Engaging sense of place in an environment of change: Youth, identity and place-based learning activities in environmental education.

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MASTER IN EDUCATION
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by
Katie Farrington

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any university for a degree.

Signature: Date:

ABSTRACT

This case study investigates sense of place of youth amidst a background of change in post-apartheid South Africa. As used in this study, sense of place refers to the attachments made to both physical and social places, and the social and cultural interactions and meanings associated with such places. The research was conducted with a group of 13 young adults at Mary Waters Senior Secondary School in Grahamstown. The literature suggests that the changes that occur in the lives of the participants at school-leaving age such as new opportunities to identify with global aspirations, tend to influence their sense of place in local contexts. Social change that occurs due to globalising forces such as access to new technologies and improved personal mobility, also influences sense of place in this context. Another integral factor is the structural influence of changing cultural and educational norms. These notions form part of the backdrop of this study.

The research project was developed in response to calls for learning approaches that are situated more in local contexts and which include the youth as intrinsic participants informing environmental education approaches. This research draws attention to the significance of finding sustainable ways that enhance opportunities for agency on the part of the youth in future local and global environmental care-taking.

The study took place over a period of 15 months in which time the participants undertook place-based activities in their communities around self-identified environmental concerns. The study was intentionally generative in approach as this allowed the voices of the participants and their environmental perspectives to be considered in developing methods and activities that were suitable to their particular contexts and interests.

The study highlights the relevance of particular social contexts, through the perspectives of people and in this case learners, as key to environmental education enquiries. The combination of approaches that consider: a) knowledge about social context, b) the educational intervention (place-based activities) and, c) the situated social capital of the participants, all form the basis of meaningful pedagogical engagements and serve to address my research question: *How is learners' sense of place developed and articulated through place-based activities, and what are the implications for environmental education amidst a contemporary landscape of change in South Africa?*

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Summary of codes and descriptions as used for the data analysis sections of this study:

Code	Description
L 1-13	Learners 1 to 13
I 1	Interview 1
I 2	Interview 2
T	Transect walks
R	Reflections in writing
FG	Focus Group interviews
Q 1	Questionnaire 1
Q 2	Questionnaire 2

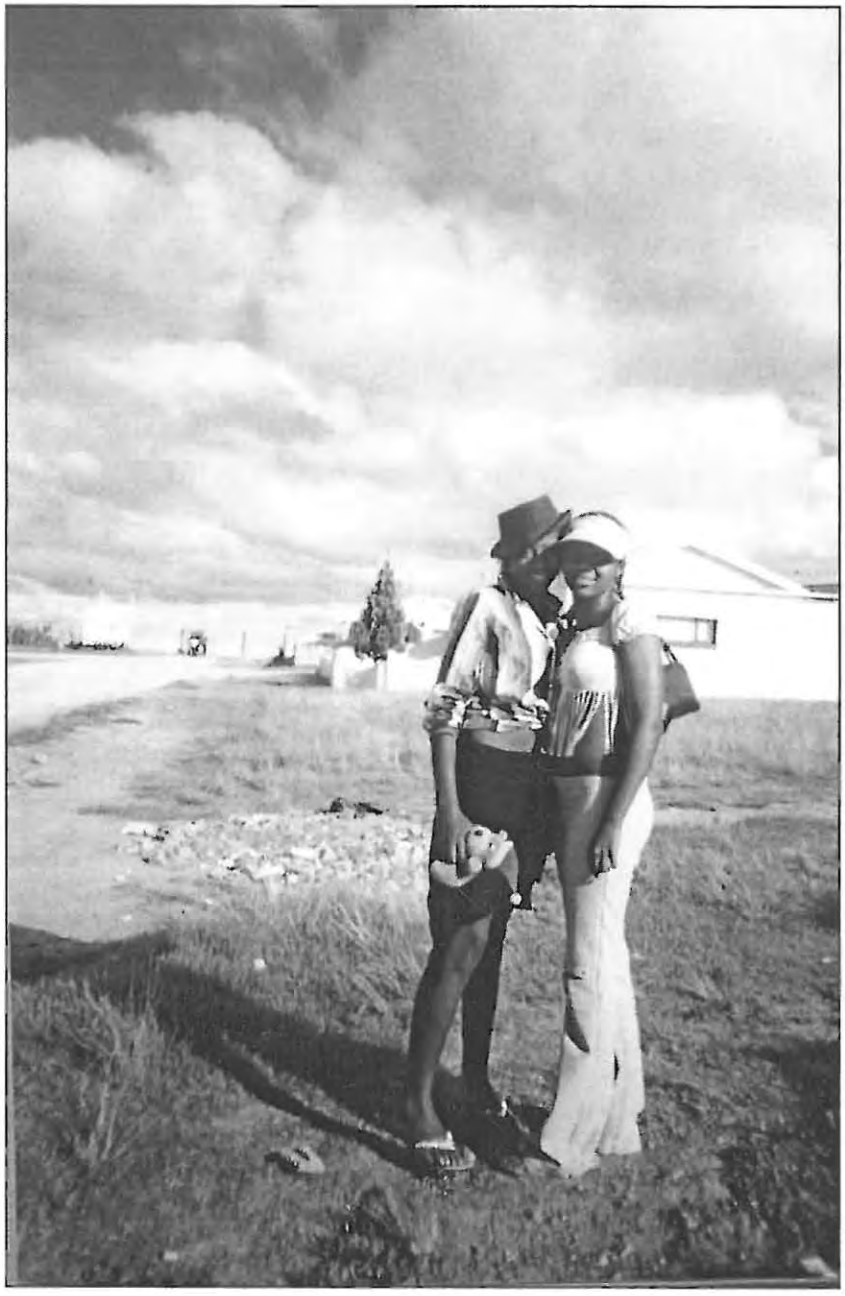
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the context

A sense of place is knowing the stories of the land where you live and feeling a part of those stories.

(Kriesberg, 1999: 2)



Introduction

Over the past ten years, young adults in South Africa have had to adapt to a rapidly transforming and modernising society, particularly in the political, educational and social domains. Young people at school-leaving age are also experiencing a shift away from the formal structures of education and family into adult roles which allow more scope for individual choice. It is at this age that young people are engaging with the contradictions of living in local communities amidst joblessness and poverty. At the same time they are having to adapt to a developing individualism and associated freedom of choice reflected in globally informed consumerist ideologies (Mlatsheni, 2004: 65; Soudien, 2004: 68).

It is common knowledge that globalising[1] forces have a tendency to promote the transgression of physical and social boundaries. The 'placeless-ness' that has come about partly due to this global orientation, cultural homogenisation and greater geographical mobility, has been keenly observed by many social scientists (Appadurai, 2000; Giddens, 1999; Beck, 1992; Baumann, 2004). Schruekens (2003: 196) for example, alerts us to the two streams of transformation that affect contemporary social processes of change:

> On the one hand, there are universalising processes of modernisation and globalisation... that are spreading all over the world. On the other hand, there are tendencies to maintain traditional life-worlds, attempting at keeping [tokeep] up the authenticity of cultures.

Ideally, educational processes provide a platform for learners to shape their skills so that they can engage in local contexts as well as respond to larger/trans-national processes of global change. According to Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard (2004: 9), what is important are skills that allow the youth meaningful educative participation on the global as well as on the local level.

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[1] Globalisation is loosely defined in this study as: "The suite of economic, social and political processes that are enabling connections to be made between people and places on a worldwide scale". (Hubbard, et.al., 2004: 345). This process is intensified by the normalising of differences within cultures, nebulous political boundaries, increased mobility of people, ideas and objects, and the interconnections that are made possible by amongst others, satellite communications and the internet.

Environmental education as a developing social field is responding to the appeal for learning processes that are informed by local situations, as well as to the demand for the participation of young people by seeking to give young voices a platform for expression (Driskell, 2002; Hart, 1997; Burke, 2004). More attention has also been given to the social context that influences people and environment relationships. According to Lutts (1985), environmental education should emphasise both the physical and the cultural identifications that are made with places. He notes that by focusing on the conservation of the 'natural' environment only, without knowledge and consideration of the cultural context, environmental educators are in danger of being:

> unskilled at linking our natural heritage with our cultural heritage – in demonstrating the continuity of people and their environment.... We need to discover and tell stories that embody our participation in our unique place.
>
> (Lutts, 1985: 40)

These insights help support the need for environmental educators to consider that the lives of young people in their social contexts are intimately intertwined with their 'natural' environments. Since young people are responsible for resolving the environmental challenges of the future, their perspectives in and about local contexts are crucial for finding sustainable environmental solutions.

The education system in South Africa has recently undergone substantial transformation in terms of access to education with greatly improved availability of resources and funds. While many of the efforts made to reallocate resources and adjust curriculum approaches have been directed towards teacher professional development, van der Berg alerts us to the educational needs of young people whose perspectives have not yet been prioritised, especially those in rural or peri-urban environments. Without contextually informed research and practice, the majority of South Africa's youth will be unable to break the cycle of playing economically and socially subordinate roles as unskilled workers, and be unable to contribute to the much needed stability and growth in the country (van der Berg, 2004: 29). Similarly, the involvement and recognition of young people's perspectives is instrumental for addressing the environmental concerns we face in the future.

The aim of this research project is to investigate the sense of place of young adults amidst the backdrop of considerable change in the country. The project was prompted by a growing

awareness that the youth are considered key to the future stability of the country, yet their voices are not adequately reflected, for instance, in the curriculum re-adjustments being made as part of the country's transformation (Mlatsheni, 2004: 67). With the changes inherent in the lives of young adults at this particular age and at this time in history, context specific, place-based activities are especially significant for developing insights into local knowledge of local environmental issues and their possible resolution.

Visual media have, in the past, been usefully employed by environmental educators, as tools that provide inspiring new ways of investigating environmental concerns. These methods have been developed into exciting games and activities to suit the South African context. Amongst others, these include the *Enviro-Picture building* game (Share-Net, 1995) and the visual interpretation of photographs by Jenkin (2000). These methods demonstrate how dimensions of the environment are introduced to the participants through the visual media of drawings and photographs. These methods have significantly brought general environmental concerns to people, but they do not actively engage people in their own local environmental concerns and communities. As such they do not provide didactic strategies that enable participants to engage with environmental concerns which are meaningful to them. Rather than being provided with generic concepts and inscriptions to engage with local concerns, my research sought to actively involve the participants as researchers engaging with environmental concerns as seen and experienced by them, in their local places. In this way, it was hoped, the participants would be able to engage with environmental concerns in the local contexts and reflect on these with ideas that they find relevant. The participants acquired the skills that enabled them to research local concerns by tacitly experiencing their environments through a process of mappings, transect walks, photography and written reflections.

The question that I sought to explore in this study is:

How is learners' sense of place developed and articulated through place-based activities, and what are the implications for environmental education amidst a contemporary landscape of change in South Africa?

I am thus concerned with both sense of place and the generative processes associated with a narrative engagement using visual media activities undertaken within local contexts. The

place-based activities acted as an expression (representation) as well as a stimulant for identifications with dimensions (narration) of the local environment.

The research project documented here was undertaken with a group of 13 school-leaving learners. The participants included seven young women and six young men, all between 17 and 21 years of age. All bar one, were in their final year of formal education (2005) at Mary Waters Senior Secondary School in Grahamstown. Over a period of fifteen months, they engaged with place-based activities to research their local environments. This was done using visual activities which sought to enhance the level of engagement and identification with local place, and to provide rich and alternative experiences of place for the participants. I focussed on the use of visual modes of enquiry to research sense of place, and have only briefly mentioned research in multimodal methods. To expand:

> Research that focusses on children's perceptions of place or space as active research informants is concerned less with the development of technical and conceptual competence and more with the interface between the formal and informal spaces that children respond to and reconstruct.
>
> (Burke, 2004: 3)

As researcher, I was able to develop an understanding of the youth in their context by observing – through their representations - how they relate to each other socially and how they experience their environment and their sense of place. This is a subtle but key methodological nuance – getting to know how the youth relate to their environment by first getting to know the participants in their context.

The context of the research was the school of Mary Waters Senior Secondary School and the surrounding community. The school was built in 1962 and initially utilized as an educational facility to school the 'Coloured' community of Grahamstown. The 'Coloured' residents of the area for whom the school was built, are now (2005) a minority at the school, with learners comprising 40% Afrikaans speaking and the remaining 60% Xhosa-speaking. The school is situated in an area to the north of Fingo Village. This area was re-zoned for occupation by the 'Coloured' community of Grahamstown in 1957 (as part of the Group Areas Act of 1950), to act as a buffer zone between European and Xhosa residential areas. The apartheid regime afforded 'Coloured' communities a higher status than the Xhosa communities. This meant the 'Coloured' communities had access to better quality facilities

including a higher standard of education and school resources (Holleman, 1997: 35). These days, the school has a cultural diversity amongst its learners, teachers and surrounding community which is more representative of their varied social, political, economic and geographical backgrounds.

My own involvement in research on sense of place and place-based concerns stems from my interest in the identifications we make with locations and landscapes. This curiosity developed out of youthful experiences in the landscapes of the Maluti and Drakensberg mountain ranges. I was later drawn back to these places with studies in landscape photography, an experience that further enhanced my interest in place. After a few years of travelling and a developing interest in the social sciences, I was drawn to studies in portrait photography and theories of representation. This research project has grown out of these interests: visual methods, place, environment and young people. Although my background is in Fine Art, my interest in the environment, people and place relationships, led me to adopt an inter-disciplinary research approach. This approach draws on elements of human geography and the representation of environments through the visual media of mapping and photography, through transect walks and written reflections. These cumulatively explore and describe sense of place, which is then understood from a sociological vantage point in relation to the interplay between the global and local, and with particular relevance to environmental education and situated learning contexts.

My interests are also informed by the growing awareness of the contemporary challenges facing young people in this country. These challenges, I argue, highlight the need for research methods where the participants are brought in as researchers of their local environments. In this research project the participants were included by using place-based enquiry activities. This thesis documents the ways in which local research has the potential to develop the agency of youth within local communities, countries and outwardly towards global environmental concerns.

The thesis comprises six chapters, this introduction being the first. The second chapter is a theoretical overview in which I provide a contextual backdrop of youth living in South Africa. I also highlight recent environmental education and sustainability developments, as well as discuss examples of place-based participatory activities in use and as currently documented in the environmental education literature. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodological

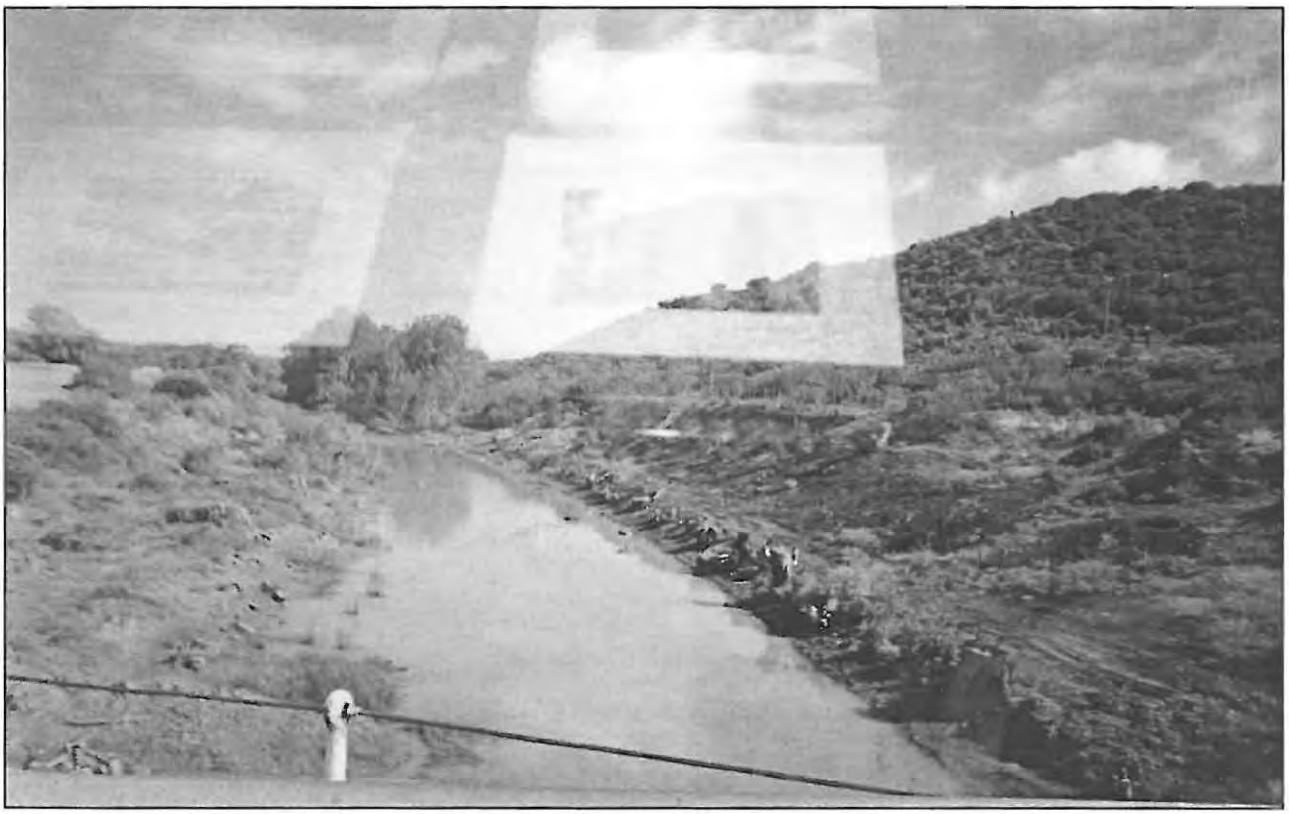
orientations that have influenced my research approach and describe the methods used during data collection. Chapter 4 gives a detailed explanation and presentation of the data, and Chapter 5 offers an overview of how the analysis of these data meet with broader theoretical arguments articulated in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of findings and recommendations.

The research participants, July 2004. Photograph taken by Simon (L11).

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

> Young men are rejecting the tradition of their elders ... It is one's individual prowess as an 'amagent' or a street-smart young man that has come to count, and not the rites of passage defined by older people.
>
> This is an important development in the modernisation equation and shows young people moving towards a greater sense of self and their ability to control their own destinies.
>
> (Soudien, 2004: 58)



Alicedale landscape with super-imposed photographs from the museum in Alicedale. Photograph taken by Nokuzola (L5).

2.1 Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, greater political participation by all citizens in post apartheid South Africa has been actively promoted. In many cases, this mobilisation has been specifically directed towards an increased involvement of the youth in programmes relating to HIV/AIDS, job creation and community volunteer work (Soudien, 2004: 60). This process of democratisation has paved the way for the loosening of cultural boundaries and the inclusion of previously undermined local knowledges and freer expressions of cultural identity. Significantly, these trends have fed into learning processes that are situated in local context, and have coincided with the global repositioning of education towards so-called "situated learning", which is being included into curriculum development processes by educators (O'Donoghue & Neluvhalani, 2002: 122). These educational developments have drawn attention to the many diverse understandings of the environment and are increasingly relevant to environmental educators. This is especially so, given that globalisation is in many ways instituting a greater conformity to dominant global norms and shared environmental problems and resolutions. Situated learning has also offered opportunities for experimenting with diverse research methods. In this research, I have included the research participants as researchers and made use of visual methods to probe the sense of place in an environment of change.

In this chapter, I first provide a backdrop aimed at locating youth in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Place, place-based activities and the varied understandings of sense of place from different disciplines are articulated and explored. Visual and written forms of representation are considered along with the methodological orientation whereby data are generated and interpreted by the research participants. I then explore how environmental educators are integrating sustainability with situated learning practices, particularly those practices that emphasise the importance of participatory and place-based activities. Finally, I probe contemporary sociological debates, notably the relationships that have been posited between structure and agency and contextualise these relationships within the field of environmental education.

2.2 Youth in post-Apartheid South Africa

> Growing up in South Africa is, for most, a journey of a dream denied, if not betrayed. Inspired by the vision of the new South Africa, the hope and faith of youth are tested each day as they and their parents struggle to make ends meet.
>
> (Soudien, 2004: 53)

In post-apartheid South Africa, the youth experience diverse processes of social and educational change, consequences from the socio-historical imbalances of the past. Perspectives and cultural norms which have been imposed have led to social disadvantage and the segregation of living areas, and have in many ways shaped people's sense of place (Coetzee, 1999: 5). Young adults are exposed to a variety of challenges and opportunities that invite identification with, often diverse people and places of the local and the global. Mlatsheni (2004) observes the influx of unemployed rural youth in urban areas, as they are 'won over' by the consumer lifestyles of cities. This co-exists with the general disregard for rural agriculture as a primary means of income respected by older generations. The emergence of individualism and self-determination amongst the youth is a global phenomenon, but as Mlatsheni (2004: 64) asserts:

> In South Africa, the distortion to traditional family relations caused by the fight against apartheid must not be underestimated. From 1976 onwards, youth assumed positions on the frontline and acquired a sense of power, which led them to reject the authority of parents and teachers whom they perceived as being muted in their rebellion against the regime at the time.... A critical task is to understand the plight of youth fully, and to spare no efforts in integrating them into mainstream society.

A glance at the youth annual 'Laugh it off' (Nurse, 2003), provides insights into the perspectives and opinions of some of the youth (albeit only the middle class educated youth) and how they are grappling with challenges in contemporary South Africa. Conversations in this publication cover diverse subjects including gender and race inequalities, living with the threat of HIV/AIDS, having HIV positive status, the future of the environment, critical consumer choices and the media. It appears from the 'Laugh it off' annual that *youth culture*

pre-fixes an anti-conformist stance. It is at this age that young adults are reconciling the ambivalences of changing identities and increased choice while they integrate global ideologies into local life worlds. Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya (2006) has given a lucid account of the challenges he has experienced in re-making his identity in an urban context, from someone who has 'freed' himself from his rural Eastern Cape roots. I have included his newspaper article in Appendix 1, to illustrate the frustration experienced by young adults when making the transition into a world of individualism and choice, and away from 'expected' social norms.

The term 'youth' has many associations. It denotes a distinct group of young adults because of age (usually 15 – 35 years), but has otherwise shifting, contextual rules and boundaries. More distinct are the unfortunate perceptions that prevail of this 'group' of young adults, often negatively associated with crime and instability in South Africa. A common and generalisable image of the youth is one taken from the 1980s, where urban male youths ("young lions") protest against the apartheid system and Bantu Education, where young adults burned down schools and organised school boycotts (Jennings, 2000: 103). Young adults befitting this age group are necessarily as different from each other, as they are from their counterparts in the eighties. I have included Tom Eaton's satirical observation of youth culture by an 'older' youth taken from the 'Laugh it off' Annual in Appendix 1 to illustrate these ambivalent and contested spaces. His humorous approach makes broad assumptions about the youth as a degenerative group who are unable to make responsible decisions. It importantly highlights the extent to which society, on the whole, unfairly categorise youth culture by this stereotypical behaviour. This is especially unhelpful when young people are seriously looking for their place in contemporary South Africa.

There have been progressive developments towards increased social and political participation of the youth, particularly since 1994 and the burgeoning new democracy and rights-based culture in South Africa. However, according to Everatt (2000), the perceptions and concerns of the youth in this context have largely been overlooked in the changing social landscape. It is in the arena of a transforming society that the 'struggle' ideologies and earlier narratives of personal sacrifice for the greater good have, to a considerable extent, been replaced by ideologies of consumerism, individualism and greater experimentation with identities. These changes are predominantly driven by various mediated sources, such as the print media and television (Everatt, 2000: 7).

Some observers maintain that globalisation emphasises global conformity and undermines experiential, local knowledge. As Wasserman and Jacobs (2003: 16) affirm, "One consequence of the pervasive quality of globalisation for scholarship is that the tools of enquiry already in use or prevalent elsewhere around the world are often transplanted to the local context to help re-view and re-understand our society". The disjuncture that occurs through considerable de-contextualising and re-contextualising of objects, ideologies and aspirations into any given local context is at times deemed oppressive to local culture (which is by no means considered unchanging) by social theorist Appadurai (2000).

Others maintain that the youth in post-apartheid South Africa are engaging with change at least cognitively: they are not the passive victims of structural forces but are actively engaging in the world and with the circumstances and conditions that surround them (Soudien, 2004: 57). Strelitz (2003) agrees that the youth are active participants in the negotiation and construction of their identities. He says that they are not idly waiting for Western ideologies and identities to influence them unquestioningly, as the media imperialism argument asserts. Rather, they are skillfully integrating select parts of a global identity into their local life-worlds. It is highly relevant to this research project that social commentators have noted how young people in South Africa are attempting to re-make and re-negotiate the changes happening around them, at the same time as realising that these processes of change are continually shifting, with countless global possibilities.

> Moral authority is no longer clear and values and traditions are in flux. Global and local ideologies are increasingly interwoven. In essence, South African youth identity is under construction.
>
> (Soudien, 2004: 59)

Wasserman, et al. (2003: 16), are opposed to generalisations about the way in which youth culture in South Africa has been associated with a 'creolisation' – a complete and mutual mix of cultures. They argue that the effects of both a recently-won democratic dispensation, freedom of choice on a local level and globalisation, means that these aspects need to be considered in terms of their local histories and local contexts. Also to bear in mind the persistent power relations which still prevail from the past, and the pre-existing cultural relationships affecting gender and generational equality, or lack thereof. Clearly, the sense of

place of young people, the local histories of the youth and their everyday realities are underpinned by these various, pre-existing webs of relationships.

According to the South African National Youth Survey (conducted in 2000), while young people spend a great deal of time playing sport, socialising with friends, watching TV and going to church, for many of them poverty is an undeniable reality. The survey notes that approximately one third of all young South Africans live in households with an income of under R1 000 a month. South Africa's literacy, which is measured by the attainment of at least a Grade 5 education, stands at a mere 55 % across the entire population. Seventy-nine percent of the population of youth in South Africa is black, and of them only 52% are literate. Only 11% of this 79% of the population have completed or are expected to complete high school. According to studies conducted in the 1990s, fewer than 10% of the high school and tertiary educated young people find work in their first year after graduation. Of the children who lack access to adequate schooling facilities (predominantly black children), around 1 in 4 of these children are HIV positive (Soudien, 2004: 54).

Having experienced considerable instability of place during the apartheid years with forced removals, dislocations and the separation of family members, and given the present economic and social environment in which people live, it is imperative that environmental educators come to understand how young people actually identify with local places and how they experience the environmental risks that are very much part of their direct experience. With this in mind, I have included a brief overview of developments during the last decades of the 20th century which can shed light on the way in which young people around the world form their future aspirations, their attachment to place and the way in which they engage with environmental issues.

2.3 Contextualising the environment

Current shifts in environmental education towards notions of sustainability within a broader landscape of change, have made valuable contributions towards fostering an understanding of the environmental education implications of risk in a modernising world (Beck, 1992; Hart, 1997). Pepper (1996), notes that the focus on sustainable development has a significant bearing on the transformations that characterise environmental education discourses. These insights are particularly significant given the social processes of transformation that are

occurring in the South African context and the changes that are required of environmental educators towards addressing issues of sustainability in a developing country. Le Grange (2003: 19) however, draws attention to the developing world scenario. In this context people have not yet experienced the benefits of industrialisation that co-exist with improved health, education and a higher standard of living and yet they are experiencing the effects of the risks that emanate from industrialisation such as global warming and insecure job markets due to a globalising economy. This phenomenon of a 'double blow' affects young people involved in this research project, who are caught in limbo between reaching future aspirations on the one hand, and dealing with larger, more global environmental risks on the other.

In order to understand young peoples' sense of place in a modernising context and the implications this has for environmental education, it is important to trace general trends of modernisation in 'first world' countries back to the mid twentieth century, as these insights serve to illustrate trends and future hopes still prevalent in the context of this research. It was during the post World War Two period that capitalism and increased consumerism became dominant ideologies. This trend led to evermore demands on natural resources that supplied materials for the development of modern technology. Eventually this brought greater attention to the way in which the earth's natural resources were being utilized and steadily depleted (Smyth, 1995: 4). For example, the general tendency towards consumerism and rapid urbanisation affected the sense of place that was particular to the turn away from institutionalised religion in the West (i.e. Christianity). Further, capitalism prompted individualised wealth and security and worked against the consideration of wider contexts relating to the capacity of the earth to withstand these increasing demands. More recently and within the arena of environmental education, issues of social and environmental justice have thus had to be integrated with local ways of understanding the environment, and have provided new opportunities for addressing educational and social needs in unique contexts (Smyth, 1995: 5).

Giddens (1999) suggests that in contemporary 'Western' society and modernised contexts, which encourage post-modern reflection and respond to living with environmental risks, there is a somewhat contradictory increase in identification with customary approaches to the environment. At the same time and influenced by globalisation, there is increasing alienation of the young from the old (a so-called 'de-traditionalising'), increased individualising and

ever-increasing uniformity and homogenisation in respect of material patterns of consumption and aspiration (Giddens, 1999: 43). This modern day trend is commonly referred to as a 'loss of sense of place' by Meyerowitz (1987), or 'global sense of place' by Massey (2005) and Auge (1995).

2.4 Genealogies of 'place' as a construct

> What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.
>
> (Tuan, in Cresswell 2004: 21)

Cresswell (2004: 21) explains that theories of place have developed from relatively objective, static ideographic locations to places inscribed with a multitude of subjective associations, interrelations and connections flowing through history and time. In other words, the notion sense of place has developed to comprise various subjective experiences one has in a location and its related social context. It may also be constituted by the emergent, and often context specific, cultural meanings that are represented through rituals, narratives, histories or symbols (Lovell, 1998: 1). Processes of globalisation in conjunction with increasingly nebulous, permeable spatial boundaries as people's mobility increases has given rise to some uncertainty around what is meant by 'place', conventionally understood as a geographically fixed physical location (Cresswell, 2004: 11). This concern has given rise to whole literatures on 'place' from different disciplinary perspectives, which seek to understand and deal with the complexity of the concept.

Cultural geographers Agnew and Duncan (1989), argue that there is renewed recognition of place which has emerged from post-modern reflection and in search of a re-definition of local culture. They assert that this phenomenon responds to the uniformity prescribed by globalising forces. Notions of place are also concerned with locale and the lived experience within a place – relating to sense of place. Other studies in anthropology consider the relationships between place and space, and the social meaning that is understood by these relationships (Agnew & Duncan, 1989: 2). Agnew and Duncan acknowledge that the often disparate notions of place need to be conceptualised in terms of their interrelatedness, as well as how they connect to their historical and social contexts (Agnew, et al, 1989: 2). Within the field of human geography, Cresswell (2004) argues that place may be seen as a fixed

object, such as a landscape, home or garden. Alternatively, place may be thought of as a way of understanding, experiencing and making meaning of space or locality. In other words, by moving away from rationalising and objectifying place, it is possible to consider the subjective understandings that link places to ontology and epistemology (ways of seeing and knowing the world) (Cresswell, 2004: 10).

Place has been accorded characteristics that have emerged through the 'ownership' of place, and this is evident in cases of nationalism and zenophobia, where places and local cultural practices are considered 'owned', and are thought to be threatened in some way by the 'outsider' group (Cresswell, 2004: 11). These notions of place prioritise 'our place', and the ownership and conservation of places of heritage, neighbourhoods and countries. It is clear from this analysis that certain contradictions begin to emerge between approaches that encourage local ownership of place, and ideologies that are open to inclusion, change and ambiguity. The last-mentioned may have the potential outcome of indifference, and consequently preventing environmental actions from taking place.

Cresswell differentiates between understandings of 'space' and 'place' by suggesting that 'space' is used by those who prefer the more generalisable and nomothetic, whilst 'place' appeals to those who are interested in particular contexts or locations. According to Cresswell, places are socially constructed and place, "is like space and time, a social construct" (Harvey in Cresswell, 2004: 29). This perspective is shared by those who acknowledge the social construction of meaning as underpinning social change. Their argument centres around notions of symbols and the meaning they hold, ascribed by the social milieu in which we find ourselves. And typically they say that this is dominated by Western cultural values, the media and politics. This means that the material components of place, the landscape, the garden and the home, are also a product of society. Alternatively, there are perspectives which argue that "society itself is inconceivable without place – that the social (and the cultural) is geographically constructed" (Cresswell, 2004: 31), and that the spatial and the social are mutually constitutive.

Massey (1997), confirms that it is increasingly difficult to define a local sense of place as place becomes significantly less specific in character. She argues that it is in response to the spatial disruption of our lives, that we have become romantically attracted to places, those that embody emotions more fictive than real. A memory of a landscape and how it makes us

feel, for example, relies in most part on the emotional response to, and memory of that landscape (Massey, 1997: 315). Massey suggests that places need to be seen to embrace a multiplicity of differing identities, each individual with his or her own sense of place, and each place itself seen as temporal. Her viewpoint is one that relates sense of place to what is happening when the global meets the local, and she sees social interaction as pivotal to how people relate a particular spatial location: "Instead ... of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined in networks of social relations and understandings." (Massey, 1997: 322). This is a key insight that I will return to in later chapters.

This importance of social connectedness (social capital) for maintaining sense of place is confirmed by Bishop (2004) as she places a premium on the development of community as part of place. She stresses the importance of work that is closely related to a local place as well as the people who live in the surrounding community, and refers specifically to 'stewardship of place' (Bishop, 2004: 68). Working with the youth in their local contexts, she suggests, enhances the educators' knowledge of local understandings of the issues and risks, as well as the potential for the emergence of local ownership of place through increased agency. To understand these complexities in the research context of this project, I consider identifications with place during my discussion chapter, as twofold; a) people who live together in communities and are attached to each other by the physical locality and genealogy, and; b) those communities that identify with each other by means of their common interests and politics (Baumann, 2004: 11).

For this study, knowledge about physical location and social relationships is central to an understanding of sense of place. Suffice to say that the inter-relatedness of the aspects mentioned above all contribute to sense of place and should remain as flexible definitions.

2.5 Participation of young people in environmental education research

Roger Hart (1997) suggests that the re-orientating of environmental concerns away from addressing the needs of the middle class elite, has made way for issues of sustainability and education *for* development to be prioritised in an effort to make the 'total environment' a

concern. This move towards inclusivity and away from cultural domination, has been a world-wide sociological trend pre-empted by globalisation, and promoted by citizen groups such as the 'environmental justice' movement. By addressing environmental issues and risks which take into account the built or living environments in which people live, this development confirms the move towards greater participation and democracy.

Driskell argues for the inclusion of the youth in decision-making at policy level and maintains that a crucial imperative in the healthy functioning of any environment is the incorporation of the youth in the activities of municipalities, local NGOs and development practitioners (Driskell, 2002: 13). Further, he says that ignoring the views and opinions of young people jeopardises the economic, social and environmental futures of communities and towns, while "empowering young people by including them in local initiatives can create feelings of solidarity and respect for one's [their] environment" (Driskell, 2002: 14). Hart suggests that as sustainable development is increasingly fore-grounded, the need to re-negotiate the roles adopted by institutions such as state democracies has arisen, so as to engage citizens (particularly older children) with new responsibilities and participatory roles (Hart, R., 1997: 6). Central to 'third world' contexts, with a focus on community-based sustainable development, is children's participation and involvement, as "only through direct participation can children develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate" (Hart, R., 1997: 3).

Visual methods of enquiry have grown in popularity as a means of encouraging inclusion of especially younger research participants in local contexts, and in order to elicit their perspectives. The camera has been adopted by researchers Roger Hart (Children's areas of play and exploring space in natural and built environments in New York City, 1997); Alison Clarke (worked with children taking photographs of their surroundings at the Thomas Coram Early Childhood Centre, in the centre of London, 2004); Catherine Burke (*'View of the Child Project'* in Leeds, looks at the representations made by children of their built environments at urban schools, 2004); and David Driskell (working in urban contexts around the world, notably as part of the UNESCO *'Growing up in Cities Project'*, 2002), amongst others. Working with visual activities is a key component of this study will be considered in more depth in Chapter 3.

2.6 Situated learning contexts

A great deal has been written on the implications of globalisation and the need for an educational platform that encourages contextualised participatory learning. According to social commentaries, although there is an inevitable infusion culturally, the way that this blend occurs is to varying degrees, one sided (Lash & Urry 1994: 280; Wasserman, et.al., 2003: 5). The reproduction of ideologies in different sites of consumption, for example is, according to Appadurai (2000), causing a disjuncture in the way that the mass movement of things, objects, people, ideas, images and discourses are being 're-contextualised' elsewhere. Instability is produced due to the changes happening around us and the things that are moving, are adopted and are functioning in contexts and places far removed from where they were invented.

The hegemonic implications of globalising trends is also being questioned by environmental educators, as Lotz-Sisitka asks:

> How, in the relationships that exist between global(ising) trends and local situations and practice, can we enable the space to exist for innovative and contextually situated practice?
>
> (Lotz-Sisitka, 2004: 4)

As part of a project on 'futures research', commissioned by Danida, Lotz-Sisitka situates southern African environmental education in the light of recent international developments (*Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, World Summit for Sustainable Development Implementation Plan*). These interventions are being steered predominantly by the changing nature and terms of engagement of sustainable development. Lotz-Sisitka refers to Beck's questioning of the universalising of 'rationalist planning frameworks' when looking at the subtleties and individuality inherent in every local context. Beck instead advocates contextually situated 'reflexive learning processes' which are responsive to, and flexible around, change (Lotz-Sisitka, 2004: 5).

It is apparent then that a common concern in environmental education is the re-situating of environmental education in local contexts whilst remaining globally informed. Increased social democratisation and broader citizen participation in the South African context has political as well as educative considerations, and these are equally significant in uncovering

the rich environmental education possibilities in a diverse country, especially given the 'new' voices that are emerging through increased participation by the youth.

Contextualised environmental learning processes cannot but benefit from a healthy identification with local context and place. These benefits are likely to increase with the integration of participatory learning activities in community or educational contexts where there are common interests among groups of individuals. Collectively, these aspects have the potential to enhance a sense of agency towards, and responsible ownership of, not only the local contexts in which people live, but also the global contexts and situations which are often relayed through various forms of mediated communication (Driskell, 2002; T. Hall, 1999; Bishop, 2004; Burke, 2004). Additionally, cultural identification in a social sense and also in connection to physical places, assists in the transitions and transformations typical of ongoing change, as they are used as a constant and constantly 'reworkable resource' (Spiegel & McAllister, 1991: 4). As such, continuity with a cultural past is a central component in the maintenance of sense of place through the performance of rituals that accompany local custom and practice. It seems that as 'place' becomes less certain through increasing local and global mobility, media exposure and the influence of global aspirations, it becomes more important for environmental educators to develop ways in which local contexts come to be cared for through an enhanced sense of place. As Gruchow recognises, "We own places, not because we possess the deeds to them, but because they have entered the continuum of our lives" (Gruchow in Bishop, 2004: 67).

Kriesberg (1999) argues that the bond between people and the environment should necessarily be made within the particular local context in which they live. Further, that the wealth of knowledge that people gain from the history and the stories of their past, connects them to a particular area. Driskell (2002) concurs that learning about context and place becomes meaningful when it happens in the environment of one's own locale, identifying local ownership of place as vital in developing sustained interaction between people and their environments (Driskell, 2002: 13).

In Bishop's (2004) 'place-based' or 'place-conscious' educational research which she conducted at rural schools in England, she recognised and valued the development of citizenship through place-based educational activities, and she notes that this also provides the foundations to engage - with environmental responsibility - within a wider context.

Environmental education practitioners have considered this conceptual shift and adapted approaches which stress the relevance of local and contextual learning processes (Cooper, 2004; Hart, R., 1997, Driskell, 2002). Tom Hall, et al (1999: 502) argue that although notions of local and global citizenship have recently been prioritised in the educational milieu to consider competency, active participation and individual responsibility, they cannot be dislocated from identification with place.[2] They explain that although key concepts such as identity and culture have been recognised, they are continually contested and fluid, and similarly citizenship needs to be seen as non-static and mobile. This is especially relevant when "youth is, by definition and irrespective of any wider context of social change, a time when identities are understood to be generally fluid – a period of transition during which elements of an adult self and future are explored and settled on..." (Hall, et al, 1999: 502).

2.7 Structure and agency in local and global spaces

Within globalisation's diffusing of spatial and cultural boundaries, there remains an inherent tension between local attachment and global appeals. This has necessitated a reworking of the underlying processes of structure and agency within a broader framework of local and global integration by the youth. And in turn, this would provide a critical platform for environmental educators as they re-shape and adapt environmental learning practice. The imposing demands of globalisation is compounded by an oppositionalising of structure and agency as a means of understanding and describing their respective domains of control. However, the dualism that is posited between the two inhibits an in-depth understanding of the processes of social change that is critical for the purposes of environmental education.

According to Margaret Archer (2002) human agency has conventionally been conceived as being, on the one hand, shaped by society and on the other hand, able to partially transform society. This formulation gives rise to an oscillation between extremes of self determination and radical social dependency. She explains that:

> Enlightenment thought promoted an 'undersocialised' view of man,...who simply operated in a social environment... there is a later but pervasive 'oversocialised' view of man whose every

[2] It is important to note that citizenship can be positive when it denotes constructive and responsible environmental agency, but it can be negative when it connotes a blind nationalism.

> feature, beyond his biology, is shaped and moulded by his social context.
>
> (Archer, 2002: 11)

As a *social realist,* Archer, critiques social constructivist orientations, which see human agents as conventionalists who are only able to manoeuvre by reasons 'appropriated' from society. We can see from Archer's critique that the approach taken in social constructivist discourses is one that excludes the ambivalences embraced by post-modernism, of non-conventionalism, individuality and reflexivity, "Here the whole of the world comes to people as sieved through one part of it, 'society's conversation' ... society is the gatekeeper of reality and therefore all that we become is society's gift because it is mediated through it." (Archer, 2002: 13).

The implications for this in terms of environmental education are provided by Archer's valuable insights into what takes place at the interplay between structure and agency, in a space that she calls our 'social identity'. Social identity, she says, is our 'capacity to express what we care about in social roles that are appropriate for doing this' (2002: 17). An imperative for Archer, as for others, is that independent influence and power be accorded to both structures and agents. For environmental education a key issue is, how to encourage a post-modern reflexivity and individuality of thought, through an understanding of how individual agency and social structure emerge and interplay.

Durkheim was an early theorist of the structure and agency debate. He drew attention to the inherent strength of society's structures on individual actors. While the contention still exists in contemporary sociological theory, particularly around processes of social change, there is a shift amongst contemporary social scientists away from structuralist theories such as dialectical materialism, towards post-structural and post-modern notions of individual determinism that maintain, "We are not the creatures of society, but its creators" (Giddens, 2001: 669).

Another approach has been to locate structure and agency in relation to each other, rather than as opposing forces. Giddens' concept of structuration is used to analyse the process of 'active making and remaking of social structure' (Giddens, 2001: 668). It has been summarised as:

> Human agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level forces) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people (and therefore can change).
>
> (Gauntlett, 2002: 94)

As a response to the dualistic formulation of structure and agency, Giddens' theory suggests that human agency and social structure should be understood as interconnected and interrelated. He argues that social structures such as cultural conventions and institutions establish the way in which society behaves, but that these structures are continually being contested, changed and understood differently by human agents (Gauntlett, 2002: 93).

Giddens warns against the philosophical dualisms between 'individual' and 'society', or 'structure' and 'agency', and he rejects structural orientations for separating them, but at the same time, he does not deny a social and physical reality within which these processes which shape individuals and society occur. This is a deliberate move by Giddens, away from the structuralist thinking in Marxist notions around the power inherent in the market and the state.

Durkheim was criticized for under-valuing the symbolic meaning inherent in objects, the symbollic capital that objects hold and that are not categorised as either a structure or an agent of change. They are the things that influence if, and the way in which, a disruption of the 'taken for granted ways' occurs. In other words, the innate relationships that these objects and 'things' are able to have or stimulate amongst the social actors in which we live (Giddens, 2001: 668). This is significant to environmental educators because of the cultural symbolism inherent in the environmental valuing of nature and of natural 'things'. Without objects to represent, and objects that hold inherent meaning with which to signify sense of place, the participants in this study would not be able to express their stories effectively.

How this affects agency within environmental education contexts, depends not only on the 'macro' structures imposing conventions and practice. It is also important to consider whether agency has been asserted individually to impact on local changes within local practice (whether reflexivity changes individual practice or whether school or community level change has occurred), or collectively to impact on the macro-structures that determine the rules pertaining to institutions or culture, for example.

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* refers to a logic of practice, the unspoken and unreflexive conventions and social ways in which we are governed in the different circles we find ourselves, such as the home, the school, work and institutional settings. 'This is just the way we do things here' is a common response to questions around conventional customs and practice. According to Bourdieu, by saying this, people "leave unsaid all that goes without saying" because it is tacit and embodied in practice (Bourdieu, 1990: 91). Bourdieu's *habitus* has provided a tool to investigate the complexity of embodiment and identity. It also offers new insight into the interdependence of structure and agency. Bourdieu draws attention to the politics of social change that is reflexive and questioning in character, not one that is simply accepting of logical norms such as "The economy is becoming global, therefore we must globalise our economy" (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 7). Hillier & Rooksby (2005) maintain that Bourdieu was an overtly political and compassionate social researcher, who was intimately concerned with structure and agency. They assert that *habitus* "not only avoids the pitfalls of mechanical determinism which often vitiate structuralist approaches; it also avoids presupposing a fully rational, calculating agent..." (Hillier,et.al., 2005: 10). Bourdieu's work in the area of education and social space, reveals important insights into *habitus* and identity. This will be drawn on in more detail in Chapter 5.

2.7 Conclusion

It is clear that for the purposes of this research, an understanding of structure and agency has the potential for furthering discussion around issues that affect people in their home and community environments. The empowering of agency (individually or collectively) through discussion and interaction – and that leads to action – is vital in post-apartheid South Africa where it is necessary to make provision for, and build, a more democratic and participatory platform for previously unheard voices, including those of young people.

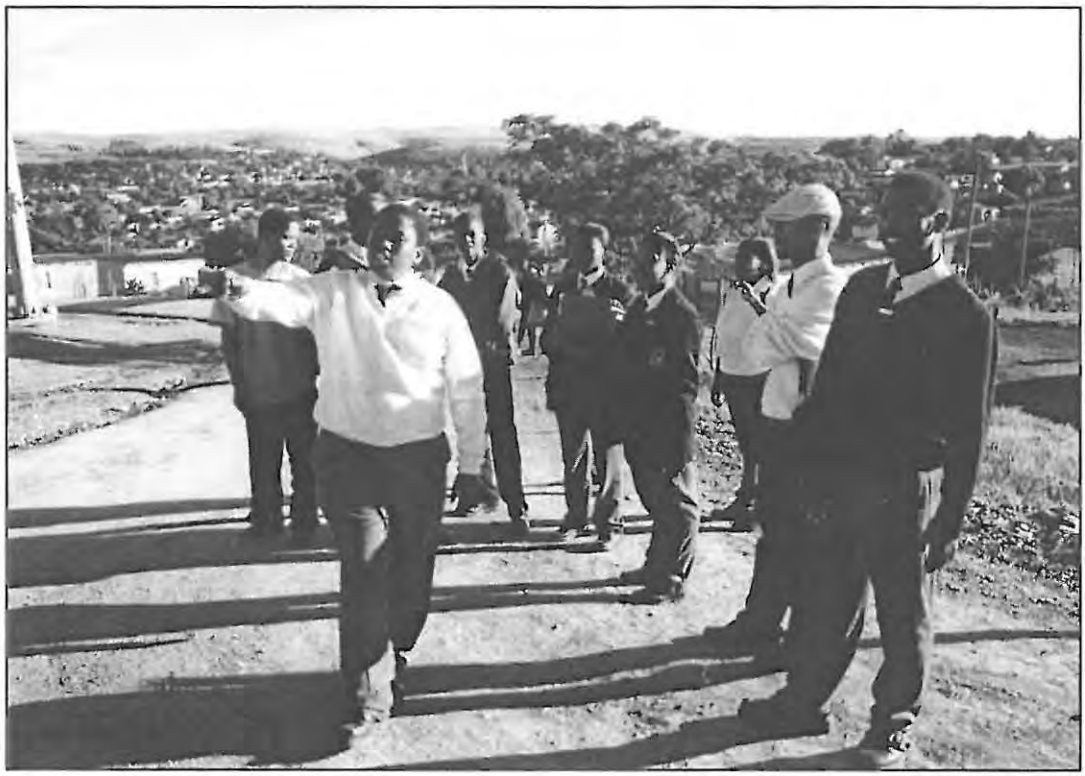
Working more closely with young people around environmental concerns which are meaningful to them as participants, lends itself as an effective and sustainable approach to addressing environmental risks in local contexts. Instead of directing young people to prescribed environmental concerns, this research is informed by the concerns that young adults identify as they explore their sense of place in the context of their local environment.

Understanding of the nuanced social relationships and the structure and agency interplay, *in situ*, assists in the approaches taken by educators for informing meaningful learning arenas by means of place-based engagement. Whilst environmental educators are developing the skills for inclusion, reflexive interaction and participatory discussion as part of a post-modern trajectory however, the challenges of living in an increasingly individualised world provide real threats to collective action and broader processes of meaningful and sustainable social and environmental change.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

> Research that focuses on children's perceptions of place or space as active research informants is concerned less with the development of technical and conceptual competence and more with the interface between the formal and informal spaces that children respond to and reconstruct.
>
> (Burke, 2004: 3)



Learners interacting during a transect walk to Xolani informal settlement, May 2005. Photograph by Katie Farrington.

This chapter provides a description of the research orientation adopted to inform my study. The use of visual and narrative research processes are discussed with relevance to the study, and issues around validity and ethics that were considered during the research process are articulated.

3.1 Research orientation

With increased importance placed on post-structuralist notions of valuing ambiguity, reflexivity and the transitory within research processes, a space has emerged to engage in more open-ended research where voices of the 'subjects' are included as research participants. This methodological shift has occurred as social science research has moved away from *objective* analysis and fixed outcomes towards more open-ended enquiry, engagement with knowledge generation (in educational research) and the usefulness of research participants researching their own environments (Burke, 2004: 3). This has also been affected by the focus which has moved from notions of *being* that are fixed, to include socio-historically located notions of *becoming* that are temporal (Gray, 2004: 17). Within this case study; 1) voices that locate (representations); 2) curiosity that engages (research), and; 3) meaningfulness that is expressed through the narration, are imperatives to the authentic co-engaged collection and analysis of data.

I have conducted the research engagement and developing analysis with an interpretive approach to provide descriptions of the learners' being in the world, their interactions with friends and their communities, and of the local environmental issues of concern to them. This encompasses what they have chosen to represent and how they have come to represent and share with each other in participating in this research together. This includes a description of the activities that were conducted, their visual representations, and the written narrations describing the young adults' post-activity reflections. The written narratives enabled the generation of knowledge and meaning making in the participant-led engagement of the activities, in the analysis of the photographs, and finally in retrospectively making observations. An interpretive research design allowed for an open and non-prescriptive orientation where rich descriptions of the activities and a probing of the learners' visual and written reflections emerged. These emerged both in the co-engaging activities and as I worked with the developing project.

Theories relating to the social construction of reality have been helpful in identifying the meanings that are made within different social contexts. For this study, I was actively trying not to be prescriptive as this would interfere with the 'unfolding' of the research process. At the same time, it was important to be informed of the historical, social and educational nature of the research context. It was thus important to have diverse and open-ended methods which allowed me to develop insights into the lives of the learners in relation to their social context, and through the ongoing production and articulation of the meaning they made during their interactions with the environment.

I have also drawn on a critical perspective to engage with the broader political and social structures, as they came to be fore-grounded in our interactions and activities with the different contexts we encountered during the research process. Cohen, et al. (2000: 23), say that a critical paradigm provides a "political and ideological context" within which to conduct interpretive research. This critical framework has been useful in engaging with learners' representations, and probing the ways in which they reflect how they have chosen to represent their perspectives and their environments.

3.2 Young adults as researchers

With the increased emphasis placed on children's rights and participation, alternative modes of enquiry and interpretation are progressively being acknowledged and used for research and educational purposes. New technologies (such as cameras) have offered researchers alternative and exciting data collection possibilities through visual methodologies, as well as offering new approaches to research by involving the participants in the research process using these visual methods (Burke, 2004: 3).

These developing trends in the research relationship are opening up opportunities for the *research subjects* to become the *researchers*, which implies that research is increasingly being conducted *with* instead of *on* (young) people and on subjects that are of concern to them (Burke, 2004: 2). The turn to visual methods allows articulation of expression through representation by actively involving the research participants and it encourages a reflexive process, which in turn reflects the transitory and subjective nature of data collection and interpretation (Burke, 2004: 6). Burke notes that research that is done by participants using

photographs, not only builds competence by way of their expression, but also informs an understanding of how they represent their worlds.

Stuart Hall's premise that systems of representation are connected to culture by way of their reflective, intentional and constructionist capacities, provides a valuable impetus for probing the way in which learners choose to represent their environments. Hall suggests that if culture is about shared meaning and the combined effects of written and verbal language and photography (visual language) are ways of sharing that meaning, then the ways in which they are represented significantly influence our identification with them (Hall, 1997: 15). Wasserman & Jacobs (2003: 15), remark on the fluid nature of culture and identity and note that only when these are represented as an object (in the case of this study, the object being the photograph or written word), are they considered fixed – for a time, until next represented. These objects convey and signify possible ideals and desires with which the participant identifies and as such they are indeed a part of the participant's life-world.

In exploring notions around sense of place for the purposes of this study, the focus has been less on the development of visual language skills amongst the participants. This research relies on the experimental expression of identity through the use of visual methods and developing environmental awareness and the ability to understand and convey environmental concepts (environmental literacy) within local contexts.

3.3 Research methods

Historical research

I have adopted a socio-historical perspective to situate the study and clarify the context (Chapter 2). This was necessary to inform the research in terms of the socio-historical setting of the particular research site, i.e. youth in Grahamstown. The significance of historical background to situate the study in the broader socio/political and geographic context, became increasingly clear during this research process. By understanding the social and educational norms that were part of the history of this country, such as 'Bantu education', I was able to better consider the compounded implications of a disadvantaged education and an under-resourced, marginalised school. To collect this data, I consulted historical documents that convey the social and political Frontier history from the early 1800s. The

'coloured' history relating to the Eastern Cape, particularly in the Grahamstown and Kat River regions, was understood to better understand the research context. Reports on the migration of farm workers from rural to urban, and back to rural settings were studied to inform the study of the dislocations that families have experienced for more than a hundred years.

Focus groups

The research has been significantly developed by co-ordinating informal focus group discussions among the learners. According to Krueger & Casey (2000: 7), the intention of focus group discussion is to "promote self disclosure among participants, in a comfortable environment". We held 3 focus group meetings at the school, with approximately 8 participants in attendance at each. The focus groups proved useful to engage and track ideas that emerged as the learners reflected on the activities in which they participated. The information was audio tape-recorded during the focus groups and I used an abridged transcript method (Krueger & Casey, 2000: 203), after which I coded direct quotations to highlight common areas and patterns from what the learners were expressing.

Photography (Visual methods)

Two photography methods were used during this study:

1. Photographs as tool of observation by primary researcher, and;
2. Photographic representations taken by the learners.

Banks (2001: 2) points out that there are the visual records that are produced by the researcher, and there are visual records produced by those 'being studied'. These methods merge to support the research, by the way they work together, to document and reflexively narrate, to develop insights into what has happened and how things are being experienced and seen, as the study unfolds. Banks notes that social researchers have increasingly moved from the objectification of photographing the 'other' to a more collaborative approach in which those being researched are more involved in providing and taking photographs and in this way identifying subject matter of relevance and significance to them. Photographs allow detailed recordings and can provide a more thorough representation of lifestyles and conditions. As the photographs were used to represent the varying contexts in which the learners interact, 'macro' photographs of the larger community will be used to describe the

broader context, and 'micro' photographs will provide close-up and detailed information of the situation or case under discussion (Busse, 2004: 1).

Transect walks and map drawing

During the pilot research phase (February to May, 2004), situated learning processes, specifically transect walking, emerged as a valuable tool for encouraging discussion and reflection between learners about the areas surveyed. During the actual research phase, we undertook two transect walks. We only selected two transect walks out of many possibilities, as we were either not able to walk to the other areas due to time constraints, or they were located too far from school. The problems we encountered during the walks are discussed in the next Chapter.

While we walked, the learners openly discussed their views and opinions of these areas, their relationships with them and the collective environmental concerns they evoked. During this research activity the young adults learnt about the areas visited through interactions and story sharing with each other, as some of the learners lived in the areas while others were from neighboring communities. A few of the learners knew the residents in the communities we walked through, while others merely walked past them on their way to and from school. The environmental concerns that were discussed during these visits into the community were identified by the group during previous mapping exercises. These included poverty, pollution, poor sewerage disposal, crime, etc. Whilst walking and talking, attention was brought to these concerns (to members of the group who had not known of them), and a deepening understanding of the concerns through the narrated walks we did as a group. During these walks, I recorded the interactions in notes and photographs and later the learners reflected on the effectiveness of this method in creating awareness of environmental concerns.

The overriding value of a mapping exercise is that the representations enabled learners to consider and offer alternative, spatial perspectives of their environments. Further, they were able to conceptualise these environments visually by using visual methods integral to all map-making (Barraza, 1999). The participation and deliberation during the map drawing brought out interesting disparities as to where certain seemingly objective physical locations were going to be placed on the map. Through this discussion and negotiation, learners discovered new places and new perspectives of these places, as well as new ways to engage negotiations around whose perspective was going to be represented on the drawn

map. The drawing of the map was particularly useful to identify local areas of environmental concern, and to establish which 'researchers' were subsequently going to be investigating these areas.

Interviews

Two semi formal interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Due to the extended nature of the research project, not all of the original learners were available for the second interview and consequently there were 7 participants who were interviewed twice.

Cohen, *et al.* (1995: 268), identify information seeking on the part of the interviewer, and information being made available on the part of the interviewee, as informing the choice of type of interview. Specific social skills are required when conducting interviews, particularly when subjective interpretations are expected. If the interviewee is asked to give personal accounts or opinions of a place or event, it is necessary to create a trusting environment and one which fosters an atmosphere similar to a 'real' interaction. Cohen, *et al.* refer to this relationship as one that can be likened to friendship (*ibid*: 268). During the initial interview, the participants interviewed each other and were very comfortable disclosing information to each other – albeit information that I would ultimately be made aware of. During the second interview, the participants were very comfortable with me asking them questions as we had developed a relationship over many months of working together. On deciding between structured, semi-structured or informal interviews, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews since they allow an informal and yet indepth probing of the context and learners' perspectives. On many occasions this allowed the space for unexpected information that cropped up, further elaboration by the interviewees and this proved interesting and informative in developing a well-rounded interpretation of the research participants and their contexts.

Written narratives

The written narratives provided the research with evidence on the usefulness of, as well as indicating the level of individual engagement with, the photographic, transect and mapping activities. They reflected changes in perceptions of local environments experienced by the learners over the course of the study. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, emphasise the valuable information hidden in the texts of stories that are written by people about their lives when

they say that "stories - like biographies - are rich in authentic, live data..." (Cohen, *et al.* 2000: 303).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are especially pertinent in research conducted with young people. In this case, permission was granted by the school principal to conduct the research at the school using a school classroom for extra mural activities. Written consent from the participating learners was solicited and granted after explaining what the project would entail. The participants were provided with a thorough explanation of the activities that were to be conducted and a table of events for the period of the fieldwork. The expected outcome of an exhibition at the end of the project was also discussed and this event occurred when collages of their representations were displayed at the National Arts Festival in July 2005. I provided weekly updates of activities and changes in the programme, when the need arose. I took into account their formal education needs, given that they were all in their final year of schooling, and conducted the research so that interactions with the learners were limited to the school term time but not during or close to exams. In this way I was careful not to unduly impinge on their study time. Anonymity was considered to be paramount and the learners were each given a pseudonym in the thesis. The participants used their real names for the purposes of exhibiting their work, as this allowed identification of them by their peers, teachers and other members of the Grahamstown community.

3.5 Validity

During Lather's discussion of different research approaches, she identifies the importance of having an empirically strong basis from which to work with theory. For Lather, research validity depends on the coincidence of 'conceptual over-determinism' with empirical data to produce an empirically informed research, in an effort to become more explicit and critically reflexive about one's research approach and objectives with 'self-corrective' techniques (Lather, 1986: 64). These insights were valuable in the research process in establishing what my research objectives were, the reasons for these objectives, and in the way in which I conducted social research during my interactions with people and the collection of data.

As with most social science research, it was important to ensure careful interpretation during data analysis, especially given the nature of qualitative research and the amount and variety of data that was collected during this study. To confirm accurate and reliable interpretation, member checking information (photographs and maps, and written interpretations from transcripts) with the learners, was a key component of this. Data triangulation between the multiple data collection methods used, further enhanced validity. Since 'objective' accounts in qualitative research were improbable, the use of *interpretive validity* as discussed in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000), was appropriate during this study. As a critical orientation was used to inform the interpretation of the data, elements of *catalytic validity* further authenticated the research. According to Lather, Kincheloe & McLaren, *catalytic validity*:

> is to help participants to understand their worlds in order to transform them. The agenda is explicitly political, for catalytic validity suggests the need to expose whose definitions of the situation are operating in the situation.
>
> (Lather, et al. cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 111)

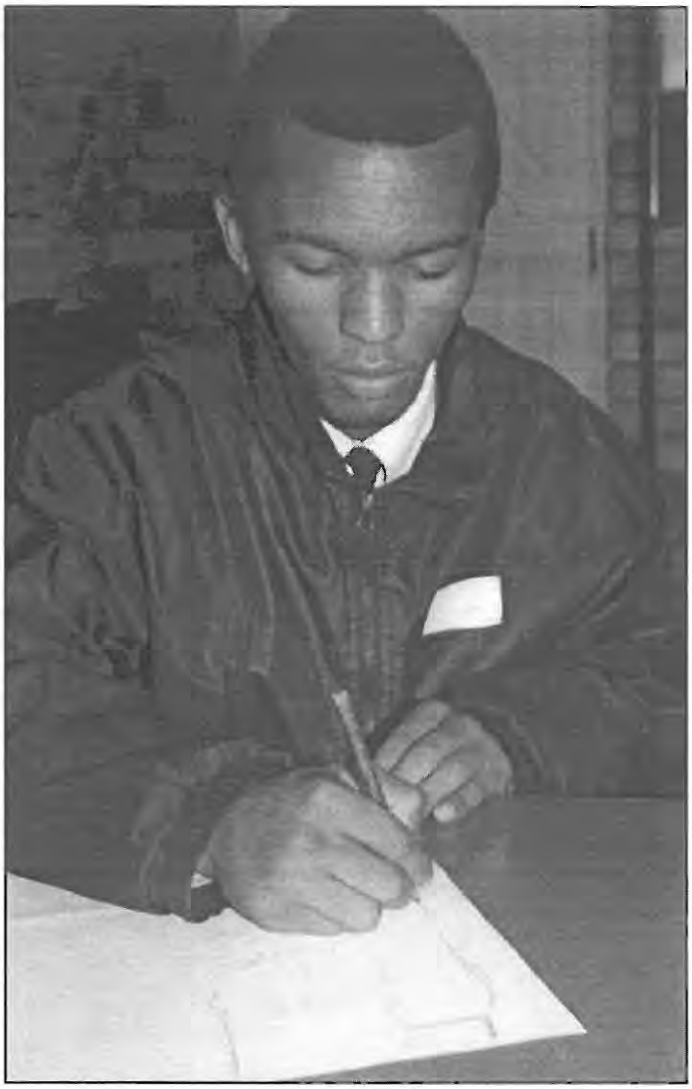
The collaborative data collection and analysis methods provided evidence on how the learners identified with their local and global environments and how these identifications facilitated their ability to contest change and affect agency within these environments. Their representations offered insights into how they engaged with local environments and how they reflected the learning process. The research findings were influenced by the nature of the self-selected group of individuals, who were all top achievers at Mary Waters School, the majority being prefects and head prefects. The learners were keenly attracted to the project because they wanted to learn photographic skills and own a camera (albeit a small cheap one), and this had some bearing on their maintained interest in the project. Food was provided during the contact sessions, and this provided further impetus for continued involvement by the majority of the participants throughout the 15 months of data collection.

CHAPTER 4

Working with young adults

I learned that different people have different views of their environment. When these ideas collide, they cause a big argument.

Zolile, reflecting on the mapping activity (I2L8).



Photograph 1: Simon drawing his map. Photograph taken by Katie Farrington

I realise, that even though you think you know the place at the back of your mind, you still need people around you to guide you and tell whether the map is drawn correctly.

Ronaldo, reflecting on the mapping activity (I2L9).

4.1 Introduction

The research project developed over an extended period of engagement with place-based visual activities, focus group discussions and meaning-making with the learners. I became increasingly informed about the learners' personal lives and home situations, their interests and aspirations as the process unfolded. Throughout the engagement with activities and involvement of the learners, I gained clarity about the modes of representation and interpretation which were most suitable for the participants, their contexts and my research objectives.

I initially met the participants at a focus group meeting held at the school in March 2004, and subsequently at the first mapping and focus group discussions which formed part of a pilot research phase. I introduced the proposed project to them during this time, and showed them examples of participatory projects using visual representations which I had come across in the following books: *Children's Participation* by Roger Hart (1997), *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth* by David Driskell (2002), *The story of my life* compiled by Han Lans (2002), and *Growing Up in an Urbanising World* by Louise Chawla (2002).

The main research methods we were to focus on were; 1) **visual** in style to enhance visual literacy skills and the use of different 'visual' perspectives; 2) situated in **local context** and relevant for place-based activities with possibilities for increased identification with place; and 3) focused on **learners researching** their local environments using easy to operate cameras, with access to learning support materials such as maps and photographs. This process also relied on learners' prior experience in and about their local environments which emerged and was enhanced through transect walks.

We met weekly during term time for the duration of 15 months (between March 2004 and July 2005). The research process was intentionally lengthy as I thought it important to establish a relationship of trust with the learners, getting to know their personal and social lives was a key element in understanding their identification with the local places they inhabit and frequent.

For clarity, I have separated the research results into two sections in this chapter. The first section reports on the findings of the initial pilot phase, and secondly reports the main study, where the learners themselves identified and researched issues in their local contexts.

The activities and stages of the study were as follows:

1. **Pilot phase: getting to know the learners (3 months, March to May 2004).**
    1a. Initial focus group discussion
    1b. Mapping
    1c. Interviews
2. **Main research phase: learners researching environmental concerns (12 months)[3].**
    2a. Mapping
    2b. Transect walking
    2c. Photographing
    2d. Reflections on these activities
    2e. Exhibiting the photo collages and written narratives.

4.2 Meeting the participants and piloting the methods

At the first focus group meeting we discussed environmental issues and risks of significance to the learners, as well as the issues affecting the communities living in areas surrounding their neighbourhoods and in the vicinity of the school – generally the areas they walked past on their way to school and back. The communities in which the learners live are dispersed in a radius approximately 5km^2 around the school.

After the initial focus group contact, I introduced a mapping activity and individual learners were each asked to identify, and draw a map of their favourite place. Once drawn, these places were reflected on, written about and discussed. What emerged from this initial discussion was a clearer understanding of the significance of these places to the participants and allowed us to start to build rapport as a group and familiarity between me and the learners. I then interviewed them individually for aprroximately 30 minutes to familiarise

[3] Although the research took place over a period of 15 months, I had no contact with the participants during their holidays and during exam time. The learners were however, supplied with film to continue their research during these periods of no contact.

myself with the particulars of their daily lives, and compiled this information about each of the participants. The initial and individually drawn maps and narratives also gave me insights into how well the learners were able to interpret places using the spatial and visual method of map drawing. This fed into the development of further visual research concepts and skills which the learners were able to employ to research their local environments (photography for example). It was only at this stage of the pilot research that I introduced the use of cameras as research tools, and the learners eagerly shared my camera to take me on a tour of the school grounds and to photograph environmental issues they had mentioned previously, such as litter and the vandalism of school buildings.

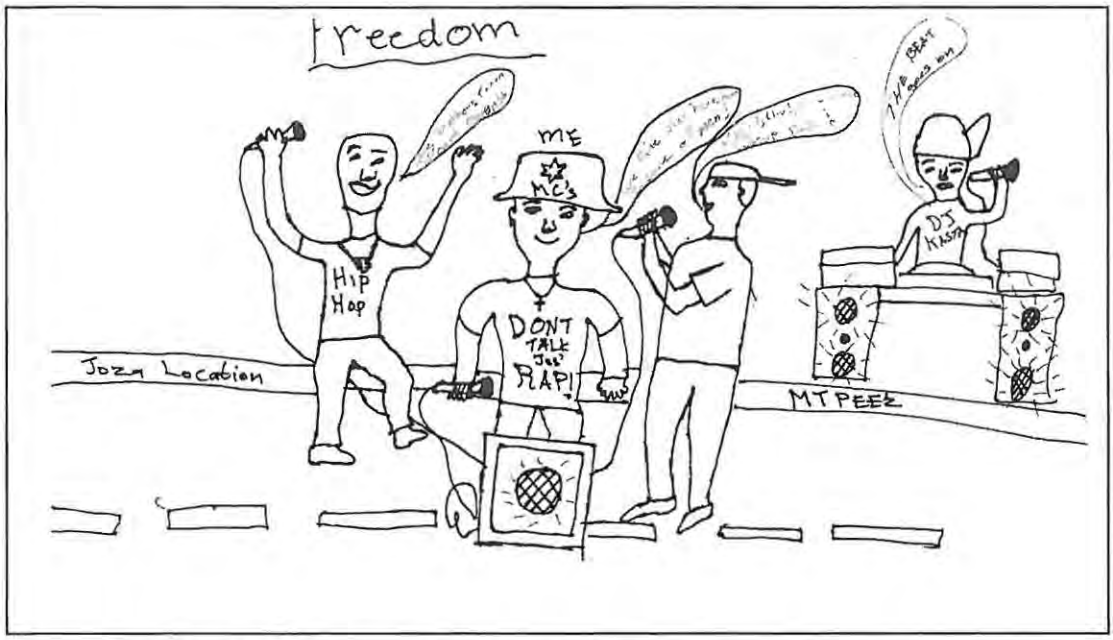
Photograph 2 & 3: Learners drawing individual maps of their favourite places, February, 2004. Photographs by Katie Farrington

Photograph 4: A group of research participants standing in front of graffitti on a wall at the school, photograph taken by Ronaldo(L9), March 2004.

This initial pilot phase gave me insights which were invaluable in the development and support of further research, not only methodologically but more significantly as part of my developing familiarity with the particulars of how they were experiencing place.

I become aware, for instance, of the distances travelled between home, school and town. The mapping activity gave me a good idea of how large their geographical area of interaction is, not least from having to walk to school and back every day. Jason's map reflects the long distances travelled to get from home in Hoeggenoeg to the Grahamstown Public Library, as he struggled to fit the map onto an A3 sheet of paper. The learners included local landmarks, such as churches, *shebeens, spazas* and schools. They also named these landmarks so that I could understand what they were, for example, a *shebeen* was named a bar, and a *spaza* was called a shop.

Each of the stories spoke of a different place which conveyed a uniqueness and individuality amongst the learners. What also struck me was their different approaches to the mapping activity, where some drew the maps from above, others chose to draw less graphic and more realistic representations of their chosen places. Even after using the Learning Support Material (in the form of a simple map, see Appendix 2) to develop mapping representation skills, some found it difficult to represent what they wanted to in this way and instead chose to draw more realistically, as in Peter's drawing of his Rap friends on the street, on the following page.



Above: Peter's map of his chosen 'place'.

The learners' contexts

The participants each live in families with unique household situations and experience varying degrees of economic hardship. The table below provides details of household members from the initial six participants interviewed (3 female, 3 male).

		Who do you live with?	**What do your parents do?**
Simon	M	With both parents	Dad: Works as a petrol attendant and car washer in Grahamstown Mum: Creche teacher in Grahamstown
Jason	M	With mother	Mum: Training to be a nurse at Fort England in Grahamstown Dad: Studying at UCT – Human Resources
Tanya	F	With father	Mum: Domestic worker in Port Elizabeth Dad: Gardener in Grahamstown
Thandiswa	F	With grandmother	Mum: Unemployed Dad: Passed away
Phumla	F	With father	Mum: Passed away Dad: Carpenter in Uitenhage Grandmother: Pensioner in Grahamstown
Peter	M	Head of household, lives with cousins	Mum: Passed away Dad: Passed away Uncle and Aunt: financial supporters living in Port Elizabeth

Remaining non-intrusive during the collection of personal information was challenging, as was my attempt to maintain an even-handedness in response to the challenges that the learners live with. The circumstances in which the learners live are very unfamiliar to me, and I felt particularly uncomfortable about the seemingly disrupted family structures that are a relatively normal part of the context in which they live. For example, it was not unusual to be raised in the absence of a mother. Tanya explained that her mother had died and that she had been brought up by her father, without another female figure in the household. Nineteen year old Peter is head of his household and is responsible for his two younger cousins. Phumla's mother passed away and she lives with her father. Out of the six participants that were initially interviewed, four grew up in homes without their mothers, and only one lived with both parents. This has implications for the expectations that other older members of the household have of the learners in terms of household responsibilities and other roles conventionally being ascribed to adults.

During the initial focus group meeting, the learners drew up a list of issues of concern to them in their school and home environments. Teenage pregnancies were considered the most pressing concern alongside HIV & AIDS. They agreed that the main contributing factor to irresponsible sex was the huge appeal of the government grants that were available to unmarried mothers. Low self esteem and naivete were also considered responsible for this, as were unsafe condoms (government condoms that were obtained from the local clinic). The male respondents seemed respectfully restrained in their responses, but did mention that some young women "think it [pregnancy] is not going to happen to them". Underage alcohol consumption was also raised as a possible contributor to teenage pregnancies.

I was convinced that whilst both genders considered the avoidance of teenage pregnancies solely the responsibility of young women, they were in consensus that it was both the responsibility of young men and women to engage in protective sex in order to avoid contracting the HIV/AIDS virus. One female respondent said "there is [a] lack of proper sex education" from their parents. Talking about sex, teenage pregnancies and HIV/AIDS was not a completely comfortable space for the young adults, at this early stage of interaction with me, and there was much laughter around such issues. As a result, learners felt more at ease by relaying humorous stories around the parents' lack of involvement in guidance and sex education. "My cupboard is full of condoms, and when I go out my parents just say 'be careful' or 'don't sleep around', they are embarrassed to talk more" explained Ronaldo (L9).

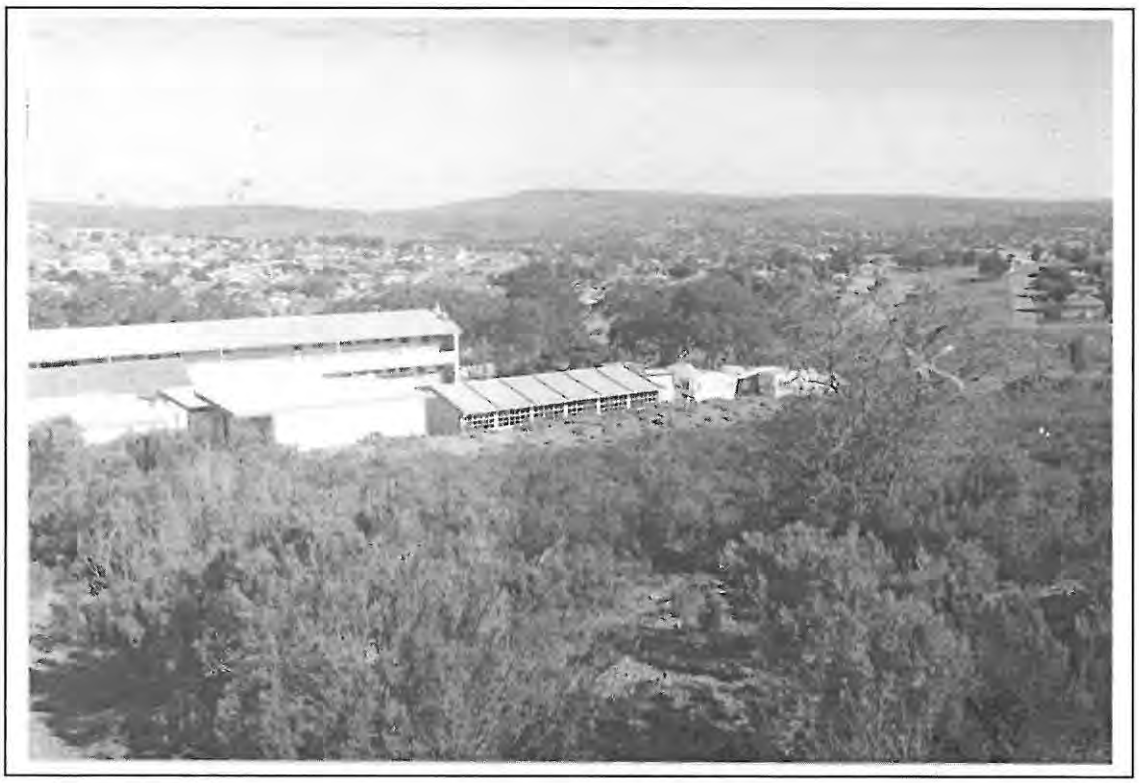
Unemployment figures in Grahamstown are estimated at 70% and exacerbated by the increasing number of farm workers taking up residency here as a result of local commercial farms being transformed into game farms (van Hees, 2000: 22). Learners see the lack of employment as affecting their lives directly and indirectly. They were concerned about what they would do if they were faced with unemployment. This was a real concern considering that they are close to school-leaving age. They were also directly affected by the unemployment of their parents: Ronaldo mentioned that his parents were illiterate and unskilled, and they were keenly waiting for him to finish school and get a job. The learners were concerned about not being able to afford tertiary education, and were aware that unskilled jobs were on the decrease. The importance of a good qualification was also mentioned, but access to tertiary education was recognised as a particularly difficult hurdle. One learner spoke about the phenomenon of 'jobless growth' and said the reason for the increase in unemployment was that there are fewer and fewer unskilled jobs available. As a result they felt pressurised to somehow find the means to become qualified in a profession.The high occurrence of teenage pregnancies was another reason recorded as contributing to levels of unemployment.

With school numbers at Mary Waters Senior Secondary School increasing from 600 to 1050 in 10 years (from 1994 – 2004), and the majority of students now being Xhosa first language speakers, levels of racial prejudice and discrimination are variable but clearly evident and articulated by the learners. Learners blamed teachers for giving preferential treatment to the non-Xhosa pupils at school and there was an air of resentment from those who claimed to have borne the brunt of this discrimination. There was also a certain amount of inter-pupil racial prejudice experienced by a few participants in the research group.

Themes emerging from the pilot research

It was from these initial interactions with the learners that I developed insights into the usefulness of visual representations (photographs and maps) in an engagement with local environmental contexts. The learners were greatly enthused by these new media of map drawing, walking and discussing, and the taking of photographs. As second or third language English speakers, this appeared to be a new and exciting way in which to express their opinions and points of view with a visual reference and without the hindrance of doing so in a

second language. These methods also proved to be valuable in that the learners were able to express themselves without evaluation on how the photographs were taken, or whether they were deemed good enough in any artistic sense. What did emerge was the need for me to provide support and encouragement, as only two of the total of 13 learners had frequent use of a camera before my contact with them. For this reason, the technical aspects of visually representing reflections and opinions were discussed as was the visual literacy necessary to ensure that the message that they wanted to convey was indeed reflected (captured and signified) in the representation. To demonstrate the use of visual literacy, I introduced the learners to other examples of photographic and map representations. We also discussed the elements that were intentionally selected and that serve as signifiers to communicate the intended message. Post-activity reflections were written in English and proved less spontaneous but nevertheless important in substantiating points of view and consolidating their ideas.



Photograph 5: Mary Waters Senior Secondary School, the research site with a view of Grahamstown in the background. Photograph taken by Jason.

4. 3 Getting to know the local: Learners researching local environments

During the main research phase of this project, the same learners and a few new-comers undertook map drawing, transect walks, photographs, group discussions and reflections. Coinciding with these activities was individual photographing of an identified local environmental concern. It was evident that these activities each served to shape an identification with the places in which they worked, both in groups and individually.

The participatory activities conducted by the learners comprised;

1) participatory mapping of the area around the school and identifying specific environmental concerns which they could then research using
2) transect walks, discussions,
3) photographing and compiling photographic collages for exhibition.

The participatory mapping in local contexts

For this activity, the learners were asked to identify places or environmental issues that they had noticed as problematic in their communities. I encouraged them to look at things in context, not only as objects (places, open areas, issues, etc.) but to begin a process of noting the relationships that the issues or places had with people, surroundings and histories. The deliberate shift from noticing to noting, 'seeing' to 'signifying', was useful for the purpose of representation. The group worked together to draw a simple map of the area around the school. This activity encouraged much discussion on what that they wanted to include and exclude. These discussions enabled each participant to decide which elements or features of the areas were worth researching and we discussed how they were going to visually represent these features in photographic images.

The following concerns were identified by the learners: 1) Poor provision of an adequate sewerage removal system in a local community, and the unsanitary living conditions it produced, particularly for the children playing in the streets. 2) Polluted living areas of informal settlements and the inadequate and in some cases, complete lack of, municipal services, and poor living conditions of the inhabitants of these areas. Four informal

settlements were chosen for closer attention, namely; Sun City, Xolani, Zolani and an unnamed settlement on the outskirts of Extension 6. 3) Graveyards were selected for attention after concerns were expressed around vandalism, pollution and disregard by the general public of these places, a lack of provision of adequate fencing or other regulatory means by the municipality. 4) One learner chose to research a local *spaza* which was considered a dangerous place to visit because of "the gang that hangs out there and that intimidates women", specifically adolescent women.

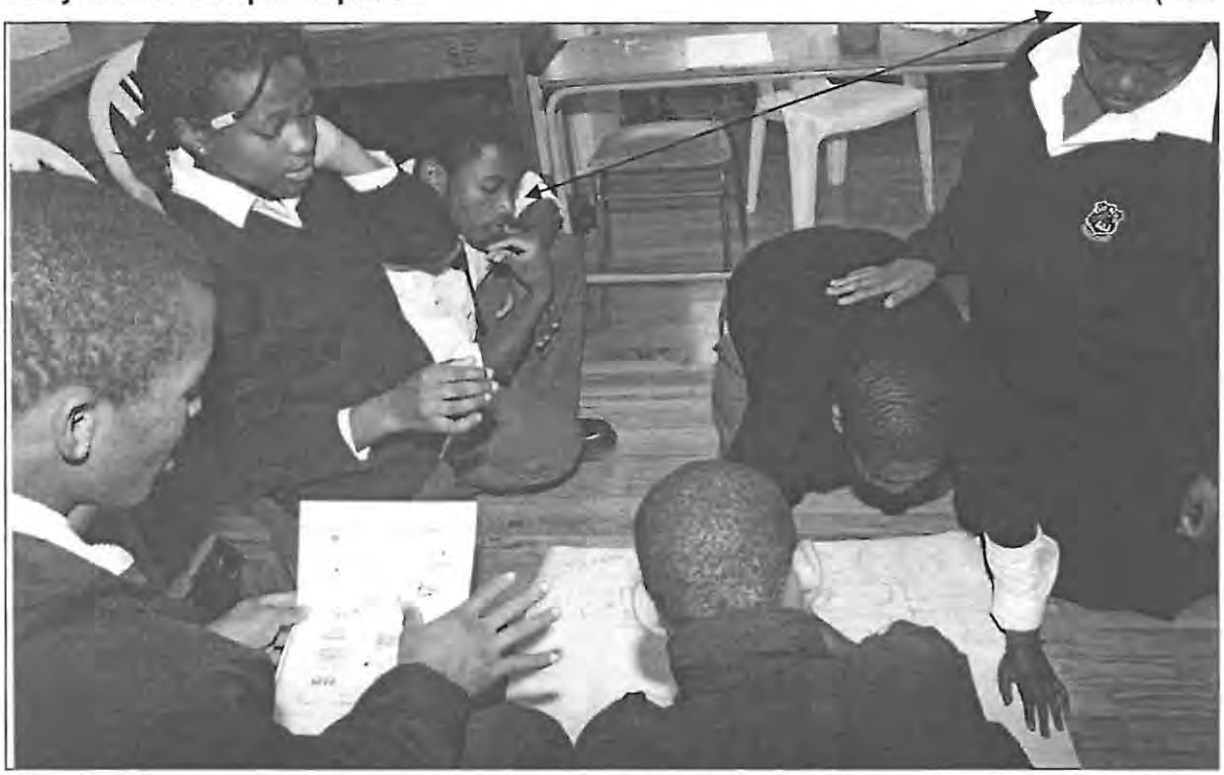
Individual and group dynamics affecting educational participation

Some participants were encouraged by the group mapping activity: Ronaldo reported "I definitely did feel part of the discussions ... because we first argued but eventually we came up with ideas on how to make the whole plan work out. My views were heard and it made me feel good when someone listens to me when I talk to them." (Q2L9). Other participants reflected the complex negotiations and highlighted issues around participatory activities. What emerged quite prominently was that some of the participants did not feel included in meaningful ways and were unable to contribute either for reasons of capability or through a sense of exclusion. One learner for example, felt that the reputation of the neighborhood where he lived was being disrespected (see case study on following page).

It was evident that some learners found it difficult to get involved in the deliberation around the map drawing. Engaging in an abstract representation of their world was unfamiliar for some participants and group consensus over how to spatially represent their communities in this participatory way was challenging. The few learners that felt disadvantaged, felt incapable of participating and to contribute meaningfully, and so remained 'out of the loop' as the others went ahead and developed a map without them.

Further limitations of group work became evident during the mapping process when 17 year old Thandiswa (Learner 12), suggested drawing individual maps, perhaps this was so that she could identify her own area to research and have more control over an environmental issue or concern that was meaningful to her, instead of having to collaborate with other ideas.

Case study: Jason and participation **Jason (Learner 2)**



Photograph 6: Learners drawing map of area around school, August 2004.

Jason felt unable to participate in the mapping activity because he felt his community had been undermined by the other learners in the group. Later, during the transect walk to his chosen area (Sun City), Jason was able to contribute meaningfully. His insights about the area were valuable to all the participants, indicative of the value of prior knowledge and experiential learning that takes place within social contexts and which depends on people's interactions and lived experiences. When asked to comment on the photograph above, Jason said "this was part of a forced combining to sketch our ideas". He also indicated that he would have preferred to have drawn a map individually rather than as part of a group.

> It was quite an experience to work out of the classroom and be active and learn from others, but when it came to the map drawing, the group didn't seem to be interested in my input. They seemed to 'dis'[disrespect] my neighborhood and I didn't like that. It was nice filming the activity to record the experiences and learn more from the visual photographs that we took (Q1L2).

This affected Jason's participation in the map drawing, he was able to participate with confidence when his chosen area (Sun City) was considered by the rest of the group and identified as a relevant place to research. During the walking to and discussions about Sun City, Jason was an authority on the area and was able to lead discussions. So although the political tension that emerged because Jason's neighborhood had been disrespected by some of the other learners, he was still able to contribute substantially later on during the transect walk. This supports the approach to use mutiple methods in order to increase inclusion of the participants.

Transect walks and discussion

After the transect walks, these two learners had positive reflections about the experience:

> I learned so much from the other learners on how they feel about the places we never even thought of and how the people lived there (eg, Sun City).
>
> Ronaldo (*L9)*

> I learned a lot about Sun City ... I did not even know that it existed. I also learned from Jason, he was talking about it when we were walking there.
>
> Thandiswa (*L12)*

The transect walks were deliberate walks into the community with the intention of finding out more about the area and the environmental concerns that were identified there, as well as to find out other relevant information such as the geographical location, estimated size, population density, poverty indicators, and economy of the area.

After the two transect walks to Sun City and Zolani informal settlements, the learners all agreed that this activity brought about new awareness of environmental and social conditions in an area that they frequently pass through, and about issues that they would otherwise not necessarily notice. Phalesa: "I remember we walked past water running on the ground and nobody knew where it came from. On our way... we came across another environmental issue, there was a stream running from a place we would like to know where [from]" (Q2L1). Neliswa remembered: "We came across a stream which came from somewhere and we were interested in finding out where it came from, and we came across a polluted area near a drain..." (Q2L4).

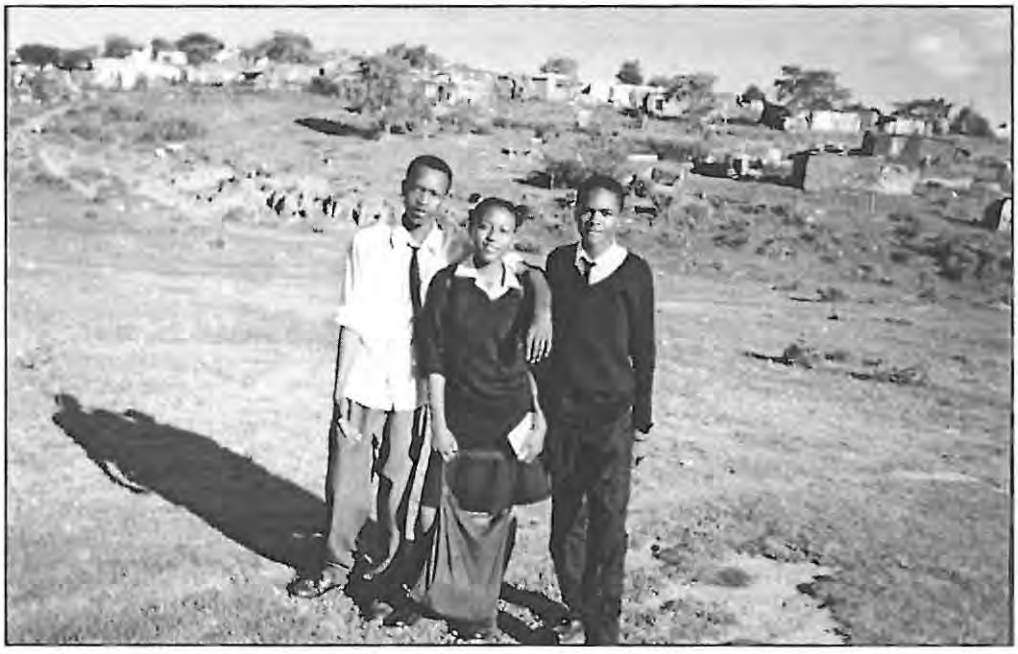
Photograph 7: Learners engaged in discussion about origins of water in stream, May 2005. Photograph by Katie Farrington.

The living conditions of the inhabitants of the community were also keenly noticed: "it's years [since this community has been here] and the Municipality doesn't supply taps and electricity." (Q2L6). As I was not able to be part of all conversations during these discussions, the learners' reflections proved very useful to me. They also served well to stimulate reflection and a deeper engagement with the activity in retrospect. When asked what they spoke about during the walking to these areas, and Jason said: "mainly issues that affect the community and the people in it, also environmental issues like pollution." (Q2L2). On the transect walk to Sun City informal settlement, Phumla noticed the remoteness of the settlement and the animals that people keep: "Sun City is like an excluded place on its own, like a farm or a place outside Grahamstown. I have never really seen it before so this was quite an eye opener that there is a place like this in my home town." (Q2L3). When asked if it is a good way to learn about an area, Peter said: "yes, because you walk around that particular community, they will always be memorised in your brain and you will remember them" (Q2L7). Thandiswa said: "I learned a lot about Sun City ... I did not even know that it existed. I also learned from Jason, he was talking about it when we were walking there." (Q2L12). And Ronaldo said: "I learned so much from the other learners on how they feel about the places we never even thought of and how the people lived there (eg, Sun City)." (Q2L9). Some mentioned that they noticed unsafe conditions when walking to the settlements, with men drinking and gangs in the area: "me and the girls were talking about the gangs that are there" (Q2L6), and "I remember seeing two old men drinking in their yard and as soon as they saw us they hid whatever they were drinking away." (Q2L4).

Photograph 8: Learners on transect walk to Sun City informal settlement, August 2004. Photograph by Katie Farrington.

Getting from place to place: walking as primary mode of transport

During the research process it became evident that people generally rely on walking to and from daily activities (school, church, friends, etc.), and an involvement in these activities hinged on the time and energy it took to get to and from different places. Many of the everyday interactions with the local environments involve walking, whether to school from home and back, to the local *spaza,* to church or homes of extended family members, school friends, or to participate in other social occasions. The movement between these places, with walking as the primary mode of transport, has the learners experiencing and interacting with the places they walk to and past with varying intensity and awareness. The walking around, to and from places is generally a social activity. Girls tended to walk together for reasons of personal safety as well as for companionship. The environmental awareness gained through this relatively casual but purposeful day-to-day movement varied according to the places encountered as well as according to how individuals experienced these processes. The relationships with these outdoor and informal learning spaces relies on both the social relations that are occurring at the time of interaction (walking through the area), and the memories of previous interactions in the particular context, whether they be in a social group or solitary. This sense of place has a significant influence on the attachments made to places and hence on the future agency of the learners.



Photograph 9: Peter, Phumla and Vuyani walking home, Zolani informal settlement in background. Photograph by Zolile (L8).

Photographs 10 & 11: Learners spending considerable time socialising on the streets. Photographs taken by Neliswa (L4) and Lisa (L13).

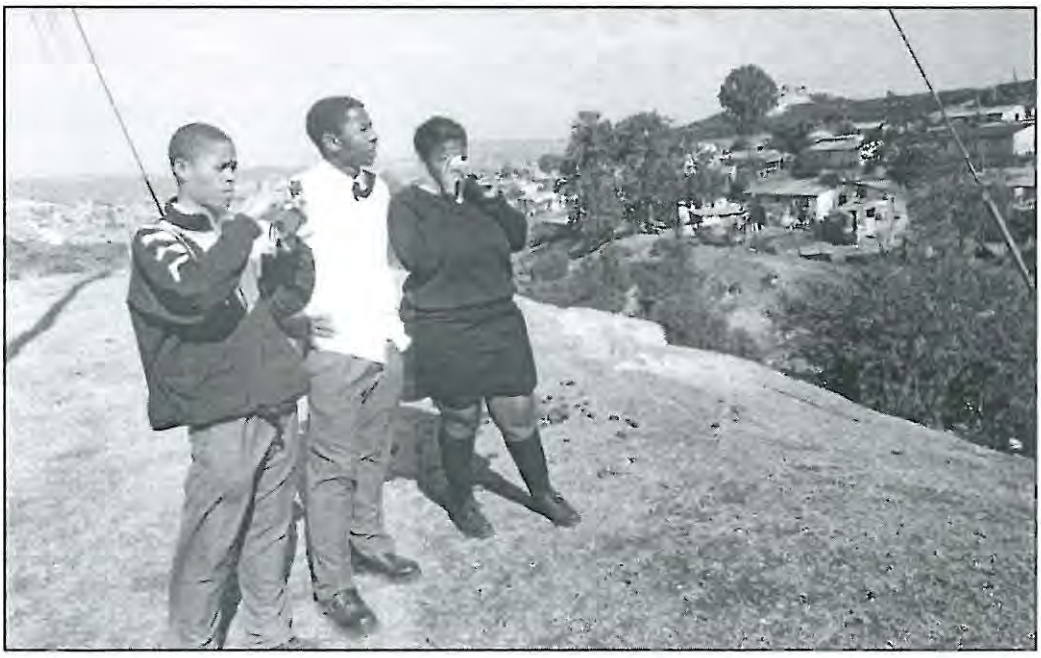
Impressions of transect walks

The majority of learners found learning about a new area interesting, Neliswa says "yes, you really get to see the real thing instead of hearing about it from other people, and as you find out more about the place it really gets interesting" (Q2L4). Others responded less enthusiastically and Nokuzola reflected that she knew of many places experiencing similar conditions: "I didn't know much about the area. I didn't care much because there are many places I know that are just like Zolani" (Q2L5).

Photography influencing the experience and the visual reminder of the experience

> [a photograph] it broadens my way of thinking about a place and it makes you think of a lot of things at the same time. The pictures help you notice things you've never noticed. Once you've noticed them, there are a lot of questions that follow.
>
> Phalesa (Q2L1)

Photography enhances the experience of place, as the place is looked at and considered differently through a process of signifying (selecting and capturing) visual images during the course of taking pictures. The process of selection through the lens is shaped in the experience of the situation, and in the process of selecting a particular frame, the experience influences, and is in turn influenced by, the picture taking process. The representation is then viewed once the photographs have been developed, and considered in terms of the place in mind, and the recollection of the experience and the place may then be understood in more depth. The learners reflected this appreciation of photography and learning: "when you walk around that particular community they [the photographs] will always be memorised in your brain and you will remember them always" (Q2L7). "pictures stay a long while, when we are passing through these places and not taking note" (Q2L6).



Photograph 13: Learners photographing at Sun City informal settlement, during a transect walk, August 2004. Photograph by Katie Farrington.

> To actually catch the environment and community on film is interesting and phenomenal. In the pictures you actually see what you did not realise. When I saw the photographs, I discovered that more houses have been built since the last month and more people moved in to this ever growing community.
>
> Jason (L2)

There is no doubt that the photographic activities were thoroughly enjoyed and embraced with much passion by all participants. They reflected on having learnt a great deal of new information about their environment and surrounding communities through the engagement with this visual medium. Zolile said this about using a camera: "When I looked through the lens, I noticed that some places have too much attention, more than others." (Q1L8). Ronaldo affirms this: "With the camera I enjoyed taking shots of the shacks, staggered upon each other which I never saw when I passed the area before"(Q1L9).

However, I would say that the passion for photography is partially due to some of the participants' enthusiasm for journalism – and as members of the school's 'Media Club' – and ideals around what it meant to them to be a photographer. The learners often mentioned that they were very proud of their new status as 'photographers', especially when others – usually those being photographed, recognised them as such. The novelty of the camera work also affected learners' enthusiasm for the picture taking process. Since only two of the participants had previously been involved in photography, there was a wonderful and exciting new world with which the learners were encouraged to engage, when they looked through the lens of a camera for the first time. There were also innumerable ways in which to capture and represent themselves and others using this new visual medium. During the year of photography, Peter for one, could not refrain from repeatedly photographing himself and his friends, with a few intermittent pictures of his community and environmental concerns. I will revisit this in the next chapter but it points to the novelty of a new means of expression. Perhaps this was especially so in Peter's case, given that he is the only learner who failed Grade 11 last year, and is to some extent, least able to express himself in English when asked to. He thus used the camera as an important aid to communicate his message. Peter also prefers to express himself through music, as his involvement with 'hip-hop' culture indicates.

Most participants reflected that photography was a useful and informative way of enhancing their experience of different places. The photographs also served as a reminder of what they had seen and experienced whilst visiting the areas. Noteworthy was Ronaldo's reflection which confirmed that viewing and talking about the photographs added another dimension to the experience: "When I looked at the photo's that we have taken, it showed things that we didn't see or talk about, we looked at the state of people are living in but not the circumstances that come with it, that most people are unemployed." (Q2L9). Evidently, working with the images brought more consideration of the circumstances of the people represented in the photographs. These insights only emerged upon viewing the photographs and upon reflection of the images. The deeper consideration is not fully realised when experiencing the event, only once Ronaldo was detached from the experience and reminded of the event after viewing the picture, was there greater meaning-making. Jason had a similar experience. When he observed his photographs he was reminded of why he decided to select the specific image to articulate meaning: "It truly takes me back to the mind state that I had when we were walking together discussing issues relevant to the community." Jason (Q2,L2).

Photograph 14: Simon (L11), a recent Xhosa initiate on the left, and Peter (L7) on the right, discuss their photographs during a preview at the beginning of 2005. This gave the new intake of participants a conceptual introduction which facilitated the photographing of their own environmental concerns. Photograph by Phumla (L3).

Education introduces environmental concepts

It became evident that through introduction to, and broader engagement with, global environmental issues, the learners were better able to identify and see the relevance of local environmental issues. The identification with the local due to education occurred primarily through interaction with learning content at school and through media exposure (television and magazines). As a participant and researcher, I also highlighted their environmental concerns and this was taken up by the individual learners and considered in more depth. The learners shared the experiences they had of local environmental matters and this broadened their perspectives and offered additional information about sense of place and local environmental concerns. The young adults were better able to identify and relate to local environmental risks after recognition of global issues, and this was predominantly done through media, school contact and my intervention. On one occasion, they were discussing the programmes that they liked to watch on television. Take 5 is a local programme about the issues affecting teenagers in South Africa and O-Zone, which has an environmental focus, are two programmes they mentioned watching. The youth described a few of the environmental concerns they had seen affecting people elsewhere in the world. They then articulated these concerns in their own and others' lives in their local contexts. It was apparent by the clarity displayed of concepts during discussions, that the contact through photography, transect walks and discussion made it easier for the group to consider ways in which to address the local environmental concerns.

It also became apparent that local concerns would be understood better by the participants if they had some way of knowing how others are engaging with these relatively enormous and common issues affecting their communities. In my interpretation, it is not that the learners lack conviction to engage and become active agents in their local environments, but it is in finding creative solutions and the resources to enable sustainable resolutions that constitutes the problem of communities not taking action.

Making sense of the photographic representations

To facilitate ease of analysis, I have drawn on four learners' photographic collages to look at their research methods more closely, and analyse in more detail. This will enable a more indepth understanding of how the learners have chosen to represent the identified areas and concerns. Here, I present the photo-collages of four participants, as exhibited during the National Arts Festival in July 2005.

Learner 2: Jason, 18 years old.
Area of research: Sun City informal settlement, established in mid 1980s.
Main concern: Living conditions of inhabitants: poverty, alcoholism, child abuse, pollution, lack of provision of services by municipality. These are Jason's reflections, which accompanied his photographs during the exhibition.

Sun City struck me as a place with issues unbearable to live with. One cannot really say that Sun City is an informal settlement because it has been there since the 1980s. But with lack of sanitation, water and electricity, pollution and joblessness and starvation, these factors discourage the youth in the area and they are tempted by crime and corruption. I walk through the settlement regularly and discover that some people have relationships between parents and children. These conditions demotivate the youth and children, this awful place which they call home.

The multi-issued community of Sun City face a lot of social issues and environmental issues linking up to one another and contributing to a lot of unhealthy conditions. My main concern is that people are not educated in the area so they cannot implement the knowledge to solve the prevailing issues and concerns. Environmental issues such as pollution and unhygienic conditions face new born infants. Social issues such as crime, gain their origins in joblessness and poverty. Concerns increase as the 'settlement' develops and gets bigger, but the standard of living is not getting better. The negative side of Sun City informal settlement dominates the positive, but there is a positive. People in the community are opening shops and selling their basic needs to survive, such as fruit and vegetables. Unemployment hits them hard, but they tend to fight it.

Photograph 15: Sun City Informal Settlement, 2005. Collage by Jason (L2).

Learner 6: Vuyani, aged 19

Area of research: Local neighbourhood

Main concern: Conditions of the present sewerage system and the slow rate of change.

Sanitation in Joza

The photographs that I took are all around my community in different places and streets. The place's name is Joza and this is where I live.

The issue is the sewerage problem and pollution. And the long period it is taking the Grahamstown Municipality to change from the old bucket system to supply water and flushing toilets. I am concerned because it makes my community look bad, dirty and it is unhealthy for children to play in the streets where all the dirt lies. This is my neighborhood and where I belong and this is why it means so much to me to see the place in such a state.

I wanted to show that I care about the community by taking photographs of the area. On a positive note, the municipality is finally starting to take action by replacing the old toilet system with new ones. They have also put up notice boards to remind people to stop polluting.

Photograph 16: Vuyani's (L6) collage of sewerage issues affecting residents in his neighborhood, 2005.

Learner 3: Phumla, aged 17
Area of research: Zolani informal settlement
Main concern: Living conditions

Zolani "be peaceful"

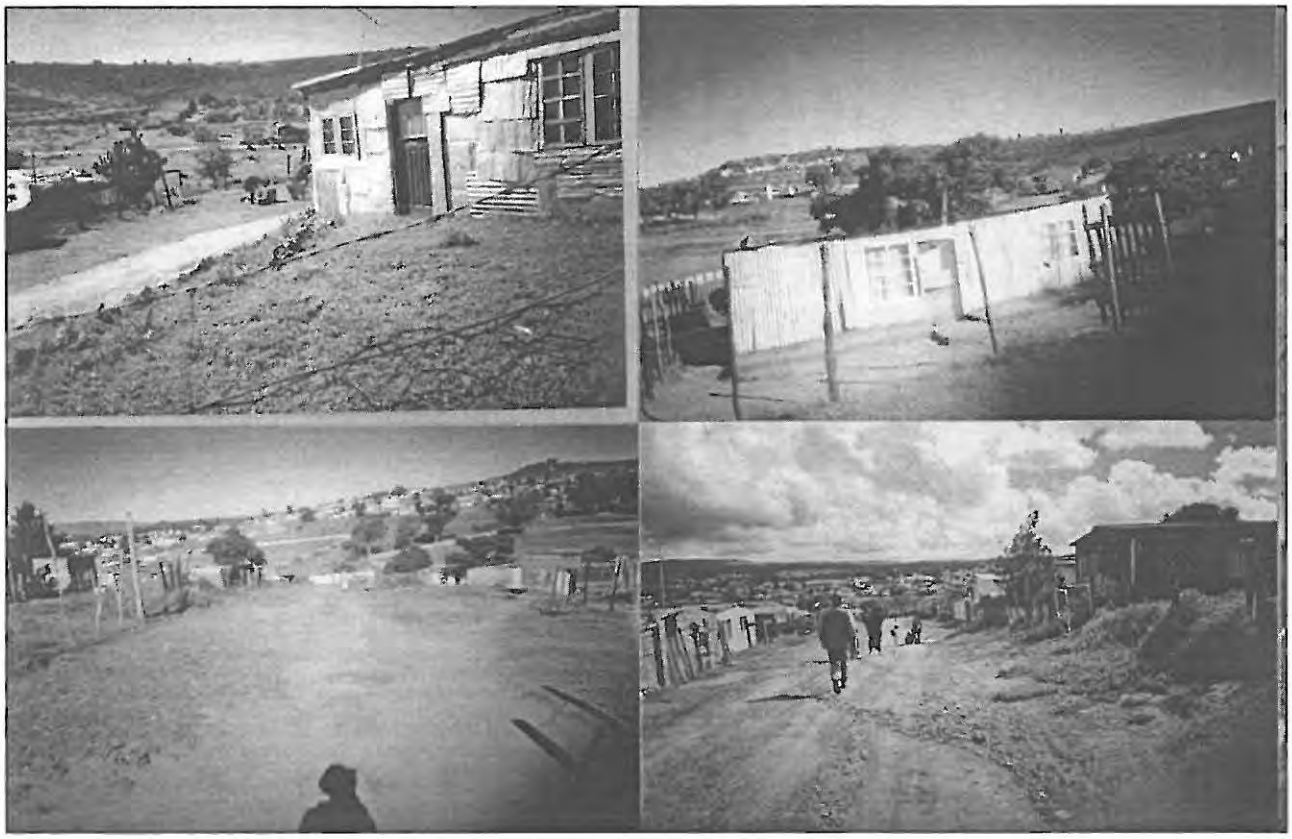
The environment that I have chosen is not far away from where I live. It is actually on my way to school. I chose this place because of its houses and its people. The houses, as you can see, are very informal because they are built of wattle and daub and some with pieces of zinc. This area is called Zolani meaning "be peaceful" and that's how it is – peaceful. From a place like this, one would expect a lot of corruption but ever since I known this place, I've never heard of any crimes being committed by anyone living here.

What attracted me to this place were the people living here. They may be living in informal settlements, using the bucket system toilets and having to share a tap, but they manage to have smiles on their faces everyday. I watch how they sit outside their homes, early in the morning, waiting for the sun, some listening to their wireless radios and some doing their day to day chores like the old lady in my photographs. They may be unhappy or poor but you will never be able to tell because of their friendliness.

Gogo, the old lady in my photographs, says she'd love to have a nice house one day, with electricity, running water, a flushing toilet and a roof that doesn't leak. She says this is only in her dreams.

Photograph 17: Living conditions of people in Xolani informal settlement, 2005. Photograph by Phumla (L3).

Photographs 18 (collage) & 19 (collage): Phumla's photo collages of Zolani informal settlement. Attention is given to children and an old lady who are photographed, note how the detail of the material used in building the home structures is highlighted, as well as the detail on the neighbouring homes and roads.



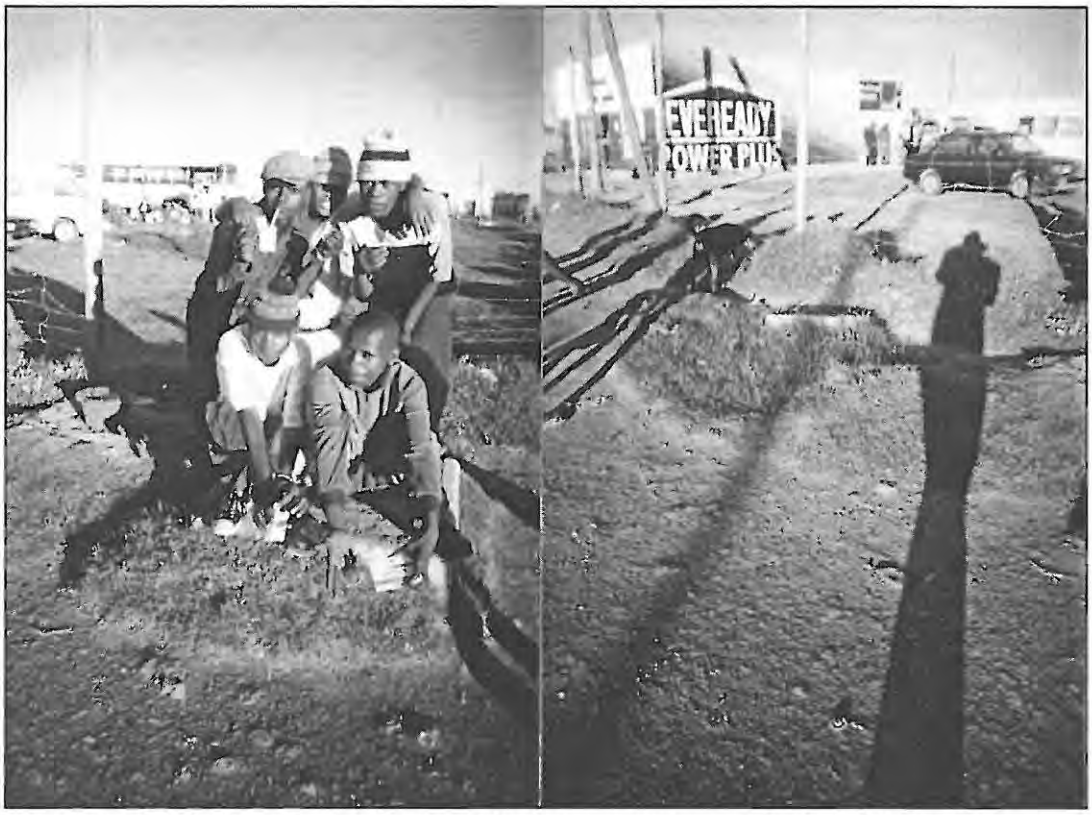
Learner 13: Lisa
Area of research: Extension 6
Main concern: Pollution and litter, crime and safety.

These photographs are taken around the area that I live, Extension 6.

What concerns me the most is that the municipality never cleans the areas around the location. There is so much pollution which could cause diseases. No one wants to stand up and complain about the jam. The councillors were selected for a purpose, but do they do their jobs? NO.

The other thing that gets me boiling is the gang that stands around the shops and asks people for money. They intimidate people just to feed their nasty habits. If you don't give them money that they want, they'll do you at night when no one is around. These guys are so young but they have nothing better to do but to sit around corners. Where is this generation going to? We have the opportunities but we don't use them.

I wanted to show people that it isn't easy living in the location. I took these photographs because that is what concerns me the most in my area. These pictures mean a lot to me because it was dangerous for me to approach the gang and ask them if I could take their picture. The photos deal with the real issues that affect the community as a whole and they tell a lot about how things are done and what some of the youth are up to. I wanted to show these photographs because the location isn't what people think it is. They shouldn't have misconceptions about how we live.



Photographs 20 & 21: The street gang who 'hangs out' near Lisa's (L13) local spaza, 2005.

Styles of representation

Phumla has a particularly sentimental photographic style evident in her attention to aesthetic detail in the photographs. This is done with the sensitive selection and capturing of soft lighting and attractive colours and landscape scenes. This style is echoed in her writing style and content: "They may be living in informal settlements, using the bucket system toilets and having to share a tap, but they manage to have smiles on their faces everyday" (R1,L3). The style may point to an initial and relatively superficial scanning of the situation by Phumla. With more involved research, the real life stories would begin to become known through her closer interactions with the people and the place.

It is only through ongoing interaction with the people of Sun City informal settlement that Jason has developed a more intense concern for, and identification with, the people living there. Phumla is familiar with the area of Zolani because of her daily walking to and from school through the area. The level of identification with the places chosen by the individual learners is apparent in their photographic representations. Phumla was not able to enter into the homes of the people she was photographing, unlike Jason who felt accepted there and was more comfortable entering the homes of the inhabitants.

Lisa's representation, left, of the gang member at the local spaza shop clearly shows her fear and apprehension as a young woman. She expresses this using shadows creating an element of intrigue and of the unknown. The gang member has an imposing figure and posture . He is presented with a confident bold posture and the hat

Photograph 22: Gang member at the *spaza* shop, 2005. Photrograph by Lisa (L13).

may indicate that this man has gone through the Xhosa 'initiation' rite of passage, with the new status of manhood which comes with certain gendered rights. His dominance is exaggerated by his size in the frame and by the lower angle of view from which the photograph was taken. This dominance is enhanced by the bold graphic lines of the building and sign writing in the background, which draw attention to the person. Collectively, these photographs express what the learner was hoping to articulate, that the area is seen as dangerous by young women and children.

Multiple and multi-layered identifications with place

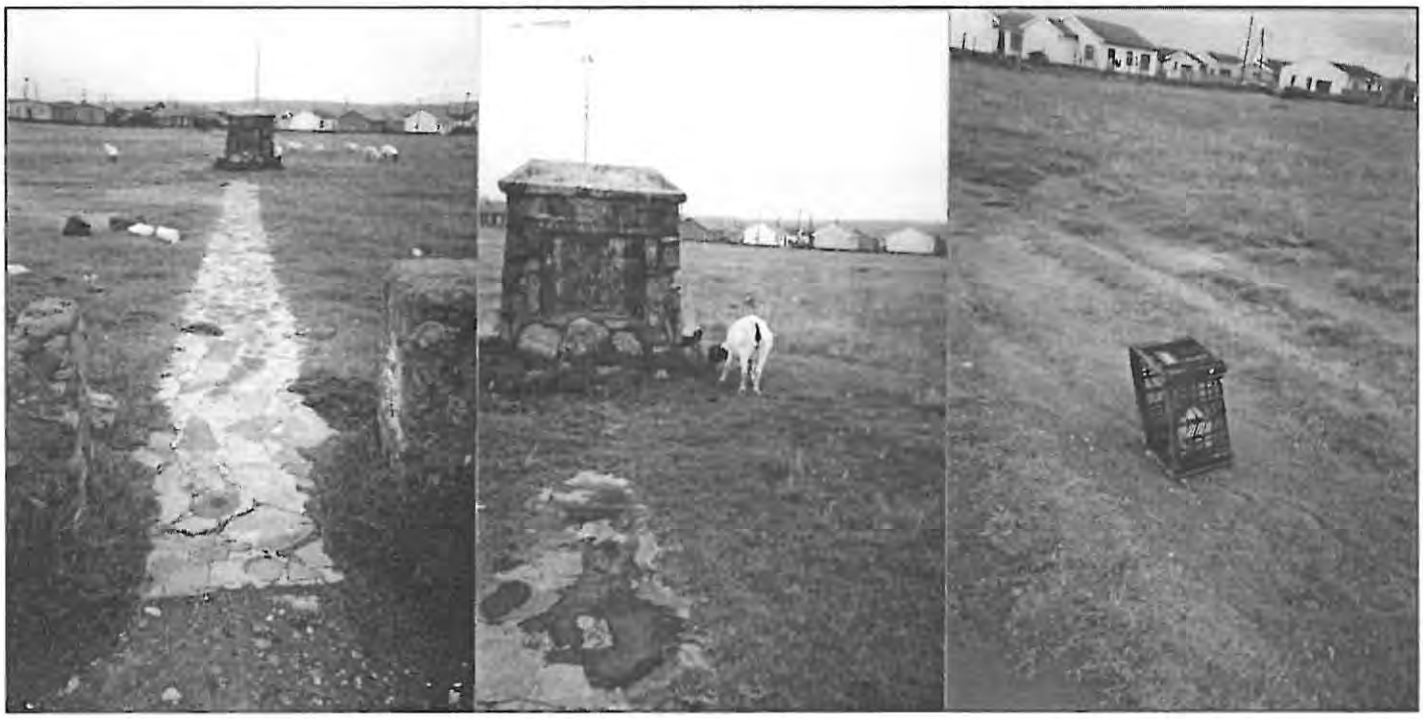
Phalesa (L1), spoke out strongly against western Christian religion for undermining local customary spiritual beliefs and practices, during a focus group meeting in May, 2005. Most significantly, that "it's a shame", that young men are not interested in the traditional practice of *iintonga* (stick fighting). During this focus group discussion, Peter (L7) concurred with Phalesa that local custom and practice was more meaningful. It should be mentioned that the learners were not always aware of the temporal changing nature of customs and practices and that their lives were indeed part of a transforming culture, allowing them to integrate modern life with older, often more meaningful ways. Peter, for example, effectively integrates contemporary practices in the form of rap music and hip-hop culture into his more traditional lifestyle. The dual and hybrid nature of identities is elaborated on in more detail in Chapter 5.

Photograph 23: Young women in church attire, 2005. Photograph by Vuyani (L6).

Here there emerges a strong link between sense of place and cultural identification, between the traditional rituals and practices that are "part of who we are" Peter (L7), and the places in which these take place. This tendency towards strong cultural identification and the ability to adapt to multiple, often opposing, identities has emerged in many of the representations produced.

Photograph 24: Vuyani's (L6) collage shows the integration of traditional and Western spirituality, and the space for social interaction that is offered, to varying degrees, in both these domains. Evidence is shown here of the easily adopting and adaptation of these conventionally disparate approaches, in the dress of Vuyani's Mother and Grandmother (top left).

The photographs below show the connections made between Phalesa's chosen environmental concern and her social attachments. Phalesa (L1), photographed the vandalism and disregard for graveyards in her neighbourhood. It could be argued that this concern is linked to the strong social connection she has with traditional custom and practice. The family ritual, on the next page, also indicates this in her attention to all the details of fermenting the beer, the details of her home and an involvement in the ritual also point to the significance of these activities for her. Incidentally, of the 7 female participants, Phalesa was most concerned with keeping a strong sense of Xhosa heritage and with continuing the practices that strengthen social ties between family and ancestors. This may well have influenced her choice of environmental concern, the place where the ancestors are 'laid to rest'. I recall noticing the fashionable braids in two of the female participants' hair and I asked them when they had been to the hairdresser. Phalesa proudly announced that hers were natural braids and not artificial, this is another indication of how young people are integrating modern and 'natural' approaches to hairstyling.



Photograph 25: Phalesa (L1) chose to photograph the local graveyard in Extension 7 and showed the vandalism graves and lack of maintenance of the grounds, 2005.

Photograph 26: Phalesa's (L1) photographic collage included these photographs of her involvement in the preparations of fermented food and beverages, during a family ritual which took place at her home.

Links between social and environmental issues

The environmental concerns that the learners identified were by and large linked to their concerns for the well-being of the inhabitants of their communities. Personal safety, poverty and poor living conditions were highlighted. These were emphasised because of their personal experiences (directly or indirectly) with crime, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, living without basic sanitation and access to water, and inadequate housing. The sustainability and survival of others (often in worse situations than themselves) was predominantly what motivated the learners to 'take up' the issues of pollution, sewerage and waste.

Photograph 27: Young adults aspiring to lifestyles of consumption and individualism is reflected here, as these young adults photograph each other in front of an expensive car. There is an individualism in pose which points to the influence of the media. How the young ladies present themselves relates to their identification with national and even global media. Photograph by Neliswa (L4).

Learners as responsible adults

The data reflect that relatively mature responsibilities had been expected of, and taken up by the learners from an early age.,These included childminding, household chores, feeding the family, and in Peter's case looking after and providing for his younger cousins (Peter had financial assistance from his Uncle who lived in Port Elizabeth). Their map drawings, and their written reflections strongly indicate the need for a place where they could 'be themselves' and to act as they wished, to get away from the burden of household responsibilities. During the individual map drawing of places during the pilot phase of the research, Phumla wrote: "I've chosen this place [at school] because here I get to socialise with friends, get to act my age and feel free being amongst my peers. I enjoy myself and forget about the problems that might be at home." (R1L3). Tanya writes about her home with great affection, as a place where she feels most secure. She mentions her home as a place where she could be herself and not be disturbed, she says: "I feel secure when I am at home, it's a place where I know no-one will attack me... I feel really safe" (R1L10). She also expresses pride in the family garden: "There is something which I am proud of and that is the garden next to my house... because the things that are in the garden are the

food that my parents keep me healthy with, also the flowers make the home look more beautiful" (R1L10).

Simon spoke a great deal about the enjoyment he got from being alone in nature. He mentioned the open spaces around his home where he enjoys spending time, as they remind him of his journey to Cape Town and the expansive view of the landscape from a bridge en route (R1L11). These places and spending time alone also gave him the opportunity to be himself. Jason enjoyed the isolation he felt amongst the books in the public library, and mentioned how the books felt like his friends and family. It is interesting that the boys were inclined to prefer solitary places, whilst the girls were comforted by friends, family and the safety of home (R1L2). Peter who lives with younger relatives who are presumably unable to offer him much comfort and security pointed out the importance of friends filling this role: "I feel free to do anything, to say anything, to go anywhere with them, and I feel protected... I like to sing hip-hop music with them and send a message to the youth" (R1L7).

The heightened awareness of social ills contributes to an air of responsibility expected of the young adults at this age, living in the socio-economic climate particular in former Department of Education and Training school communities (previously disadvantaged communities). These concerns are reflected in the following excerpts taken from the Mary Waters High School newspaper (MAWA's voice), produced in 2004 by the Media Club at the school. Many of the participants of this research group are members of the media club. The selection gives insights into local youth culture and the choices and associated dilemmas that the youth face living in Grahamstown.

HIP-HOP: THE ILL vs THE PHAT
By Jason

> "Some say it's a freedom of expression. Some say it's an individual culture. Many say it's an imitation from TV. The elders say it has a bad influence on kids and the world will be destroyed 'tomorrow'."

KILLING ME SOFTLY
By Phumla

> "Many people, young and old, around the world are sick and tired of hearing about HIV/AIDS. They feel that they know enough. Yes, hearing about it can get boring sometimes..."

RACISM AT SCHOOLS
By Jason

> "Education is part of your life; it determines your future and where you are going to end up in later days...what people don't know is that some people experience racism in a racially mixed school. Education is everybody's right! Our school, which is in the coloured area in Grahamstown experiences racism between Xhosa and Afrikaans speaking learners".

ALTERED SPIRITS: LATE NIGHTS ON DESOLATE STREETS
By Rene

> "Young people that belong at home are prowling the deserted streets. There is a lack of dedication and commitment in our church... Teenagers don't want to become actively involved in church activities".

JUMPING BUNKS
By Zolile

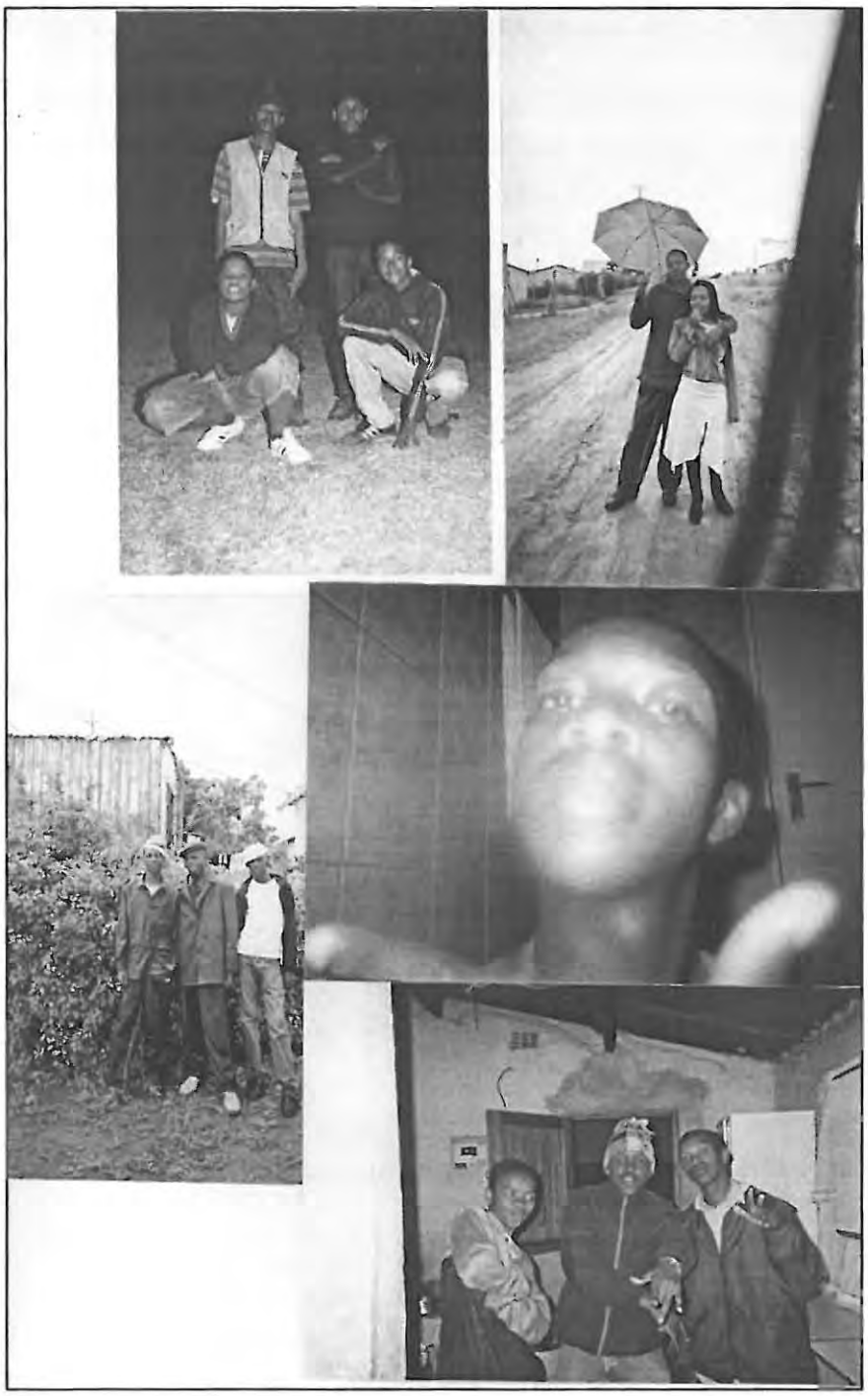
> "Whenever a workshop facilitator is asked about problems facing schools concerning learners, 'bunking classes' always seems to be at the top of the agenda. Bunking appears to be the latest unstoppable evil super villain as in dragonballz".

Living in a socially and environmentally disadvantaged community has bearings on the youth's attention to their futures, as suggested in the Daily Dispatch (16 June, 2005) newspaper clippings, see Appendix 3. The first article reflects the perspectives of the youth living in Duncan Village, a township area neighbouring East London in the Eastern Cape. The second article reflects the ambitions of learners from various privileged schools in East London. These reflect ambitions that are not contingent on affordability or access to higher education, but rest on the access these pupils have had to various careers through role models and privileged access such as school trips. The inequalities experienced in terms of education and socio-economic backgrounds arguably affect self motivation and the knowledge available to them at school leaving age, of future opportunities.

The social significance of place

During the mapping session, Peter drew himself in between his two friends and as part of a rap group. It is likely that he considers himself of fundamental importance to the band, but more significantly that his place is a socially constituted one, not one particularly attached to a physical location. This emerged compellingly in many of the maps drawn by other participants, that the experience of the place is contingent on the social connections with that place. Peter's collage on the following page indicates the reliance on his friends

and the attachment to the social places on which his sense of place relies. Similarly in Thandiswa's drawing of her imagined place, she highlights aspects of her life that she would like to incorporate and parts that she may not be experiencing. Here, people are significant to the meaningfulness of place. The socially situated identification with place is a strong theme emerging throughout the research and is reflected on in more depth during the discussion chapter (Chapter 5).

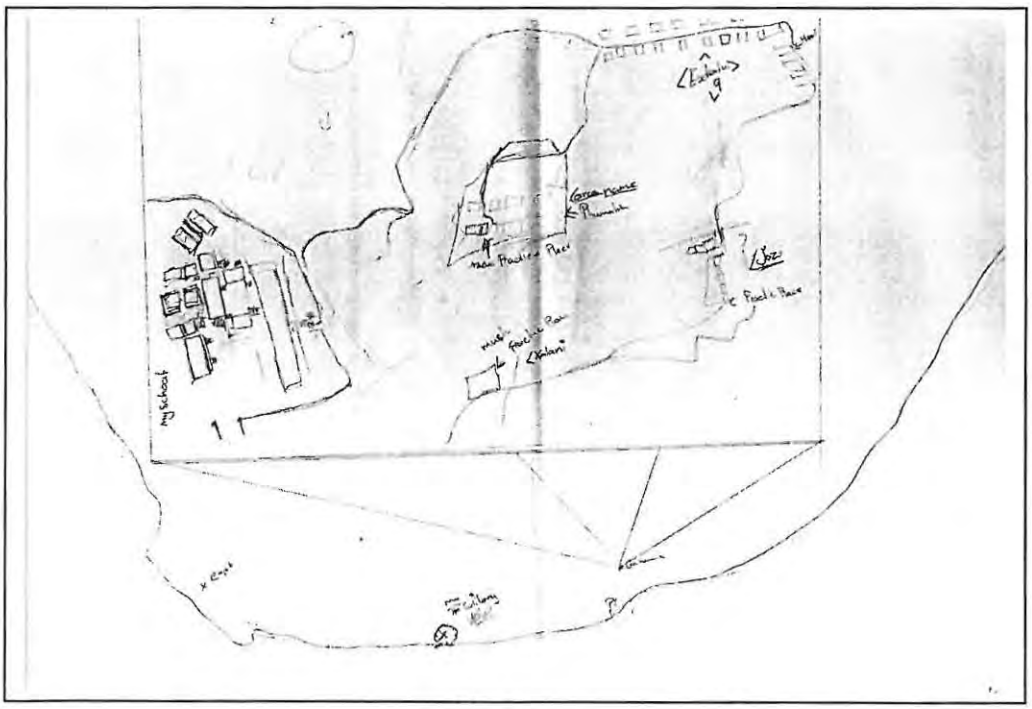


Photograph 28: Peter's (L7) photo collage shows his pre-occupation with friends and his own self portraits, these few photographs summarize his theme around 'place', and the significance of people in making place meaningful.

Generational knowledge of places from memory

Simon (map below) wrote and spoke about what he called 'my view' which was situated between Grahamstown and Cape Town. He spoke about the connections he had with the Cape Town countryside and how he thought it held special meaning because his parents had grown up there. This relates to the power inherent in memories of places and how the stories of places may be passed down from one generation to the next. Simon was the only learner who identified a meaningful place that was located outside Grahamstown.

Photograph 29: Simon's (L11) self portrait: my place in nature, and below; Simon's map of his place.



Nokuzola decided to photograph the town of Alicedale because she felt connected to the area through the stories she had heard and her trips to the town when she visited her grandmother and extended family members who still live there. Here she describes the transformations that are occurring in Alicedale since investors have bought property there and developed the town.

The town of Alicedale

These pictures were taken in Alicedale, a very small town just outside Grahamstown which has recently been developed and built up by a property developer linked to the game farms in the area. This is where my Grandmother was born and raised. What is amazing about this town is that it was once a minor and un-recognised place which is now a major tourist attraction. The photographs depict the place before these improvements and after many people have gained a lot from all these developments. New jobs have been created in order to boost the town's economy, but at the same time, even though all these developments have occurred, not everyone is benefiting from them as some of the community are still living in poor conditions. And although people are living in poverty, boys keep busy playing soccer and other community services such as wood work, instead of turning to crime.

Her photographs on the next page, articulate a certain nostalgia that is part of the memories of how things were – passed down from her Grandmother. The first layer of images was photographed inside the museum in Alicedale of old photographs taken in the area. These are juxtaposed with pictures of the new developments which express hope for a more prosperous future for the people of the town. The photographs are interesting because of the overlaying of different stories, by way of double exposures, on the one hand express sentimental landscapes, and on the other hand the possibility for future developments.

Photographs 30: Double-exposed representation of Alicedale, 2005, by Nokuzola (L5).

4.4 Conclusion

This Chapter presents the data collected during the 15 month period of the study. I have attempted to draw out themes that are of relevance to the research question posed and also to highlight common threads that indirectly relate to the investigation into sense of place. The main themes emerging from this collection emphasise the substantial social and cultural components which constitute sense of place.

The place-based activities (mapping, transect walks, discussion and photography) were particularly successful for enabling an improved grasp of local environmental issues during this study. The technical competencies of the learners were enhanced as the study progressed. The conceptual competencies were developed and witnessed in the articulation of the various environments through written reflections and representations. The ability to work with spatial and visual concepts was also encouraged as the project developed and as the confidence of the participants grew. The level of environmental engagement and awareness matured as increased interactions ensued in the participants' communities. Ideas about environmental issues were established and resolutions considered and thus the environmental competency developed. These stages developed

through a generative involvement with activities, and were articulated through their representations in the various media.

For this study, I was unable to consider more fully many of the issues that arose during the course of the project and the prolonged period of research engagement. These issues concern social status, such as the social exclusion of poorer youth, gender biases, race, HIV/AIDS and pressures that influence the suicide rate amongst young adults. Due to the relatively privileged nature of the group of young adults in this study, and also due to the sensitive and personal nature of these particular issues, they did not come to the fore as predominant concerns during the study.

CHAPTER 5

Youth identity, place and globalisation

Young people at home, 2005. Photographs by Neliswa (left) and Nokuzola (right).

> Histories of place are never just a straightforward accounting of 'the facts'. Like the life histories with which they are closely intertwined, they are always multiple, contested, deeply politicised, produced in specific contexts, and made to serve the needs of the present.
>
> (Hart, G., 2002: 9)

5.1 Introduction

Through interactions and visual engagements with place in collaboration with the research participants, I was provided with glimpses into the home, community and learning contexts of the youth. This backdrop informs my insights into the way that young people situate themselves in their local environment and make choices and changes in their daily lives that are meaningful to them as young adults.

Efforts to understand how young people use their environments for socialisation, for learning and for recreation have increasingly supported the application of alternative and visual methods of enquiry. Burke (2004) asserts that it is appropriate for young people to use a visual means of representation when interpreting the environment, as the sensory experience is congruent with the visual representation of it.

> An exploration of children's environments naturally leads to visual methods of enquiry since the dimensions and dynamics of children's relationship to place and space is more easily described in imagery than in text.
>
> (Burke, 2004: 2)

At the same time, the perspectives and insights of researchers working in the field with young people and associated theoretical developments have proved invaluable for a broader understanding of what it is that young people identify with in their lived worlds. In this chapter I relate relevant theoretical contributions to the context of this research project, and the perspectives of the young people involved in the researching of in their own communities.

Whilst some researchers have recently become concerned with the local context of the research site and place-based activities (Taylor, 2005; Bishop, 2004), others have shown an interest in youth and children more broadly, researching various sites around the world (Driskell, 2002; Chawla, 2002). There is also interest in young people's perception of place in built environments (such as inner cities) and some studies employ photographic records produced by young research participants (Burke, 2004; Clark, 2004). Other researchers emphasise the engagement of young people in environment through participatory activities (Hart, 1997; Driskell, 2002). At the same time, theoretical developments have noted the

importance of the local integration of global aspects of everyday life by social theorists such as Giddens (1999) and Appadurai (2000). Research has only recently been conducted amongst young adults in the post-1994 South African context, that integrates these concerns and foci (Soudien, 2004; Coetzee, 1999; Wasserman & Jacobs, 2003; Strelitz, 2003). I have drawn on many of these perspectives in interpreting the data that have emerged from my interactions with the youth in the course of this study.

I begin this chapter discussing how the use of visual and place-based activities might be helpful in deepening and shaping everyday engagement with local environments. To understand sense of place in local and global contexts, I consider how the young adults in a small town in South Africa relate to global processes of modernisation, as I understand these processes 'playing out' in this context. I then discuss the local integration of global identities, perceptions of the future, concerns and potential pitfalls around identification with place, and the associated potential for environmental agency. I conclude by discussing the benefits of greater emphasis on learning that takes into account local contexts and that is enabled through the involvement of place-based and visual engagement.

5.2 Place – making

The place-based activities that the learners engaged in during the research project, provided them with alternative skills to engage and reflect on local environmental concerns and to recognise the different perspectives and approaches of their peers. The deeper level of engagement with their local environments that developed in work with visual representations and transect walks, enabled the application of competence to further probe issues and risks in local arenas as well as those foreign to their own (for example, cities or rural areas) in the future.

Due to the situated nature of the place-based visual activities, and because the activities were to some extent self guided and made use of alternative literacies, they offered new opportunities for engagements with place, in ways meaningful to the participants. Without the insights gained through use of visual media to develop a deeper engagement by the young adults, environmental education processes and research in this field will not be grounded in, and informed by, the social and historical realities of the participants.

As appropriate locations in which to conduct environmental learning activities, local places offer physical familiarity as well as social identification (Bishop, 2004: 65). The contextualisation of learning actions is an important dimension to environmental education, as learning that takes place in one's own locale is most likely to provide grounds for responsible competence in the future, whether in local or global situations. Bishop (2004) acknowledges that a strong identification with place requires a different level of interaction with local places and this will provide the "skills to live well anywhere" (Bishop, 2004: 65). She makes use of storytelling and the study of local literature, drawing on the 'power of community' for improving identification with place. This draws attention to the social significance of representation and relates it to the possibility for enhanced identifications with place. One has to be cautious however, that although it is important to make resilient identifications with places in order to provide caring relationships, this approach could be in danger of being 'separatist' in approach. Massey (2005: 132) and Cresswell (2004: 11), both affirm that ownership of place could potentially describe an 'othering' of those who do not 'belong' there – whether physically or socially/culturally.

In a modernising world, one has to acknowledge and reconcile these ambivalent spaces of, on the one hand, becoming inducted into indifference because of 'a global sense of place' (Massey, 2005: 131), a place that encourages the interconnections and interwoven stories that make place, but that disallow proper attachments and meaningful connections to anything at all because they are shifting; and on the other hand; balancing the obsessive protection of local places, that disallows the inclusion of others, a romanticising of place to conserve and prevent change, which has the potential danger of prohibiting 'outsider' influence. Memories of place may also be affected in this way – physical and cultural memories – an essentialising that concerns the important but contentious arena of indigenous places and ways of knowing in South Africa – those that are informed by memories of places, without heeding the potential for parochial and inward-looking approaches to environmental learning processes. To encourage responsible agency, it is important to bear in mind that local places, such as homes, schools, neighbourhoods, suburbs and towns, remain distinct and valuable for working in situated learning arenas (Taylor, 2005: 15). This is important so as not to become trapped in post-modern relativism and indifference.

Massey articulates this ambivalence of contemporaneous notions of place in an increasingly interconnected world;

> In the context of a world ... the notion of place (usually evoked as 'local place') has come to have totemic resonance. Its symbolic value is endlessly mobilised in political argument. For some it is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as 'the global' spins its ever more powerful and alienating webs. For others, a 'retreat to place' represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions. Place, on this reading, is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference. It is a politically conservative haven, an essentialising basis for a response; one that fails to address the real forces at work.
>
> (Massey, 2005: 6)

A familiar local context not only has pleasurable memories and ideals of how the community centre/ public playground/ street once was to play in, it also embodies qualities of how it could be, hopes for the future. There are memories of social interactions from childhood, and memories of being in the environment when passing through on the way to school and back for example. These all contribute to commitment to, and sustainable interaction in and with a place. There are commonalities here between my use of sense of place and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus.* Both are closely concerned with social structure and embodiment. Hillier & Rooksby (2002) question the relevance of *habitus* in a globalising world as much of place-making can be questioned as people become more mobile. How effective are the controls of the 'commonplace way we do things' when these are being altered and influenced by a melting pot of constantly changing choices? Hillier & Rooksby alert us to the role of *habitus* as a form of resistance, a socially anchored 'place-making' and an apparent foil, in times of post-modern relativism. Cresswell (in Hubbard, *et al.,* 2004: 61) relates the body to space through *habitus.* He suggests that "place, territory and landscape are constitutive of social life because they relate the body to space through *habitus*". These notions of place are reflected in the context of my research as the learners integrate the global into their local life-worlds, while remaining grounded by social norms and practice, those comfortable and comforting *habitus* that allow the 'everyday' of practice to go on.

How is space for the inclusion of different environmental perspectives encouraged in post-apartheid South Africa, while at the same time getting groups of people to take collective responsibility for local places? The places that the participants chose to research, were in most part, identifications which were meaningful precisely because of their daily interaction (including social interaction) with these places, by walking through and in noticing certain environmental concerns or deficiencies in these places. It is significant that all concerns they identified were within close proximity to the learners' homes, so that there was a certain familiarity with, and commitment to, them.

5.3 Deeper engagement through place-based activities

Each stage of conducting these research activities (in the order of maps, walks, discussion, photographs and reflections) was important in establishing identification with local places. Each stage also served as an indicator of how well the participants knew their respective places, and then fed into the next stage. The written reflections at the end of the research journey produced insights into how well the learners understood the environmental concern, how much they learnt through the activities, and also provided stimulation in developing an interpretive understanding that was written and verbalised.

There was much deliberation as the learners spoke about which areas to include in the mapping exercise, as well as debate among different participants during the transect walking. They reflected on how this process of encountering places through their own and others' memories, and experiencing them through their senses and social interactions, opened new avenues for learning. The usual interaction between the participants and these places when walking through them with the intention of getting to school, was informal and relaxed. The transect experiences appeared to contribute significantly to their sense of place because of the deliberate interpretive nature of their interactions.

Place-based activities are known for offering experiential encounters, and many environmental researchers have reported on the value of using them with people of all ages (Bishop, 2004; Hart, 1997; Driskell, 2002; Taylor, 2005). The written reflections by the participants provided evidence of the efficacy of this research technique, in enabling more in-depth information through multiple perspectives of place through the visual, verbal and experiential actions. They also reflected the social nature of the activity and how

others' memories act as reminders of similar occasions or places. The importance of this interaction with each other was probably the highlight of the conversations amongst the participants, and was reflected upon as the most positive aspect of the transect walk.

The activities employed during this research project were not only diverse because they took place in different physical places, but the qualitative richness was established further because the participants were considering different literacies and perspectives for engagement. These covered the visual, spatial, social, compositional and verbal spheres of communication, each sphere bringing a different and useful conceptual tool and perspective to bear on the subject matter, thereby contributing to the enhanced understanding of place. As Cooper articulates "developing a sense of your environment involves observing and talking about its main characteristics, becoming articulate about what you like (or dislike) about it, maybe recording it in drawings, plans, models" (Cooper, 2004: 11). Cooper also confirms that the usefulness of investigating places lies in the interaction with the tacit, the experiential, through touch, feel, see and reinforcing, or realising the sense of place through talking and/or writing/ photographic representations. Reflection and articulation of the experiential is an important part of realising it. She not only confirms the significance of this space to reflect on learning activities, but affirms that levels of literacy, and these include geographical and visual literacies, are improved through these various 'multimodal' forms of interaction. Cooper (1995: 11), argues that these experiences also provide "concrete starting points for later symbolic and abstract thought". The advantages of multimodal approaches to research are confirmed by Norton (2005).

The relational component of the activities conducted significantly contributed to understanding the complexity of each of the places, as it expressed stories relating to previous experiences and past memories. This social learning about place through relatively open-ended conversations can be significant and the relational or social space importantly affects the identifications made with physical places. It is in these places that environmental agency may emerge and be enacted.

5.4 A changing social environment

A number of writers have expressed concern about the rapid global transformations that are imposing change at a local level and which affect local attachments to culture and place. Giddens has drawn our attention to the ways in which traditional life and modernity are integrated in a First World context. He notes that increasing urbanisation and the associated cosmopolitan market-driven lifestyles, intermeshed with the growing global society, has precipitated a move away from traditional patterns of social inter-dependance. He argues that the support structures of family and tradition are, to some extent, being exchanged for support offered by materialist lifestyles which provide more incentive for independence and freedom of choice. For example, modernisation and technological advancement have meant that meaningful jobs are not as easily available and no longer secured for life (Giddens, 1999:47).

This line of argument encouraged me to probe the local attachments to place and sense of place amongst the youth in Grahamstown, which is a peri-urban centre with a considerable amount of rural infiltration and traditional influence (Manona, 1988). The young adults in this research context are exposed to globalising trajectories, those that exemplify individualism and material wealth, such as fashionable clothing, cell-phone trends and the latest sports cars on the market. Their aspirations of securing a good education and well-paid jobs would potentially necessitate moving to a larger urban centre. Such an imperative is hard to reconcile with the attachments to local places (social and physical places) which are reflected in traditional customary practice, and with which most of the young people in the study maintain a committed identification. These trajectories of 'modern' and 'traditional' are often considered disjunctive and encourage young adults to, on the one hand maintain involvement with traditional culture, and on the other hand, experiment with an ever greater eclectic mix of the interchangeable bits and pieces of popular culture. For the most part, these seemingly diverse paths are thought to be competing structures controlling, and of threat to, each other.

During the research process I developed an understanding of the young adults' enthusiastic and highly politicised social agendas. The meaning-making interactions amongst the youth in this study embodied freedom of choice as they described contradictions such as living with strong connections to local custom and practice, whilst

simultaneously embracing new forms of cultural identification such as hip-hop music. They welcomed change, contested some norms of practice, and contemplated future lifestyle and career options with aspirations that are informed by globally distributed media. The ease with which the young adults were able to maintain multiple identifications within global cultures (which stress change, opportunity and flexibility) and local cultures (which offer security and stability) appeared seamless and effortless. They were, for example, able to shift between, and integrate, identifications with globally informed aspirations and future desires, as well as locally informed attachments to rituals and beliefs. Through them, developing orientations and choices shape a hybrid youth identity that is constantly evolving and changing. This hybrid youth culture experienced by many young adults in this study has not, however, generally been fully realised by them. They may be entertaining multiple identities and exciting new opportunities for their futures, but they are not yet responsible adults as breadwinners and parents, for example. Their futures are still to be realised, and aspirations and challenges of adulthood have not yet been experienced in practice.

Change can be a difficult adjustment at any age, but it appeared to be an exciting prospect for the research participants as they welcomed the change that comes with leaving school and possibly home. They embraced a putative anticipated control over their futures as though starting afresh with limitless possibilities and opportunities to improve their lives – out of poverty and into a lifestyle of consumption, individualism and fast cars. Their agency and confidence to seemingly embrace and control change, was established to varying degrees (at differing ages), amidst the emergence of future prospects, aspirations, and past successes or failures. Change by way of the globalising forces, such as media-driven consumerism – those which were not within the realm of control by these young adults – were to some extent still regulated by them, by their choice and level of identification and 'buy-in' to these new and popular trends.

Nevertheless, when asked to consider change in terms of customary practice, many of the male participants perceived the 'cultural' status quo as an unquestionable constant. Regardless of the recognition that most customary practices were changing even a little, they were not in favour of this shift. The female participants were more concerned with the implications of questioning customary ways because they feared for their future children's well-being – curses and witchcraft were considered prominent indicators that the ancestors

are unhappy about rituals abandoned or neglected (FG 3). Predictably, it was the male participants, to whom the cultural benefits of ritual more overtly accrue, who were unwilling to question the 'way things were'. Whereas the women, for whom the practices typically maintain and reinforce subservience to male domination, felt unable as individuals to assert agency in order to change the *status quo*. These reflections caused me to pose the question: How does this inability amongst women in a cultural and social field, to first recognise the need for changes in environmental practice, and then assert it, affect environmental agency on a local level whether as individuals or as a social collective?

5.5 De-contextualising and re-contextualising cultural practice in peri-urban Grahamstown

A concern that emerged in the context of this research is a disjuncture between global ideologies – those experienced through the media, and how they are being integrated within the local realities of the participants. The tension is reflected by Appadurai (2000), who maintains that globally distributed mass media, by their very nature, crosses political, geographic locales and boundaries. The ideologies and lifestyles that are represented in this way, potentially point to an affluent lifestyle that is not attainable to the majority of its viewership and readership. It is in this social space that ideas about style, taste and patterns of consumption are re-invented, according to the television programme, music video or advertisement most recently seen. This unilateral and hegemonic transferral of what Appadurai refers to as 'social imagination' is not only restricted by the financial constraints of those living in less privileged circumstances, but cultural constraints are also questioned on a local level, again substantiating the claims that these patterns of cultural integration occur within their own local hierarchal frameworks (Strelitz, 2003:7).

Appadurai (2000) suggests that the global movement of objects, ideas and images, plays out differently according to their de-contextualising and re-contextualising in the different sites of consumption. In the context of the research, the young adults were seemingly able to reconcile the differences between the 'imported' parts of their lives and the local parts which offered stability and security. Instead of contributing to instability, the disparate cultures were integrated with apparent ease and contributed to the same measure of stability in terms of sense of place and belonging (whether to assist in being seen to be

part of a popular culture such as hip-hop, or to maintain traditional lives). This stands in contrast to the pessimistic critiques of globalisation offered by well-known theorists (Appadurai, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Beck, 1992), who are working within First World contexts.

Lash & Urry (1994) and Wasserman, et.al., (2003), have questioned the imposition of globalisation on local life worlds. They say that although there may be an 'acceptable' level of homogenous infusion culturally, the hegemonic way in which this occurs predicts the dominance of one practice or culture over another. Lash & Urry (1994: 280) and Wasserman (2003: 5), assert that hegemonic roles are played out in all spheres of social, economic and political arenas. Within the research context, for example, several learners were simultaneously able to identify with both traditional spirituality and Christian beliefs without feeling compelled to choose one or the other. During the third focus group meeting there was much debate about the two approaches and as the discussion ensued, they were increasingly seen in opposed perspectives. Clearly, some learners were able to reconcile the rituals that address the needs relating to their ancestors at the same time as being committed Christians similarly immersed in the rituals of choir practice and regular church attendance. Whilst most of the participants acknowledged the dominance of Christianity over traditional ways, they feared this was to the detriment of local indigenous belief systems. However, each appeared able to reconcile these tensions in different ways. This indicated the need of young people living in a modernising context, to adopt flexibility when identifying with local and global paths. There was clear evidence of tolerance and acceptance of the differing perspectives of each family, and indeed interactions with each individual family member, in order to find and reconcile their own approach on these matters. The flexibility required to integrate these ways, in turn, indicates that change is an inevitable part of modern life, and is in some cases, unknowingly helping people reconcile the often contesting norms of traditional versus Christian belief systems (Lash & Urry, 1994: 282).

Strelitz (2003: 7), describes a different scenario, identified during his doctoral research in the Grahamstown area investigating the role of global media on local youth. He maintains that the media provide "a useful resource for individuals to think critically about their own lives and life conditions" and also acknowledges the role that Western media are known as 'carriers of modernity'. Strelitz critiques the media imperialist theory which asserts that

before the 'cultural invasion' by Western media in 'developing' countries, they were largely untouched by outside influences (*ibid,* 2003: 8). As mentioned earlier, the context of peri-urban Grahamstown has a unique rural/urban cultural mix. There appears to be an intermingling of aspects of modernity (globally informed) and more locally informed custom and practice. These hydrid identifications are each controlling and supportive mechanisms in the development of sense of place amongst the youth in this context. It is in this context that without exposure through the media and education to 'global' influences, young adults would undeniably have difficulty integrating in urban centres. At the same time, the socially congruent customs especially meaningful in a rural area balance the often confusing choices that are to be made at this time in the young adults' lives. In this 'mixed bag' situation the youth deftly engage global ideologies and adapt them to suit their local situations. Multiple identities mingle in comfortable co-existence and without the expected contradictions, to produce seemingly healthy identifications with place and a consolidated sense of place for many of the young adults. The participants in this peri-urban setting seemingly benefit from a healthy balance of global influence and local cultural stability, rather than feel a loss of sense of place as predicted of more cosmopolitan regions.

5.6 Youth and identity

In their paper *Self, Space and Place: youth identities and citizenship,* Hall, Coffey & Williamson (1999: 501), equate the notion of multiple identities amongst young people living in England, with the daily reality of adapting in a modernised world of multiple social 'spaces'. Instead of being distinct, identities are moulded into eachother and shaped by any given situation and context. Identity is such that it is increasingly malleable and has come "to be seen as something contested and fluid, rather than static and given" (Hall, et.al., 1999: 501). Further, they maintain that it is at the age of early adulthood that self-chosen identities are settled on – more or less, at least – and this is done with circumspect and much conscious consideration given the variety of choice. Due to increased individualisation (see Beck, 1992), the patterns of social transition from childhood to adulthood are less predictable and generalisable and rely, in most part, on the deliberate choices made by individuals. According to Hall, et. al., (1999) the social transitions between child and adult are complicated because of these options and opportunities. Young adults have been given, and willingly accept, responsibility for active involvement in

negotiating and shaping their own identities, and the level of self-determination is inevitably daunting.

> A greater plurality of possible transitions, and the notion of individualisation, point to enhanced, if complex, opportunities to manage one's own transitions and identities (to be what you want to be), but this brings with it risks which must be negotiated in the absence of older sureties.
>
> (Hall, et. al., 1999: 503)

Not surprisingly, the perspectives expressed by the youth in the context of this research project, coincide with these broader and more generalised notions of identity. There were instances however, where a sense of place and belonging to a peer group with similar likes and dislikes, was clearly just as, if not more important, to many of the participants. They considered themselves free thinkers, able to make individual choices, yet they were also eager to remain part of a bigger group. There was a more assertive and latent individuality (culturally endorsed) displayed by the male participants than the female participants. The interactions and reflections of the young men expressed the enjoyment of deciding when and where to 'fit in' with the crowd. Whereas it was predominantly the case that the young women preferred to be part of a social group in order to conduct activities, perhaps for reasons of personal safety. This occurred primarily in informal situations such as during transect walks and was reflected in the photographs taken by the female participants which showed the meaningfulness of the many social occasions and activities with friends.

Although there is a tendency at this age towards individualism and independence, this does not occur without the compulsion to be a part of a socially coherent group to test their new-found roles. Hall, et. al.(1999) say that these social identities are substantially influenced by place and locality; that when introduced to one another for the first time, especially in the Eastern Cape, people do so with an immediate and automatic "*uhlalaphi*?", or, "where do you live". This gives an affiliation between person and place. It assists the other to establish one's social identity, and not only in the geographical sense, but also in terms of social place, clan, status and cultural background.

These days, as I have previously articulated, there is no single, seemingly static identity. And when people (more so urban dwellers than rural) 'belong' to numerous places it is

harder to 'place' them in terms of where they stay, especially with the insecure jobs which are part of living in a modern economy, there is a tendency to move location fairly regularly. People still have a home in the figurative sense – a place that they come from and belong to even if they do not live there anymore. The multiple-homed scenario is compounded by the appealing notion that this mobility suggests being well travelled, individualised, middle class and having gained wordly experience. This is less so for the participants of this research project or their adult family members, since they seldom leave Grahamstown and its surrounds, and rarely have the financial means to leave the Eastern Cape.

5.7 Education as a means of integrating broader ideas into local contexts

Certainly education can and should introduce new places, perspectives and practices. Education also allows a mediatory social space in which learners are able to interact and deliberate, enabling them to make the exciting trans-cultural leap cognitively, if not practically, by imagining different worlds and new places. This has the potential to take place when people watch television programmes about different people in other places around the world. Without the introduction of concerns affecting the global environment through education, the participants of this research project felt challenged to define their own local environmental hazards.

One conclusion to draw from this, is that I consider the initial introduction to other approaches addressing environmental concerns and solutions, highly significant in evoking an awareness of community and environment issues at a local level. An educational arena provided the young adults with a space to interact with each other through discussion which further aided their confidence and conviction towards making an impact on environmental change in their local contexts. This was indicated while the learners were discussing the map drawing, and once some of the photographs taken by members of the group had been viewed and discussed. The learners were reassured by being presented with examples of what is expected through present actions, and what could be done in future actions towards addressing environmental concerns in their communities. According to Hillier & Rooksby (2005: 23), an actor's relationship with the future, characterises his or

her behaviour in the present, and "consists of the relationship between the *habitus*, 'constructed in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities' " (Bourdieu 1980: 64, in Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 23). Environmental educators need to pose the question: What makes the subtle and nuanced shift from the habituated and everyday way we do things (*habitus),* to alternative environmentally sustainable choices possible?

Bergmann (1992) argues that planning for the future will only take place when there are structures in place to support them, either in terms of previous track record experience, or the physical presence of human and financial resources. Hillier & Rooksby (2005: 22), concur that *habitus* is not a deliberative process, but rather provides support as an intuitive 'practical reaction to a situation':

> the dispositions of *habitus* serve to predispose actors to choose behaviour which appears to them more likely to achieve a desired outcome with regard to; their previous experiences, the resources available to them and the prevailing power relations... actors undertake a practical evaluation of their potential behaviour...
>
> (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 22)

The knowledge that somebody else is doing things differently elsewhere, provides less inclination to 'go with the flow' and rather tends to motivate a definitive decision, through this outside influence, to enact change at local level. In this way, one can embody the effects of someone else's experiences and success in a local (and safe) environment.

5.8 Conclusion

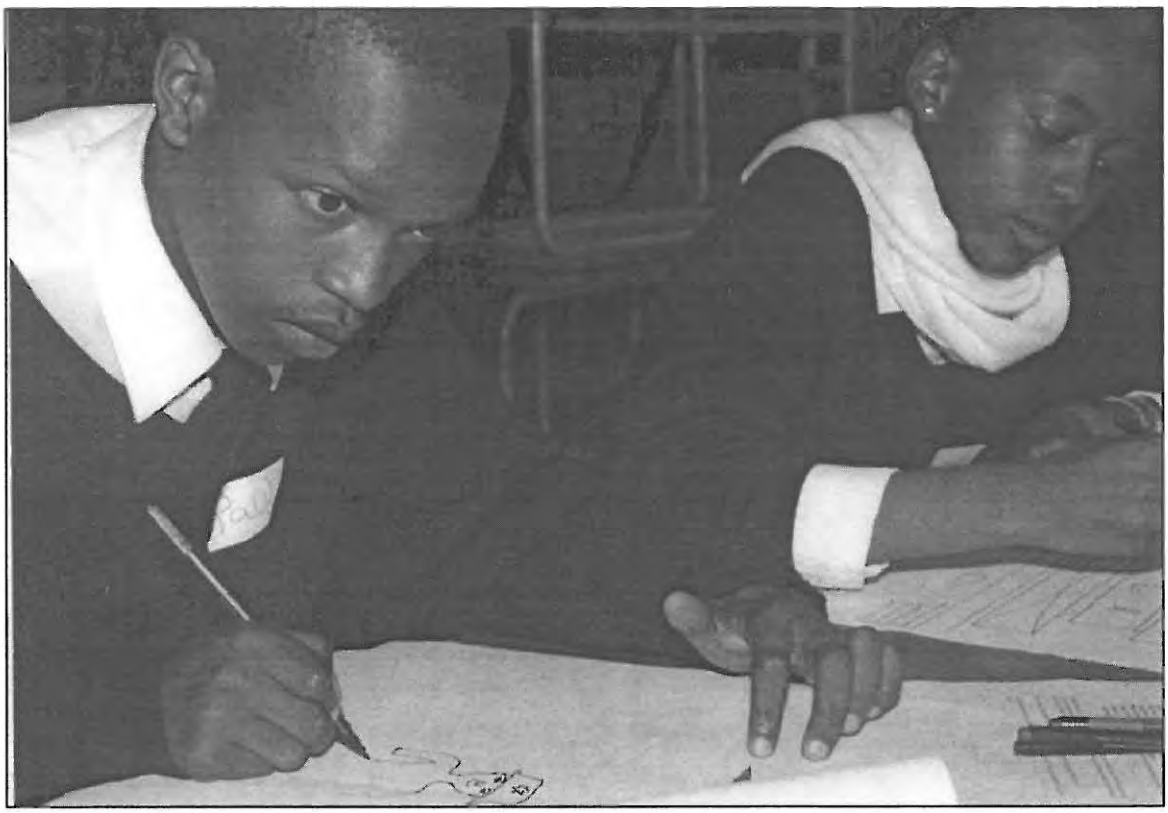
In Chapter 2, I mention the repositioning of environmental education approaches in southern Africa, so that they progressively take into account environmental sustainability as a primary focus. In this Chapter I highlight that in order to do this, there is a need to pay careful attention to learning actions designed and informed by specific contexts and suggest we approach this with knowledge and consideration of the complex local social and cultural situations in which the research participants live.

This chapter addresses the significance of integrating place-based and visual activities in learning actions for a multi-tiered and enriched engagement with local environments, as well as to involve young adults in the researching of environmental concerns that are meaningful to them. The participants in this study are excited by futures that depend largely on freedom of choice and individualisation, aspects of a lifestyle that urbanisation, economic security and financial independence can offer. At the same time and in doing so, they are able to rely on family stability and security that traditional customs and practice can offer. I suggest that heightened consideration of the future ambitions, aspirations and environmental concerns of young people should inform environmental educators in the design of environmental learning actions. Without local attachment and involvement of the youth on a local level together with greater exposure to global identifications and possiblities, young adults may not invest themselves meaningfully in local places, something that is necessary for improved environmental care-taking at 'home'.

With increased engagement in local environments through place-based activities, local sense of place is enhanced. The close consideration of social and cultural environments in which the young adults interact, provide invaluable insights into the social spaces of the youth. These are influential indicators of how young people envisage and enact agency within the structures of family, community and school. An investigation of the social environment in terms of structure and agency, therefore, enriches understandings of environmental perspectives through a history of ideas and local 'know-how'. These ideas can be integrated into more 'Western', or global approaches to address environmental concerns more appropriate to local contexts.

CHAPTER 6

Concluding comments and recommendations



Peter and Phumla draw maps of their favourite places, March 2004.
Photograph by Katie Farrington

6.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the significance of developing the capabilities and necessary proficiency amongst the youth that will bolster their response to environmental risks. At school-leaving age young adults are required to participate in the making of their futures and to do so with accountability and responsibility. They are also expected to become citizens who have the social skills to embrace difference and who are capable of individual and critical thought, in an ever-changing local and global environment. The structural disadvantages that are the result of a lack of resources make it more challenging in the South African context, to prioritise social and environmental reflection, alongside the personal immediate needs of poverty alleviation, social and physical security, health and employment. In a developing country like South Africa, young adults cannot but question the cultural and political *status quo* by making logical comparisons to other places, while they themselves live with uncertainty and ambivalence.

In the course of conducting this research project, I have provided compounding support for the use of place-based activities by young people. I have presented them with interactive ways in which to engage with local environmental concerns and developed the thesis to reflect the research as it opened up ways that sense of place is embodied by the participants. The project documented here illustrates the potential for enhanced engagement with places and environmental agency and responsibility by encountering young adults in their varied home, school and social contexts. Further, the thesis highlights the potential for probing the local and global interplay in a peri-urban environment.

If and when the young adults in this context feel the need to move (not necessarily a physical move, but significantly in mindset) to global domains, there is a shift to identifications with a more 'global sense of place' (Massey, 2005:131). Since young adults are the 'care-takers' of the future, they are primarily responsible for addressing future environmental risks and hazards. This requires environmental educators to look at strengthening the skills of the youth for increased local identification and responsible environmental care-taking. By observing the global and local interplay in the lives of young adults and in their unique contexts, environmental educators can be better informed about the social, cultural and geographical identifications that young adults make with local places that provide the emotional, intellectual and cognitive basis for them to respond to

global challenges. At the same time, they need to find the middle ground for furthering possibilities for identification with, and participation in, global environmental concerns in the future. Place-based experience equips young adults to locate environmental risks and find resolutions in their local contexts. These activities also engage young adults in reflection and responsible decision making so as to give them the experience and confidence to assert agency in situations further afield.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, this investigation into sense of place sits well with the shifts that are being made within the field of environmental education towards greater inclusion of people in their social context, in attempts to address environmental concerns. This turn has necessitated that researchers spend more time acquiring indepth knowledge of and with people in their unique socio-ecological contexts, an imperative for understanding the complex and subtle social dynamics which inform environmental perspectives and practice. Without careful consideration of the subtleties of the social context influencing people living with environmental risks and future challenges, the potential for successful environmental education remains limited. To assist with this understanding, careful sociological consideration of young adults' identification with place, i.e. 'local' and 'global' place and the inter-relatedness of these two, is vital.

This study was introduced in Chapter One and conceptually set out globalisation, social change and youth studies in the South African context. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature in various disciplines and approaches that consider sense of place or related concepts. Concerns experienced by the youth in post-apartheid South Africa were discussed and current notions of place and place-based activities were investigated in light of the effects of globalisation as South Africa became more open to global influences. I mention theorists Lash & Urry (1994), Giddens (1999) and Beck (1992), who have all provided convincing critiques of the effects of globalisation. They argue that globalising trends tend to undermine identification with unique locations (cultural and geographical). Further, they say that processes of globalisation (generally characterised as offering the opportunity for greater mobility and increased exposure to communication technology), discourage active engagement with local contexts and rather encourage less defined engagement with global environments. Chapter Two documents the conceptual shifts that have been made amongst researchers in the field of Human Geography, around notions of place, place-based acitivites and sense of place. Finally structure and agency is discussed in relation to the institutional structures of culture, family and education. This discussion

offers a space for reflexive engagement between young adults as agents in contemporary South Africa and the structures that are to some extent exerting control over their futures.

In Chapter Three I discuss the methodological choices made in designing and carrying out the study, particularly in light of the growing popularity of research that includes young peoples' perspectives and representations as research participants. The use of less orthodox research methods, those that include the visual and the experiential were also articulated and defended.

The research data generated and interpretively engaged by the research participants and myself are presented in Chapter Four. These data and associated narratives provide insights into how the local context relates to the broader theorised setting. Themes emerging out of the data are concerned with sense of place as a social construct. They also point to the need to look more closely at the social aspects of sense of place, those that assist in forming attachments to physical places. Education emerged as an important link and means of supporting responses to local environmental concerns. It not only provides useful and alternative new approaches when addressing environmental concerns, but importantly informs learners of what might legitimately constitute an environmental concern in a range of different contexts.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the themes that emerged in the visual representations and associated discursive reflections and compare these with findings from other studies. A key finding of this study is that the young people in my research sample do not have all the necessary conceptual resources to engage with challenges that are faced in their local environments. The participants responded well to developing many of these with the use of visual and place-based participatory activities, but this was not always developed as well through verbal or written engagements. There is a need to develop conceptual and practical competencies in young people to adapt to changing environments and to address environmental concerns in a developing country.

The increasingly nebulous social and political boundaries have been analysed in specific contexts by other researchers and these are discussed in terms of the research context which is less developed and less cosmopolitan than many of those documented in the literature. The learners in this context are passionate about playing an active role in the

'making' of their futures. They are equally keen on the so-called 'brown' issues of the living conditions of residents in local communities.

The participants have a strong sense of tradition as Xhosa speakers, but much of this has been integrated into hybridized forms with 'Western' elements such as Christianity. This Chapter relates the ability amongst young adults at school-leaving age to adopt hybrid and multiple identities that are not static, but are rather adaptable and intermeshed with other identifications. Chapter Five also articulates the need to find a way to negotiate the extremes of post-modern relativism and indifference, on the one hand, and the danger of expressing exclusivity in ownership of place, on the other hand. This is a space that simultaneously promotes an ambiguous non-attachment to place, and a decisive sense of place that remains static.

Another key finding of this research indicates the importance of understanding identity as more than the place in which people live (locality) and the people they live with (social), identity is also about future possibilities, ideas about common interests that help maintain social capital amongst groups of people. Hip-hop music, for example, may attract people from very different parts of the world with similar lifestyles, experiencing similar power relations – perhaps of similar ages. In this way identification can be explained by Baumann's notion that there are people we identify with because they are kin, and there are people we identify with because they have related ideals and aspirations (Baumann, 2004: 11). Significantly, these identifications with popular culture mostly aim to get young people to spend, not to save the planet, by acting collectively to regulate consumption.

For young adults at this age, there are well-founded concerns about the insecurities evoked during identity formation in a rapidly changing environment of teenage pressures. However, this insecurity can exist side-by-side with the 'window' of opportunity it offers youth, to assert self-determined agency and individuality. This is while they hold onto connections to formal structures of family and education which provide an institutional grounding. This complex position presents environmental educators with an opportunity to involve the youth in participatory place-based activities that will stretch their understanding of environmental issues locally as well as globally.

The findings emphasise the need to strengthen local identification for offering stability and security, but to do so with circumspect, reflection and individuality of thought. By not taking

for granted the prevalent social and cultural *habitus*, learners will build the necessary resources for increased individuality of thought, supporting the collective agency to change inequalities which affect them, either as young women or young men, within the prevalent structures. At this age, young adults have the political space, agency and enthusiasm to get involved in local environmental concerns and contribute to the future of the country. Whilst the young adults in this context may not have the economic resources to influence change, they need to be considered seriously, since even the economically disadvantaged citizens have to exercise their agency if the environmental crisis is to be tackled effectively. Developing participatory skills amongst the youth will facilitate a smoother transition to their inclusion as responsible agents for the environment in the future.

6.2 Educational implications

The insights generated during this study indicate that young adults are encouraged every day through exposure to information technology such as the internet, radio and television, to move into lifestyles which are driven by increased consumption and materialism. At the same time they experience a desire to remain attached to the structures and security of family and 'home-based' local practice.

Expertise and 'know how' of local environments and places will clearly empower the youth as citizens in addressing environmental concerns. They will also be empowered with the experience and confidence gained through local interactions and engagements in concerns affecting global environments. Although this study challenges the cultural *habitus* perpetuating inequality amongst the various race, age and gender categories in the research site, I am not in favour of change *per se*, only for opening up the space for discussion, so that young people come to assert agency and make changes in their lives and environments which are meaningful to them, and not as inscribed by the structures (social, cultural, educational) that impose these. Given that agency arrives through place-based activities and out of reflexive enquiry, learners as a group or individually develop this competence and further engage in self-chosen contexts that are significant to them.

Lotz-Sistka (2004: 54) highlights the orientation amongst educators and environmental educators in post-apartheid South Africa as one that has necessarily transformed in the 'new' social and political landscape. The social, the environmental and the economic

(three pillars of sustainable development) as issues related to risk, are being integrated into curriculum development that is more responsive to, and informed by, local context.

Place-based activities are highly recommended and informed by this research project, for enriched identification of, and reflexive engagement with the local, for environmental educators. Beck (1992: 21) affirms that reflexive modernisation needs to evolve structurally within social institutions, and the relationship between these social structures and social agents needs to be shifted to encourage individual thought and collective action. He goes on to argue that these are important considerations in a rapidly transforming society.

This thesis argues for increased participation of young people in decisions that concern their environments and their futures. The evidence suggests that for this to happen, it is essential for educators to maintain a helping hand in developing the competence and flexibility required by the youth to adapt in a landscape of heightened change. Encouraging responsible and reflexive involvement of young citizens in both their local and global environments through place-based and issue centered activities is a pre-requisite for sound environmental education that engages the youth. The study highlights the need for further research into the sociological context of the youth for more clarity on issues such as how the youth are experiencing HIV/AIDS and growing unemployment. Deeper engagements were not possible within the scope of this research. However, they were highlighted as pertinent issues raised by the research participants during one of our early interactions.

By prioritising the uniqueness and richness of individual contexts, environmental educators can be better informed about the local setting within the broader picture, and this knowledge underpins approaches taken by research that seeks to address these concerns. This shift has provided the space within Environmental education for issues that relate to the lived environment of people and their needs, specifically those that affect their day-to-day experiences of their immediate environments, such as health and poverty. The progression towards greater inclusion of the 'social' components in the broader environment within developing contexts, commonly referred to as 'sustainable development', does not negate or dismiss as irrelevant the conservation motives that previously drove the environmental education initiative. Rather it seeks to further inform

practice of the important ever-changing social dynamics that influence environmental transformation and social change.

6.3 Future opportunities for research

The scope for further research is considerable and there are many areas of interest within this study that warrant further investigation. Multi-modal literacy within environmental education research has been highlighted during this study as a significant subject associated with the use of place-based and visual activities. Visual modes of representation initially informed my research interest and gave me insights which were useful in analysing the work produced by the participants. This is another area worth investigating and one that would fit well with other multi-modal methods because of the multiple perspectives they elicit.

The potential for exploring Giddens' notion of a 'double hermenuetic' (Scott & Usher, 1996: 19), would require a further probing of the socio-cultural learning arena. This theory addresses learning that takes place at different, sometimes divergent, levels. In a social context, *habitus* is the 'taken for granted' foundational knowledge which is generated through practice, and theory is the propositional knowledge that co-exists in resonance with *habitus*. The 'double hermeneutic' allows one to conceptualise reflexive axes of tension between the assumptive proposition within social *habitus* and narratives that might bring into question and reshape these established orientations. Finally, the relationships between institutional structures and local level agency needs probing in order to gain insights into how to engage the youth further in a participatory manner with place-based environmental activities.

Hart (1997) and Wals (1994), recognise the importance of engaging young people as 'lead' researchers in their own contexts for meaningful and sustainable environmental agency. In his paper *Popular education for the environment: Building interest in the educational dimension of social action, 2005,* Whelan articulates a possible pedagogical orientation which informs 'educators for sustainability' of the important links made with the social environments of learners.

> Popular educators build curriculum from the daily lives of community members, address their social, political and structural change priorities, and emphasise collective rather than individual learning.
>
> (Whelan, 2005: 117)

Just as Hart (1997) and Wals (1994) promote the active involvement of young people in environmental education processes, this study has found that an important learning opportunity emerges when environmental issues are considered from the perspectives of the youth and not as inscribed by 'outside' interventions. Further, that consideration of the cultural capital and social worlds of young people, as mentioned by Whelan (2005), are brought into the learning arena by the learners.

Based on the findings, this study supports the notion that greater engagement by the youth with local places is necessary for local environmental actions to be effective. In order to do this, place-based experiences that provide multiple perspective approaches in their various spatial, visual and experiential literacies, can be useful. This experience is enhanced by the opportunity to self-identify and research environmental concerns that are meaningful to the participants. These activities provide new insights and knowledge of familiar places and issues, thereby developing an informed sense of place in local contexts. An enhanced sense of place in familiar contexts will present young adults with the experience and confidence to make responsible environmental decisions in the future and further afield in global places.

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Appendix 1:

1. Ekasi is my roots by Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya.

2. Culture? What Culture? by Tom Eaton.

Culture? What Culture?

TOM EATON

Tom Eaton is a freelance writer living in Cape Town. So far he has concentrated on sports journalism because nobody will pay him for his opinion about anything else.

Youth Culture is a contradiction in terms. It's true. I know this nebulous youth who masquerades as somebody worth knowing, and he's a dumb ass. He's smelly, loud and ignorant. And he wouldn't know culture if it bit him.

Naturally, when I express this opinion to any slack-jawed youths who will listen, I am immediately excommunicated from the Culture, as if this is some sort of punishment. The reason? I'm too old, either literally or figuratively. Hey man, the sentiment seems to be, you're a dinosaur. You're like thinking inside the box, man. You've gotta think outside the box, young people are thinking outside the box.

And that's how it works in this strictly policed so-called culture, where all freedoms are permitted except the freedom to think and act independently, and where no rules apply except a tome of unwritten ones. Generation X, that utterly self-obsessed upswelling of over-comfortable white middle-class ennui, created the nebulously named "Youth Culture" in its own narcissistic image. As it espoused the death of norms and declared itself dedicated to the destruction of conformity, it set about entrenching its hegemony by laying down ground rules that its disciples dare not break. If they do–questioning the validity of youth music or art, wanting to move on to a more mature worldview–they are automatically expelled.

So why has youth culture survived? Why don't the grown-ups simply insist on bedtime and turning out the lights? One answer could be prole drift. This phenomenon, recognised by American observer Paul Fussell in his book *Class*, suggests that there is a strong trend in the modern world for people at opposite ends of the social scale to aspire to each other's positions. In other words, wealthy suburban whites desire what they see as the virility and danger of the poverty-stricken inner-city black ghetto (Eminem's popularity doesn't come from nowhere); while those in the ghetto dream of a swimming pool and a chauffeur. Even intellect is affected: whereas the working classes were once suspicious of school while the upper class prized erudition and learning, today the working classes aspire to sending their children to university while those with education are discouraged from flaunting it.

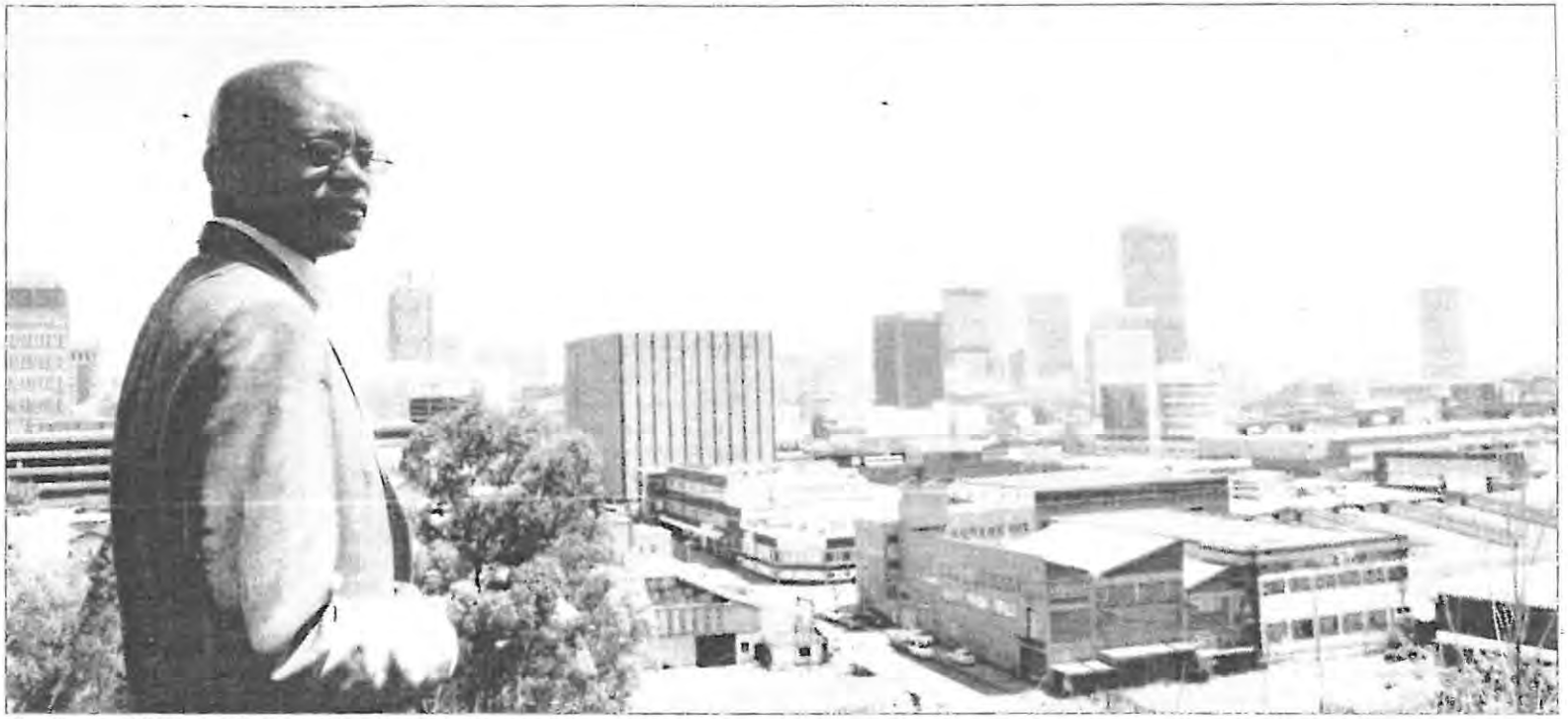
The result of this convergence is a homogeneous mass of mediocrity, in which free thought and intellectual achievement are not encouraged because they threaten the illusion of unreality so carefully arranged. The curfew and lights-out rule isn't being enforced by the grownups because they so badly want to be teenagers.

The politics of youth culture are the politics of teens who have opened a newspaper for the first time. Shock and revulsion abound and humanity's oldest truths are trumpeted for all to hear, as if nobody had ever thought of them before. But to a population obsessed by fashion and not truth, politics are an accessory to flaunt. Che Guevara's elevation to pop icon is a telling indictment of those vocal dimwits who prescribe the political fashions: scratch the surface of the revolutionary hero myth and you find a hit-squad commandant drunk on self-righteousness and the power of summary execution, increasingly out of touch with political realities. Like the myth of Che the Martyr, Youth Culture's existence depends on ignorance of the past: look back more than a generation and the cycles of history emerge, with the damning news that nothing is new. It's all been done before, and better. Even postmodernism was invented a thousand years ago, in the story of Scheherazade and the Arabian Nights.

By limiting your experience of the world, you elevate your own place in it. Graffitists, emboldened to call themselves artists by youth culture's fetish of self-esteem, cannot afford to study genuine artists because they will discover what they are–toddlers doodling on the nursery wall with crayons. Likewise, music has never been more homogeneous and safe than it is under the pervasive dumbing-down of the youth: pop (all music that hangs off a drum beat and contains the word "baby" or "ya", from rap to reggae to the Rolling Stones) long ago staged a coup, relegating creative and challenging music to a ghetto called "classical" music, making it other and therefore disturbing, and as a result grows more vacuous as time goes by.

It is no coincidence that in the West, dominated by the egoism of the youth lobby, organised religion is teetering against the onslaught of feel-good spiritualism. The complete humility required by the major religions is anathema to a youth convinced of its own superiority, and so when that Jesus guy still dares to poke his head out, he is turned into a pal, a Dawson's Creek buddy to whom the faithful can whinge about their jobs and bitch about their neighbours. In a million households, insipid 20-somethings watch Buffy commit pseudo-spiritual hyper-violence without a single twinge of real human emotion, and dream bland sentimental little dreams of revenge and power, and the day when someone will ask them their opinion. When that happens, they will simply endorse the current buzzwords and factoids, because they've never had their own worldview.

None of this is a conspiracy by corporate America, the World Bank or globalisation. Youth Culture is not a backlash against middle-class hypocrisy or the failure of the family unit. It is simply the natural byproduct of what happens when the extremely limited intellect and experience of adolescents is combined with the childlike belief that they are the centre of the universe. And nobody is telling them to shut up, sit still and eat their vegetables.



City slicker: Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya at home in Jozi. Photograph: Oupa Nkosi

Ekasi is my roots

Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya

'So which part of the Eastern Cape are you from?" I have come to accept this and "Why have you got a girl's name?" as questions I will never stop having to answer.

They are a constant reminder of how much is assumed from names.

My Xhosa double-barrelled name makes it "obvious" for some people that I am of Xhosa stock. From eKoloni, as that part of the world is fondly called.

I resent the assumption and refuse to confirm or deny it. My roots are in Dobsonville, Soweto. True, my grandparents could trace their ancestral homes back to what was the Cape Colony. I cannot.

Influx Control laws and the bantustanisation of South Africa ensured that Africans could look at urban life as a temporary encounter that would soon be over as soon as the *baas* had had enough of us.

We were never allowed to forget our "roots", so that we would happily pack up and go once our time in "white" South Africa was up.

After a decade of freedom, I surely have the right to say where my roots lie. Ekasi is where, as the Zulus would say, my umbilical cord is buried.

There is something subliminally racist in the question. Nobody ever asks city-based white people where their roots are and whether they intend returning there at Christmas or Easter. They are accepted as naturally belonging where they are.

The constant questions about my and other black people's roots are a determined plot to deny that our society's evolution has created a new construct — urban black.

I am one of that new breed. We are more likely to show loyalty to a football club and its supporters than to people who speak the same language or share the same surname.

I belong with those youths whose traditional garb is All Star sneakers, Dickies pants and spotty hats. I am not to be confused with the darkie who thinks nigger-speak and all that represents black America is cool.

I belong with those people who only remember the rituals and customs of "their" people when they are in trouble with the law or have had enough of a windfall to find "someone" to thank for their good fortune. Otherwise, they are at ease with the norms of a secular society.

> Our society has created a new construct — urban black

We are a people who, even if descended from the proverbial Jim who came to Jo'burg and was blinded by the city lights, have cut their rural roots.

My parents' ethnic origins are not enough to make me honestly say that I belong to the same community. Speaking a language or having a name that suggests a certain ethnic lineage is just not enough for one to become a member. Johnny Clegg is accepted as a Zulu not because he says he is one but because he has embraced their way of life.

The life I know is that of other urban blacks whose identities have little to do with ethnicity.

The stories of my people are those of Abubaker Asvat, Tebogo mRamble and Des Backos, as well as of June 16 1976. It is neither better or worse, it is our experience.

Africans with their rural roots firmly in place will continue to exist and flourish. I am happy for them and often envy them, if only for the fresh air they can call their own.

But that does not mean that those of us who have no "ancestral homes" to speak of are any less African. Nor does it mean we are less in tune with our national identity or that we have necessarily forsaken our solidarity with our kith in the diaspora.

Don't ask me about my roots again. I am urban and black, finish and *klaar*. It does not make me any better or worse. It just makes me — me.

Appendix 2:

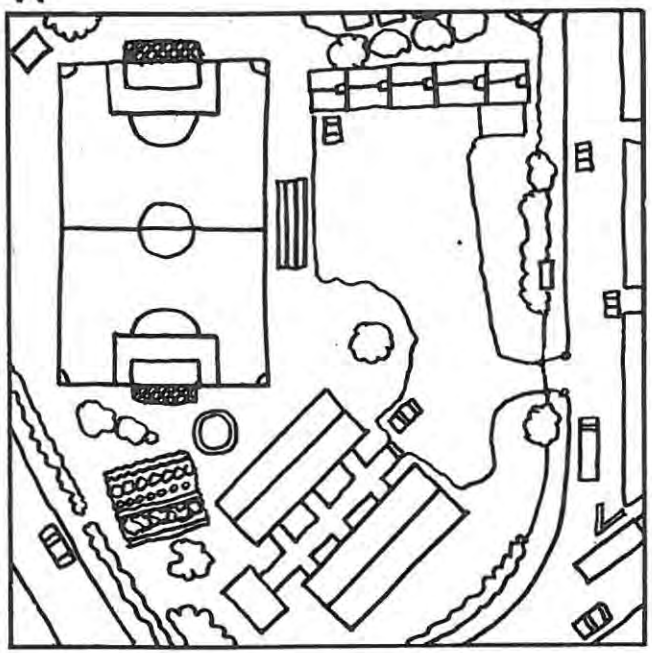
1. Learning support material

from *Looking at maps* by Jo Collett, READ Educational Trust.

Three aerial views

Here the helicopter is not very high.
The artist drew this picture of the school.

A



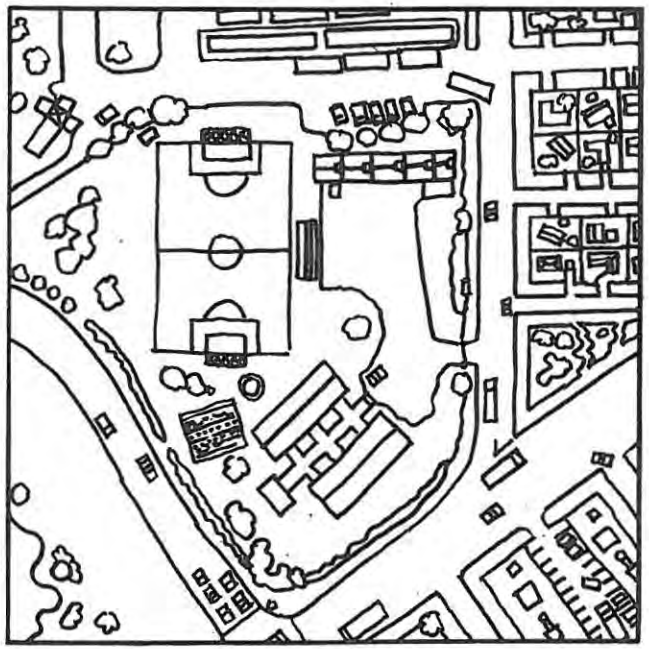
You can see the soccer field in the top left-hand corner, the school buildings and grounds, some teachers' houses and a few cars on the roads.

Look at the drawing and see if you can find all the things listed above. What else can you see?

Here the helicopter is higher.

Everything looks smaller but you can see more of the area around the school.

B

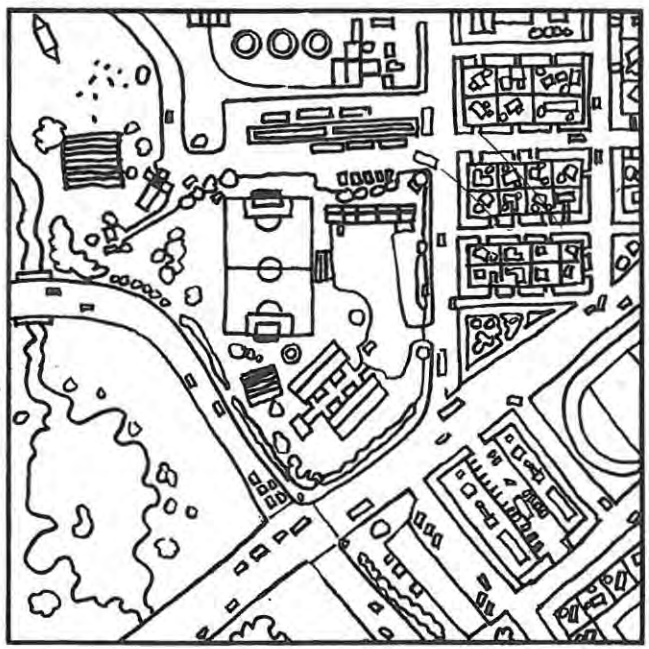


You can still see the soccer field and the school buildings and you can also see a church in the top left-hand corner. The long buildings at the top of the drawing are part of a taxi and bus station. You can also see more roads and some of the houses close to the school.

Here the helicopter is at the highest position.

You can see a much larger area than you can see at A and B. Everything looks much smaller.

C



Now you can see even more things.

You can see three power station chimneys at the top. There is some open land on the bottom left. There are more houses and part of a sports stadium on the right. What else can you see?

Appendix 3:

Newspaper articles collected during 2004-2005, informing the study on the youth.

1. 'Government 'could do more', by Lindile Stifile, Daily Dispatch, 16 June, 2005.

2. Youth want out of Duncan Village, by Modise Kabeli, Daily Dispatch, 16 June, 2005.

3. Pupils see a rosy future, by Taralyn Bro, Daily Dispatch, 16 June, 2005.

4. Degredation in the name of teenage sexual morality, by Fred Khumalo, Sunday Times, 3 July, 2005.

5. Initiation is not what it used to be, by Pontso Pakkies, Grocotts Mail, 15 December, 2005.

Lack of education stifles young people's dreams

Government 'could do more'

JUNE 16 - YOUTH DAY

Report and picture by Lindile Sifile

EAST LONDON — Young people are making strides to better their lives and feel that the government could do a lot more to help them.

Zukisa Jikwana, 23, survives by selling jewellery and wallets in Oxford Street. He came from Butterworth last year in search of a better life after dropping out in Grade 11 because his unemployed parents could no longer afford to send him to school.

"The government has let me down because I should be studying at my age and not selling stuff in the street."

Jikwana said police harassment of street vendors was another difficulty for him. He has to pay R100 to get his merchandise back when it is confiscated by police. He makes about R40 profit on an average day.

He has heard little about the government's Umsobomvu Youth Fund but hopes one day to go back to school to learn about business.

A third-year fashion design student, Melikhaya Sani, 22, said education should be free as there are many township youth with skills and dreams who lack education. After Sani completed his matric in Grahamstown in 2002 he worked at a pub to raise funds to go to a technikon. He hopes to have his own clothing label one day.

Thembakazi Rali, 24, a street vendor from Duncan Village, said she had no hope of studying further. She passed Grade 12 five years ago. "I will keep on selling until I get a decent job."

Fashion design student Anela Nomadwayi, 21, said government funds should be easily accessible for young people like her who want to start their own business. "If I have my own business I could employ other people and alleviate poverty."

Sipho Dubade, 15, of Orange Grove, and Bulelani Dyani, 16, of West Bank collect fares at a taxi rank. Both dropped out of school and spent four months in prison for robbery.

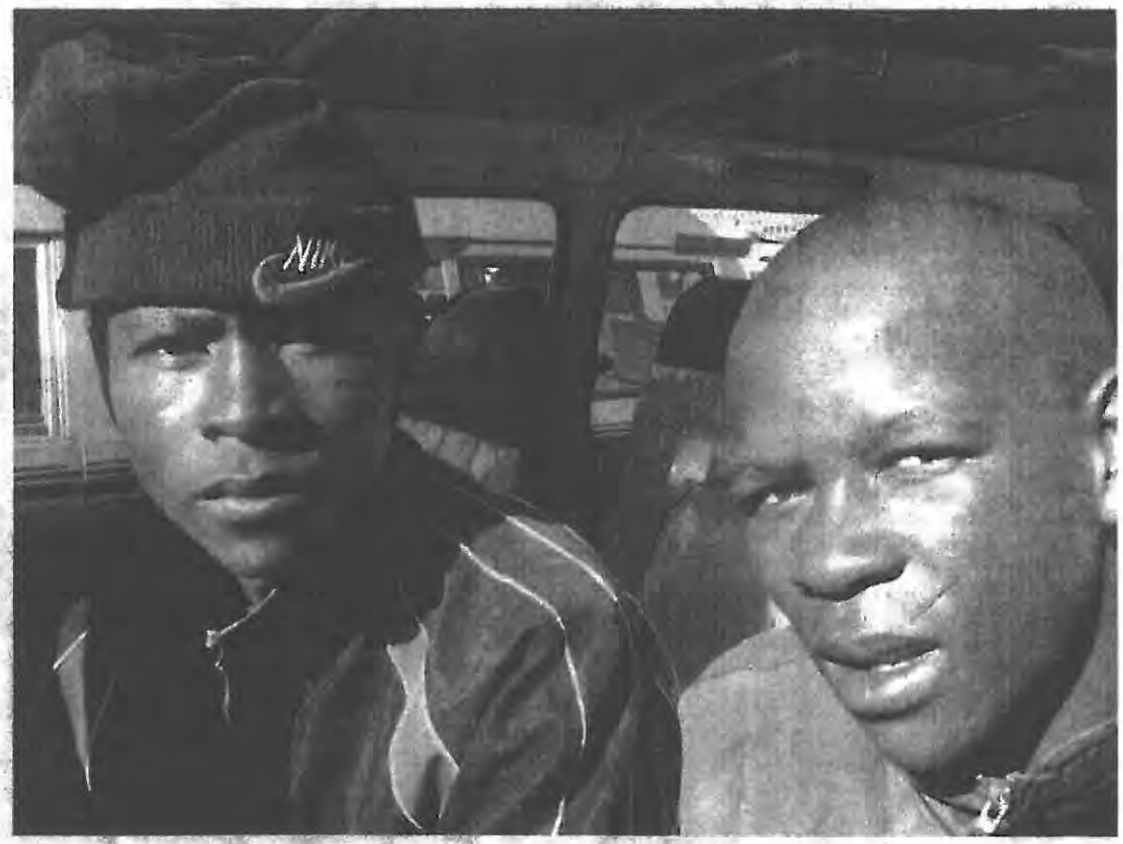
They work from 5am to 7pm and pocket R40 each for their families.

"... I want to work and leave my thug life because I don't want to go back to prison," said Dubade.

● Youngsters at the Sakh'ingomso Children's Home in Southernwood feared disease – especially Aids, TB and pneumonia – and lack of security.

Most had no idea of what the future held, but were scared of prison and did not want to live on the streets.

Thando Jack, 15, a Grade 8 learner at Ebenezer Majombozi High School, used to live on the streets in Quigney before he moved into the home. Lunga Ranana, 15, does not attend school, and neither does Mbuyiselo Bedja, 16, who wants to get a job at a shop.



WE ALSO HAVE DREAMS: Bulelani Dyani, 16, and Sipho Dubade, 15, are taxi fare collectors and make about R40 a day to support their families.

Youth want out of Duncan Village

JUMPING FOR JOY: Grade 10 pupils Sonwabiso Zweni, 16, from Greenpoint Secondary School in Buffalo Flats, Bongiwe Maqobozo, 19, from Wongalethu High School in Mdantsane and Zukile Ngesi, 17, from Greenpoint, see new hope for South African youth.

Picture by PHILLIP NOTHNAGEL

By Modise Kabeli

DUNCAN VILLAGE — Young people here believe this country has good prospects for them, but they will have to leave Duncan Village first.

Bongiwe Maqobozo, 19, dreams of being one of South Africa's best long-distance runners.

She is concerned that due to "lack of guidance and sponsorship" her dream might not be realised.

"I would like to continue with running but I don't have people supporting me," she said.

Maqobozo, a Grade 10 pupil at Wongalethu High School in Mdantsane, lives with her aunt in Duncan Village.

She said she missed out on an opportunity to run in Johannesburg earlier this year because she could not afford to go.

"I couldn't go run in Johannesburg because I have no sponsors ... I can't participate in events because I have no money," she said.

"I have to buy licences, get a kit and other things myself."

Zukile Ngesi, 17, a Grade 10 pupil at Greenpoint Secondary School, said with the upcoming events like the Soccer World Cup in 2010 he does not fear for his future.

"I see my future as a young person in South Africa as bright. There are many job opportunities coming up," he said.

Ngesi said when he finishes school he wants to study to be a mechanical engineer.

"New cars are being released every month ... (Once qualified) I cannot be without a job," he said.

Sonwabiso Zweni, 16, also a Grade 10 pupil at Greenpoint, does not share the same optimism as his friends about the future of young people – especially in Duncan Village.

"I don't see myself going anywhere especially if I stay here. There is no future here ... lots of crime and youth here use drugs," said Zweni.

He sees himself progressing if he is able to move elsewhere.

Msimelelo Seti, 22, has a graphic design diploma from PE Technikon and is completing a film and video course at the Gompo Arts Centre.

"I want to combine the two and go to Johannesburg or Cape Town to join an advertising company."

Seti said "June 16 is a very important day for youth – we should keep the day special".

Seti said he feared the impact of HIV/Aids on the future of young South Africans.

"Especially to us blacks ... we like drinking and having a good time ... we overdo things and do not think about the future."

Pupils of top schools see rosy future

By Taralyn Bro

EAST LONDON — Pupils from private and former Model C schools in the city are confident of a bright, prosperous future.

A snap survey of how teenage learners at private school Merrifield College and former Model C schools Selborne College, Port Rex and Stirling see the future revealed that most are confident they will succeed in life.

Ambitions included wanting to be veterinarians, entrepreneurs or even "a multi-billionaire".

Merrifield Grade 11 learner Morolong Mahole wants to open his own business. As a black male, he said, he would not use the colour of his skin to get ahead in life: "It's wrong how people abuse affirmative action to get what they want."

But wannabe billionaire Chris Fielding, 12, from Nahoon, felt that affirmative action could be an end to his dream: "You work hard and try to do as well as you can but you still may not get a job."

Port Rex Grade 10 learner Vaughn Smith, 15, from Parkside, dreams of being an architect, but hopes to get a bursary to pay for further studies.

Jade Johnson, 15, a Grade 10 learner at Stirling High School, plans to leave the country as soon as she finishes school: "I'm going overseas because I think this country is going down."

Selborne College Grade 8 learners Adom Amoah, Richard Osner and Cuan George all agreed that Aids is a bigger concern to them than crime.

All three were fairly confident they would be successful, citing chartered accountant, businessman and IT specialist as their respective career choices.

S/Times 8/07/05

Degradation in the name of teenage sexual morality

IT IS my belief that adolescence is the most truculent period in life (others will say adolescence is but a close second to senility, but I won't enter that debate since I haven't reached the green pastures of old age yet . . .)

In adolescence we become the most disagreeable creatures on God's Earth: we think we are the cleverest, coolest and strongest beings ever created.

It is during adolescence that many of us plunge into nihilistic behaviour — experimenting with drugs, sex or crime, for example — from which we sometimes never recover.

And, oh, are we adolescents touchy!

It is against the fragile persona of an adolescent that I have always wondered what virginity testing, and other means of monitoring the sexuality of young people, does to the girls subjected to it.

A part of the answer to that question came a few weeks ago when I read *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, a shocking novel by the Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat.

FRED KHUMALO

The narrator of the story is a Haitian girl called Sophie who, since the age of around 12, has been subjected to virginity testing by her mother, who slides her little finger into the girl's private parts to make sure the hymen is intact.

The mother thinks this is a virtuous and proper way of making her girl respect her sexuality as she moves into adulthood. After all, this testing had been carried out for generations, not only in her family, but in her section of Haitian society.

Out of this crucible had emerged women who obeyed culture. This was a culture that stipulated that each and every finger on a woman's two hands had a purpose: mothering, boiling, loving, baking, nursing, frying, healing, washing, ironing and scrubbing.

Whenever Sophie has to be tested, her mind goes blank and she feels like nothing.

When she finally reaches adolescence, and has moved from rural Haiti to the US where her mother is working, her world view changes, just as her hormones are taking over the way she behaves.

In a moment of what many might regard as insanity, the girl fetches a broomstick and plunges it into her essence, breaking her own virginity. It's a powerful yet shocking act of rebellion — against her mother, her culture and her community's expectations of her.

Even before reading this book, I was opposed to virginity testing, which has been revived in some parts of South Africa. The practice has been hailed by many as a move towards restoring morals among young girls and protecting them against HIV/Aids.

Without having said it in so many words, I have thought of virginity testing as demeaning to the girls and insulting to the perpetrator (the examiner). No one can control another person's sexuality without debasing her own integrity. The jailer is often more morally bankrupt than the jailed.

But until reading *Breath, Eyes, Memory* I had never thought of the possible psychological damage testing might do.

Some "victims" play along merrily (at least on the outside) because the testing affirms them in the public eye, making them paragons of morality. But, until one encounters someone like Sophie, one can only wonder at the extent of the psychological damage, conscious or subconscious, that these virtuous tests do.

In the book, when Sophie's mother discovers to her shock that her hitherto obedient, morally upright daughter has lost her virginity, she wonders what went wrong.

Naturally, she looks into that dark part of her heart where the demons of self-blame reside; then she plunges into the abyss of madness and endless nightmares.

A friend I discussed the book with remarked that the girls who undergo virginity testing are, in fact, luckier than those elsewhere on the continent whose clitorises are cut off and their labia sewn back, leaving only a small hole to pass urine through, as a sure way to suppress their sexual appetites.

I groaned at the barbarity of it all.

But I still maintained that the South African testing was equally bad in that, while not as crude as mutilation, it could leave scars on the girl's psyche.

I have yet to be confronted with the tragic results of virginity testing in the South African context. I have yet to hear from the horse's mouth what it has done to the psyches of girls who, at regular intervals, have to undress and be examined.

I also wonder what happens when the mothers of the hitherto well-behaved girls suddenly discover, at first hand, that their daughters have lost their prized virginity. Imagine the sense of loss, the sense that they have been shown disrespect.

It is heartening that the Draft Bill on Children's Rights and Protection now outlaws virginity testing. It's about time.

Instead of championing the physical testing, parents and others rightly concerned with the chastity of children should be talking more with their daughters about their need to control their sexual urges, to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and disease.

Sexuality can be managed and negotiated, never controlled. That much we should have learned from the failure of the Immorality Act, which tried to legislate sex lives.

Initiation is not what it used to be

Grocott's Mail
15 Dec 2005

PONTSO PAKKIES

WHAT do I know about manhood, you might ask yourself? I pride myself on my African brothers. For years they have been 'going to the mountains' for their most important rite of passage. I never knew exactly where they were taken. I looked and searched for them, but no-one was in sight. To womenfolk and girls, they seemed to have disappeared without a trace, albeit temporarily.

When the time came, they always returned; dramatically transformed. There were a lot of new rules they had to follow. The training prepared them for courtship, marriage, family life and how to conduct themselves as men.

All of a sudden there were new rules I also had to follow to bestow respect upon these new men. Some of the things I did not agree with, but had no choice in the matter. I believed my parents when I was told that they were now men; after all, what did I know about manhood?

Driving through Raglan Road on the way to East London I could not help but notice how times have changed. Small huts, made of grass, plastic and cardboard materials, are scattered in what has become Grahamstown's most famous initiation school.

Most striking is the school's proximity to houses. *Ukuya entabeni* (going to the mountains) is no longer the case, as these initiates have in fact become neighbours to the residents of Vukani.

What I learnt as a little girl is different to what I see now. I really do not understand what has happened. Mountains are there. The initiates are just no longer going to them. Previously initiates' huts were hidden in remote places. Could it be a question of convenience that they are no longer literally 'going to the mountain'? Could it be the fact that most boys in urban areas have not been exposed to rural life – which is epitomised in circumcision schools?

We recognise that this is the new millennium. Things have changed across almost all spheres – the economy, politics, social life and technology. This is the age of innovations, cellphones and tsunamis. And so it is that initiation schools are situated just across the road.

Some of these new-age initiates even take cellphones with them and communicate with girlfriends and mothers, something which would have been frowned upon. Communities relied predominantly on *amakhankatha* (the nurses) to report the progress of the boys. Young boys served as messengers and took food to the initiates.

Does the use of cellphones now mean that *amakhankatha* and *amanqalatha* are no longer ideal links between the initiates and the communities? If that is the case, they might as well use their mobile phones to seek Western medical intervention when physical complications arise.

Talk is that some initiates even take portable CD players for entertainment. What entertainment? Aren't they there to learn to become men? Could they not put aside the music for a few weeks?

They are seen hanging out with girls while still in the initiation school. When they return they still hang out with boys, something which was not done in the past.

And horror upon horrors, we see an initiate, complete with red sunglasses, endorsing a beer in a television advert. Even I – who have never set foot in an initiation school – know that drinking alcohol is not something initiates are encouraged to do.

With all these unconventional episodes – many done in the name of change – it should hardly come as a surprise that initiates go 'to the mountains', but return unchanged. But what I do know about manhood?

Pontso Pakkies

Pakkies has just graduated from the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University