

PAINTING A PICTURE OF POSSIBILITY:

The transmission of symbolic violence in an urban township school

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives and non-verbal communication of students and teachers in one low socioeconomic status school, with particular reference to the messages that are conveyed about student performance and student aspirations, and student responses to these messages. The validity of these messages is evaluated in relation to the contexts, conditions and interactions within the school.

To this end, the study employs conceptual resources drawn from Bourdieu and Lefebvre, especially Bourdieu's notions of symbolic violence and misrecognition. Data is derived primarily from interviews with teachers and students and from observations within the school.

The study finds that students are confronted with several messages of promise and threat at school which link 'success' and performance to individual effort and choices. However, such messages ignore the ways in which the contexts and conditions in which schooling takes place impact on student performance and constrain their future opportunities. Even students who have great ambitions, who adopt a positive mind-set and who work hard have to reckon with the realities and narrow possibilities that come from being in an under-resourced school in a poor community. The study suggests that managerialist and meritocratic explanations of student performance, that are currently dominant in South African policy discourse, present too narrow a view of the realities that produce underperformance and that such explanations imply that students and teachers are to blame for disadvantages that are produced by systemic inequalities.

Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

WORD COUNT: 28863

Signed by candidate

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8 February 2019

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation explores the accounts of students and teachers in one school relating to student performance, how messages regarding the reasons for students' performance are communicated through the multi-modal messaging systems in schools, how students and teachers respond to these messages and how these accounts and responses relate to lived experiences within the school and its social environment. It is motivated by an interest in how deficit views of students and teachers in urban township schools, evident in hegemonic media, policy and scholarly discourse, relate to the perspectives and responses of those negatively affected by distributional problems in education: the students and teachers in low-SES schools.

In urban South African schools, there is widespread underperformance as measured in standardised assessments (van der Berg, 2016; Spaul, 2013). Explanations are proffered by politicians, educators, researchers and by students and teachers themselves. A significant opportunity for identifying the main narratives about urban township schools presents itself in the manner in which performance data is explained. Dominant narratives in public discourse explain this underperformance in terms of leadership deficits and teacher practices (Motshekga, 2013; Taylor, 2008). Popular narratives that focus on individual choices and hard work also abound in the media and across social institutions, including family and religion. Such narratives render invisible the differing contexts from which students enter into schools, the differing resources students are able to mobilise for success, and the unequal distribution of resources with which schools must provide education. Such narratives also adopt a neoliberal posture concerning responsibility (shifted from public to private) and blame (located at the level of the individual), to the extent that they neglect the unequal distribution of resources with which schools must 'play the game'.

Every explanation or proposed solution ultimately frames the problem in a particular way. Some of these 'framings' of the problem foreground macro-level policy issues that position students in urban township schools at a disadvantage and so open up possibilities for challenging such policies and arrangements. Other framings locate the problem at the level of the individual student, teacher or school and, in so doing, hide advantage and disadvantage and limit critical engagement with the ways in which policies and related processes affect schools in different ways.

Rationale

In fact, to penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques, and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the education system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities. (Bourdieu, 1976:113)

According to narratives that are prevalent in the media and policy discourses as well as some economics driven scholarship (Spaull 2013), students attending schools in 'less-affluent' neighbourhoods generally perform worse than students in schools in affluent neighbourhoods. Motshekga (2013) attributes this underperformance to leadership deficits and teacher quality. However, alternative explanations for student performance are offered by other writers such as Mills & Gale (2010:120) who suggest that performance is negatively affected by disadvantage and who also suggest that many schools are forced to play the game 'from the back of the field', as they describe the reality of being positioned 'without' (i.e. without adequate resources). James (2011:2) notes how a "displacement of understanding from one realm to another" masks the fact that students who are well-endowed with cultural capital may achieve relatively high grades even when exposed to bad teaching when performance is solely attributed to quality teaching; at the same time, the assumption that teacher quality determines student performance obscures the role of social and economic context on student achievement in lower performing schools.

My experience in working within low-income schools on the Cape Flats, South Africa has motivated me to examine the reasons for student under-performance in these schools because much of the dominant narrative would appear to obscure the harsh realities in which teachers and students must conduct schooling. Such narratives also seem to leave very little room for the experiences of youth to be taken into account. For example, how might rainy weather, leaky roofs and long distances to travel to school contribute to the kind of school absenteeism that places students in a precarious position? And how do students interact with dominant narratives about their own behaviours and performances? At times, student behaviours and performances that may be attributed to circumstance are interpreted and perhaps misrecognised as delinquent behaviour. Added to this, the poor class results 'produced' by teachers are sometimes attributed to ineffective teaching practices, but could as easily be related to the way in which community troubles and issues intersect with experiences inside the classroom.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research is to explore the narratives and non-verbal communication of students and teachers about school, student performance and student aspirations, in relation to the contexts, conditions and interactions in one low-SES school and to describe student responses to the messages they receive. In foregrounding the relation of the social context of the school to student achievement, I do not wish to imply that other partial-explanations are invalid. There may indeed be leadership issues or teacher quality concerns in urban township schools. However, I am suggesting that considering only such factors may present too narrow a view of the realities that produce underperformance, and may also imply that students and teachers are to blame for disadvantages that are produced by systemic inequalities.

The design of the study

The research was conducted in one co-educational public secondary school located on the Cape Flats. Data was derived from classroom observations, interviews and an examination of the how time and space are experienced, used and represented in the school and classroom. (The school is located in a low-income neighbourhood where there is high dependency on the social grant system and where crime is prevalent. The school has been classified as a 'high priority' site in terms of school safety, and permanent law enforcement officers have been deployed to the school as part of a programme known as the School Resource Officers initiative). The context of the school as well as the socio-economic background of the students is pertinent to the study as it presents an opportunity to explore how a difficult community context intersects with daily experiences in the school.

Working with concepts drawn from Bourdieu and Lefebvre to guide my analysis, I examine the subjective accounts of teachers and students, produced in interviews, regarding the academic performance and future opportunities of students. I also draw on observation data relating to the school context, conditions and multi-modal communications in order to produce an account of how messages are communicated within urban township schools, how these messages relate to the actual lived experiences of students and how students respond to these messages.

Drawing on Bourdieu, I describe: (a) the ways in which students internalise their experiences in terms of 'habitus'; (b) the capacities and resources students bring in terms of 'capitals'; (c) the ways in which students, teachers and the school are positioned in relation to the education system in terms of 'field'; (d) the strategies students adopt in their engagement with the school in terms of 'playing the game' and (e) the effects of representations of students in dominant narratives in terms of 'symbolic violence'.

Drawing on Lefebvre's notion of spatial practice, I will describe the ways in which time/space is organised, used and experienced and the messages conveyed in these ways.

Research questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What messages are communicated to students concerning their academic performance and aspirations for the future?
2. How do the messages students receive about success and performance align with how students are positioned within the schooling system and a broader social context?
3. How do the students themselves account for their academic performance and what aspirations do they have for the future?
4. What student responses are evident in student behaviour?

Chapter outline

This chapter has introduced the study, providing an overview of its purpose, rationale, design and research questions.

Chapter Two will examine explanations of student (under)performance offered in literature including: meritocratic approaches, technical-managerial approaches and social reproduction approaches.

The conceptual framework for the study is presented in Chapter Three. The chapter describes how concepts drawn from Bourdieu & Lefebvre have been employed in this study in order to more adequately describe how messages are transmitted through narrative and non-verbal communication.

In Chapter Four, I explain the research design and methodology of this study. In addition to this, I explain the reasons for conducting a single-site case study and why I selected the school site.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data from the observations and interviews that were conducted at the research school. Chapter Five also demonstrates how the data was organised thematically and presents the following themes: 'Work hard(er)', 'Futures wide open', 'Weak boundaries', 'Sensory overload', 'Visible conditions, invisible causes', 'Checking out' and 'Dislocation'.

In Chapter Six, I discuss the research questions in relation to the data that was produced in this study, and offer key findings. In addition, I include a section concerning teachers, considering how teachers, like students, operate under conditions that severely limit agency.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, a conclusion of the study is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature review

As the primary focus of this study is on understandings of student (under)performance in schools, this review will focus on literature related to this topic. It organises such perspectives according to three significant approaches, namely: meritocratic approaches, managerialist approaches and social reproduction approaches. Each perspective foregrounds different factors that contribute to (under)performance. It might be argued that the causes are always a combination of the contributing factors. However, some perspectives offer greater explanatory power than do others.

Meritocratic approaches

Meritocratic approaches explain differences in performance with arguments concerning individual effort and ability. The basis of meritocratic approaches is that those who do well have earned their success. The logical end of the meritocratic approach is that students who do well deserve reward, while those who do not do well receive the just deserts of their lack of effort. Ultimately, the approach provides a justification or legitimisation for difference in performance and difference in social outcomes.

Taylor et al. (1997:126) allude to the meritocratic myth, recognising how mass schooling was thought by many to be “an opportunity for social improvement, and for access to power and privilege”. In meritocratic explanations, success is deemed to be the product of effort and ability, leaving little room for contextual factors such as historical and contemporary disadvantages, poverty effects and a mismatch between the experience of the student and the expectations of the school. In this view, the problem of underachievement lies with the learners themselves. Christie mentions how theories based on individual ability and merit appear to have an “enduring appeal” with policymakers but cautions in saying:

...the theory of 'meritocracy' cannot explain why success and failure in school are not random. They reflect the broader social patterns. Closer analysis of students' performance at school shows that it relates to their social backgrounds. Middle class students tend to do better than their working class counterparts. Wealth and poverty make a difference. (Christie 2008:165)

Social reproduction approaches

Social reproduction approaches attempt to explain the inter-generational reproduction of class in society and how major social institutions are implicated in such processes of reproduction (MacLeod, [2009]1987:11). In contrast to popular perspectives on education that view education as ‘the great equaliser’ or as ‘the key lever’ for social change, reproduction theorists argue that schools reinforce inequalities and class differences. Social reproduction theorists ask why there is such a strong relationship between social class and school performance. In the South African context, this argument may be extended to ask why there might be a relationship between the racial and urban-spatial arrangements of apartheid (the Bantustans or the urban townships) and performance.

Perhaps the most influential work that informs the line of questioning presented in my study is the 1966 Coleman Report on *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. A key concern of the Coleman Report was why African Americans were performing poorly in school achievement tests. Whilst the researchers expected to find problems related to the schools that African Americans attended, the results indicated something different and disturbing, i.e. that students’ personal and family characteristics had more influence on achievement than did school-factors. Coleman mentions:

The inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (Coleman 1966:325)

The findings of the Coleman Report were both controversial and unwelcome. Nobody would have liked to accept that schooling made little difference to students’ life chances. According to Christie (2008), even though the Coleman Report has been criticised for its methodology it remains of great significance. It opens up discussion about the relation between schooling and social inequality and challenges the dominant discourses about teacher quality and meritocracy. Interestingly, though not necessarily a counterpoint (perhaps an argument for how resources should be distributed), is that the Coleman Report also suggests that teachers make the most difference in the poorest schools:

It is for the most disadvantaged children that improvements in school quality will make the most difference in achievement. (Coleman 1966:22)

The social and economic roots of under-achievement

In an Australian context, Mills & Gale (2010) draw on three separate studies to argue that low socio-economic status strongly influences student achievement. The first study, by Teese (2000 as cited in Mills & Gales, 2010) considers the Tertiary Entrance Rank (in Australia) and found that students with low-socioeconomic status have consistently lower scores than those with higher socioeconomic status. In the second study, also by Teese et al. (2006 as cited in Mills & Gales, 2010) it is noted that “two thirds of low achievers completing the Victorian Certificate of Education are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and conversely, two-thirds of high achievers are from high-socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, Mills & Gale (2010) also recognise that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be underrepresented in Australia’s elite universities and fields of studies that are associated with social and economic power. While these observations are located in the Australian education context, they are certainly comparable and relevant to the South African context, and to low-SES communities such as those on the Cape Flats.

Connell (1993) regarding the socioeconomic roots of underachievement and writes the following:

the best advice we can give to a poor child keen to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents (1993:22)

In the South African context, Smith (2011) conducted a similar study, exploring “Which in-and out-of-school-factors explain variations in learning across different socioeconomic groups?” Smith’s study suggests that many of the present inequalities in South African schooling link back to Apartheid. Drawing on data from SACMEQ II and analysing it for patterns related to school effect versus other contextual factors, the study concludes by stating:

In South Africa’s pursuit of raising the levels of academic attainment of all learners, the work described here has shown that there are clear differences in the mix of factors which can hinder or improve a learner’s attainment and this mix depends in many ways on the socio-economic status of the individual and the wider influences of the community in which they live. (Smith 2011:93)

While Smith’s (2011) study considers ‘the overall wellbeing of the child and neighbourhood effects’ and recognises these factors as having significant potential to influence student outcomes, my study seeks to gain a deeper and more textured understanding of why this is so. In order to do this, it is necessary to do ethnographic styled work to understand the subjective experiences of learners as they move between their communities and the school. As Fataar (2015) suggests:

Unorthodox methodological application is a requirement...the logic that presents itself is that if the subject on the make is 'on the move', the research should be prepared to move with her in order to apprehend the complex process of subject making. (Fataar 2015:6)

A system designed for failure

While there is sufficient research to indicate that there is a relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement, there are other important factors to consider in how this happens. How does being of low-socioeconomic status position a learner within a school and how do school systems and structures respond to such learners in terms of pedagogies and practices?

Mills & Gale (2010) suggest that “the connection between under-resourcing and failure seems built into the system”, and that this happens when schools create environments which place the responsibility of resolving resources issues on individual learners. This could also happen on a cognitive and social level when schools expect a set of behaviours, dispositions and cultural capital from learners which the individual learners themselves have never been given the opportunity to acquire at home. The concern then is not only about the broader macro-economic conditions which contribute to the low-socioeconomic status of families but also about the arrangements of schooling that reinforce and perpetuate inequalities by failing to take into account contextual factors and by treating all learners the same.

Positioned 'without hope or purpose' and 'without a working future'

Mills & Gales (2010) make a relevant observation in their study, claiming that students of low-socioeconomic status are often positioned as being “without”, without hope, without purpose, without a working future, hungry and without the resources required to succeed in school. It is important to note that the use of “without” denotes a concrete and tangible position rather than a deficit view of learners' cultural capital. In other words, if a learner has no food at home or cannot afford to purchase books and stationery, that real and tangible experience places them at a certain disadvantage in the classroom. This experience is also exacerbated by the social context of high unemployment, when learners discover that regardless of how well they do at school, they may still be at a disadvantage. A further point Mills & Gales (2010) make is that it is not only the way in which students are positioned at a disadvantage that matters but also the ‘stances’ which schools adopt toward students that matters. ‘Stances’ refers here to the ways in which schools respond to students: they can either help students or further disadvantage them. For example, a school might adopt a late-coming policy that it feels penalises all students equally but find that some students are disproportionately affected

because they live further away and/or are dependent on public modes of transport that may be unreliable at times.

In addition to the poverty effects, Bourdieu also explores the idea that schools make demands on learners, often related to cultural capital, or cultural competencies, which learners do not have and which the school does not offer:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (Bourdieu 1973:80)

This is not to say that learners from poor backgrounds do not have cultural capital but rather that their cultural capital is in the 'wrong currency' and is undervalued at school. Thus, in addition to being economically poor, when the school fails to recognise and legitimise the cultural capital learners bring, the same learners are also rendered poor in cultural capital, according to the dominant view.

Why working-class children end up in working class jobs

A seminal text within the social reproduction approach is Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*. Willis' book is an ethnography of the lives of working-class boys in a British school. In *Learning to Labour*, Willis compares two groups of students whom he names 'the ear'oles' and 'the lads'. The ear'oles are those students who adopt compliant strategies toward the norms of school life, while the lads are those students who are nonconformist. Willis (1977) argues that the lads resist their schooling because they do not believe in its promises of upward social mobility. Reading their own situation and recognising their limited opportunities, they resist, even though their resistance is self-defeating. Yet Willis does not only consider the consequences of a limited structure of opportunity and the socio-economic geography of the lads. Instead, Willis highlights how the outlook, or aspirations, of the lads are shaped in relation to such a structure of opportunity. The lads end up viewing manual labour as more masculine and as something to be desired. The lads' reinterpretation of manual labour, as well as their reactions to schooling, demonstrates that they are not passive subjects. By deploying the term 'cultural production', Willis moves away from a dualistic perspective with regard to the structure/agency debate, recognising that they cannot be understood in isolation from each other.

Managerialist approaches

Managerialist approaches locate the problem of (under) performance at the level of school leadership and management. Borrowing from the language of enterprise, such approaches view schools as businesses, students as clients or consumers, teachers as service providers and education as the product on offer. Managerialist approaches often seek to introduce performative accountability measures in the hope that such interventions will improve school quality. The challenge however is that it is difficult to reduce the processes of teaching and learning into narrowly defined key performance indicators that can guarantee improvement. In addition, in a system characterised by inequalities, it is hard to hold teachers and schools to account for that which they are not equipped or resourced to offer. Despite the evidence for social-inequality being a significant influencing factor (Coleman, 1966; Christie, 2008; Mills & Gale, 2010), the global education environment at present appears to be dominated by an accountability discourse. While no reasonable educator would object to being held accountable, it is a very particular technical-managerial brand of accountability which is being promoted and which may be contributing to the pervasiveness of acontextual and ahistorical practices of educators. Biesta (2004) argues that this approach to accountability is the result of broader shift from “welfarism” to “new managerialism”. Biesta describes new managerialism as being:

... characterised by a customer-oriented ethos, decisions driven by efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and an emphasis on competition, especially free-market competition (2004:236)

Thrupp & Lupton describe it as a theory which posits that:

... social change can be engineered through organisational change and through more efficient, market-oriented public service delivery which is informed by best practice, driven by incentives and targets, and closely scrutinised and monitored. (2006:311)

This kind of accountability forms the basis of a performativity culture in which the indicators of success become more important than the process and the product itself. The result is often that teachers feel a loss of creative freedom to do their work and a loss of scope to exercise their professional judgement as teachers. Unfortunately for learners, this has the potential to translate into pedagogies and practices that neglect to take into account important contextual factors, which is precisely what learners in contexts of poverty don't need. Ball (2003) describes performativity as:

... a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based

on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement. (Ball 2003:216)

In such a framework of thought, underperformance is considered to be the result of bad management or bad teaching, without taking into account the influence of context. In response to such deficit views of school leadership and teachers, various attempts are made to improve accountability, sometimes directly from government via test-driven measures but also through NGO initiatives in the form of school leader training and mentoring programmes. However, attempting to improve student achievement via means of increased accountability and blame may in fact have the opposite effect in low-SES schools, as Harrison & Chapman (2004 in Thrupp & Lupton, 2006) note:

As the long-term patterning of educational inequality looks set to remain, to rely on standard or standardised approaches to school improvement that combine accountability, pressure and blame to force improved performance would seem unwise. In schools in difficult contexts, this is more likely to exacerbate the problem rather than solve it. Instead the evidence would suggest that more locally owned and developed improvement strategies are needed that appreciate school context, best match prevailing conditions and build the internal capacity for development within the school. (2006: 323)

In conclusion, each of the three approaches (meritocratic, technical-managerialist and social reproduction) foregrounds different factors in their attempts to explain differences in students' academic performances. Meritocratic approaches emphasise effort and ability but neglect the effects of difference in opportunity and access to resources. Hard work and effort are good qualities for all students to develop but inequality produces a situation in which some students are required to work harder than others. Technical-managerialist approaches highlight possibilities for improvement in school leadership and teaching practices but potentially fail to recognise that schools across the board (not only schools in poor communities) may benefit from improvement in leadership and teacher quality. The social reproduction theories foreground the manner in which some students are positioned at a disadvantage (on the basis of class, race or gender) and examine how the stances schools adopt towards such students further entrench inequality. This research is situated within the social reproduction perspective. It focuses, more specifically, on the ways in which understandings of the reasons for (under)performance within the school are implicated in the reproduction of unequal outcomes. This involves an examination of the ways in which these understandings are

communicated in one particular school and internalised by learners (and teachers), and the ways in which actors respond to the understandings communicated in this way.

In the following chapter, I explain the conceptual underpinnings of this study. I discuss more carefully the Bourdieuan concepts of symbolic violence, misrecognition, field, capital and habitus, the Lefebvrian dimensions of space, and the manner in which I blend these tools to provide an analysis of how messages (symbolic violence particularly) are transmitted not only through what students hear but also through spatial practices and arrangements of time-space.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented in this chapter is anchored in social reproduction theory, as already discussed in the literature review. In attempting to frame the research task, I have found sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's analytical tools to be particularly helpful. Bourdieuan concepts that are foregrounded in my research include symbolic violence, misrecognition, habitus, and playing the game. These concepts are used to describe the process by which messages (meaning systems) are constructed and communicated to social agents within a school setting, and also to examine the content of the messages and their effects on social agents. These foregrounded concepts may only be understood in relation to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of *field* and *the capitals*, and so these concepts are also discussed in order to provide clarity.

Symbolic violence and (mis-)recognition

Symbolic violence is central to my research because it provides a language of description to discuss the manner in which pedagogic actions, power and class imbalances are reproduced in society through the communication of ideas, or 'categories of thought'.

Symbolic violence is introduced by Bourdieu as the manner in which dominant categories of thought and perception are imposed on social agents. It is also employed by Bourdieu to describe the manner in which the dominant social order is legitimised and naturalised. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is more potent than physical coercion because it requires the complicity of the dominated. This notion of complicity or agreement bears some similarity to Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural *hegemony*, which also suggests that the maintenance of dominant meaning systems is dependent on the *consent* of the dominated.

In *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu 2001:1-2), Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition or even feeling". Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:167) offer that symbolic violence "is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity..." implying that the reproduction process is contingent upon the collective agreement to the legitimacy of the imposed arbitrary. In fact, symbolic violence "accomplishes itself through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond - or beneath - the controls of consciousness and will, in the obscurities of the schemata of habitus" (Bourdieu 1992:172). An even more explicit clarification is offered in the *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 2000:171) concerning the "agreement" of the dominated, in which Bourdieu writes that "submission is in no way a

‘voluntary servitude’ and this conscious, deliberate act; it is itself the effect of a power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated...”

An important acknowledgement in Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:170) is that those who are dominated are unable to refuse their consent when the tools they use to interpret their situation are also those of the dominator. The implication, here, is that the symbolic violence itself obfuscates reality, and interpretations of reality, and therefore makes misrecognitions of the terms of struggle more likely to occur, constraining possibilities for resistance. Baldwin (1993 [1963]) in his book about race, religion and American history, describes what is going on beneath the surface when he writes

Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. Every effort made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him causes him secretly, in terror, to begin to await, without knowing that he is doing so, his mysterious and inexorable punishment. (1993:26)

Baldwin's (1963) description of waiting without even being aware of it is indicative of dominant arbitrariness that have been inscribed in the body of the dominated, that which leads to the inability to articulate what the real cause of their misery might be. Bourdieu, describing a similar reality, wrote that:

Social agents do not innately possess a science of what they are and what they do. More precisely, they do not necessarily have access to the core principles of their discontent or their malaise, and, without aiming to mislead, their most spontaneous declaration may express something quite different from what they seem to say (Bourdieu 1999:620)

This concept (symbolic violence) enables me to explore how students and teachers receive and internalise imposed meanings and descriptions of reality, how these descriptions influence beliefs about the future on the part of both students and teachers, and ultimately how they influence the responses of teachers and students whether through compliance, non-compliance and/or resistance strategies.

Closely related to the concept of symbolic violence is the idea of misrecognition, which occurs when dominant narratives (of the powerful) legitimise the present social order and conceal the nature of the game, masking material and social inequalities.

In Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence, all messages may be described as symbolic violence to the extent that they attempt to impose meaning and change social agents.

Symbolic violence, as such, cannot be avoided. In my own research, I want to more carefully distinguish between messages in general and messages that can be construed as symbolic violence. While all messages may attempt to produce change in social agents, I only frame such messages as 'violent' to the extent that they disadvantage social agents by concealing the structural effects of the game (misrecognising such effects and treating them as individual deficit or lack).

By analysing the narratives which teachers and students offer of their struggles, while embedded in an environment that also constructs and communicates meaning, I will explore the various messages transmitted to social agents, the social effects thereof and the responses of social agents.

While the notion of symbolic violence and misrecognition are foregrounded in this study, along with the concept habitus and, to a lesser extent, capitals, these concepts can only be fully understood in terms of how they relate to a particular field of practice. For example, ideas about how academic (under)performance is explained are produced, circulated and contested in the field of education.

Field

For Bourdieu, the social world was comprised of several different social arenas or fields in which struggles take place over specific stakes such as cultural goods, intellectual distinctions or power (Jenkins, 1992:52). Education is one such field of practice. Fields have different logics, structures and rules that govern them. Fields are also comprised of social positions and the relations between positions (domination, subordination or homology). These positions are dependent on access to the specific species of capital at stake within the field (Jenkins, 1992:53). Positions within the field may be occupied by individual social agents (such as teachers) or institutions (such as schools).

An important aspect of the notion of fields is that they are hierarchical and that they are always subordinated to the '*field of power*' or politics. The field of power structures the relations in subordinated fields such as education, religion, art, etc. (Jenkins, 1992)

The field of education in South Africa is shaped by socio-historical inequalities that force many schools to 'play the game' in the same way that other schools do, but also to do so with fewer resources. Similarly, as individual social agents, students compete with each other for stakes within the field but do so from different social positions, depending on their access to and ability to mobilise various forms of capital. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) explain the concept of field as follows:

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents and institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97)

In Bourdieu's corpus of work, he often utilises the analogy of a 'game' to introduce the notion of 'field'. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), a distinction is made between the two by highlighting the fact that the rules or regularities in fields are not made explicit, as they are in a game. Bourdieu elaborates on his description of 'games' as follows:

Thus we have stakes (enjeux) which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an investment in the game, illusio (from ludus, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (doxa) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract," that the game is worth playing, that it is "worth the candle," and this collusion is the very basis of their competition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:98)

The above quote also introduces the concept of *illusio*, which explains how players' mere participation in the game indicates their consent and acceptance of the legitimacy of the game itself. All social agents, therefore, regardless of their position or stances (including those who pose critical questions concerning power relations in education or those who may demonstrate compliance) remain invested in the game by virtue of their participation in it.

Thompson (2014) differentiates between the field of education and the 'game' as follows:

The field of education must produce the people qualified to work at all levels in all other fields, as well as to re/produce the kinds of knowledge, skills and dispositions already possessed and valued by the social elites and managerial elites in each of the fields. The game in the education field is fundamentally 'sorting and selecting' people by, for example, privileging particular knowledges, ways of speaking and acting, educational pathways and particular certifications. These come to seem only right and proper, 'natural'. (2014:90)

In my research, 'field', is taken to indicate the education system, and more specifically the schooling environment in South Africa, which is governed by a distinct policy framework that constrains the manner in which individual schools (sub-fields) are meant to play the game. It is acknowledged as ever present in that it generates the boundaries and constraints within which students, teachers and schools act on a daily basis. In this study, field is not foregrounded but remains salient and present, particularly in relation to the manner in which resources – or capitals - are distributed, positioning schools in different ways.

Capital

Capital references that which is at stake within the field. Social agents (individuals or institutions) compete with each other in the structured and regulated field in order to accumulate specific species of capital (e.g. prestige, honour, legitimate knowledge). Differences in access to the capitals also serve to position social agents in the field.

Bourdieu's *Forms of Capital* essay (in Richardson, 1986) provides a general description, suggesting that capital:

... is what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle... Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible (1986:46)

The essay discusses the various forms in which capital exists: economic (immediately and directly convertible into money), social capital (connections, networks) and cultural capital. Of particular importance for this study is cultural capital, which exists in three forms: an embodied state (dispositions and habits of body and mind), an objectified state (as cultural goods), and an institutionalised state (educational qualifications). Bourdieu (1986) suggested that the unequal scholastic achievements of students from different social classes might be related to the cultural capital students have already acquired before they even enter the school. He referred to this as primary pedagogical work, or primary socialisation.

I draw on Bourdieu's descriptions of capital in order to examine how students are positioned in the field of education, based on both their home experience (cultural, economic and social capital) and their past and present schooling experience (cultural and symbolic capital). Exploring the relationship between the capitals and students' present status in the game helps to examine the viability of the several messages communicated to students via their school.

When messages conceal the relationship between students' access to the capitals and how this positions them within the field, such messages may be construed as symbolic violence.

The embodied capitals which students bring to their engagement with the field of education is part of the way they have internalised their past experiences, or their habitus.

Habitus

Bourdieu (in Wacquant, 1989:44) describes the relationship between habitus and field in two ways; firstly, as conditioning, in which the field structures the habitus; secondly as cognitive construction, in which habitus also contributes to the constitution of the field. Habitus therefore provides a way to talk of the manner in which the social world is internalised and embodied, shaping how actors perceive themselves in the world, how they think and act in the world.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu uses the expression 'bodily hexis' in reference to habitus and writes:

... bodily hexis is a political mythology realised, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.' (Bourdieu, 1977:94)

Such permanent dispositions, as described by Bourdieu, may also function as capital within the field, to the extent to which they are congruent with what the market desires (the habits of the powerful).

Habitus offers a language to describe the tension between the manner in which the system shapes behaviours and thought, and the possibility for exercising agency. It disrupts the binary opposition between objective and subjective descriptions of the social world. Bourdieu presents the habitus as both a 'structured-structure' (created by the conditions in the life-world of the student) and a 'structuring-structure' (shaping how the student interprets, responds to and interacts with the world). Bourdieu (1977) writes the following, concerning habitus:

... in short, the habitus, the product of history produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions - a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles, an internal law relaying the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities (irreducible to immediate conjunctural constraints) - is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis. (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]: 82)

Habitus is helpful then to describe the formation of students in relation to the context, conditions and social arrangements in their own environment. The habitus, which is structured by the environment in which students find themselves, constrains student action and imagination, and invites a range of postures or disposition that are also products of the internalisation of the social world in which they occur.

Space(-time)

In my attempt to operationalise Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence and to examine how (and where?) such messaging occurs, I felt it necessary to include the notion of space-time, so that I could also examine communication that takes place in the classroom without the use of words, i.e. as space/time arrangements, actions in space/time and meanings represented in and through space. This section demonstrates how I bring together the ideas drawn from Bourdieu & Lefebvre.

In order to engage with how meaning is conveyed through spaces, I began by considering Bourdieu's (1990) work in *The Logic of Practice* and in particular in the appendix: "the Kabyle house or the world reversed". In analysing the Kabyle (Berber) house and its divisions between male and female, top and bottom, light and dark, Bourdieu demonstrates how cultural meanings are materialised in produced spaces. Bourdieu (1990) writes:

The house is as a microcosm organized by the same oppositions and homologies that order the whole universe, stands in a relation of homology to the rest of the universe. But from another standpoint, the world of the house, taken as a whole, stands in a relation of opposition to the rest of the world, an opposition whose principles are none other than those that organize both the internal space of the house and the rest of the world and, more generally, all areas of existence. (1990:277)

The habitus which is psychologically and biologically embodied, is also physically materialised in culturally produced environments. The Kabyle house then, more than being functional, also represents and reproduces the social hierarchies, social relations and values of which it is a product. In Bourdieu's work, then, it is possible to view spaces as external versions of habitus, shaping (habitus as a structuring structure) and shaped by (habitus as a structured structure) a history of broader social relations. As Bellal (2004:113) writes, "Bourdieu's theory of the habitus suggests that the built environment constructs the real as spatial ideology. The division of space is a vision of the world". Harvey (1996, cited in Easthope, 2004) expresses the same idea, yet without deploying the term habitus, when he writes "cultural politics in general (and the search for affective community in particular) and political-economic power intertwine in the social processes of place construction" (2004:128).

Yet Bourdieu's own work on space remains somewhat limiting in that it primarily focuses on spatial arrangements as materialised habitus. It is focused mainly on representational space (how spaces manifest and represent meanings and ideology) rather than representations of space (how space is planned, or structured) or spatial practices (how space is lived and used). It does not make explicit a theory of space that can be employed to disentangle the arrangements, uses and meanings of spaces. Additionally, while Bourdieu is interested in how macro-level factors (the field of power, politics and education) relate to the micro-environment (the classroom, the home), his work on the Berber home remains at the level of the micro. A more developed theorisation of space would enable one to explore how activities, arrangements and meanings are produced at various scales (micro, meso, macro), as well as how the time-space dimension of such activities carries through across scales.

Singh et al. (2007) in *Spatial Theories of Education, Policy and Geography Matters* offer a very helpful introduction and overview concerning contemporary theorisation of space:

Space is much more than a structural grid within which objects are located and events occur. In analytical terms, space is no longer treated as a container of static, though movable, objects and dynamic flows of behaviour. The dimensions and contents of space are no longer assumed to be natural and given ...In contrast, a relational view of space seeks to provide a relational understanding of how space is constituted and given meaning through human endeavour. Space is no longer given a neutral or passive geometry; it is continuously produced through socio-spatial relations ... space is conceived as a product of cultural, social, political and economic interactions, imaginings, desires and relations. In this way, space is not merely an objective structure but also a social experience. (2007:197)

Such perspectives rely quite heavily on the work of Henri Lefebvre and his pioneering work in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre's (1991) work demonstrates how space is both constituted through social relations and also constitutive of social relations. It focuses on how space is organised (physical arrangements often made to serve the purposes of the powerful), used (activities) and experienced (cultural; subjective meaning). Lefebvre (1991) uses the following terminology in his triadic view of space: Spatial practices (the perceived space/used), Representations of space (the conceived space/organised) and Representational space (the lived space/experienced). In order to proceed, I have therefore elected to work with Lefebvre's conceptualisation of time-space.

Employing Lefebvre's Analytic

In my introductory chapter, I described the aims of my research in the following way:

To explore the narratives and non-verbal communication of students and teachers about school, student performance and student aspirations, in relation to the contexts, conditions and interactions in one low-SES school and to describe student responses to the messages they receive

I employ Lefebvre in my research not as the main organising framework but rather as an extension to deal with aspects which Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit appears to neglect. Using Bourdieu's toolkit allows me to consider how difference (inequality in school performance) is related to the capitals and how through misrecognition (or not considering the influence of the generative structures of fields) and symbolic violence (unconscious, tacit modes of domination) such difference is naturalised and reproduced. Yet, Bourdieu's toolkit does not enable me to analytically consider how such domination (as referred to above) is also exercised and communicated through socio-spatial relations, to ask: what do the spatial-relations of schools suggest about who students are? What promises/threats does it make about their future?

In relation to my key questions (particularly questions. 1 & 4), and especially in relation to the data produced from my classroom observations, Lefebvre's spatial triad offers a way to move beyond the language component of discourse, and to consider also the manner in which symbolic violence is communicated through space-time and how students comply with or resist such violence. While Bourdieu's own descriptions of the Kabyle House quite clearly describes its space as a culturally produced space that in turn represents and reproduces the same set of social relations and values of which it is a product, it does not go the distance as Lefebvre does in constructing a theory of space-time or making explicit the constitutive components of space.

In this study I am interested in (a) representational space, such as posters on classroom-walls, (b) representations of space, such as arrangements of furniture and even the architectural design of the school and (c) the spatial practices of actors, such as the coming and going, in and out of classes, the movement of students from their allocated desks, the patrolling of law enforcement officers, the displacement of students or their books from the classroom, the detaining of students and so forth.

This interest is driven by the insight that space is the site of everyday life and also the site of political contestation. Actors 'play the game' in a very concrete and tangible way in their everyday lives: this includes their time space practices.

Lefebvre's conceptual triad can also be deployed across multiple scales. This enables me to examine the relation between the school and the wider community of which it is a part (the Cape Flats). At this broader scale, representations of space reference the racialised and classed organisation of space, representational space references meanings expressed in the form of graffiti, and spatial practices reference activities such as the mass of people heading to the factory each day.

Lefebvre's understanding of time space is premised on the idea that time/space practices are socially and historically produced. This enables me to examine how the history of this school and this place is still evident today, as part of a system of time/space arrangements, activities and meanings that are experienced by students in their everyday lives. There are two moments in the history of the Cape Flats that are worth considering. The first is the shift in the 1950s brought about by the implementation of the Group Areas Act. During this period a particular strategy of development was implemented in the Cape Flats (reflected in town-planning maps and road layouts, the architectural design or construction of multi-story apartment/tenement housing, the forced removals and relocation of non-Whites). This development strategy or apartheid urban-spatial design ('representations of') is reflected in the graphic below, taken from *Territories and Urbanisation in South Africa* (Giraut & Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2009)

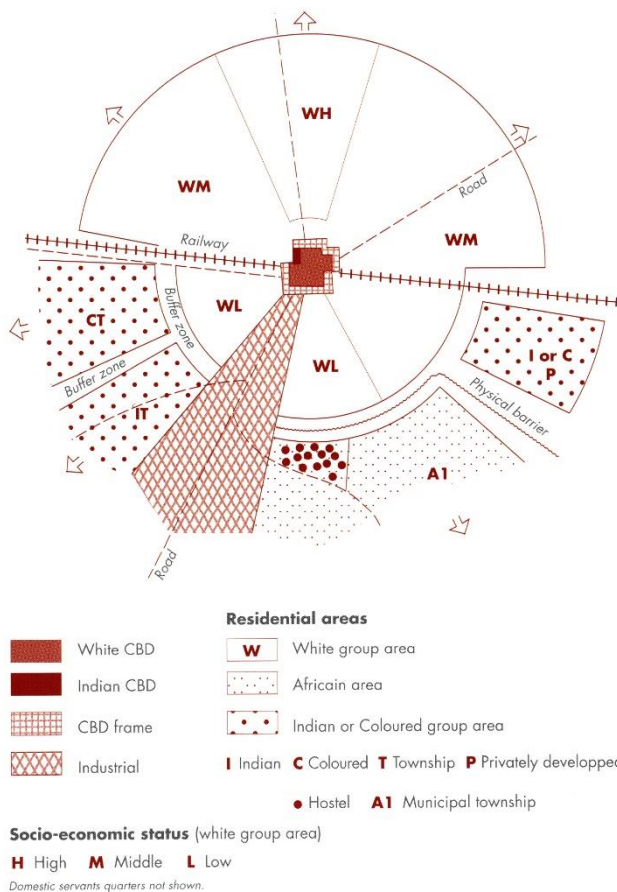


Figure 1 The model apartheid city

The above map, or town-planning design, emphasises how apartheid cities were segregated along lines of both race and class through the physical relocation/displacement of people but also through the use of industrial areas, physical barriers, buffer zones and even railway lines. The imaginations of the apartheid state were articulated in physical time-space. The location of industrial zones in the lower-socioeconomic areas might well suggest who the apartheid government supposed would or should provide the labour power for such factories. Policies such as the Jobs Reservation Act further suggested what place the people of the Cape Flats might have occupied in the imagination of the apartheid state.

The second shift in the history of the Cape Flats is that which occurred in the early 1990s. With the desegregation of schools and the first democratic elections, South Africans on the Cape Flats might have been hopeful that the underdevelopment that existed because of apartheid policies might be redressed. Yet, 23 years later, the Cape Flats is still characterised by poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. Its schools remain under-resourced, perhaps even more so than before 1994: The quintile funding model and teacher provisioning strategy positions some Cape Flats schools with less resources than what they had prior to 1994. Whilst the underdevelopment post-1994 might not been a design strategy, it has been allowed to persist, like the underdevelopment in other ghettoised spaces and townships have been allowed to persist. The triumphalism of the 1990s and the de-racialisation of schools have had little impact on schools in the ghetto. The only notable changes have been the flight of the middle class from urban township schools as they were rapidly included into the community of former Whites-only schools.

In Lefebvre's terms, this can be described as a failed transition. For Lefebvre, social change necessarily requires spatial reconfiguration. Lefebvre's mode of interrogating revolution leads us to ask: Where is the space of the 'new' South Africa? Where is the revised urban spatial layout of the city in the 'new' South Africa? Where is the evidence of the architectural reimagining of housing in the areas of the poor, when the tenement buildings still cast a shadow over the Cape Flats? For purposes of this study, more specifically, it leads us to ask if and how the everyday lived experiences of students, as they move between home and school, and around the school, is any different from that of students who attended this school before 1994, and what messages about their possible futures students derive from this experience?

Conceptual framework

Below is a visual representation of the conceptual framework for my research. This representation is an attempt to translate the original research questions in a manner that incorporates both conceptual and empirical considerations. As depicted in the diagram below, my research examines the messages students receive about school, performance and success, through what they *hear*, *see* and *experience*. The internalisation of these messages is then examined by analysing what students/teachers say (how messages received structure student habitus) and *do* (how they respond via compliance or resistance strategies; ‘playing the game’).

The diagram below summarises this conceptual framing which will be developed and elaborated in chapter 4 in order to carefully construct an analytical framework.

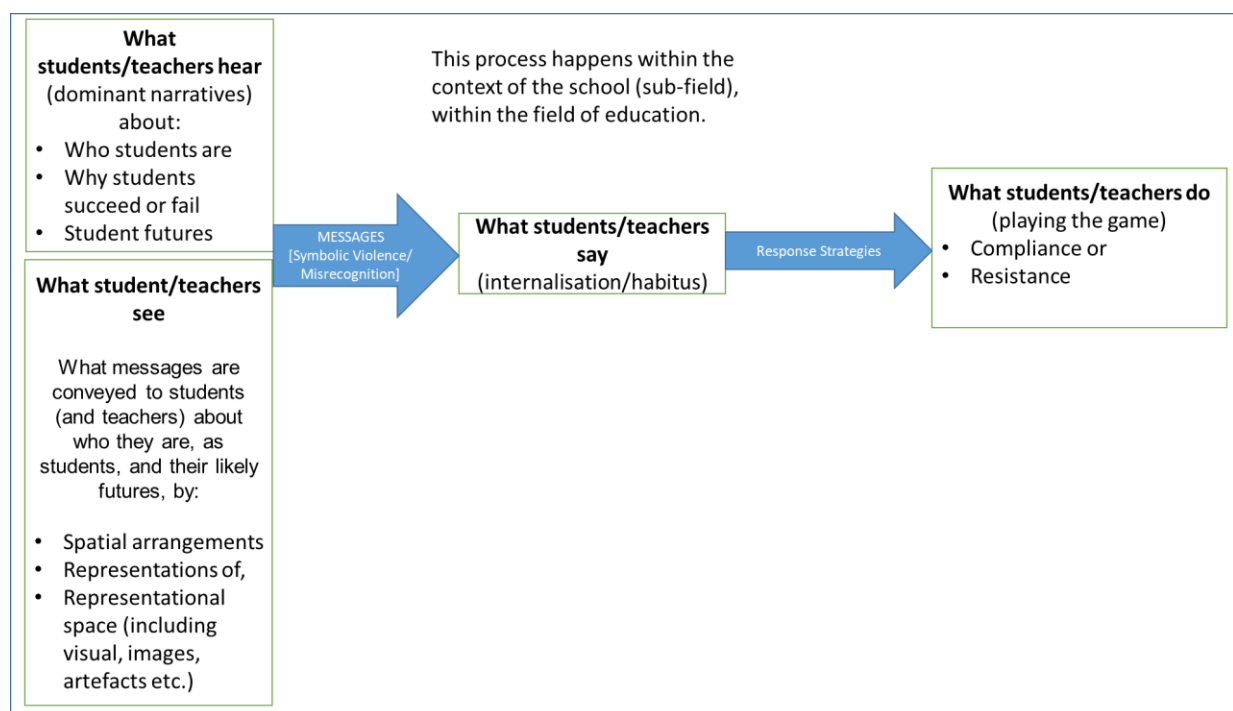


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I have described the conceptual underpinnings of the study. Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ has been used to describe the manner in which students internalise the messages transmitted through school; ‘capitals’ to account for the capacities and resources students enter into school with and which position them advantageously or disadvantageously in the ‘field’ depending on the currency of such capitals; and ‘playing the game’ to describe the strategies students adopt, whether characterised by resistance or compliance. Lefebvre’s spatial triad has been invoked to account for ways in which messages are transmitted through spatial practices and through arrangements of time-space. Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic violence’,

along with the closely related idea of 'mis-recognition', however, are the central concepts in the study which focuses on the transmission of messages (symbolic violence) conveyed about student (under-)performance, student aspirations and futures in one South African urban township school. In the chapter that follows, I describe the research design, methodology and analytical frame that was used to conduct this study.

Chapter 4: Research design

This chapter describes the research design of this study. It explains how the research school (the case) was chosen, how student and teacher participants were selected, the data production process and why the particular research strategies were adopted.

Approach to the research design

The research approach that was adopted was a single-site case study in one low-SES urban township school. The case study, according to Yin (2003:2) “arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena”. The communication (and internalisation) of symbolic violence within an environment as dynamic as the school certainly counts as such a complex phenomenon. Another reason for adopting this approach was that the main research question was one which addressed a “how question” (Yin, 2002), or, in other words, a question of process that necessitated a fine-grained analysis.

The nature of the study also implied that little control could be exercised over behaviours of participants or events occurring, further warranting the case study approach (Yin, 2002). Case study method, Yin (2002:2) suggests, “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events”. The single-site case study was an appropriate fit for this research because the focus of the study was to understand the process through which symbolic violence is communicated and internalised, and to describe in greater detail how this happens in an urban township school.

Research site (case) selection

The research site selection of a low-SES urban township school was relevant to the logic of the study in that such schools represent those which dominant narratives about performance often describe in deficit terms. I was also interested in conducting research at this particular site because it represents the kind of school (and community) that has been negatively affected by the historical inequalities of Apartheid. Using a school positioned in this way allows for consideration of whether dominant perspectives such as the meritocratic or the managerial perspective are as viable explanations as they are claimed to be within the context of urban township schools.

The research was conducted at a co-educational high school in a low-SES community located on the Cape Flats. The community is a low-income, high crime community, where many families are dependent on social grants and piece-work jobs. The school may be categorised

as a low-income, fee-paying school with annual fees below R500/per student and may also be considered to be a relatively underperforming school.

In my research I have employed the term 'performance' quite broadly, including performance as measured by testing results as well as performance reflected in dropping out. While there was no data that formally tracked students who dropped out of school, the effects of dropout are somewhat reflected in the 'pyramidal' structure of enrolment records (2017 enrolment records indicate 88 students in grade 8, 86 in Grade 9, 48 students in Grade 11 and 37 students in Grade 12), as the enrolment tapers down quite significantly as students move into the higher grade levels. Formal performance data from school tests and examinations were easier to access and the school had also displayed lists of the top 10 students in each grade. Quite notable was that results were generally low and that students with 45,7% (in a class of 49 students) and 37,3% (class of 32 students) grade averages were reflected in the top 10 of the two respective grade 8 classes. In fact, two of the student participants who placed in the top 10, did so with relatively 'average' performances (Student J, placed 2nd in his class of 32 with a 55% grade average and Student S, placed 5th in his class of 49 with a 54,8% grade average).

Statistics tracked by the school principal during the writing of this dissertation show that the Grade 12 cohort of 2018 represented only 38% of class size in 2014. In addition, many of the students who formed part of the 2018 Grade 12 class, were not part of the original 2014 Grade 8 cohort.

The school site is also part of a group of 18 schools in the Western Cape identified as high priority zones for school safety and as such, permanent law enforcement officers have been deployed at the school as part of a safety plan inspired by the United States SRO (school resource officers) model (Petersen, 2015). In addition to being located in a low-SES community, the students may additionally be confronted by the reality that even those who complete grade twelve remain in the entanglement of multiple poverties and have a limited range of realistic options.

Data production

Data production took place in the field for a period of eight weeks during the third quarter of 2017. The eight-week period provided ample time to conduct classroom observations and to schedule after-school interviews with participants.

On the basis of my research questions, it was necessary to produce the following data sets. These data sets would allow me to analyse student and teacher narratives, as well as data on the spatial aspects of schooling in relation to the actual performance of the school and the

participants involved in the study. My interest was primarily in the messages conveyed to students by teachers and also by teacher actions and by symbolic displays such as posters and spatial arrangements. I was also interested in the verbal and non-verbal responses of students to these messages and the ways in which they made sense of their own levels of performance.

1. School performance data:
 - WCED Systemic testing results for grade 9
 - Internal quarterly results from schedules data
2. Performance data of student participants
3. Student/teacher narratives about performance/school drop-out/future aspirations
 - One hour- individual interviews with four grade eight students and four teachers
4. Teacher to student communications about schooling/performance/the future
 - Classroom observation
 - Field notes

The analytical framework

In order to proceed with data production and analysis, I designed a framework that would guide the process and help me to keep a clear focus.

The following table offers a visual representation of my analytical framework. It was formulated on the basis of my conceptual frame, which provided a language of description (the theoretical terms in which these phenomena are described) for empirical phenomena pertaining to my research question. This framework was utilised as the basis for my classroom observations and also for designing and analysing interviews. This table integrates both the Bourdieuan concepts (symbolic violence, misrecognition, habitus, field and playing the game) and Lefebvorean concepts (the spatial triad) into an examination of the three focal areas of messaging within the school. The built-in assumption here, on the basis of my conceptual toolkit, is that messages about how students are expected to behave and what they are expected to achieve is communicated not only through speech acts (what students hear) but also through the spatial arrangements within the school and the community (what students/teachers see), and actions and routine school activities (what students do and experience). Such messages could potentially be internalised by students and teachers alike (reflected in what students/teachers say). Students and teachers in turn may adopt strategies that may be described in terms of compliance or resistance behaviour (what students/teachers do). Whilst Bourdieu's descriptions of symbolic violence would imply that all messaging is 'violent' in the sense that they attempt to impose cultural arbitraries, it is worth noting that messages have different effects and that some are more helpful or harmful than others.

The main focus of the research was on students, but it is also important to acknowledge that teachers' own narratives and responses are shaped by similar forces internal and external to the school. While teachers have some degree of power within their own classrooms, they are subject to pressures exerted by the policy environment and become the actors who develop strategies to 'play the game' subject to the ways in which they have internalised or questioned dominant narratives.

Table 1 Analytical Framework

	Messages (symbolic violence) about who the students are /link to home life	Messages (symbolic violence) about what learning is e.g. w.r.t specialisation	Messaging (symbolic violence) about the future/futures of students and about reasons for levels of achievement
(Who)			
Says what (symbolic violence?)			
Does what (activities) = spatial practices			
Within what space / time arrangements (the desks, the timetable) = Representations of space			
and representations (The photograph etc.)			
With what (objects, resources, technologies)			
To what ends (meanings, purposes)			
Interpreted/internalised by students in what ways (Habitus & Recognition/misrecognition)			
With what effects (responses; how the game is played)			

In the following sections, I describe the interview, observation and note-taking processes in more detail.

Semi-structured interviews

I have utilised interviews because I believed that this would be the best strategy to enquire how students and teachers interpret their reality and to explore how ideas in hegemonic discourses (e.g. meritocratic or managerialist approaches) influence or reflect the sensibilities of students and teachers. Cohen et al. presents the following argument for the use of interviews:

Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (2007:349)

Interviews with students were conducted to understand how students perceive themselves in relation to their school, the obstacles or opportunities they recognise on their scholastic journeys, and whether they see school structures, systems and teachers as enabling their success. Student interviews also sought to understand how the students interpret success and failure within the education system, and how they think about their own future.

Initially, I wanted to interview four students. That would have included two students who are top performers and two students with below average performance (based only on academic performance at school). However, it was difficult to recruit students amongst the lowest performing of the school and as such I have interviewed four students, two higher performers and two average performers (though in the context of the school, the difference is really between average and underperforming, as performance results are generally low). I have commented on this in the discussion section. I do not consider the “at-risk” definition, in the manner in which it is applied in other studies as appropriate to my own research as nearly two-thirds of the school may be considered “at-risk” of school drop-out but also because “at-risk” does not seem to capture the influence of structures on the individual performances of students. Often, the term ‘at-risk’ is applied in a manner which problematises the individual student in attempts to advocate for intervention programmes rather than in a manner which emphasises systemic failure.

All of my interviews with students and teachers were audio recorded using a digital audio recording device. Written transcriptions of the audio recordings were produced in order to make the analysis process more manageable. I elected to do audio recording and transcriptions because I wanted to accurately represent what participants had said with minimal risk of my own interpretation or selective remembering.

The majority of the students at the research site are Coloured students, though there is also a small but growing body of Black African learners who commute to the school. The research sample will focus on the experiences of a group of male students who live on the Cape Flats, in the communities surrounding the school. I employ the term 'Coloured' not as a homogenising one, recognising that there are several meanings concerning Coloured-identities. A range of meanings concerning Coloured-identities (Khoisan revivalist, essentialist, 'bruin mense', creolisation) is catalogued in Adhikari's (2013) *'Burdened by Race'* and I am conscious of how the term "Coloured" may be infused with connotations of colonial and Apartheid oppression for those who prefer to self-identify as 'Black' and those whom Adhikari (2013) refers to as the "Coloured rejectionists", who see the term Coloured as one which only racializes social relations. Some of these uses of the term Coloured might still be accused of essentialising identity, while the rejectionist view might be accused of painting over social inequalities or reducing such inequalities to a purely class-based analysis. Instead, I believe the term carries weight in this study because it locates the school within a socio-historical context that is meaningful for understanding the inequalities that characterise the suffering of students. Put simply, despite the repeal of apartheid law, the spatial arrangements of apartheid remain relatively intact. This geography also perpetuates the differentiation of ways of being and doing according to old apartheid social categories. As such the classificatory descriptions remain meaningful.

The four teachers who were selected for interviews were class teachers of the four students. Two of the teachers teach subjects that are highly valued in public discourse (mathematics and life sciences) and two of the teachers teach subject areas whose value in the curriculum is often subject to public scrutiny and criticism (history and life orientation). The subject areas, while not a focus of my research, were relevant as they provided an opportunity to consider whether the symbolic value of mathematics and the sciences as well as the pressure for schools to perform in these subject areas translate into different stances (e.g. with regard to time-use and/or specialised spaces)

During the process of conducting the interviews, I attempted to be flexible by adapting the order of questions or rephrasing some of them so that these would be clearer to interviewees. In some circumstances I also asked additional questions in order to gain further clarity about responses. Most of the interviews were conducted in English. However, where an interviewee preferred Afrikaans or switched between languages (trans-languaging), I accommodated this and attempted to use the participants' language preference.

The interview schedules reproduced below, show how particular topics of interest, which arose from the research questions and conceptual framework, were translated into questions.

Student interview schedule

Positionality of students

1. What kind of work do your parents/guardians do?
2. How many people live together with you in your home?
3. Could you describe a typical day with your family?
4. Which primary school did you attend? What was that like?
5. Why did you choose this high school?
6. What kind of reputation does this school have in the community in which you live?

Student narratives about performance

7. How are you doing at school now?
8. What factors influence/affect how you are doing at school now?
9. Why do you think so many students drop-out of school?

Student narratives about school

10. Could you describe a typical day at school?
11. What is your relationship like with teachers at this school?
12. Could you describe your most challenging experience at school?
13. How do you get to school each day and how would you describe the experience?
14. What are your thoughts on the school's code of conduct?
15. Do you think the discipline policy of the school is fair and effective?
16. Are there any facilities that you feel the school needs to make learning easier?
17. Could you describe a typical school assembly and what that is like?

Student narratives about success and the future

18. What are your dreams/aspirations for the long-term future (beyond school)?
19. Do you have plans for tertiary/university education after school? If so, in which field would you like to study? (adapted in line with response to Q.18)
20. What are you doing now to work toward your vision for your future?
21. What do teachers tell you and other students about what is required to be successful?
22. Do you believe what teachers have to say about the future/about success?
23. Do you think school is helping you toward your future goals?

Teacher interview schedule

Teacher awareness of positionality

1. How would you describe your background (Where did you grow up, go to school)

Teacher narratives about the research school

2. Why did you choose this school (work/career)?
3. What kind of reputation does this school have in the community?

Teacher narratives about performance and success

4. How would you describe your students' academic performance?
5. What do you believe contributes to the achievement/underachievement of learners?
6. How does this school assist students toward academic success?
7. What personal advice do you offer students concerning career choice?
8. What advice do you give to students that are struggling?

Teacher narratives about student futures

9. Where do students go when they leave school?
10. Where do students go when they drop-out of school?
11. Do you believe this school is preparing students well for the future?

Teacher awareness about contexts and conditions that undermine performance

12. Are there any things you would improve about this school?
13. How do out-of-school factors for students influence your work as a teacher?
14. What do you believe to be the difference with higher achieving students?
15. Do you believe this school is relevant to the context in which it is embedded?
16. What are your thoughts concerning the school's code of conduct?

Observations

Part of the data production process of my research was focused on the multi-modal messaging systems of the school and particularly what messages are being conveyed to learners about who they are and who they are expected to become. Such messages were taken to not only be conveyed through classroom discourse and interactions but also embodied and reproduced through the space of the classroom and the school. Applying Lefebvre's (1991) triadic conceptualisation of space, alongside Bourdieu's concepts, allowed me to consider what messages are conveyed through the actions of student and teachers in time-space.

The analytical frame previously discussed was used to guide my observations. Using the framework, I recorded events, statements and actions, and also recorded data about objects, artefacts and arrangements at school and in the classroom.

I observed two lessons with each of the four teacher participants (eight lessons in total). Sessions were recorded using a digital note-taking tool called Evernote, which allowed me to record both typed notes and audio.

In summary, I attempted to capture the narrative constitutive components of practice (via Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual tools) as well as their time-space dimensions (via the conceptual frame of Lefebvre).

Researcher's field notes

During the research project, notes were kept in order to produce a more textured analysis of the day to day experience within the school. These notes were to assist me to observe and record the ordinary and mundane aspects such as the ringing of the school bell, the corridor conversations and the activities occurring in and about home and school. The recording of such notes allowed me to include data about what was happening around the school more generally and events such a mass walkout that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Research validity

My research project is qualitative by design and utilises interview and observation as primary data-production tools. As a qualitative research exercise conducted as a single-case study, there were validity issues which I needed to be conscious of and address in the manner in which I conducted the research. In this regard, I relied upon Maxwell (1992) on '*Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research*'. Maxwell (1992) cautions:

As observers and interpreters of the world, we are inextricably part of it; we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience. Thus it is always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives (1992:5)

Maxwell (1992) offers five categories of validity for the qualitative researcher to attend to: Descriptive validity (pertaining to the factual accuracy of the account), interpretive validity (pertaining to what behaviours or words mean to the people engaged in them), theoretical validity (pertains to how empirical phenomena relate to conceptual accounts of these phenomena), generalizability (pertaining to the applicability of the account/theory in other,

similar contexts) and evaluative validity (the application of an evaluative framework to understanding social actions). Maxwell (1992:296) proceeds to suggest that in qualitative research (as opposed to quantitative research) "...prior elimination of threats is less possible, both because the qualitative research is more inductive and because it focuses primarily on understanding particulars rather than generalizing to universals". The principle implied by Maxwell (1992) is not that interpretation should be avoided but rather that the logic of the interpretation be made visible and coherent with the conceptual framing of the study itself.

In order to deal with the validity concerns Maxwell (1992) raised, effort was made to carefully record and observe. I also utilised an audio recorder to accurately record interview responses. During the interviews I had the opportunity to check with participants whether I had correctly understood what they said. In observations, I also attempted to record lessons (audio) so that I could be free to watch and observe what was taking place. Outside of the formal interview and classroom observations, I spent a significant amount of time on the school site interacting with students and teachers and testing my own understanding of what they said and did.

I am also guided by Pierre Bourdieu's own commentary on conducting research, including the observation that researchers must "have the most respect for their subject...most attentive to the almost infinitely subtle strategies that social agents deploy in their ordinary conduct of their lives" (Bourdieu, 1999). Bourdieu recognises that the research interview is a kind of intrusion in which power relations are at play and where the respondent may offer a crafted representation of their situation (Bourdieu, 1999). In order to counteract this, Bourdieu suggests to "reduce as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted through that relationship" (Bourdieu, 1999). This is accomplished through active and methodical listening, by being available to the respondent and by "adopting the interviewee's language, views, feelings and controlled imitation" (Bourdieu, 1999). Bourdieu suggests that social proximity and familiarity provide two conditions necessary for such relatively non-violent communication to occur (Bourdieu, 1999).

In my research, I was advantaged by the fact that I had reasonable familiarity with the schools and the participants. In the context of the research school I considered myself to be an 'insider' in terms of my closeness to the school but also remained aware of the theoretical distance between myself and the participants and the need to not project my own understanding onto research participants. In Bourdieu's own words, care must be taken not to "impose their own definition of the game" onto the subject (Bourdieu, 1999).

Research ethics

In order to proceed with the research at the school, I adhered to the ethical procedures as required by UCT, which included the approval of my supervisor as well as the UCT School of Education. In order to enter the school, I obtained permission in writing from the WCED (Director of Education Research) according to the WCED protocols for conducting research.

Further permission also had to be obtained from the school principal and all student and teacher participants involved. As I was already familiar with the school, arranging convenient times to discuss the project was easier. As per such discussion, I agreed to conduct interviews after school hours in order to avoid any disruption to the learning programme. While I was able to spend much time at school, I was only in classes during pre-scheduled observation times agreed upon by each teacher participant.

The purpose of the research was explained to each teacher and student participating in the interview so that they could offer their informed and voluntary consent to participation in the study, in writing. For student participants, consent was obtained from both the students themselves and their parents.

The anonymity of the schools, teachers and students participating in the study have been protected by the use of pseudonyms.

Data analysis

According to Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault (2016) qualitative data analysis entails three distinct activities. The first of these is described as 'ongoing discovery' that involves identifying themes and developing concepts and proposition. As the data is worked with, emerging themes will be uncovered and the researcher will be involved in a constant process of theorizing. The second activity entails the coding of the data and refining an understanding of the subject matter. Finally, the researcher must engage in a process of "scrutinising the emerging analysis and attempting to discount findings" or interpreting the data within its context.

Once the data was produced, the interviews, observations and field note extracts were transcribed and/or coded according to themes that were frequently occurring. While this process was inductive one, the research questions and the conceptual framework were relied upon in the generation of the themes.

This chapter has described the specific parameters of the study, the research design as a single-site case study and the methods of interview and observation that have been deployed. The chapter has also presented an analytical framework that articulates the research

questions in terms of the conceptual resources that have been used in this study. The analytical frame was then deployed in the design of the instruments of data production, namely the interview schedules and the observation sheet.

In Chapter 5, the analysis of data is presented and the conceptual framework is used to organise the emerging themes in the study.

Chapter 5: Data analysis

In this chapter, I undertake the task of working with the data sources to produce an analysis that proceeds from the theoretical vantage point already articulated in the previous chapter, to answer the research questions concerning the content of messages, the means through which messages are communicated and the strategies students adopt in response to such messages. I present seven key themes that have been generated through an inductive process and refined through iterative reflection upon both the research questions and the conceptual framework. Later in the chapter, I revisit and discuss the key research questions in light of the thematic analysis.

The following table¹ demonstrates relationships between the themes presented here and the analytical framework

Table 2 Cross-reference of conceptual framework and emerging themes

Conceptual Framework	Emerging Themes
<p>What students hear (dominant narratives) about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student futures • Who students are • What learning is • Student performance 	<p>Theme 1: Work hard(er)</p> <p>Theme 2: Futures wide open</p>
<p>What student see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial arrangements • Representations of space • Representational space (communicated partly through artefacts) 	<p>Theme 3: Weak boundaries</p> <p>Theme 4: Sensory overload</p> <p>Theme 5: Visible conditions, invisible causes</p>
<p>What students/ say (internalisation/habitus)</p>	<p>Theme 2. Futures wide open</p>
<p>What students do (playing the game)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance or • Resistance 	<p>Theme 6: Checking Out</p> <p>Theme 7: Dis-location</p>

¹ In the table, only students are mentioned. However, teachers' perceptions and practices are also shaped and constrained by the field. This is an important cautionary note, to avoid blame narratives concerning teachers.

What students hear

The following set of themes pertains to messages communicated to students verbally and has therefore been grouped under the title “what students hear”. While there is much overlap in the themes across my entire study and all of the themes are treated as messages, most salient here are messages which call for students to work harder and which suggest to students that their futures are open and rich with possibility if they just work hard.

Theme 1. Work hard(er)

As perceptive dispositions tend to be adjusted to position, agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine... (Bourdieu, 1989:18 – Social Space and Symbolic Power)

In the following section, my intention is to examine teacher narratives about how they believe the game should be played and how this influences their evaluations of student performance. A salient theme arising from a more general examination of the transcripts is the theme of “hard work”. For all the teacher participants, student under-performance is believed to be linked to the lack of hard work or individual will. Here I consider four extracts from the interviews:

Teacher M:

I've heard of a few stories of learners proceeding with their education, like going to tertiary education, but mostly [they] are just sitting at home from what I hear from learners, which is also impacting negatively on learners because they see these learners sitting at home doing nothing, being idle at home, so it doesn't really drive them to work hard. They don't see the importance of education. So, from what I've heard, because I'm new, it's only a few learners that proceed or do something with their education.

Teacher M at the time of the interview was a new teacher at the school. According to Teacher M, performance, which might be reflected by the choice (or ability) to go to a tertiary institution, is a function of hard work and of recognising the “importance of education”. Teacher M therefore demonstrates the ability to critically reflect on why students might not see the importance of education given what they see and bear witness to in their community.

The next extract is from an interview with Teacher P who is a mathematics educator and the principal of the school.

Teacher P:

I then left school. I think it was in 1981, and then I went on to do an apprenticeship. I went to work in the building industry where I completed an apprenticeship and I became a qualified carpenter but then when I was busy studying part time, when I was busy studying, while I was on apprenticeship, I decided: "You know what, this is not what I want to do for the rest of my life," and then I pursued and I went on, and I then did all of my studies part time, and the last time I was in a class was in 2011, when I completed the course at UCT. So, my post schooling study career was - all of it was done on a part time basis but I use this story to tell the kids - and I tell the kids: "You know, so don't tell me about where I come from, don't talk to me about this poverty, because anything is possible if you put your mind to it. For me, yes I had to sacrifice a lot of my social time, social life growing up as a teenager into my early twenties, but that was the sacrifice that I made, so ja, so here I am today."

For Teacher P, his own life story is characterised by having to overcome adversity through hard work. Teacher P's own account reflects the costs of striving when he expresses "I had to sacrifice a lot of my social time, social life growing up as a teenager into my early twenties". Whilst Teacher P has not had an easy life journey, in their account, poverty is trivialised. Teacher P reasons that if he could overcome difficulty through hard work and sacrifice, then students should not view their own situations or circumstances as an excuse for underperformance. Teacher P's version of the hard work narrative is one I encountered several times during the study.

Teacher I:

I can remember when I started my first job, I was a casual at Hyper [market] here. I worked there for ten years and I mean - I just finished Matric and I started working there. My whole varsity, I paid my varsity, I didn't take a bursary or anything like that, from the money I earned there. So, it's up to you man, entirely up to the person themselves

Similar to that of Teacher P, Teacher I's account is characterised by the idea of overcoming adversity through hard work. Teacher I worked in minimum wage employment and managed to fund the costs to obtain a teaching qualification. Teacher I's comment, "So it's up to you man, entirely up to the person themselves" places the sole responsibility for performance or underperformance onto the individual. While Teacher P's account, like Teacher I's, does not neglect to describe the trying conditions of working-class life and low-income labour, these conditions are not thought to have a significant influence on one's personal trajectory.

Teacher J:

But unfortunately our kids come from disadvantaged backgrounds, as were I, but because of my choices and my will power I made my decisions that brought me to where I am now. But unfortunately societies are so ill it's very difficult for a learner to focus on their future self if there are so many obstacles in the way. So one of my main reasons for being here is to help the learner deal and understand the different obstacles and overcome it with their mind first of all.

Teacher J's account appears to offer more room for the influence of "disadvantaged backgrounds", though when Teacher J describes what has made the difference in his own life, it comes down to choices and will power. His belief is that, even when faced with disadvantaged, individual agency is sufficient to make it in life. In Teacher J's account, the effects of personal agency are elevated in a manner that renders (at least in word) the effects of structural domination negligible.

Theme summary and comments

In summary, teachers all recognise poverty and inequality but these 'out-of-school' factors are represented as mainly tangential factors in relation to the success and performance of students.

What is left out in all the hard work stories that teachers offer is any calculation of cultural capital (parent education histories or parent occupations, for example) or any deeper analysis of how structural inequalities constrain personal agency. In the accounts of teachers, poverty appears to be neutral and disconnected from any broader power-relations. Even Teacher M's engagement with the context of schooling places the burden of responsibility on the student to still recognise the importance of education. It would seem from teachers' accounts of their own lives, that the most important aspect to be remedied concerning education is not inequality but simply the mind-set of students.

With the exception of Teacher M, who attended school in Zimbabwe, all of the teachers have had the experience of growing up in the Cape Flats. All of the teachers experienced upward social mobility by becoming teachers. From supermarket casual worker to science teacher (Teacher I), from carpenter's apprentice to mathematics teacher (Teacher P), from growing up in a family that could only afford R500 annual school fees (in 2004) to earning a teacher's salary (Teacher J). These teachers' life experience therefore position them as "successful" in relation to both their families and the communities from which they come. Perhaps then, these positive life transitions have shaped their habitus in such a way that they hold a more positive

outlook on life and see their personal futures as something which can be determined by personal choices and effort.

For all the strategies, hard work and personal choices, however, little critique is offered about the structural constraints which have required the teachers to develop the tenacity or resilience to break free from their own limiting circumstances. There is little consideration of the fact that structures themselves can change, or any suggestion that work should be done to alter them. Like the 'Brothers' in Macleod's (1987) ethnography, the teachers' belief in the power of their personal agency has benefitted them in some substantial ways but also forms the source of their misrecognition. Macleod (1987) puts it this way:

But cloaked in the language of meritocracy, academic performance is apprehended as the result of individual ability by both high and low achievers. Such is the magic of school-mediated exclusion: It implants in those it marginalizes a set of cognitive and evaluative categories that lead them to see themselves as the causal agents of a process that is actually institutionally determined. (MacLeod, 2009 [1987]:16)

Theme 2. Futures wide open

In this section, I examine narratives about the future of students as expressed by teachers. These narratives represent data about the beliefs teachers have about their students, about success and about how the game should be played.

The teachers interviewed for this study offer a rather sober (perhaps sombre) view of student futures. However, while teachers offer more plausible estimations of the future considering the many students who do not perform or reach their goals, the teachers' exclusion of discussion about structural constraints seem to result in a deficit view of students, even if such a view may not be intentional and consciously held. Teachers' views are however not homogenous and even in the small sample of teachers interviewed, there are differences in how the issue of a sombre future is problematised.

Teacher 1:

I must always - I don't force them into - I always want them to... like I said, "What do you want to do, man? If you want to be a mechanic, be the best in it. If you want to be a plumber, be the best in it, and just don't be lazy. You can make money wherever you're going. It's not just be a lawyer, you're going to be a rich person, a lawyer's got more problems than what you will have." I mean I was brought up with so many people around me in different avenues, jobs and stuff like that. I've got nieces that are doing hairdresser. They are the best in it, they make their money. I mean they can decide to

close the shop and go on holiday and I can't do that, that type of stuff. Yoh. That's their right, and it's not that stressful. They don't die of heart attacks and things like that, that easily. Here we have got - teachers, we're more stressful than what they are.

The above extract from the interview with Teacher I occurred within the context of Teacher I suggesting that the students at the school are not academically strong. Teacher I does not necessarily begin with a deficit framing of students but instead wishes to challenge the idea that certain career options are “lesser” options. By explaining the advantages of his own friends’ career paths in comparison even to his own work as a teacher, he expresses that career paths that are traditionally undervalued sometimes allow one to earn more and have a greater degree of freedom. Teacher I stresses a kind of deeper personal integrity that is important in his worldview, that is, whatever you do, try to be the best that you can be at it. Whilst this view may be attractive to many people, there are two issues which this view also conceals. Firstly, by setting up certain choices as “academic” and other choices as “hands on”, he reinforces a very traditional and narrow view of what it means to be “academic”. Secondly, perhaps more pertinently, this view naturalises differences in student abilities by suggesting that some students are in fact intellectuals and others not. This view stands in contrast to a perspective such as that of Vygotsky, which explains difference in terms of social-contexts (Vygotsky, 1931). For a teacher to adopt a view that only some students are academic presents a great danger, even when the teacher means well. Schools, teachers and even the education system as a whole are absolved of their responsibility for the differences in performance if one accepts that only some children can perform in certain subject areas. Additionally, such a view reinforces the ‘myth of meritocracy’ by suggesting that inequalities are not the result of social injustices but the result of unchangeable trajectories of the students themselves.

Teacher P

Well, I will always, you know, try to paint a picture of possibility, because what's the point in not doing that? What are you going to achieve by clouding the minds of young people with pessimism? It's of no use. So sometimes if you- even if you know- and I tell the teachers 'Even if you know Johnny is not going to make it don't tell him he's not going to make it, tell him that if - motivate him that if you do this, that is possible, if you achieve that, the next thing is possible.'

Teacher P’s position on the future of students is complex. For Teacher P, foreclosing on hope is a greater injustice than confronting reality. On one hand, Teacher P wishes to inspire confidence and motivate students by painting a picture of possibility, on the other he begins from a position that suggests some students are not going to ‘make it’. Teacher P’s position

highlights most clearly the contradiction contained in the messages of promise communicated to students.

Teacher M (excerpt 1):

INTERVIEWER: And would you say that's a similar thing for learners who maybe - they didn't finish school but they dropped out of school or they just didn't come back to school. Like, would you say it's the same kind of thing for them or are they doing other things?

INTERVIEWEE: We have a lot of dropouts, or dropouts from grade 8 to Grade - I'm teaching Grade 8 to 11 so I cannot talk about Grade 12. From grade 8 to 11 I've seen a lot of learners dropping out. And one learner I even asked yesterday why she - she's no longer coming and her friends told me that her mother said she should look for work, and she was one of the best students in the class. It really shocked me that, why would a parent want a learner in Grade 9 to go look for work instead of pursuing her studies.

Teacher M is able to link together the social context and student performance in ways that present more possibilities for resistance and challenging the status quo. Teacher M's social analysis is more sympathetic to family and community level difficulties that place pressure on her students. She expresses shock at parents who encourage her students to pursue an income rather than finishing school, and as previously identified (see theme 1.), Teacher M also recognises a connection between what students see in their community and how students value education. While Teacher M's social analysis could go further to begin to explain what the causes of these family and community level troubles are, simply being able to offer an honest evaluation of family and community (micro- and meso- level) factors is already a shift away from a deficit view of the student.

Section summary and comments

In summary, what students hear are messages of hope and possibility that all hinge mainly on concerted individual efforts and that are only marginally affected by one's social location. Students are presented with various versions of the hard work narrative: For Teacher M, students should work hard but because of what they see around them they do not. She problematises students' evaluation of education but not the value of the education offered to students. For Teacher P, anything is possible with hard work and sacrifice. His version does not problematise the existence of chronic community poverty. Teacher J suggests that all can be overcome with willpower and making the right choices. While for Teacher I, it doesn't matter where you start, it's up to the individual themselves to achieve. Teacher I raises little concern

about how some people have come to be in such trying situations in the first instance: life is what it is and we must make the most of it.

Messages concerning the future are knitted very closely to hard work narratives when for Teacher I the most important ideal is that students not be lazy, when Teacher M feels that if only students saw the importance of education, they might work harder and when Teacher P attempts to always paint a picture of possibility. While Teacher P's propping up of hope is clearly based on the best intentions for students, the foundation of this kind of hope is not a solid one. It is not anchored in the contextual realities of the students and the school itself. This kind of hope is like that of the student who hopes to become a mechanical engineer without meeting the requirements for entry into the field. The alternative, of confronting reality, as grim as it looks, might present more possibility for challenging the status quo and creating the conditions necessary for hope to be realised, rather than converted into the pain of being left wanting in the long term. Teacher P, like Teacher I, is a good teacher who wants good for his students but whose social analysis does not link together the individual troubles and broader structural issues in a way which enables the disentangling of the root causes of students' suffering.

What students see and experience

The following set of themes, which examine what students see and experience in and out of school, stand in antagonism to the messages about hard work winning out in the end and those of futures that are wide open and rich with possibilities. They are messages that raise contradictions. On one hand teachers say that all it takes is hard work, while on the other, the challenges presented by weak boundaries, the sensory overload and the hollowed-out conditions in which schooling must take place appear to suggest that hard work alone is not enough.

Theme 3: Weak boundaries

In this section, I focus on the context, conditions and interactions in which learning takes place at the research school. This particular theme concerns both time use and spatial practices within the classroom. I have titled this section "weak boundaries" as this most adequately expresses the classroom experience resulting from the conditions and interactions in and in-between the class and the community. The weakness of boundaries between the specialised activity of the classroom and everyday activity are evident in both pedagogy and practice, suggesting that students are not well inducted into scholarly competence (or the formation of scholarly 'habitus').

In this section, I analyse one lesson. While the lesson I am analysing should not be taken as representative of the full range of practices employed by Teacher J, nor as a comprehensive account of the realities at the research school, it does offer a snapshot of what may frequently be witnessed at the school. Similar overlapping data, confirming the weak boundaries, was also produced in the classroom observation in Teacher M's morning history class, which was intermittently disrupted by the arrival of late-coming students.

Teacher J's lesson:

Teacher J's lesson which is scheduled to begin at 10h00 is initiated at 10h10. Ten minutes of the 30-minute lesson, a third, is lost on arranging bodies in space as learners move from their previous class into their allocated spaces in Teacher J's class.

The lack of boundedness extends to the technologies and resources students utilise in order to participate in the lesson. As Teacher J greets the class and loads up the data projector, Teacher J instructs the class to take out their books and elaborates by saying: "If you don't have a book, take out any book". In this instance, Teacher J is clearly anxious to get the lesson started but the deliberation further dissipates the subject boundaries by reinforcing that any writing book will do, even if it is that set aside for a different subject. Here, I am not attempting to enter an analysis of pedagogical method; instead I am recognising that this moment is a culmination of everything that has happened prior to students arriving to class, i.e. that what happens in class is affected by conditions outside the school. There are reasons why some students have arrived with the correct exercise book for the subject area while others use books that they appear to be using for multiple subjects. The failure to acknowledge, explore and to compensate for such seemingly insignificant differences creates space for distractions from doing the work.

Not long after the lesson begins (at 10h12), a law enforcement officer arrives at the door to indicate that a parent has arrived to speak to Teacher J. The lesson is paused momentarily but the scheduled time and duration of the lesson cannot be paused in the same manner. Time for teaching and learning becomes time to attend to non-subject related engagements. In this way both time and space are disrupted. Inasmuch as Teacher J attempts to create the space for teaching and learning, Teacher J has limited control over even the physical boundaries of the classroom that are not impervious to happenings 'outside'. A bunking student entering the room or a knock on the door make clear that Teacher J's classroom is situated within a much larger environment in which the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside', the classroom and the school, or even the classroom and the community, are blurred.

The frustrations of Teacher J are made visible and embodied when he punches the door and calls out to the students: "If you are going to go on, you are going to fail ... I'm gonna send you home and I'm gonna scold at your parents". Teacher J's communication, his message about students and learning - appears to conflate several messages or ideas about the relationship between behaviour, achievement, consequence and blame. The assertion that students who are not well behaved will fail is not necessarily accurate as it assumes achievement to be a function of obedient behaviour rather subject area knowledge.

As the lesson proceeds, there are further disruptions at the door, students eating lunch at the back of the classroom, a student with headphones watching a video on her cell-phone and other students holding their heads up with the palms of their hands and then another knock at the door (at 10h29) before the lesson, scheduled to be 30 minutes long, ends.

In the same lesson, a Grade 11 student who is well behaved, who has achieved good academic results, and whom the principal has taken on an excursion to parliament, is presented to others as an example they should emulate. Perhaps these are Teacher J's attempts to resist or push-back against the dominant narratives about who students are and about their future. This message is contrasted with the myriad other messages (the dislocation of books or students from the classroom, the blaming of parents or manner of interacting with students) that suggest something else about who the students are.

In Teacher J's classroom, an advertisement clipping from a real estate agent is displayed on the wall. According to Teacher J, the clipping has been placed there intentionally, with the expressed aims of motivating and inspiring students to achieve. It is used to bolster aspirations. While this classroom visual also relates to messaging about the future, here I wish to focus on what it might suggest about education and knowledge. In this regard, learning and acquiring knowledge and the creative potential which knowledge unlocks for students is not seen as a desirable goal in and of itself. Instead, education is seen as but a means to achieve upward social mobility, i.e. to be able to possess a beautiful house.

Theme 4: Sensory overload

Another theme arising from the interview data with students is an issue which I have chosen to describe as sensory overload. These are instances in the school day or aspects of schooling related to the overwhelming of the senses, which students expressed frustration about. While such experiences are not planned or intentional, they do arise as a result of the way in which the school is forced to play the game of schooling.

Consider the following examples:

STUDENT S:

"... [there is] no library, like a quiet place for you to sit during exams and study, there will always be noise. And the toilets don't get cleaned really often. They take children to clean the toilets, they don't hire real people to clean toilets. And that's all."

STUDENT K: Yes, Sir there's no problem with the building or classes, but some classes are just too small.

INTERVIEWER: Some classes are too small? Why do you say that?

STUDENT K: Because we're a lot in our class, Sir.

INTERVIEWER: About how many?

STUDENT K: Like 40, 50 something.

STUDENT V: Ek sal miskien... Ek sal miskien vir elke klas 'n heater koop, Meneer, [I will probably buy a heater for every class, sir]

The three students above express various forms of sensory overload as being frustrating and uncomfortable. For Student S it is the inability to find a quiet place to escape the ever-present noise, as well as the fact that the toilets aren't cleaned very often. For Student K, it is the overcrowded classrooms, whereas for Student V, it is the cold that causes discomfort and leads him to suggest that one change he would bring if he could, is the installation of heaters in every classroom.

During my time at the research school, I was able to experience with my own senses what students had expressed in the interviews. In some classrooms, there are broken windows that let in the cold air on rainy days. The school toilets are dirty, the walls are covered with graffiti and there is no toilet paper available for students. In addition to this, the design of the school, which is built first for security, is not really built with noise or sound in mind, and so as corridors become busy, sound travels through the entire school.

In addition to this, during the time of my research, there were no chairs available to students during assemblies and students were required to sit on the cement floor. When it rained, the area used for assemblies would also get wet and when this happened, students would stand for the duration of the assembly.

Theme 5. Visible conditions, invisible causes

In the following section, I examine excerpts from my interview transcripts which I have organised under the theme of “resource-related problems”. This theme expands on what I have called the “conditions” of schooling. Here I attempt to explore how these conditions might influence school performance. What becomes apparent in examining the excerpts is that little explanation is offered by teachers as to why conditions are the way they are at school. Just as the electrical wiring remains hidden from sight, so the causes of student (under)performance remain hidden in everyday discourse.

Teacher I:

Ask the State for a remedial teacher, you'll wait for 'thy kingdom come'.

“If you look at life orientation, it's just, there's the subject but our kids still don't know what they want to be in life, where at certain schools I know that kids are called in at Grade 8 already, called in and they are guided into what they want to be. Not here. Why? Manpower. It's all about money. Other schools have extra money so they can employ people to do that.

Teacher I expresses frustration about the lack of human resources at school. The religious metaphor employed suggests that expecting help from the Department of Education is like waiting for something that may never come during our lifetime. However, while Teacher I's frustrations with the lack of departmental support highlight the unfavourable position of the school, this is not the main problem Teacher I focuses on. Instead, Teacher I is suggesting that if life orientation were improved and students received more careful guidance for their future paths, this might improve their chances.

Teacher P

I want to go back to the previous question where you asked me, do we have enough resources. I respond to say 'basic' but I think what we have had to now accept is that – In fact it's not the basics, because the fact that we can't help this child [referring to a child that cannot read] indirectly says we don't have enough resources in terms of the support, the educators, the human resources, because I believe that we could be able to do more with that. So when I say - and I want to go back to that response and when I say the basic resources, I am talking about - we have classrooms, we have books and stuff.

Take for example physical education, it is so important. Now it's part of LO and it's one person, when physical education the way you and I know, it was taught to us in a

structured way by someone who was fully skilled, a male teacher had taught the boys and a female teacher had taught the girls, and there was - there were those kind of people available, and very skilled people, you know. And I'm just using that as one example you know, where what we've now switched into as principals is survival mode, and I'm just - I'm just becoming aware of it now, when you go into survival mode you actually accept it because you know you're not going to get it, so you tell yourself the resources is just enough.

Teacher P's reflections offer clues as to how a situation of glaring inequalities comes to be accepted and internalised. When I first asked Teacher P whether he believes the school and its students have the resources they need to be successful at school, he suggested that "basically" they have the resources they need. Yet, after considering the school's struggle to obtain support for a student who was having difficulty with reading and reflecting on the lack of support from departmental officials when he brought the concern to their attention, Teacher P re-evaluated his original assessment. Teacher P holds a belief that the student could have been helped if he received adequate support. Teacher P also appears to believe that if the student concerned could not be helped with reading (reading being a basic task of schooling) it indirectly implies that the school does not have even 'the basics'. Teacher P, as a school principal who also has to engage with the provincial department, recognises that the support he seeks is not coming: because of being 'taught' this lesson repeatedly, he has come to accept the thinned-out conditions of schooling.

In the case of the student who has not acquired the ability to read in primary school, the research school's lack of resources, compounded by the lack of departmental support means that there is little that they are able to do to assist the student. While the student's case appears to have been quite accentuated, students with reading difficulties are not uncommon in the research school and there is little help the school is able to provide to them. Their progression through the schooling system is aided not by the proper support but only by a policy which allows students to fail only once per phase.

Teacher J

The library. We don't have a library at our school. In the beginning of this year or last year I got two Congolese girls into my Grade 10 class and one of them couldn't read at all, couldn't understand English at all. So what I tried to do was – although I've done it but only once or twice – I downloaded some pictures. I had some pictures with the name of the animals and the sounds that they make, so that was teaching them – I don't know if that's crèche or Grade R or whatever but that was teaching them. So I tried to do that in my schedule, and I teach twelve periods a day, five days a week, I think ten or eight on a Friday. So teachers are swamped with the workload and we

have no personal assistants or teacher assistants, we have no library on school, so unfortunately for the learners to be taught reading and writing skill they need to get external assistance, and we made some agreement with the – or made contact with one of the guys at the local [community] library here at the Civic [centre] down the road but apparently he was charging R50, I think, a lesson, for an hour, we don't really know what he was doing.

Teacher J is frustrated, yet like the other teachers, is unable to name what it is that produces the situation he finds himself in. Teacher J has to teach foreign students for whom English is a second language. Aside from being inadequately equipped to teach language, there is a more important resource that Teacher J is lacking: this is time. Without adequate staff for the needs of the school, Teacher J has a full teaching roster with open/planning periods. In this situation the school attempts to find external assistance by drawing on local resources (the tutor at the library) but as they have discovered, this too carries a financial cost that is out of reach of students. The success of such students, who have no barrier to learning other than being required to do school in a foreign language, is made dependent on the students themselves. Responsibility and blame are shifted from the level of the system to the level of the individual.

Teacher M

Think most of the lessons, and which I heard all the time, is too teacher centred and the lessons should be learner-centred, and because of resources we are forced to like in history or in LO or in maths, the teacher only has a text book, so you tend to talk more than the learners, which should be the other way around.

The above excerpt from the interview with Teacher M demonstrates a tension between the expectations of the curriculum, which aims to be learner-centred and the material resources of the school. Teacher M feels that the lack of textbooks constrains her classroom interactions. Because students have little access to the information they need other than the teacher's copy of the text book, they become dependent on the teacher and this requires of the teacher to do more instructive teaching.

In the above examples, the non-existent textbooks, the non-existent school library along with limited access to internet services create a situation in which independent learning is harder for students to do. It also creates a situation in which classroom dialogues are impoverished and students are dependent on the teacher for what they want or need to know in the relevant subject area.

Theme summary and comments

In summary, the data presents a story about a school that is positioned unfavourably. The school is positioned in a community of lower socio-economic status that makes it difficult for the school and its students to benefit from local resources. It is positioned unfavourably by policy that requires schools to draw on local resources in the provision of schooling (via tuition fees). Finally, it is positioned unfavourably in that the families that students come from may not always be able to provide them with the kind of guidance necessary to achieve within the game of schooling.

Also evident in the data, is a story of a school characterised by lack. According to Teacher P, the school is lacking even the basic resources that would enable it to help a struggling reader. According to Teacher J, due to the tight schedules and the demands of the curriculum, teachers lack adequate time to attend to the needs of students. In addition to this, the lack of sufficient materials, according to Teacher M, renders the school unable to deliver the curriculum in the manner imagined by policy.

Teacher I's assertion that "it's all about money" is valid because the financial position of the school is not one which will enable the school to employ additional educators. The human resource problem is unlikely to be adequately resolved, for as long as no assistance comes from government and for as long as the responsibility is shifted to the level of the school. School Governing Bodies are 'allowed' to employ additional staff from funds raised but the ability to raise funds is not disconnected from the spatial arrangements of South Africa's past. If the school were located in a wealthier suburb, it would have the ability to source more funds and it would be able to employ additional teaching and support staff.

While Teacher I's ideas about what other schools do may not always be true, what he is suggesting without framing it this way, is that 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003) makes a difference to the life trajectory of students. Middle-class families are able to mobilise their many resources toward the future of the children (e.g. tutors, mentors, au pairs, extra-curricular and co-curricular classes) and this process of cultivation is further reinforced in schools that are well-resourced. Whereas in the research school, the students do not receive the same kind of attention at home or at school. In Teacher I's reflection, he offers one example of how this affects students: They have no clear idea of their future goals, or - where they do - they have only a brittle knowledge of how to achieve these goals. Of course, even knowledge about the pathways to achieve goals is not enough, if one does not also have access to the species of capital that may be required along the way.

Section summary and comments

In summary, what has been presented across the three themes of weak boundaries, sensory overload and visible conditions/invisible causes is a set of data that highlights the many obstacles students must contend with in trying to succeed at school. The sights and experiences students encounter are not only indicative of the conditions of schooling but are also messages in themselves that seem to suggest something about the students and activities that take place in this particular school. First, students are confronted by the fact that classroom boundaries are porous, they let in all manner of elements that seek to disrupt the specialised activity of the classroom. Similarly, the context of a school with several students traversing long distances to get to school, imply that even lesson time is not fixed or immune to constant disruption when late-coming students walk into class at differing intervals. Secondly, students are confronted with the sights, sounds and smells of crowded classrooms, of dirty toilets, of broken windows, leaky roofs and cold classrooms, and of standing in assemblies in the absence of sufficient seating for students. Finally, teachers express the frustrations of waiting for departmental support, of the lack of resources to support students in learning to read or even the delivery of the curriculum as imagined in policy texts. What may be inferred from teacher accounts is that, for learners who might require a supportive environment, such an environment is not one they might encounter, despite the efforts of teachers to create one.

While teachers are able to describe resource problems by referring to examples, such accounts do not offer an explanation as to why such resource problems exist, or how they are linked to historical and contemporary inequalities. Teacher accounts do not expose policy architecture which aim to distribute resources equally but leave schools like the research school without what is needed. It is not enough to recognise the inadequate conditions of schooling without recognising the 'rules of the game' as it were. Without making these links explicit, the possibilities for challenging dominant discourse is constrained.

Some of the challenges presented arise because of how the school is positioned in the field and consequently, how it is forced to play the game. Where a class might exceed even the standard ratio of 1:34 it is because the school is incentivised to increase enrolment numbers. Where the window is broken it is because the school, which is classified as a fee-paying school, is forced to extract such fees from a community where several families live on minimum wage labour, pensions funds and social grants. In fact, during the period of research, the school lowered its fees in an attempt to boost collection rates.

The constraining context in which the school must operate, produces conditions which may be described as spatial forms of symbolic violence against students. Without requiring the

school to deliberate or plan, such violence is articulated in the everyday life of students at school.

The challenges are also present across scale. For example, the sensory overload within the school is also experienced within the community itself, except that in the community it is more severe. There is also a combination of factors that are the result of design. When driving through the 'courts' in the nearby tenement buildings at night, as I have done during less formal interactions with the school, I have noticed the bright floodlights which light up the courts until late into the night.

Communities such as the one the school is located in, were designed to be easily accessible for police vehicles, with easy to cordon off roads, and to be easily visible when using patrol helicopters, for which purposes the floodlights could also assist. In addition to the heavy street-lighting and flood-lights, there are also other sources of light, such as that from the fires in the metal drums which the residents call "galleys". The "galley" fires are used to keep warm outside and, even late at night, people are seen on the street corners and pavements around the 'galley'.

Noise is also a significant source which bombards one's senses when in the flats. The walls of the apartments in the tenement buildings are not entirely sound proof and so the knocking of the next-door neighbour is something that presents a disturbance. Added to this, when the flat is overcrowded, there remains little private space and sometimes only a curtain might separate an adult's sleeping quarters from that of the children.

Students in urban township schools like this one do their schoolings in conditions which are quite different from those of privileged schools to which they are often contrasted in standardised performance tests. These students experience the bombardment of the senses both at home and at school. What becomes apparent in their own words, which express both frustrations and hopes for their school, is that this sensory overload matters. For example, a student who wants to learn might sometimes wish to seek out a quiet place to study, but in the context of the urban township school, they may come up short in their search. A student who may want to focus on the lesson at hand because of the conditions of their schooling might find it hard to concentrate in the winter, not because they do not have the intellectual stamina but because the cold presents too much of a discomfort or a distraction. Perhaps more profoundly, the sensory overload in the community may at times interrupt or disrupt what may be considered optimal sleeping and waking patterns in a way that is incompatible with the traditional start of the school day at 8h00am.

What students say:

In this section, I examine narratives about the future, in particular the future of students, as expressed by the students themselves. Narratives of course are not always accurate reflections of what students do or do not do in practice but they do offer insight into how students are calculating their own futures, aspirations and chances in life. Here I revisit a theme already discussed but do so with a different focus, i.e. how students themselves perceive their future opportunities.

Theme 2. Futures wide open

The data extracts presented here also pertain to student futures. Here however, I deal with what students say rather than what students hear. As such, extracts from the students themselves (rather than teachers) have been presented. I have retained the theme name of “futures wide open” because student accounts are consistent with the idea of hopeful futures and possibility. Following here are student narratives:

Student J

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so I'm going to shift a little bit again. So what are your dreams or your aspirations for the future after school?

STUDENT J: Probably go study because have my eyes set focused now on becoming an accountant, but it is only a view of which I want to become. So I don't basically know where will life take me, but that, so I have my eye set focused of becoming an accountant

Student K

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so let look at some other things maybe not so much about school but maybe a bit about your own self. So when you think of the future do you have any dreams or goals for the future? What do you want to do?

STUDENT K: Yes, Sir, I want to become- mechanical engineering.

INTERVIEWER: Mechanical engineering? And do you have to study to do that?

STUDENT K: Yes, Sir.

INTERVIEWER: And so have you researched that a little bit, like what you need to be able to do to become a mechanical engineer?

STUDENT K: No, Sir.

INTERVIEWER: Not so much?

STUDENT K: I got advice, Sir, how to work on cars.

INTERVIEWER: Okay who gives you that advice?

STUDENT K: I work sometimes with a neighbour, Sir. He's a mechanic.

Student V

STUDENT V: En dit sal nou seker dit insluit, wat jy wil wees. Soos wat sal jy studeer as jy daaraan dink?

INTERVIEWER: Meneer ek sal meer studeer vir 'n [ward] councillor, Meneer, en ek sal meer research vir dit wat ek wil wees, Meneer.

Translation of Student V Response:

Sir I will study more to become a ward councillor. I will research more about what I would like to become.

STUDENT S:

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so I'm going to ask you a couple of questions now that's got a little bit more to do with your own aspirations and your own dreams and so on. So what are your dreams or your aspirations for the long term future, so what do you hope to do one day when you're out of school?

STUDENT S : I hope to one day become an architect.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And what will you do with that?

STUDENT S : What do you mean?

INTERVIEWER: I mean what are you going to do when you're an architect, are you going to design houses, are you going to work on roads or...?

STUDENT S: Buildings.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Buildings

STUDENT S: Skyscrapers to be precise.

INTERVIEWER: Skyscrapers. And I mean it plays into the next question as well, do you have plans for university education after school, and if so, in which field? I take it you want to be- you're probably interested in architecture, but have you ever explored that, have you ever looked at what it takes to get into that field of study?

STUDENT S: No I haven't really looked into it yet.

All of the students interviewed have what might be described as aspirations for middle-class careers. Student K wants to be a mechanical engineer, Student J aspires to be an accountant, Student S hopes to become an architect designing skyscrapers and Student V has political aspirations to be a ward councillor in his community. Their career aspirations reflect lifestyles beyond the borders of their schools and communities. This stands in contrast to the discourse about 'raising aspirations' or 'expanding horizons' that suggest that students in the lower socioeconomic strata of society do not have dreams.

However, even though the students interviewed all have admirable future goals, there are two common threads which tie together their stories. Firstly, they have what Appadurai (2004) describes as a brittle knowledge of the pathways that lead them to their goals. Student K and Student S have not really researched the requirements for their career options and do not really have clear ideas about how to accomplish their goals. Student V's response is quite typical ('I'm going to study') of the responses many students offer, anchored in the belief that a tertiary education is the path to any career, even the political role of the ward councillor which requires no tertiary qualifications. In my other interactions with students at the school, outside of the parameters of the research project and within the context of a life orientation programme offered to students at the school, several such stories were expressed where students over-estimated the requirements for certain careers (i.e. I'll go to university to become a hairdresser).

Secondly, perhaps more profoundly, the career aspirations of the students interviewed are not always matched by the subject choices offered at the school. At the time of interviewing, the school had not offered mathematics as a subject and Teacher M, who was a new teacher, was in discussion with the school about whether there would be enough students to offer a

mathematics class (which she was advocating for at the time). Without the opportunity to take mathematics as a subject, the chances of Student K becoming a mechanical engineer, Student S becoming an architect or Student J becoming an accountant would be foreclosed on. Counter-arguments that suggest such students could pick up mathematics as a subject post-school before applying for university access do not take into account the time-factor for students who already in their school years are pressured to start earning an income to support their families, or even just the additional cost of embarking on such an exercise in the context of low-income households. In many ways then, the dreams and aspirations of these students are already foreclosed on through the inability of the school to offer what these students require to even apply for the studies they hope to engage in after high school.

The significance of the points made above becomes even starker when we take into account that the students who participated in this study, and whose comments are reported above, are among the higher achieving students in their grade. While I attempted to recruit both high performing students as well as under-performing students in my research, only relatively high performers and “average” performers were willing to participate in the study. The lowest performing students presented the greatest degree of difficulty. I was unable to get signed consent forms from the lowest performers. Some parents were unwilling to allow their children to participate in the research project: one student mentioned that his parents do not really trust the school. For several reasons the lowest performers or, more accurately, the ones worst affected by inequalities in schooling and in the community, were unavailable. Yet in the context of the school, where overall grades of 37,4% and 45,7% earned students a place in the top 10 of the two grade 8 classes at the end of the year, comments about high, average and low performing begin to take on less meaning. Even for Student S and Student J, who are ‘top five’ students, are only scoring in the 50%-55% range. Perhaps under different conditions, in a better-resourced schooling environment and with greater support, they might genuinely become ‘top students’ but as it is their dreams are being fast foreclosed on by their grades.

What students (and teachers) do:

This section groups together thematically, data pertaining to student response strategies or what student students do. Also included in this section is the theme of dis-location, which relates to the actions of teachers yet is closely linked as both students and teachers adopt response strategies that are characterised by the removal from or the vacating of space, metaphorically and literally.

Theme 6: Checking out

In my observations, I tracked several instances of student behaviour which I categorised as “checking out”. I used the term ‘checking out’ because, in these instances, students appear to be somewhat disengaged from the activity of teaching and learning, and focused on other activities. I have differentiated between ‘checking out’ behaviour and ‘disruption’ (e.g. a student throwing a paper at another student) because these behaviours (checking out) are not intentionally disruptive and have only an indirect impact on other students in the class.

The following example represents instances in the data that I have framed as “checking out”. While the students are physically present in the class, they no longer consciously participate in specialised activity intended for the class. Cognitively, arguably, they inhabit a different temporality to that of the classroom.

Teacher I S2: Teacher wakes a student who looks as if they are sleeping and says “this is not a sleeping session”

Teacher P S1 9:11am: Student opens window to peek outside

Teacher P S1 9:22am: Two students with heads on desk. Some students rocking their desks. Ends in a minor scuffle

Teacher P S1 9:50am: Students with head on desk. Three other students now congregate at the back of the class.

Teacher J S2: A student at the back of the classroom has had his head on desk since the beginning of the lesson

Teacher J S1 10h25: One student gets up to have a conversation with a friend while the teacher continues typing on slides. Another student is wearing earphones and watching a video on her cell-phone.

Here some students choose to pass time at school by using time for their own purposes: sleeping, conversing with friends, watching videos, observing other students outside of the classroom. While the behaviours above are often responded to with reprimands, they still occur frequently. While students do not frequently verbalise their frustrations in a clear manner, and it might also be unrealistic to expect agents to offer a social analysis of their own behaviours and their actions, their spatial practices do communicate much about frustration about the use of their time.

Acts of checking out were not limited to individuals but were expressed in the behaviours of groups and at the level of the institution as well. As an example, during my research, a majority of students from the school staged a 'walk-out'. On the day of the walkout, the school water had been shut-off due to problems beyond the control of the school. The lack of water and inability to flush toilets produced a smell that agitated the students. The student leaders (Representative Council of Learners) had then met with the principal to suggest that school be closed for the day. The principal suggested they wait to see if the water supply would be turned back on. Students then organised to walkout during break-time. However, by the time they had started to walk out of school, the water had already been turned back on. I choose to mention this incident here because while it is not a classroom observation, it may be seen as another instance of 'checking out' behaviour in a very concrete and tangible way.

Such behaviours, I will later suggest, are frequently misrecognised for laziness or expressions of disinterest in education altogether. However, it is helpful to take our cue from Bourdieu (1999:620) when he writes:

Social agents do not innately possess a science of what they are and what they do. More precisely, they do not necessarily have access to the core principles of their discontent or their malaise, and, without aiming to mislead, their most spontaneous declarations may express something quite different from what they seem to say.

It might then be more appropriate to ask: "Why are students checking out?" or "What about their schooling are students disengaging from?" rather than to judge only at face-value (or on the basis of our pre-conditioned assumptions) what these spatial practices may be indicative of.

It is possible to argue that all forms of checking out, whether they present more passively in forms of laying a head down on a desk or active forms of staging a walkout may be seen as acts of resistance. While a typology of resistance such as that of Solozarno & Bernal (2001) may help to differentiate between resistance that is self-defeating and resistance that consciously seeks to promote justice, simply recognising student actions as resistance behaviour, helps to avoid common misrecognitions. If students are resisting, there must be some genuine experience of discomfort, alienation or injustice undergirding such resistance.

Theme 7: Dis-location

Dislocation refers to a disturbance or disruption to an original order, state or place. The term is often employed to talk about social disruptions caused by rapid urbanisation. In this section I refer to the disciplinary practices of teachers as spatial practices that dislocate students from the process of learning.

In my classroom observations, such practices were evident in two lessons taught by the same educator. However, while I only observed the lessons of four educators, on any given day during my time spent in the school for this study, there would be students outside of classrooms. Since there are several occasions at the school where students who are put outside of class might be observed waiting or walking in the corridors, a different explanation might be required as to why the act of “dis-location” was not witnessed more frequently in the 8 sessions which I observed. Firstly, there is the issue of the observer-effect or the ‘Hawthorn effect’ in which the very act of observing influences what the actors do. My presence in the classroom then, might have influenced the disciplinary strategies which teachers adopted. Whilst this is one possibility, I would suggest an alternative explanation, related to the actual actors involved and their pedagogical techniques. Of the four teachers observed, two of them taught highly valued subject areas (mathematics and life-sciences). In the mathematics and life-sciences classrooms, I also noticed that the lessons were presented in a more structured manner where the aims were clear from the beginning and planned activities were presented in a manner that kept students focused on the task at hand. The mathematics class and particularly the life-sciences teacher’s classroom contained several visual representations related to the subject area (it was a bounded and specialised space). Whilst teachers in these classes still employed disciplinary strategies, the instances were less frequent and less severe than in other classes.

The following examples were observed lesson of teacher J, who teaches life orientation

Teacher J S2: Teacher says to a student “Girl, I’m going to put (send) you into the office.”

Teacher J S2: Three students are removed from class and wait outside the classroom

Teacher J S2: Teacher picks up a student’s books and puts it outside of class on the floor, while saying “making an example”

Teacher J S2: Teacher puts another student who is laughing outside of class saying “she is lonely here outside.”

Student in J S2: “you can ma[shortening of Afrikaans ‘maar’] put me out of the class cause I can’t even hear”

The extracts above from an observation of Teacher J’s class offer examples of what appeared to be Teacher J’s default strategy for handling classroom discipline matters. When classroom incidents (such as an argument between students or provocative comments from student to teacher) occurred, Teacher J appeared (as evidenced from the extracts offered above) to

'make an example' by removing someone from class. These students were not sent to the office or to law-enforcement: instead they were made to wait outside in the corridor.

In addition to the instances of dis-location in the classroom noted through formal classroom observations or through observations walking through the school corridors, the school as an institution employed strategies which dislocate students from the school. An example of this is the disciplinary procedure of issuing students with notes requesting their parents to visit the school and not allowing such students back until their parents have visited the school. Another example employed at the school was the system of lock-out, in which students who arrived late were disallowed from entering the school grounds for a period of 20 minutes, during which time the student would lose class time and after which the student would be subjected to writing out lines. While lock-out is not exactly a 'dis-location', it functions in the same way spatially, by separating student bodies from the process of learning and from the classes they are meant to be attending.

Section summary and comments

In summary, both acts of 'checking out' and 'dis-locations' need to be read in relation to the particularity of the school context and the socio-historical background of many of the families in the wider community. The school itself is located in a community that has its genesis in a history of dislocation. Many of the students come from families whose histories are characterised by displacement in the 1950s and who remain marginalised in post-Apartheid South Africa. From time to time, families find themselves facing off against each other or against police in disputes concerning the provision of housing (the space to live). As an echo of the bulldozers that destroyed homes in District Six, police units destroy the informal structures families construct for themselves in response to the lack of provision from government.

If the marginalisation, separation, displacement or dislocation that happens at the scale of the city might be described as spatial injustices, what do the very similar practices mean at the scale of the classroom? Engaging with this mirrored reality might offer insights into how exclusionary discourses, discourses of not-belonging, are inscribed in the bodies of youth. Their families were dislocated from their homes in the 1950s, now they are being dislocated from their schools.

How does checking-out behaviour and its counterpart, 'dis-locations', relate to my research question about how performance is explained in urban township schools? Since I adopted a much broader definition of performance and under-performance, the practice of dropping out of school might be understood as a reality that sits on the most extreme end of underperformance, as an act in which the students themselves opt out of the game of

schooling altogether. In the research school, the attrition rate of enrolment increases substantially from Grade 8 through Grade 12. In such a context, the checking-out behaviour as well as the dis-locations may be read as 'training and practice', that, for several learners, leads to a final and complete rupture with formal schooling.

Layered on top of the same historical context presented above, the practice of removing students or even their books from the classroom may be interpreted as acts of symbolic violence. Forced removal from the classroom arguably repeats a history of forced removal in the city, even if at a lesser scale.

In the next chapter, the themes identified here are reorganised around the main research questions and the questions are discussed in a manner that is consistent with the data produced through this study. Final commentary and conclusions are made concerning the transmission, content and practical reliability of messages students receive at the research school in relation to the context, conditions and interactions in time-space within and surrounding the school.

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusions

The overarching purpose of this study focuses on the messages concerning students' future opportunities that are communicated in the research school, how they are transmitted, how they shape students' habitus and how students in turn respond. The study draws on concepts derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu & Henri Lefebvre, especially Bourdieu's notions of symbolic violence (to conceptualise the messaging), habitus (to conceptualise how students internalise the messages, 'playing the game' (to conceptualise student responses), and also Lefebvre's notions of representational space, representations of space and spatial practices to conceptualise non-verbal messaging and responses).

The study challenges explanations offered in hegemonic media and policy discourse for the performance of students and schools by examining how these explanations align with actual conditions and activities within the context of schooling in a disadvantaged community. The concepts derived from Bourdieu & Lefebvre enabled me to produce an account that does not leave out the subjectivity of students, and that highlights the different ways in which students evaluate the messages they receive and internalise or reject such messages through their own reflections and spatial practices.

In the previous chapter I introduced seven key themes that emerged from data analysis, labelled: 1) work hard(er), 2) futures wide open, 3) weak boundaries, 4) sensory overload, 5) visible conditions/invisible causes, 6) checking out and 7) dis-location

Themes one and two dealt with the content of messages which students receive about success, aspirations and the future. These two themes showed how students frequently receive message about hard work and possibility that emphasise personal agency but neglect to account for the influence of structural factors that may limit such agency. Such messages were interpreted as symbolic violence in that they blame individuals for causes beyond their own control and in so doing also conceal influencing factors that must be engaged with for a more just and equitable schooling system.

Themes three, four and five concerned the conditions and context of schooling and probe the question of alignment (or misalignment) of messages about success in relation to the socio-economic position of students. The data relating to this cluster of themes suggested that the conditions and context of schooling do not favourably position students for the futures they desire. This also implies that requiring under-resourced schools to draw on community resources renders schools like the one in this study unable to support students in a manner that may be necessary for students to perform.

Themes six and seven, which are really two sides of the same coin, concerned acts of 'checking out' and acts that 'dis-locate'. Where checking-out was interpreted as representing the response of alienated students, dis-locations were interpreted as the response of alienated teachers but also as acts that carried messages that students receive at school (in this case, messages about where students belong). Taken together, these themes address the question of how students are responding to the symbolic violence of schooling.

In dealing with the question of how students are shaped by messages received at school, I considered data from across the themes. This was appropriate as 'habitus' may be taken to be reflected in both students' reflections and their actions.

This chapter revisits the key research sub-questions and provides a discussion that is anchored in the insights that were generated in the previous chapter on data analysis.

What meanings and descriptions of reality are communicated to students concerning risk and responsibility in relation to success and aspirations?

Most well-meaning adults might encourage students to work hard and do their best. There is of course little harm that might come from students putting in concerted efforts toward their goals. The violence is however present in the concealment of the myriad of social forces acting upon students, their schools and their communities. As Macleod (2009:16) suggests, it leads people to see structurally determined processes as the result of individual agency. To reframe Macleod in Bourdieuan terms, it produces misrecognition in which hard work, effort and will-power are misrecognised as the cause of differences in performance. In this study, such messages or 'hard work stories' are also shown to be delivered with force. While the challenges of poverty are recognised, it is assumed to have only a marginal influence on student trajectories when success is considered to be "up to the person themselves" who must have "will power" and not be "idle" because "anything is possible if they put their mind to it"

Both the students and teachers in this study demonstrate an internalisation of this myth of meritocracy. Some teachers are more generous in acknowledging outside factors, yet even then much of their 'social analysis' remains at the micro or meso level. For example, students sitting on the street corner might be identified as a problem and even a negative influence on others, but such observations do not take heed of how structural unemployment might be linked to the visibility of the students on the street corner. Such observations fail to ask: "Why are youth on the street corner and not in the classroom in the first place?" Such observations suggest that hard work and effort is what it takes to succeed, and that perhaps the students on the street corners have not worked hard enough or put enough effort in. Their shortcomings are misrecognised as personal troubles and failures, rather than public issues for which society is collectively responsible.

The same misrecognition is present in public discourse when researchers, educationalists, policy makers, economists and the general public continue to talk about “achievement” or “attainment”. It is reproduced in schools on an annual basis when ceremonies are conducted for “prize-winners”. Even in the research school, a site that reflects the deep inequalities in the education system, the myth is reproduced when a ‘Top Ten’ list is put up to celebrate the top students. Often, when such top students or top schools are celebrated, it is done in a meritocratic manner that attributes success to individual effort and hard work or to good governance as conceptualised within technical-managerial approaches. Such attributions fail to consider the social location of students and the resources and to which capitals they have access. Another common motif, year on year, involves the media highlight stories of students who are represented as succeeding ‘despite the odds’. Such stories also fail to provide a deeper analysis of capitals and what counts as capitals in particular communities. For example, some schools in the urban township are also supported by networks of NGOs that act as buffers against the full effects of being in an under-resourced school.

Other scholars have noted that the myth affects those who ‘have’ and ‘have-not’ very differently. In the former case, the myth bolsters individual pride whilst in the latter it may result in self-blame, as in the several cases presented in Jennifer Silva’s (2013) *“Coming Up Short”* or in the stories of the ‘Brothers’ presented in Jay Macleod’s (1987) *“Aint No Makin It”*.

This myth also limits the possibility for the ‘have-nots’ to organise and mobilise around important public issues in education in ways that promote equity and justice: the myth directs attention toward the individual, who then becomes the locus for intervention, shifting the ‘social analysis’ of those who are affected away from the structural factors which affect groups of people and which seriously constrain the agency of targeted groups. The acceptance of this meritocratic myth may otherwise be read as the internalisation of symbolic violence. Important matters and decisions concerning those affected by such inequalities are then left to those in politics or the academy, more often, those who are not directly affected by the consequences of their own decisions. Mills puts it this way:

With the cultural capital of the dominant group embodied in schools, educational differences are frequently ‘misrecognised’ as resulting from ‘individual giftedness’ rather than from class-based differences. (Mills 2010:44)

How do the messages students receive about success and performance align with how students are positioned socially and economically?

This study profoundly demonstrates that the hard work stories and stories of futures being wide open often contain within themselves a contradiction. Those who reproduce the narratives of hard work conquering all appear to be able to hold this contradiction without

having to wrestle too much with the tension between two competing ideas: On one hand, they suggest that hard work is all it takes; on the other, they are confident that many students won't make it under present conditions, and that there are even some students whom the school is unable to assist. Yet, it is not only at the level of discourse that this contradiction is present. The same contradiction becomes apparent when one considers that, out of a class of 83 who were in Grade 8 in 2014, only seven remained to write the NSC exams in the research school in 2018. These numbers suggest that the narrative about hard work, on its own, is insufficient to explain the performances produced in the research school. Perhaps only seven worked hard enough? Such a declaration would be inconsistent with the findings of this study, as is illustrated in the stories of two hard working students, who were interviewed for the study, and whose performances still teeter between success and failure.

Both Student S and Student J might be considered to be hard working students. Student J is also a member of an opt-in student group called the ARC (action research committee) that is attempting to explore and address issues relating to student disengagement at his school. He is also a member of the representative council of learners (RCL). Student J might be seen working at school after hours to complete home-work tasks or to study in a teacher's classroom. Student S, like the other student participants, also has high ambitions. Student S's teacher (Teacher M) suggested that Student S showed much promise as a student and had the right attitude toward his education. Student S though, unlike Student J, appeared to express a greater degree of dissatisfaction about his school, most clearly articulated when, in his interview, he suggested: "This is not a school to be proud of."

For Both Student S and Student J, though, despite their high ambitions and hard work, their official performance as measured by school test results do not indicate that they are on a trajectory toward their own ideas of a successful future. Their hard work positions them among the higher achievers in the school but their grades – at around 60% - are not good enough to enable them to break through the boundaries and constraints that appear to lock the majority of students in to a range of probable futures. Of course, it would be unfair at this early stage to make assumptions about future trajectories of these two students, and it may be insightful to revisit the student participants in five or ten years' time, as was done in other longitudinal studies such as Annette Lareau's 'Unequal Childhoods' or even the "Up" video series which tracks a group of students over 7 year intervals. But the bigger pattern of how the majority of students progress across the grades, and of the life chances available to students who achieve these grades, would suggest that Students S and J are unlikely to become professionals in the field of architecture and accounting.

This analysis suggests that probable student futures are not primarily explained in terms of individual student 'ability' or motivation: this should rather be understood in terms of how

performance appears to be anchored to the contexts and conditions of schools that are differently positioned within the field of education and that are inextricably linked to the unique challenges of their community. Both student S and student J are striving to find ways to work hard in difficult circumstances. Student S's concern about sensory overload, along with his unsuccessful search for a 'quiet place', may have long term impact on his personal achievements if a quiet place is indeed what Student S needs in order to be able to engage with the intellectual labour of schooling. Student J finds such a quiet place by staying later after school, but student J might also need to take on additional and quite significant personal risk to do so. Indeed, in a community where violence is prevalent and where the WCED has itself deployed police officers for safety, such risk is real.

When, as the researcher, I reflect on my own schooling experiences, the influence and effects of economic, social and cultural capitals become quite evident. The windows of the classrooms I sat in for high school were covered in UV protective film to protect us from the sun. In both institutions I attended for high school, we had access to well stocked and well managed library spaces, and technology centres where we could study or work. Many of us were transported to and from school by family vehicles, unlike the students at the research school. In my family home, there were quiet spaces, internet access and books to read. In these and many more ways we were buffered from the need to assume risk and our families were able to support our learning. Contrasting these experiences with those of the students of the research school renders visible 'what is missing', the absences that are sometimes unrecognisable, or sometimes recognised in part when students and teachers engage in self-reflective activities.

Messages about success and performance that emphasise agency and hard work are inconsistent with the lived reality of the working-class students in the research school. They explain drop-out as a failure or shortcoming, rather than a rational response under strenuous conditions. Not reflected in the formal interviews, but present within the broader school context, is the story of students at the school who are more severely affected by poverty and who were difficult to recruit as participants for this study. During the time I was doing research in the school, in 2017, the story of a particular Grade 8 student came to my attention. Her story is illustrative of a tension that exists between home and school life. The demands and troubles of her home life exert much pressure on her ability to deal with the somewhat competing demands of schooling. This student resided in an overcrowded single bedroom flat and had a mother who was living under a bridge. This particular student had a very strained relationship with the school and was frequently absent. On revisiting the school for work unrelated to my research in 2018, I found that this student had 'dropped out' of school. Her story is not an outlier, given that enrolment data for the 2014-2018 cohort has shrunk 67% (this according to data produced by the school principal using school records). Of course, it is not easy to determine where these missing students went or whether they may have changed schools.

Some students may well have entered low wage labour in local factories or in the retail sector; some may have entered the informal economy of local gangs; others, like the student mentioned, may be involved in keeping up with household responsibilities. To know for certain the pathways of the 67% would require access to confidential student data, the WCED information management system and following up on each student who is no longer enrolled at a public school. Despite this disclaimer, 67% represents a significantly high percentage of students who exit this particular school.

The economic capitals of the students' families have given them access only to very narrow schooling options. The parents of the four participants in the study all have what might be described as working-class careers or are unemployed. Student J's father is a gardener and his mother works at a bistro. Student S's father is a taxi driver and his mother is unemployed. Student K's parents both work for 'the council'. Student V's father is a factory worker. These families do not have the resources to send their children to schools that are further away or charge higher fees. Students are forced to attend either this school or another under-resourced school that is largely incapacitated to provide the supportive environment they may need, given the disadvantageous position from which they begin, a position which has been produced through arbitrary and changeable structural arrangements and a position into which they were born. At home they are faced with conditions which make it difficult to focus on school work and at school they are faced with conditions in which they must make do with less than "the basics" that may be necessary for them to succeed.

Their limited economic capitals in turn produce a very small pool of funding sources from which the school can extract fees, and which the policy architecture of schooling in South Africa requires of schools to do. This generates a vicious cycle in which, for schools to offer more to students, families need to become richer, yet education, the vehicle through which to do so according to dominant narratives, is unable to deliver on its promises.

Additionally, the cultural capital the students draw on in their working-class home environments may not grant them the advantages other children might have access to at home. Finally, with parents occupying low-wage jobs or being unemployed, their networks of social capital are likely to be more of the variety that Putnam (2000) describes in his book "*Bowling Alone*" as 'bonding' (occurring within homogeneous, exclusive networks) than the 'bridging' variety (i.e. having connections to wider society and networks of opportunity beyond one's own social grouping) and may not grant them the networks of opportunity available to students whose parents occupy middle class careers.

Trap music, a genre of rap music that has recently regained popularity with students and resonates with their life experiences, describes ghettoised communities with all the inequalities and social ills that accompany life in the ghetto as "the trap". This notion of "the

trap” quite aptly describes the situation in which students find themselves, with their life chances tied to the socio-economic status of their families and to the communities into which they are live.

How are students being shaped by the meanings conveyed to them through multi-modal communication within the school?

In Bourdieu’s view, when students act in time-space, their actions could be taken to reflect their feel for the game. Similarly, when students speak about their experiences at school and about their aspirations for the future, their reflections convey something of the history and life experience that have shaped them - their habitus - in very particular ways.

Macleod’s (2009) study suggests a complex relationship between habitus and aspiration. Macleod draws a distinction between students who have internalised achievement ideology – the ‘Brothers’ - and those who reject it - the ‘Hallway Hangers’:

A theory stressing a correspondence between aspirations and opportunity cannot explain the excessive ambitions of the Brothers because it underestimates the achievement ideology’s capacity to mystify structural constraints and encourage high aspirations. The Hallway Hangers reject the achievement ideology, but the situation for the Brothers is quite different. (Macleod, 2009:126)

In this study, given the rate of ‘success’ of students, the school conditions and the context, it may have been expected that students might have lowered aspirations for the future. This is certainly a view held by those who advocate for students to raise their aspirations or ‘broaden horizons’. However, what the data demonstrates is that even under such trying conditions, students can have high expectations for the future. This is certainly the case for the students who were interviewed. Perhaps these students, like the Brothers in Macleod’s (2009) study, have internalised the promises of hard work and schooling communicated by their teachers.

However, this study also suggests that there are several students who evaluate school differently from those who participated in interviews. These are the students who ‘check-out’.

Here, I am confronted with a limitation of this study, in that a comparative analysis may be necessary to probe the differences between students who buy-in to the narrative of hard work, and those who appear, through their actions, to reject it. The four main student participants in this study did all ‘buy in’ to the narrative, at least to a degree.

In addition to the students who accept or reject hard work narratives and the visions of success presented at school, Student S’s interview suggests a third possibility, that of accepting the message but rejecting the viability of the message under present circumstances. This is

suggested when Student S talks about the school he hoped to attend but where his application was not accepted, in comparison to the school in this study which he now attends. In doing so, he does not reject the content of messages about hard work, success and the future: he only questions whether his present school is one that is able to enable the achievement of those aspirations. This is even more apparent when reading Student S's response against the backdrop of the real estate advertisement of a mansion home, displayed in his classroom. Student S does not problematise or challenge the vision of success implied by the classroom visuals and articulated by his teachers. In fact, these notions of success represent the kind of future which student S aspires to and the hard work narrative still represents how he imagines he will get there. Considering this, it is not enough to label student speech or acts as resistance behaviour: more work must be done to closely examine what, specifically, they are resisting.

What response strategies do students adopt in relation to the symbolic violence of schools?

In the previous chapter, I explored the different ways in which students are checking out, whether through small individual transgressive actions in the classroom, or in the collective action of multiple students staging a walkout. These actions suggest that students might rather be elsewhere, be it mentally or physically.

When reflecting on the theme of 'checking out' as a student response strategy and the experiences of discomfort or pain that 'checking out' suggests, I found Marx's conceptualisation of 'alienation' to hold much explanatory power. Whilst, I did not initially foreground alienation in the conceptual framework or as an analytical device, the term has emerged during analysis to describe students' implicit desire to be somewhere else that is reflected in acts of checking out. The site of the school is the site of violence, the site of pain or perhaps more simply, but no less forcefully, the site where both students and teachers are estranged from their own sense of self. Marx (as cited in Allen, 2011) wrote of alienation from labour in the following way:

He does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, only feels himself outside of work, and in his work feels outside of himself. He feels at home when he is not working and when he is working, he does not feel at home. (2011:44)

The concept is also explored in Adorno & Horkheimer's (1947) work "*Dialectic of Enlightenment*" in which alienation from labour is shown to result in people using their "free-time" in particular ways such as consuming mass-produced cultural products, in the search for meaning, identity and purpose. Work becomes an activity that is utilised only as a means

to an end, work and play are divorced from each other, and the alienated individual seeks out leisure time activities that least resemble the world of work.

The idea is helpful here to describe students' responses to the activity of schooling and the subjective experiences of schooling. 'Checking-out', whether mentally or physically, across time-space, is an act of a resistance. 'Checking out' is about disconnection, dis-location and displacement from, rather than the disruption or transformation of the site of resistance. When a student plugs their headphones into their ears to listen to music or watch a video, are they not also tuning into mental-space where they are more "at home" or where there is a greater degree of congruence with their sense of self (their music, their favourite genre, their cultural artefacts)? When students walk out of school, are they not also running toward spaces where they are recognised, rather than just running away from the symbolic violence of school?

The limits of teacher agency

In this study, I focused on messages communicated to students, how such messages are internalised or rejected, and how they are responded to by students. A constraint of focusing on students in this way, is that teachers may be viewed as having greater degrees of agency or as being the sole originators of the messages communicated in schools. In contrast, a thread within this study which has not been foregrounded is that teachers are as much affected by the education environment and socio-political milieu in which they find themselves. In fact, as I later mention in this section, teachers also respond in very similar ways to the students themselves.

Teachers do not teach in environments that are politically neutral. While they may adopt definite stances in their own practice, they are still subject to the rules of the game which govern how schools are organised and how they are measured. As discussed in the literature review, the present set of rules are defined by new managerialism, meritocracy, performativity and an overarching neoliberal ideology. When viewing teacher narratives within such a milieu, the messages teachers communicate appear as echoes of the discourse of a dominant culture.

There are also several factors that constrain 'how' education is 'delivered' and which therefore also limit the practice of teachers. Such constraints may include the curriculum, assessment and performative accountability measures that are implemented in schools. In addition to this, the myth of meritocracy is reinforced when at a national level, provincial performance is celebrated or mourned in ways that do not carefully attempt to understand how such results are produced or what such results are indicative of. This is repeated at district and circuit level with the issuing of awards for top performing or most improved schools, and at school level in prize-giving assemblies.

In this environment teachers' time and behaviours are highly regulated and monitored with instruments such as the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and by curriculum advisors. Where teachers expect students to bear personal responsibility for success or failure, departmental officials make similar demands on teachers. If school is an alienating experience for students, it is equally alienating for teaching staff. During this study, it became apparent that teachers adopt similar response strategies to students in 'checking out', while at other times using the power they have in the classroom to 'dis-locate' students.

Checking out patterns of teachers were apparent as many teachers left school soon after the students left. Many teachers displayed checking out behaviour in staff meetings (sitting with crossed arms or resting head on arms and not engaging in discussions). These small transgressive actions of teachers also culminated in larger ways, as described before, when in the last week of the school term, teachers no longer taught or managed classes but attended to marking and administrative duties in the computer room or staff room. The checking out behaviour of teachers was further reflected in their weak engagements in extra-curricular activities, as only the headmaster and a few other staff members volunteered time after-school to facilitate extra-curricular activities. Patterns of actions by teachers that dis-located students were apparent in several instances when students or their possessions were removed from classrooms.

The acts of "checking out" should be read together with those acts which "dis-locate". Although, I have previously described these two themes separately, they are not entirely unrelated and should perhaps be understood as two sides of the same coin. Where acts of 'checking out' are active disengagements on behalf the subjects themselves, dis-locations are acts done to subjects. The act of putting a student out of class or of flinging a student's books out of class both indicate some level of disengagement (a teacher not ready, willing or able to attend to the disruptive behaviour of students). Alternative responses to the same classroom disruptions might involve attempting to understand the cause of student behaviour or negotiating it in order to de-escalate the disruptive behaviour – acts which aim at strengthening classroom relationships rather than acts which excommunicate students from the classroom.

The acts of checking out and the acts which dis-locate are both acts of alienated individuals. In the case of teachers, they suggest alienation from their workplace. Yet to analyse these behaviours at the level of the individual, thereby locating the blame with the individuals themselves, would be a gross misrecognition of the underlying problems. Like the students, teachers are exposed to a schooling system that makes several promises about the future but which, even at face-value, it is failing to deliver. Teachers are exposed to a work environment that is inadequately resourced to meet the demands of the communities in which they work. Both students and teachers are forced to take up the burden of responsibility for success or

failure, despite the unequal playing field and despite being positioned 'at the back of the field' (Mills, 2010).

For the teacher participants in the study, their own reflections betray their expressed confidence in a future that is wide open. Most telling is the instance in which Teacher P, the school principal, upon thinking about a student who he believed could be assisted but whom the school was unable to assist, recognises that if a school does not have the resources (teaching staff or otherwise) to assist a struggling reader, then such a school does not have the basic resources for schooling.

This study suggests that possibilities exist for further research that would explore the construction of teacher identities and socio-political stances in relation to schooling and education in particular contexts, and how such identities and stances are expressed in what teachers say and do in the classroom.

Conclusion

In light of the analysis, an overarching theme emerges concerning promises and threats that are made to and received by students at school: promises about success and promises about hopeful futures, qualified only by the need for hard work and effort. Promises that you can be anything you want to be if you only put your mind to it. Dovetailing with these promises are threats: threats of failure, threats of exclusion and threats of damning futures. These messages of conflicting futures are expressed through classroom conversations, through visual displays and through the reward systems implemented at school. Working hard, having the right mind-set and making the right choices are represented as the pivotal hinge that ultimately determines one's destination. In the end, the narratives of both teachers and, to some extent students also, are most closely aligned with a belief in meritocracy.

In stark contrast to the meritocratic tale of promises and threats, another reality confronts both students and teachers at school. This is the very real context and conditions in which schooling takes place. Such contexts and conditions are not merely a background against which schooling takes place but a concrete, tangible and present set of realities that interface and interact with the school at every level: from the less visible policies and departmental relations that position the school unfavourably in the game of schooling, to the social forces in the community that intersect with school life, and the constant distractions generated by a lack of basic resources for schooling. The pictures of bright futures that are painted by the promise of education are severely threatened in the face of such trying contexts and conditions.

In the face of these competing messages and difficult circumstances, not all of the actors choose to play the game in the same way. For the four central students in the study, they

choose to keep their faith in the promises of education and hope for a brighter future, even though reality does not look as promising at present. Yet for many students who are not named in the study but whose stories creep into the study in mentions of a sleeping student, a student with earphones on, a student staring out the window and students staging a walkout, their spatial practices of checking out suggest less trust in the promises of education and hard work. Further afield, those students who enter the study as the students who sit on the sidewalk, express realities that also speak powerfully against the promise of hopeful futures.

In everyday life, teachers, students, parents, administrators, policy makers and the media talk about performing, achieving and making a success of life. Troubled in this study is what is really needed to 'make a success' of life. Anyone can have aspirations but the conversion of aspirations into reality is constrained by context. Hard work and a positive mind-set can propel one far but even a simple obstacle such as a school that does not offer the correct subject choices can severely hamper progress toward one's goals. The conditions in schools positioned like the one in this study expose students in ways that render their goals harder to attain.

Turning back to the theoretical perspectives in which this study is anchored, the doubtful feasibility of the messages communicated to students may be understood as symbolic violence because they conceal several factors which bear upon the lives of students and influence their trajectories. This act of concealing produces a fundamental misrecognition that renders individual students solely responsible for successes and failures that are socially produced. Students are asked to accept total responsibility for outcomes in a system on which they have only limited influence. The meritocratic story is shown, in the context of this study, to be not only a myth but one that mystifies and obscures from vision the profound influence of context, conditions and capitals.

In order to understand the present situation, it is also necessary to trace back our steps to those moments in which the present finds its genesis. The underperformance or dysfunction we may notice in schools serving low-SES schools is far less shocking when we retrace these steps. In the same manner as Lefebvre suggests, this does not imply foreclosure on the possibilities for resistance. Instead, through exploring the spatial practices, representations of space and representational space suggested by Lefebvre, the potential exists for highlighting the contradictions and recognising and re-framing existing forms of resistance that are often misrecognised as individual shortcomings or mere delinquent behaviour. When the majority of students drop out of a school in the ghetto, it highlights a contradiction in abstract space, in the neoliberal space that suggests that hard work is the main component of individual success.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Student consent form

Request for Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME: TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF STUDENT UNDERPERFORMANCE IN LOW-SES SCHOOLS

Researcher: Mr. Ashley Visagie

Department: School of Education
 Graduate
 Humanities Building
 Upper Campus
 University of Cape Town
 Private Bag X5
 Rondebosch 7700

Dear Student

Student Full Name _____

RE: Information and consent request for masters' study

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project being conducted at XX High School. The aims of my research is to examine whether school policy and practice may at times be at odds with the context of the surrounding community and how the arrangements of schooling may help or hinder student achievement.

My research project will involve teachers and six school learners.

This study will involve the observation of six learners in the classroom. In addition, interviews with the six learners and their teachers will take place outside of class time in order not to disrupt contact time. I will be a passive participant in the classroom and will be recording observation data manually in written format. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for research purposes. The duration of the research will be 4 weeks of which I will spend two periods with each learner in class and also have time to engage and observe learners during their informal break times and/or during extra-curricular activities.

As part of the research, I will conduct classroom observations in your class and additionally interview you personally to find out about your own school experiences and thoughts surrounding your school and community interactions.

I would like to request your permission to audio-record the interview using a digital recording device for the sake of accuracy in the recording process. Should you not to be audio-recorded, you may still participate in the process, in which case I will only take hand-written notes.

I would like to promise you that the information obtained from this study will be treated in the strictest confidentiality possible, and it will be used for this research purposes only. Your names and the child's names will not be revealed.

The research insights (not personal information) will be presented to the school leadership team and the WCED and may assist in the formulation of better policy-making and educational practices that serves your school community.

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this form and return it to me. **You are free, at any time, to withdraw your consent** should you feel you no longer wish to participate in the study, and any information about yourself will **not** be used in the research if you do so. It should also be noted that **there are no costs involved in this study for your part**. I do not believe there are any risks to your person of any nature (including to your school marks), and hope that your school will find the results of the study interesting and useful. **Your name will not be attached to your answers and thus your answers will be entirely confidential.**

Please tick all the following and then sign at the bottom of this letter.

	I agree (tick)
I have read this consent form and the information it contains and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the study.	
I agree to participate in the research study	
I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected.	
I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this study.	
I grant permission for my interview to be audio-recorded	
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage.	

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Ashley Visagie

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Sample parent letter**Request for Consent to Participate in Research**

Project Title: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME: TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF STUDENT UNDERPERFORMANCE IN LOW-SES SCHOOLS.

Researcher: Mr. Ashley Visagie

Department: School of Education

Graduate

Humanities Building

Upper Campus

University of Cape Town

Private Bag X5

Rondebosch 7700

Dear Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian Full Name _____

RE: Information and consent request for Masters study

I am writing to you to request your permission for your child to participate in a research project being conducted at XX High School. The aims of my research is to examine whether school policy and practice may at times be at odds with the context of surrounding community and how the arrangements of schooling may help or hinder student achievement.

As part of the research, your child may be interviewed and I would like to request your permission to audio-record the interview using a digital recording device for the sake of accuracy in the recording process. Should you not wish for your child to be audio-recorded, they may still participate in the process and be recorded only via handwritten notes.

I would like to promise you that the information obtained from this study will be treated in the strictest confidentiality possible, and it will be used for this research purposes only. Your names and the child's names will not be revealed and a pseudonym will be used to preserve anonymity.

The research insights (not personal information) will be presented to the school leadership team and the WCED and may assist in the formulation of better policy-making and educational practices that serves the school community.

If you are happy for your child to participate in this study, please complete this form and return it to me. **You are free, at any time, to withdraw your consent** should you feel you no longer wish for your child to participate in the study, and any information about your child will **not** be used in the research if you do so. It should also be noted that **there are no costs involved in this study for your part**. I do not believe there are any risks to your child any nature and hope that your school will find the results of the study interesting and useful.

Please tick all the following and then sign at the bottom of this letter.

	I agree (tick)
I agree to the participation of my child in this research project.	
I have read this consent form and the information it contains and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the study.	
I agree to my child's responses being used for education and research on condition his/her privacy is respected.	
I consent to have my child's interview audio-recorded.	
I understand that my child is under no obligation to take part in this study.	
I understand that I have the right to withdraw my child from this study at any stage.	

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Ashley Visagie

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Sample teacher letter**Request for Consent to Participate in Research**

Project Title: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME: TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF STUDENT UNDERPERFORMANCE IN LOW-SES SCHOOLS

Researcher: Mr. Ashley Visagie

Department: School of Education
 Graduate
 Humanities Building
 Upper Campus
 University of Cape Town
 Private Bag X5
 Rondebosch 7700

Dear Educator

Participant's Full Name _____

RE: Information and consent request for Masters study

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project being conducted at XX High School. The aims of my research is to examine whether school policy and practice may at times be at odds with the context of the surrounding community and how the arrangements of schooling may help or hinder student achievement.

My research project will involve teachers and six school learners.

This study will involve the observation of six learners in the classroom. In addition, interviews with the six learners and their teachers will take place outside of class time in order not to disrupt contact time. I will be a passive participant in the classroom and will be recording observation data manually in written format. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for research purposes. The duration of the research will be 4 weeks of which I will spend two periods with each learner in class and also have time to engage and observe learners during their informal break times and/or during extra-curricular activities.

As part of the research, I will conduct classroom observations in your class and additionally interview you personally to find out about your own school experiences and thoughts surrounding your school and community interactions.

I would like to request your permission to audio-record the interview using a digital recording device for the sake of accuracy in the recording process. Should you not to be audio-recorded, you may still participate in the process, in which case I will only take hand-written notes.

I would like to promise you that the information obtained from this study will be treated in the strictest confidentiality possible, and it will be used for this research purposes only. Your names and the child's names will not be revealed.

The research insights (not personal information) will be presented to the school leadership team and the WCED and may assist in the formulation of better policy-making and educational practices that serves your school community.

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this form and return it to me. **You are free, at any time, to withdraw your consent** should you feel you no longer wish to participate in the study, and any information about yourself will **not** be used in the research if you do so. It should also be noted that **there are no costs involved in this study for your part**. I do not believe there are any risks to your person of any nature and hope that your school will find the results of the study interesting and useful. **Your name will not be attached to your answers and thus your answers will be entirely confidential.**

Please tick all the following and then sign at the bottom of this letter.

	I agree (tick)
I have read this consent form and the information it contains and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the study.	
I agree to participate in the research study	
I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected.	
I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this study.	
I grant permission for my interview to be audio-recorded	
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage.	

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Ashley Visagie

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: Sample school letter

Request for Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME: TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF STUDENT UNDERPERFORMANCE IN LOW-SES SCHOOLS

Researcher: Mr. Ashley Visagie
Department: School of Education
Graduate
Humanities Building
Upper Campus
University of Cape Town
Private Bag X5
Rondebosch 7700

Dear XX

Principal at XX High School

RE: Information and consent request for Masters' study

I would like to thank you sincerely for volunteering your kind assistance with research being undertaken at your school. My research project will involve teachers and six school learners. My research is titled "Changing the rules of the game: Toward an alternative narrative of student under-performance in low-SES schools".

This study will involve the observation of six learners in their classroom. In addition, interviews with the six learners and their teachers will take place outside of class time in order not to disrupt contact time. I will be a passive participant in the classroom and will be recording observation data manually in written format. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for research purposes. The duration of the research will be 4 weeks of which I will spend two periods with each learner in class and also have time to engage and observe learners during their informal break times and/or during extra-curricular activities.

Before commencing with any data collection exercise I will first come to the school and explain

the research and what each of the participant's role will be. I will explain how I will go about the research and data collection will be conducted.

It is my presumption that the research findings will make a creditable contribution toward understanding the contextual factors related to underperformance in schools serving low-SES families, and may also contribute toward the development of socially just policy-making that is in the interest of learners in disadvantaged communities.

Please tick all the following and then sign at the bottom of this letter.

	I agree (tick)
I have read this consent form and the information it contains and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about the study.	
I agree that my school may participate in the research.	
I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this study.	
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage.	

Name of Principal: _____

Signature of Principal: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Ashley Visagie

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Letter to WCED**WCED CONSENT FORM**

Dear Sir/madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH IN XXX HIGH SCHOOL

I hereby wish to apply for permission to conduct research in XXX High School. My research is titled "*Out of place: An examination of symbolic violence as an alternative explanation for student under-achievement in low-SES schools on the Cape Flats*".

This study will involve the observation of six learners in their classroom and at home (with parental consent). In addition, interviews with the six learners and their teachers will take place outside of class time in order not to disrupt contact time. I will be a passive participant in the classroom and will be recording observation data manually in written format. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for research purposes. The duration of the research will be 8 weeks of which I will spend two periods with each learner in class and also have time to engage and observe learners during their informal break times and/or during extra-curricular activities.

It is my presumption that the research findings will make a creditable contribution toward understanding the contextual factors related to underperformance in schools serving low-socioeconomic status communities, and may also contribute toward the development of socially just policy-making that is in the interest of learners in disadvantaged communities.

Yours sincerely,

Ashley Visagie

STUDENT ID: VSGASH002

Masters student: M.Ed Policy, Leadership & Change

University of Cape Town