuminated in Chapter 2 and later explored in Chapter 4. His ideas open a window to understanding how these students learning practices are mediated and negotiated in this space. I will be using these lenses not as a means to mark or code students in any way, only to show how they are positioned and how they navigate this positioning.

Lebo, for example, could be considered a mobile student since she lives in the township but criss-crosses the city landscape over weekends and holidays to more affluent areas in the city. I suggest that she is 'spatially dislocated', not only because of her 'space hopping' (Fataar, 2007:8) but also because she does what I coin 'class hopping, where she moves out of her working-class existence in the township, into an upper middle-class environment. The apparent detachment and disaffection that she displays towards her culture and language is a manifestation of her spatial and classed dislocation. Soudien (2007:83) notes that people in their quest to be normal and 'fit in' often become alienated from the communities in which they live. They become ambivalent, which often leads them playing down their cultural backgrounds. Lebo's ambivalence can be understood in terms of her adopting a middle-class type of persona, which shows in her disaffection towards her culture. What is fundamental to this discussion is that "young people can emerge from ambivalence with a heightened sense of awareness-they take nothing for granted, mainly because they are both insiders and outsiders of the multiple worlds they inhabit" (Soudien, 2007:84). Lebo's exposure to a middle-class environment, its attitudes,

beliefs and ways of doing things influences the way her learning practices are informed in this space. I show this further down in this chapter.

Shafiek, on the other hand, appears to be physically embedded in the township since his movement is fairly restricted, i.e. he moves between home and school and home and madrassah. He therefore lives this space fairly routinely. He is, however, conceptually mobile, which could be attributed to his engagement with technology (the computer and video games). Fataar explains that practices produced in localised context are themselves produced within wider circuits of global, national and local scales (Fataar, 2010:4). I suggest that Shafieks 'conceptual-mobility' takes place through his interaction with his popular culture or what Nespor (1997:169) terms 'kids-based funds of knowledge', which children draw on to make sense of themselves and their environments.

As previously noted, in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.8) 'kids-based funds of knowledge' is made up of "heterogeneous networks of people (adults and peers) and things (representations and technologies). According to Moje et. al. (2004:38),

> It is important to acknowledge the many different funds of knowledge such as homes, peer groups, and other systems and networks of relationships that shape the oral and written texts young people make meaning of and produce as they move from classroom to classroom and from home to peer group, to school, or to community. It is equally important to examine the ways that these funds, or networks and relationships, shape ways of knowing, doing, reading, writing and talking....

In Shafiek's case, his involvement in his popular culture shapes the way his learning practices are negotiated in this constraining environment.

Bongiwe, unlike Shafiek and Lebo, cannot be regarded as either embedded or mobile. Bongiwe can be described as a 'displaced' student. Displacement appears to have a profound influence on how her learning practices are shaped in the environmental space. Her difficulty in establishing spatial routines, making friends and feeling isolated all point to this displacement. Dyers (2009:5) captures the relationship between township living and feelings of detachment when she notes that "township life frequently poses severe challenges to aspects such as family cohesion, parental control and the exercise of

traditional practices and values". These urban problems can make the rural heartland an idealised place with which students, like Bongiwe, strongly identify. She further notes that this enduring link to ones 'place of birth' ensures the vitality of one's mother tongue, and this is a major marker of group and individual identity. For Bongiwe, the township becomes a disabling space since she cannot engage productively with her language or culture. Living in a predominantly coloured neighbourhood makes it difficult to form friendships with children from the same ethnic group. Bongiwe's friendship with Lebo becomes essential since it acts as a protective buffer and support mechanism in what appears to be a racially-hostile environment but it also offers her a sense of belonging and ethnic identity (Renold, 2007:395).

Tasneem's strategic readings of her social context, catapults her towards upward mobility. She is aware of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and acts accordingly. I regard her as a mobile student having moved to and fro from Johannesburg to Cape Town. She does not show any real attachment towards this township area. She however, uses her 'inner resources' or 'social competencies' to enhance her subsequent functioning in this space. This shows in her tenacious commitment to education. Yosso (2005:77) refers to this resiliency as being in possession of aspirational capital; ones ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. She remains forward looking and is purpose-driven, despite the physical and mental abuse that she experiences from her stepfather and growing up in this constrained and impoverished space.

The above discussion shows that these students inhabit their social spaces quite differently. I suggest that the way they are positioned in this constrained space of the township can be associated with how their learning practices are framed. In the next section I illuminate how they go about navigating this constrained social space by drawing on various networks, connections, and interactions and processes, which are linked to their environmental space.

6.2.2   How the students interact with networks and processes in their environmental space.

In the previous section I explained how the four student respondents inhabit their environmental space, noting that even though they live in the same neighbourhood their

lived experiences in this environment differ. In this section I illuminate the multiple networks and processes that they draw on in order to navigate the constraining space of the township. Their lived experiences are examples of Massey's view that "lived space is constructed through social relations and material practices in light of the material textures of the environment" (in Fataar, 2010:6).

It is apparent from the findings that Lebo uses her social ties; her friendships with Emma and Jade, to obtain economic and cultural capital. Devine, following on the work of Bourdieu (1998) argue that recognition is central to the mobilisation of social and cultural capital. She explains that:

> Cultural capital has a particular currency in the field of education comprising of embodied (dispositions, set of meanings and modes of thinking), objectified (access to cultural goods such as art and literature) and institutional forms (educational qualifications) that are given recognition by those who are already dominant within the field. Recognition is central to the mobilisation of social and cultural capital (2009:522).

Lebo, as I previously highlighted, is both an insider and outsider of the multiple worlds (the township, her movement across the city landscape into a middle-class existence) in which she engages. Her friendships generate wider social networks and contacts, which benefit her economically (access to money/use of a credit card) and culturally (access to literature and educational products). Devine, (2009:526) further notes that "friendships have their own rule of governance, predicted on forms of recognition that are mediated by gender, social class, ability and ethnic identity. In order to be affirmed and recognised within her friendship circles, I am suggesting, that Lebo needs to keep two identities in tandem. In other words, based on her strategic readings of particular spaces, she ends up adopting particular identities relevant to the space that she occupies. When in the township she adopts a 'coloured identity' as a coping strategy in what appears to be a racially hostile environment. In the suburb, she adopts a 'middle-class identity', which Devine calls 'ethnic self-monitoring', which centres on minimizing embodied aspects of cultural differences related to accent, dress and diet. Lebo's exposure to a middle-class culture can account for how her learning practices are negotiated and informed in this space.

Shafiek, as mentioned earlier, is embedded in the township, so his movement is fairly restricted. It is however, through his engagement with his popular culture (use of computer and playing video games) that he forms lasting networks that are crucial to the nature of his learning practices in this space. Nespor (1997:171) notes that "everyday life is made up of a variety of networks". In Shafiek's case three networks converge to inform his learning practice within this social context: 1) his family-based network (his mother is instrumental in obtaining the video games and provides the space for him to indulge in his popular culture, as is his brother whom he observes in order to learn how to use the computer), 2) peer networks (cousins and classmates with whom he shares his computer skills, and knowledge about insects) and 3) commercial networks (games and computer software). His engagement with different networks prove that children are not only involved in networks that are compose of humans or animate entities but they are also connected to inanimate or non-human elements that is becoming increasingly important in their lives (Nespor, 1997:169). Shafiek's active interest in video games and interest in Encarta computer software are examples of his relation to the inanimate world around him.

As noted above, Bongiwe lives a fairly secluded life, which causes her to struggle to form the type of social connections that Lebo and Shafiek managed to accumulate. Her networks on whom she relies is her family network (her mother who helps her with school-based activities) and her friendship with Lebo (both in and out of school). Her friendship with Lebo is vital. According to Olivier (2006:57), peer friendships are vital for the development of learners since they usually hold peers in high esteem, as they provide company, a sounding board, and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Bongiwe holds Lebo in high esteem. She offers some relief to her feelings of isolation being from the same ethnic background and helps her cope in school, which I discuss later in this chapter. They also share activities, like compiling scrapbooks (see chapter 4) from reading materials in their popular culture, in order to structure their interactions with each other and give meaning to these encounters (Nespor, 1997:xviii).

Tasneem, like Bongiwe have limited social connections, mainly because she is a very private and purpose-driven person. Her resilience and tenacious commitment to education, and her constant movement in and out of the township, prohibits her from forming lasting connections in the environmental context. Most of her social ties are to teachers who

recognise her commitment and who aid in her in her quest for narrow expressed upward mobility. Self-formation (her forward-looking disposition) and bodily discipline (Fataar, 2010:2) are crucial parts of her young life since these enable her to gain access to and engage in culturally self-improved activities and social practices, which could ensure her upward mobility.

In this section I presented a discussion of how these students engage with various networks and things to navigate their social context. In the next section I discuss how these students transcend this deeply constraining space by looking at how and on what basis they engage with educational literacies in their environmental space.

6.2.3   How and on what basis the students engage with educational literacies/their literate world.

In, 6.2.1., I provided a discussion of how these students are positioned in the environmental space. I follow this in 6.2.2 with how they engage in multiple networks, which help them to navigate their spatial positioning. In this section I describe how they transcend their spatial positioning by illuminating how and on what basis they engage with the literate world. In other words, I elicit their engagement in multiple educational literacies like, knowing, doing, speaking, reading and writing.

One common dimension, fundamental to how these students transcend their spatial positioning, and to how their learning practices are informed in the environmental space, is the issue of parental involvement. This warrants discussion since "parents from low socio-economic families are looked down upon and therefore their voices are not heard" (Kralovec and Buell, 2000:79). In my findings I show that working-class parents are often constructed as uncaring, uninterested and uninvolved in their children's learning. The deficit discourses of teachers can powerfully position these parents, whom the teachers assume as not possessing the material and mental resources to aid their children's learning. My research in the homes of these children provides evidence to the contrary. Lebo's grandmother, as well as Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem's parents, plays a crucial role in the acquisition of their learning practices in both social spaces. It is especially their mothers who play a very important supportive role in their children's learning.

Lebo's grandmother provides the pathway for her to network across global lines by acting as a go-between, between Lebo and her friend in England. It is because of her grandmother's dedication in her work as a domestic worker that connected Lebo to the material resources (books, stationary, money for school fees) that she required at school. Shafiek's mother on the other hand, is instrumental in his engagement with his popular culture. She provides him the space, time and privacy for him to engage with music, magazines and information technology. According to Nespor (1997:116) "it is misleading to treat popular culture as a peculiar source of the curriculum". Later in this chapter I will show how Shafiek's engagement with his popular culture informs his learning practices. Bongiwe's mother uses creative ways to ensure that Bongiwe reads books and newspapers, which offer some assistance in her struggles with school-based activities. She manages two small-businesses to ensure that Bongiwe and her brother have the necessary material resources (books and newspapers) necessary for their schooling. Similarly, Tasneem's mother goes the extra mile to ensure Tasneem's success in school.

The findings (refer to a discussion of parental involvement in both Chapters 4 and 5) prove that all these parents provide creative learning opportunities in their home that appears to be beneficial to their children's learning. They 'stay on' their children, by monitoring their homework, provide material resources (computer software, games, educational books and toys), engage in their children's school-based activities (taking them to the library, reading with them and helping with tasks and homework assignments) and constantly motivate and encourage them. This study therefore reveals the intensity with which these parents care about their children's success in learning. They provide important support and resources for the children to access their aspirational capital, i.e. the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for these children's future success, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005:77). The involvement of these parents are seldom recognized, valued or acknowledged by teachers in the institutional space. This dovetails with Crompton-Lilly (2003:60) who noted that working-class parents are often positioned as uncaring, uninvolved and unconcerned. Felix et al. (2008:111) argue that, deficit discourses that teachers hold (see chapter 5, section 5.1) of township parents, powerfully position parents in particular ways, which serve to produce and reproduce inequalities in society. I now move on to discuss the multiple learning practices in which the four student respondent's, engage in, in their domestic spaces.

Lebo's interaction with her various networks and connections enables her to engage in a variety of practices in the environmental space that are used productively to enhance her learning in the classroom. By criss-crossing the city landscape she becomes actively engaged in new spatial terrains that for her present a rich context full of interaction and stimulation. She uses her linguistic and communication skills (her ability to converse in isiXhosa, English, Afrikaans and colloquial Afrikaans) to navigate her township environment. Her assimilation into a middle-class culture, which she access across the city, which includes her ability to mobilise middle-class resources, translates into inter-cultural experiences that appear not only to have a positive affect on her aspirations for mobility but also offers her a broader perspective on life. As Karlsson (2009:155) noted "the white and more affluent suburbs held views over the city centre and were well-positioned for easy access to highways, places of work, beaches and recreational areas". Lebo, therefore has the rich experiences of both the township streets and the suburbs. Karlsson, (2009) notes that children living in townships, "are enriched by being filled with many different people from whom they learn about society." Karlsson specifically refers to the street sweepers, shopkeepers, food stall vendors, loiterers, friends and the many local personalities with whom they engage with daily (p161).

Shafiek's interaction with various networks related to his popular culture, his ability to learn through trial and error and his observational skills, inform his learning practices in his home environment. He engages conceptually and strategically with a variety of learning resources, which enhances his learning. As Nespor (1997:169) suggests, his learning disposition is made up of "webs of associations beginning and ending far beyond the boundaries of formal schooling". Engagement in his popular youth cultural activities, primarily ICTs enhances his knowledgability and translates into hybrid social practices (see Chapter 4 paragraph 4.4.1).

Bongiwe's, involvement in real-world literacy events (religious and economic activities) enables her to live in what appears to be a culturally alienating environment, fairly productively. As noted before (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.1) people residing in townships often live viable productive livelihoods through their involvement in social, economic and religious activities (Fataar, 2007:13). Despite the fact that she is involved in real-world literacy events in her home, she lacks the agency that Lebo displays. This can be attributed to her detached positioning in this space and the fact that she lacks the social

capital (peer and other social contacts), which can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through social institutions (Yosso, 2005:79).

As previously noted in this chapter, Tasneem makes strategic readings of her social space, and navigates her spatial positioning based on those strategic readings. She is raised as a 'resistor' through verbal and non-verbal lessons from her mother. Yosso (2005:81) notes "mothers teach their daughters to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong and worthy of respect, thus resisting societal messages that belittle and devalue women in society". It is her forward-looking and aspirational disposition that affords her the opportunities that could facilitate her desire for upward mobility. Based on her strategic readings of her social context, she engages mostly in school-based learning activities and practices the necessary social skills, which are in line with what is required of her to become.

In the above discussion, I offered an analysis of the four students 'lived realities' in their environmental space, showing how they individually, inhabit space, draw on various networks, interactions and connections with people and processes to navigate their spatial positioning and how they transcend their spatial positioning through their engagement with 'educational literacies'. I argue that the way they go about transcending their positioning within the environmental space, produces 'rich literacies', which often does not get recognized, valued or acknowledged by teachers in the institutional space. This becomes apparent in my analysis of the institutional space, which follows.

6.3 Analysis and discussion of the institutional space

6.3.1   Introduction

In this section I offer an analysis and discussion of the findings as presented in Chapter 5 dealing with the space of the school and classroom. As noted before, Fleisch's (2008) analysis is a discussion of underachievement in South African primary schools. Bush et al. (2006:6) agree with Fleisch but adds that it neglects one major factor, ie. a focus on the important dimension of leadership. According to them, principals fail to make informed judgements about the quality teaching and learning, which is one of the main purposes of schooling. Although these theorists get us to the generative reasons for underachievement

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they still do not get us to understand student learning in localized context. Fataar's (2007) work in a similar context, which combines the lenses of 'space' and 'performativity', speaks directly to the way I used the conceptual lenses of 'space' and 'learning' in this thesis. He captures how three principals, at township schools enact a number of spatially-inspired performances in reference to their pedagogical practices that they have established in this terrain (2007:1). In other words, he suggests that these principals navigated their school surrounding dynamics to gain credibility and authority and thereby, to establish their schools as viable learning institutions under constraining conditions.

I start this discussion with an interpretive focus on space 1: the hall space, which is the performative stage on which the principal of Dawood Primary School enacts a number of spatially-inspired performances (Fataar, 2007:1) which gains him credibility as principal, especially with his school's parents and surrounding community, although he seldom gets to engage with the teachers and students inside the classroom. I would like to note that his performance ends essentially at the proverbial classroom door, in other words, his leadership does not get him to engage with students' learning and the teachers' pedagogical processes. Behind the closed door, in space 2, my findings show a type of 'homogenising' pedagogy employed by teachers. In the classes that I observed and specifically the one class where the research played out, I observed that the teachers go about teaching on the basis of an undifferentiated view of the students. In other words, they do not distinguish among the various students in their class and the issues, perspectives and learning style they engage in and bring with them from their home environments. I show how the teachers who formed part of this study and who are responsible for teaching the four student respondents, teach these students as if they all learn basically in the same way. After presenting an analysis of space 1 and space 2, I go on to discuss what I label space 3- a conceptual space in the third section of this chapter.

6.3.2   Space 1: The hall space: The Principal's spatial performativity

As has been noted, Fataar (2007) uses the lenses of 'space' and 'performativity' to show how three Principals, in similar context, engage in a range of pedagogical performances, based on nuanced readings of their discursive environment. He further points to the fact that spatial enactment has to be understood as "creative articulations unfolding in the spatial contingent terrain of the township (2007:22)." The principal of this school's

performances are informed by the school's surrounding dynamics. For Mr. Jansen (pseudonym), the school hall is his performative stage. I suggest that the physical position and structure of the school hall (previously described in Chapter 5, paragraph 5.2) which forms the centre of the school's building enables the principal to transact a set of performance that enables him to play the role of principal and manager of Dawood Primary School. Mr. Jansen confined himself to this physical space, the school hall, where he physically occupies this space by performing the role of Principal which translates in a particular way into the classroom but seldom physically gets beyond the classroom door. He established his authority as a principal by occupying the space of the school hall and foyer by enacting verbal performances and marching back and forth, but never into the classrooms. He fails to use his role as principal to engage with the core purpose of schooling, that of teaching and learning inside the classroom. Robinson (2007:21) stresses the fact that "the closer leaders are to the core business of teaching and learning the more likely they are to make a difference to students' especially with regards to student outcomes. Mr. Jansen's performances as principal, never get to this dimension.

Dressed in elaborate designer suits, the flamboyant Mr. Jansen directs teachers and students with a loudspeaker from the hall, acts as choir master at assemblies and puts on a one-man show at staff meetings, which he uses to enforce his authoritarian role as principal. He also initiates and uses various social functions as an ideal stage to display his performances. I describe in Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.1), how he established his pedagogical performance in full glare of an expectant community, consisting of community workers, church leaders, police officers, organisations, district officials and other stake holders, who incessantly move in and out of the school on a daily basis. I also described how he interacted with residents and small business owners surrounding the school, which establishes his credibility and popularity as a hands-on, socially sensitive and active principal. However, his confinement inside the hall and surrounding administrative offices does not get him inside the classroom. So he does not get to experience and address what I have observed as a diminished quality teaching in the classrooms, and the teachers who sit and do administrative work during teaching hours. He also does not notice the students having to endure corporal punishment or being left alone whilst the teacher leaves the class unattended. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.2) he uses eccentric ways to 'monitor' teachers work but this he does in the photocopy room by rolling off worksheets and activities which get him to monitor the

amount of work done but not the quality of the presentation of that work inside the classroom. What he does get to see is the worksheet or activity the teacher will deal with in the classroom but he does not get to see how that worksheet is used and engaged with within an actual lesson.

Recent research (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007 in Bush et al, 2009) shows that leaders are able to raise standards by,

> motivating and inspiring educators to high standards of performance, by developing and implementing effective evaluation and monitoring of classroom practices, including observation, and through direct engagement with parents and the local community to limit the impact of unpromising contexts on learner achievement (2009:6).

Robinson (2007:21) further notes that the role of effective principals should include direct involvement, and participation in, curriculum planning and co-ordination, teacher learning and professional development if they want to make a difference to student outcomes at their schools. From my observation at the school, these leadership tasks were often redirected to other staff members. This dovetails with Fataar and Paterson's (2002:16-17) notion of 'moral diffusion' which is the institutional response to the schools surrounding context and which occurs where management in dysfunctional schools cannot muster the moral authority to make demands on the staff. Jansen is an example of a principal who lacks moral authority among the teachers. According to Fataar and Paterson (2002:21) this in turn resulted in teacher responses that detract from a cohesive school culture and an effective and multi-dimensional focus on teaching and learning.

The individual responses of the teachers to the principal's diffused and diminished authority could be attributed to his performative role. While he managers to pull off his role as a responsive principal, he is involved in fraught relationships with his staff. This relationship and the fact that they are unionized, prevents him from entering the teachers' classrooms to monitor and engage with their pedagogical processes. He also has very one-dimensional relations with the rest of his senior management. Mr. Jansen runs the school more or less without support or productive co-operation from the rest of his management and teachers. The principal's spatial processes in the hall and foyer are cut off from the

goings-on in the classroom space, leaving the school's leadership, embodied in his person, unable to engage with learning of students' and the teachers' pedagogical processes. I now go beyond the classroom door to analyse what happens inside the classroom.

6.3.3 Behind the closed door: teachers homogenising pedagogy

In the previous section I discussed the performative role of the Principal, which only got him as far as the classroom door. In this section I move beyond the closed door to the inside of classroom in order to analyse and discuss my findings of what I observed inside the classroom space. For Fleisch (2008:126) the classroom is the major source of crisis in primary education in South Africa. He attributes this crisis to five factors:

- Teacher absenteeism
- Under utilisation of resources
- Ineffective teaching methods
- Teacher weak subject knowledge
- Misunderstanding the demands of the curriculum

My findings provide evidence to support Fleisch's analysis (see my interpretation of Table 1 in Chapter 5), which provides background information on the teachers responsible for teaching the four students under study. In brief, I found teachers still using 'chalk and talk' as a teaching strategy and relying heavily on the textbook as a teaching resource, thus failing to use diverse teaching strategies. I also found teachers who were not trained in the subject areas they teach, which appeared to have an effect on their subject knowledge. I observed teachers allowing other non-teaching activities to interrupt with teaching contact time. These factors dovetail with Fleisch's findings on factors that contribute to poor quality teaching.

Christie (2008: 184) notes that "students have very different experiences of learning in South African schools". She points to the two-tier education system operating in South African schooling much in the same way as Fataar and Paterson (2002) describes with the functional-dysfunctional continuum and Teese and Polesel's (2003) description of

fortified and exposed sites, which I discussed in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.4). From these discussion and my observations it appears that Dawood Primary resembles much of the characteristics associated with dysfunctional schools or exposed sites. One major factor that emerged of my findings is that there appears to be no agency in the teachers pedagogical encounters with the children inside the classroom and this appears to have a profound impact on how these children are positioned in the classroom, which in turn impacts on how their learning practices are acquired, mediated and negotiated in this space.

One way to understand these students' positioning and lived experiences inside the classroom is by drawing on Nespor's (1997) notion of the classroom as a 'bounded space'. According to Nespor,

schools define regions of space and permissible behaviour within these spaces. It tries to suppress bodily movement, and expression and to define appropriate bodily orientations. They help code bodies as having gender, race, beauty, grace, ugliness, and stink. Having exclusive control of a bounded physical space is important part of a teachers' identity within the school. But teachers' frames of reference, the 'spaces' of their practices, were not just their physical classrooms, but also their students bodies, considered as bounded containers of attributes and behaviours (1997:122-123).

This helps in understanding why Lebo is coded a as second language student, assertive and growing in confidence. It explains why Shafiek is coded as 'unruly', whilst Bongiwe is coded as a struggling, second language student, and Tasneem as a 'civilized schooled body'. Davis and Hunt (1994) use the concept of 'marking' to develop their analysis on how marginal members of the classroom are coded. They noted that competent students are unmarked in terms of 'good-bad' student binary and those disruptive students are marked as problem students (1994:390).

I gathered from the teachers interviews that they are aware of the differences between the students and these differences are illuminated in their descriptions of their students for example, in their own words they describe Lebo and Bongiwe as 'second language students', Shafiek as lazy, one who has a temper and is stubborn, who seldom participates in classroom activities, but shows confidence in the computer laboratory and Tasneem as

hardworking. However, even though these teachers figured out who these students are, it appears from my observations that they fail to see what the consequences of 'knowing' these students could have for their teaching practices. In other words, teachers tended not to differentiate in their pedagogical encounters with these students. They teach the students as an 'amorphous entity' with what can be described as 'distant proximity.'

While it appears that these teachers don't read their students as homogeneous, which is clear from their descriptions of these students, they enact their pedagogical practices in the classroom in a homogenising manner, failing to make distinctions among them. What I'll describe as their homogenising pedagogy, in reference to an undifferentiated teaching approach to their students, does not get them to these students' interesting and novel approaches to their learning practices. These teachers have no idea about them. Instead, every student seems to be treated in a crudely differentiated manner, as lazy, dumb, clever, or struggling. They do not engage with what the students bring to their classroom learning. So the effect of style of teaching one of differentiated pedagogy, where they teach to the rich diversity of their students, is lacking. From my observations I concluded that they adopt blunt and unmediated pedagogical styles that largely fail to provide a productive learning platform in their classroom. Pillay (2004: 5) notes that this approach is compounded if educators are not trained to work with students from diverse backgrounds, since they end up mapping problems that emerge onto the students rather than on the system that needs to be modified, and crucially, in their personal pedagogical styles and approaches. The homogenising pedagogy of the teachers could account for how the four students in this study are positioned and how this contextual positioning appears to affect how their learning practices are mediated in the space of the classroom, which will be made clear in the next section.

6.3.4   Space 3: The conceptual space: students parallel navigations

I now turn my attention to the conceptual space of the students' own learning navigations, the basis on which they experience the physical space of the institution and how, given their experiences in it, they go on t establish their learning practices. I argue that the constrained or bounded physical space of their classroom positions each of them in specific ways. They in turn navigate this space based on their own resources, networks and interactions, which relates to their learning dispositions. In other words, due to the

poor quality teaching evident from my observations and from interviews with the respondents, these students 'agentially', individually and personally work out, relative to their own resources, networks and interactions with people and processes, their specific ways of establishing their learning practices. They carve out their own conceptual space of learning, parallel and in response to constraints on them by the school and classroom. This led them to establish novel and diverse learning practices, which are manifested in what they know, do, speak, read and write. Following is the analysis of each students positioning in the institutional space and how they navigate their spatial positioning to construct what I coin their 'conceptual space', which gets us to the heart of the research question f this study (see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2)

As noted in Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.3), Lebo is positioned as a 'ghost student' in her classroom, one who seldom gets recognised for developmental opportunities. She transcends this positioning due to her affection for Afrikaans, the dominant language used in this school and surrounding community, and her desire to adopt a 'coloured' identity. Lebo possesses what Yosso (2005:78) refers to as 'linguistic capital' with which she arrived at school, in reference to her multiple linguistic ability and social skills. This is evident from her exposure to an English environment in her environmental space, her affection for Afrikaans and her ability to speak colloquial Afrikaans. Hence, she is able to navigate the apparent hostile environment experienced in school and assimilate into the dominant culture with ease. As noted by Blommaert et al., (2005a), Dyers, (2007) multiple languages are likely to be a reality in the lives of students where they borrow and blend from two or more languages when engaging in various learning practices. Blommaert et al., (2005a:210) notes that multilingualism is not what people have, or don't have, but what their environment enables or disables them to use, which points to a deeper understanding of the use of languages in living context such as Lebo's. Armed with linguistic capital, Lebo is able to gain affirmation, by using it to aid her learning. Soudien, (2007:84) explain that students such as Lebo simply want to blend in, which often leads to alienation from their culture and in turn results in ambivalence.

Lebo also gains affirmation through participating in learning practices associated with the dominant culture at the school; through conversing with friends and sharing scrapbook ideas. According to Devine (2009:526) friendships, are not only important sources of social capital, but also provides crucial networks to combat challenges. She notes that

there is a fine line between recognition and rejection, when it comes to ethnic differences in peer friendship groups. This is predicated on the extent to how well the 'other' could be accommodated to the dominant ways of 'being' and 'doing'. By speaking like the coloured children and playing their games, Lebo was able to signify her willingness to be the same. Her sense of agency lies in her ability to make nuance readings of her spatial positioning, which shows in her affection for Afrikaans and her need to blend in. In this way she could be said to possess what Yosso (2005: 80) refers to as navigational capital based on his notion of community cultural wealth, which acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints. In the absence of quality teaching in the bounded space of the classroom, Lebo is able to counter-position her physical positioning. Her multiple linguistic ability enables her to tutor weaker black students, by code-switching instructions for them.

Like Lebo, Shafiek does not allow the institutional space to define him. As noted earlier (Chapter 5, paragraph 5.4), he learns in the absence of a loving, positive and supportive school and classroom environment. According to Mokhele (2006:149), it is believed that in a relationship of trust positive educative learning can be achieved. This is not the case for Shafiek. Because of his recalcitrant behaviour, he is positioned as an 'uncivilized' or 'unruly' body, which impacts on his lived experiences in the classroom. In fact the school and classroom appears to be a disabling space. Davies and Hunt (1994), note that disruptive students are often marked as problem students, where the problem is seen to lie in them and is read in terms of their differences from others. These students make authority relations of the classroom much more visible (1994:391).

As mentioned previously, (in Chapter 5, paragraph 5.4) he displays a disaffection for classroom activities, which Rist (in Panofsky, 2003:419) argues could manifest as either acting out through verbal and behavioural resistance to school work or apathy in the form of work not done. From my observations I would argue that the reason for his disaffection could be as a result of his learning practices in his environmental space. Shafiek, as noted in paragraph 6.1 is conceptually mobile because of his involvement in his popular culture or kids-based fund of knowledge. In Shafiek's case his 'conceptual mobility' is shown by his active involvement with Playstation games and his interest in the Encarta computer programme. The fact that he is able to learn by himself, through a complex network of

people and things, points to why we should reconsider what it means to learn (Nespor, 1997:168).

For Shafiek, the space of the classroom is a constraining space, which he manages to transcend drawing on his own networks (peer-networks) and resources (as a Digital Native). He is stimulated more by his popular culture than actual quality teaching. In other words, his learning can be seen in terms of networks and webs of association beginning and ending far beyond the boundaries of school (Nespor, 1997:169). His engagement with a variety of learning practices; sharing inter-religious stories, marketing his drawings, interacting with the computer, and sharing information and computerised skills with his classmates, shows his agency to engage with learning despite being bounded and constrained inside the classroom.

For Bongiwe, the classroom space appears to be a disabling space. She is positioned both in terms of being a 'ghost student' and a 'low-status' student thus marking her as a marginal member in the classroom. From my observations and interactions with Bongiwe, it appears that she lacks enough confidence and individual agency needed to transcend her spatial positioning, being somewhat locked into patterns of powerlessness. According to Davies and Hunt (1994:389), "being positioned as one who belongs in or defined in terms of the negative or dependent term, can lock people in repeated patterns of powerlessness". This feeling of powerlessness is further compounded by the way she is treated or viewed by teachers. Rist (2000, in Panofsky 2003:419) found that low status students lived experiences of schooling differs substantially from that of 'high status students, especially with regards their treatment by teachers. This was evident from my findings in that being a 'ghost student' she seldom got called on to participate in activities which could lead to greater academic learning. This form of differential treatment is confirmed by one teacher's reaction, who regarded her as a 'second language' student, whose poor academic performance is to be expected. Fleisch (2008:119) also warns that for these students language is likely to be a profound barrier to academic achievement. I argue that poor quality teaching and the added implications of undifferentiated treatment in the classroom compound this. She appears to accept herself as a passive receiver of knowledge, uncritical and unquestioning (Clark and Linder, 2006:79). Panofsky notes that differential treatment, which translates into differential classroom instruction, is of crucial importance in the development of a student's identity and agency (2003:424).

It appears from this discussion that Bongiwe has been positioned in a particular way and she ends up accepting this positioning. This shows in her disengagement in classroom activities. She seldom speaks out or asks questions. Children, like Bongiwe are often culture bound not to speak back to adults until they are asked to (Kiringu, 2005:290). This could account for Bongiwe's silence in the classroom. Probyn (2008:8) notes that language use in the classroom is also closely tied to issues of language loyalty and cultural identity. In Bongiwe's case this is evident since she shows a strong affection for her place of birth and her mother tongue. Her use of isiXhosa in intimate domains; her home, in church, with Lebo and when reading her bible, shows this affection towards her mother tongue.

Unlike Lebo, Bongiwe finds it difficult to make friends. Her friendship with Lebo, however, is important to her learning, since she often turns to her for help with her school work especially given the fact that she is seldom visible to her teachers. Her engagement in various learning practices such as being involved in real-world literacy events, reading books and being proficient in multiple languages, which comes from her environmental space often, goes unrecognized and unacknowledged by her teachers. Her positioning, one of powerlessness makes it difficult to position oneself as having power, or being able to act in self-directed ways.

Unlike the first three students in this discussion, I described Tasneem in Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.4.1) as a 'civilised' or 'schooled' body. This is evident from her teachers' descriptions of her. She embodies all the qualities of a good student or a high-status student. According to Wilcox (1988, cited in Panofsky, 2003) high-status students are given more opportunities to develop 'self-presentation' skills, such as speaking and presenting before a group, and they receive considerable guidance and praise doing so (2003:421). This is reiterated by Davies and Hunt (1994) who noted that,

Competent students are also unmarked in terms of the good/bad student binary. These students with their teacher create the context that is recognisable as a classroom. They know 'how to behave' and in doing so become members of those social scenes in which the teacher is positioned as authoritative teacher and they are positioned as co-operative students. The achievement of this normal scene is in

many ways not visible to any of the participants since it is taken for granted as the way things are in classrooms (1994:390).

Being a co-operative student makes her more visible to the teachers and therefore her lived experiences in school and classroom differ profoundly from the experiences of the other students in this study.

Tasneem reads this space strategically. Her performances in school translate into opportunities that will ensure her upward mobility and may enable her to break free from poverty. Fataar (2009:4) notes that mobility is often influenced by the vagaries of the physical spaces one finds oneself in. She often does what Fataar alludes to "navigate 'her' life circumstances fundamentally on the basis of simultaneous internal discipline that controls her psychological imprinting, marshalled, sometimes with difficulty, while performing ... a forward looking disposition" (2009:4-5). Yosso (2005:78) refers to her resilience, as based on the exercise of aspirational capital. Most of the developmental opportunities that she received are as a result of being noticed by her teachers, which is mainly due to the fact that she acts in ways that fit her role as a 'co-operative' student. As a result of this role, she seldom succumbs to the same treatment afforded the other three students in this study.

Tasneem is an upward mobile student, whose learning practices are marked by her involvement in reading teenage and adult books, writing stories and being involved in school-based organisations. She uses her ability to read to engage in productive learning. What is clear from this discussion is that, like Bongiwe, she is positioned in this space in a certain way and acts in accordance to this spatial positioning. In other words, her positioning, one of competent, high-status student or 'civilized' or 'schooled' body not only informs the way she learns but also how and what basis she positions herself to become.

6.4   An integrated analysis and discussion of student learning practices across the two spaces.

In this section I offer an integrated analysis and discussion of the nature of the students' learning practices across the spaces of their learning: the environmental space (township community and home) and the institutional space (school and classroom). Earlier, in this chapter (6.2 and 6.3), I illuminated the crucial role that space plays in the lives of the four student respondents, by showing how they are positioned in these spaces, how they individually, personally and agentially navigate these spaces and how they then manage to transcend this spatial positioning. Their ability to transcend their spatial positioning informs, frames and positions their learning practices across these spaces. In this section the disjunctural linkages between these social spaces is illuminated based on their 'lived experiences' in these two spaces, which is in turn is based on their rich narratives and described in the preceding analysis of these spaces. I want to clearly state that I do not view these spaces as separate and unlinked. The distinctive focus on each of the two spaces was meant as a heuristic, to highlight the specific dynamics that constituted their learning practices in each space. We need to understand that in reality these spaces are not lived in this distinctive manner. These children navigate their spaces through intersections and over-lappings. The analytical purposes of the study was to understand how, based on these lived practices, they navigate and establish their own learning, what I referred to above as a conceptual space of learning.

I argue that the social spaces are either congruent or incongruent depending on the personal positioning of each of the students in it. The environmental and institutional spaces became relatively congruent and productively linked spaces for both Bongiwe and Tasneem, in that these social spaces dictate what they should be and they become what these spaces allow them to become. In other words, it appears as if their spatial positioning circumscribes their identifications. I would suggest that these two students' learning practices are positioned and defined by the spaces in which they find themselves.

In contrast, the environmental and institutional spaces are somewhat incongruent spaces for Lebo and Shafiek. They developed a productive agency to counterpoise their spatial positioning. They became co-constructors of their lived spatiality, in reference to the complex ways they establish their learning practices. In other words, unlike Bongiwe and

Tasneem, Lebo and Shafiek do not allow their spatial positioning to dictate their learning dispositions.

Lebo, for example, manages to position herself parallel to her spatial positioning by keeping two identities in tandem and by engaging in rich socio-cultural activities that informs her learning practices in these spaces. However, there is a disjuncture between her productive learning engagements in the environmental space and the way she is marked, (as a 'ghost student' or 'second language student') and treated (in undifferentiated or homogenising ways) in the institutional space. Similarly, Shafiek also positions himself parallel to his spatial positioning, by relying on his engagements with both his animate and inanimate world. Shafiek engages in his own learning, despite being marked in the institutional space in terms of a good and bad student binary and coded as 'unruly' or 'disruptive' student, and in the absence of a supportive and enriching classroom learning environment.

In contrast, it could be said that Bongiwe and Tasneem, lack the type of agency displayed by Lebo and Shafiek. Bongiwe. In other words, Bongiwe lacks the confidence and individual agency needed to transcend the isolated and culturally alienating spaces in which she encounters her learning practices. As previously noted, she allows her social spaces to define her, as a 'struggling', 'second language student' experiencing her institutional space as a 'low-status student' and a 'ghost student', a somewhat invisible persona. This is attributed to her displaced feelings towards these social spaces, which is explained in terms of her strong alienment to her culture and language. She therefore remains entrapped in patterns of powerlessness, finding it difficult to lift herself out of this entrapment. To compound things, Bongiwe's lived experiences across the social spaces differ from that of Tasneem. Tasneem is marked positively, as a co-operative, high-status student and coded as a 'civilized' and 'schooled' body, whereas Bongiwe is marked in negative terms. I would therefore suggest that Tasneem, given her disciplined positioning in the institutional space, has a sense of agency that positions her narrowly as a forward looking person who is focused on her educational mobility.

In conclusion, it is clear from the analysis (in 6.4) that even though these students' live in the same township neighbourhood, live in similar homes, occupy the same township school and classroom, their 'lived realities' in these spaces are profoundly different,

indicative of the role that space plays in their lives. Their multifarious engagements in interreligious, intercultural, and real-world literacy events and activities in their environmental space often go unrecognized and unacknowledged in the institutional space, which shows a disjuncture or disconnect between these two spaces. In the next chapter I offer the conclusion to this study and provide recommendations based on the significant and profound outcomes this study delivered.

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation was an attempt to explain the link between the social lives of children in their families' living environments and their learning practices in their schools and classrooms. I started from the assumption that one fruitful way to understand these students' learning practices is to consider how their home lives influence their school lives and vice versa. I had set out to understand the children' learning practices in relation to their social networks and movements in and out of their township. This was tied to the position that there is a link between their learning practices outside their school contexts and those inside their classroom. This study set out to explain the nature of this link. In Chapter 1, I introduced the conceptual framework, which underpins this study. I combined, the conceptual lenses of 'space' and 'learning' to foreground the learning practices of four Grade 6 students in an urban township school against the background of two interlocking spaces: the environmental space (township community and home) and the institutional space (school and classroom). The key question that this study responded to is: What are the leaning practices of a group of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape? I proceeded in Chapter 2 to introduce the theoretical framework. I used an interdisciplinary approach in terms of which I drew on literature from various disciplines to understand the multiple complexities associated with my study. The study had set out to reveal multiple and underlying causes and issues that surround student learning practices across the spaces of their learning. I drew on literature informed by socio-cultural theory and critical race theory to provide alternative ways in which to view student learning practices within a localized context.

In Chapter 3 I described the methodological aspects relating to this study, which followed an ethnographic research design, underpinned by an interpretavists metatheoretical framework. I set out methodologically to attempt to capture the voices and perspectives of the student respondents and their parents that allowed me to penetrate and understand the intricate sociological processes that constitute the selected students' learning approaches and practices.

I went on in Chapter 4 and 5 to present my research findings in the form of narrative descriptions of each of the four students in their learning spaces; Chapter 4 concentrated on the environmental space of their families, social networks and township living, and Chapter 5 provided data-based narratives about their learning positions and navigations in the school and classroom. Together, these chapters gave descriptions of their learning practices, especially the distinctiveness of their learning practices in each space and the linkages between them.

In Chapter 6 I provided an analysis and discussion of the findings. I presented an argument about the multiple ways in which each of these four students' learning practices are framed, informed and positioned across the interlinked social spaces. In other words, what emerged from this process of analysis was: 1) that these four children's 'lived realities' across the interlocking physical spaces are formative in the way they are positioned in what appears to be their bounded and impoverished living and school spaces; 2) that despite their spatial positioning these students individually manage to productively engage in multiple and hybrid learning practices, that often goes unacknowledged by teachers; 3) that teachers deficit discourses often portray township parents as uninvolved, uncaring and uninterested in their children's schooling. 4) that the spatial positioning of the children play a huge role in determining the underlying and multiple aspects surrounding these students learning practices, and that their agency is determined by their complex positions and navigations in their localized environments; 5) it also confirmed the disjuncture or disconnect among their social spaces. I made the argument that these children produce rich literacies in their environmental space, but these go unrecognized and unacknowledged in the institutional space.

This study has shown that the learning practices of the four student respondents in their environmental space are determined by their positioning in this space and how they navigate this spatial positioning based on various networks, connections and interactions among family and peer-based networks and processes. I showed how and on what basis they manage to transcend their spatial dispositions. In other words, despite encountering the township as a constrained and impoverished space, the students and their parents manage to engage in rich learning practices that are multiple and hybrid in nature. Their learning practices range from activities such as reading books and newspapers, writing letters, doing homework and assignments to being involved in peer-based activities that

were informed by their popular culture. Some examples were their modifying and marketing of drawings, emailing letters, designing computer-based material, compiling scrapbooks, their involvement in real-world literacy events, and sharing intercultural and interreligious stories. In other words, my research shows the myriad in terms of which the children produced rich and hybrid literacies in their environmental spaces.

This study shows that their learning in the school and classroom is limiting, bounded and constrained. The students are treated in a relatively undifferentiated homogenizing manner by disinterested teachers who adopt one dimensional pedagogical approaches. These approaches fail to take into account the complex and rich literacies that the students bring with them from their homes. The most poignant finding is the inability of the teachers and school's management to leverage a productive platform based on recognizing the students' rich "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al, 1993). There are therefore no productive linkages between the spaces of learning in the environmental space and the learning practices of students in the school and classroom.

The dynamics inside each of these interlocking spaces point to a disjuncture or disconnect between these social spaces, which have a profound impact on how these student learning practices are framed, informed and positioned. I argue that the social spaces are either congruent or incongruent depending on the personal positioning of each of the students in it. Two students, Bongiwe and Tasneem end up accepting their spatial positioning and in contrast, Lebo and Shafiek navigate their spatial positioning by becoming co-constructors of space, confirming the ways in which space produces human agency. This holds various implications for teaching and learning, and opens up possibilities for further study, which I discuss in the next section.

Implications and recommendations

While this study focused on the lived experiences of four students within the context of one township primary school, the findings have various implications for teaching and learning far beyond the boundaries of this context. In closing, then, I will focus on the implications this study holds for policy-makers, principals, teachers, parents and researchers, and all other stakeholders who have the interest of teaching and learning at heart. I will end by offering recommendations for further study based on these implications:

- Policy-makers should adopt a backward mapping approach, as explored by Christie (2008) by looking at the smallest unit, namely teachers and students in classrooms. They should use this approach to offer support and guidance to teachers when working with students from diverse backgrounds.

- Principals should redirect their roles as administrators and instructional leaders to becoming more involved in the core business of schooling; that of teaching and learning. They can do this by going beyond the closed classroom doors, to engage productively with teachers and students inside the classrooms.

- Teachers should adopt qualitative approaches to gain some understanding of their students' lives. Here I am suggesting that the practice of home visits should be reinstated. In this way teachers will get to know the lived realities and family dynamics of their students in their environmental space. 'Knowing' their students will have a profound effect on their teaching styles. Instead of teaching children in the same way they should adopt a style of teaching, one of differentiated pedagogy, where they teach to the rich diversity of their students.

- Parents' voices and perspectives should be heard. This could be done by involving parents in all aspects of their children's learning. This study revealed that teachers hold various deficit assumptions about township parents and students.

- Researchers should direct their research to the wider context in which children learn. One way of doing this is to research the role of space in the lives of children, like this research has done but also more fundamentally to move from theory into researching practices that will be valuable to teachers and students in marginalized contexts. This brings me to my final words where I offer recommendations for further study.

In this study I illuminated how the four student respondents constructed what I called a rich conceptual space of learning based on a wide range of networks, connections and interactions with both their animate and inanimate world that, start and end far beyond the boundaries of formal schooling. What is required now is further study, which will explore how teachers tap into this 'conceptual space' in order to provide rich pedagogical spaces in their classrooms. This should be done as a means of offering alternative ways in which schooling for marginalized students can be imagined.

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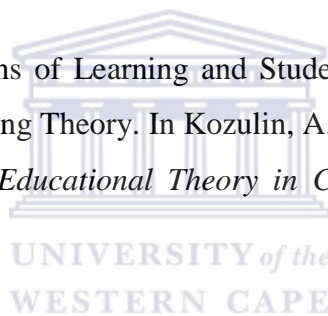
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PERSONAL DETAILS:

1.Name and Surname

2. Where do you stay?

3. Where and when where you born?

4. What is your home language?

5. Which church denomination do you belong to?

6. What do you do for leisure?

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

1. Highest qualifications

2. Institution obtained

3. How long have you been teaching?

4. At which schools have you taught before?

5. Do you think that this school is a resource centre for the children/ Motivate why/why not

6. What do you teach and how long have you been teaching it?

7. Which other resources besides the textbook do you use when designing a lesson a particular topic in your teaching area?

8. What are your responsibilities at school besides teaching (extra things you do)

LANGUAGE ISSUES:

1. In which language do you communicate with learners?

2. Are you comfortable communicating in this language?

3. In which language do you communicate with your colleagues?

Could you please give me your views on the Grade 6A learners regarding:

(a) Family background that you aware of

(b) Academic performance thus far

(c) Reading abilities

(d) Any relevant positive and/or negative issues you observed about the student

[To protect the teacher's identity the completed questionnaires have not been included]

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APPENDIX B: **TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES WITH TEACHERS

BACKGROUND:

Three teachers involved with the grade 6A class were interviewed. One teacher refused an interview and did not complete the questionnaire. He said he doesn't have time for this. At the time teachers were involved with reports and schedules after the exams and I then rescheduled the interview dates to provide for time. All teachers were asked the same questions with variations here and there depending on their responses.

Interviews lasted between 45 to 50minutes.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think that this school is a resource centre for the students?

2. In which way is the school a resource centre for these students?

3. In which way is your classroom a resource centre for the students you teach?

4. Are there resources available in Dawood which could be used by students to complete assignments/homework/ or aid in their learning?

5. Do the majority of the students use the local library?

6. The following three questions deal with the schools institutional environment: whether or not you think it is conducive to teaching and learning.

   6.1 Do you consider your school to be 'Functional' or 'Dysfunctional' or where would you place your school on the functional-dysfunctional continuum?

   6.2 What are the positive attributes of the school?

   6.3 Which aspects hinder or constrain teaching and learning here at Dawood Primary?

[To protect the identities of the teachers their responses to these questions will not be included]

APPENDIX : C   **FAMILY INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

Interviews were done at the homes of each of the four student respondents. The interview schedule consists of a few basic questions but these questions were followed up with more questions depending on the responses. Lebo's grandmother responded on behalf of her family, although her mother was also present. Bongiwe's mother and father were present for this interview. Shafiek's mother and eldest brother were present for their family interview. In Tasneem's case her mother was interviewed.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. **Could you provide me with a brief family history, your personal story?**

2. **What is your educational background?**

3. **Could you sketch the personal family history of ….?**

4. **What can you tell me about his/her schooling [educational background]?**

5. **Do you value education?**

6. **What aspirations do you hold for his/her future?**

7. **Who helps with school related activities (homework/assignments/task)?**

8. **Does the student belong to any clubs, societies or activities in this neighbourhood?**

9. **Did he/she have any educational toys growing up?**

10. **Which resources are in the home that could help with his/her learning?**

APPENDIX D: STUDENT PROFILES

STUDENT PROFILES:

The student profile not only captures the diverse background of each student and his or her family dynamics but also sheds light on issues like language, their future aspirations and popular culture. [The profiles were compiled before the individual and family interviews]

Lebo: is an 11year-old black girl who currently shares a house with her grandmother and nine other children. Both parents were from Ciskei in the Eastern Cape. Her father was murdered when she was only three years old. Her mother works in a restaurant in Melkbosstrand. Lebo is does not see why people should speak to her in isiXhosa when she doesn't know the language and doesn't want to speak the language her mother speaks. She prefers spending time outside the township with a middle-class white family in Wynberg, where her grandmother works as a domestic worker. In fact she spends most of the holidays with this family and will travel with them to England soon.

Shafiek: is a 12 year-old coloured boy who shares his home with both parents two brothers ages 24 and 19 and two sisters ages 10 and 5. His father is a welder and his mother a housewife. He hasn't travelled outside the township, lives a very restricted life moving only between Dawood and Mitchells Plain. He spends most of his time playing Playstation games, placing great value on his original collection of Playstation games. He shows a great interest in the Encarta Computer software, where he learns about insects, planets and Greek Mythology. He hopes to go to Japan to study sword fighting. He knows a lot about sword fighting from the games he plays.

Bongiwe: is a 12 year-old black girl who lives with both parents and a 3 year old brother. Her father is a mechanic and her mother a domestic worker. Both parents are isiXhosa speaking and from East London. She enjoys travelling by bus to visit her grandparents in the Eastern Cape. She speaks at length about life in East London. She does not show much affection for Dawood, finding it difficult to 'fit in' and wishes that she could return to her place of birth.

Tasneem: is a 12 year-old girl who lives with her mother and stepfather, 2 brothers' ages 21 and 6 and a 3 year-old sister. Her father died when she was in Grade 3. Her mother is a housewife and her stepfather is a panel-beater. They live with their extended family of fifteen members on one plot but each has their own space. She enjoys painting with the art box her mother bought. She collects posters of various celebrities and reads thick books, which her mother gets from the adult section of the library. Her biggest desire is to live in Johannesburg where she attended grade 1. She regards herself as a hardworking student and enjoys the attention and opportunities that she receives from the teachers.

Individual interviews with each of the four respondents:
These interviews where based on information derived from the children's own research diaries, information from parent interviews and from classroom observations. Aim was to give the children the opportunity to get their voices heard. I was allowed to interview children during the reading periods and on class teacher days. I therefore did an unstructured interview. The transcribed interviews will be protected for ethical reasons; to protect the identity of these students.

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE
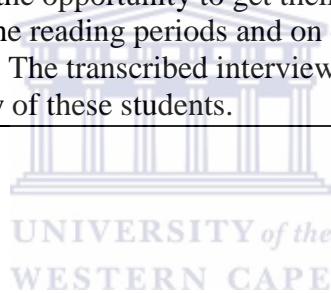
APPENDIX E: PHOTOGRAPHS

THE TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY [abuzz with activity] AND SCHOOL GROUNDS [barren land]

THE STUDENTS' ENVIRONMENTAL SPACE –INSIDE THE HOME

Bongiwe's Home

LEBO'S HOME – "One way in and one way out"
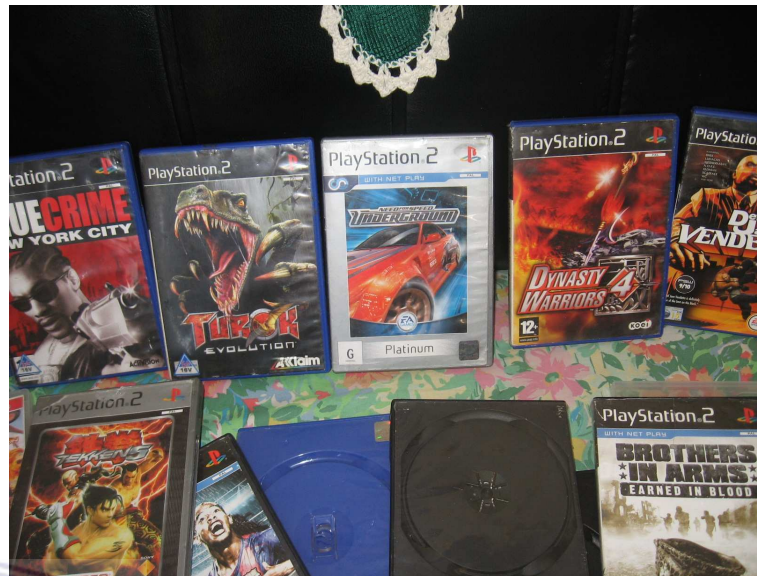

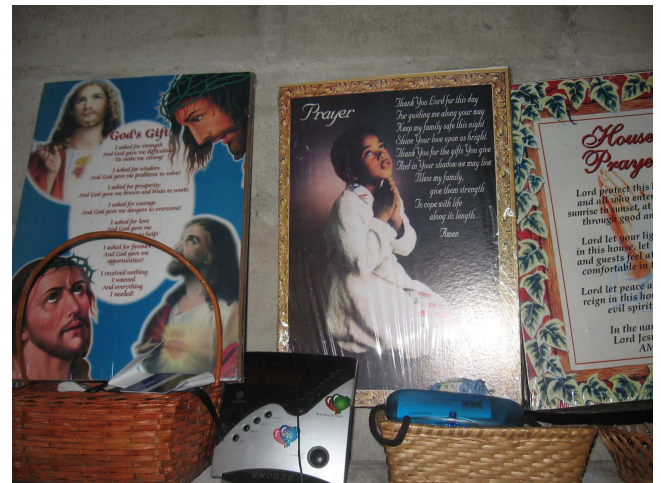**SUITCASES FILLED WITH CLOTHING/TOYS/BOOKS**

LEBO'S GIFTS FROM ENGLAND

SHAFIEK'S COLLECTION OF PLAYSTATION GAMES

RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS/POSTERS IN THE HOMES

APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

<u>**LETTER OF CONCENT**</u>
<u>**RESEARCH TITLE:**</u>
An ethnographic study of the learning practices of Grade 6 students in an urban township school in the Western Cape: a sociological perspective
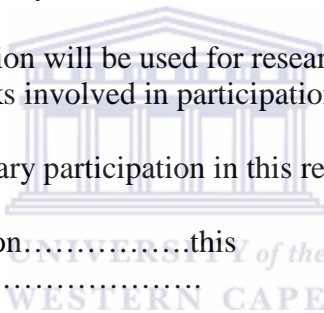PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: Lucinda Lucille Du Plooy (Mocke)

I, …………………………………(Full name in print) hereby give consent to the interviewer to interview my son/daughter; ……………………. This is for the purpose of data to be collected by means of an interview to be used in the research study. Permission to record the interviews has been requested, and I am aware that I may refuse to have the interview tape-recorded.

I understand that participation is voluntary, that my child may refrain from answering any or all questions with which she/he might feel uncomfortable and that I have the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time if I so wish. Information gathered from the study will be handled with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used to protect my child's identity.

I am assured that the information will be used for research purpose only and I am reassured that there are no risks involved in participation in the study.

I consent to my child's voluntary participation in this research study by completing this form.
Signed:…………………….. on……………….this
day……………………at……..…………….

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Navrae Enquiries IMibuzo	**Dr RS Cornelissen**	
Telefoon Telephone IFoni	**(021) 467-2286**	
Faks Fax IFeksi	**(021) 425-7445**	
Verwysing Reference ISalathiso	**20080222-0047**	

Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Mr David Langhan
Maskew Miller Longman Foundation
P.O. Box 396
CAPE TOWN
8000

Dear Mr D. Langhan

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: TO RESEARCH AND DEVELOP BEST PRACTICE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1.   Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2.   Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3.   You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4.   Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5.   The Study is to be conducted from **25th February 2008 to 30th June 2009**.
6.   No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7.   Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8.   A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the Principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9.   Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Education Research.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:
         The Director: Education Research
         Western Cape Education Department
         Private Bag X9114
         CAPE TOWN
         8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: **25th February 2008**

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