

*Ligotshwa Lise Manzi:*

**Uncovering Colonial Legacies and Possibilities for Spatial Justice in the  
Productions of Space in Primary Schools in Makhanda**

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## **Dedication**

To those children who have married difference, those who have dared to travel where few or none have dared. To you who have not sought after a following but rather encouraged others to carve their own paths. To you who have suffered this thing called education so that others may not, to you who courted and then married difference inspired by the confounding diversity of creations and the one God who created it all, I dedicate this thesis to you!

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## Abstract

In the shadows of apartheid's end, South Africa's two-tiered educational landscape still bears the deep scars of socio-spatial inequalities. This study examines the re/production of space in three primary schools in Makhanda, where colonial legacies continue to shape teaching and learning spaces. Through the lenses of decolonial and spatial theory, this research aims to explore and critically analyse the production of social space in primary schooling within the peri-rural socio-spatial context of Makhanda. It seeks to unmask and resist the complex, often invisible barriers to meaningful learning while uncovering potential opportunities within these educational environments, working toward more just educational offerings.

The research was conducted as a qualitative ethnographic case study in three phases, focused on three primary schools in Makhanda, and a selection of Grade 6 learners attending these schools. The data was generated over 84 days during 2019 and 2020 using time-space diaries kept by learners, interviews with learners and staff members, classroom observations and mobile ethnography. The analysis consisted of data walking, spatial analysis, rhythm analysis, decolonial analysis, and generative thematic analysis. In total, 126 participants were involved in the study, which involved four learners from the selected schools who participated in the mobile ethnography. Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory, with its triad of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces, provides a framework for understanding how social spaces are produced and reproduced, revealing the intricate entanglements of homogeneity and fragmentation in the everyday practices in the novel context of primary schooling. Similarly, decolonial theory via the works of Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Ndlovu Gatsheni (2013) and, in particular, their work on the colonial matrix of power and the colonality of power, being and knowledge provide the analytical tool that unmask and resist how the present continues to carry with it the weight of the past.

The findings show how colonality persists in the selected schools through the homogeneity of architecture, the use of space and rituals, the persistence of race as an organising principle, and the fragmentation of educational experiences, all of which shape and potentially limit children's learning and development. *The phrase ligotshwa lise manzi is an isiZulu proverb that likens children to saplings, emphasising how they are shaped when young.* It illustrates both the positive and negative potential of the socialising effect of education. The findings also revealed children's creativity as they transcend conceived spaces, along with their desire

to be agents of change within their perceived and lived spaces. This was evident in their imaginative play when surveillance is minimal, their expressions of hope, and their connection to lived space as they reflect on their mobilities. The children's creativity is coupled with a sense of ubuntu, expressed as a strong sense of community and solidarity among peers. Moreover, the children express a strong connection to Makhanda, with many wanting to remain and contribute positively to their community. The 'hybrid' context that is Makhanda, fraught with historical contradictions but also rich with diversity and relationality, along with the strong relational disposition of learners, suggests opportunities to recenter education towards care and concern, leveraging existing relationships towards building and producing spaces differently for a more socially just education system.

A scholarly contribution of this study is its integration of decolonial and spatial theories, providing an integrated framework to understand and challenge the persistence of colonial legacies in primary education. Methodologically, the study showcases the value of ethnographic approaches in capturing social spaces' fluid and relational nature. Time-space diaries and mobile ethnography, in particular, provided rich, contextualised data that illuminate the lived realities of learners in Makhanda. By focusing on the lived experiences of learners, the research offers nuanced insights into how space and power shape educational outcomes and identities.

The study also identifies pathways for transformative practice, emphasising the importance of contextual understandings in educational planning. Leveraging local knowledge and acknowledging and fostering community partnerships emerge as crucial steps towards creating inclusive and equitable educational environments. The research advocates for education systems that centre the voices and experiences of learners and their communities, challenging the rigid educational structures that currently dominate and colonise primary education.

In conclusion, this research highlights the enduring influence of colonial legacies in South Africa's primary education system and how these legacies, evident in architectural, perceptual and behavioural mapping and imposed hierarchies, influence the kinds of relationships children form with people and place. Interestingly, children's relationality and shared collective consciousness, along with their 'speaking by doing' drawing on their agency, provide practical options towards resisting the legacy of coloniality and reimagining teaching and learning collaboratively toward a more just and inclusive education.

## Isishwankathelo

Xa kanye kuphela ucalucalulo, imfundo yaseMzantsi Afrika enezigaba ezibini isathwele amanxeba anzulu okungalingani ngokwentlalo. Olu phando luvavanya ukuveliswa kwakhona kwendawo kwizikolo ezintathu zamabanga aphantsi eMakhanda, apho ilifa lobukolonyali lisaqhubeka nokumisela iindawo zokufundisa nokufunda. Ngokusebenzisa iinkqubo zokuphelisa ubukolonyali kunye nethiyori yendawo, olu phando lujolise ukuphonononga nokuhlalutya ngokucokisekileyo ukuveliswa kwesithuba sentlalo kwizikolo samabanga aphantsi umxholo wentlalo mmandla yasemaphandleni aseMakhanda. Ifuna ukudandalazisa nokubhenca izinto eziyimiqobo ekuphuculeni indlela yokufunda, ukudandalazisa amathuba anokuvela kumaziko emfundo nasekwenzeni imfundo efanelekileyo kumntu wonke.

Olu phando luye lwenziwa ngophando ntyilazwi olugxile nzulu kwinkqubo ye-ethnography kwizikolo ezintathu zamabanga aphantsi eMakhanda, kunye neqela labafundi bebakala lesithandathu abafunda kwezi zikolo. Imijelo yolwazi ifunyenwe kwezi zikolo kwisithuba seentsuku ezingama-84 kunyaka wama-2019 ukuyakutsho kunyaka wama-2020 kusetyenziswa iidayari zexesha nendawo zale mihla ezigcinwe ngabafundi, udliwanondlebe lwabafundi kunye nabasebenzi, ukubonwa kwenkqubo yemfundo ngelixa isenzeka kwakunye ne-mobile ethnography. Uhlalutyo lwale mijelo yolwazi luye lwaquka uhlalutyo lwendawo, uhlalutyo lwesingqisho, uhlalutyo lobukolonyali, kunye nohlalutyo ngokweziqu namabinzana aveliswa loluphando. Uhlalutyo lwendawo ngokukaLefebvre ngowama-1991 kunye nonxantathu wokuqonda, ukucinga, neendawo ezihlala abantu, lunika isakhelo sokuqonda indlela ezenziwa ngayo kwaye ziveliswe, lutyhila ukudibana okuntsonkothileyo kokufana kunye nokuqhekeka kwiinkqubo zemihla ngemihla kwimeko entsha yemfundo yamabanga aphantsi. Ngokukwanjalo, nophando olujongene nokupheliswa kobukolonyali ngokwemisebenzi yophando yooQuijano (2000), Mignolo (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007) kunye noNdlovu Gatsheni (2013), ingakumbi, umsebenzi wabo kwi-*matrix* yobukolonyali yamandla kunye nokujonga ifuthe lobukolonyali engqondweni, ebuntwini nakulwazi lunika indlela yokudandalazisa nokuveza indlela ubomi esiphila kubo ngoku okuqhubeka ngayo bubonisa ifuthe lwexesha elidlulileyo.

Iziphumo zolu phando ziveza indlela obusaqhubeka ngayo ubukolonyalu kwezi zikolo zicaphulwe apha ngokumanyaniswa kwezakhiwo, ukusetyenziswa kwendawo kunye namasiko, ukuqhubeka kohlanga njengomgaqo wokulungelelanisa izinto, konke oku

okubumba kwaye kunokuthintela ukufundiswa nokuphuhliswa kwabantwana. Intetho ethi ligotshwa lise manzi yamaZulu egxininisa ukuba abantwana bagotywa besecancinane. Le ntetho ibonisa okuhle nokubi okwenziwa lifuthe lemfundo. Olu phando luye lwavelisa ubuchule bokuyila kwabantwana njengoko begqitha kwiindawo ukuze babe ngabenzi botshintsho phakathi kweendawo abazibonayo nabahlala kuzo. Oku kubonakale xa becinga bengabekwanga so ngabahlohli, bebevelisa ukubanethemba, bebonakalisa ukudibanisa ingcinga zabo nokubangqongileyo njengoko bebonakalisa ukuhamba kwabo. Ukusebenzisa indlela yokucinga ebantwaneni bubonisa ubuntu nendlela yabo yokuhlala nabanye abantu ekuhlaleni nendlela yokwenza izinto novelwano lwabo kunye nabanye abantwana. Ngaphezu koko aba bantwana baye babonakalisa indlela abanxibelelana neMakhanda, uninzi lwabo lufuna ukuphucula nokuhlala benze lukhulu ekuhlaleni. IMakhanda njengendawo ehlangahlangeneyo igcwele ukungavisisani ngokwembali kodwa ikwanobutyebi bokwahlukahlukana kunye nobudlelwane, kwaye iinenkqubo zabafundi zokunxibelelana ngemfundo, kunye nolungelelwaniso olunamandla lwabafundi, lubonisa amathuba okubuyisela uqeqesho olujolise kwinkathalo, ukuvelisa izithuba ngokwahlukileyo kwinkqubo yemfundo enobulungisa ngokwentlalo. Igalelo lezempundo lolu phando kukudibanisa kwayo ithiyori yobukoloni yali neyesithuba, ukubonelela ngesakhelo esihlanganisiweyo sokuqonda nokucela umngeni kweenkqubo zokufunda.

Olu phando luye lwabonisa indlela iindlela zocwangciso lwe-ethnographic ekubambeni indawo yoluntu kunye nendalo. Ixesha ndawo lwencwadi zale mihla kunye ne- mobile ethnography, ngokukodwa, zibonelele ngolwazi olutyebileyo, ukucacisa izinto ezenzeka kubomi babafundi baseMakhanda. Ngokugxila kumava aphilileyo uphando lunika ingcaciso enzulu malunga nendlela isithuba namandla ezibumba ngayo ubuntu kunye neziphumo zemfundo. Uphononongo lukwachaza iindlela zokwenza utshintsho, lubethelela ukubaluleka kokuqondwa kwemeko ekucwangcisweni nasekusekweni kwemfundo. Ngokunika ulwazi lwasekuhlaleni nokunika isidima iinkqubo zokunxibelelana zasekuhlaleni njengezingunobangela nesigaba esibalulekileyo ekwenzeni imfundo yesininzi efanelekileyo. Olu phando lukhuthaza iinkqubo zemfundo ezijolise kumazwi namava abafundi noluntu ngokubanzi, ukujongana nezakhiwo zemfundo eziqinileyo ngoku ezilawulayo nezibuyisela ubukholoniyali kwimfundo yamabanga aphantsi.

Ukuqokumbela, olu phando lubonisa impembelelo ehlala ihleli yelifa yobukoloni yali eMzantsi Afrika kwimfundo yamabanga aphantsi nendlela ilifa, elibonakala ukucwangciswa ngalo,

ifuthe lobudlelwane babantwana, indlela abanxibelelana ngayo, indlela yokuqonda nokuziphatha, nolwalamano abantwana abalubumbayo nabantu neendawo. Into enomdla kukuba ubuhlobo babantwana kunye nolwazi abalabelana ngalo ngokudibeneyo, kunye 'nokuthetha ngokwenza' besebenzisa amandla abo, kubonelela ngeendlela ezisebenzayo zokumelana nelifa lobukoloni kunye nokucinga kwakhona ngeendlela yokufundisa nokufunda ngokudibeneyo, ngenjongo yokwakha imfundo enobulungisa ngakumbi nenokubandakanya wonke umntu.



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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>ADHD</b>   | Attention-deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder                            |
| <b>BCI</b>    | Black, Coloured and Indian  |
| <b>BLM</b>    | Black Lives Matter  |
| <b>ECAs</b>   | Early Career Academics  |
| <b>ECEC</b>   | Early Childhood Education and Care                                    |
| <b>HE/I</b>   | Higher Education/ Institutions  |
| <b>MEC</b>    | Member of the Executive Council                                       |
| <b>NPHE</b>   | National Plan for Higher Education                                    |
| <b>NPPSET</b> | National Plan for Post-School Education and Training                  |
| <b>POS</b>    | Production of Space   |
| <b>STEM</b>   | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics                      |
| <b>TSD</b>    | Time Space Diaries  |
| <b>TVET</b>   | Technical Vocational Education and Training                           |
| <b>URP</b>    | Urban Regeneration Partnerships                                       |
| <b>WPHE</b>   | White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education |
| <b>WPPSET</b> | White Paper on Post-School Education and Training                     |
| <b>WSOE</b>   | Witwatersrand School of Education                                     |

# Chapter One: Introduction and Research Context

## 1.1 Introduction

Three decades after independence, South Africa's education system remains a site of profound inequity and ongoing struggle, where the past continues to shape the present. Historical injustices and entrenched spatial inequalities still influence access to quality education, employment opportunities, and socio-economic mobility (Spaull & Jansen, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020). Although policy reforms have sought to redress these inequities, the legacy of apartheid persists, reflected in disparities between racial groups, geographic locations, and socio-economic strata. For instance, Black African<sup>1</sup> and Coloured<sup>2</sup> populations disproportionately experience lower educational attainment and higher dropout rates. In contrast, White<sup>3</sup> and Indian/Asian<sup>4</sup> populations are more likely to complete secondary and tertiary education, as shown by 2022 Census data (StatsSA, 2023). South Africa's socio-economic inequality is stark, as the nation holds the highest Gini coefficient worldwide, at 0.63 (Dyvik, 2024).

This inequality is evident provincially, resulting in contradictory lived experiences. Focusing on the country's gross domestic product (GDP) provides valuable insights into economic performance and highlights these inequalities. Gauteng contributes 33.9% of GDP, followed

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<sup>1</sup> The "Black African" racial group in South Africa refers to individuals of indigenous African descent, encompassing diverse ethnic groups such as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and many others, who have historically been the majority population but were subjected to severe marginalisation and oppression under colonialism and apartheid.

<sup>2</sup> The "Coloured" racial group refers to people of mixed racial heritage, including African, European, and Asian ancestries, who were classified as a distinct group under apartheid, experiencing social and political marginalisation, though with a status that afforded them slightly more rights and privileges than Black Africans but less than Whites

<sup>3</sup> The "White" racial group in South Africa refers to individuals of European descent, primarily Dutch, British, and other European ancestries, who historically held political and economic dominance during colonial and apartheid eras.

<sup>4</sup> The "Indian" racial group refers to descendants of indentured labourers and traders from the Indian subcontinent who were brought to South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Under apartheid's rigid racial hierarchy, Indians held a middle position between White and Black populations and as a result experienced forms of segregation and discrimination, yet with privileges relative to Black Africans.

by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape at 16.6% and 14.2%, respectively. In contrast, the Northern Cape, with 5.1%, and the Free State, with 2.3%, contribute the least. Despite accounting for only 7.9% of GDP in 2023, the Eastern Cape is notably impacted when GDP per capita is considered alongside its large population. The Eastern Cape contributes only 0.63%, compared to Gauteng (1.29%), KwaZulu-Natal (0.83%), Western Cape (1.22%), and Northern Cape (1.05%). These economic disparities align with unemployment statistics. While the national unemployment rate stands at 32.6%, rates in Gauteng (33.7%), KwaZulu-Natal (29.4%), and Northern Cape (26.3%) are lower save Gauteng. The Eastern Cape, however, has the highest unemployment rate in the country at 38.8%, exceeding 50% when youth unemployment is considered (StatsSA, 2023).

Access to educational resources also underscores this inequality. For example, while over 68% of schools in Gauteng and the Western Cape have libraries, only 8.7% and 7% of schools in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape are similarly equipped. Moreover, while approximately 10% of adults in Gauteng and the Western Cape hold degrees, only 5.7% in Limpopo and 6.4% in the Eastern Cape do. These inequalities across space contribute to migration patterns, with the Eastern Cape and Limpopo being viewed as migrant-sending regions, showing a net migration of 62,629 and 114,328 persons, respectively, while Gauteng and the Western Cape are migrant-receiving regions (StatsSA, 2023).

However, this should not imply that people in Gauteng live better lives than those in the Eastern Cape. There are contradictions within provinces, and rural<sup>5</sup> and township<sup>6</sup> areas are not inherently inferior but instead reflect different spatial productions, as will be discussed later (see sections 2.10). According to the South African Index of Multiple Deprivation (SAIMD), 90% of the most deprived municipal wards are in the former homelands—areas

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<sup>5</sup> Rurality in this thesis is initially used simplistically and then later problematised in chapter two as it is an old categorisation of space that is seeped with connotations that nonetheless seeks to explain that which is fluid and changing. This term is often used with 'township' as the study site includes elements of both the rural and township context that overlap making it difficult to see where one ends and another start.

<sup>6</sup> Similar to rural, townships are context are also hard to define, historically they are understood to refer to underdeveloped area designated for non-white residents during apartheid, typically located on the outskirts of cities and challenged by poverty and limited infrastructure. Post 1994 these spaces continues to face these challenges but are also evolving into diverse spaces of resilience, cultural vibrancy, and economic potential in the democratic era. This term is often used with 'rural/ peri-rural' as the study site includes both. Rural and township context that overlap making it difficult to see where one ends and another start.

marked by intersecting inequalities rooted in colonial and apartheid spatial planning. Post-1994, these areas exhibit overlapping deprivations in material possessions, employment, living environment, and education.

These statistics illustrate how, three decades after independence, South Africa continues to be characterised by socio-spatial inequalities where the past profoundly influences the present. The persistence of colonial legacies—entwined with geography, inequality, discrimination, and segregation—stems from the ongoing renewal of domination practices in contemporary contexts. As Trouillot (2015) argued, the so-called legacies of past horrors are sustained by present and continuous practices of domination. While many studies have examined these practices nationally, this study offers an in-depth exploration of social space production within the peri-rural socio-spatial context of Makhanda in the Eastern Cape Province. Using Lefebvre's (1991) spatial framework and decolonial theory, this study examines how social space in education emerges as a socially produced phenomenon and how it can be (re)shaped.

The proverb “*Ligotshwa lise manzi*” commonly used in many African communities, underscores the significance of shaping an individual’s character during early childhood. Literally translated as “it is bent while still wet,” the phrase refers to the practice of bending a sapling while it is still pliable—before it hardens with age. Metaphorically, it conveys the belief that the values, behaviours, and attitudes instilled in children will determine the kind of adults they become.

However, when examined through a decolonial lens, this seemingly benign metaphor reveals a deeper complexity and tension. The act of “bending” suggests the imposition of a predetermined form—raising critical questions: Bent by whom? Toward what ideal? Whose vision of the “desirable” is being imposed upon the child?

As this study will demonstrate, in the schools under investigation, the direction of this formative influence often appears to orient children toward passivity, individualisation, and conformity. There is a marked emphasis on the uncritical acceptance of traditional roles and hierarchies—traits that mirror those inculcated during colonial education. This suggests that educators today may be reproducing the very patterns into which they themselves were shaped, perpetuating a legacy that traces back to colonial regimes. Such shaping may inadvertently hinder the cultivation of values essential for postcolonial societies: tolerance,

inclusivity, creativity, innovation, agency, and relationality. This study thus interrogates how inherited educational practices may be limiting the transformative potential of learners in contemporary African contexts. Having outlined the national and provincial context, this study now focuses on Makhanda, where it was conducted—a microcosm encapsulating South Africa's broader socio-economic divides.

## **1.2. Makhanda: A Peri-Rural Microcosm of Inequality and Potential**

While econometric approaches are commonly utilised in educational literature (e.g., Venkat & Spaul, 2015; Spaul, 2016; Mullis et al., 2020), this thesis aligns with the transdisciplinary movement, which aims to transcend disciplinary boundaries that often fragment complex phenomena. Accordingly, this thesis offers a multi-layered representation of Makhanda, integrating geographical, econometric, historical, relational, and visual narratives. These layers, underpinned by Lefebvre's socio-spatial theory (1991), serve as a meta-narrative that legitimises the cross-disciplinary dialogue and provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate production of space in Makhanda.

Formerly known as Grahamstown, Makhanda is a city in the Eastern Cape Province and the principal urban centre of the Makana Local Municipality. Established in 1812 as a military stronghold, Makhanda evolved into a commercial hub on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony (Reynolds & Reynolds, 1974). However, the discovery of mineral wealth in other areas shifted economic focus away from the city, reducing it to a legal centre and regional market (O'Meara, 1995). In its contemporary form, Makhanda epitomises South Africa's socio-economic inequality, emblematic of the nation's globally unparalleled Gini coefficient of 0.63 (Dyvik, 2024). The city embodies a stark dichotomy between aspirations of economic prosperity and the entrenched realities of inequality and infrastructural decline.

The renaming of Grahamstown to Makhanda in 2018 marked an attempt to disassociate from the colonial and apartheid legacy. The new name honours a Xhosa warrior and visionary who, in 1819, led an attack against the British garrison stationed at Grahamstown during the Xhosa Wars (Thompson, 2001). The historical trajectory of Makhanda necessitates detailed exploration, as it forms the contextual foundation for its contemporary realities. Like many postcolonial spaces, Makhanda's history is fraught with violence, the vestiges of which persist (O'Halloran, 2016). Between 1811 and 1812, the “first great removal in South African

history” (Mostert, 1992, p. 389) forcibly displaced the Xhosa population to segregate them from the burgeoning British colony. Archival records reveal that Colonel John Graham orchestrated the expulsion of Xhosa communities from the fertile Zuurveld between the Sunday and Fish Rivers (Mostert, 1992). Further displacement occurred during the Brereton Raid of 1818 when Xhosa groups were driven eastward under accusations of cattle theft. British forces indiscriminately attacked Xhosa settlements along the Keiskamma River and confiscated over 20,000 cattle. This dispossession of land and livelihood tethered the Xhosa people to a paradigm of colonial dependency. This legacy endures in the spatial divisions between Makhanda’s township and rural sectors in the east and its urban and commercial core in the west. The struggle for land, identity, and resources remains a defining feature of Makhanda’s socio-spatial landscape (O’Halloran, 2016).

To date, Makhanda exemplifies a complex interplay of contradictions and transitions. Renamed Makhanda, yet colloquially referred to as Rhini, occupies a liminal space between urban and rural classifications. While designated a city due to its historical and administrative significance, it retains the characteristics of a town. Makhanda’s status as a peri-rural area—a transitional zone between urban and rural landscapes—illustrates its dual identity. As the Global Institute for Peri-Urban Landscapes (n.d.) explains, peri-rural areas blend urban features like economic hubs and basic infrastructure with rural elements like agricultural land and livestock. Makhanda’s estimated population of 140,000 resides in this transitional space, situated between the metropolitan centres of Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela Bay, 160 km and 120 km away, respectively. Limited conventional employment opportunities further complicate its economic landscape.

The city embodies visible signs of privilege and disadvantage (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2), most evident in its spatial divisions. The western half of Makhanda, situated at a higher altitude than the east (see figure 1.2), associated with privilege, is characterised by colonial architecture, tree-lined streets, fairly well-maintained residential areas, and cultural landmarks, such as the high court and commercial zones. Prestigious educational institutions dominate this part of the city, including Rhodes University and elite private schools like St Andrew’s College, Diocesan School for Girls (DSG), and Kingswood College. The National Arts Festival, a prominent cultural event, further reinforces this image of privilege (Hoefnagels et al., 2022; StatsSA, 2022).



**Figure 1.1 A view of Makhanda taken from a school**

Source: Author's own



**Figure 1.2 Makhanda**

Source: South Africa info Grahamstown/ Makhanda

Conversely, the eastern half of Makhanda faces significant socio-economic challenges. Residents often live in substandard housing, including overcrowded informal settlements connected by gravel roads (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Water outages, inadequate sanitation, and sparse vegetation characterise the landscape. Recreational spaces are scarce, and environmental degradation is widespread. Although apartheid-era spatial planning delineates these divides, overlaps are apparent: municipal service failures, such as potholes and water

shortages, affect both sides of the city, and signs of environmental degradation are ubiquitous.

The educational landscape mirrors these disparities. Schools in western Makhanda are well-resourced and high-performing, with a mix of private institutions and high-fee public schools that operate with semi-autonomous governance (Department of Education, 1998). Conversely, eastern Makhanda is dominated by no-fee schools such as Nombulelo Secondary School, Ntsika Secondary School, and C.M. Vellem Primary School, which face infrastructure and resource availability challenges due to budgetary constraints. Classified as quintile three schools, these institutions serve communities with moderate socio-economic challenges and aim to provide accessible education by eliminating tuition fees (Department of Education, 1998). Nevertheless, recent years have seen notable improvements in eastern schools (Amner, 2023). This thesis explores these schools as spaces of both challenge and potential, celebrating their successes while critically examining their limitations.

Makhanda's employment landscape reflects its educational and spatial inequalities. While Rhodes University provides significant employment opportunities, the public sector (including healthcare and local government), retail, and agriculture also play substantial roles. Non-profit organisations and informal economic activities sustain many livelihoods (Makana Local Municipality, 2017; StatsSA, 2023). However, this economic profile contrasts sharply with nearby Gqeberha, which boasts a more diversified economy, including manufacturing and food processing industries (Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, 2022).

Despite its challenges, Makhanda also embodies the potential for transformation. Its complex spatial productions—marked by contrasts, contradictions, and transitions—offer an opportunity to rethink and reimagine spatial justice, particularly within the context of education, where the study's problem statement is found.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem: Perpetuating Educational Inequality: The Legacy of South Africa's Two-Tiered Education System**

In this section, I start by succinctly presenting the problem statement, which is later unpacked in more detail: Despite democratic reforms, South Africa's past negatively impacts the education system. This negative impact is most evident in schools located in rural areas and peri-urban townships (Spaull & Jansen, 2019). As a result, it is vital to address these inequalities to ensure that quality education is accessible to all.

The legacy of apartheid exerts a pervasive influence on South Africa's educational landscape, propagating disparities along racial and geographical axes. Preceding the nation's transition to democracy in 1994, the educational system was starkly segregated, with distinct standards, resource allocation and opportunities predicated upon racial classification. For example, during the apartheid era, schools for the white minority received disproportionately more significant funding and resources, including superior infrastructure and well-qualified educators. Conversely, schools classified for the black populations, governed by the Bantu Education Act of 1953, grappled with chronic underfunding, a dearth of teachers qualified to teach a full range of subjects, and inadequate facilities. While 96% of teachers in white schools had teaching qualifications, only 15% in black schools held similar credentials (Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015). Moreover, the teacher-pupil ratio in white schools was notably lower at 1:18 compared to 1:39 in black schools (Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015).

Since 1994, the government has undertaken various strategies in response to the segregated educational context pre-1994 to work toward fostering national unity, inclusion and redress. One such strategy has been that of curriculum reform away from racially differentiated curricula towards more equitable education curricula that seeks to provide equal opportunities for all (Department of Education, 1998)). Another strategy is the policy alterations, such as extending school feeder areas from five to 30 kilometres and reflecting efforts to ameliorate the persistent geographic discrimination perpetuated by apartheid (Cross et al., 2002; Govender, 2016). The department also implemented a funding model based on quintile classification to bring about redress and equity by taking account of variables, such as income, test scores, or other measures of socio-economic status in the provision and distribution of resources and financial support (Department of Education, 1998). Schools are ranked into five quintiles based on their area's socio-economic status, as per the National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy (NNSSF) (Department of Education, 1998). Schools in the poorest areas (quintile one) receive the most government funding and do not charge fees. Quintiles two and three schools also waive fees. Quintile four and five tend to

have to be well-resourced, receive the least governmental funding per learner and are fee-paying schools, with quintile five schools charging higher fees and relying on parental contribution and private funding.

Post 1998 and the implementation of the NNSSF policy, the expenditure on white students remained significantly higher, with white children benefiting from more years of compulsory schooling (Hindle, 2007). Here, the effectiveness of the quintile system in facilitating equity is questioned as learners' socioeconomic circumstances are still a significant determinant of educational success (see Spaull & Jansen, 2019; Van der Berg & Gustafsson, 2022). Similarly, educational outcomes continue to reflect the historical privileging of white schools while perceptions of inferiority persist concerning schools formerly designated for non-white populations, particularly in the township and rural locales (Keswell, 2010; Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023). Again, similar to pre-1994, Geographical location emerges as a pivotal determinant of educational opportunity, exacerbating other disparities. Choices regarding school selection often reinforce the existence of this dual education system, intersecting with considerations of class, race and culture (Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023). Research indicates a strong correlation between school location and educational attainment, prompting parents to pursue enrolment in institutions offering better educational quality often linked to particular places (Zoach, 2017; Adebayo et al., 2020).

Democratic South Africa has been characterised by increased educational mobilities post-1994 (see Ndimande, 2018). Learners have been transitioning to alternative schools; however, such movement remains predominantly unidirectional. Few learners from white, coloured or Indian communities/schools have enrolled or moved to previously black-designated institutions or townships/rural contexts (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006).

The implications of these mobility patterns raise significant concerns, including the closure of schools in the areas mentioned above as lacking opportunities and resulting in lengthy and costly commutes for children. In 2021, 39 farm schools in the Eastern Cape alone were closed, with approximately 1142 schools across the province earmarked for closure. This was done as part of the rationalisation, realignment and merger of non-viable schools (Studio, 2021). Such closures necessitate lengthy commutes for learners seeking schooling, perceived as more viable outside township locales. The shutting of numerous public schools, notably in the Eastern Cape, underscores the ramifications of these mobilities, resulting in dwindling

enrolment in township/rural schools, prompting deliberations within the education sector to begin renting out the buildings as retail centres and residential spaces (Piliso & Phandle, 2021; Velaphi, 2024).

The research site, Makhanda, given its size and diversity of socio-economic population, can be viewed as a microcosm of South Africa. In 2011, three schools in Makhanda faced closure due to declining enrolments: Andrew Moyakhe Primary School, Benjamin Mahlasela Secondary School and Makana Primary School, all situated in the townships east of Grahamstown. Benjamin Mahlasela Secondary School was shut in 2013 owing to dwindling pupil numbers – its remnants today as a dilapidated monument to school choice mobilities. Despite the exodus from township/rural schools, including and especially those of educator-parents based in township schools (see Lombard, 2007), waiting lists persist in schools previously set aside for the white population alongside enduring financial barriers to access. As articulated by Woolman and Fleisch (2006), black children are slated to continue attending these so-called township schools for the foreseeable future -[ provided they persist]. Consequently, research into such schools assumes paramount importance, extending beyond institutional confines to elucidate the spatial constructs within which schools operate, delineating opportunities, challenges and the agency to embrace or resist prevailing norms.

In conclusion, South Africa's dual education system perpetuates historical inequalities, manifested in resource disparities, facilities and educational outcomes. Despite post-apartheid reforms, the legacy of apartheid endures, shaping perceptions and mobility patterns in the pursuit of quality education. Addressing these entrenched disparities necessitates sustained efforts to understand and dismantle the nuanced barriers perpetuating educational inequality, ensuring that all learners have equitable access to quality education, regardless of their background or geographical location. While this issue is extensively documented, with emphasis on the structural and enduring facets of the system of socio-spatial inequality, there exists limited research foregrounding space, place and mobilities drawing on decolonial and socio-spatial theory in primary schooling (see sections 2.6). Primary schooling is where *ligotshwa lise manzi* - children are to be 'bent' or educationally shaped towards particular inclinations, at an early age.

Moreover, evidence suggests that spatial theory has facilitated innovative solutions in post-colonial contexts (see Chapter Two). It is imperative to support and enhance the quality of

teaching and learning in public schools situated in rural and township settings, as they constitute the majority. Such schools provide a context for critical skills, social cohesion, equity, and other democratic values (see Roberts & Chitiga-Mabugu, 2019; Van der Berg, 2021). Consequently, this study explored the interface between socio-spatial inequalities, learning, and children's mobilities in post-colonial South Africa, aiming to inform innovative rethinking of the purpose of education in Makhanda—a town with a rich history where conventional employment does not align well with the lived realities of children in a peri-rural context, close to the town but removed from industry. This research seeks to re-centre education in a way that addresses these unique challenges.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The main research question was: How does/can the production of social space in rurally located township schools influence the learning of grade 6 learners?

Research sub-questions:

- How is school space re/produced in the three schools?
- What social practices do learners engage in when in 'free' spaces?
- How is power distributed in the production of space within the socio-spatial systems experienced by the learners?
- What are the mobility patterns of learners in the socio-spatial system?
- What opportunities for learning do the mobilities of learners make possible?
- What does it mean to be a child in a rural socio-spatial system [identity]?
- What opportunities for learning does the production of space make possible for teachers and learners?

#### **1.5 Aim of the Study**

This study aimed to examine the production of social space in primary schooling within the peri-rural socio-spatial context of Makhanda, South Africa, by employing both spatial and decolonial theory. This investigation seeks to understand how these spaces have and can influence and inform teaching and learning. In other words, the study sought to examine how social space is produced in Makhanda, including the relations, ideologies, mobilities and built environment, to explore how this knowledge is and can help us identify (new) and cultivate

(old) opportunities for innovative action towards more inclusive and equitable educational practices and theorisations.

## **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

The two objectives of the study focused on exploring spatial productions to inform the transformation of space. The *first was to examine* the socio-space production in three primary schools in Makhanda, drawing on Lefebvre and decolonial and spatial theories to consider perceptions, theoretical and ideological conceptions and lived experiences of various stakeholders. In doing this, the study also explored the mobilities of learners that form part of the spatial productions. Based on this contextual exploration, the *second objective was to explore* opportunities for transformative practice by uncovering strategies and practices that leverage the spatial insights for creating more inclusive, equitable and contextually relevant educational experiences in primary schooling.

## **1.7 Outline of Thesis**

**CHAPTER ONE** introduces the study by examining socio-spatial inequalities in South Africa, specifically focusing on Makhanda. Despite various efforts to enhance education and living conditions, rural and township areas face significant deprivation, resulting in substantial migration to more developed provinces, such as Gauteng. The enduring legacy of apartheid adversely impacts the education system, leading to urban schools consistently outperforming their rural counterparts, thereby perpetuating inequalities.

**CHAPTER TWO** explores the evolving debates surrounding the historical conceptualisation of space and their implications, culminating in Henri Lefebvre's spatial framework, which serves as the foundational framework for this thesis. This chapter discusses the applications of Lefebvre's framework in educational research and connects it to discussions on rurality and decoloniality.

**CHAPTER THREE** outlines the design of this study, which employs a qualitative ethnographic case study methodology executed in three phases. This chapter also describes

the approach taken for data analysis and addresses the ethical considerations inherent in the research.

**CHAPTER FOUR** presents a discussion of the findings from the decolonial rhythm analysis, focusing on the school context (Phase One). This chapter reveals the enduring legacy of coloniality in shaping school spaces and its impact on children. Additionally, it examines break time as a "third space," contrasting it with the formal teaching time spent in classrooms.

**CHAPTER FIVE** expands the discussion beyond the school context by presenting findings from Phase Two, which focuses on four children's enacted and imagined mobilities. This chapter highlights the children's strong connections to their birthplace and aspirations to become change agents. It also begins a discussion on the types of schooling experiences that children desire.

**CHAPTER SIX** synthesises the findings from Chapters Four and Five to address the research question: How is school space re/produced in the three schools? This chapter provides an overview of broad spatial production in the schools that form part of the study. It then draws on data from Phase Three to answer another research question: What opportunities for learning does this production of space create for teaching and learning?

**CHAPTER SEVEN** discusses the contributions and implications of this study within the frameworks of decoloniality and spatial theory in primary education. This chapter articulates recommendations for further research and practical interventions to advance discussions on social justice. It sets the stage for future inquiries that can contribute to reshaping children's experiences by decolonising education in South Africa.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the socio-spatial inequalities in South Africa at a national and provincial level, focusing on the context of this study, Makhanda. Despite several efforts to improve education and living conditions, rural/township areas remain deprived, leading to significant migration to more developed provinces like Gauteng. The legacy of apartheid continues to affect the education system, with urban schools generally outperforming rural

schools, perpetuating inequalities. This chapter has further introduced the questions the study seeks to answer and the reason for the study. The chapter that follows presents the conceptual and theoretical lens of the study.

## **Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this conceptual and theoretical framework chapter, I plot the developments in the historical conceptualisation of space as absolute, relational and relative. I then present the spatial framework developed by Lefebvre (1991) and the importance of the reconceptualisation of space, foregrounding what it enables: capitalism and colonialism. A brief discussion of the value of a Lefebvrian spatial analysis follows this. Given the case study's location, I then fashion rural space through Lefebvrian spatial theory. Lastly, I outline the critiques such a framework gathers and how this study responds to such critiques by drawing on decolonial theory and the mobilities research in the social sciences to explore the nuanced movements and experiences of individuals, particularly children, in diverse spatial contexts.

### **2.2 Absolute Time and Space**

In the 16th century, contrasting views on the conceptualisation of space and time emerged, mainly through the ideas of Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz (Harvey, 1973; Smith, 2003). Newton believed that space and time were absolute, fixed, and independent, existing regardless of events or objects. In contrast, Leibniz argued that space and time were relative and dependent on the relationships between objects and events. While they did not engage in a formal debate, their ideas represented two fundamentally opposing views on the nature of space and time (Harvey, 1973; Smith, 2003). Newton's view of space and time as absolute was influenced by the technological advancements of his era (Kern, 1983), including the improvements in telescopes, microscopes and logarithms. Newton was influenced by Aristotle's work, which presented space as absolute and immovable and, consequently, silent on power dynamics (Gill & Lennox, 1994). On the other hand, Leibniz held space and time as relational rather than absolute; he argued that space, like time, was only comprehensible through frames of interpretation and so could not be understood independently. Unlike Newton, for Leibniz, space was not a container waiting to be filled but rather dependent on the processes and substances that continue to produce it. Leibniz's space, similar to Einstein's space, depends on what is being relativised in an open-ended process that is never complete. However, Newton's ideas prevailed: space/time as an absolute (Kern, 1983).

Unlike his opponent, Newton's conceptualisation of space downplayed or abated power relations and presented space as objective. His triumph over Leibniz is accredited to what his space made possible as opposed to its intrinsic logic. As Thomas Kuhn (1962) argued, the acceptance of a particular paradigm is often not a matter of logic but of how a paradigm makes manipulation and control of everyday activities possible.

Newton's conceptualisation of space dominated the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and married well with Rene Descartes's work. Descartes, whose contributions were influenced by Euclidean geometry, partly founded the epistemological viewpoint that privileges sight in knowledge construction – modern ocular centrism (Warf, 2009). Regarding space, everything that was known was what people could see, so they conceptualised space similarly to Newton as something physical. Cartography, in line with this conceptualisation of space and aided by the printing press, focused mainly on mapping physical locations that detached the subjective viewer and presented an 'objective' truth (Soja, 2009). In doing this, maps did not just represent space; they created space with a Eurocentric worldview. Cartography rendered space homologous, united and confined to a surface (Lefebvre, 1991). People were in spaces, but not part of space, so differences in relationality, positionality and power differences were silenced. According to Massey (Warf, 2009), this conceptualised space as something to be crossed and conquered.

### **2.3 From Absolute to Relative and Relational Space**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a shift to Leibniz's conception of space as relational and away from Newton's conception of space as absolute gained much ground. Such a shift was brought about gradually from economic, political and cultural fronts.

Several contemporary scholars from geography, sociology, cultural studies, etc., in the 20<sup>th</sup> century critique the view of space as “a horizontal order of coexistent places that could be sharply delimited and compartmentalised from each other” (Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 4) offered to us through Euclidean geometry and the Cartesian plane. Today's consumer culture connects people across the globe who exchange capital for goods and services in unprecedented ways. Likewise, the development in transportation has led to people travelling to distant places at affordable prices. Added to the movement of goods and bodies is the movement of information via the internet from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to date. The rise of ecological and

environmental problems further challenged the idea of space as a container of social processes (Warf & Arias, 2009). Deforestation, carbon footprint and water scarcity demonstrate how we are intertwined with space and place (Soja, 1989). In all these processes, it has gradually become clear that spaces are not simply horizontal, delimited, compartmentalised and homologous, as differences across language, culture, ethnicity and gender (Warf & Arias, 2009) in the step towards globalisation have resulted in both the local and the global being transformed as the ‘borders’ separating them blur.

The processes mentioned above, and the works of various scholars have resulted in the ongoing reconceptualisation of space. These developments in space conceptualisation have transformed human geography from being a purely empirical discipline. As a result, it has had to rely on ideas borrowed from other disciplines to one that now provides other disciplines with ideas (Warf & Arias, 2009). One such scholar at the forefront of the new conceptualisation of space whose work on space provides this research with its theoretical framework is Henri Lefebvre (1991).

## **2.4 The Production of Space**

Lefebvre’s work, penned in the mid-20th century, is influenced by Karl Marx. This manifests in his discourse and his deep desire for freedom for all in a society with as little domination as possible (Foucault, 2000). Lefebvre shifts scholars' attention from conceiving of ‘things in space’ to focusing on the production of space, moving from the exchange of things to social relations in his book *The Production of Space*. This is similar to how Marxism moves from perceiving commodities as objective ‘things’ to sets of intersubjective relations laden with power in capitalistic societies. Marx’s problem is industrialisation, and for Lefebvre, it is space. However, Lefebvre departs from temporally defined dialectical reasoning, favouring trialectics—a framework incorporating three dimensions of space and being. This approach resists binary reductionism and the totalisation typical of dialectical thought (Soja, 1996).

Lefebvre (1991) posits a trialectic of being and spatiality that departs from Marxist thought as it includes the spatial dimension of social existence, a dimension Lefebvre argues Marxism neglected. The ‘trialectics of being’ is a central concept in his work that speaks to the three intertwined and mutually constitutive dimensions of human existence: historicity, spatiality, and sociality (see Figure 1). Historicity focuses on the temporal dimension, particularly

how the present is fused with the weight of the past and future possibilities (Soja, 1996). Here, the focus is not just on the passage of time but on how the temporal shapes are shaped by human activity. In other words, History is not a backdrop but an active and ongoing process in which individuals and societies are embedded (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2001; Soja, 1996).

Spatiality, the second dimension, will be discussed later. The third dimension, sociality, highlights the inherently social nature of human experience. Humans are embedded in social networks, institutions, and interactions, engaging in collective activities such as education. Historicity, spatiality, and sociality are mutually constitutive, meaning historical events are always spatially situated and socially mediated; space is always historically produced and socially constructed; and social relations are always rooted in specific historical moments and spatial contexts. As Soja (1996) asserts, "Our spatiality, sociality, and historicity are mutually constitutive, with no one inherently privileged a priori" (p. 18). Therefore, Lefebvre's goal is to broaden our understanding of being spatial, historical, and social in life and, in this study, in particular, the life of a school-going child.

## **2.5 The Perceived-Conceived-Lived Space Triad**

This section outlines the second dimension of human existence, *spatiality*, that form the trialectic of the epistemology of space (see figure 1). Here, I discuss Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space (spatiality) as perceived, conceived, and lived, as well as the later advancements of this framework by Edward Soja. Edward Soja is an American urban geographer and spatial theorist whose works embraced and extended Lefebvre's concept of the spatial triad. Soja's most prominent books, *Postmodern Geographies (1989)* and *Thirdspace (1996)*, are often viewed as a continuation and extension of Lefebvre's ideas within contemporary urban and geographical studies. He used Lefebvre's concepts as a springboard to explore how space is shaped by power relations, social struggles, and historical processes, particularly in the postmodern city. His contribution to the spatial framework is discussed later in this section. Lefebvre's model of three interconnected spaces forming social space (see Figure 1) provides explanatory power that enables a different and innovative analysis in educational research. *Perceived* space denotes the spatial practices of everyday life perceived by the senses as reality and produces the relationships to practice – people, things and places of practice (Sheehy, 2009).

This space is similar to Soja's firstspace, which focuses on space's physical and material aspects. Lefebvre's framework, however, foregrounds the perceptions one has of the materials. Perceived space is considered the empirical aspect of social space: the presence, position, and actions of bodies and objects and how they interrelate, including scents and tastes (Middleton, 2016). This space has often dominated research into space because it is measurable and open to calculation. Here, we refer to a person walking through the school grounds, passing the desks, chairs and school building that are actual and physical and how they experience them. Spatial theory argues that, while the questions we ask may start with the visible practices, they should never privilege them because what is perceived is colonised by what is conceived.

*Conceived* space is the abstract mental space of ideology (Middleton, 2016). What Soja terms secondspace, foregrounding the political nature of discourse and ideas. This space operates dialectically with perceived space by codifying and rationalising perceived space to give meaning (Allen, 1999). Here the focus is on how the school-grounds have been planned, designed and organised by architects, policies and teachers mentally prior to it becoming a physical reality (a perceived space). The emphasis here is these ideas that direct how the space is designed and filled with ideology, beliefs, values and assumptions. Conceived space legitimises perceived space by creating what Allen (1999) terms a cover story that people apply to perceived space. We can legitimise what we see and do; sometimes, participants may be unaware of the conceived space that legitimises their lived experiences. For this reason, an outsider (not functioning in the rhythms or cover story) may be more helpful in critiquing and transforming the dominant rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004).

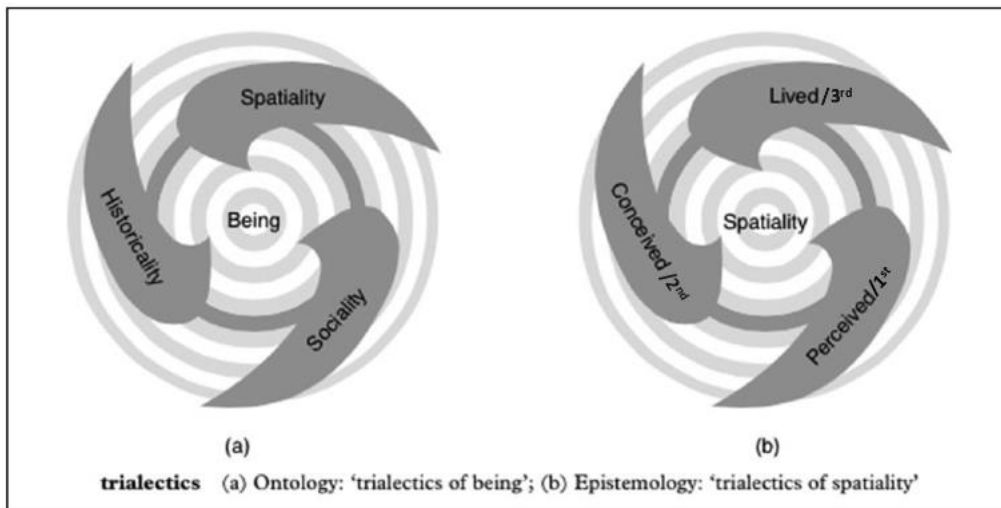
The *lived space* completes the triad that makes up spatiality (see Figure 2.1). Lived space is the clandestine space (Merrifield, 2006). It can function underground because it can go against the perceived-conceived space rationality by reimagining new ways of being and doing. Lived space is powerful as it can allow people to transgress space by asking: what if? (Hannah 2010). While powerful, it is also unstable and unsystematic. As a result, lived space may play out differently in similar situations as it cannot be controlled (Merrifield, 2006; Soja, 1996). It reminds us that what is is not all there is and that what is imagined by architects of space is not all that is lived. Here, the focus is on how people live and experience space beyond the physical and planned aspects how they use space and how space

filled with personal memories, emotions and symbols. For some, the school grounds evoke memories of loss, and it may be used for things the planners did not imagine.

Soja's work advances the spatial triad and, in particular lived space by advancing the concept of a *thirdspace* as a hybrid space that breaks down binary thinking. It is not just a space focussed on physical vs mental or real vs. imagined or design vs use. Instead, it recognises the flux and the intersectionality and how social space can give rise to alternatives.

Lived space, which overlaps with *thirdspace* by Soja, who foregrounds its emergence in the interplay of *firstspace* and *secondspace*, includes part of what Foucault (2000) termed 'deviation heterotopia', as it includes cases that disturb the rhythm imposed by order of conceived space or what is normalised. For Foucault, these are spaces of psychiatric hospitals, prisons, care homes for the elderly and brothels where behaviour deviates from what is considered the norm. Such spaces each have a precise and determined function relating to the culture of which the deviation heterotopia is a part (Foucault, 2000). They can also act as breaks from traditional time or emerge for short periods, like a festival or a strike, and then vanish. Central to deviation heterotopias and all other heterotopias is how entry into the space is restricted and exclusion is normalised. One enters by submitting to the rites – brothels – or entrance is compulsory – psychiatric hospital or prison (Foucault, 1977). The slight difference between Foucault's spaces of deviation and Lefebvre's lived spaces is that Lefebvre's spaces are less structured, more unsystematic and more challenging to control. It is as though Lefebvre speaks of spaces that emerge in our day-to-day lives that may not have a well-articulated space socially, like a mentally ill person in town as opposed to her being in the psychiatric hospital.

These two similar yet slightly different tools help me make sense of differences that have been demarcated in a space socially as well as the differences that find no place and, as a result, operate underground and are in danger of non-existence or myth.



**Figure 2.1: The ontology and epistemology of space**

Source: Gregory et al. (2009, p. 776)

The triad makes up social space, and having used this framework, scholars emphasise the mutual constitutive nature of the dimensions of space being produced and reproduced (Crang & Thrift, 2000). What is lived can also be perceived, and what is conceived can be both perceived and lived. Social practices operating underground today may be legitimised (i.e. accepted/ justified socially) and, as a result, normalised and no longer operate underground.

This can be said of several movements that form part of the narratives that codify social practices: decoloniality, Afro feminism and Indigenous knowledge systems, Black Lives Matter (BLM), etc. Lived space evokes the function of the sociology of education to develop new social patterns in a constantly changing world where some things, like inequality, for example, nonetheless remain entrenched (Ballantine et al., 2017). Lived space ensures that social space is alive and unstable. Understanding this ensures that innovative educational research can be transformative if afforded or obtains a space that legitimises it. Researchers can facilitate transformation by tracing together the epistemologies of a particular phenomenon so that it is not regarded as a myth and, by so doing, legitimise the phenomenon. In other words, naming the movement BLM normalises the movement; naming is a political process part of the production of social space (Berg & Kearns, 1996). There now exists a conceived space that justifies black people's lived and imagined realities of police violence. This gives credibility to people's lived experiences that may have been disregarded or treated as mythical or fictional because of the lack of conceived space to justify them (Lefebvre, 1991).

Lefebvre's work critiqued and responded to two aspects of the historical conceptualisation of space as a concrete material object. The first aspect Lefebvre challenges is the ideology that space is a container waiting to be filled. This ideological error attempts to conceive of space “without apprehending contents in terms of their interrelationships within the containing form” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 94). This was primarily due to scholars such as Aristotle, Euclid, Newton and Descartes, who presented space as absolute, immovable and silent to power differences. Like time, space existed independently and objectively and was detached from observers. Such space was mapped out, calculated, and treated as a backdrop/stage for all events (Soja, 1996). Naturally, the focus for geographers fell on the bodies or objects in absolute space and ‘space’ was assigned a passive role, likened to a constant in a scientific experiment. Little needed to be said about space, and so accounts of history privileged time because, unlike space, time was conceptualised as dynamic and developmental (Foucault, 1977). Thinking of space as everything: “contents” (movable objects, bodies), “containers” (immovable mountains, trees and buildings), ideologies and imaginations, however, enables thinking about the interrelationships in our spatial productions of social life.

The second aspect Lefebvre challenged by providing a broad and relational framework is what he called a “fetishism of the partial”, the fragmentation of space into, for example, disciplines that provide layers of knowledge addressed in isolation: geography, architecture, botany, anthropology, ecology, economics etc. which is similar to treating the eye without relating it to the body it forms part of (Lefebvre, 1991; Middleton, 2014). Lefebvre’s (1991) view on research, for example, is that research should not look at shards of knowledge (i.e. fragmented, partial, and often disconnected pieces of understanding that emerge from different disciplines, perspectives, and experiences.) or study space emptied of things or things outside of space (i.e. abstraction and disconnection of space from the material and social realities that fill it or reducing space to mere geometric concept devoid of the objects, activities, and relationships that give it meaning).

The Lefebvrian view of space presents space as an emergent social phenomenon constantly constructed and deconstructed. Lived space makes possible new social practices that deconstruct and transgress what has been legitimised by the collaboration created by conceived space and perceived space (Lefebvre, 2004). Lived space also works

constructively by presenting new/marginalised social practices, later theorised and then assimilated into the conceived space narrative.

Several scholars, such as Gottfried Leibniz in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later Einstein, tried, with little success, to provide these conceptions of space as relative and transforming to advance the absolute conception of space to emphasise the importance of context( Smith, 2003). However, as stated earlier, accepting a new paradigm is not always a matter of logic but control (Warf & Arias, 2009). One of the reasons why this conceptualisation of space was resisted is that the historical conception of space facilitated or aided colonialism and capitalism.

## **2.6 Exploring Henri Lefebvre's Socio-Spatial Framework in Educational Research: Adoption, Transformative Potential, and Future Directions**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

There has been considerable interest in Henri Lefebvre's spatial framework (1991), which presents space as an emergent social phenomenon in educational research. In this literature review, I analysed 46 research papers that used this framework in education in the past decade. The purpose is to delve into the nature of the framework, comprehend the reasons for its value in education, and identify the entities that have benefited from the socio-spatial framework. The review shows that firstly, HEIs have predominantly adopted the framework. Secondly, the framework plays a crucial role in promoting transformative efforts and advancing decolonisation agendas by exposing the underlying aspects of coloniality. This is because Lefebvre's contributions to educational research have proven invaluable as they shed light on the *limitations of capitalism* in teaching and learning, the inherent *conflicts between broader educational policies and individual classroom dynamics*, and the pressing necessity for exploring *alternative methodologies*. While the review primarily focuses on adopting Lefebvre's framework in higher education, I also focus on the goal of this study – what this framework, along with decolonial theory, can enable in the exploration and critical analysis of primary education in Makhanda. This question prompted the methodology that this thesis adopted. Could this be one pathway to strive towards creating more inclusive and equitable educational environments in the compulsory leg of education?

Fourteen of the 46 reviewed articles focus on capitalism and its limitations. I draw on five studies in particular to illustrate the work of a spatial framework in both unmasking and responding to capitalism. These studies are Bristow et al. (2019), Brown (2017), Cunningham (2016), Duckworth and Smith (2018), Ford (2017) and Wozniak (2017).

In a paper titled “Production of Consumer Spaces in the University”, Cunningham (2016) calls for producing new learning and social spaces in universities that actively interrogate and critique consumerism and capitalism within education by reclaiming education as an end. This is because Cunningham argues that “capitalist ideology limits potential directions for the university’s spatial development as any direction that diverges from the pressure to consume is often met with a dead end” (p. 200). He holds capitalism partly responsible for the uneven spaces in society. In universities, the above ideology perpetuates the limited purpose of education for upward social mobility or as a silver bullet for all social ills. The paper shows us how consumer spaces are produced in HE and the implications of such productions. Cunningham exposes the uniformity imposed in HEIs where knowledge is commodified; research into STEM subjects is foregrounded by various funding available while research into pedagogy is left on the margins. The implication is, therefore, that any alternative or fluidity meets resistance because it does not align with the governing rules of how space is to be used.

The above argument is supported by Duckworth and Smith (2018) who, two years later, called for an education that connects one's hopes for life and work instead of viewing students quantitatively through funding terms such as ‘bums on seats’ or a limiting framework of ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’. This limited rationalisation of education is also echoed by Wozniak (2017), who used spatial theory to broaden knowledge about educational debt and how it shapes subjectivity. Here, the focus is on the rhythms of debt in education as both a phenomenon and a tool for analysis to argue for creating educational experiences that disrupt rhythms of indebtedness. To do this includes (but is not limited to) education for individuals not bound to debt financing. While debt financing may result in immediate contentment, i.e. a student being able to study towards a qualification, the contentment comes at the cost of increased labour in the future – a future with no guarantee (Wozniak, 2017). Higher education needs to discover or invent rhythms dissonant with the rhythms of indebtedness often justified by upward social mobility.

This capitalistic production of space in universities presents hurdles for students and early career academics (Bristow et al., 2019; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2010). Bristow et al. (2019) used a rhythm analysis to articulate how the consequences of broader pressures like internationalisation, publish or perish, growing teaching and administration work, and the regulation of academic identities on Early Career Academics (ECAs) in business schools create unhealthy working environments. Data was generated through 32 in-depth semi-structured interviews with critical management studies ECAs from 14 countries. The paper shows how ECAs find themselves in a fundamentally unhealthy environment where multiple rhythms that are constantly interacting cause disruption and conflict (arrhythmia), as broader pressure, institutional strategies, strategies to accommodate ECAs and their attempts to reassert themselves and identity construction/insecurity create a vicious cycle (Bristow et al., 2019). This paper uses a Lefebvrian framework to raise concerns over the implications of academic capitalism on students and staff in business schools.

In a paper by Ford (2016) titled “A Pedagogy for Space: Teaching, learning, and Studying in the Baltimore Rebellion”, a significant number of individuals, approximately 3,000, were experiencing homelessness, while 47 000 vacant residential properties remained unoccupied, many of which were deliberately inaccessible to the homeless population. Meanwhile, the construction of a new prison, costing \$30 million, had taken place despite over 50% of individuals aged 18–65 being unemployed. Ford (2016) shows how it is clear that while the resources to educate, employ and house people in Baltimore are available, they are privately owned: “It is the capitalist mode of production that has produced this reality and the radically uneven spaces of Baltimore, and the city is not unique in this respect” (Ford, 2016, p. 190). Again, the author uses the spatial framework to show how social justice is hindered by an ideology that privileges profit and stops/limits any spatial developments that drift away from this rationalisation. Brown (2017) challenges the narrow view of adult education as a tool for preparing individuals for employment, arguing that such an approach perpetuates the capitalist system's status quo. Drawing on spatial theory, Brown's paper entitled "The Social Economy as Produced Space: The 'Here and Now' of Education in Constructing Alternatives" highlights the potential for producing alternatives to capitalism through education and learning. The spatial triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces illuminates the social economy's constitution, focusing on existing spaces that provide alternatives to capitalism. Thus, the social economy holds the potential to resist and challenge the dominant logic of capitalism in adult education by producing a space that offers alternative possibilities. These

alternatives arise from people's reflective and imaginative actions in everyday life, so the call for adult education is to surface alternative educational qualities. This is similar to a nomad, whose focus is not on travelling but on subversive actions that resist convention (Brown, 2017).

### **2.6.2 Glocal Tensions**

Seven of the 46 reviewed articles show that spatial theory enables the unmasking of contradictions across the conceived macro policy demands and the localised lived space experiences of students, teachers and women in higher education and public libraries (see Christie, 2013; Dixon & Janks, 2018; Fataar, 2012; Manathunga, 2019; Moss & Richter Smith, 2011; Spencer-Bennett, 2020).

Manathunga (2019) in Australia looked at how the time pressures placed on doctoral students and supervisors to produce various outcomes present particular practical and epistemic difficulties for Indigenous, migrant, refugee and international students. This is partly because these students are more likely to a) have various commitments outside of their studies (work, family, etc.) that place a demand on their time and b) lack the assumed social and cultural capital needed for the doctoral studies, e.g. they may take longer to find a suitable supervisor or need time to make sense of the tacit institutional culture. The time pressure placed on these students by capitalistic ideologies of efficiency and speed, according to Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000), results in what they term 'assimilationist pedagogies' – "a unidimensional, one-way process by which outsiders relinquished their own culture in favour of that of the dominant society". Indigenous, migrant, refugee and international students are, in essence, socialised into the Western knowledge system at the expense of other knowledge systems and the considerations of their career trajectories and lived experiences. To respond to this epistemic injustice, Manathunga (2019) called for temporal equity in higher education: a move towards reconceptualising doctoral studies with the realisation that the way time is lived, experienced, and (re)constructed is shaped by location, positionality and experience, gender, class and race producing unequal power relations and socio-cultural differences. Added to this shift is a need for universities to recognise that they are businesses and centres for epistemic transformations.

Moss and Richter (2011) investigated the persistent reproduction of gendered inequalities in higher education. Using the theoretical framework developed by Adams, Lefebvre and

Massey, the paper titled “Changing Times of feminism and Higher Education: From Community to Employability” analyses the lived space experiences of two academics in two different universities – reflecting on how macro-level changes in HE inform research, course development and teaching. The paper highlights the gendered implications of changes in the HE framework, such as the accumulation of debt and precarious employment for women and the disempowerment of teachers by shifting the centre of control and responsibility to the system rather than the individual teacher. The contradictions between macro-level changes and local-level practices are evident, as the changes lack understanding of the daily practices of women in Higher Education.

Spencer-Bennett (2020) emphasises the significance of libraries in women's lives, providing space and time that women can claim for themselves, linking them to particular histories and entering shared rhythms with other women. In the article “Libraries in Women’s Lives: Everyday Rhythms and Public Time”, Spencer-Bennett argues that changes in the operating times of public spaces like libraries need to be consultative, recognise the importance of lived space experiences and prevent arrhythmia in closures or changes in operation hours. Similarly to changes in HE, public spaces require consultation with the individuals who use them to ensure equitable access and promote inclusivity.

Similarly, Dixon and Janks (2018) used spatial theory to argue that space is not a neutral entity but a social construct that positions and shapes individuals into particular subjectivities. By examining the architecture of the Witwatersrand School of Education (WSoE), the authors emphasise the need for critical reflection on the implications of our actions. They contend that the production of space creates a centre and periphery and often perpetuates colonial history in subtle and normalised ways by inviting some while alienating others. Moreover, the authors highlight how efforts to transform university spaces through protests have not resulted in significant architectural changes, leading to the continued use of the same space for new initiatives. The present study is aligned with the work of Smith (2017), who examined educational buildings and raised issues about the hierarchical relations between conceived space and living space in the Building Colleges for the Future (BCF) initiative in a paper titled “Building Colleges for the future: Pedagogical and ideological spaces”. The BCF initiative was a three-year investment programme of £2.3 billion in new college buildings, intending to create futuristic, environmentally friendly learning spaces. However, this initiative privileged the conceived space of architects and developers over the

lived space experiences of teachers. The spatial reconfigurations of learning were based on capitalist ideologies that prioritise economic ends and emphasise the global discourse of enhancing productivity and profitability. The initiative's outcomes generated mixed responses, with staff in some subjects, such as motor vehicles and painting and decorating courses, appreciating the coherence of the hybrid workplace/classroom environment. However, staff in classroom-based subjects expressed concerns about the use and availability of space, such as the shared desks that communicated the interchangeability of staff. Despite these limitations, the spatial analysis revealed unplanned opportunities for alternatives in these new buildings. As in universities, the built environment of primary schools is not neutral. It may also contribute to a sense of alienation that shapes their self-perception and potentially silences their voices or cultural dissonance- where they are exposed to and must navigate two conflicting cultural systems or sets of expectations.

Similarly, Fataar (2012) employed spatial theory by Lefebvre, Hart and Massey to shed light on the discrepancy between national educational policy reform intentions and the actual outcomes of policy implementation at the local school level. His work emphasises that policy reform can only be comprehended through analysis at the site where it is put into practice. Fataar's study, conducted in a township in Cape Town, reveals that schooling practices do not primarily stem from policy but from localised processes arising from a network of relations. The production of a school's space, including its relation to the school's history, perceptions about the school, the fluidity of the school's learners and the lives of parents, whether absent or distracted and the in/stability of domestic life, constantly renovates or transforms the quality or state of policy. A spatial lens is used to uncover how national policy reform, while intending to transcend South Africa's apartheid history, inadvertently perpetuates racial segregation locally due to policy taking on different meanings in different contexts.

Furthermore, as an increasing number of children in remote locations select schools located in urban locations, Fataar (2012) investigated the lived spatial experiences of poor black children and their strategic navigation of urban spaces. These children are excluded from the routes and architecture that city planners have normalised and envisioned. However, a spatial lens revealed the multiple ways these children encounter resistance from schools that are often unable or unwilling to provide an inclusive culture and fail to recognise their nuanced ways of being and doing in favour of assimilating them into the racialised and hegemonic status quo. The relationships between material, conceptual and lived spaces demonstrate how

these youth understand the prevailing discourses of their new spaces. These Youths then construct subjectivities that enable them to adapt and transcend the requirements for survival. Christie (2013) developed a methodological approach through rhythm analysis (Lefebvre, 2004) to connect space, place and social justice in South Africa's education system. Her work brings to the fore the multiplicity of logic operating in education and the contradictions of globalisation on local policy. She argued that there is a need to consider the relevance and viability of global discourses on the local every day realities found in diverse and unequal contexts like South Africa. Christie (2013) notes that this complex context with multiple rhythms that exist and are constantly in flux helps explain why socially just results have been difficult to attain and why educational opportunities have not been more fairly redistributed in post-conflict contexts. Such contexts give rise to multiple new social practices to work towards 'how things should be'. There is, however, the possibility that some social practice may support or be seen to support the structure being reimagined towards a socially just existence. Christie (2016) concludes that, due to the contradiction and complexity of the social practices at play, achieving social justice may remain elusive despite ongoing efforts to address it.

### **2.6.3 The silencing of bodies in space**

Seven of the 46 articles critique the silencing of bodies in the production of space due to unequal power relations. The papers show how multiple intersecting ideologies/systems like patriarchy, ageism and coloniality can silence women, staff and parents. These studies are Alzeer (2018b, 2019), Clark and Constantius (2020), Duckworth and Smith (2018), Galvin and Simme (2017), Kellock and Sexton (2018) and Persson and Broman (2017).

In two interconnected papers entitled 'Types and Dynamics of gendered space: A Case of Emirati Female Learners in a single-gender Context' and 'Spatializing Higher Education: Emirati Women Learners' hot and Cold Spaces', Alzeer (2018b, 2019) focused on the university as a produced space but, unlike Moss and Richter, on the lived experiences of the female students.

Alzeer (2018b) conducted an ethnographic qualitative inquiry following an interpretive methodological approach using the Lefebvrian spatial triad with observations and 29 in-depth interviews with male and female Emirati students and faculty staff focusing on female students. Her papers show how gender segregation is socially and institutionally produced on

campus and is constantly intersecting with race, class, culture and space for the Emirati learning community. Here, social space is shaped, and lived experiences are shaped. Through rhythmanalysis, Alzeer (2019) distinguishes between spaces of high intensity, emotion and social practices (hot spaces) and spaces of low intensity, emotion and social practices (cold spaces). The result is the production of gendered spaces with unequal power relations leveraged through spatial positionality that limited mobilities for the female students. The movements of female students are limited by their being female and the cultural norms that view them as precious ‘needing’ to be guarded through segregation. To enter and exit their university, female students enter a hall with a scanning system that security guards monitor. While most women agreed with the need for protection, they sought to be trusted and treated like adults who can uphold cultural norms; they sought the production of space that allowed and encouraged agency and self-actualisation (Alzeer, 2018a, 2018b). Alzeer’s (2018a, 2018b) papers foreground two central ideas in a Lefebvrian conceptualisation of space: firstly that spaces are not static – a cold space could evolve into a hot space or two students could view spaces differently and secondly, as is commonly found in Lefebvre’s ontology of spatiality, spaces consist of entanglements of socio-culture, history and the glocal with a complex cyclic/linear polyrhythm in harmony, discord and co-construction or equivalence (Lefebvre, 2004).

Galvin and Simme (2017), drawing on the works of Lefebvre on spatiality, Engeström on Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Holland et al.’s concept of positionality and social identity, provide an adult education perspective to theorising participation in Urban Regeneration Partnerships (URP). Their paper advances the theorising of partnership. The paper is based on the URP that began in 2007 Limerick City, Ireland. Four low-income communities experiencing relatively high levels of drug and related criminal activity formed part of the study. The study shows the unequal relations in the partnership that question the validity of the process and the findings of the URP. While the policy positioned the process as participatory, an adult education perspective informed by spatial theory revealed the absence of a space that provided the needed condition for equality of voices over and above simply having multiple voices. There was also a need for a deeper theorisation of participation where participants do not simply agree with the decisions provided but also participate in deliberations on the agenda, problem and solutions. The authors argued that for such deliberations to be fruitful, participants needed to have their lived space experiences as a sufficient basis to participate in resisting the domination of conceived space by those

considered to have more cultural, social and economic capital (Galvin & Simme, 2017). This study echoes a study by Persson and Broman (2017), which problematised how the conceptualisation of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Sweden as a child's space resulted in no emphasis on the role of parents' cooperation amidst policy that seeks to spread child education and care between families and public institutions. While a significant aspect of the Swedish and Nordic ECEC is care, the policy discourse focuses on creating spaces for learning, knowledge development and health with little focus on care, safety and security. Again, we see how, while certain people's views are foregrounded, others are overlooked, and in this case, the views of parents were overlooked. Kellock and Sexton (2018) surfaced instances where the children were silenced in a paper entitled 'Whose space is it anyway? Learning about space to make space for learning. They argue that the re/production of educational space in primary schooling involves children's lived space contributions'. Such contributions deepen our understanding of social space as children's contributions often add a layer to the production of space that, although important, may not be thought of in conceived space. For this reason, changes to the perceived space of schools should include children: they need to be heard and their input considered.

Colonialism involved the imposition of Western knowledge systems and ways of understanding the world onto colonised peoples and cultures, which often involved silencing or marginalising existing knowledge and perspectives. This can be seen in the erasure or suppression of Indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural practices, as well as in the imposition of Eurocentric education systems and forms of governance. Coloniality and silencing, therefore, are interconnected, as the lasting effects of colonialism can contribute to the suppression or exclusion of certain voices and perspectives, particularly those that do not align with dominant Western knowledge systems and power structures (Santos, 2016).

Clark and Constantius (2020) similarly call for higher education that is more socially just and transformed in post-colonial South Africa, as the lasting effects of colonialism can contribute to the suppression or exclusion of certain voices and perspectives, particularly those that do not align with dominant Western knowledge systems and power structures (Santos, 2016). Their paper titled *Redress at HEIs in South Africa: Mapping a Way Forward* argues that the demographically diverse bodies in HE (both student and staff) have not mended race-based prejudice and structural inequality in HE. Their paper responds to the question: Where does one start when seeking to transform HE, and why is this necessary? The authors argue that

one first begins by placing the perceived space of the physical landscape and the lived space of the experiences of staff and students to demystify institutional space. They argue that this may facilitate creative practices that would make it impossible for official structures to ignore staff, particularly Black, Coloured and Indian (BCI) staff. Similar to the study reviewed earlier by Duckworth and Smith (2018), the goal would be to produce a welcoming and healthy space where everyone feels at home and where students become independent users of knowledge and skills. A decolonial and transformative lens aided by spatial theory argues for human dignity in teaching and learning for staff and students. Simply creating spaces for contact with difference alone cannot succeed in dismantling the symbolic violence of language in signage, architectural landscapes and statues of white benefactors that drain, anger and silence BCI students. According to Clark and Constantius (2020), what is needed is a pedagogy that holds both compassion and discomfort to open spaces for self-reflection and critical debate in HE. The focus here is to enable a multiplicity of voices so that no one attempts to speak on behalf of another.

#### **2.6.4 A call for alternatives**

Christie (2013), in a paper outlined earlier, argues that a Lefebvrian spatial framework may not provide novel conclusions. It is, however, able to enable different strategies for action. This is confirmed by eight of the 46 papers calling for alternatives to pedagogy, supervision, capitalism and dualistic thinking (Fataar & Du Plooy, 2013; Finn, 2019; Gutierrez & Dasgupta (2015) Heather (2004); Middleton and McKinley (2010); Pillay and Karson (2013); Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019).

In a paper titled ‘How pedagogical diversity can afford parallaxes of competence – Towards more inherently inclusive school’, Finn (2019) flipped the traditional conceptualisation of a classroom to a studio in a mainstream school with a diversity of learners, including those with special needs, attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learners on the autism spectrum. In the studio, the learners have two rules: to focus and work with materials respectfully and conservatively. The studio produces a child-directed and child-centred space where children pursue their own goals alone, collaboratively or with some support from adults as helpful friends. Although not without challenges, the findings showed how children, particularly those with special needs, who were passive in the traditional classroom, became highly motivated and demonstrated great organisational skills in the studio. These learners did not need constant shadowing by a teacher’s aide and instead initiated action and showed

creative ideation and steadfast commitment to tasks. Interestingly, students who tended to be at a higher level academically entered the studio feeling lost and wanted structure and direction. In contrasting learners who tended to be high-level performers with learners with global learning delay, the paper also shows new skills, wisdom and talents for some children and new concerns for others. For example, high-level performing learners tended to be hesitant partly due to high expectations. Also, they felt they should be able to get things right on their own. In contrast, so-called passive and delayed learners showed an openness to failure resulting in them beginning activities immediately and being open to new information or asking for assistance. Drawing on the spatial theory, the study makes the point that while the activity in the traditional class has value, pedagogical diversity that breaks free of teacher-defined activity may be essential for all children to succeed. Due to its one-size-fits-all approach, a limited pedagogical approach cannot produce inclusive spaces. The study showed how failure and success are linked to pedagogical spatial productions. Perhaps the misbehaviour in traditional classrooms indicates something is missing in the learning environment. Perhaps it calls for more agency and less structure for some students. (Barab and Plucker 2002).

These findings resonate with Fataar and Du Plooy's (2013) work that also drew on spatial thinking to examine how four grade six learners in a township school are positioned in space as they move from school to home. While their work focused on children in compromised learning environments, it also pointed to how schools can fail to leverage a productive learning environment for some students who are often misrecognised, similar to the students in the paper by Finn (2019). Fataar and Du Plooy (2013) added a layer to the analysis by going beyond the classroom or studio's four walls and demonstrating how vital learning opportunities are missed when schools fail to go beyond the classroom and leverage a productive learning environment.

In other studies using spatial theory in exploring the causes of educational inequality in post-colonial contexts, such as South Africa, the focus has been on improving teaching and learning outcomes through pedagogical practice. While this paper is outside of the timeframe given its location and focus, I have incorporated it. In Heather's (2004) article, "Discourse, Integration and Spatial Rhythms: Locating Pedagogic Practice in a Material World," the author critically engages with Bernstein (1999) and Lefebvre's spatial theory to develop a typology of different forms of pedagogical practice. This typology was applied to the study of

33 lessons from two schools in Cape Town, where data was collected through observations of staff interactions and spatial practices and tracking three grade 9 class groups for six days. The study identified three types of pedagogical practice: discursively led, convention-led, and repetition-led.

The discursively led pedagogical practice involves making grammar and specialised language accessible through lesson activities and responding to the questions 'how' and 'why' to demonstrate vertical discourse and school knowledge. Conventional-led pedagogical practice focuses on teaching the lesson in isolation as an end, while repetition-led pedagogical practice relies heavily on spatial theory, specifically rhythm analysis, and requires learners to implicitly follow unassisted procedures, such as copying what is on the board. Heather argues that this type of pedagogical practice is not framed by interaction and that it hides more than it reveals, centred as it is on the corporeal compartments of the school rather than pedagogic discourse or everyday experiences outside the school. Based on the study's findings, the paper argues for a view of pedagogical practice as a hybrid practice with three referents: the generative principles of the discourse, the practice conventions circulating in a practice community, and the affordance of pragmatic coordination and repetition. This view is proposed to respond to the purpose of the school and acknowledge differences.

Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019) conceptualise space as socio-political (Lefebvre, 1991) to analyse four national cornerstone policy documents on the transformation of Higher Education in South Africa. The four policies analysed are the 1997 Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (WPHE), the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), the 2013 White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (WPPSET), and lastly the 2017 Draft National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NPPSET). The four policy documents demonstrate diverse understandings of space that nonetheless conceptualise space as an object instead of a co-produced and co-producing subject. The policy documents also focused on the 'how and why' modalities of transformation and neglected the 'where' or location of transformation that speaks to the everyday lives of students and staff (for example, the classroom, taxi rank or sports fields).

According to Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019, p. 6), the policies and plans fail to understand the campus environment as a complex "social space where people learn, live, fall in and out of love, grow, find and lose and refine themselves, as social beings". Their paper is

a call to insert space into the theorising of the national agenda to transform how it plays out in everyday contexts in diverse institutions. The paper concludes by proposing socio-spatial types (like living, learning, working, movement, recreation, architecture, etc.) that may enable policy to draw on the agentic capabilities of space to harness the transformation of higher education to consider ethically the right things through the right lens (Tumubweinee, 2019; Tumubweinee & Luescher, 2019).

Gutierrez and DasGupta (2015) focused on the future of health humanities, drawing on the works of Hooks, Soja and Lefebvre to add a vital layer that broadens the use of spatial theory in feminist work on education. Their call is to seek social justice by resisting the hegemonic binary between coloniser/ colonised, us/ them, and, according to bell hooks, choosing the margin. Students and staff need to examine their epistemology, undergo critical self-reflection, and engage deeply with situations that challenge deeply held beliefs. Although this call is directed to those in the health humanities who find themselves on the margins of traditional medical care, it goes beyond. This is because all binaries create both spaces for oppression and, more important to the study by Gutierrez and DasGupta (2015), a space with the potential for inclusion in the margin: a site of radical openness to possibility. Occupying these spaces and drawing on them to speak to the centre is both challenging and uncomfortable (Gutierrez & DasGupta, 2015)

A study by Middleton and McKinley (2010) using Lefebvre's spatial triad complements and extends Manathunga's (2019) and enacts the ideas presented by Gutierrez and DasGupta's (2015) work by providing a microcosmic example of the experiences of Maori doctoral students. Their study offers a way toward social justice by critiquing and challenging the academy from the margin. It also foregrounds how doing this is hard work for students who grapple with their knowledge systems and the western theories whose hegemony pressures students to 'fit' or identify with the accepted methodologies. It further foregrounds the challenges for supervisors – who may not have the necessary knowledge to guide the students – and subtly suggests co-supervision, where a second supervisor's positionality enables the learner's local theories/ experiences.

Another example of working from the margins to resist the hegemonic binary is the work of Pillay and Karson (2013), also based in HEI, who explored universities in South Africa that, during apartheid, reflected the racialised politics of the time. Ten years later, these

universities continued to function in a socially unjust manner, with the hierarchy in social status and state funding evident in postgraduate education research. Using socio-spatial theory, they demonstrated how a project surveying doctoral work across institutions on a database broke down the apartheid-era silos that separated postgraduate education. Pillay and Karson (2013) did this by creating a thirdspace where a researcher can gain insights into trends, patterns and in/consistencies in postgraduate researchers in education from differing perspectives to generate new understandings that go beyond the present siloes of the past. Primary schools also need research to co-production safe and supportive spaces for children, parents, and teachers to exercise their agency and promote self-actualisation. By doing so, they can challenge the status quo and bring forth perspectives that challenge capitalism and colonialism from the margins.

The 46 reviewed journal articles drawing on Lefebvrian thought educational research are crucial in highlighting the limitations of capitalism in education, the conflicts between educational policies and classroom dynamics, and the need for alternative methodologies. The review of journal articles demonstrates that Lefebvrian spatial theory has helped educators and researchers rethink both research and practice, particularly regarding transformation and decolonisation goals. However, most studies focus on higher education institutions (HEIs), with limited attention to primary schooling, especially in terms of decolonisation i.e more than 40% of all 46 reviewed papers focussing on Higher education institutions and only four papers focussing on primary schooling- none of which focus on decolonisation. This gap in literature may be due to the decolonisation agenda that re-emerged in universities in South Africa in 2015 (Le Grange 2016). Despite this, exploring primary school spaces through Lefebvre's framework could reveal opportunities to resist coloniality and foster diversity and social justice. Primary schools, with their unique challenges, offer a chance to reimagine education in ways that could resonate with both staff and learners, supporting broader social transformation and inclusivity.

## **2.7 Capitalism and Colonialism Founded on Absolute Space**

In this section, I focus briefly on two enduring social systems facilitated by absolute space to show how our understanding of space has implications for everyday life: the decisions made and the questions we ask. These two systems are capitalism and colonialism.

Both Foucault (1977) and Lefebvre (1991) argued that space is central to capitalism's structuring and functioning. Conceiving of space as a flat, physical and uniform system of coordinates (i.e. absolute) meant space could be exploited for capitalist gains by the hegemonic West. Such a concept of space meant that travellers could freely travel through spaces and duplicate their cultural practices of commodification (extracting minerals, labour and land) anywhere (Thompson, 2001). Nature could also be understood as a resource to own (appropriate) and exploit without restraint. Nature was and still is abused because such a conceptualisation of space as absolute is silent to the existing relationships between nature and mankind (Igoe & Sullivan, 2009). Space is robbed of its substantive meaningfulness and conceived as ordered and uniform. This view has facilitated Western capitalism and the various imposing policies that treated China, the Americas, India and Africa alike, thereby deliberately silencing differences and subjectivity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

The oversimplification of space by Cartesian concepts rendering the globe as a unified entity (Pratt, 2017) was also evident in the race to conquer and "civilise" countries with cartographical aid. Classical maps presented space as homologous and reduced differences by assuming that what separates two spaces is primarily distance, which can be overcome by maps and ships so that the same structures of power, education, architecture and world views could be reproduced seamlessly wherever conquerors wished to do so (Warf & Arias, 2009). Maps "innocently" represented distant places to colonisers and made them *present* in those places; this enabled the domination of such places by establishing colonies and building empires - as in the case of the British settlement in eastern-southern Africa (Warf & Arias, 2009). Both capitalism and colonialism, two highly interconnected social systems, were preceded in many cases by spatial maps that made the unknown "comprehensible". This resulted in voyages of discovery that saw space as something to cross and conquer (Massey, 2005).

The notion of space as absolute was used to colonise the natives and direct discourse on education. In South Africa, H. F. Verwoerd's educational justification (see Jansen, 1990), similar to Euclid's understanding of space, treated space as both fixed and natural as though the places and spaces people inhabited were fixed and neutral – divinely given and not socially re/produced. As a result, the view of space as fixed acted as the conceptual space that Verwoerd used to justify the dumbed-down education that, although negatively affecting the

entire schooling cohort, was most harmful to black children. Here a conception of space as neutral, objective and innocent conveniently neglected that subjects and social practices can and do act to maintain and reproduce their own conditions of existence (Lefebvre, 1991). These ideas silence people, particularly the oppressed, by fostering a false consciousness (Engels, 1893). This is where the dominant ideologies distort the awareness of the oppressed, concealing the true nature of conflict and exploitation under systems of power. As a result, individuals may accept and even perpetuate conditions that work against their own interests. Consequently, the end of colonialism needed to be accompanied by, or coincide with, a shift from understanding space as absolute to relative (Smith, 2003).

This conceptualisation of space as a social emergent phenomenon of perceived, conceived and lived space enables this research to do three things. Lefebvre's spatial theory, in response to the critique of the "fetishism of the partial", provides a unified theory on space that seeks to encourage empirical research that, while still holding these disciplines intact, encourages their communication and collaboration. Failure to do this in both social life and epistemology results in misunderstandings and the reproduction of the status quo. This conceptualisation of space adds to the calls for transdisciplinary research to address persistent social problems that permeate the whole. One such persistent social problem is the coloniality we live and breathe, which permeates everything (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). From this vantage point, transdisciplinary research is not an option but a requirement. Lefebvre's work enables this by connecting the empirical (physical and sensory experiences), conceptual (abstract representations) and lived space.

Secondly, spatial theory as a metatheory has and continues to emerge as a lens that enables and is informing educational research in postcolonial contexts (Christie, 2013; Dixon, 2011; Fataar, 2007; Jacklin, 2004). It is sensitive to how the past leaves its traces in the present and to how colonisation as a system permeates space entirely in subtle and overt ways. While it may not provide new conclusions it can provide innovative strategies for action (Christie, 2013) and according to Msila (2005) and Fataar (2007), this is something education needs: new ways of addressing and understanding lingering problems in South African education. Lastly, spatial theory enables the researcher to rethink the notion of justice. Spatial theory works towards spatial justice, which is not a substitute for economic and social forms of justice but rather a "theoretical emphasis on the specifically (and often neglected) spatial aspects of justice and injustice, including how they are embedded in urban spatial causality"

(Soja, 2009, p. 32). This form of injustice was illustrated in the discussion on mobilities and socio-spatial inequality in South African schools in section 1.3 and revisited in section 2.9. The research hoped to find outcomes that are justly derived. Although the above describes why Lefebvre's spatial theory has gained prominence, it is without critique.

## **2.8 Critiques of Lefebvre's Spatial Theory**

There have been several critiques of Lefebvre's theorising. Here, I briefly discuss some of the central critiques related to its locus of enunciation (and body politics) and its operationalisability as I reflected on its suitability to respond to the research questions. Lefebvrian spatial theory has been critiqued for its Eurocentric perspective as a Marxist theory rooted in France post World War II in a context experiencing an industrial revolution. Similarly, Lefebvre, as a white, male, European intellectual, operates from a particular locus of enunciation shaped by his social identity. His work, while revolutionary in its critique of capitalist space and its exploration of social relations, has been critiqued for not fully engaging with issues of race, gender, and other forms of identity that deeply influence spatial experiences and the politics of space (hooks, 2009; Massey, 1994; McKittrick, 2006).

Robinson (2006) likewise critiques Lefebvre's work stating that it "like much of Western spatial theory, is grounded in the experiences and histories of European cities, often overlooking the distinct spatial dynamics of cities in the Global South" (p. 12), echoing a similar point made by Roy (2009) that it is in danger of universalising a European experience and as a result obscuring the complex spatialities of post-colonial and non-Western contexts" (p. 820). How does one justify its usage in Makhanda in post-colonial South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Reflecting on these critiques resulted in the thesis's design bringing Lefebvrian spatial theory into conversation with decolonial theory (see section 2.9) and working with the works of spatial theorists with diverse bodies like Doreen Massey (1994) and bell hooks, feminists who critique traditional and often masculine conceptions of space including those of Lefebvre's that are shaped by patriarchy. An example in a schooling context is the school rugby and soccer sports field, where physical strength and aggression are celebrated and afforded more space, resources and prestige. These spaces can take up a significant portion of the school grounds leaving little room for other sports. The works of Massey and hooks emphasise the intersections of race, class and gender that result in spaces being experienced differently based on one's identity. Hooks also provides the concept of 'homeplace' to

describe places where the marginalised, especially women, resist sexism and racism's dehumanisation and instead create a safe and nurturing environment (hooks, 1990).

The second critique as expressed in the words of below Merrifield (1993) and Gregory (1994) speaks to the operationalisability of the theory due to its "conceptual ambiguity and terminological fluidity" (Brenner & Elden, 2009, p. 4) often considered result of it being translated to English from French.

"Lefebvre's work is notoriously difficult to penetrate, brimming with idiosyncrasies and esoterica" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 517).

"Lefebvre's theoretical framework, while rich, often leaves researchers grappling with the practicalities of translating his abstract concepts into concrete analyses" (Gregory, 1994, p. 353).

This complexity can hinder understanding and applying his theory in practical contexts. One response to this critique is its prominence amidst such challenges, speaking to its being viewed by several scholars in several disciplines across the globe (see section 2.6) as a helpful framework notwithstanding these difficulties that required me to unpack it so that it is applicable in the context of the study (see sections 3.4).

## **2.9 Decoloniality and Lefebvrian Spatial Theory**

I outline the decolonial theory and then discuss it with the spatial framework to address some of the limitations of spatial theory explained in section 2.7.

Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243) defined coloniality as

long-standing patterns of power that emerged due to colonialism but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism.

Coloniality, therefore, is that which is colonial but remains after decolonisation and continues to control knowledge, being and power relations. This concept helps us understand the deep-rooted structures of oppression and inequality that persist in the postcolonial world.

Decolonial theories, therefore, are concerted attempts to resist, unmask and destroy coloniality as a natural state of the world. Although these ideas are not new, they have gained

prominence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the works of Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, who argue that colonialism created a "colonial matrix of power CMP " that continues to influence contemporary global dynamics, even in the absence of direct colonial rule (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000).

As outlined by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), the three main dimensions of coloniality are the coloniality of *power*, *knowledge*, and *being*. The coloniality of power refers to the enduring global power structures rooted in colonialism, which maintain social and economic hierarchies favouring the West. It also explains how asymmetrical power structures are formed. The coloniality of knowledge highlights the dominance of Western epistemologies and the marginalisation of non-Western knowledge systems, perpetuating Eurocentrism in academia and beyond. Here, Indigenous and endogenous knowledge and ways of knowing delegitimize the coloniality of being and address the dehumanisation and identity distortions experienced by colonised peoples, affecting their sense of self and cultural existence, where their humanity is questioned. They are conceptualised, as Grosfoguel (2007) describes (as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 12), as having “gone from the sixteenth-century characterisation of ‘people without writing’ to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century characterisation of ‘people without history,’ to the twentieth-century characterisation of ‘people without development,’ and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of ‘people without democracy.’” Decolonial theory in this study is also justified by its ability to structure the design and respond to the critiques expressed earlier as a Western framework from France in the mid-20th century that is abstract, lacks operationalisability and lacks emphasis on gender and race. This brought to question its applicability and usefulness in South Africa in the 21st century in schools in Makhanda and may explain its limited use in the rest of Africa (see section 2.6). In this grapple, I was assisted by this section taken from the *Production of space* of an imaginary dialogue between Lefebvre and an interlocutor to make a point (p. 109):

Would you say that this ravaging of nature is attributable to capitalism?

To a large degree, yes. But I would add the rider that capitalism and the bourgeoisie have a broad back. It is easy to attribute a multitude of misdeeds to them without addressing the question of how they themselves came into being.

Surely the answer is to be found in mankind itself, in human nature?

No. In the nature of *Western* man perhaps.

You mean to say that you would blame the whole history of the West, its rationalism, its Logos, its very language?

It is the West that is responsible for the transgression of nature. It would certainly be interesting to know how and why "this has come about, but those questions are strictly secondary. The simple fact is that the West has broken the bounds. 'O felix culpa!' a theologian might say. And, indeed, the West is thus responsible for what Hegel calls the power of the negative, for violence, terror and permanent aggression directed against life. It has generalised and globalised violence - and forged the global Javel itself through that violence. Space as locus of production, as itself product and production, is both the weapon and the sign of this struggle.

Here, Lefebvre's framework overlaps with decolonial theory, as both seek spatial justice and aim to reclaim and reconfigure space shaped by colonial/capitalist legacies, i.e. Western man's generalised and globalised logos (what decolonial theorists may term universalism) that is violent. In the words of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) talking about coloniality, he states that "it [coloniality] produced a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies" (p. 11). Lefebvre's statement, 'O felix culpa!' also emphasises the failure and repercussions of this Western man, which has brought us to a point where radical transformation and the creation of new possibilities are sought after. Both theories seek to unmask and resist capitalism and the "architects of poverty" in the Global South (see Mbeki, 2009) who ride on the broad back of capitalism for options (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

This link between decolonial thought and Lefebvre's explanation of the problems in Western episteme enables this study to respond to the critiques that a Lefebvrian analysis attracts mentioned earlier. Decolonial theory, through some operationalisable concepts like the colonial matrix of power, coloniality of power, knowledge and power and its emphasis on race and gender, helped advance Lefebvrian spatial theory to be useful to my context. This study, therefore, looks at the everyday life of children to study the more insidious effects of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy in the context of schooling. Exploring that which is seemingly trivial, mundane and recurrent in schooling may help us make deeper sense of the 'every day' (Lefebvre, 1991) experience of coloniality. This study extends Lefebvrian analysis by looking through capitalism to uncover that which has survived decolonisation, that is, to uncover enduring coloniality.

## **2.10 Fashioning Rural Space Through Lefebvrian Spatial Theory**

Lefebvre remains a helpful figure in the conceptualisation of rural space. At the same time, it might be argued that he focused on the city, his work focused on space as a complex socially emergent phenomenon (Lefebvre, 1991). His spatial framework structuring social space into a triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces, presents space, and as a result, rural space, as a process and product encompassing everything: physical, conceptual and imagined. For Lefebvre (1991), space includes all “living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols” (p. 101).

Rural spatial productions are complex places (as Chapter 1 alluded to) that are difficult to define because these productions are both ongoing and differ across geography and time (Bell & Osti, 2010; Cervone, 2017). Due to this context, a definition of rurality is not provided; instead, I emphasise the apparent tensions in literature when conceptualising rurality.

Much of what has been written on rural spaces (and rural education) casts the rural as a deficit (Corbett & Forsay, 2017; Gristy, 2019); that is, as a space that is both ineffective and ill-equipped to prepare its citizens for the global economy (Cervone, 2017) or as a stable space with stubborn ties to family, community, place and ethnicity in contrast to the innovations and progress of urban spaces (Bell & Osti, 2010), where economic deprivation in the form of poor housing, limited access to services and transport and the prevalent mobilities emphasise escape (Corbett, Forsay, 2017; Gristy, 2019). Similarly, the families that form part of such spatial productions who live in spaces termed rural are often portrayed as lacking aspiration amid a growing body of empirical literature, showing that rural children aspire to a wide range of high-status careers (Corbet & Baack, 2017; Zipin et al., 2015). Such narratives present education as the solution to the problems of the rural, and parents follow suit by encouraging their children to do well in school as a way to leave (Cervone, 2017); as a result, rural schooling is conceptualised as a space for competition, where those who ‘win’, i.e. perform well academically and have access to the economic means, get to escape. Here, the rural is presented in decline, even though most of the world remains predominantly rural (Cervone, 2017). This narrative then perpetuates and legitimises governments minimising their focus on the rural, reducing it as Weston (1996) notes to a space that represents mere lack and limitation.

Other studies romanticise the rural idyll as unchanging, resisting the capitalistic mode of production and its domination of nature (Cervone, 2017). They present the rural as a space that counters urbanisation and resists environmental degradation (Bell & Osti, 2010). The rural, however, is complex, varied, and ever-changing. It is dynamic and entangled by urban spatial productions and the mobility of its children. Here, education is the cause and solution to many challenges facing the production of rural spaces that continue to matter in the 21st century. This study focused on the peri-rural context of Makhanda to study these complexities, where rurality and mobility patterns displayed in the media and various other texts may not marry well with the lived realities of children in a peri-rural context, close to the town but removed from the industry.

## **2.11 Mobilising Spatial Theory**

Building on the conceptual foundations of rural space as socially produced and contested, this section turns to the ‘mobilities paradigm’ to further illuminate how space is not only structured, but also shaped and being shaped through the movement (and restriction) of people, ideas, and resources. The mobilities paradigm (Urry 2000, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006)) explores the movement of ideas, things and people and their implications and causes (Cresswell, 2010). This paradigm arose as a critique of the nomadic and static traditions in social sciences that ignored the movements of people for work, pleasure, and protest, aiming to “suggest a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 210). It therefore does not present a new grand narrative for research, but rather complements and extends research in the social sciences.

This paradigm extends or mobilises the spatial turn (Sheller, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006). It strengthens research by extending inquiry beyond the production of space in classrooms, schools, homes, etc., into the fluid interdependence and relationality of these spaces that are constantly in flux (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Physical, social, imaginative and virtual movement is made possible by the immovable: roads enable cars to move, fibre-optic cables enable data, and schools enable social mobility. These movements or non-movements often perpetuate and sustain inequalities (Hidayati et al., 2021; Jensen, 2011; Vanessa et al., 2018). From this

perspective, mobilities are seen as a key mechanism through which space is produced, contested and experienced.

The present-day social landscape has undergone significant transformations in the movement of people, goods and ideas across space and time compared to previous generations (Leander et al., 2010). Technological advancements have facilitated unprecedented mobility patterns, resulting in profound implications for the global population's quality of life. However, discussions on mobilities have often centred on adult movements in urban settings, neglecting the equally crucial perspectives of children outside urban settings (Shaw et al., 2015). Consequently, researchers have increasingly focused on studying children's mobilities in rural and township contexts to shed light on the essence of being a child in contemporary society (Boyden, 2018; Camlin et al., 2014; Gristy, 2019). For this reason, by studying a child's learning, this research acknowledges the learner to be both mobile and relational.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined the adoption of Lefebvrian spatial theory in educational research, highlighting its utility and the existing gaps in the literature, particularly regarding primary education and the transformation/decolonisation agenda. The chapter further underscored the significance of conceptualising space by illustrating how both capitalism and colonialism are partially sustained by spatial frameworks—systems that Lefebvre's theory critiques. It also engaged with critiques of Lefebvrian spatial analysis, particularly concerning how it constructs and expresses identity, power, and subjectivity within specific social, cultural, and political contexts. To address these critiques, the chapter brought Lefebvrian spatial theory into conversation with decolonial theory, emphasising shared concerns around spatial justice and the need to resist, reclaim, and reconfigure spaces shaped by colonial and capitalist legacies, often framed within the Western, universalising logos. Finally, the chapter, aligned with the study's context and methodology, focused on rurality and mobility within the spatial theory, acknowledging that both learners and teachers (and ideas) that form part of the school/s—units of analysis—are mobile and situated in the peri-rural context of Makhanda.

This study is partly due to the following questions: What might one discover if they used this framework aided with decolonial theory to explore the production of primary school space where *ligotshwa lise manzi*? Where there is both danger and opportunity. The danger of bending young children in a peri-rural context via a colonial matrix of power that alienates

and produces hate for one's progenitors and an opportunity to resist coloniality in favour of difference and diversity and a socially just existence. After all, to decolonise, i.e. to imagine new ways for social transformation (Chilisa, 2012), must include compulsory education, and a Lefebvrian spatial framework may be well suited for this kind of work. In contrast to universities, these schools primary schools in this study present their own challenges, but they also provide possibilities for reimagining education in innovative ways that may be better received by staff and learners who are in search of something different (Fataar and Du Plooy, 2013). What if Lefebvre's socio-spatial framework guides research into teaching and learning in primary schools?

The following chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in the study to answer this question.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This qualitative ethnographic case study is carried out in three phases. I used an embedded case study research approach (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018) as the study explores the production of school space in three schools in the eastern section of Makhanda (see Figure 3.1). Despite criticisms of lacking rigour from a positivist perspective, case study research proved beneficial due to its intensive nature, resulting in depth, detail and rich data (Scot & Morrison, 2005). Qualitative case studies are ideal for empirically investigating phenomena within their real-life contexts. This research focused on exploring the production of social space in a peri-rural socio-spatial system guided by theories of spatiality and mobility. The theories on spatiality and mobilities helped conceptualise the 'bounded' cases and their broader social contexts in which actors participate (Hammersley et al., 2000). This problematising of 'boundedness' aligns with insights from Scot and Morrison (2005), who emphasise the natural occurrence of cases in case study research in contrast to artificial experiments in which variables can be controlled to make the point that in case study research in the social sciences to talk of a case as a singular independent unit is mythologising and romanticising of the world when in fact "even a single actor [selected as a case] participates in a multiplicity of potential research sites" (Scot & Morrison, 2005, p.20). The same can be said of this study's schools (and participants) that exist within a broader context. So, while there is a focus on time, space and context, this is to make the manageable and distinct for in-depth analysis and not to view it in isolation.

The units of analysis (UoA) guiding the data generation and analysis (Merton, 1968) in this study to answer the research question are three primary schools located in Makhanda East Pseudonymised: Amila, Kamva, and Themba Primary Schools. While these schools are distinct entities, they share substantial similarities. As a result, the study treats them as a single unit of analysis due to their commonalities and, in some minor instances, as three

distinct units at other times to highlight their unique characteristics. This dual approach positions the schools as interconnected and individual components embedded within the primary schooling context of Makhanda East. Additionally, Chapter 5 introduces a further analytical layer by exploring the schooling mobilities of four pseudonymised children: Nesi, Vuyo, Nosipho and Dumisa, each embedded within one of the three primary schools (see Figure 3.1).

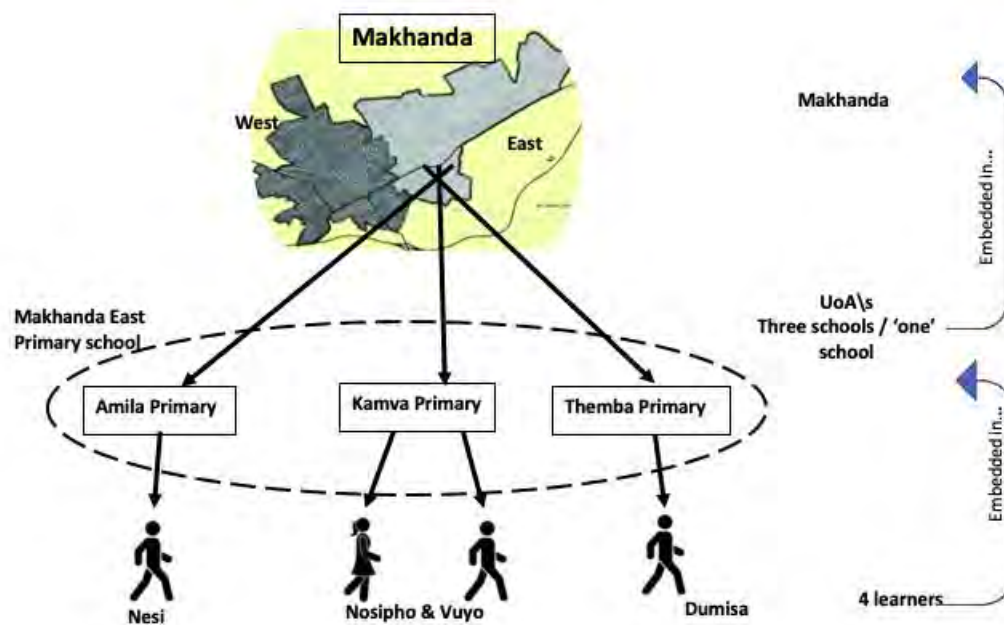


Figure 3.1: An overview of the embedded case study

### 3.2 The Selection of Study Sites and Participant Context

The three embedded cases (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018), i.e. the schools selected for this study, offering grades R to seven to learners varying from age five to 14, are attended by learners residing in the township of Makhanda East and from the nearby farms. As stated in section 1.3, public schools are ranked into five quintiles based on their area's socio-economic status, as per the National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy (NNSF). This study focused on three quintile three schools in Makhanda. It is important to note that most South African schools fall into the quintile three category. This category represents most of the

country's schools, often in semi-urban or rural areas (Department of Basic Education, 2024). While the generalisability of the findings is limited given the complex context, the study's population is nonetheless partly representative of the prevalent educational context in South Africa in relation to race and class.

It is essential to acknowledge my complex and fluid positionality as a transitioning outsider within the research locale of Makhanda. When I relocated to the town in 2017, I brought with me limited prior knowledge of its intricate history and the prevailing socio-economic and political dynamics, having previously lived in a different province. At that point, I was positioned as an outsider—socially, culturally, and geographically removed from the context I intended to study.

Over time, particularly after beginning my formal studies the following year, I gradually transitioned along the insider–outsider continuum. Through sustained engagement, I began to acquire deeper insights into the socio-cultural and political fabric of Makhanda. Although the local conditions were uniquely rooted in the town's own colonial and post-apartheid histories, they echoed broader national patterns that I could begin to recognize and relate to. Initially, my unfamiliarity required reliance on diverse sources and perspectives to begin to understand the field and guard against misinterpretation. Yet, as my immersion deepened, my lived experiences as a resident, student, worker, and community member aided in navigating and interpreting the research site.

This partial movement towards “insiderness” was facilitated in part by my own identity. As a multilingual young black Swati adult who resides in the western part of Makhanda, speaks and understands isiXhosa, I found that I held a degree of cultural proximity and linguistic access. These attributes fostered a certain level of trust and access, enabling more nuanced participation in community life. However, I remained acutely aware that such proximity did not equate to full ‘belonging’. The schools where I conducted research—located in the eastern, peri-rural/township parts of the town—were shaped by specific dynamics: predominantly middle-aged female teaching staff, strong ties to isiXhosa cultural practices, and school environments different from those I had previously worked or studied in. In this sense, I was (and still am) an outsider in transition, continuously negotiating my presence and positionality.

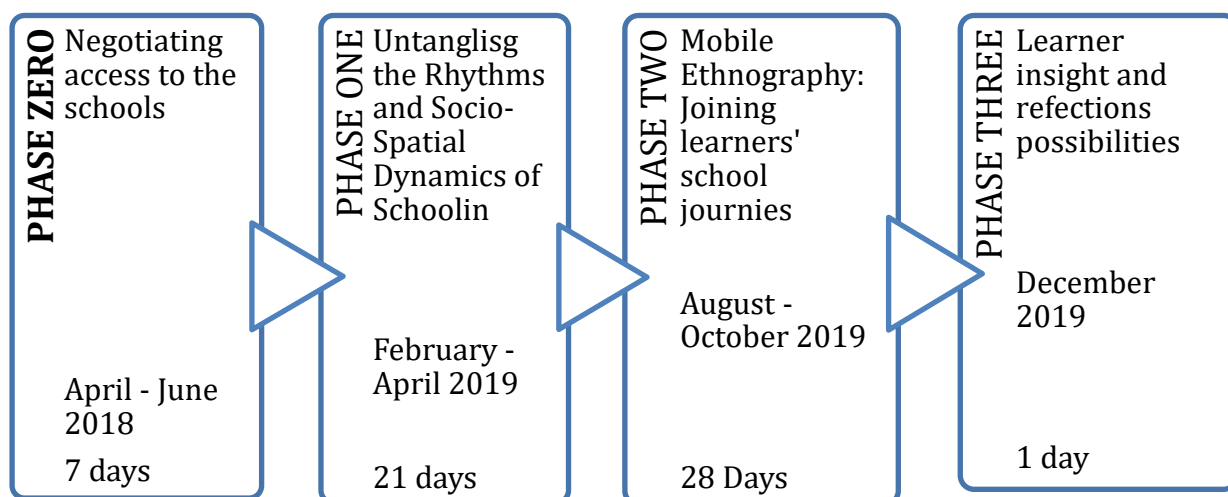
These negotiations became especially apparent in interactions beyond the school setting, particularly during walks and informal conversations with children. In such moments, I encountered heightened community scrutiny—understandably so, given the broader context in which “the village raises the child.” It became necessary to explicitly and repeatedly clarify my role in the community to alleviate concerns from guardians and onlookers. While this sometimes highlighted my outsider status, it was partially mitigated by Makhanda’s identity as a university town, where research engagement and partnerships between the university and local schools and broader community is common. Nonetheless, I remained conscious of the ways in which academic research, including my institution, has historically served as a site of imperialism, perpetuating the objectification and dehumanisation of Indigenous people and knowledge systems (Smith, 1999).

This awareness formed a core part of my methodological approach. Drawing on decolonial theory and Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2012), I sought to create a space for participants, especially children, to tell their own stories, unearth relations, and shape the narrative of the research in meaningful ways. My evolving positionality required me to practice ongoing reflexivity (Finlay, 2002), especially as I moved further away from being a complete outsider. This involved a deliberate effort to interrogate my assumptions, resist saviour complexes, and remain alert to the power dynamics embedded in interpretation and representation.

Ultimately, reflecting on these dynamics highlighted the reciprocal nature of the research relationship and the ethical imperative of transparency, mutual benefit and accountability to communities and not just institutions. As part of this commitment, I prioritized dialogue with schools, children, and broader community stakeholders. However, as I will reflect in Chapter 3.3.4, the proposed dialogue was not possible to the extent I had planned. The dialoguing was central to ensuring that the research did not merely extract knowledge, but rather contributed meaningfully to the community and honoured its histories, values, and voices (Chilisa, 2012).

### **3.3 Data Generation**

The data generation occurred in three phases across the three primary schools selected for the study. Ethical considerations outlined in section 3.5 were paramount, given the potentially intrusive nature of the study.



**Figure 3.2 An overview of the Ethnographic Case study**

Source: Authors own

### 3.3.1 Phase Zero: Negotiating access to the school

The study was conducted across three embedded case schools: Themba Primary, Kamva Primary, and Amila Primary Schools (pseudonyms). Before the main data generation process, I conducted a pilot study to refine the time-space diaries (TSD) tool. This pilot involved ten learners from grades five to seven who were asked to complete the time-space diary for one week. The purpose of the pilot was to establish the duration of the diary and refine the language and format to ensure it was accessible and appropriate for the learners. The diaries were made available in both isiXhosa and English, allowing learners to respond in the language of their choice, with most opting for isiXhosa and/or English.

The pilot also allowed me to test how best to explain the study and the tool to the learners, addressing concerns such as when to complete the diaries, the expected length of responses, confidentiality issues, and the diaries' fate post-study. The feedback obtained from the pilot was used to refine the process and ensure the tool was culturally and contextually appropriate. In particular, the pilot helped test the duration of the time-space diaries, how they are most likely to be completed, the needed space per day, and the language use. This helps introduce and model the diary's use better.

Following the pilot, I worked closely with each school to identify one grade six class. In total, 126 learners, 17 staff members, and four snack vendors were involved in the study. Before data generation, I visited the schools to introduce the research to the principals, teachers, learners, and guardians. I held separate meetings with the school principals to present the research, followed by sessions with the teaching staff (the whole staff or those directly involved with grade six). I then met with the learners to explain the study, answer any questions, and distribute assent forms for the learners and consent forms for their guardians. The consent and assent forms clearly explained that participation was voluntary and that learners could opt out of the study without consequences. The letters were provided in English and isiXhosa, and I visited guardians—especially grandparents with limited literacy in either language—for further clarification when requested.

### **3.3.2 Phase One: Untangling the Rhythms and Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Schooling**

Phase one of the study aimed to understand how school space is re/produced and how power is distributed within the socio-spatial systems experienced by learners. The following key research questions drove this phase:

- How is school space re/produced in the three schools?
- How is power distributed in the production of space within the socio-spatial systems experienced by the learners?

To explore these questions, I spent a week at each school, observing the school dynamics from before school hours until after the learners departed or participated in extracurricular activities. I accompanied the selected grade six class throughout the day, noting their interactions during teaching, breaks, and after-school activities. On some occasions, I stationed myself outside classrooms and used a 360-degree camera to record the dynamics of the space, which helped capture details I may have missed during real-time observation. Field notes, audio recordings, and informal interviews complemented this.

Throughout this phase, I adopted a dual role as both observer and participant. I moved between observing and interacting with the learners, which allowed me to document the rhythms of the school day. According to Lefebvre (2004), rhythms are most noticeable when

disrupted, and this approach helped me understand how the learners within the school experienced space and time. To help ease my integration into the school environment, I shared personal stories with the learners and engaged in casual conversations with staff. I introduced the recording devices in a way that made the learners comfortable, gradually shifting their focus away from the presence of the equipment.

As part of the data generation process, the learners completed their time-space diaries, recording their activities before, during, and after school and on the weekends. The diaries were designed to be engaging, with space for written responses and creative drawings or photos. I reminded learners daily to complete their diaries, and I also completed my diary to model the process. Each learner provided a pseudonym and a brief introduction to themselves, which helped ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

While the time-space diaries provided valuable insights, their reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases. To address this potential limitation, I used classroom observations as a complementary method, allowing for data triangulation and providing a fuller picture of the learners' experiences.

*On the way, she was reading a book, and I took out my diary. she wanted to see it, and I said, 'No, these are my secrets that I should not tell anyone'. Mr. Nkosi told us not to show anyone our diaries. She understood, and we continued walking to school, chatting about animals. (TSD B28)*



**Figure 3.3: Examples of time-space diary drawings**

The primary focus of this phase was to understand how space was produced inside and outside the school during and after school hours – including during teaching time, break time and extracurricular activities. This phase took three weeks and an additional week to meet with the various participants and propose the study. Eighty-six of the 126 grade 6 learners completed and submitted the time-space diaries.

### **3.3.3 Phase two: Mobile Ethnography: Joining learners' school journeys**

Phase two involved conducting mobile ethnography with a purposive sample of four learners (Vuyo, Dumisa, Nosipho, and Nesi, all pseudonyms). These learners were selected based on themes that emerged from their time-space diaries and classroom observations, with particular emphasis on learning, identity, aspirations, and practical considerations such as their proximity to the school.

The purpose of this phase was to document the learners' mobility patterns and explore how they engaged with their socio-spatial environment. The methodology allowed me to accompany the learners during their journeys to and from school, observing their interactions with peers and their surroundings. This approach provided an opportunity to capture spontaneous conversations and behaviours that would not have been easily obtained through structured interviews.

During the week, I followed the learners during their journeys, recording their conversations and observing their interactions with the environment. I used a 360-degree camera to capture the journey, allowing for detailed route mapping, key locations, and notable interactions. These video recordings were beneficial as they provided a comprehensive view of the learners' movements and the spaces they inhabited, ensuring that I did not miss important contextual details.

This phase was complemented by semi-structured interviews with each learner, where we discussed their mobility patterns, experiences of space, and the broader context of their daily lives. These interviews were flexible and allowed for the exploration of themes that emerged from the diaries and observations. I spent five to six days with each learner, resulting in 15 in-depth interviews. This phase was critical in understanding the spatial dimensions of learners' lives. It extended the research beyond the school to include the journey and its implications for their experiences of space and place.

In this phase, the focus, while still on the production of space, moved beyond the school and incorporated what is often placed at the periphery of schooling – the journeys to and from school (see Cervone, 2017; Corbett & Forsey, 2017; Gristy, 2019).

### **3.3.4 Phase Three: Learner Insight and Refection**

Phase three involved synthesising the findings from the previous phases and engaging the learners in a generative workshop to reflect on the results and discuss potential strategies for transforming teaching and learning. This phase aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the production of space in the peri-rural socio-cultural context?
- What opportunities for learning does the production of space make possible for teachers and learners?

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated participation challenges, this phase focused on the four learners from phase two. I presented preliminary findings to the learners and facilitated discussions about potential improvements to the learning environment and the production of space within the school. The learners actively engaged in these discussions, reflecting on their experiences and suggesting changes that could enhance teaching and learning.

This phase was important not only for generating findings but also for understanding how the learners conceptualised their educational environment and what changes they believed would improve their learning experiences. The insights gathered were crucial for developing recommendations on how spatial dynamics could be used to enhance educational practices in similar contexts.

The entire study generated a substantial amount of data: 86 transcribed/translated diaries (623 pages), 98 drawings, 60 videos of break time and before/after school activities, over 100 pages of field notes, 15 interviews with extensive transcriptions and 198 images created by

the participating learners, representing their daily activities and inputs in the generative workshop. Figure 3.2 shows the duration of data generation.

### **3.3.5 Data Generation Tools**

The data generation tools used in this study were strategically selected to provide rich, detailed insights into the socio-spatial dynamics of learners' experiences. The study utilised a combination of time-space diaries, school observations, walk-along interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. These tools allowed for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity of the study by capturing a comprehensive view of how learners interact with and experience space.

#### **3.3.5.1 Time-Space Diaries**

Time-space diaries, also known as activity diaries (Harvey, 1993), travel diaries (Wan, 2019), time-use diaries (Harrell et al., 2005), mobility diaries (Schlich & Axhausen, 2003), and spatial-temporal diaries (Zhang et al., 2009), represent a versatile data generation tool employed across various disciplines. Participants typically record what they do, where they are, who they are with, and the duration of each activity. Emerging in the early 20th century in sociological studies, time-space diaries were designed to systematically analyse human activity patterns (Bauman, Bittman, & Gershuny, 2019). This method offers a comprehensive perspective on how time and space are utilised during a given period (Bauman, Bittman, & Gershuny, 2019).

In this study, the use of time-space diaries was not intended to produce a complete or exhaustive record of each child's daily activities. Rather, they served as one method among several to explore the production, use, and experience of space from the children's perspectives. It is both expected and acceptable that some children may omit details, whether deliberately or unintentionally. Importantly, participants retained the right to withhold information, and the study does not assume full transparency. Given that the aim was not to document every action but to understand how children navigate and make sense of space, the

data generated through the diaries—when triangulated with interviews, observations, and accompanying sessions—proved entirely adequate and methodologically sound.

Time-space diaries enabled participants in phase zero (pilot) and phase one to document their activities, locations, movements, and interactions, providing detailed insights into daily behaviours and spatial experiences. I chose and adapted time-space diaries for their ability to generate the spatial and temporal data essential for addressing the research questions. Their capacity to provide contextual understandings, elucidate routines and rituals, and render temporal and spatial patterns explicit made them an invaluable tool. However, their use also posed challenges, such as the potential for time-consuming completion processes, which can lead to non-compliance or diminishing data quality over time (Bolger et al., 2003; Bauman, Bittman, & Gershuny, 2019). To mitigate these concerns, I took several measures to ensure their suitability for the context of grade six learners.

Each learner in the selected grade six classes across three schools was issued a time-space diary to complete over seven days, from Monday to Sunday. On weekdays, learners documented their events, activities, and thoughts before, during, and after school, while the weekend entries were unstructured, allowing learners to record freely. The diaries were designed to be engaging and accessible, including an A4 blank page titled Umzobo/ Drawing for each day, where learners could illustrate their responses instead of or in addition to writing. The bilingual format in isiXhosa and English allowed learners to respond in their language of choice (see Appendix K).

The diaries included prompts to guide learners in reflecting on their routines and spatial experiences. These prompts included questions such as:

What were you doing, and who were you with?  
Where did you do this?  
When was this happening, and how did it make you feel?  
How did you travel to this place?  
What did you learn, or are you learning?

The diaries were completed over seven days, as this time frame was deemed optimal for capturing meaningful data without overwhelming the learners (Bolger et al., 2003). The pilot study also confirmed this. Each learner provided a pseudonym and a brief introduction about

themselves, which helped establish confidentiality and trust in a section titled Ndingubani?/"Who am I?" (see Appendix L). Throughout the study, I reminded learners to complete their diaries, and I also completed my diary as a model of participation.

Ultimately, 88 out of the 126 grade six learners submitted and completed diaries, yielding a response rate of 69.84%. The remaining 30.16% of learners did not submit their diaries for various reasons, including opting out of participation, losing the diaries, or prolonged absences. The completed diaries offered a rich dataset comprising drawings, photographs and text in both English and isiXhosa, providing substantial material for analysis.

While the time-space diaries provided valuable data for understanding spatial practice, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. One notable shortcoming was the lack of structured opportunities for learners to reflect on the process of completing the diaries. Reflection is a key aspect of diary methodologies, as it encourages participants to engage more deeply with their experiences and observations. Including reflective prompts or discussions about the diary-keeping process could have enhanced the depth and richness of the data collected.

To mitigate these issues, several measures were taken. Firstly, honesty was normalised by emphasising that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the emphasis was on enjoying the process of recording daily experiences. To encourage more accurate recall, I monitored diary completion with the various classes of learners throughout the week. While entries were not made in real time, learners were encouraged to record their activities as close as possible to when they occurred, rather than retrospectively summarising the week. This approach aimed to support more detailed and authentic accounts, while remaining sensitive to the practical limitations of diary-keeping for young participants. To further address potential bias, the diary data were triangulated with classroom observations, interviews, and, during phase two, sessions accompanying students both inside and outside of the school. Finally, the diaries were intentionally designed to be both engaging and confidential, which helped sustain participant motivation while reducing any concerns about judgement from peers or staff.

### **3.3.5.2 School Observations**



**Figure 3.4 School observation using 360 camera**

Observations played a critical role in capturing the dynamics of the school environment, providing a first-hand account of how space was experienced and navigated by learners in phases one and two. Observations were conducted across different times of the school day, including before school, during classroom lessons, during breaks, and after school. These observations allowed me to understand the rhythms of school life, including how learners interacted with each other and their environment (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

I utilised both direct observation and video recordings to document the school space. In particular, I used a 360-degree camera during observations to capture a broader view of the physical and social dynamics (see figure 3.4). For example, I positioned the camera in classrooms before lessons started to capture how learners organised their space and interacted with their peers in informal settings. This was crucial for documenting the moments before formal instruction began, offering insights into the more organic rhythms of the school day.

I arrived 30 minutes before school started and observed how children arrived at the school premises, who they were with, and what they did upon arrival. I noted some learners dropped off their bags and heading directly to classrooms, while others engaged in activities like playing soccer or skipping rope. These observations provided a glimpse into the learners' routines and interactions as they transitioned into the school day.

Observations extended beyond the classroom into informal spaces, such as break times and extracurricular activities, to better understand how learners engaged with their environment

when not in structured learning settings. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the socio-spatial dynamics that shaped the learners' everyday experiences. Additionally, observations helped capture power dynamics in the school setting, including how authority and space were negotiated between learners and staff.

At times during class time, I sat outside the classroom and placed a video recorder to capture the environment beyond the teaching space (see figure 3.4). This allowed me to observe learners heading to the bathroom, running or walking on the premises, and occasionally spotting stray dogs roaming around the school. The recordings also captured ambient sounds, such as teachers' voices during lessons, learners clapping, and other background activities. These observations added context to the structured classroom environment.

Break times offered opportunities to explore how learners used their free time. While walking around the premises, I entered classrooms and noticed learners drawing on the chalkboard, eating inside classrooms, and heading home early. Additionally, I observed children purchasing snacks from vendors, which highlighted the informal economic interactions taking place during these periods. These varied activities shed light on how learners navigated and utilised their free time within the school environment.

Acknowledging my dual role as a participant observer, I aimed to minimise my influence on the environment. At times, I positioned myself as a non-participant observer by sitting at the back of the classroom, avoiding reactions to classroom activities, and maintaining a neutral stance. At other times, I participated more actively by walking around the classroom, engaging in conversations with learners, and contributing my perspectives on matters as they arose. This dual role as a non-participant and participant observer followed recommendations by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) and allowed for a nuanced understanding of classroom rhythms. This approach aligns with Lefebvre's (2004) reflections on rhythm analysis:

"To grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it, to have let go of it, to have held and dropped it, not to have been its captive.. It is by escaping from the rhythms that one sees them, and also by stopping them by interrupting them with an instrument, a tool." (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 27)

To comprehend the rhythms of the classroom, I moved between participant and non-participant observation roles. The observation process was supported by a video recorder placed at the back of the classroom, enabling the review and analysis of recorded activities. Data collection began with unstructured observations, during which I noted classroom happenings. As the process evolved, observation notes were structured and analysed alongside field notes using Lefebvre's (1991) spatial framings of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces and rhythms (see Appendix I).

Before and after school, during break times, and during extracurricular activities, I observed learners as they arrived at and departed from school, and engaged in various activities such as eating, playing, and walking around the premises. These observations were complemented by the use of a 360-degree camera, which was either carried during walks around the school or stationed at fixed locations to record spatial dynamics (see figure 3.4). The recordings were designed to capture details that might have been missed during real-time observations. For example, the 360-degree footage allowed me to revisit interactions and activities that occurred simultaneously in different areas, enriching the analysis and triangulation of the data. A consistent process was followed across all three schools in the study.

While video recordings and direct observations were invaluable, it is important to note that observation is inherently selective, shaped by the researcher's perspective (Bertram & Christiansen, 2019). To address this limitation, I triangulated observational data with other tools, including the time-space diaries and interviews, ensuring a more robust understanding of the space and the learners' interactions within it. In future another way to address these limitations, could be to have multiple individuals review the recordings independently, take notes, and then share their findings. This collaborative approach could help minimise potential researcher bias and broaden the perspective on the observed events.

Furthermore, while alternating between participant and non-participant observer roles was helpful in this study, it may be more beneficial to extend the duration of each role separately. Spending longer periods as a non-participant observer followed by longer periods as a participant observer could provide more clarity and reduce the potential for blurring findings. A lengthier duration in each role may also make the process of exiting rhythms more evident and impactful, enhancing the researcher's ability to act as a reference point for the interplay of rhythms within the observed environment. Lastly, observations are shaped by a shared

history of interactions within the observed space (Bertram & Christiansen, 2019). To respond to this limitation the observations were accompanied by semi-structured interviews with teachers, staff and learners to help understand more fully the meanings of certain interactions.

### 3.3.5.3 Interviews

Interviews were a key component of the data generation process, providing rich, in-depth insights into the learners' experiences, their perceptions of space, and their understanding of their socio-spatial environment. The interviews in this study included semi-structured, unstructured, and walk-along interviews. Each type of interview helped uncover different aspects of the learners' experiences and resulted in a better understating of the productions of space.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the learners, parents and school staff to explore themes related to identity, spatial dynamics, and the learners' and teachers' daily routines.. These interviews followed a set of predefined questions but were flexible enough to allow the conversation to flow naturally, with space for learners to raise additional points of interest. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to provide both structure and flexibility, allowing for the exploration of predetermined themes while also enabling participants to share their perspectives in more open-ended ways (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

For instance, during the *semi-structured interviews in phases one and two*, I showed the learners images from their time-space diaries as prompts to facilitate reflection and conversation. For example, I showed Dumisa a drawing from his diary that depicted a shirt with a smiley face after school, asking him to explain the context of this drawing and what it represented concerning his experiences of space and his community.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted after the walk-along interviews (discussed later) to delve deeper into the themes that emerged from the learners' journeys. These interviews allowed me to clarify any points of interest and gain further insight into how the learners perceived and interacted with the spaces they occupied.

Unstructured interviews were also used to gain a broader understanding of the school environment and to explore areas not directly addressed in the time-space diaries or observations in phase one. These interviews were informal, with open-ended questions allowing participants to speak freely about their experiences. Unstructured interviews are valuable in exploring areas of inquiry that may not have been anticipated and can reveal new insights that were not part of the original research design (Bertram & Christiansen, 2019).

I conducted unstructured interviews with teachers, school staff, and community members such as caretakers and snack vendors. These individuals offered additional context about the school environment, revealing informal dynamics, such as how learners navigated the school grounds during break times and the role that snack vendors played in the daily rhythms of the school. One notable unstructured interview was with the snack vendors, who were frequently seen collecting litter after a break. I asked the vendor about their role in the school and their observations about the learners' behaviour, which provided valuable insights into the informal interactions that shaped the school's socio-spatial context.

In addition to the semi-structured and unstructured interviews, *walk-along interviews* were conducted as a specific form of mobile ethnography. Walk-along interviews allowed me to explore learners' perceptions of space in real time as I accompanied them during their daily journeys to and from school (Kusenbach, 2003). This method enabled the collection of spontaneous conversations and interactions, providing a deeper understanding of how learners engage with their surroundings.

During the walk-along interviews in phase two, I accompanied the learners on their way to school, assuming a passive role while observing their interactions with peers and the environment. For example, during a walk with Nosipho, as an aeroplane flew above us, she and her twin started discussing their dreams about being a pilot and lawyers- a discussion that was later picked up in the semi-structured interviews. These real-time conversations were crucial for understanding how learners perceived their environment and how their daily routines were embedded in the socio-spatial dynamics of their community.

Using a 360-degree camera during the walk-along interviews allowed me to capture the learners' conversations with me and each other and the physical context in which these conversations took place. For instance, the camera recorded places where learners stopped to

chat with neighbours or bought snacks, providing valuable data on how these locations contributed to their overall experience of space. The walk-along interviews also allowed me to document the journey naturally and unstructured, offering a rich data source on the learners' spatial practices and interactions with the environment.

After completing the walk-along interviews, I followed up with semi-structured interviews to explore further the themes that had emerged during the journey. These follow-up interviews helped deepen my understanding of the learners' perceptions and provided an opportunity to clarify any points raised during the walk.

I used focus group discussions in phase three to reflect on the study's findings and engage participants in a generative discussion. Although I had initially intended to involve more learners and teachers, due to participation challenges during COVID-19 lockdowns, the focus group involved only the four learner participants from phase two. I presented tentative findings and gathered their input on potential improvements to their learning and thoughts on living and learning in Makhanda to answer research questions focussed on their learning and the available opportunities. These discussions provided valuable insights into the participants' perceptions and how space and schooling shaped their experiences in Makhanda. The collaboration of peers from different schools demonstrated competitive relations, especially in relation to the secondary schools they wished to attend and their perceptions of each other's schools in relation to theirs.

This study's final type of interview took place during the children's journeys to school. These interviews are referred to as “walk-along” (Evans & Jones, 2011), “go-along” (Kusenbach, 2003), or “drive-along” when conducted in vehicles (Sheller & Urry, 2006), as was the case with Vuyo (see Section 5.1). These methodologies are designed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in situ, yielding rich and contextual data (Kusenbach, 2003).

By accompanying participants on their journeys, I could observe firsthand how they engaged with and navigated their environment. For instance, I witnessed the dogs participants reported running from in their time-space diaries (see section 5.3) and the gatherings of friends en route or stops at corner shops. These observations provided a deeper understanding of the relationships between individuals, groups, and their surroundings.

This approach also offered the advantage of minimal disruption to participants' daily routines, as it eliminated the need to schedule separate interview times. Instead, the interviews occurred naturally during the participants' typical activities. Furthermore, this method reduced reliance on memory, as participants could discuss their journeys in real time and point out details they might have otherwise forgotten (Carpiano, 2009). For example, during one journey, I realised Nosipho and her twin sisters chose not to carry school bags, opting instead to do their homework at school and avoid the burden of heavy bags (IntNosipho, 2019).

Additionally, this method diminished the often hierarchical gap between researcher and participant. Since participants guided the journey, they also could lead the discussions, creating a more egalitarian dynamic (Bibi & Ehgartner, 2021). This was very helpful given the age of the participants and the fact that participants had friends and family during the interviews.

Despite these advantages, this approach presented several challenges. Recording conversations were at times difficult due to environmental factors such as passing cars, wind, and the movement of groups. Safety concerns arose as I sometimes walked through open fields and rocky paths while carrying recording equipment.

#### **3.3.5.4 A Multi-Perspective Approach to Data Collection**

The use of multiple data generation tools—time-space diaries, school observations, and interviews (walk-along, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews)—helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. By triangulating data from different sources, I was able to construct a fuller and more nuanced understanding of how learners interact with and experience the spaces they inhabit. Each tool provided a different perspective on the learners' socio-spatial environment, contributing to a more well-rounded analysis. Integrating time-space diaries and interviews with observational data helped mitigate biases and ensured the findings were robust and reliable.

Ethical considerations were central to this study and are explained in detail in section 3.5. Here, I will note that informed consent was obtained from all participants, including

guardians, and confidentiality was assured through the use of pseudonyms and secure handling of data. Learners were informed that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. These procedures ensured that the rights and privacy of all participants were respected throughout the research process.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the entire study phases one to three, was analysed using five different ways on NVivo, where the data was stored and analysed. The data analysis methods are briefly mentioned here and then further unpacked in chapters four and five. The five different methods of analysis are *data walking*, *spatial analysis*, *rhythmanalysis*, *decolonial analysis* and *thematic analysis*. In each phase, I drew on the various analysis methods in line with the nature of the data and the research question/s (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Data analysis methodology**

| Phase       | Data analysis methodology                  |
|-------------|--|
| Phase One   | Data walking                               |
|             | Spatial Analysis                           |
|             | Rhythmanalysis                             |
|             | Decolonial Analysis                        |
| Phase Two   | Data Walking                               |
|             | Spatial Analysis                           |
|             | Generative Thematic Analysis on mobilities |
| Phase Three | Spatial Analysis                           |
|             | Generative Thematic Analysis               |

### 3.4.1 An overview of the analytical tools

**Data walking** is an expansive methodology that avoids closure or identifying a single central theme and instead identifies the links between multiple explanations (Eakle, 2007). In this process, I ‘strolled’ through all the data: I listened to all the interviews, examined all the sketches, read the time-space diaries and watched the video footage from the school. This provided a holistic picture of the data and helped relate the various observations, spoken/written accounts and surfaced relationships and conflicts produced in the space.

**The spatial analysis** included analysing and presenting the data through the spatial triad of firstspace/perceived space, secondspace/conceived space and thirdspace/lived space to see the relationship between the empirical experiences, the theoretical/ideological conceptions and the lived and imagined spaces that make up social space. A rhythmanalysis followed spatial analysis.

**Rhythmanalysis** is a multifaceted and potentially transformative strategy for inquiry that consists of looking at the data and identifying rhythms, such as repeated interactions between place/s, time, and energy (Lefebvre, 2004). I layered the rhythms into three layers: (1) architectural mapping, focusing on the morphological analyses of the schools; (2) perceptual mapping, exploring smell, taste and sound; and (3) behavioural mapping, where the focus is on behavioural patterns emerging from the data. I applied the three layers of analysis to explore the production of school space: before school, during school (including recess/break time) and after school.

I then used a **decolonial analysis** focused on the three premises of coloniality: coloniality of being, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of power to uncover the colonial matrix of power and explore how, as modern subjects, the study participants breathed coloniality all the time and every day in the production of the school day (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

This study, in essence, adds to the little academic work that focuses on the recursive links between the social context and the educational processes of the young (Fataar, 2007). This later helped to identify new/missed links and augment existing links that aid pedagogical relations. Figure 3.5 shows the cyclical analysis method used in phase one once the data was generated.



**Figure 3.5: Diagram showing the cyclical phases of analysis in phase one**

Source: Author's own

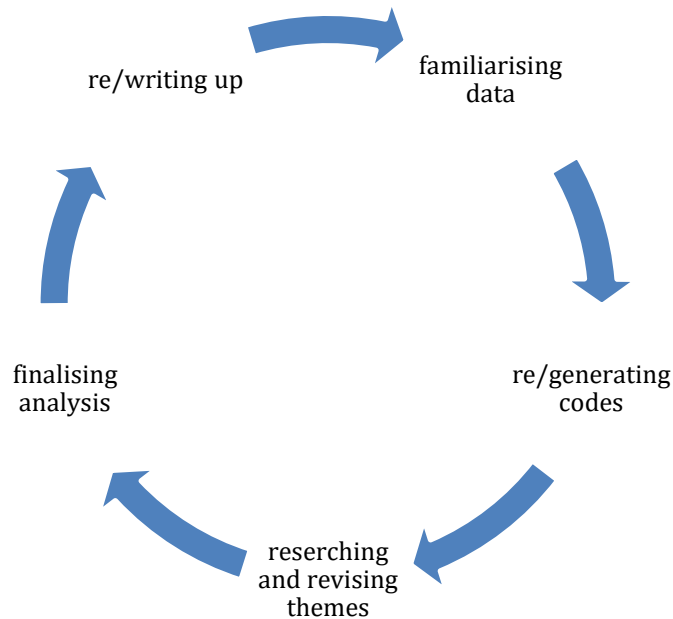
The generated data from phase two was analysed qualitatively. Like phase one, the data was initially analysed through data walking (Eakle, 2007). The data walk was then followed by a spatial analysis that focused on two kinds of mobilities – those *enacted* and those *imagined*. Perceived space was used to denote the spatial practices of the participant's everyday life that are perceived as real and natural (Sheehy, 2009). Perceived space privileges the subjective perceptions of the built environments and the embedded social relationships. Perceived space cannot, however, stand-alone because space is colonised by conceived space (Schreiner, 2016). The second facet explored the conceptual processes of social space by authorities;

unlike perceived space, this space is presented as objective by architects and city planners. Here the focus was on knowledge, theories, ideologies, signs, symbols and codes that 'rationalise', 'legitimise' and control (some of the) social action (Allen, 1999). This is the primary social space as it is the dominant space of any society (Merrifield, 2006). It imposes and directs order in moving objects and bodies and governs relationships. This production of conceived space is always subject to change and always in production or reproduction (Massy, 2005) as it rules our lives to our benefit and often to our detriment (Merrifield, 2006). This space, although conceptual, manifests physically and cannot exist without this physical manifestation as it gains its objective expression through the empirical buildings, bodies, discourse and activity in the learner's everyday lives (Merrifield, 2006).

The third facet of space that concluded the spatial analysis was one of both hope and despair. It did not look only at what was abstracted by subjects and those in authority but rather at their lived experiences – it provided the learners' space to dream and hope as they lived beyond their perceptions – this is where their fears of poverty and loss lived. Lived space is the clandestine space that completes the triad of social space (Merrifield, 2006). It goes beneath the rigidity of perceived and conceived space and actively reimagines new ways of being and doing that may go against the current conceptualised narratives. This transgressive space is powerful as it constantly asks – what if?

### **3.4.2 A generative thematic analysis**

In phase three, once the data generated in phase two focused on mobilities was analysed, I proceeded with two interrelated generative thematic analyses of the findings from phases one and two to answer two facets of the research question: a) *what is the production of space* and b) *what opportunities or learning do they make available for teaching and learning?* In the latter part, b), I drew on decolonial theory, focusing on alternative narratives by actively seeking out and highlighting marginalised perspectives that emerged from the data. I then followed a cyclical process, beginning with familiarisation with the data and ending with writing up the analysis before reviewing it by repeating the process to refine themes and the entire process (See Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.6: Cyclical thematic analysis**

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

In this study, ethics were not treated as procedural formalities but were deeply embedded within relational, contextual, and decolonial frameworks that shaped the research throughout. While formal approval was obtained from the Eastern Cape Education Department and the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) (Appendix A), ethical engagement extended well beyond institutional protocols. Drawing on feminist and decolonial ethics (Smith, 1999; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009), this approach viewed ethics as dynamic, situated, and continuous—rooted in accountability, reciprocity, and care.

Informed assent and consent were approached as dialogic and ongoing processes rather than one-time contractual exchanges. In keeping with Indigenous and feminist epistemologies (Kovach, 2009; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), consent was negotiated through repeated conversations with principals, teachers, caregivers, and learners. For instance, when one family expressed concern about their daughter s walking (and being seen walking) with me - the researcher, an adult male—this was discussed with both the daughter and her mother who later opted to withdraw from the study. The research design was subsequently adapted: a new participant selected, also a girl, who as paired with another girl (twin sister) so that the

researcher never accompanied the girl alone. In other words, measures were implemented to prioritise familial trust, participant safety, and the situated communal knowledge embedded within participants' social contexts.

This approach centred children as active participants with agency—reflected in their ability to choose pseudonyms and in their right to assent (or decline) to each component of the research process, including diary writing and walk-alongs. These repeated opportunities for consent respected children's evolving comfort levels and affirmed their autonomy as co-constructors of meaning (Spyrou, 2018).

All communication occurred in English and/or isiXhosa, affirming both linguistic diversity and cultural relevance. The principle of ubuntu (Metz, 2007), with its emphasis on interconnectedness and mutual recognition, underpinned relationships within the research process. Ethical care extended beyond anonymity and confidentiality to consider the communal nature of knowledge and responsibility, particularly within the tightly-knit peri-rural communities of Makhanda.

Protecting participants' identities involved a careful negotiation of tensions between recognition and concealment. While pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity, I often wrestled with the implications of withholding names and faces—concerned that this might be perceived as a form of erasure. However, recognising the participants' age and the potential unintended consequences of visibility—such as community scrutiny or disruptions to social relationships—ultimately reinforced the importance of confidentiality. This assurance of anonymity created a protected communicative space, or what might be understood as an ethically bounded zone of expression, where participants felt safe to articulate experiences that might otherwise remain unspoken. As Punch (2002) observes, children are more likely to express themselves authentically when afforded privacy and freedom from adult oversight. This ethical tension between anonymity and recognition as well as protection and visibility was navigated with reference to feminist ethics of care, which advocate for contextually sensitive, relationally responsive decision-making (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993). The study resisted viewing children solely through deficit-oriented frameworks of vulnerability. Instead, echoing decolonial feminists like Lugones (2010) and Indigenous scholars such as Chilisa (2012), both children and communities were framed as creative, knowledgeable, mobile, and relational agents—capable of complex insights and deserving of epistemic respect. Their

observations about schooling, space, and mobility were treated as legitimate forms of situated knowledge. For example, when a family expressed concern over their daughter's walking group, which included older boys, this concern was taken seriously, and adjustments were made in consultation with the child—again foregrounding both safety and relational trust.

Ethical engagement also required sustained reflexivity regarding my own positionality as a researcher (see Section 3.2). Though I was welcomed into participants' homes and classrooms, I remained conscious of the structural asymmetries and historical contexts shaping these interactions. Some parents, for instance, assumed I could directly assist their children—for example, by helping them perform better in school. Feminist and postcolonial critiques of researcher neutrality (Narayan, 1993; Pillow, 2003) reminded me that my presence, interpretations, and institutional affiliations were never neutral, but always implicated in the social fabric of the research. Reflexivity thus functioned not merely as a methodological tool, but as an ethical imperative.

Importantly, ethical commitment extended to questions of justice, benefit, and epistemic equity. While participants were not promised material outcomes, the research was premised on generating knowledge that could contribute meaningfully to learners, educators, and communities—by revealing systemic inequities and imagining pathways toward transformation. This aligns with Smith's (1999) assertion that ethical research must not only "do no harm" but also actively resist epistemic domination and promote collective well-being.

In sum, this study adopted an ethical stance grounded in relational accountability, decolonial theory, care-based practice, and ongoing reflexivity—challenging extractive models of research in favour of approaches that honour participants' voices, agency, and complex social realities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in this embedded ethnographic case study, which was aimed at unveiling the intricate ways social space is produced within the context of peri-rural primary schools in Makhanda. The study's

qualitative approach highlighted the significance of relational space in educational settings, illustrating the complex interplay of classrooms, communities, and histories. By focusing on spatiality and mobility, the research sought valuable insights into how learners, teachers, and the broader community navigate, shape, and are shaped by their educational environments.

This methodology emphasised the importance of using multiple tools to ensure data validity and reliability, including time-space diaries, school observations, and diverse interview methods such as semi-structured, unstructured, and walk-along interviews. Each method comprehensively understood the socio-spatial dynamics within the schools and their surrounding communities. The research approach also allowed for a deep exploration of the rhythms of everyday school life, offering a nuanced perspective of the space as experienced by learners and educators alike.

While the findings from this study are context-specific, they offer broader implications for understanding the socio-spatial dynamics in educational contexts across South Africa, particularly in peri-rural settings. Aspects of the methodology, such as rhythm analysis and mobile ethnography, will be revisited in the subsequent chapters, where the data from the first phase—focused on the schools—will be presented and discussed. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role and conceptualisation of space in educational theory and practice, advocating for a more nuanced appreciation of the spatial dimensions of learning.

The next chapter will present the data analysis of the study's first phase, focusing specifically on the school- as a produced space. It will explore the dynamics of space that shape (and is shaped by) the learners' experiences within these settings.

## **Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings**

The production of space must be understood as a political and social process. It is not merely a question of planning or economic considerations. (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 21)

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins the presentation and discussion of findings from the data generated in phase one to respond to the main research question: How does/can the production of social space in rurally located township schools influence the learning of grade 6 learners? This chapter, however, contributes to the above research question and the broader thesis by focusing on the following sub-research questions:

- How is school space re/produced in the three schools?
- What social practices do learners engage in when in 'free' spaces?
- How is power distributed in the production of space within the socio-spatial systems experienced by the learners?
- What does it mean to be a child in a rural socio-spatial system [identity]?

In doing the above, there is a strong focus on providing a thick description of the schooling context, as is familiar with ethnographic studies, to give the reader insight into what it is like to be in the schools. The data presented in this chapter is analysed through a rhythm analysis, discussed later, drawing from spatial theory exploring perceived, conceived, and lived spaces and decolonial theory (see sections 2.5 and 2.9, respectively). After unpacking what rhythm analysis is and why it is done, the chapter presents two situating texts: a school day vignette (see figure 4.1) and the typical school day (see section .4.3.2).

This work essentially undertakes a rhythm analysis of the built environment, sensory experiences, behaviours, and an English lesson.

The analysis is divided into two main sections: data, a discussion on the rhythms of architectural mapping, and a chapter that outlines a typical school day. This chapter explores the rhythms of perceptual and behavioural mapping alongside an English lesson, offering an integrated perspective on the school as a socio-spatial entity deeply imbued with ideology.

- *Architectural mapping* examines the rhythms embedded in the built environment.
- Perceptual mapping highlights sensory dimensions, such as soundscapes and scentscapes.
- *Behavioural mapping* reveals how actors—children, teachers, and community members—navigate and interact with these spaces.
- *The English lesson* focuses on producing teaching and learning spaces, emphasising their role in shaping educational experiences and identities.

•  
This is followed by a discussion on *free time*, including break time, conceptualised as a "third space" of hybridity. Free time encompasses "other worlds" or spaces beyond the immediate, as Schreiner (2016) described. It is characterised by the interconnected rhythms of relationality, emotionality, and creativity in the production of space, contrasted against the structured rhythms of formal teaching time

## **4.2 Rhythmanalysis as a Method of Data Analysis**

According to Lefebvre, "Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm" (2004, p. 15). A rhythmanalysis directs one's attention away from the sum of activities and instead to their sequencing to bring to the fore the routinisation of life, in this case, schooling. Rhythmanalysis serves a dual purpose of, firstly, *critically analysing contemporary social structures* by a) unveiling the social production of time and space and b) critiquing the alienation/ cultural dissonance of modern life rhythms to uncover the social production of time and space. The second purpose is to *reimagine and transform social practice* by a) reconnecting individuals with their lived experiences of space and time and b) revealing the potential for social change (Lefebvre, 2004).

To better understand this, Lefebvre distinguishes between rhythm types, cyclical and linear rhythms, and key concepts, such as polyrhythms, arrhythmia, eurhythmia, and isorhythmia. Cyclic rhythms originate in nature's cycles that last for a period and then restart in terms of days and nights, months and seasons (Sgibnev, 2015). Cyclic rhythms do not accumulate. Instead, they are continually beginning anew, with each new day or school year, for example. Linear rhythms, however, are associated with the tick-tock of the clock and are "produced from social practices that impose a monotony of actions and movements" (Wozniak, 2017, p. 499). Industrialisation and capitalism privilege the superimposition of linear rhythms over cyclic rhythms, as linear rhythms are mechanical productions that subject people to programmed self-regulation and the need to produce and accumulate for the sake of accumulation (Lefebvre et al., 1999).

Lefebvre (2004) distinguished between four fundamental concepts of rhythms: **polyrhythmic moments**-the everyday to ecosystems, schools and the body are moments in which there are many rhythms in time and space. **Arrhythmia** refers to moments when there is conflict or dissonance between two or more rhythms, and **eurhythmia** occurs when there is a constructive or beneficial relationship among rhythms. **Isorhythmia** is when two or more rhythms are equal in terms of repetition, frequency and measure. Rhythms are characterised by repetition and difference and are thus able to change and develop over spatiotemporal configurations. According to Lefebvre (2004), studying the polyrhythms of everyday life is studying capitalism.

This study, therefore, looked at the polyrhythms of everyday life to study the more insidious effects of capitalism and colonialism in the context of schooling. Exploring seemingly trivial, mundane, and recurrent aspects of schooling may help us make a more profound sense of the “every day” (Lefebvre, 1991). This study extends Lefebvrian analysis by looking through capitalism to uncover that which has survived decolonisation, that is, to uncover aspects of enduring coloniality.

Once the data was analysed using the above cyclical phases (see Figure 3.4 in methodology), the findings were presented in a discussion using a similar structuring of rhythms across social space steeped in coloniality. This makes explicit the homogeneity and fragmentation in the production of schooling. I then discuss the findings of break time as a thirdspace concerning formal teaching time and time before and after school to discuss the emergence of relationality, emotionality and creativity. The chapter then concludes by tangling the school rhythms.

To provide the reader with a sense of the school day as a whole and to contextualise the data before the data analysis and finding discussion, I provide a vignette of the school day data in Figure 4.1. Many of the themes that emerged here are discussed further in this chapter.

As learners, primarily boys, arrive at school in the morning, small groups wait outside the open school gate and pass around brushes, combs, cloths and polish. Learners then brush/comb their hair, polish and shine their black shoes. Others ask friends to help them fasten their ties, and some stomp their feet and dust their pants to remove the mud and dust gathered from the gravel roads to school. Once this is done, they enter the school premises and head to their classroom and other meeting spots under trees and by the fence.

There is a water station in the corner of the classroom. On the opposite side lies a dustbin next to the only door to the grade six classroom. During lessons, learners walk towards the water station and meet to talk. Often, only one or two learners drink water in the shared cup. Others simply walk back after talking to friends/peers. Similarly, learners stroll towards the door, look outside, and talk to the learners seated by the door, and when they see you, they grab something to throw in the dustbin and then head back to their seats.

*Dear diary, I have some questions I don't understand. I read lies in my classwork book and I was afraid [off] asking (TSD B35)*

During break time behind the principal's office, four boys and one girl sit with a phone in hand. These vibrant learners are practising a rap performance. The girl sings the chorus, two boys rap, one boy composes the beat, and the other boy joins in to listen.

**TIMESPAN OF SCHOOL DAY**



During break time, learners use the water tower as a jungle gym. Girls and boys, often in pairs, play a game of tag on the bars and beams elevating the water tank.

Two girls meet at the bathroom more than 20 meters from the classroom as teaching and learning continues. What did you wear at church? She asks her friend. Outside you can overhear a brief discussion about Sunday, along with taps opening and water running, followed by the two girls running off to their different classrooms.

In the expansive grassland, a man selling imitshayelo (besoms), a batch of brooms made of twigs, is seen cutting through the school premises carrying the brooms on his head. He walks on a pathway created by several previous journeys cutting through the school.

During break time, around eight to 10 girls remain in class and gather by the green chalkboard. They use their bodies to block what they are writing, and three to five learners write simultaneously. Now and then, they move to expose their writings: names of boys who did not sweep the class, sketches or trees, mathematical sums, their favourite musicians and hip-hip songs: New rules by Dua Lipa, DJ Snake, Cardi B ... Other learners write down alleged relationships and crushes in their class framed in hearts. Before the teacher or other learners enter, they quickly erase what was written. They leave behind sketches and thank you messages to teachers.

**Figure 4.1: School day vignette**  
Source: Author's own

### 4.3 Data Analysis and Findings

Once the data was analysed using the cyclical phases (see Figure no. 3.4 in methodology), the findings were presented in four layers that made up the rhythmanalysis, namely: (1) architectural mapping, focusing on the morphological analyses of the schools; (2) perceptual mapping, exploring smell, taste and sound; and (3) behavioural mapping, where the focus was on behavioural patterns emerging from the data. Lastly (4), I present the discussion and findings from the thirdspace of break time and before and during school in contrast to formal teaching time (see Figure 4.2).

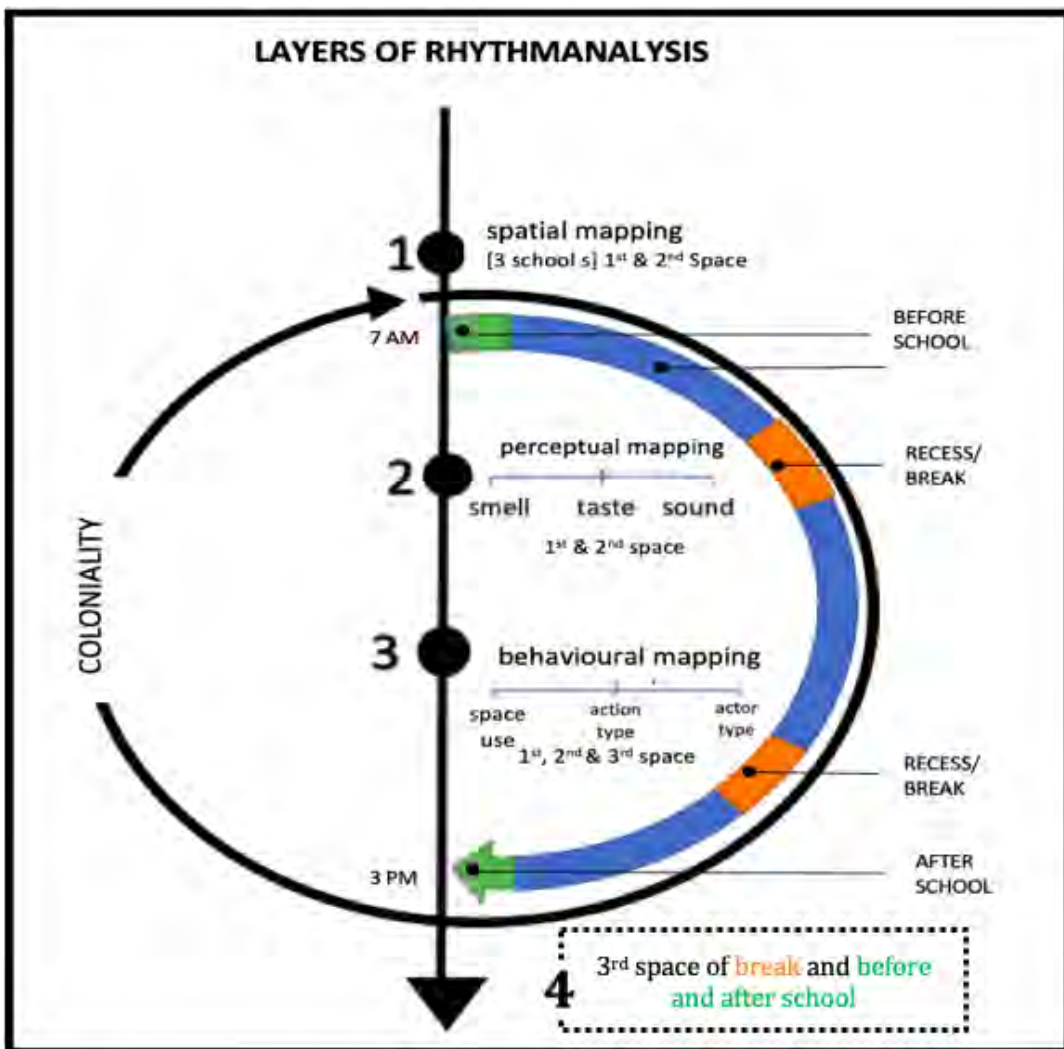
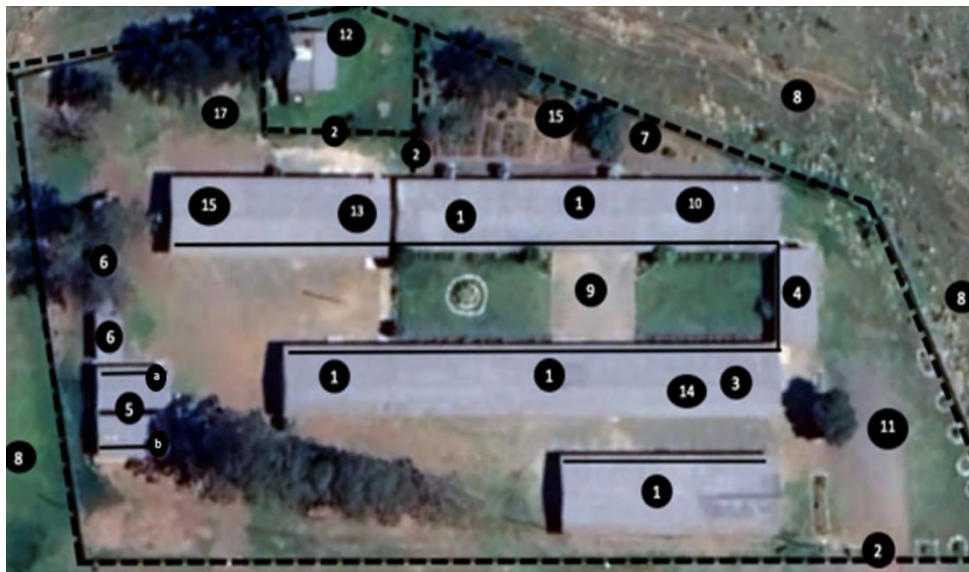


Figure 4.2: Layers of rhythmanalysis

Source: Author's own

### 4.3.1 Architectural mapping

#### 4.3.1.1 The built environment: Fixed architectural rhythms



- 1. Classrooms
  - 2. Entrance/s
  - 3. Staffroom
  - 4. Offices
  - 5. Toilets
    - 5b boys
    - 5g girls
    - 5s staff
  - 6. Tool shed/ storage
  - 7. Vegetable garden
  - 8. Open field
  - 9. Quad
  - 10. Kitchen
  - 11. Staff parking
  - 12. Caretaker's house
  - 13. Library
  - 14. Clinic
  - 15. Grade R facility
  - 16. Staircase
  - 17. Tuckshop
- walk passages  
 - - - Fence

**Figure 4.3: An aerial photo of Themba Primary School**

Source: Satellite imagery of Themba Primary School from Google Earth (2020).



**Figure 4.4: An aerial photo of Kamva Primary School**

Source: Satellite imagery of Kamva Primary School from Google Earth (2020).



**Figure 4.5: An aerial photo of Amila Primary School**

Source: Satellite imagery of Amila Primary School from Google Earth (2020).

#### ***4.3.1.2 A description of the tri-school***

The three schools are nestled in the peri-rural eastern Makhana, far away from metropolitans that often house industry, in school grounds characterised by expansive grasslands with few trees. The conceived space of all three schools includes the school entrance gate that provides a driveway that leads to parking and is right in front of the school office/s, where you will find reception. Similarly, the architects conceived of the school space across each of the three schools as three parallel rows with a central quad” (refer to figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5). The Grade R classrooms and associated facilities are enclosed by secure fences, reinforcing safety as a key design consideration in the planning of the school grounds.

Each school has a vegetable garden intended to contribute to the children’s education and sustainability. The administrative offices are housed in separate buildings connected to the classroom blocks by narrow walkways. These walkways, forming a network of horizontal and vertical lines, link the classrooms, offices and toilet facilities for girls and boys. However, these walkways do not extend to the peripheral spaces such as the gardens, play areas, or grasslands. Instead, informal footpaths have emerged over time, carved by the movements of

children and teachers heading to these areas. These footpaths illustrate the tension between conceived space (the orderly, planned pathways envisioned by architects) and lived space (the organic and improvisational use of space).

Each school enforces a uniform policy, emphasising specific school colours, contributing to a sense of collective identity. However, signs of dilapidation are evident across all three schools: broken door handles, shattered windows, malfunctioning lights, and discarded furniture signal insufficient maintenance and resource allocation. These signs are contrasted with ongoing action to care for the school by sweeping, picking up litter, and cleaning uniforms by learners and staff. The classroom windows, notably bare of curtains, are in stark contrast to the staffrooms and offices where curtains afford privacy. This difference highlights an uneven distribution of autonomy and surveillance within the school environment, which will be discussed later.

The perceived space of the schools—the physical layout and material organisation—functions to segregate children by grade, sex, and role. For instance, at Kamva Primary, foundation-phase classrooms (grades one to three) are on the ground floor, while intermediate-phase classrooms (grades four to seven) occupy the upper floor. This physical organisation reflects planners' intentions to delineate educational stages while prioritising accessibility and safety for younger learners. The spatial distinction between paved walkways and informal footpaths further underscores the dynamic interaction between the conceived and lived spaces. While the walkways signify order and uniformity, the footpaths symbolise the agency of children and teachers in reshaping the spatial landscape to suit their practical needs.

These footpaths also present the learners and teachers as architects of space through their agency. The emergence of informal footpaths leading to gardens and play areas highlights how children and teachers act as agents of spatial production, resisting the rigidity of the planned layout. These paths reflect the organic rhythms of daily life and illustrate Lefebvre's concept of lived space as an arena where users reinterpret and transform the conceived space. The absence of paved paths to the vegetable gardens further underscores the dynamic nature of space, as these gardens were added later following the Department of Basic Education's School Food Garden initiative introduced in 2004 (Department of Basic Education, n.d.). This temporal layering of space reveals how the schools' environments evolve in response to shifting priorities and initiatives.

The perceived space of these schools, experienced through sensory interaction, carries the ideological imprint of the conceived space. The spatial arrangements reflect sociocultural values and priorities, such as safety, order, and control. For example, the separation of male and female toilets, the placement of foundation-phase classrooms on the ground floor, and the fencing around Grade R facilities all communicate a concern for safety and accessibility. Narrow, straight walkways reinforce this emphasis on control by limiting the number of children who can walk or run together, privileging slower, single-file movement. Only in hindsight do I realise how my movements in the space, although appearing autonomous, were in some ways directed by my perceptions of the space that are socially produced by the conceived space of spatial planners.

In all three schools, as in any school, the perceived space is infused with conceived space meaning, i.e. ideology, values, and beliefs held by those in power—such as planners, architects, and policymakers (Schreiner, 2016). In other words, the above-perceived space description is steeped with sociocultural values and ideology and is not neutral or random. Spatial analysis enables a discussion of the implications of spatial architectural mapping. In the architectural mapping, **safety** is valued. This partially informs the decisions to have separate male and female toilets for staff and children and the rationale to place foundation phase children on the ground floor to limit the use of stairs; similarly, the fence separating grade R children from older children and the fence around the schools. The learners also shared this safety concern, as one friend expressed concern for their friend's safety: “I drop him [friend] off at his home and make sure he gets home safely” (see also TSD B3, D7 & G7). The narrow and straight walkways also reduce the number of children who can walk/run together, privileging single-file, slower mobility that may be considered safer.

The characteristics of the building hold **conceived space** ideology that helps regulate what, where, when and who is permitted in the school, classroom, staffroom and restrooms within spatiotemporal configurations.

Transparency in architectural design is another prominent feature of these schools. Classroom windows without curtains create an environment of visibility, enabling constant observation as any person walking past is seen and sees what is happening inside the classroom or in another parallel classroom. This fosters a culture of surveillance in which children discipline themselves under the gaze of their peers and teachers. For instance, the schools have a

practice of writing the names of misbehaving classmates or those absent from class on the board, a practice observed across all three schools (ObsG, 26/02/19). This surveillance goes beyond the classroom. One child recorded in their diary: “Mother bought a new pair of school shoes for my twin sister because she was wearing formal shoes at school, and everybody was laughing at her” (TSD G22). Similarly, teachers monitor whether children’s shoes are polished, noting infractions (TSD P23). Children also “go to the school gate and watch the other children arrive” (TSD P8). These rhythms also couple and form eurhythmic polyrhythms, for example, the narrow walkways privileging single-file, slower mobility next to the curtainless windows so that movement is safe and slowed, and those inside can see and police what is happening outside. Also, parallel architecture means the teacher- who usually stands up, sees their class outside the class and into other classes. The learners know this and, as a result, discipline their bodies or, as we will see later, find ways to move or go unnoticed. The rhythms of surveillance are then interrupted by the curtain in the staff-rooms and offices where surveillance is minimalised in spaces set aside for staff. This communicates that the exercise of power in the school day is supervised by everyone (Foucault, 1977), as everyone (particularly the children) is watching and being watched.

This surveillance in schools is similar to Foucault’s panopticon (Foucault, 1977), which is common in prisons and used to analyse schools (Gallagher, 2010); these schools have slight differences. Firstly, supervision in the school space is shared and not the role of a supervisor/s in a tower who can see but is never seen. Children, teachers, parents who live around the school, and all other staff survey each other. Children write down the names of misbehaving children or children who do not help clean up at the end of the school day. Children similarly report fights and accidents during break time and parents scold children to hurry up and head to school once the bell rings. Surveillance in the three schools is shared, but similar to the prison, the focus, it seems, is mainly on the learners being surveyed as they survey each other. Secondly, surveillance is not constant in schools as children during formal teaching time and break time find ways to escape the surveillance of peers and staff, and surveillance is reduced during break time. Children positioned themselves behind walls or at the far end of the expansive grassland or met in bathrooms where surveillance is minimal. The effect, however, is similar to that of the panoptic gaze: the internalisation of school/social norms and increased conformity (Foucault, 1977). The above, however, again emphasises children’s agency in navigating and, at times, resisting surveillance.

Spatial mapping includes the ‘things’ in a space as spatial theory rejects the conceptualisation of space that excludes that which is movable. As a result, the bodies that form part of the space are also mapped. All three schools have an almost entirely Black population (incl. staff), and most of the children are isiXhosa speakers. The emerging Black middle class has resulted in racial divisions being partially replaced by class divisions in South Africa’s schooling system, as Black children enrol in historically Coloured, Indian and White schools (Msila, 2008; Sekete et al., 2001). Nonetheless, race continues to act as an organising principle in schooling. This migration has been a one-way process, with children generally moving from townships to suburban schools.<sup>7</sup> In Makhanda, it is incontestable that the schools in the town have had and continue to have better resources and results (see Lemon, 2004; Westaway, 2017). Thus, a rhythm of race as an organising principle in the coloniality of being is evident as a hierarchy exists, where whiteness is still afforded a greater ontological density in contrast to blackness in the provisioning and maintenance of schooling resources (IntCT, 22/02/19; IntHT, 27/02/19; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

The conceived spatial analysis identifies what may be de/valued and how and why each space is ordered, i.e., ideas on who should be, where, when, and what to do. For example, the built boys’ toilet is set aside for children who are boys during break time so that the cyclical rhythms of the body are imposed by the linear rhythms of the school day, creating order and control of bodies in space. One can see the relationship between perceived space and conceived space in how space is designed and how space is intended to be used foregrounding teaching and learning as most of the space is intended for classrooms, and the walkways leading to the various classrooms reinforce where children ought to be and how they should get there. This is not to say children fully comply, as the emergence of informal footpaths and the children’s practice of relieving themselves outside designated toilets signal the tensions between conceived and lived spaces, revealing moments of resistance and reinterpretation and negotiations of spatial norms. The spatial organisation of the three schools reveals a dynamic and layered interplay between conceived, perceived, and lived spaces and, as we will see it, plays out in space and time.

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<sup>7</sup> Traditionally these were called White schools as they were set aside for the White population.

#### **4.3.1.3 The built environment: Temporal Architecture rhythms**

I was in the classroom writing my classwork. After we finished, the bell rang, and we looked at the timetable and saw that it was Miss X's period again. She was happy that she would continue with her lesson... The bell rang, and it was break time. and I went outside with my friends (TSD B28)

*"Everything has its time – maths time has ended, now it is isiXhosa time"* (18/02/19 Obs/B).

In all three schools, the timetable structures the day into six periods. Teachers and children rely on this schedule to determine their roles, activities, required resources, and locations. The timetable dictates what subject is taught, when, and what follows, orchestrating the movements and expectations of all participants within the school day; after the first two periods and before the final two, children and teachers enjoy a break. Data from children's diaries highlights break time as the most pleasurable part of the school day (TSD G1, G2, P2, P4). Here, a polyrhythmic ensemble emerges: the six-period school day's linear rhythms interact with the cyclical rhythms of the natural day and the bodily rhythms of hunger, thirst, and elimination. There is, however, the possibility of arrhythmia in the division of time, based on the assumption that learners become fatigued after the first two periods and require a break. This assumption does not hold for some children whose school day is preceded by a long commute, a result of farm school closures (see sections 5.3)

Lefebvre's (1971) concept of rhythm illuminates this interplay, where linear rhythms "rationally" overlay cyclical time, dividing labour into distinct categories: pledge time for work, compulsive time for school-specific activities (e.g., assembly and movement), and free time for leisure. The structuring of time and space within the school day aims to create eurhythmia—a state where rhythms are synchronised to ensure order and functionality. As Lefebvre et al. (1999, p. 2) note, such structuring normalises and naturalises "*modus vivendi*", or ways of life, marked by the division of labour and automation of production. As a product of conceived space, the timetable operates as a blueprint that fragments the natural cyclicity of day and night by dividing the day into artificially constructed units. Reinforcing this division, the school bell signifies transitions, as captured in the children's words: "The bell rang for us to go to class" (TSD S1).

The timetable divides the day and fragments learning into predefined periods for mathematics, English, natural sciences, social sciences, and life skills. This segmentation reflects the conceived space of policy in curriculum mandates of South Africa's Department of Basic Education, which stipulates specific weekly time allocations, such as six hours for mathematics, three and a half hours for natural sciences, and one hour for physical education. Such structures exemplify the coloniality embedded in educational systems, where the timetable functions as a mechanism to regulate people, relationships, and interactions with objects and subjects of study. Arum and Roksa (2020) argue that timetables mirror the labour market's ideologies, promoting punctuality and workplace discipline. However, in these peri-rural schools, this framework is applied in a context far removed from industrial production, where children might benefit more from diverse approaches to work and learning.

The timetable's influence extends into the realm of power and habit. Edensor and Holloway (2008, p. 483) assert that such schedules are tools through which "power attempts to order rhythms so that [they] become habitual, embodied, and thus difficult to contravene knowingly". This underscores how the conceived space of the timetable colonises perceived space, recalibrating time and bodies to serve capitalist imperatives within the school's operational framework. Teachers and learner leaders, as enforcers of the timetable that hangs on the classroom walls, may remain unaware of its broader socialising effects, which attempt to bend learners towards realities often disconnected from their lived space.

The spatial mapping of the schools' architectural rhythms reveals divisions and homogeneity. The division is evident in separating children by grade, race, and role (staff, children, parents) and in allocating social spaces for distinct purposes: learning, playing, walking, gardening, and staff activities. Conversely, homogeneity emerges in the architectural uniformity, the abundance of grasslands, the shared racial composition of staff and children and identical divisions of time across the schools. These spatial and temporal patterns underscore some of the consistency observed across the three schools.

To reflect the homogeneity revealed in the data, the analysis deliberately avoids segregating the three schools—Themba Primary, Amila Primary, and Kamva Primary. This decision emerges from the consistent patterns identified in the data, which suggest that the schools are indistinguishable in many key aspects. The findings imply that children could transition from one school to another with minimal awareness of distinctions. As a result, differentiation is

introduced only in instances where the data highlights deviations from these shared patterns. Consequently, the term “tri-school” is employed to denote three schools that, in many respects, function and appear as one (see Figure 3.1).

#### 4.3.2. The typical school day

Below is a presentation of a typical school day in the tri-school. Similar to the aerial images and the descriptive overview of the tri-school, this depiction provides the reader with a clear sense of what a day typically entails in any of these schools. This context enhances understanding of the preceding and following discussions, which focus on perceptions, behaviours, teaching and learning, and break time.

*Children begin arriving at school around 7:00 AM. Most travel on foot in groups ranging from two to seven. Some children, including those from farms, arrive by minibus taxis or vans. Upon arrival, some children head to their classrooms to drop off their bags before going out to play. Meanwhile, other learners, primarily boys, gather around the school gate to wait for friends, dust their shoes, comb their hair, or fasten their ties. Teachers arrive during this time, either being dropped off or driving to school, parking their vehicles, and proceeding to the staff room. Some learners are dropped off at school but then leave the premises.*

*When the bell rings, learners are ushered by teachers either to an outdoor assembly or directly to their homeroom classes. Community members living near the school hurry stragglers along. Assembly takes place outside, with learners standing in two rows per grade—one for boys and one for girls. Teachers position themselves at the front and back of the rows. During assembly, learners sing traditional church songs, pray, and listen to a staff member who shares motivational words before concluding with a benediction. Announcements are made during assembly, such as introducing new teachers, noting special events like Valentine’s Day, or communicating schedule changes. After assembly, learners march in single file to their respective classrooms. On days without assembly, learners remain in their homerooms, sing traditional songs, pray the Lord’s Prayer, and end with a benediction, usually before the teacher arrives. Teachers often verify if the morning rituals have been completed.*

*Two periods of teaching then follow. Learners stay in their classrooms, and teachers move from class to teach their scheduled subject. Learners greet the teacher and take their seats. The lessons involve a combination of whole-class discussions, chorused responses, and individual work based on the Department of Basic Education curricula. Work is self-assessed, peer-assessed, or reviewed as a class. Learners read their answers aloud, and correct responses are applauded. Occasionally, teachers arrive late or do not show up. At such times, learners manage themselves: they pray together, take the register, learners fetch the shared books from another class and hand them out or do other work whilst the class representative records names of misbehaving. During lessons learners are seated in groups. Some learners visit the toilet, dustbin, or water station. As the lessons near their end, catering staff—all women—enter the classrooms to serve food. Learners eat at their desks*

*while finishing their work. Food is shared among learners, especially if portions are too large or someone is not eating.*

*After the first two periods, the bell rings for the first break. Learners leave the classrooms to play outside. Others stay behind to finish eating or finish class work. Some learners, typically girls, use this time to write on the chalkboard. Most learners engage in group activities outside. Teachers gather in the staff room. Learners visit snack vendors to purchase sweets and snacks. When the bell rings, learners return to the classroom for two more periods, followed by a second break. Another two teaching periods occur after the second break, and then school ends.*

*At the end of the school day, the learners head home in groups. Some wait by the gate for friends before leaving together. Others participate in extracurricular activities like choir practice or netball. This routine is repeated Monday through Friday.*

### **4.3.3 Perceptual mapping**

#### ***4.3.3.1 The sonic and rhythms of formal teaching time***

Examining the production of school space necessitates a deliberate focus on data derived from participants' sensory experiences—what they touch, smell, taste, hear, and see—which are often excluded from traditional cartographic representations (Leander et al., 2010; Warf & Arias, 2009).

Sound plays a pivotal role in modulating the rhythms of the school day (Potts, 2015), a phenomenon observed within the tri-school context. The voices of children in perceived space create a wave of sonic activity, peaking before the school day begins, during breaks, and at its conclusion. During pledge time, this amplitude diminishes, and by evening, it flattens entirely as children and staff return home to await the next cyclic rhythm, upon which the linear school day imposes its segmented order. Children internalise the classroom rule that demands silence, as evidenced by an observational record: “The bell rang for us to go back to class, we got in, sat down and remained quiet” (TSD P9). As the day unfolds, one hears a dynamic array of sounds: children and teachers praying together, clapping in response to correct answers, laughing, singing “Happy Birthday”, and greeting one another. Simultaneously, the auditory backdrop includes the hum of the water pump, barking dogs, grazing cattle, chirping birds, footsteps in varying rhythms, and moments of silence.

Auditory cues provide temporal and spatial orientation within the school community (Allen, 1999)—additionally, sound functions as a mechanism to regulate bodies and manage the school day. Sonic polyrhythms within the school operate eurhythmically, ensuring the synchronisation of participants’ actions to maintain order. Silence, in particular, highlights disruptions—whether a child is crying, a teacher is absent, or children are running about. Such auditory knowledge facilitates the control and discipline of bodies within the rhythms of the school day. Lefebvre’s concept of *le dressage* (training) underscores how schools employ repetitive rituals that engage the senses to “break into the body” and instil discipline (Lefebvre, 1971).

This disciplining function of sound is captured in diary excerpts:

“When the bell rang for break time, the teacher told us that if we made a noise, he would chase us out of the classroom. We should sit quietly and do our schoolwork” (TSD B8).

“The bell rang for us to return to class. We got in, sat down and remained quiet. The teacher arrived to teach us isiXhosa, and we were instructed to write a letter” (TSD P9).

“I went to class, I read, I wrote, and listened to my teacher while she was teaching. When she asked questions, I answered her” (TSD G20).

“We played a lot, and the bell rang. We went to assembly and sang a song. After that, we went to class and wrote down all the noisemakers” (TSD G29).

These rhythms illustrate how children are programmed towards a silent disposition, equating learning with silence and controlled communication. The resulting soundscape normalises the school day, embedding these rhythms into the production of school space. However, a contradiction emerges: sound is a vital medium for learning, facilitating questioning, answering, and singing, yet silence is enforced to maintain discipline. Addressing this contradiction requires a pedagogical approach that enables silence and sound to function eurhythmically, recognising that controlled noise levels can enhance task performance (Helton et al., 2009).

The smell also plays a crucial role in structuring the school day, interacting with sonic rhythms to produce eurhythmia or arrhythmia. The scent of food signals the approach of lunch, aligning with the natural rhythms of hunger, while unpleasant odours—resulting from

inadequate sanitation—disrupt the school’s rhythm and highlight infrastructural deficiencies.

One child’s diary entry reveals:

“Today, I woke up at 7 o’clock, and when I got to my classroom, it smelled so bad, like a dead mouse. I did not want to go inside” (TSD P18).

Odours also mediate social interactions and authority dynamics. Teachers identify smokers through scent, as another diary entry illustrates:

“I do not like the children in my class that smoke. They asked me to go and smoke with them, and now my teacher smelled the smoke on me, and she beat me because she thought I was also smoking. I do not like smoking” (TSD G23).

The interplay of sound and smell generates soundscapes and scent-scapes that shape the perceived space of the school, reinforcing its rhythms and rituals. These sensory landscapes evoke memories and associations, influencing how participants perceive and interact with their surroundings. Lefebvre’s analysis highlights how these sensory rhythms align with the broader socialisation processes of the school day. Hearing teachers’ instructions, children’s responses, and clapping in adjacent classrooms; smelling lunch being prepared; or hearing a reprimand linked to the scent of smoke reinforces patterns of behaviour through repetition, normalising these experiences as universal and natural.

Such repetition risks masking the asymmetries inherent in the rhythms of school life, reflecting the coloniality embedded within educational practices. The focus on uniformity—both in sensory regulation and in the broader structuring of time and space—may lead teachers and learners to overlook diversity and pluralism. This condition perpetuates the disregard for lived realities, privileging imposed rhythms that align with dominant ideologies while marginalising alternative experiences and perspectives.

#### **4.3.4 Behavioural mapping**

The **actor types** found in the school comprised teachers, children, administrative and ground staff, snack vendors, parents, community members passing through the school and animals (cows, donkeys, chickens, and dogs). These actors interact with spatial arrangements in ways that reflect broader social, cultural, and economic dynamics, contributing to the production of both lived and contested spaces.

#### ***4.3.4.1 Land use and action types***

The land in the schools is used for teaching and learning, restrooms, offices, storerooms, staff rooms, vegetable gardens, assembly points, kitchens, libraries, clinics, parking, staircases, walkways and play areas. Children also use the open fields to gather and eat lunch, play soccer, spin tops, play games, fight, sing and dance, skip rope and run around. Older women sell snacks to children, and cows graze on the grasslands in Themba Primary and Amila Primary. At Themba Primary, people often cut through the school premises as they travel through the school grasslands- one cannot necessarily call this ‘trespassing’ (at least not anymore) as it has become an accepted practice. After the fence was stolen and not replaced, people took shortcuts through the expansive grassland that forms part of the school but is separated by another fence closer to the classrooms. Numerous footpaths have been made in a shared space for learners and the broader community. In perceived space, the actual physical traces of movements by individuals over time as a collective who resist or adapt the dictates of conceived space in lived space illustrate how collective human behaviour continuously shapes and reshapes the spatial environment similar to occurrence like the BLM mentioned earlier (see sections 2.5).

The prioritisation of school-related activities in formalised spaces, such as classrooms, libraries, and offices, contrasts sharply with the informal and often marginalised activities like vending and recreational play. For instance, Kamva Primary provides a limited designated play area with a few swings. At the same time, at other schools, children and snack vendors adapt and repurpose existing spaces to meet their needs. These adaptations demonstrate the creation of thirdspaces, where actors negotiate spatial constraints to assert their agency and redefine the use of their surroundings. Similarly, during unsupervised periods, children use classrooms as sites for creative expression, composing hip-hop music or scribbling personal notes on chalkboards, which are promptly erased before teachers arrive. These actions underscore the fluidity and adaptability of spatial practices within the schools.

#### ***4.3.4.2 The behavioural rhythms of mobilities***

The immobile roads and passages support the perceived space mobilities of the public school children in the study. These mobilities follow a similar rhythm to the polyrhythms of sound. Over 75% of the children from the three schools walk to school, and the remaining children use transport because they reside further away or have a vehicle at home (ObsR 8/04/19;

ObsR 11/04/19). Many arrive early and, after dropping off their bags, head off to socialise, play rugby, soccer, hand tennis or jump rope. Some children gather outside the school gate to converse as they engage in a preparatory practice of “preparing their bodies” by polishing their shoes, combing their hair, fastening their ties or removing the dust gathered from the journey to school. During break time children’s mobilities peak as they walk around the school premises, play sports, walk to the tuckshop or find a spot to eat lunch. These mobility practices during free time are juxtaposed with the sedentary norms apparent during formal teaching. In all three schools, the teachers rotate from class to class, and as a result, the children remain in one class for a large portion of the day (ObsB/18/02/19; ObsG/27/02/19; ObsP/04/19).

However, children exhibit agency by carving out thirdspaces within these structured routines to move. This is depicted in this interaction between the children and I:

*Can I go outside? I want to go play... I want to go to the toilet. (ObsG 27/02/19)*

These questions from the child mediate desire and what is deemed appropriate or natural in the school day during pledge time, resulting in a hybrid space for relieving oneself and playing/being mobile. Children often negotiate in ways that require less communication. Children frequently walked to the board, the dustbin, the water station, the timetable, the door, their peers, and the restroom. Interestingly, in many of these mobilities, what is foregrounded is movement and relationality: children gather by the water station or dustbin to converse. Often, they leave, having not dropped anything in the dustbin or drinking any water (ObsB 11/04 19). One overhears them conversing about the weekend and church clothing in the restrooms. Here, the children, having read the rhythms of the school day, strategically carve out a thirdspace to connect and move within the constraints of teaching time (ObsV 21/02/19).

#### ***4.3.4.3 The behavioural rhythms of capitalism***

The three schools in this study exist or are placed in competitive and collaborative relations. They compete for teachers and children, better results, efficient nutritional programmes, sports/cultural activities, success and funding (Amner, 2022; Novukela, 2021). While these schools may not aim to compete, the broader discourse around school ranking, school choice, and school funding calculated by the number of enrolled children in an isolated context like Makhanda creates competitive relations. The three schools compete against each other but

with the better-resourced schools closer to the town economic hub that acts as the “ideal type” of school in post-apartheid South Africa (see Christie & McKinney, 2017). While it was argued that competition would improve educational opportunities and quality in schools similar to those under scrutiny here (Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Pampallis, 2003), these schools start with large proportions of disadvantaged and low-performing children and a greater concentration of “difficult-to-teach children” from homes that are headed by grandparents with no schooling (TSD/B21, B25). Schools like these do not benefit as much from competition; instead, competition is likely to exacerbate their problems. This is because, in South Africa, such as Chile, England, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States, parents tend to judge school quality by the socioeconomic and ethnic mix of children (Fiske & Ladd, 2003). This disadvantages the three schools in the study as they are in “underdeveloped” contexts, where high dropout rates push the youth into unskilled and semi-skilled labour (see Hendricks, 2008; Spaul, 2019; Westaway, 2017).

In this context, the interests of capitalism are served through the systemic production of cheap labour, where education is shaped to sustain an exploitative economic structure. Schools situated outside urban centres, often in the township or rural areas, are outside the narrow conceived space of education, fitting schools in the city that charge fees and historically have been bestowed resources that can generate additional income and a culture of superiority (Christie & McKinney, 2017). However, these schools in peri-rural areas face a persistent lack of adequate funding, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, substandard facilities, and limited access to essential learning materials. The spatial production of inequality—rooted in historical and contemporary socio-political processes—marginalises these schools. This mirrors the patterns established during apartheid, where spatial segregation deliberately entrenched educational and economic disparities. As a result, these marginalised schools face difficulties in providing the quality of education necessary to empower their learners and can, as a result, perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality and ensure a steady supply of low-skilled labour to the capitalist system.

The uneven competitive relations are contrasted by the cooperative relations, as evidenced in these diary excerpts:

*When I wake up in the morning, I make tea for my grandmother, and then I make it for everyone else. I am one person who shows humanity/ubuntu towards other people. My father taught me this. (TSD B13)*

*When I have money, I share it with all my friends. (TSD G10)*

*I go to [the] shop to buy chips and sweets, then we share with my friends, because we love each other and we always share, and even if some of my friends do not have something to eat, we share. (TSD G3)*

*I learned that when another child does not have lunch, I should share it with them. (TSD P15)*  
*I was very hungry today because I did not have a lunch box, but my friend shared her lunchbox with me. I thanked her for giving me her lunch, she even shared her money with me, and I said 'thank you'. (TSD B33)*

From the diaries, a culture of sharing is evident in the children's perceived space activities, where children report sharing sweets, money, lunch, transport, walks to school, books, hair brushes, shoe shiners ... everything (TSD B21) with friends, family and those in need (TSD G3/P15). The reasons for the reciprocated generosity in the data are that they love each other (TSD G3), have an abundance, see a need, or simply love sharing (TSD P8). This relates well with ubuntu (TSD B13), an African concept of social reciprocity that develops a framework for decolonial work, which has also been used in social work (see Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu refers to moral qualities like empathy, a deep sense of connectedness, generosity, consideration and promotion of life through mutuality. In the school, learners, from teachers, family, and peers, 'learn' this commitment to caring for one another, which plays out at school and home (TSD B13). In an interview, this sense of ubuntu was well reflected in the grade 6 children's responses: Nesi explained why he *had to* find all his friends before heading home after a meeting and one of many time-space diaries incidents presents the generosity and connectedness:

*When we all have to go home, we have to go together so that no one might have an accident while walking alone ... I do not want a parent to ask me [what happened to one of us and I do not know] because I was walking with that person. Maybe they get robbed. We all have to know about it! (Interview Nesi 16/08/19)*

*I went to my friends and my mother called me to buy electricity from Lathitha's mom. When I got there, they said that there was no electricity. I asked when they would have it, and they said that they would have it in the evening and I should leave the money behind and they would send someone to bring it to us. I left, got home, bathed and went to church. (TSD, B5)*

In the above abstract, you also note the closeness and trust in the relationships where the local shop is identified by a peer's mom 'Lathitha's mom' and how the child can leave the money and go on with their lives ... bath and head to church, implying they will get the electricity once it is available as promised. We also see a learner making tea for the entire family in the morning because of this deep sense of connectedness taught to her by her father (TSD B13).

Similarly, once the bell rings, members of the surrounding community encourage children who are still walking to school to quicken their pace. (Obs, 28/02/19). Once break time ends, the older women who sell snacks and sweets at Themba Primary voluntarily, i.e. the snack vendors, pick up litter in the school and, at times, allow children to run a tab (Obs, 22/02/19 IntSnackVendor). When asked how long they have sold snacks in the school, they responded:

*Kudala silapha, more than 10 years, kudala silapha! Abantwana esaqla nabo sebayaphangela...*(IntSnackVendor).

The snack vendors at the school communicate that ‘they have worked here a long time, well over 10 years, and the children they started with are now working’, and later that their children are and have schooled here too. They talk about how they have seen changes in principals and the effects of abolishing corporal punishment on children over the years.

Along with the above, a possibly marginalised group of snack vendors are the parents who permeate the time-space diaries although ‘absent’ in the walls of the classroom. In the diaries, learners talk about parents encouraging them to study (TSD B13); parents ask and help their children polish shoes, iron, and wash their uniforms (TSD B15). Parents also pack lunchboxes (TSD B33), Tell their children about teachers they like at the school (TSD B33), Help learners with homework (TSD 29), pray for their child’s schooling and buy various school items for their child’s schooling (TSD B33; G13; G19; G22). During observations, you also noted that parents accompany learners and often carry them to school. Their absence in the school context contrasts this, whilst their involvement is apparent from the data. A similar point can be made about the absence of teachers in the home. When meeting grandparents/ parents in phase two, it was common to have them ask that I help learners with regard to their child’s schooling in a space where the teachers seem absent. I return to this point in my reflection in section 7.5.

This deep sense of connectedness is also cultivated and evidenced by singing together during assembly. At the same time, children await a teacher, and it partially offsets the separation mechanism of graded classrooms and rows for boys and girls during assembly. These instances of ubuntu or relationality are also demonstrated in spaces of more freedom, with little to no supervision from school authorities, providing from within the school context a possible alternative to the capitalistic, competitive culture of individual accumulation that presents a binary foundation/ intermediate, girl/boy and has/ have not.

Upon contemplating my data generation and analysis within the educational institutions, I was compelled to ponder the semblance of egalitarianism evident among the children. This observation is not to discount instances of conflict arising from disparities in possessions but to acknowledge the nuanced manifestation of such inequalities within the school's milieu. Engagements with initiatives such as school feeding programmes, communal acts of sharing, collective pedestrian commutes and the sheer volume of children congregating for transportation arrangements left an indelible impression, evoking a perception of parity among them. In this microcosm, a prevailing ethos emerges wherein the notion of superiority is conspicuously minimised, fostering an environment where each individual is regarded with some equanimity.

#### ***4.3.4.4 The behavioural rhythms of coloniality: Christian-centrism and gender antagonism***

As soon as the bell rings, children hurry to the assembly point. The uniformed children form two parallel lines – one for boys and one for girls for each grade kitted in gendered uniform. The children face the teachers who stand in front. As part of these daily rituals, the children sing church songs, and the greeting rituals begin:

*Principal: Good morning. School, how are you today?  
Children: We are fine, thanks. How are you?*

The principal or the teacher on duty shares a word of encouragement. The children then sing the school song, recite the Lord's Prayer, and benediction. Once the children are dismissed, they march towards their classes in single file, singing, "We are marching in the light of God" (Obs18-22/02/19; TSD/B16).

Both mission and Bantu Education were gendered spaces. For example, subjects like needlework, agriculture and cookery were gender-defined, and stories in textbooks were differentiated according to the perceived roles within domestic and public spaces (see Chisholm, 2017; Tjelle, 2013). While much has changed in the explicit curricula in all three schools, the legacy of heteronormativity and Christian centrism is still evident in the production of the school day, in what Jackson (1968) has elsewhere termed the 'hidden curricula'. Below are some of the extracts from the data relating to religion and spirituality.

In the time-space diaries, the children's daily and weekly routines and rituals, such as going to church, praying, singing worship songs, etc., are frequently mentioned, and once again, in all three schools, their structuring is the same. In the 88 completed time-space diaries, the word 'church', for example, appeared 118 times. 22 times in 23 time-space diaries from Kamva primary, 43 times in the 30 time-space diaries from Themba primary and 53 times in the 35 time-space diaries from Amila primary. From the data, it seems church attendance plays an important role in the children's weekly and weekend routines, and a rhythm of spirituality is also evident in the school and home. At home, children pray before they head to school. As one child puts it, "I woke up in the morning... prayed for God to be with me when I am going to school" (TSD G19). Other children return from school and pray (TSD B5). The children usually attend an assembly in the morning, church on Saturday or Sunday and various church events during the week (TSD B1,2, G6,19, P30). These gatherings, interestingly, act as a significant community hub where children interact with family, friends and community members. This may be contrasted with the limited parental support and visibility in their children's schooling. However, this is not the case at these gatherings. Phrases like "My mother's friends from church arrived to have Sunday lunch with us" (TSD G6) and "My whole family wakes up, bath and go to church" (TSD B2) highlight the presence of community and family in these practices. Here, the community's reliance on the church for social and spiritual life can be viewed as a form of resistance against the fragmentation caused by colonialism.

Interestingly, this rhythm of spirituality is constantly related eurhythmically with the polyrhythms of the children's lives and the school day. To say that these occurrences of church/religion are simply signs of coloniality may be partly problematic or limited as one sees a thirdspace- a hybrid of colonial and Indigenous influences in these practices. The frequent mention of Christian practices at school during assembly points to how Christian missionary school rituals and routines have been integrated into daily life. The communal element and family involvement in phrases as above (see TSD P6 & B2) highlight the importance of community and family in these practices that relate to traditional African values, including statements like "I go to a Zionist church, so we sang many songs while beating the drum" (TSD G3) – indicative of the blending of Indigenous musical and cultural elements with worship. It is a hybrid of colonial and Indigenous practices of worship, similar to how the enslaved African Americans who were forced to speak English found ways to subvert the dominant power structures through language by using it not only as a tool of

communication but also as one of cultural expression, survival and resistance (hooks, 1990). Here, communities are using churches for worship and cultural expression, survival and resistance. As this rhythm threads through the home, school and church, it challenges the fragmentation of colonialism; the diaries and observations show how many children find joy in these rhythms of spirituality while they are known to marginalise other children, especially in contexts like these where a strong group identity exists due to a reduced amount of diversity as discussed earlier along race and culture.

However, considering that the conceived space and lived space might contradict certain aspects of other children's identities—potentially marginalising such learners—there is cause for concern. This is particularly relevant in the case of Kamva Primary, which, though now a government school, was historically a church school. The past leaves its traces in the present, as curriculum changes are often enabled or constrained by historical contexts and teachers' lived experiences (Nespor, 2013). A similar observation applies to the gender norms in the school, which are discussed next—where it seems the teaching staff (who have also been 'bent' into very particular views about education, rurality etc.) mediate curricula.

As Chisholm (2017) illustrates in her study of missionary and colonial education in South Africa, spirituality (and in particular Christianity) was part of the 'civilising' mission directing gendered subjectivities. Curricula, routines, and spatial configurations were deliberately structured to mould boys into public leaders or religious functionaries and girls into domestic, moralised caregivers. These colonial-Christian gender norms were encoded into educational practices through everything from subject choice (cookery for girls, agriculture for boys) to the use of biblical passages as moral instruction.

This disciplining, though subtle and not in isolation, continues in the post-apartheid schools in Makhanda through what Jackson (1968) refers to as the hidden curriculum. These hidden curricula—comprising the implicit and unofficial lessons, values, attitudes and norms that reinforce dominant ideologies and social structures—are deeply inscribed in the spatial production of the school environment. Through Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space, we can trace how these ideologies are maintained and reproduced. In this context, spatial theory and rhythm analysis offer powerful tools for revealing the ways in which heteronormativity and Christian values continue to shape the rhythms and organisation of school life—evident in how girls are still positioned as the moral guardians of behaviour and

cleanliness, while boys are excused or given physical authority, echoing what Lugones (2007) terms the colonial/modern gender system.

Below are some of the extracts in the time-space diaries where the children are divided based on sex:

During break time, we study and chat in the classroom. The boys usually play soccer.  
(TSD P5)

My friends and I study nicely because we are friends with the boys. (TSD G3)

Today, I sat with my friends at school. I do not play with boys because they are rough.  
(TSD B3)

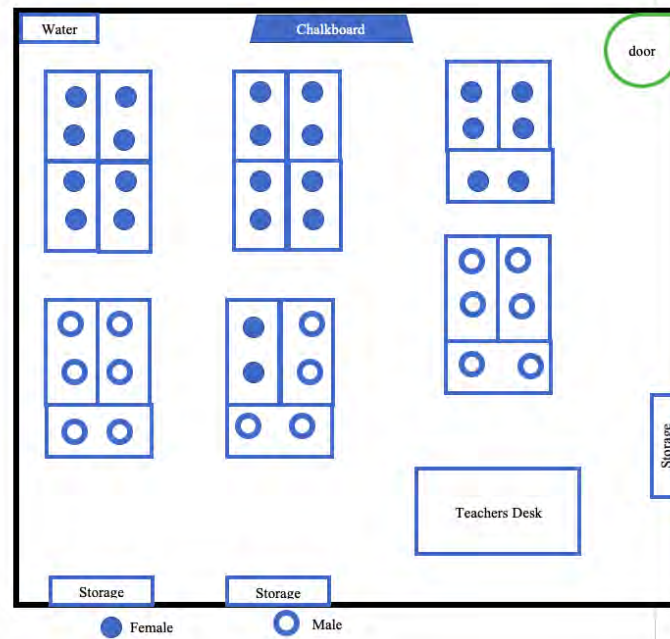
In an interview, when asked about what it is like attending school at Kamva Primary School, Nosipho responded: “It is good and bad because a girl made jokes about the boy. The boys cannot make jokes but will want to hit the girls” (IntNosipho, 2019). During observations, the task of recording the names of children who misbehaved was typically assigned to girls, positioning them within a socially constructed space of surveillance and responsibility. In this representational space—imbued with gendered expectations—it is also a girl who, synchronised with the repetitive rhythms of the school day, distributes spoons before the food is served. This act precedes and complements the labour of women who both prepare and serve the food, creating a gendered rhythm of care reinforces dominant spatial practices.

The production of the school day in all three schools has numerous instances where learning bodies are divided by traditional gender roles, and stereotypes are reinforced, potentially leading to gender antagonism. The gendered uniform reaffirms the fragmentation of school ‘boys’ and ‘girls’, where girls wear white socks, and boys wear grey socks. The boys pack away the chairs (or at least should, as they often escape to play soccer) while the girls sweep the floor (TSD/G5 and G2), and the girls and boys have separate lines and bathrooms. The repetition of gendering social practices and material relations can reinforce and naturalise gender antagonism, producing roles and relationships in antagonistic spaces. Here we do not have isolated behaviours, but technologies of power inherited from missionary/colonial schooling. This may partly explain why girls sit with girls, work with girls and associate or befriend girls in the same grade or even class (see Figure 4.6). Girls were acutely aware that boys frequently evaded accountability for behaviours such as refusing to clean the classroom,

hitting girls, disrupting their play, and entering girls' bathrooms. In response, some girls attempted informal forms of recourse—such as name-calling or writing the boys' names on the board during break time—but would often erase them before teachers arrived, fearing retaliation (TSD/B9 and G2). Within the school, colonial and patriarchal hierarchies are arguably reinforced through such gendered practices. Boys are regularly excused from disciplinary consequences and are assigned tasks involving physical labour, reflecting enduring colonial legacies that normalised male privilege and female subordination. While the children are often aware of these patterns, they tend to remain silent or comply, having internalised these asymmetries as part of everyday life. Girls' behaviour is more tightly regulated, while boys' transgressions are more likely to be overlooked—thus reproducing unequal gender norms through the micro-politics of schooling.

The gendered organisation of school space further entrenches this imbalance, dictating who feels safe and who belongs in particular domains. These dynamics do not operate in isolation; they create the conditions in which some male teachers may come to view female learners as accessible or exploitable, reinforcing entitlement and blurring ethical boundaries. At the same time, girls—socialised early into roles of moral responsibility—may come to internalise blame for violations committed against them, including sexual violence or early pregnancy, with families or teachers often complicit in these narratives. The caregiver identity assigned to girls can later be mirrored in the professional roles of female teachers, some of whom may be drawn more toward nurturing and pastoral functions, inadvertently sidelining their pedagogical responsibilities. Meanwhile, male teachers, habituated to being excused for inappropriate or 'naughty' behaviour, may continue to operate with impunity. These patterns highlight the insidious ways in which colonial and patriarchal scripts are maintained and reproduced within the school environment, bending not only school-going children's interactions but also adult roles and institutional culture. As discussed by Chisholm (2017) referring to missionary education and apartheid education and still evident in these schools the education project is not just bringing and encouraging faith it also was and is imposing gendered moralities and roles, especially the domestic, obedient girl vs. the rational, active boy and positioning men as natural leaders and women as nurturers. What is marginalised or rendered invisible in this context is the gender diversity present within the school. Such diversity is excluded from the hidden curriculum—it is neither publicly acknowledged nor given conceptual or spatial legitimacy. As a result, gender identities that fall outside the binary are treated like myths: non-existent or fictional, denied the conceived and perceived

space necessary for their recognition. Later, I explore how this division of boys and girls is disrupted during free time.



**Figure 4.6 Seating arrangement and classroom layout**  
Source: Author's own

The production of space in schools, excluding break times, is largely characterised by polyrhythms of arrhythmia and eurhythmia: division, homogeneity, silence, stillness, surveillance, spirituality, competition, care and coloniality. This setup only partially reflects the broader world and merits scrutiny due to its implications on how a child is socialised or given a lens through institutional practices to make sense of themselves and others. The linear rhythms imposed over natural, cyclical rhythms can lead to alienation and loss of autonomy over time. Children are partly disconnected from their natural rhythms and the organic flow of life, compelled to adhere to externally imposed schedules. When the school bell rings, it often signals the beginning of a class and the stifling of individual thought (Gatto, 2002). Actions that conform to the school's norms are deemed natural. Entering school, therefore, is to “bend oneself” or “to allow oneself to be bent”. The school repeatedly presents situations through various rhythms that function eurhythmically to discipline children (and teachers). These rhythms mould the child who may not question the status quo into a learning body with a use-value akin to a commodity for capitalistic trade. Such a child is “settled down” by the architecture governing their movements, the soundscape guiding their speech, and the

facilities and resources shaping their bodies. Before school, they stand in line, face the front, close their eyes in prayer, and remain quiet unless engaged in choral singing. Many of these rhythms are well-intentioned, like those of safety, but nonetheless need scrutiny given the purpose of education and the context in which it takes place (see section 6.3.3).

#### **4.3.5. A grade six English lesson at Themba Primary**

Below is a detailed account of a Grade Six English lesson on the topic of Present and Past Tense, conducted over two periods at Themba Primary School.

*The English teacher entered the classroom, prompting the entire class to stand and participate in the customary greeting ritual:*

*"Good morning, ma'am."*

*"Good morning, class, and how are you today?"*

*"We are good, thank you, and how are you today?"*

*"I'm good. You may be seated."*

*Following this exchange, the homeroom teacher briefly entered the classroom and enquired whether the class had prayed while awaiting a teacher. The learners collectively responded affirmatively, saying, "Yes, ma'am." Satisfied, the homeroom teacher departed, allowing the English lesson to continue.*

*The English teacher quietened the learners and distributed the available textbooks, allocating one textbook for every two learners seated in a desk so that everyone has a book to read from. The teacher then proceeded to write questions on the board, simultaneously directing the learners' attention to essential elements such as the use of capital letters, correct spelling, and the conventions of reported speech. Additionally, the teacher emphasised the importance of maintaining neat work and adhering to mark allocation guidelines. Learners diligently copied the questions and proceeded to complete the activity in silence.*

*A significant number of learners lacked writing implements, necessitating the borrowing of pens from their peers. The teacher issued three additional pens for those unable to source a pen to ensure all learners could participate.*

*The marking of individual work was conducted interactively as a whole class. The teacher invited a learner to approach the board and write her response to question 1, which was confirmed as correct. The rest of the class individually marked their own work and if they got this question wrong, they made corrections. Correct answers were met with applause, fostering a competitive yet positive reinforcement dynamic. The same learner then asked the rest of the class who would like to give their answer to question two. Learners raised their*

*hands and she selected a learner to read aloud their response and she then recorded it on the board. This process continued, with each selected learner's response being recorded on the board for collective review and correction. On occasions when a learner provided an incorrect answer, the class often expressed their displeasure through grumbles, after which another learner offered the correct solution. After each correct answer, the class applauded. Some pupils displayed hesitancy in responding or spoke quietly under their breath, potentially indicating uncertainty or apprehension. In such instances, other learners occasionally blurted out the answers unprompted. Some learners took down the correct answers and did not seem interested in providing answers. Notably, learners only answered questions and did not ask any questions themselves during the lesson.*

*During the activity described above, the teacher temporarily stepped out of the classroom. Despite her absence, the learners maintained their focus, continuing to engage in the marking process by providing answers and making corrections. While one might reason that this was due to my presence in the classroom, it was evident here and in numerous other instances that the learners were used to continuing with assessment without a teacher, i.e. it was common practice and would have continued even without an observer/ visitor.*

*At the conclusion of the lesson, as the bell rang, the learners quickly made their way to the water station to drink water. Although it was a requirement for each pupil to bring their cup, only one learner had complied on this occasion. Consequently, the cup was shared among the learners.*

The learning interaction described reveals how the persistent rhythm of scarcity shapes the school day, compelling learners and teachers to adopt sharing practices as a response to systemic inadequacies. Resource shortages—such as insufficient textbooks, pens, or cups—are significant yet do not hinder the continuation of teaching and learning. Instead, these limitations foster collaborative behaviours. The teacher facilitates textbook sharing, while learners extend this to writing implements, embodying polyrhythms of sharing that transcend the classroom. For instance, learners share combs and transportation before school (see sections 4.3.2) and food and money during break times (see sections 4.3.6.1). These acts of collective resourcefulness highlight an underlying communal ethos, countering the individualistic ideals typically associated with Western formal education.

These practices form part of the hidden curriculum, teaching implicit lessons about interdependence, solidarity, and communal care. Rooted in the principle of Ubuntu (see sections 4.3.3.3 and 6.2.2), these actions underscore how shared relationships affirm one's humanity and collective well-being.

However, the lesson also exposes a troubling yet normalised pattern in teaching and learning: the frequent self-regulation of learners in the absence of teachers. Like "latchkey children,"

learners adapt to systemic failures by maintaining classroom routines when teachers are late or absent. In the described lesson, the homeroom teacher arrives late, leaving learners to independently perform the morning prayer and ritual, which she later confirms without issue. At Kamva Primary, a class representative assumes multiple roles, such as distributing books and announcing reading lessons when no teacher is present, completing the register, distributing spoons and monitoring other learners' behaviours, and the classroom cleanliness. At Amila Primary, no teacher arrived for four out of six periods, and one teacher admitted confusion about the timetable, stepping into unattended classes sporadically. Across these schools, significant teaching time is lost due to absenteeism, compounded by disruptions from the arrival of meals before the break.

The absence of teachers shifts authority to learners, transforming the classroom into a decentralised space where learners assume roles typically occupied by educators. This recurring rhythm of teacher absence has become embedded in learners' daily routines. While their resourcefulness demonstrates agency, this imposed self-regulation masks systemic failures. It normalises inequities, undermining learners' right to consistent and supportive education.

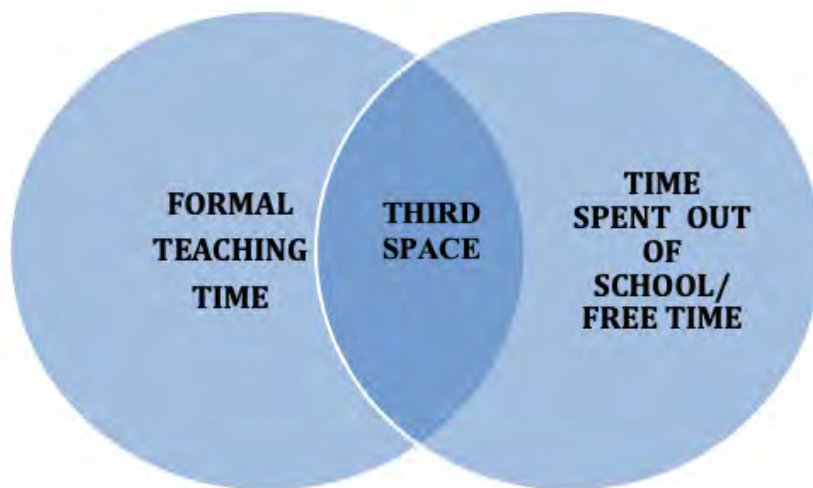
Lastly, in the English lesson described above, there is a noticeable emphasis on form ("how") and appearance, often to the detriment of content ("what") and purpose ("why"). For example, in a lesson that is ostensibly on the topic of on Past and Future Tense, the educator places significant attention on presentation, stressing handwriting, neatness, underlining, and book covering. Similarly, the teacher organises learners into pairs to ensure shared access to textbooks, reinforcing the importance of uniformity and order.

#### **4.3.6 The thirdspace Rhythms of Free Time**

The rhythms of break time, the most pleasurable part of the school day for the children, are placed strategically during cognitively demanding times to ensure that both children and teachers have increased attention, which may result in improved teaching and learning. Owing to the above, break time is intended to relate eurhythmically with the linear teaching and learning rhythms. Break time also creates eurhythmia with cyclical bodily rhythms, allowing children to eat, go to the toilet and be mobile.

Free time, which includes break time and time before and after school, offers a chance for novelty. On observation, the playground was audibly a space of creative and imaginative possibilities rather than simply a break from “serious work” to “let off steam” (Blatchford & Sumpner, 1998). During this time, children have more freedom to choose what to do, where to do it, and with whom (Pellegrini, 1995). Supervision during break time is reduced in all three schools compared to formal teaching time. The reduced supervision is due to the expansive space each school provides the children and the large learner-to-teacher ratio on the playgrounds during the break. As a result, free time allows for self-defined and spontaneous activity with peers and friends from different locales. These characteristics of free time explain why, in this study, it is read as a thirdspace, a hybrid or intersection of time set aside for formal teaching and learning and time at home away from school (see Figure 4.7). While it supports formal teaching time, it contradicts the overarching production of formal teaching space in many ways. Schreiner (2016) describes thirdspaces in terms that are true of free time:

Thirdspaces... are mental inventions, but mental inventions that can open up new possibilities for spatial practice. They provoke other-worlds, or spaces beyond what is presently known, where alternative territories or worldviews are explored (p. 348).



**Figure 4.7: Break time as a thirdspace**  
Source: Author's own

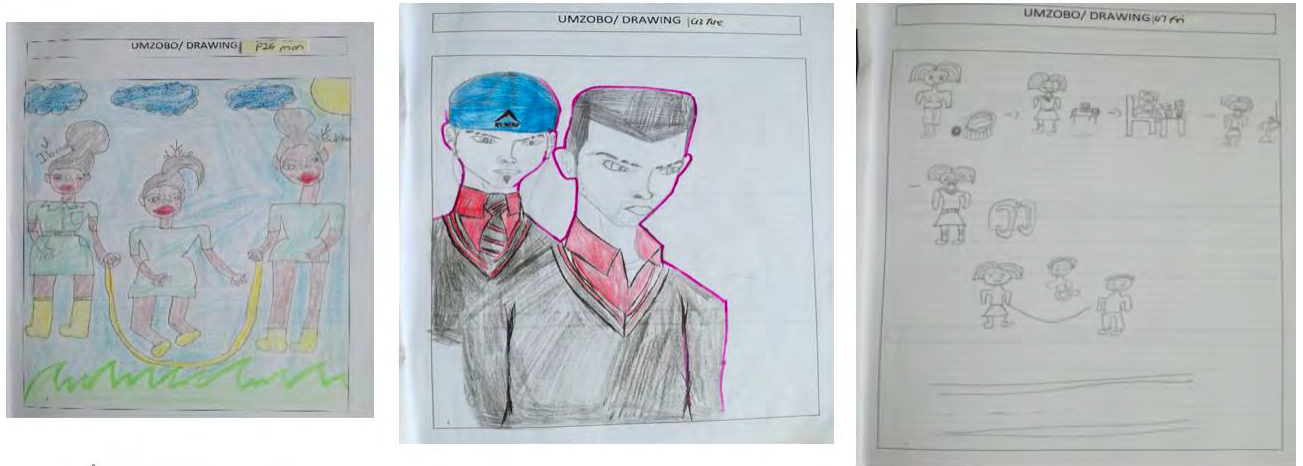
Below is a description of this thirdspace across all three schools.

As documented in the time-space diaries, break time emerges as a fundamental and cherished part of the children's daily routine. This period is filled with activities that cater to their physical, social, and emotional needs. As soon as the bell rings to signal the start of break time, children eagerly rush outside, transforming the playground into a bustling hub of activity. Groups of children actively engage in various pursuits, including soccer, tag, composing music, performing flips, running, spinning tops, playing mobile games, hand tennis, walking around the school, and skipping rope (see Figure 4.8). These activities typically occur in groups or pairs; one rarely observes a child playing alone. During this time, the school becomes louder, and the children are at their most mobile.

While many children participate in outdoor activities, others remain in the classroom, drawing on the chalkboard or taking time to rest. Friends gather in small circles, conversing animatedly about their classes, hobbies, and interests. Some children sit together to enjoy snacks, sharing food and stories. The children frequently highlight the enjoyment and freedom they experience during break time, expressing their delight in the opportunity to choose activities and companions freely. For instance, some children relax in quiet spots to unwind, while others immerse themselves in imaginative play, inventing their own games and adventures, while others form a circle and play games on their mobile devices. The lively atmosphere is filled with children singing, shouting, laughing, crying, and applauding, underscoring the diversity of activities that reflect their varied interests. One child remarked, "At break time, we all go outside and play different games. I usually play tag with my classmates" (TSD, B1).

The ringing of bells marks both the beginning and end of break time, providing a structured framework while allowing children the flexibility to pursue activities of their choice. Observations and diary entries consistently reveal similar dynamics across all three schools. The spacious grasslands provide ample space for children to evade surveillance and engage in activities that transcend classrooms, grades, and gender divisions. For example, Figure 4.8

illustrates drawings capturing the vibrant and inclusive nature of break time and along with the instances where learners are divided by sex.



**Figure 4.8 An Examples of TSD drawings: P6;G7; G3**

An analysis of the data showed that free time presents the following interconnected rhythms of **relationality**, **emotionality** and **creativity**, resulting in semi-structured life sharing.

#### **4.3.6.1 Relationality**

Break time provides a space for children to form and maintain relationships that shape their daily routines and social interactions and contribute to their overall development. The word "friend" (including its stemmed forms) appeared 455 times in the time-space-dairies, making it the second most frequent noun after "school".

*The bell rang to go to break time, and we went to play soccer. (TSD P1)*

*Break time is fun; I usually play with my friends or sometimes just relax. (TSD P6)*

*Break time is when I get to see my friends and play. (TSD P12)*

*Break time is the best part of the day because we can play. (TSD P15)*

*We all gather to play different games during break. (TSD P16)*

*When the bell rings for us to go to break time, I play skipping rope with my friends. (TSD S1)*

*At break time, we all go outside and play different games. I usually play tag with my classmates. (TSD P)*

*Break time is the best part of the day because we can play freely. (TSD B6)*

*We share our snacks during break time. (TSD P2)*

*We enjoy sharing stories during our walk. (TSD B26)*

*We wait for each other at the corner before heading to school. (TSD P3)*

*We wait at the gate for everyone before heading home. (TSD B17)*

The children's diaries show that new friendships are formed during break times as children go outside to play (TSD B1). Through shared interests, children interact with peers outside of their classroom and grade, allowing them to form friendships beyond their close circle. Friendships are also maintained and sustained during breaks through shared activities, resources and experiences. Phrases like "we all gather/go," "we relax," "we use," "we chatted," and "with my classmates" highlight the communal nature of this space, emphasising a deep sense of connection among children in a relatively free environment.

This relationality is articulated in the following diary extracts:

*I am so happy my friends are like my brothers and sisters. I play with both boys and girls when I am in the mood. (TSD B27)*

*I ate with my friends and thank them for being my friends. (TSD B1)*

*I love my friend because I can tell him anything that is bothering me. I am currently not feeling good. (TSD B1)*

*At school, I played with my friends and we went to the aunties that sell goodies during break time (TSD B31)*

*At break time, I went to play soccer with my friends. I have learned that if you don't have friends, you don't feel good in your spirit/being. (TSD B13)*

*When I have a problem with my homework, my friend helps me understand it. We always support each other. (TSD B14)*

Boys and girls were most likely to interact during free time (TSD B27 and figure 4.8), resisting the strict divisions of seating arrangements, assemblies and other social practices. They composed music together, walked together and played games together. However, in class, they generally did not sit together unless instructed to do so.

Play, administration, and sharing resources and journeys to school are some primary ways children negotiate friendships (TSD/B21). In the three schools observed, around 85% of children walk to school, with over 75% of these accompanied by one or more peers (OBS8/02/19). Children typically walk in groups of two to seven, with around 76% walking in groups of two or three. Children often wake up early to gather before heading to school (TSD/P17).

The data consistently shows that friendships allow children to communicate freely across different contexts and, in so doing, resist the fragmentation imposed by school rhythms of subjects and grades. They can tell each other “anything” (TSD B1). You overhear them talk about relationships, church dress codes, the latest dress codes, etc. In some ways, friendship gives them a vehicle carrying their entire complex lives. The children’s well-being at school is closely tied to their relationships with peers. When friends argued, children “felt hurt” (TSD B1), and when friends were waiting for them at school or home, children were “very happy” (TSD 25). Conversely, children felt angry when left behind or when friends associated with others outside their friendship circle (TSD B33).

*I use private transport to get to school. In my transport, there are two girls that have a problem with me, every day they like fighting with me. I don't like the things they do to me, I want to change transports because they bully me every day. They insult me every day and I feel alone." (TSD B21)*

*I use transport to get home from school. They all have a problem with me in my transport, they all don't like me. They never even said "happy birthday" to me on my birthday. I told them that I don't have a problem with them not speaking to me because at home, I am loved and at school, the teachers and my friends love me (TSD B21)*

*I sat with my two siblings, we were very hungry but we ate when father got back home. We stay with our aunt and her child. She doesn't give her child a hiding but she gives it to us, she gives her child a lot of bread and she gives us very little bread. I am not feeling good at all.*

*Sometimes I think about both my parents when our aunt gives us a hiding; I cry a lot. One day, my brother got a hiding from our aunt, she hit him with a shoe and he bled, when I cried for my brother, my aunt hit me too. (TSD B1)*

*I was writing in my books and at break time, I went to play on the swing... I don't bully and I don't like bullies."(TSD G23)*

*We played nicely but one of my friends injured himself and I felt sorry for him because the others were laughing at him and I went to go buy him a plaster to cover the wound. The one that was laughing at him was beaten by an older boy.*

The data above illustrates children's intricate and multifaceted lives, emphasising the power imbalances and relational complexities they face. It contrasts positive relationships with the conflicts that emerge within various spaces, such as the school's break time environment, the journey to and from school, and the dynamics at home—all of which intersect to influence their experiences in the school space. This underscores the contested nature of these spaces, which can often become alienating and exclusionary.

The fragmentation of relationality becomes evident as children assert their self-worth by juxtaposing the negative and hostile social spaces of transport with the affirming and supportive environments of home and school. This dynamic highlights how children's identities are fluid and shift depending on the context, revealing how space is imbued with layered meanings that reflect social relations, power hierarchies, and the struggle for belonging. These findings reveal that free time is critical for relationship-building among children. The rhythms of their interactions during these periods provide insight into the social

dynamics of their complex lives, foregrounding relationality and a deep sense of community. Nonetheless, this lived space is also nuanced with contractions and conflicts that play out in and outside the school that influence and are influenced by their free time perceptions.

#### ***4.3.6.2 Emotionality in Children's Lives: Unveiling Hidden Feelings beyond the Classroom***

In their free time and in their time-space diaries, children resist the ritual response of “Fine, thanks, and how are you” (Obs18-22/02/19). At these times, they communicated their feelings of happiness, anger, hurt, fear and curiosity. This contrasts with formal teaching and learning, where children with similar emotions often reserve them.

*I really enjoyed learning Mathematics because the teacher explained it to us. (TSD B3)*

*I love school because you will never be a doctor if you have been to school to learn. (TSD G13)*

*My mother, my sister and I went to a funeral in Port Elizabeth. It was my grandmother's funeral and I was so sad, I was grieving. (TSD B31)*

*During break time, I was very angry because my friend was standing with other friends that had made me angry in class. (TSD B33)*

*I use transport to get home from school. They all have a problem with me in my transport, they all don't like me. They never even said 'happy birthday' to me on my birthday. (TSD B21)*

*During school, I went outside to play rugby with Lathitha. I was not happy because I lost. (TSD B26)*

*I looked for Kuhle and I couldn't find her so I went to school, I was so **sad** because I thought Kuhle had left me behind. I saw Kuhle at the shop buying a lot of chips and she gave me two chips and I said "no thanks" because I was so **upset** with her. (TSD B28)*

*The bell rang and it was time to go home, I went home alone and I was so scared but I saw my big brother. (TSD B28)*

*In my transport, there are two girls who have a problem with me; every day, they like fighting with me. I do not like the things they do to me; I want to change transports because they bully me every day. They insult me every day, and I feel **alone**. (TSD B21)*

*On the way home, we see older children mugging a younger child and the younger child ran home. I also ran home and found my father home, he said he had just arrived, I was very happy. (TSD P7)*

The data shows the complex emotions from part of the production of the school day beyond the confines of the classroom and school grounds. How can formal teaching and learning provide more space to discuss and draw on emotions alongside logic and reason? One child wrote the following in their diary: “Dear diary, I have some questions I do not understand. I

read lies in my classwork book, and I was afraid of asking” (TSD B35). This rhythm of restraint is also evident in the writings on the board that children erase as the teacher and/or peers enter the classroom, as well as the learners needing to confirm that no one will read their diaries, including their classmates, friends and teachers (ObsG 26/02/19; TSD B27 & B28). One wonders what teachers might uncover about the children and their learning if they ask them what they feel, not just what they think. One also wonders what children might say when given anonymity about their learning and lives.

Here, we see opportunities where emotions help identify how children like to learn and why they learn- they enjoy explanations (TSD B3) and hope to be doctors (TSD G13)- which could be leveraged to increase motivation and engagement. We also see instances where children’s emotions may act as a high affective filter, making it difficult for them to process and retain new information (Krashen & Terrell, 1985) as children experience loss, abandonment, anxieties about the future, depression and bullying.

It is in free time, however, that the children’s emotional states were made plain and provided context for in/action. Children’s emotions, as reflected in diary entries, point to the complex lives they bring to or find at school, with themes revolving around abuse, hunger, poverty, pollution, bullying, peer pressure, sickness and death. Upon entering the school, it seems as though, like the dust gathered en route to school from gravel roads and footpaths, these experiences are marginalised. For example, a child who constantly arrived at school tired and fell asleep for the first two lessons was told to wake up and work, and not asked why she was feeling tired (Obs, 26/02/19). The result is that within formalised teaching and learning, children have little to present their emotions and uncover the burgeoning complexity of their lives.

#### ***4.3.6.3 Creativity and Crisis: The Duality of Resourcefulness in Underfunded Schools***

Spending time in all three schools revealed numerous instances of dilapidation and insufficient financial support. During observations, it was noted that several classrooms had broken handles, windows, chairs and desks. In some cases, windows had been welded shut to prevent further damage. At both Themba Primary and Amila Primary, fence sections had been removed or stolen. In an interview with the janitor at Themba Primary, a member of the school governing body, he commented on the school’s condition. Pointing to a broken window and general dilapidation, he mentioned the lack of funds to address these issues,

stating, “You know how things are like in the township” (IntJanitor, 22/02/19). This points to the conceived space that justifies the dilapidation of schools in ‘townships’ that question the humanity of primarily black children who are still defined by what they do have- working toilets, fixed windows, sufficient resources, etc.

This theme extends beyond the schools to the children’s realities, highlighting financial hardships. Examples from children’s diaries include: “I woke up early to boil water on the stove because my family does not have enough money to buy an electric kettle”; “When I woke up early, I was very hungry, but there was no food at home” (TSD B33); “After school, I went to town with my father to ask for donations because we do not have enough money” (TSD G5); “I prayed to have enough money to help my family” (TSD G25); and “Today, I am feeling better. I woke up and bathed even though we do not have enough money to buy soap” (TSD P28). These excerpts illustrate a pervasive theme of financial struggle.

At Themba Primary, the principal attempted to raise funds by visiting classrooms with plastic bottles and asking children to bring any spare change from home to fill the bottles. This pattern of dilapidation and financial scarcity echoes the school funding crisis in such schools before 1994. This situation is exacerbated in areas removed from traditional employment opportunities in and near the metropolitan areas characterised by large industry, with an unemployment rate of 32.5% and 45.5% for youth (StatsSA, 2022).

The internalisation of ‘othering,’ as described by Said (1978), results in these schools being viewed, even by those who work there, as lacking or differing from urban schools. However, this perspective provides a limited, one-sided story that overlooks the richness and creativity inherent in these contexts that emerge in and perhaps due to the dilapidation.

What is absent in this view is how rural places like Makhanda can become the envy of the city, representing purity, authenticity and morality often lacking in urban areas. Rural areas often partially resist the arbitrary accumulation of capitalism (Warf & Arias, 2009).

*I live at Eselumu, that is the name of our farm. We do agriculture and have much livestock (TSD B5).*

*Before school, I travelled to school using private transport. Our village is quite remote (TSD B26).*

*I was in the classroom writing my classwork, the environment reminds me of our village school (TSD B28).*

*During the day, I go back home and eat. It is easy because we live in the countryside where we grow our own food (TSD P12).*

Here, families live with and in nature, living off the land and dwelling amid cattle. In Themba Primary and Amila Primary, you contently find cattle belonging to community members grazing the expansive grassland inside the school along with chickens, dogs and donkeys. Children also have the opportunity to dwell in remote contexts that, although having limited access to services, can provide peace, privacy and a connection to nature and family, demonstrated by the use of personal and possessive pronouns “we” and “our” that frame a unified and collective identity.

Secondly, what is often overlooked is the creativity that flourishes within the school context that emerges from scarcity and dilapidation. Teachers, for instance, incorporate local cultural elements to teach mathematical concepts such as improper fractions. They draw on the popularity of local musicians and the children’s daily experiences, using the example of a child carrying an adult to illustrate the concept. A popular song by the late Xhosa musician Zahara from the Eastern Cape, “Umthwalo wam’ uyandisinda”, which translates as "the load I am carrying is too heavy for me, please help me," is used to aid memory retention of improper fractions.

However, it is crucial to highlight the creativity demonstrated by the children during their free time, which contrasts with the passive behaviour often observed in formal teaching settings. During break time, children create an arrhythmic thirdspace that defies the perceived and planned spaces designed by architects. They read their environment and engage in critical problem-solving to ensure an enjoyable break time experience.

Images of children repurposing and creating ad hoc structures taken by the researcher where children use their perceived space, including dilapidated resources, to facilitate social activities not anticipated by school planners. For example, children use broken chairs on wooden frames to create swings (see Figure 4.14). They use concrete slabs with protruding metal rods as goalposts for soccer and finger soccer (see Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.13) and half-filled plastic bottles as musical instruments for composing music (see Figure 4.10). They

imagine the frames elevating water tanks as jungle gyms (Figure 4.11). At Amila Primary, children use large rocks as springboards to perform flips (see Figure 4.12). At Kamva Primary, children place broken chairs upside down to create mini goalposts for soccer (see Figure 4.15).



Figure 4.9: The concrete slabs goal posts



Figure 4.10: Water bottle shaker

Creativity in free time



Figure 4.14: The chair frame swing



Figure 4.11: The water tank jungle gym



Figure 4.12: The large rocks springboard



Figure 4.5: Desk frame goal posts



Figure 4.13: Concrete slab finger soccer board

Despite Kamva Primary having swings and a soccer field, the many children and the priority given to senior children create opportunities for younger children to innovate, ensuring their participation in desired social activities. In these thirdspace activities, children repurpose firstspace materials to achieve thirdspace imaginaries. These activities mimic some of those found in better-resourced schools and resonate with the children's contexts and identities.

Break time is a pivotal thirdspace within the school day, strategically placed to enhance cognitive functioning while providing essential bodily and social rhythms. Reduced supervision during break time allows children to freely navigate their expansive school grounds, fostering friendships and communal ties crucial for their social development. Unlike the more structured formal learning environment, break time allows for creative and spontaneous activities. These inventive practices and strong social ties highlight their ability to create and problem-solve collaboratively. This thirdspace contrasts sharply with the formal classroom settings. Despite financial constraints and infrastructural challenges, the children's use of break time underscores a resilience and resourcefulness that mirrors the broader context of their lives. In the classroom, this thirdspace is partially suppressed by the homogeneity and monotony in the production of the classroom space common to both capitalism and colonialism. Formal teaching space suppresses the children by unintentionally assigning them a sedentary, silent and controlled role, hindering creativity that requires a certain level of liberty or individuality.

#### **4.4 Conclusion: Tangling the School Rhythms**

The interplay of polyrhythms in the school day foregrounds homogeneity and fragmentation, reinforcing capitalistic and colonial ideologies. The repetitive yet divergent rhythms of schooling induce the automation and memorisation of gestures, systematically shaping bodies towards 'accepting' or bending towards learning practices segregated by grade, race, class, and sex. These rhythms contrast sharply with life's collaborative and communal patterns outside formal schooling time. The architectural design prioritises safety, surveillance and the division of bodies by role, race and sex. The school timetable, regulated by the bell, conditions bodies into habitual actions, making them second nature and challenging to contravene knowingly. Examining these three schools in the rural context of Makhanda highlights a singular form of schooling that privileges standardisation over diversity.

The architectural design of these schools embodies priorities that align with colonial and capitalist imperatives, emphasising safety, surveillance, and the division of bodies by role, race, and sex. The school timetable, dictated by the bell, ingrains habitual actions into learners, rendering these practices second nature and challenging to resist consciously. Through such regulation, linear rhythms are superimposed onto the cyclical rhythms of nature, possibly alienating children from their bodily rhythms and communal modes of existence. This regulation dictates essential bodily functions such as eating and going to the bathroom while segregating bodies by grade, sex, and role, creating spatial divisions alien to the more integrated rhythms of homes and places of worship.

Perceptual rhythms—encompassing smell, sound, and taste—operate eurhythmically with architectural and temporal rhythms, providing learners with a structured sense of time, location, and order. However, behavioural rhythms privilege formal and sedentary learning, cultivating competitive relations among learners. The complex entanglement of these rhythms within formal teaching and learning culminates in a singular social space: the school day as a “hyper-complexity of rhythms, “some interpenetrating, others in conflict” (p. 88).

Learning within this framework functions through ‘le dressage,’ or training protocols, designed to elicit obedience and conformity. These protocols compel children to suppress aspects of their identities to fit the “school children” mould, presenting only socially “accepted” facets of themselves—consequently, children's self-silence questions, scepticism, passions, and aspirations that deviate from school norms. Nevertheless, in thirdspaces—moments that exist within and alongside the structured school day—learners assert their fuller identities. They compose hip-hop music, write names or songs they enjoy on chalkboards, and document relationships, revealing glimpses of their unencumbered selves during free time and within the interstitial “eddies” of the school schedule.

Within the narratives of progress advanced by capitalism and colonialism, spaces like these schools remain marginalised. The dominant ‘modus vivendi’—the prevailing way of life—positions these schools as sites where children are more likely to drop out, fail to qualify for university admission, get employed and end up entering the employment markets as cheap labour for post-apartheid neoliberal systems. The rhythms and spatial productions in these schools, categorised as quintile two in a peri-rural context, reflect a broader lack of differentiation in South African schooling.

Nevertheless, resistance to these rhythms emerges in thirdspaces, such as during breaks or before and after school. Here, learners forge strong social ties with people and nature, create hybrid spiritual experiences, and engage in acts of creativity amid systemic crises. Teachers, however, often remain unaware of the multifaceted identities of their learners, their roles in spatial production, and the broader implications of their actions as they shape children during their formative years— *ligotshwa lise manzi*. The next chapter presents the data analysis of the second phase focussed on four children’s mobilities beyond the school contexts.

## Chapter Five: Socio-Spatial Analysis

*I would not be happy (if I stayed close to school), because I want to walk a long distance  
because it's nice to walk – Nesi*

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the discussion of findings to further address the main research question. Specifically, it focuses on the second phase of the study, which involved a mobile ethnography accompanying four learners on their journeys to and from school. This phase contributes to the broader thesis by exploring the following sub-research questions:

- What are the mobility patterns of learners in the socio-spatial system?
- What opportunities for learning do the mobilities of learners make possible?
- What does it mean to be a child in a rural socio-spatial system (identity)?

The chapter provides a socio-spatial analysis of the complex dynamics of four primary school children's real and imagined journeys. It highlights how children's mobilities bridge the gap between adult assumptions about childhood and the lived experiences of children. Unlike the previous chapter, which focused on the production of school space, this chapter extends the analysis to encompass the peri-rural context of children's movements to and from school, offering additional perspectives on how educational spaces are shaped and experienced.

The analysis underscores the inherently social and fluid nature of children's journeys, reflecting the dynamic and multifaceted character of childhood itself. To frame the discussion, the chapter begins with a review of relevant literature on mobilities, focusing on children's mobilities. This is followed by introducing the four children through a vignette, allowing readers to see the world from their perspectives. The chapter then analyses their enacted mobilities, followed by an exploration of their aspirational mobilities.

Building on this, the discussion considers how the school can or should serve as a potential "third space," where the needs and interests of the local community are foregrounded. This reframes the traditional view of rural schools as institutions that prepare children to leave for urban opportunities (Cervone, 2017), instead positioning schools as sites of collaboration

with the community. This approach emphasises fostering children's idealism to contribute to the betterment of their local context.

Understanding the diverse dimensions of childhood experiences is paramount in educational research and crucially involves exploring children's movements in terms of their trajectories, motivations, means, timing and the social contexts they traverse. Such understandings bridge the gap between adult assumptions about childhood and the actual day-to-day realities experienced by children that influence teaching and learning practices (Leander et al., 2010). Recently, children's mobilities have received burgeoning attention, coinciding with the rise of the mobilities paradigm mostly prevalent in the social sciences (Benwell, 2009; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Vanessa et al., 2018).

The mobilities paradigm explores the movement of ideas, things and people and its implications and causes (Creswell, 2011). This paradigm arose as a critique of the nomadic and static traditions in social sciences that ignored the movements of people for work, pleasure and protest (Sheller & Urry, 2006). The aim was /is to "suggest a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 210). This focus, therefore, does not present a new grand narrative for research, but rather complements and extends research in the social sciences and is often considered the mobilisation of the spatial turn (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Sheller, 2014; Sheller, 2014). A key area of exploration has been children's journeys to and from school which have traditionally been considered peripheral to the school day. However, these play a pivotal role in comprehending the complexities of children's lives and the learnings that they bring to school and home. A diverse body of research by scholars such as Benwell (2009), Bosworth et al. (2020), Cervone (2017), Corbett and Forsey (2017), Farrugia (2016), Gristy (2019), Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) and Thorsen and Yeboah (2021) considers the intricate (im)mobilities experienced by children in these contexts, which vary in both length and duration.

Cultural factors significantly influence children's mobility experiences, with gender playing a notable role (Porter et al., 2011). For instance, girls often navigate their journeys to school carefully, avoiding walking amid cattle, driven by cultural beliefs as they travel to schooling in the hope of improved livelihoods. In contrast, boys often assume important decision-making positions during their mobility experiences (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016). Power

dynamics and safety concerns are also intertwined with these movements, as some journeys are partly voluntary while others are compelled by parents/guardians seeking the best opportunities for their children, even if it means encountering potential dangers such as wild animals (Cervone, 2017; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016). ). These studies align with the findings in childhood sociology (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016), emphasising that children are not merely passive recipients or victims of their environment, but rather active social agents who shape the structures and processes around them. Children exercise agency to influence the process and impact of their mobilities, providing researchers with insights into the situated shaping of children's agency (Kullman & Palludan, 2011).

Furthermore, children's mobilities serve as crucial markers of privilege, highlighting disparities in the choices children have regarding their mobility. For instance, a nationally representative survey in South Africa revealed that over 24.9% of grade 12 children resided more than 10 km away from school, and this distance was primarily determined by parents' ability to afford school fees and transportation costs (Kadt et al., 2014).

A child's mobilities can cause considerations about learning to go beyond the classroom and the school. Nespor (2013) argues that to understand a grade six child, for example, we need to take into account the history of their neighbourhood, transportation, and housing. This includes the smells, sounds and rituals of their daily lives. One way to do this is by going beyond the home and school and accompanying the learning body/ies as they travel across different places and spaces.

This chapter considers where the children situated in a peri-rural context go, how and why they travel, and with whom to gain an understanding of the spatial productions and children's identities. This understanding is crucial for providing effective and appropriate education, centred on children's identities as explored through their mobilities (Beghetto & Dilley, 2016). This research is of value to an international audience as it considers how qualitative data on mobilities can be generated to aid in understanding what it means to be a child. In doing so, this research contributes to making sense of the contrasted contexts that teachers often encounter, where despondent children sit silently in classrooms and become more exuberant and alive as they begin to head home (Nespor, 2013).

## 5.2 Mobile Ethnography as a Method of Data Analysis

In this second phase of data generation and analysis, a mobile ethnography approach was employed to explore the production of space in Makhanda, Eastern Cape, focusing on grade six learners' experiences. The research involved accompanying four purposively selected learners over 20 days, documenting their journeys to and from school and extracurricular activities through various methods such as mobile interviews, photography and observations (see phase two in sections 3.3.3). By immersion in the learners' daily routes, I effectively gathered rich data on how space is perceived and interpreted within the peri-rural context, fostering open discussions and uncovering nuanced spatial practices. This methodology diverges from traditional interview-based approaches, providing a more dynamic and insightful understanding of spatial dynamics in the community (Kusenbach, 2003).

The qualitative analysis of the generated data began with data walking (Eakle, 2007). Subsequently, the spatial analysis focused on perceived space, reflecting participants' subjective perceptions and conceived space, representing the objective space defined by authorities like architects and city planners (Allen, 1999). In addition, the analysis explored lived space, where participants navigate hopes and fears beyond perceived and conceived constraints (Merrifield, 2006). This space allows for imagining alternative narratives and challenging existing conceptualisations. For a detailed insight, refer to Chapter Three: Methodology. The findings and discussion based on the above focused on two sets of mobilities: those *enacted* and those *imagined*.

## 5.3 Findings and Discussion

### 5.3.1 Seeing the city through the eyes of children

*Here in Rhini (the Xhosa name for Makhanda, used to refer to Makhanda's township) its bad here, you get robbed just sitting down here, you must not be careless, you must not get drunk-drink a lot of alcohol when you know you stay in the township because the criminals will come and take your personal belongings and your groceries and leave. These are things worry me a lot.*

A spatial framework was employed in the analysis, and the findings and discussion are organised into four primary segments to comprehensively address the core research question: *What are the mobility patterns of the learners in the socio-spatial system?* The first section

provides four vignettes to give the reader a brief but vivid snapshot of the particular context of the participants' lives drawn from the interviews.

Vuyo, Nosipho, Dumisa and Nesi's lives are an entanglement of historical, geographic and social relations with various commonalities and yet clear distinctions that make them unique and complex.

### ***Vignette 1: Vuyo***

*Vuyo's story begins in the Eastern Cape, near the rural village of Riebeek East. Born on a farm, he was raised by his mother and grandparents, who are farm workers. His younger brother, five years his junior, has recently started school. Vuyo's educational journey commenced at Kamva Primary, a township school in Makhanda. However, when his mother moved to another farm for better work opportunities, Vuyo was transferred to a nearby farm school, where he completed grades two and three. He later returned to Kamva Primary, completing grades four through seven while living with his grandparents on the farm. Vuyo's daily routine is both arduous and routine. His day starts at 5 a.m. as he prepares for his 3.5 km trek across grasslands, carrying his school bag and accompanied by younger children from the farm who like him reside in the farm and attend school in Makhanda. Together, they reach the farm gate around 6 a.m. to catch a minibus that arrives shortly after. This minibus, owned by a Makhanda resident, travels around 30 km, picking up children from surrounding farms and dropping them at various schools. The return journey begins around 2:30 p.m., when the children are collected and dropped at their respective stops. Vuyo then walks back home with the younger children from the farm gate. At times Vuyo visits his mother in Makhanda who resides 3 km from her house to Kamva Primary. Despite these challenges, Vuyo is a passionate and talented artist. He spends his free time drawing or playing soccer and dreams of one day becoming an artist or an art teacher. His talent has been recognised through art competitions, compliments from his teacher, and even classmates buying his work. Vuyo firmly believes his artistic ability is a gift from God. Although he is still in grade six, he imagines attending university and improving his family's living conditions by repairing and furnishing their home with new doors, windows, and furniture.*

### ***Vignette 2: Nosipho***

*Nosipho and her twin sister were born in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) but it was decided that they relocated to Makhanda, a decision they were not happy about. The twins now live with their grandmother in a house around 500 meters from their primary school, Kamva Primary.*

*Their mother, however, resides less than 5 km away. Every morning, Nosipho wakes her sister, and together they prepare for school. Their journey includes a walk through their neighbourhood's gravel roads, stopping at a shop to buy sweets and meet up with friends on route. The route is watched over by vigilant neighbours standing on their porches, wary of dangers such as kidnappings and harassment by older men.*

*Nosipho is affectionately called "Twin" or Wele by her community. She enjoys playing soccer, netball, and tennis and takes great pride in being a majorette. However, Nosipho has her struggles, admitting to "anger issues" and sometimes causing trouble at school. Despite suggestions to see a therapist, she prefers to handle these challenges on her own. At school, Nosipho often retreats to the library or stays in the classroom during breaks, finding solace in solitude. Her few friends are primarily other children from Gqeberha, a city she still yearns to return to and visits occasionally.*

*At home, Nosipho helps her grandmother with chores but often finds herself alone, as her grandmother spends much of her time silently watching television. Nosipho dreams of becoming a lawyer, driven by a desire to defend those who cannot defend themselves. While she continues to navigate her mixed feelings about living in Makhanda, she remains focused on her education and her aspirations for the future.*

### ***Vignette 3: Nesi***

*Nesi was born in Makhanda and has spent much of his life here. He began at Themba Primary, completing grades one and two before his grandmother decided he should move to Gqeberha, where he attended grade three. After this brief stint, he returned to Makhanda and rejoined Themba Primary from grades four till seven.*

*Nesi's household is close to his school, less than a kilometer away. His mornings begin with the simple act of opening the gate at home, a daily chore that marks the start of his routine. At 7 a.m., he sets off for school on route finds friends heading to school sparking conversations about their hope and plans and the neighbourhood. He occasionally has to outpace dogs on route to school as there are a number of dogs that roam around. Once he arrives, he heads to his classroom to drop off his bag before meeting other friends. Nesi has a unique role among his classmates, often leading them in singing church songs before the school day begins. These heartfelt moments resonate with some students, while others giggle at his commitment.*

*Nesi's family inspires him with their resilience. Both of his elder sisters have successfully pursued higher education qualification, one holding a postgraduate degree and the other working toward one, despite struggles with employment. One sister, a psychology graduate, now works at a retail pharmacy company in Makhanda. Nesi however dreams of becoming a soldier or policeman and hopes to lead his own choir one day. Outside school, Nesi is*

*passionate about boxing, which he practices at a local gym. He has competed in tournaments in Mthatha and Gqeberha, finding strength and stress relief through the sport. On Sundays, he helps his grandmother with church activities, adding another layer of purpose to his life.*

#### ***Vignette 4: Dumisa***

*Dumisa is a quiet, introspective child born and raised in Makhanda. He has attended Amila Primary since grade one, where he now faces the bittersweet reality of a term three failure that may jeopardize his hopes of attending his preferred secondary school. His parents live and work far from Makhanda, in KwaZulu-Natal and Gqeberha, leaving him in the care of his elderly grandparents and older brother. This arrangement has fostered a strong sense of responsibility and independence in Dumisa.*

*Each morning, Dumisa walks to school, a journey that is short in distance but lined with challenges. The gravel road leading to Amila Primary is marred by an illegal dumping site, one of several in the neighbourhood. Despite this, Dumisa finds solace in his studies and his love for soccer. Books are his sanctuary, and he often immerses himself in reading during his free time. At home, Dumisa takes pride in assisting his grandparents with chores, such as sweeping and washing dishes. He even manages their finances, counting money for them as their eyesight fails with age.*

*Dumisa's dreams extend beyond his personal circumstances. He aspires to become a doctor, motivated by a desire to heal others and to restore his family's home. His concerns for Makhanda, including issues like bullying, drug use, and crime, weigh heavily on him, further fuelling his ambition to make a difference. Despite the challenges he faces, Dumisa's quiet determination and compassion for his community reveal a young boy with a deep sense of purpose and hope for a bright future.*

#### **5.3.2 Moving to learn: Learners enacted mobilities**

Each story communicates how mobility for these four children is part of life. In the data from the time-space diaries that provide a broad focus on children's mobilities, their mobilities can be categorised as follows: *School-related locations* (school, playground, classroom, assembly, library and tuck shop) where the most prevalent are to school and the playground – partly due to children not moving during lessons. The second is *social and recreational locations* (friend's house, shop, park, fire station, soccer field, community centre and beach) and the last is *family and community locations* (home, aunt's house, grandparents' house and church). They participate in mobilities that range in length and duration that are seldom

enacted alone. They travel with grandparents, parents, siblings and friends past farms, veldts and illegal dumping sites surrounded by many on-lookers (see figures 5.1 & 5.2).



**Figure 5.1: sketch from TSD G12**



**Figure 5.2: An accompanied walk to school**

A focus on the purposive sample that provided more qualitative data shows how the participants' longer journeys are for relocation, visiting family and extracurricular activities. Both Nosipho and Nesi have relocated from Gqeberha (previously called Port Elizabeth) and Dumisa's parents live in Gqeberha while Vuyo has moved from one farm to another with his mother. These mobilities are partly due to employment, as grandparents or parents secure a job they relocate and find a school closer to the new location. These movements are common in a context like Makhanda, a town with minimal industry, high unemployment and many people in the informal economy and blue-collar and casual work like some farm workers. From the data, there is always the looming possibility of relocation, as grandparents pass on, work contracts end, or new jobs become available – mobility is always a possibility. Here the socio-economic conditions echo how the children's mobilities act as a marker of disadvantage, as the lack of secure employment results in mobilities and the nature of the mobilities, usually on foot and rundown taxi as this is more affordable.

The kinds of mobilities for relocation are involuntary for the children revealing the power dynamics. Vuyo was 'was transferred' by his mom and similarly, it was 'decided' that Nosipho and her twin sister should leave; it was Nesi's grandmother who said he too should move to Gqeberha. One reason for these power relations may be the tendency to emphasise the lowly position of young children in African cultures (Porter et al., 2010). This is evident in Vuyo's response when asked if there is anything children can teach older people:

*Researcher: do you think that when an adult sees the world and the child, do you think they see it the same way?*

*Vuyo: no*

*Researcher: so what would you say it's the difference between the adult and the young person?*

*Vuyo: it is not the same. We as the young ones we have not been taught a lot about the world. We have not arrived in Grade 10. Old people know more about the world than us. Because they have been taught and they know everything*

*Researcher: so is there anything the young person can teach an older person?*

*Vuyo: no there isn't. The older person teaches the younger person.*

Here, Vuyo has internalised the African proverb “Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili,” which highlights the wisdom of elders and underscores the importance of seeking guidance, knowledge, and insights from those who have walked the path before. Although valid as children through primary socialisation are integrated into society through the transmission of values, here it has resulted in the assumption that all walks are the same, that learning happens at school ‘grade 10’ and that teachers or adults cannot be taught as they ‘know everything’. This perhaps partly explains why Vuyo wants someone to teach him how to behave and why he expects matters pertaining to bullying to be attended to by the principal (intVuyo). Later this is critiqued in relation to both the context of Makhanda as a place with minimal industry and job opportunities and the purpose of education.

Long-distance mobilities can be expensive, but those facilitated by schools—sometimes partially or fully subsidized—help make such opportunities more accessible, especially for families who might otherwise find them unaffordable. These experiences not only enable mobility but also broaden children’s cultural exposure. Extracurricular activities, serves a latent function by creating opportunities for long-distance travel. For example, Nesi has been able to travel to various places through boxing and singing in the school choir. Similarly, Nosipho, as a majorette, has travelled beyond Makhanda, and Vuyo has participated in art competitions both within and outside Makhanda.

Beyond extracurricular activities, the basic act of attending school also provides mobility for all participants. This mobility varies in distance, and in Vuyo’s case, it allows him to travel from his immediate farm context into Makhanda, further expanding his cultural exposure and opportunities. The short enacted learner mobilities centre around five locations: home, school, shops/town, playgrounds/sports fields and church. These journeys are primarily by foot and in groups with peers. Interestingly, spaces conceptualised for mobility, like roads in

front of homes are in lived space sites to socialise and play. Here mobilities, enabled by the immobile schools, homes and churches, enable life sharing – learners are not just walking from one destination to another but strategising on safe or preferred routes as they talk about their learning, future cars, birthdays, smoking etc.

*Our teacher had punished us to detention but he let me go earlier because the school bus was going to leave me behind. I waited for my and chatted with my friends about cars we would own when we are older. My friends and I want to be police cops when we are older, we are going to study until we finish university because we want to be important people in life. I am still in Grade 6, so university is still too far for me. (TSD G3)*

*Researcher: I noticed in your diary you have discussions about the kinds of cars you will drive when you are old?*

*Learner: Yes, we do, we talk about hoping to drive a jaguar, Volvo, ranger, open top, things like that, [when I drive that car I will you feel happy] ... because I bought it and its mine and will never be anyone else's.*

The time-space diary entry and interview illustrate how school journeys create a lived space where mobilities, aspirations, education, and identity intersect. For example, as the children catch the school minibus they depend on to travel home, they engage in conversations about their educational journey and its potential to elevate their social status. They envision a future where their achievements enable them to own prestigious cars like Jaguars, Volvos, and Rangers—symbols of status, success, and independence. This highlights the centrality of mobility in their daily lives and its profound role in shaping their educational aspirations and broader social goals.

Below are the learners' responses during the interview when asked to comment on what it is like to reside in Makhanda:

*Dumisa: It is very nice... because my friends are many here, my grandparents stay here. My other parents are in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and some in KwaZulu-Natal.*

*Nosipho: It's not that nice, girls from here they like to talk, girls from Port Elizabeth are better.*

*Vuyo: Staying in Rhini, it's nice but what hurts, or makes it difficult is that we often don't have water, what is difficult is that electricity costs are increasing and many people are fighting in*

*the streets and many people are being broken into in their homes. We are also scared that someone can break in at any time. But the community hits the criminals now.*

*Nesi: it's nice, I don't know why but it is nice... uhm I play with my friends and I learn the school.*

In the interview, as learners spoke about their lived experiences in Makhanda and their conceived space aspirations, only Nosipho talked about leaving Makhanda to return to Gqeberha. The other participants, although perceiving the challenges – the lack of water, electricity cuts and high levels of crime – still see themselves staying in Makhanda. This is because contrary to an absolute view of space that conceptualises space as a container to be filled void of social relations (Lefebvre, 1991), Vuyo perceives Makhanda as a social space. They have friends, families and a community. Schooling is central to forming these bonds with friends and community as it provides some stability amid various ongoing changes. In like manner, in the cases of Nosipho, who is not fond of friends and Vuyo who stays on a farm with children in grades one and two, at school, they both find a space for repeated interactions that for Nosipho, enable trust and continuity as her only friends in Makhanda are from school. In the minibus, conceptualised as a means to get to school in lived space, Vuyo travels to other farms, interacts with learners his age from other schools, and rests after a long walk before and after formal teaching and learning.

Similarly, while the dominant conceived space about education in rural contexts is for learners to compete and for those who win i.e. perform well academically, to get to leave (Cervone, 2017), the findings show that not everyone leaves or wishes to leave. Instead, participants chose to stay or return to their place of birth. In the interviews, the children did not aspire to leave save Nosipho, whose home is in Gqeberha, but rather desired to remain in Makhanda, i.e. home. Both of Dumisa's sisters opted to stay in Makhanda and further their studies and later, one settled for a job that was not in line with their obtained postgraduate qualification. They know there are more opportunities in the cities, but they choose to stay where their strong bonds exist despite the economic ramifications. Later we will see that this is partly due to the learners having a hopeful view of Makhanda as a space that can change. The narratives of Vuyo, Nosipho, Dumisa and Nesi shed light on the complex web of mobilities that shape their lives in Makhanda. These children navigate a range of physical and social spaces, from schools and homes to farms and towns. Despite challenges like looming

relocation, inadequate infrastructure and crime, their connections to community, friends and family make Makhanda a meaningful place for them. Schooling acts as a vital nexus where bonds are formed, and aspirations take root. The participants' desires to stay and contribute to their hometowns challenge conventional notions of rural-to-urban migration, emphasising the importance of social ties in shaping their perceived sense of mobility and belonging.

### 5.3.3 Learning to Move: Learners' Aspirational Mobilities

In the interviews conducted with the four participants, discussions centred on the learners' **aspirational mobilities**. While these mobilities are oriented towards the future, they exert significant influence on the present, shaping and being shaped by the learners' perceptions and actions. Additionally, aspects of Makhanda's conceived space, such as its institutions and social structures, project particular possibilities onto its residents.

This section presents two key findings. Firstly, it examines what each participant aspires to become and explores how these aspirations are rooted in the perceptions and conceptions of their immediate social context. Furthermore, it highlights how these aspirations reflect a desire to act as agents of change within their homes and communities. This analysis addresses the question: What are the (aspirational) mobility patterns of learners within the socio-spatial system?

Secondly, the section considers the opportunities these findings present for schooling in Makhanda, particularly in relation to answering the central question of Chapter Six: What opportunities for learning do the mobilities of learners make possible? The analysis is supported by excerpts from the participants' interviews.

*Nesi: I want to have a choir and I want to be a soldier.*

*Researcher: Why do you want to be a soldier?*

*Nesi: I want to protect our land from the people that want to rob.*

*Researcher: Have you seen people that rob?*

*Nesi: Yes, in the streets! One day, the child from home was walking over there and was robbed in the corner.*

*Researcher: You said you wanted to have a choir, why?*

*Nesi: Yes, I want to show people not to lose their talent.*

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*Vuyo: The dream I have it's to get into high school. I would love to get into Ntsikia, but I failed term one, but what I am praying for is to get into Ntsika; they say they don't accept people who have failed, so maybe the results can say they don't accept me. I hope to go to Ntsika because they have art there.*

*Vuyo: When I am old, I would like to be an art teacher.*

*Vuyo: I wanted to be a policeman but then I realised, the teachers told me I cannot want to be a policeman when I have a talent in art. So I then decided to change my mind and want to study to be an artist.*

*Researcher: Why did you want to be a policeman?*

*Vuyo: I wanted to catch people who are breakings the law. I wanted to relieve the community from people who are robbing them. I wanted to have my car as I drive the police van to also have my own car on the side, have my own house and work for myself and have a wife and pay my money to the government because the job I have is also from the government.*

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*Researcher: When we started you said that you wanted to be a lawyer, why?*

*Nosipho: Because most importantly, I want to know how to fight teacher, for people. Maybe a person took something of yours and you say it a mistake. Now the teacher will make a big deal out of it. So, I want to stop that.*

*Researcher: Did this happen?*

*Nosipho: Yes teacher... my mother is a drunkard; she takes things that belong to my grandmother and borrows from her friends. My granny arrested her, now she [granny] does not have a lawyer.*

*Researcher: Were you around when she took the things?*

*Nosipho: Yes. It was when I was here at home with my grandfather. Now grandmother says she doesn't have money. She can't afford [a lawyer]. We went to the court. Then we were granny's witnesses. That's when I wanted to be a lawyer.*

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*Dumisa: When I am old, I want to work. To help my parent with things that they buy here at home, fix the house, first buy doors, chairs and windows. Create a new home, change the fence that's all.*

*Researcher: When you say you want to work where do you want to work? What type of work?*

*Dumisa: I want to work as a doctor in the hospital, so that I can save people's lives. People that are sick.*

*Researcher: What made you decide that that you want to be a doctor?*

*Dumisa: Because I want to save people's lives, so that they live in the world. Maybe there are people that get a headache then you hear that they are dead.*

*Researcher: Do you know of anyone that has been through that?*

*Dumisa: Yes, it killed my grandmother from Ext. 10. But she had asthma. She had it for a long time, and then she passed away.*

How the term ‘aspiration’ is defined in literature is ambivalent (Bernard et al., 2014; Fruttero et al., 2021; La Ferrara, 2019; Moulton et al., 2016). Various authors distinguish aspirations from expectations, hopes and dreams (Favara, 2017), while others interchange these terms (Appadurai, 2004). In this study, the terms are used interchangeably as some of the data is translated from isiXhosa and there is no direct single-word equivalent for "aspirations" as understood in English. This has resulted in the reliance on a phrase or group of words like iphupha/ dream, umnqweno/ desire etc. As a result, this section defines aspirations loosely as an orientation to a desired future that includes children’s hopes and dreams (Ray, 2006).

In response to the interview question – What are your dreams and hopes? – the participants’ answers show how aspirations are not endogenous (Favara, 2017) but shaped by social factors and individual circumstances (Appadurai, 2004). These responses reveal that children are not passive recipients or casualties of their surroundings. Rather they are active social agents who shape and are shaped by the structures and processes of socio-spatial development. While the participants’ perceived space varies, their aspirations share many similarities that foreground education as the pathway to social mobility enabling personal goals and communal altruistic aspirations.

In the children’s time-space diaries, they mention they focus in class so that they can succeed in life (TSD P11; P15). Similarly, as learners set out for school, they hear repeated fragments of their parents’ prayers for their educational commitment so they can secure a brighter future. In their diaries, learners dedicate themselves to their studies, aspiring for success while harbouring concerns for those who are not dedicated to their educational journey. This conceptualised space of education as a means to a successful future (Cervone, 2017) is echoed by the learners’ and parents’ conceived space and the university that is elevated in Makhanda’s landscape.

The data subtly highlights a critical tension: for many children in contexts like these, aspirations often fail to materialise due to the undermining effects of socioeconomic inequality on meritocracy. As Mills (2023) explains, these children can only fully grasp their life chances by understanding the circumstances of others in similar contexts—what Ray

(2006) refers to as an “aspiration window.” This creates a stark contrast between the children’s idealistic aspirations and the harsh realities they face, such as widespread unemployment (even among graduates), limited access to healthcare, financial constraints, and specific challenges like Vuyo’s struggle with failing term three. Despite this tension, the children demonstrate resilience in continuing to aspire. Their aspirations are however as is common with children idealistic (Becker et al., 2022 This stands in contrast to the "terrible yet magnificent" lesson of the sociological imagination (Mills, 2023), which offers a more nuanced and empowering perspective—linking personal ambitions to historical and social realities of Makhanda as a space rife with contradictions, thereby possibly equipping children to navigate the future with greater clarity and understanding.

While the primary emphasis of this section revolves around the aspirations of children, it is important to acknowledge that firstly, children are often labelled idealistic with lofty and imaginative aspirations, including professions that might seem unattainable (Becky et al., 2022; Hutchings, 1993). Secondly, these aspirations are subject to change over time, as exemplified by Vuyo, who initially harboured the desire to become a police officer before, under the guidance of his teacher, eventually aspiring to be an artist. Similarly, Nosipho initially aspired to be a pilot and later a lawyer. Nevertheless, delving into these aspirations offers valuable insights into the concept of identity and what children deem possible. By examining their aspirations, we gain a window into the individual objectives of the participants (Nurmi, 2004) and their potential selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This affords us a clearer comprehension of what it entails to be a child within these circumstances, as we observe the possibilities that children envision for themselves. Moreover, aspirations also illuminate the beliefs about reality that children tap into when making decisions and exhibiting behaviours (Fruttero et al., 2021).

The findings indicate that the aspirations of all four participants stem partly from personal encounters that evoke empathy and social concern, compelling them towards altruistic aspirations to become catalysts of positive social transformation within their homes and communities. In the case of Dumisa and Nesi, their exposure to elevated crime rates in Makhanda fuels a profound sense of community responsibility, prompting them to aspire to become a police officer and soldier, respectively. The data also showed how part of the reason why Dumisa later decided to have choir was “to show people not to lose their talent”. He desires to encourage others to pursue their ‘god given talents’ in a similar sense to how he

was encouraged by his teacher. Similarly, Dumisa and Nosipho, witnessing inadequate healthcare access leading to preventable or unexplainable deaths and an unjust legal system, aspire to become a doctor and lawyer, respectively. The data suggests that these varied career paths are chosen due to their perceived potential to benefit the self, the conditions at home and in the broader Makhanda. Contrary to the conventional view of rural spaces as stagnant, the participants view Makhanda as dynamic and fluid, and most importantly, they see themselves as part of Makhanda, affirming a relational view of space.

These future aspirations are deeply rooted in the intersections of the social context and the town's conceived space. For instance, Makhanda boasts a military base, resulting in a prevalence of military vehicles and personnel. In addition, the high crime rates have led to a significant police presence, disproportionately concentrated in low socioeconomic areas like the eastern part of Makhanda, where all participants reside. This small town also hosts the seat of the high court, which forms part of the town's ecosystem. Makhanda is also recognised as a creative city that prides itself on artistic endeavours, hosting events like the Makhanda Arts Festival and celebrations such as Masicule, which showcase the diverse voices of the town and its surroundings. Rhodes University, the sole university in a semi-rural location in South Africa, notably contributes to this artistic reputation. The humanities faculty, which encompasses the arts department, constitutes the largest department in the university, accounting for 43% of all student enrolments in 2023 (Rhodes University, 2023). All this (and more) tangles to present Makhanda as a space with an intersectionality of experiences.

The participants' aspirations are shaped by their socioeconomic context or, as Favara (2017) puts it, drawing from Appadurai (2006), "the capacity to aspire is not evenly distributed in society" (p. 526). While these aspirations are personal, a sociological imagination reveals their public nature, intertwined with Makhanda's socio-spatial dynamics as a creative city that hosts a university and the high court seat, a town grappling with substantial crime rates. This may explain why Vuyo and Nosipho, sixth graders, aspire to attend a university. Could this be because Makhanda's cityscape features prominent university buildings, unlike many other peri-rural areas? Or because they have already seen family members study at the local university? Or perhaps it is because, for Vuyo, every drive to school goes past the university buildings.

The eastern part of the town, where all the participants reside, is characterised by a slope that places it beneath the imposing sight of the university buildings. Whenever the participants lift their heads, these buildings dominate their view, serving as a constant reminder of the opportunities that higher education might offer. Moreover, the continuous flow of mobilities—students walking or travelling by minibus to Rhodes University—further reinforces the university’s presence in their daily lives including their aspirations. After all, research has highlighted that university aspirations are common in urban areas as opposed to rural contexts, and yet in this study, discussions about continuing studies at a university abound (Al-Bahrani et al., 2020; Favara, 2017).

Children’s aspirations are shaped by Makhanda’s spatial dynamics as a creative city, marked by the presence of police and military institutions, the high court, and a pervasive Christian ethos. These spatial dynamics reflect the enduring coloniality of knowledge, where formal education and institutional frameworks often reinforce dominant epistemologies while marginalising local and lived knowledges (Inc. concerns). The children’s empathy-driven aspirations demonstrate their desire to be proactive social agents and catalysts for positive change, rooted in their understanding of Makhanda as a dynamic and relational space. However, what is notably absent is a decolonial thirdspace—a transformative educational framework that transcends the coloniality of knowledge to validate and harness the children’s current aspirations for local change. Such a space would reimagine education as a site for producing knowledge that is deeply embedded in and responsive to the sociocultural realities of their context, empowering children to realize their aspirations within a more equitable and locally relevant paradigm.

#### **5.3.4 A thirdspace: A School for the Community**

*Researcher: Is there anything you would change about Makhanda?*

*Vuyo: There is. It is waste [in the] open spaces or fields. Like there [pointing at the illegal dumping site], the papers. Because the papers are blown away into the school, they make the school dirty. Then it seems as if the school doesn’t care because we don’t pick up the papers. These papers come from those open spaces and get blown into the school.*

*Researcher: What would you want to do?*

*Vuyo: I would change the littering and clean up here in Grahamstown, not at school. At school maybe we would get the gloves to pick up all the papers.*



**Figure 5.3: An illegal dumping site next to a school**

Source: Ellis, E. (2021). Rubbish piled up in Makhanda. *Daily Maverick*.

Vuyo's response can be interpreted as a metaphoric representation of how the challenges faced by the community are projected onto the school, leading to the school being found wanting. Embedded within Vuyo's exposition is an intricate interrelationship that recursively binds the school and the community in a symbiotic loop. This applies to issues like low literacy rates, and various forms of abuse including substance abuse, crime and poverty. Vuyo's response implies that to address these concerns, the community should be the primary focus rather than the school per se. In doing so, he underscores the contention that the task of seeking redress for these predicaments is not relegated to an individual agent, such as himself, but hinges on the concerted and aggregated exertions of the communal collective denoted as 'we'. It is noteworthy, however, that Vuyo does not entirely absolve the school from its role. Instead, he proffers a nuanced role that the educational institution assumes within the peri-rural spatial productions – an agency that offers the necessary facilitative means, akin to the provision of gloves, to expedite and fortify these communal initiatives towards rectification and mitigation.

This metaphorical response delineates a noteworthy opportunity for education. It delineates the conceptualisation of a thirdspace positioned between the school environment and the community, serving as a bridging nexus connecting the two domains. It envisions an educational establishment intertwined with the local community, wherein a primary objective involves harnessing the inherent idealism of children to function as catalysts for societal transformation. This is realised through a collaborative process wherein the identification of prevailing social ills afflicting the community is collectively undertaken. Subsequently, schooling deploys its reservoir of resources to ascertain viable 'gloves' – both physical and ideological that empower children to actively participate in mitigating or resolving these challenges. For this to occur, the culturally embedded views that reinforce a binary between teacher and learner—rooted in ageism—must be re-examined, fostering a space where

children can teach and learn with one another, and adults can equally learn from and alongside children.

As Vitiello et al. (2012) argue, this initiative functions not only as a platform to engage learners by aligning with their personal interests and sustaining their participation but also operates on a dual rationale. The first rationale centres on channelling the idealism inherent in children to effect positive change within their immediate spatial contexts and broader social landscapes. This resonates with the vision of a school as both embedded within and serving the community, symbolised by the metaphor of the absent fence, where the community is the fence (see sections 4.3.3.1).

The second rationale takes on particular importance in the context of the dominant spatial narrative of outmigration, which highlights the movement of people and skills from peri-rural areas to urban centres—a theme also explored in Section 1.3 regarding the two-tiered education system. This approach challenges such narratives by moving beyond a perspective that positions children solely as contributors to a distant future. Instead, it seeks to recognise and utilise the current and potential value of young individuals within their present spatial realities.

This perspective underscores the potential to reinforce the spatial bonds between children and their peri-rural environment. For many, the saying “Intambo yesisu ingwatyelwa ekhaya”—“the umbilical cord is buried at home”—symbolises a profound connection to place, heritage, and ancestry. By fostering this connection, the approach can instil a greater sense of purpose in children, encouraging them to invest in their peri-rural spaces as they actively engage in their transformation. This shift enables children to develop a clearer understanding of their spatial roles, strengthening their attachment to home.

Without such a thirdspace, however, children like Vuyo are left “worried a lot,” with limited opportunities to engage meaningfully in their immediate spatial context awaiting for adults to resolve act. Their aspirations risk being deferred indefinitely, reduced to waiting for the day they can secure employment and afford basic repairs to their homes, such as buying doors and windows.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a socio-spatial analysis of the mobilities of four learners, uncovering the intricate interplay between their physical movements, aspirations, and the socio-economic realities of their peri-rural context. By employing Lefebvre's spatial framework, the chapter has illuminated how children navigate perceived, conceived, and lived spaces, offering a lens through which to understand the productions of space in Makhanda and the dynamic and relational nature of childhood in Makhanda.

The findings highlight the dual nature of mobility in these children's lives. On the one hand, longer mobilities where children have little or no say often stem from economic instability, compelling families to relocate in pursuit of livelihood opportunities. These movements underscore the precarious nature of employment in peri-rural areas, where casual labour predominates. On the other hand, shorter, daily mobilities—whether walking to school or traveling with peers—create vital spaces for socialisation, collaboration, and the articulation and development of aspirations.

The children's fluid aspirations, spanning medicine, military service, policing, law, and the arts, reflect their deep awareness of the challenges faced by their community. These ambitions are rooted in empathetic responses to their surroundings, shaped by Makhanda's unique spatial dynamics, including its creative milieu, socio-economic inequalities, and visible institutional structures such as schools, courts, and universities. Despite these challenges, the children exhibit a strong connection to their community and a desire to effect transformative change in their immediate context.

This chapter has also introduced the concept of education as a "thirdspace"—a transformative arena where children's idealism and agency can be harnessed to address local challenges collaboratively. By engaging with learners' lived realities and leveraging their aspirations, schools can transcend their traditional role as preparatory institutions for urban migration. Instead, they can become catalysts for local development, fostering a stronger sense of place and purpose among learners.

In conclusion, the mobilities of these learners reveal not only the socio-spatial constraints of their context but also the possibilities for reimagining education as a tool for community empowerment. These findings pave the way for a broader discussion in the next chapter, which synthesises insights from the study and examines the opportunities that the production of space provides for innovative educational paradigms.

## Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I bring into the conversation a discussion of the findings from chapters four and five that respond to this research question: *How is school space (including im/mobilities) re/produced in the three schools?* To provide an overview and the closed findings of the production of space. This provides me with the grounds to answer the following research question: *What opportunities for learning does this production of space (including im/mobilities) make possible for teaching and learning?* From the analysis and discussion in the previous chapters, Makhanda emerges as a unique socio-spatial hybrid fabric where the past and future converge. It is characterised by coloniality, rurality and permeability, infused with ubuntu and a cohort of children who strongly desire to be agents of change.

### 6.2 Findings and Discussion

#### 6.2.1 Coloniality and Education in Makhanda's Township/Rural Schools

Regarding **coloniality**, the focus is on the reoccurring themes of race, dilapidation, homogeneity, separation/ division and surveillance and how they 'bend' the learners into a particular and limited disposition- *ligotswa lise manzi*. Themba Primary School, Kamva Primary School and Amila Primary School have a predominantly Black learner and staff composition. Although there has been an outflow of learners to city schools, historically designated for White populations and often perceived as offering superior education, this movement remains unidirectional. White and Indian learners do not enrol, and only a few Coloured learners enrol in the three study schools in a space historically segregated for the Black population 28 years after the demise of the policies that produces racially segregated schooling (South African Schools Act, 1996). Here the demographics make it hard to resist labelling these and similar schools as 'Black' schools. While walking and driving with the children to and from school, I observed minimal interaction with different races; similarly, the school linguistic norms during assemblies are often in isiXhosa, with no need for translation.

There have been considerable efforts to resource schools servicing the previously disadvantaged groups as evidenced in the study, with newly built Early Childhood Development centres and libraries in Amila and Kamva primary schools. There are, however, still clear signs of *poor maintenance, dilapidation and insufficient resources and funds* as observations show minimal sporting facilities, gravel roads around the schools, no or broken-down jungle gyms, broken windows, doors and fences and insufficient textbooks across all three schools, especially in Themba and Amila primary schools, situated furthest from the towns and in accordance with historical spatial planning are less developed (see figure 1.2). A focus on the bodies in space, the linguistic norms and resource discrepancy implies that *race* continues to act as an organising principle, perpetuating a systemic privileging of whiteness over blackness post-colonisation – one wonders if this would be the case in schools in the town’s economic hub, the schools previously set aside for the white population. Scholars argue that the continued success of city/town-based schools, historically reserved for the White population, is sustained by systemic advantages like community and business based engagement, funding, extracurricular activity and experienced teachers due partly to their location (see Hoadley & Jansen, 2022); furthermore, these schools serve as benchmarks against which all other schools including those in this study are measured (Christie & McKinney, 2017). For example, in Makhanda, because of their facilities city-based schools can generate income by renting out facilities, for example, for the city’s arts festival and are in close proximity to the city’s economic hub that can result in increased funding and sponsorship.

The underlying logic of coloniality perpetuates the historical division as where the schools are located whether close or far from the economic hub is partly due to pre 1994 where sections of Makhanda (then called Grahamstown) were divided by race into three distinct spheres for the white, coloured and black community, with the ‘black’ schools further always from the economic hub. City planners conceived these spaces based on problematic idea on where, for example, public services and facilities should be located (who they are for or who can/should access them best) and is perceived by children from Themba Primary School who during a drive with the researcher identify a small Pick’n Pay recently built next to a petrol station slightly closer to the township when then refer to it as “our Pick’n Pay” implying there is another one (that bigger and harder to access) but that one does not belong to them. While Makhanda as a whole struggles with potholes and poor maintenance of roads- it is in the east of Makhanda where roads are seldom tarred and key services like the post

office and education department are further away. During the study, as I travelled in and out of the schools, this inequality became clearer as you drove onto the gravel roads, past the illegal dumping sights and over the sewage spills. Similarly, as ground staff who perceive the blatant inequality responded: “You know how things are like in the township” (see sections 4.3.4.3). In an interview Vuyo (interview, Vuyo, 2020) perceiving the space commented:

*Here in Rhini [common name for the rural/township part of Makhanda] it's bad here, you get robbed just sitting down here, you must not be careless, you must not get drunk, drink a lot of alcohol when you know you stay in the township because the criminals will come and take your personal belongings and your groceries and leave. These are things worry me a lot.*

The participant in perceived space sees the township context and the measures that ‘you must’ take to survive it, how your choices are limited in how a black child can organise- you cannot be found sitting down outside or drink a lot of alcohol cause you may experience loss. Coloniality is also presented in the emphasis on *homogeneity* (Lefebvre, 2004). In this study, this homogeneity is seen to silence differences. Here I refer to the uniformity in the study, where a strong sense of sameness is evidenced across the three schools in architectural, practice and spatial-temporal divisions (see chapter 4.3.1). The architectural configuration in all three schools portrays a conceived space featuring three rows of buildings parallel to each other within expansive grasslands. These schools share common features such as narrow walkways and curtainless windows. In addition, each of these schools maintains a vegetable garden on the school premises. The architectural layout, including the timetabling, is not neutral, favouring conformity and surveillance with narrow walkways, curtainless windows, and a central quad reminiscent of historical educational paradigms geared towards supplying a workforce for industry – despite the minimal local industry (see sections 1.2). The daily routine in these schools follows a similar pattern. Despite the different data generated across three schools in this study, the observed striking similarities suggest an almost seamless transition from one school to another and hence the use of the tri-school. For this reason, the reader may struggle to demarcate the three schools, and this is because I too struggled to do this given the homogeneity.

This homogeneity may extend beyond these specific schools. The focus, therefore, lies in understanding the implications of this uniformity, whom it serves and how it trains/tames learners through repetition so that their dispositions are limited and predicted – what

Lefebvre (1991) calls *le dressage*, similar to how horses and dogs are trained for exhibitions and competitions. This training, however, may not be inherently problematic; the real question lies in its relevance, especially considering that Makhanda is a creative city with minimal industry.

From the study it seems modern-day schooling in the three contexts follows the form and function of coloniality. These schools not only perpetuate homogeneity but also *separation and division*. At first, this may seem contradictory – how can schools simultaneously demonstrate a large amount of sameness and separation or division? The schools in comparison to each other are similar in architecture and practice; likewise, the spatiotemporal divisions and how they work to separate and divide bodies in space are similar. In other words, they look the same and act the same; part of this act is dividing bodies. How do these schools separate and divide? As discussed in Chapter Four, through dividing bodies by race, sex, age, role and subjects across time and space. Upon closer examination, spatial divisions reveal inherent valuations and devaluations. For instance, while playgrounds are expansive, only Kamva Primary School offers swings for recreation, with no allocated space for food vendors during breaks across all schools. Resources predominantly support formal teaching, marginalising play. Coloniality also permeates teaching and learning.

The rhythms of scarcity, self-regulation and the focus on form and appearance often at the expense of content or deep and critical learning (see sections 4. 3.5). In the production of space, learners and educators unknowingly reproduce the very conditions that perpetuate systemic inadequacies. Although learners' communal practices and resilience are commendable (i.e. their creativity in working around the scarcity and learners managing the class during teacher absence), the normalisation of these dynamics sustains a system that inhibits equitable and effective education. Perhaps the learner's energy and agency could be used in disrupting this rhythm of neglect and reconfiguring educational spaces to prioritise the presence and support of educators, ensuring that communal care complements, rather than compensates for, systemic failures.

Learners are also socialised into the form of communication through structured behaviours: greeting teachers upon entry, raising hands or standing up to respond, and clapping for correct answers. Beyond the classroom, this emphasis on form extends to how learners present themselves, with a focus on uniform, neat hairstyles, polished floors, and segregated

rows for boys and girls. Daily rituals, such as prayer at the start of the school day, further reinforce the prioritisation of routine and structure.

While a focus on form is necessary for primary school learners to instil foundational habits, there is a concern that the prioritisation of form over deep content exploration reflects a colonial legacy where there is a strong emphasis on the purpose of education as being to instil discipline/ compliance and routines. Such an education risks inhibiting the development of critical thinking skills, where learners are encouraged to ask questions and deeply engage with the material. For instance, while corrections are important, it is a form of rote learning. Understanding why an answer is right or wrong is more meaningful for fostering understanding and critical engagement; this emphasises the importance of having a teacher facilitating teaching and learning.

This study focused on what Lefebvre (1991) calls the “everyday”—those aspects of life that are taken for granted and seldom questioned. The reinforcement of division, manifest through daily routines, rituals and distinctive uniforms, amplifies this separation. This division extends beyond gender, encompassing age, grade levels and the assigned roles of teachers and learners. Although there are moments when the divisions and sameness are resisted, they are nonetheless legitimised through repetition. Learners are alienated from others and themselves (i.e. estranged from their own identity, thoughts, emotions or actions that are relational). These spatial productions promoting homogeneity and sameness establish a core and a periphery within educational space. It is evident that children absorb more than just formal lessons within school environments; they also internalise the emphasis on differences and the “need” and “norm” for segregation. These findings in the everydayness of schooling underscore the transformative potential of spatial analyses, prompting a re-examination of the familiar by questioning how our social constructs programme our “every day”.

### **6.2.2 Ubuntu and community interconnectedness in Makhanda’s schools**

In the study, ubuntu also emerges as a characteristic of Makhanda spatial productions in the interconnectedness demonstrated by sharing food and journeys and demonstrating empathy and a strong sense of collective wellbeing. In the discussion, walks to school are seldom done alone; children wait for each other at various spots or collect friends and then walk together. Similarly, during break time, children share food and play together. Snack vendors, not only

sell items to children on credit due to a strong sense of empathy but also walk around the school and pick up litter after break to keep the school clean. Even in the shops in the community, children pay for electricity is unavailable in the shop, and the shop arranges for it to be brought to their home once it is (Obs21/02/19; TSD B5). Once the school bell rings, adults from the surrounding neighbourhood help hurry children to class. While accompanying children to school, community members stand outside their houses and watch what is happening around them and when they deem it necessary, they reprimand children to hurry to school. When heading back from a school event children wait for each other before walking home (see chapter 4). They know each other and have deep social ties that foreground relationality and echo the essence of ubuntu – “I am because we are”.

### **6.2.3 Permeability and community integration in Makhanda’s schools**

What also distinguishes the schools in the study, possibly adding to the resistance of a limited conceived space and the rigidity imposed by coloniality, is the degree of exhibited **permeability**. These schools function as porous entities, allowing the entry and exit of not just books, cars and individuals (staff and learners). Absent fences or open gates means Themba Primary learners’ sometimes returned home during breaks for lunch; vendors enter the school and set up shop, offering credit to learners based on their familiarity with them and their families. In addition, these schools are frequented by animals, such as dogs, chickens and cows, grazing within the extensive grasslands. At Amila Primary, litter blown from nearby dumping sites finds its way onto the school grounds. Themba Primary staff witness individuals from surrounding areas taking shortcuts by walking through the school. The ‘lack’ of physical barriers enables nearby residents to observe activities within and around the school premises. The symbiotic relationship between the schools and their communities intertwines, presenting opportunities muted by an approach that seeks to rigidly separate the “two” entities, mirroring the division of land through colonialism’s narrow conceptualisation. Of particular interest is that some of this porousness is not due to a spatial mapping (as the spatial map delineates clear boundaries), but rather arises from lived space experiences that, in many ways, transcend the narrow conceptual confines. Amid the rigidity, in lived space, people create their own thirdspaces of negotiation and resistance but cutting through the school premise, having animals enter the school and vendors selling in and around the premise.

#### **6.2.4 Children's Aspirations and Hybrid Spatial Productions in Makhanda**

Lastly, this hybrid spatial production has within it creative children who, contrary to what is at times the case, desire not to relocate to the metropolitan areas but instead wish to remain in Makhanda or where they are from because they want to bring about positive change (see chapter 5). A discussion on the children's aspirations depicted that while their aspirations emerge from their socio-spatial context they demonstrate a deep desire to help. The careers they aspire to are not necessarily selected or attractive because they have a high status, but rather because they are viewed by the children as vehicles to help in the home and the broader community. From the discussion of the findings, the children care and are very worried about their community; they are worried by high crime levels, children who go without, drug and alcohol abuse and justice and health care systems that they find wanting. Similarly, a focus on the thirdspace of break time demonstrated their creative ability to repurpose materials in a context characterised by budget limitations to enable creative activities outside the conceived space of architects and school planners. The children desire to be agents of change and their creativity is a valuable resource, especially in a context with limitations.

All the above needs to be understood in the context on Makhanda as a per-rural context. A context with limited mobilities (especially for children), fluid lives, being with and in nature, the strong communal relations discussed and expansive grasslands. The children have limited mobilities save for relocation and as a result, school extracurricular activities provide opportunities for children to travel. Relocation is partly due to the limited employment in Makhanda and the large amount of informal work that is usually precarious. I noted this in my attempts to locate children to accompany them to school. At times they would be with parents in town or grandparents outside town, or they would be told they needed to head to a different place as guardians sometimes were not in the same place over extended periods. In such cases, schools provide a sense of stability and routine to the children's lives.

As a result, Makhanda is a hybrid space because all this and more is taking place at the same time and so 30 years after democracy both the present holds within it the weight of the past and future possibilities – having a grasp of this complex social space provides opportunities to reimagine what teaching and learning is and what it is for.

### 6.3 Opportunities for Teaching and Learning: A Critical Appreciation of What Is

The chapter now shifts to focus on the opportunities for teaching and learning this production of space in Makhanda makes possible towards a more socially and spatially just existence in order to answer the research question: *What opportunities for learning does the production of space make possible for teachers and learning?* Here I outline five opportunities: the importance of context; uncovering and acknowledging the inherent relationality; recentring what the purpose of education is towards care and concern; drawing on our diverse transgressive and collaborative learning experiences, and lastly, creative children's idealism and their desire to be agents of change.

#### 6.3.1 Resisting Coloniality: Embracing Contextual Relevance in Makhanda's schools

The schools in the study struggle to conform to the implied notions of an "ideal school" post-apartheid and this is where the *modus operandi* is found wanting by those whose lived space (away from more traditional industry) constantly necessitates creating one's own space. This section aims to explore the potential opportunities that arise when in lived space we resist and unmask coloniality within this educational context. Our hunt for what to do as educators and teacher educators begins by exploring what is already happening in the margins.

One of the primary arguments this thesis makes in chapters four and five, which is arguable and undeniable, is that space is not and cannot be neutral. This includes the production of school space. Part of what we have inherited from colonialism is the tendency to assimilate, and by so doing we silence or ignore differences (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). An example is how many countries colonised by the British Empire drive on the right side, enjoy cricket and have a keen interest in tea. In many ways, the goal was to recreate the empire in previous parts of the Americas, Australia, Europe, the Caribbean and Africa. Ndlovu-Gatsheni cites Edward Blyden, making a similar point by focusing on the problematic emergence of universities (termed colleges of London) in Africa with a curriculum from the UK. He argues that it was assumed that a student from Manchester and one from Soweto would abide by the same knowledge. A similar argument is made here looking at the complexities in Africa, and in particular South Africa, to argue for contextually meaningful and relevant learning experiences. One where **context matters** so that the common emergence of glocal tensions is unmasked and addressed (see sections 2.6.2). The tension is across the contradictory micro localised lived space experiences of children- their desires and life opportunities and the

macro conceptions of educating children for industrialised employment in urban contexts amidst a decline in industrialisation (Growth Lab, 2023). The opportunity here is to encourage and equip teachers as part of their teaching to carry out contextual analysis on the contemporary sociocultural landscape, considering factors such as social, economic, political and cultural dynamics. An example, from this study may be rurality, the high unemployment rates and the absence/minimal industry in Makhanda contrasted by the open grasslands and interconnected relations. We need a culturally relevant education to grapple with such micro level context – more so now we know this worries children too (see chapter five). This call for a culturally relevant and resonant education is not novel, as similar calls have been made (see Goldenberg, 2014; Freire, 2018), here however a spatial and decolonial theory give this call additional weight by making explicit the untapped potential available.

### **6.3.2 Uncovering and acknowledging the inherent relationality in school-community dynamics**

While some may advocate strengthening ties between schools and communities as an initial step to improving teaching and learning, I contend that resistance to this approach is crucial. Encouraging “stronger ties” inadvertently implies a conceived space of weakened ties between the two entities, insinuating the necessity in perceived space of a closer unity- more parents meetings, newsletters and open door policies. Consequently, this may lead to conceptions about poor parental involvement in schools – disregarding the existing manner in which parents are engaged with schooling, albeit perhaps not conforming to “expected” norms. Thus, an initial step in producing the educational space is **uncovering and acknowledging the inherent relationality** that exists.

Consider the vendor who has sold food to learners within a school setting over the past 15 years (IntSnackVendor, 22/02/19). She has familial ties to the school as her grandchild attends as did her own children, and she resides near both the school and a teacher who is also a personal acquaintance. This saleswoman actively engages in maintaining the school environment during school hours by picking up litter and directing learners to do the same. Moreover, she supervises children during breaks in the extensive grasslands, away from the direct supervision of teachers. She sells food to the learners often on credit and offers authentic opportunities for mathematical learning, and her merchandise becomes a catalyst for negotiating relationships among the learners (see chapter 4). However, despite her role, she is not afforded in perceived space a designated spaces for vending and is excluded from

educational discussions and meetings while holding such valuable insights. Her role is perhaps marginalised and the lack of a physical space adds to this. Drawing from Cunningham(2016), such rich relations are overlooked or met with a dead end because they may not marry well with current capitalistic norms or the yard stick set by former model C schools.

Here spatial theory sheds light on the absence of a space that fosters equitable participation, beyond the mere presence of multiple voices (see Galvin and Simme, 2017). The above example is taken from observations at all three schools, where vendors play a powerful role in lived space while not given physical space to operate that consolidates their role. They are a vital community partner on the margins and an opportunity for symbiotic partnerships. Why not make this existing relationship more explicit? Doing this, I posit, confronts the present-day workings of coloniality as it unveils existing relationships that exhibit shared concerns and centres on what is marginalised. Her entrance into a classroom is one way of resisting the fragmentation of work and play in children's learning. A similar argument can be provided with regards to the school janitor, the man who drives the mini-bus taxi across the various farms, the children from other nearby schools who walk with some of the learners in the school. These relations exist and they should be acknowledged and explored and celebrated.

### **6.3.3 Recentring education towards care and concern**

Adding to the above, there is an opportunity to **re-centre the purpose of education towards care and concern** and away from a primarily capitalistic focus on the economy. By this, I mean resisting the tendency to view children from a funding point what Duckworth and Smith (2018) term 'bums on seats'. Metaphorically, coloniality enables the constant enacting of disregarding what learners bring with them to school. When learners arrived at school in the study, I noticed numerous incidents that I use metaphorically where they stood outside the gate and dusted their feet or scraped the mud of their feet that was gathered on route to school before entering the school premises. What the learners (and teachers) bring with them to school – their objects, ideas, relations and experiences that they or schooling deems irrelevant like the dust – deserve attention. Especially if the purpose of education is envisioned and imagined with a firm grasp (and concern) for both the children and their contexts and not just a job market that, given Makhanda's context and many other similar contexts, removed from the traditional employment common in cities and towns with large industries. This will require heeding not just what industry or potential employers need from schools or what

universities need from basic education, but rather a realisation of the connectedness and shared concern that coloniality silences and the importance of partnerships that see contributions even at a micro level as necessary.

The mobile ethnography involving the twins living less than a kilometre from their school highlighted a significant issue and an innovative solution. The twins, burdened by the weight of their school bags, chose not to carry them. Instead, they reached an agreement with a grandparent and their teacher to return home slightly later and complete their homework at school, allowing them to leave their heavy bags at school (IntNosipho, 2019). This instance reflects a practical adaptation to challenges within the educational framework that requires egalitarian discourse, emphasising the importance of flexibility and strategising across teachers, learners and parents.

In another poignant observation at Kamva Primary, the daily struggle of a child commuting from a distant farm became evident. Each morning, this child would arrive at school only to fall asleep shortly after, succumbing to the exhaustion from the early start and lengthy commute. The teacher would scold the learner and continue with teaching. Through conversations with her peers, I realised the reason was known among some children and the transport driver, pointing to a communal awareness of the hardships faced by this child who travels long distances to school (Obs, 26/2/19). The closure of farm schools, intended to streamline the education system, has partially taken into consideration the distance learners (unsupervised because they reside with elderly grandparents) often have to walk – in this case, 3.5 kilometres through a farm to get to the pick-up spot, because the farmer does not allow the minibus onto their property. Learners then wait while the minibus collects children from other farms and then drops them off at different schools. Imagine what could have transpired had the Department of Education or even a grassroots activism from teachers, learners, grandparents, farm owners and transport drivers found a thirdspace to form a community partnership that's mutually beneficial.

Both incidents shine a light on the critical issues facing children in accessing education and the innovative, albeit small-scale solutions that emerge from within the school community. They underscore the necessity of understanding and addressing the physical and logistical barriers children face given their context away from big industry. The twins' negotiation for a workaround to avoid carrying heavy bags and a collective concern for the 'sleepy' child's

wellbeing brings to the fore discussions on **what education is and what it is for**. Education is not just to supply industries with skilled labour. As is the case in Makhanda, firstly, there is not enough such employment for all, and secondly, education should be about relations (UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, the study was faced with the question: Why do the children not leave Makhanda and head for a metropolitan area where employment prospects are better? Instead, the participants aspire to improve Makhanda. When asked what he wanted to do, Nesi responded that he would like to clean up the illegal dumping site a stone's throw from his home and school (see chapter 6). He aspires to fix his home by changing the fence and purchasing doors, chairs and windows (IntDumisa). Vuyo similarly aspires to be a policeman to "relieve the community from people robbing them" (IntVuyo). Similarly, Nesi aspired to be a soldier to "protect our land from people who want to rob" (IntNesi). Both Nesi's sisters still stay in Makhanda after three-plus years of completing their postgraduate education. The participants in the study do not desire to leave to go to the metropolitan areas where there is more industry; this is because they have strong ties to Makhanda and a desire to improve not just their but their community's lived conditions.

It is expected that one may read this and fear for teachers given their ever-growing responsibilities, but this should not be the case. Firstly, the purpose of education is to encourage an "ethics of care" (see o'Donoghue et al., 2020) or ubuntu, an African concept referring to moral qualities like empathy, a deep sense of connectedness, generosity, considerateness and promotion of life through mutuality (Waghid, 2020). This sense of ubuntu was evident in the schools when children resisted the need to compete and instead developed a culture of sharing sweets, money, lunch, transport, walks to school, books, hairbrushes, shoe shiners ... "everything" with friends, family and those in need. This culture was also demonstrated when a child articulated why they could not leave and walk home, about four kilometres away, without their peers after a social event that several schools were invited to:

*When we all have to go home, we have to go together so that no one might have an accident while walking alone. ... I don't want a parent to ask me [what happened to one of us and I do not know] because I was walking with that person. Maybe they get robbed. We all have to know about it! (see chapter 5).*

This call is echoed by UNESCO's (2022), *Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*, where the focus is on rebalancing our relationship with each other, i.e. shifting towards more inclusive, equitable and cooperative interactions among all stakeholders in the education system. If this is the purpose of education, it cannot be viewed as additional work for educators, it ought to be at the core of our work: rebalancing our relationships with each other. The question perhaps is: are educators enabled to fulfil this role or are we majoring in the minors?

Teacher training institutions have the opportunity to prioritise these relational aspects by highlighting the African Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession (African Union, 2019) for teacher's roles and competencies that include but are not limited to that of community, citizenship and the ability to work strategically with parents, carers and guardians professionally and ethically (Rosenberg, 2022). Teacher training institutions need to emphasise defining the teacher's role in relation to parents and other community stakeholders (including the environment), thus fostering a collaborative space. This challenging yet crucial effort aims to challenge preconceptions that either schools fail communities or communities fail schools (see Biesta, 2019) Instead, it seeks to identify the coupling of school and community to potentially transform educational environments. These demanding environments, despite their difficulties, inadvertently present opportunities to reimagine the role of schools within and with communities.

How do we do this? Relating to the incidents previously cited – why did the teacher not draw information from the child's peers or the transport driver, and why did the school governing body or the principal not invite the snack vendors to their school governing body meetings or staff meetings? There is an opportunity to rethink what it means to partner so that it goes beyond just agreeing or disagreeing with decisions and instead enables deliberation on what is on the agenda and what the problems and solutions are. A space where every participant's lived experiences are a sufficient basis to participate so that those with perceived and conceived capital are not privileged (Galvine & Simme, 2017). There is a danger that we may become so accustomed to requesting help from larger social institutions that we are failing to recognise and galvanise local collaborative agencies and insights. Makhanda's position as a small town that is not completely urban or rural provides unique opportunities to reimagine education and its profound impact on spatial development by unmasking, resisting and challenging race, gender, grading and architecture as definitive organising principles.

This positioning, not limited to Makhanda as there are several schools in and outside of the Eastern Cape with similar spatial productions (schools in rural/ peri-rural context removed from industry), creates opportunities to reimagine education and its profound impact on spatial development. By unmasking, resisting, and challenging the organizing principles of race, gender, grading, and architecture, Makhanda offers a critical lens to understand and reshape these entrenched systems. What I mean here is that there is an opportunity to **draw on our diverse transgressive and collaborative learning experiences** naturally prevalent in learners' communities where they play, travel and shop across grade, gender, economic status and sometimes race. When spending time observing and partaking in the rhythms of the school day, it was clear that the boys and girls became more aware of the (imposed) differences in the production of the school day. These differences are legitimised by various actions, objects and spaces that are demarcated for one and not the other. While this is useful, are there opportunities to deliberately emphasise the commonalities and collaborations? Outside the school or in moments of less/little surveillance like break time while groupings are evident they nonetheless play together, walk to school together, are sent shopping together and compose music together. Should a decolonised education not encourage and facilitate multi-graded and even multigenerational learning opportunities given the apparent strong connection to people and place shared by people in different bodies, grades and life stages?

Similarly, as mentioned earlier, race in all three schools continues to act as an organising system as the teaching and learning cohort is largely Black. Historical segregation under apartheid and colonisation in South Africa entrenched racial divisions, perpetuating the ideology of inherent differences among racial groups. Over time, this resulted in internalised racial segregation and often stereotypes, leading to a natural gravitation towards those perceived as similar and a consequent ignorance and exclusion of others (Dubow, 1992; Mamdani, 1996). A similar point is made by Tatum (1997) in "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" Unintended racial categorisations in educational settings post-apartheid result in these divisive ideologies being perpetuated, undermining efforts to foster a cohesive and inclusive society. Therefore, early education as a transformative stage for promoting inclusivity and diversity must be leveraged. Practically, this may mean deliberate exposure to diverse groups to significantly reduce prejudices and enhance social integration, especially in a collaborative context. While sports/ cultural interschool competitions can facilitate exposure to diversity, for example when the schools take on other

schools in Makhanda's economic hub, this can be marked by a competitive context. Similar moves have taken place in Kenya and Nigeria (see Aydin, 2013; Kibui et al., 2015). We cannot expect multicultural interactions to naturally occur in one of the most unequal countries in the world; as a result, we need to ask what enables or disables what is at times present outside the school in the early years. There is an urgent need to work towards a multicultural education that highlights shared human experiences and values to dismantle the legacy of apartheid and colonisation (Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 1996). Here lies an opportunity to 'bend' children differently and to use produce space that enables this for a more inclusive existence.

The production of school space (see chapters four and five) fragments children's days by demarcating time to play, eat, and go to the bathroom as well as times for mathematics, English etc. There are reasons for doing so like establishing order and routines; however, from the data analysis, one can see why children could be in sexually abusive contexts or bullied and not share it with the teaching staff – their school day and life are fragmented and what happens outside the four walls of the school is often marginalised or disregarded in other spaces. This occurs even when the learning content is on bullying or sexual abuse because some of the children have internalised the exclusionary positioning of the school in relation to their broader lives. This needs to be resisted so that the entire learning body is welcome in the school. Interestingly, the use of time-space diaries and how they reconfigured power relations managed to do this – by asking the learners what they did throughout their day including the weekends. Also, the learners' enjoyment in completing the diaries could mean some desired spaces and opportunities to present all of who they are in the school context.

### **6.3.4 Building different schools: Embracing diversity and context in education**

Linked to this is the need to not just build new schools, but to build different schools or build schools differently. The built environment has already been flagged previously by Luckan (2022) as vital to the healing and socio-economic emancipation of marginalised communities as evident in the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (Republic of South Africa 2009); the National Development Plan 2030 (Republic of South Africa 2013) and the National Spatial Development Framework 2050 (Republic of South Africa 2020). This study confirms that space, including architecture, is not neutral. Spaces foreground learning and marginalised play. For example, the architecture in the three schools

encourages slow single-file movement visible through its narrow corridors and curtainless windows. Hierarchies are also implied in a school with multiple floors with more senior children having classes on the highest floors. As a result, if we want to use a diverse approach then schools need to have diverse architecture. As in universities (Smith, 2017) there is a need to build buildings where those who conceive the space dialogue with those who use the space. The starting point towards educational spaces that are more socially just is to first demystify institutional space by examining the perceived space of the physical landscape and the lived space of the experiences of staff and learners (Clark & Constandius, 2020). What memories, emotions and meanings do the current spaces have for the teachers and learners and how can we interrogate this to think deeply and carefully about school buildings and the processes that inform building or renovating a school?

Having said this, it may not be possible to rebuild schools and so as was the case in the Building Colleges for the Future initiative (Smith, 2017), it is possible to use space for more than it was conceived to be used and to even contradict conceived spaces. Teachers and learners alike were able to creatively repurpose space, as classrooms became dining spaces and churches, the grasslands became classrooms, and learners repurposed frames holding up water tanks into jungle gyms, broken desks into goalposts and broken chairs into swings. We are not limited to the current configurations of space, and this should include the timetabling that often goes unchallenged.

Rural education is often conceived as a space where there is competition, and those who win, i.e. perform well academically or in extracurricular activities, get to leave (Ceverone, 2017). In this study, however, the learners in the sample of grade six learners are not dreaming of leaving Makhanda despite the real challenges the town faces like water cuts, high crime levels and unemployment. For example, the participant's older siblings accept jobs that are not in line with their studies. They opted to further their studies and later studied for a postgraduate certificate in education and sought local employment because they wished to remain at home – despite knowing that larger cities provide more opportunities. Similarly, in interviews with the four participants, all desired to stay or go back home to improve their communities and grandparents' or parents' living conditions. In break time, children who are more emotionally expressive and creative link how they are doing to their relationships with their friends. From the data, it is clear that these learners, at least at this stage in life, have strong desires to be at home; the study revealed how their wellbeing is connected to place and

people. Here lies an opportunity to theorise broadly and work towards alleviating social ills with a schooling cohort whose concern is the community. Creative children's **idealism and their desire to be agents of change** provide an opportunity for education to confront challenges like water cuts, high crime levels and unemployment (O'Donoghue et al., 2020) Such an approach links one's hopes for life with education (Duckworth & Smith, 2018) resulting in more engaged learners, as they are more likely to engage in activities of their own choosing (Patall & Robinson, 2008).

These findings are not new and have resulted in relevant and resonant pedagogy and the critique of pedagogy that fails to do so. For example, O'Donoghue et al. (2020) developed a pedagogical approach through the handprint CARE framework where the starting point in teaching is the learner's concerns related to sustainability and the environment. In these learning activities, learners engage with peers and community members to develop solutions and, as a result, also enhance relational skills and social cohesion. In a similar light, Long and Grant (2024) explore how useful the Learner Representatives Council (LRC) and their findings underscore the importance of not only having LRC members raise concerns regarding the school but also creating educational environments that are responsive to learners' voices and experiences to foster a participatory culture in the school. Similar advances have taken place in maths, where rurally situated primary schools have enhanced learners' understanding of the construction of prisms and pyramids by teachers using artefacts and Indigenous activities and going so far as recommending ethnomathematics as a culturally responsive teaching strategy to enhance the relevance and meaning of mathematics (Jojo, 2024).

Shining a light on the implications of failing to consider and work with context, Kitsili & Murray's (2024) study examines the complexities faced by teachers when implementing Group Guided Reading in primary schools in South Africa. Their study amongst other things brings to the fore the challenges related to cultural sensitivity as teachers were reluctant to comply with grouping students according to their reading ability as required by the Group Guided reading as the pedagogical approach implicitly pointing to a competitive approach to teaching and learning common in western thoughts conceived space of education that did not align with the teachers' sociocultural context. These studies echo a sentiment made by Ngubane and Makua (2020) who in response to the realisation that despite being rich with Indigenous philosophies South African and African education has been construed from

Eurocentric perspectives and as a result recommend Ubuntu pedagogy as a transformative and decolonial approach that promotes inclusion and social justice

These findings are not new but highlight the ongoing development of relevant and resonant pedagogical approaches, alongside critiques of those that fail to achieve such alignment. For example, O'Donoghue et al. (2020) Handprint CARE framework prioritises learners' concerns related to sustainability and the environment as the starting point for teaching. Through this approach, learners collaborate with peers and community members to develop solutions, thereby enhancing relational skills and fostering social cohesion. Similarly, Long and Grant (2024) examine the effectiveness of Learner Representative Councils (LRCs), emphasising that beyond merely raising concerns about school issues, LRCs should operate within educational environments that actively respond to learners' voices and experiences. Such responsiveness cultivates a participatory culture that empowers students and strengthens school governance. Advances in culturally responsive teaching have also been made in mathematics. For instance, Jojo (2024) demonstrates how teachers in rural primary schools improved learners' understanding of geometric concepts, such as the construction of prisms and pyramids, by incorporating indigenous artefacts and activities. Jojo further advocates for the use of ethnomathematics as a teaching strategy to make mathematics more relevant and meaningful to learners by embedding it within their cultural contexts.

The consequences of neglecting sociocultural contexts in pedagogy are evident in Kitsili and Murray's (2024) study on Group Guided Reading in South African primary schools. Their findings reveal that teachers encountered challenges related to cultural sensitivity, particularly their reluctance to group students by reading ability as mandated by the approach. This resistance arose from the perception that such grouping implicitly reflected competitive, Westernised educational practices that were misaligned with the teachers' sociocultural values and context. These recent studies (O'Donoghue, 2020; Long & Grant, 2024; Jojo, 2024; Kitsili & Murray, 2024) resonate with the critique of Eurocentric frameworks in African education. As Ngubane and Makua (2020) argue, despite the richness of indigenous philosophies, South African and African education systems remain predominantly shaped by Eurocentric perspectives. They advocate for Ubuntu pedagogy as a transformative and decolonial approach, emphasising inclusion and social justice as essential components of meaningful and culturally relevant education.

Here, the call is not for an alternative but rather to resist a narrow approach and advocate for diversity. For this to continue or to happen, schools, especially teachers, need to be freed from the pressure to uncritically assimilate what is termed ‘best practice’ from schools, usually in different socio-economic contexts. If, as stated by UNESCO (2022), pedagogy is relational, in what part of their learning journey can grade two learners collaborate with grade five learners? In what part of learning can the similarities of all orientations in class be leveraged so that the norm is not boys sitting with boys and girls with girls? What needs to be done so that instead of two education systems loosely classified by one’s socioeconomic status and race, one multicultural education system is birthed? What needs to be done to ensure that teachers (and learners) are thinking critically about the purpose of education and the spaces in which it takes place? Might this not help respond to some of the pressing issues of our time – gender-based violence and racial prejudice? Again, the point here is not to depart from many of the traditional practices but to allow for other practices that have or will emerge that consider context and allow for diversity and options as opposed to alternatives (Mingolo, 2007). Children are being bent or allowing themselves to be bent and the call here is for schooling through spatial productions to be critical of the implications of this training so that we can ‘bend’ children differently.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter employed spatial theory to critically examine the construction of educational spaces in Makhanda and is a meta-reflection on the analysis and findings from the three schools. Within this framework, Makhanda is depicted as a complex social space, bearing the visible remnants of historical legacies. The enduring presence of settler colonialism persists post-1994, showcasing colonial traits of homogeneity, separation and division in a context of rurality where the local is ignored or viewed as deficient. This perpetuates the ongoing struggle for spatial ownership and citizenship, mirroring broader dynamics within South Africa. The schools under scrutiny are positioned at the periphery, contrasting starkly with schools historically designated for the White population that benefited and continue to benefit from colonial legacies. These schools previously designated as White are presented as unattainable benchmarks. Through its capacity to expose the spatial, social and historical dimensions, spatial theory enabled an understanding of the production of a centre and periphery in education. This chapter, however, in response to this narrow/limited framing of

these schools shifted the analysis to an appreciation of what is there, and an exploration of the opportunities available given such spatial productions to resist and challenge the state of affairs.

Based on the findings and the engagement with the literature the study concluded with five strategies aimed at expanding options in the production of school spaces, urging a departure from narrow approaches. It advocates the importance of context, acknowledging and nurturing existing relationships instead of focusing on “strengthening” ties between schools and communities. Emphasis is placed on the deeply interconnected nature of these entities, evidenced by the permeability observed across all three schools. Moreover, the chapter delved into the potential for diverse collaborations inherent in participants’ lived experiences, challenging established norms regarding gender, grade levels and roles within the school day to reveal the nuanced in-between spaces within this complex adaptive system.

The discussion extends to considering the perceived and lived spaces within school buildings, advocating the construction or repurposing of diverse educational spaces to uncover options in the production of schooling environments. In addition, the analysis highlights the valuable resources available within the local community, particularly the children, emphasising their creativity, idealism and strong connections to place. The chapter also underscores the importance of community partnerships, urging a departure from assimilationist pedagogies that stifle diversity and emphasising the need for egalitarian negotiations drawing from local experiences rather than rigid, spatially confined approaches.

The chapter does, however, refrain from articulating a definitive purpose of education at a practical level. This would necessitate a reconciliation of broad policies with local realities, acknowledging the distinct resources and histories each community brings to the table. Notably, the study emphasises that coloniality, ingrained through repetitive practices, moulds children into specific dispositions during their most formative years and bends a child into a particular identity. Therefore, decolonisation efforts, often overlooked, should engage spatial theory and heed calls for the decolonisation of the school day production to, in essence, ‘bend’ with social, spatial and relational justice. This is where the calls to decolonise are seldom heard unless one listens closely to the voices, movements and aspirations of children on the margins of the production of the school day.



## **Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This final chapter delves into the significant contributions and implications of this study within the frameworks of decoloniality and spatial theory in primary education. It also underscores the theoretical contribution of integrating Lefebvrian spatial theory with decolonial thought, creating a hybrid framework that enhances our understanding of how race and historical contexts shape educational spaces. Through examining the persistence of colonial legacies, the centrality of relationships in children's educational experiences, and the transformative potential of children's agency, this chapter advocates for reimagining educational practices that prioritise the voices and lived realities of learners. This chapter also articulates recommendations for further research and practical interventions that aim to advance discussions on educational equity and social justice that set the stage for future inquiries that can contribute to *bending* children differently by decolonising primary education in the South.

### **7.2 Significance of the Study: Knowledge Gap**

This study contributes significantly to the expanding body of knowledge on decoloniality and spatial theory in primary education. As highlighted in the literature review (see Chapter Two), while Lefebvre's spatial theory has been instrumental in transformative work, its application has primarily focused on higher education. Similarly, the decolonial agenda that has resurged in South Africa over the past decade has concentrated on higher education, with limited empirical insights into primary schooling. This presents a critical knowledge gap, particularly as the study demonstrates that coloniality is prevalent in the primary schooling context, which acts as a primary socialising agent. Therefore, by applying decolonial and spatial theory to primary schooling in South Africa, this study adds to a nascent body of knowledge that elucidates how the legacies of the past continue to shape the everyday experiences and educational environments of children and as a result, provide opportunities to resist coloniality.

### 7.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to socio-spatial theory and decolonial theory through their integration. It successfully identifies an intersection between Lefebvrian spatial theory and decolonial theory. Although these theories hold strong differences, their integration as a thirdspace hybrid allowed for a structured approach to the complex and often difficult-to-operationalise spatial theory that tends to overlook race. This hybrid space is based on common ground as both theories hold a strong desire to unmask and resist capitalism and the ‘architects of poverty’ in the global south (see Mbeki, 2009) who ride on the broad back of Western man (Lefebvre, 1991). Here, I drew on decolonial theory, particularly the concepts of spatial coloniality of being, power, and knowledge, alongside the spatial triad of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. These frameworks enabled me to operationalise the theories and address issues related to being, specifically examining how race continues to function as an organising principle. Here his theoretical “marriage of convenience” facilitates the unmasking of coloniality, which is habitual and embodied, revealing the need for liberation from colonial structures for both the colonised and the coloniser in the production of space.

Here we have an inclusive blend of theories emerging from within and without the global south. A deliberate action to resist an approach that seeks to simplify decolonial work to only the global south, notwithstanding that which needs to be resisted from the global North so-called “the invisible vampirism of technologies of imperialism and colonial matrices of power that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South”( Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p.11). Decoloniality’s locus of enunciation is from the global South but it is of global relevance. After all, decoloniality is a global move and in the words of a popular song by Asa titled Mr jailer.

I'm in chains, you're in chains too  
I wear uniforms and you wear uniforms too  
I'm a prisoner  
You're a prisoner too, Mr. Jailer  
...  
I have fears, you have fears too  
Let he who is without sin be the first to cast the stone  
...  
You suppress all my strategies  
You oppress every part of me  
What you don't know

## You're a victim too, Mr. Jailer

Both the previously colonised and the coloniser need liberation. The study has given me a greater understanding of how, while certain spaces have been transgressed more than others, nonetheless, all places have been transgressed. I saw this complexity where in one small town of Makhnada, schools have benefited differently from this colonial legacy. This personally enabled me to resist binary thinking, good/bad, victim/ perpetrator, north /south, etc., by bringing me into contact with the overlaps and coupling at play in complex and embedded spatial productions. For example in the rhythmanalysis the polyrhythms that place schools outside of the city as deficient while explored at a micro level in this study relate with the broader macro level narrative in literature where the teachers who teach in such township/ rural contexts send their children to urban schools (Lombard, 2007). Nonetheless, given this strong interconnectedness coloniality is detrimental to all and not just to certain places and certain peoples.

### 7.4 Meta Conclusions

The specific, conclusive findings that answer the research questions are presented in Chapter Six. Here, three broader meta-conclusions are offered where the goal is to a) consider the research implications beyond the specific context of the embedded case study and b) look at how these conclusions contribute to broader theoretical, methodological, or practical debates in the field and c) bring these three meta conclusions in conversation to make explicit the complex productions of space. The three meta-conclusions I briefly explain first and then bring into the conversation are the *persistence of the colonial legacy*, the *centrality of relationships* and the *potential for transformative practice*.

#### 7.4.1 Persistence of the Colonial Legacy

This study has confirmed the subtle legacy of coloniality in South African schooling persists 30 years after the end of apartheid. In other words, to date in the study sight one encounters how the present carries the weight of the colonial past in ways in which being and doing favour ideas, practices and characteristics of the coloniser. This legacy is evidenced by the neglect of what children (and teachers) bring to the school, the school rituals and practices, the architecture and how race continues to act as an organising principle in the hierarchy of South Africa's dual school system.

Studies have drawn on spatial theory to study coloniality or inequality in the four walls of the classroom exploring pedagogical relations (Finn 2019; Heather, 2004) and educational policy (Fataar, 2012; Tumubweinee and Luescher 2019). Here however this legacy has been explored privileging the shadows of teaching and learning – what happens outside the four wall of teaching and learning the so called hidden curriculum. As argued by Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019) policy tends to neglect the context in which policy plays out, the very context that Fataar argues (2019) renovates policy. Unpacking the spatial productions and unmasking coloniality enables the consideration of the relevance and viability of global discourse on local everyday realities in the diverse spaces of South Africa. A context where children live and breathe coloniality. Exploring these spatial productions beyond the classroom therefore help us see how as also argued by Appadurai (2004), children’s lives are aspirations are deeply imbedded in their social context and as a result historical inequality that plays out geographically affects children’s dreams as the present ontologically carries with it the weight of the past and future. In other words discussions to move a high court form one context to another (as is the case in Makhanda) has consequences in the lived realities and future aspirations of children to for example be lawyers. From the study it is plausible that the transformative goals of the Nationals Norms and Standards for School Funding policy (NNSSF) to facilitate equality is reproducing the very system it sought to address by and this echoes the importance of the everyday lived realities that policies come in Contact with beyond just the classroom space.

#### **7.4.2 The centrality of relationships in spatial productions**

Given that space is not neutral, contextual understandings are vital. The study uncovered the centrality of relationships in the lived space experiences of the school going children in Makhanda. Here I refer to how, of equal importance if not more importance to the children who/what they are relating with than what is being done. For the children in the study relationships are central to their well-being, identity and fulfilment. This echoes the the Zulu proverb, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which in essence is translated “I am because we are”. In chapters four and five this sense of the collective is evident in the children’s lives as they walk together and share food, stories, hopes and dream as they walk to school and back. It’s evident as people (incl. researcher) are watched as they accompany children to school by the community, as children live move from parent to grandparent during the week, it’s evident in the religious practices as the children as a whole start praying in the morning *Baba wethu...*

(Our father), it is evident in how children dream to build family members a home, help those without a house. It is evident as children change their future plans based on advice from teachers and parents, and in the numerous times children use the word ‘friend’ and related words in their diaries. It seems from the data that in the production of space, the collective is given more importance than the individual, a perspective aligned with functionalism (Durkheim, 1893). Functionalism emphasises the role of consensus in maintaining social order, where the needs and priorities of the group or society as a whole take precedence over those of the individual. In this context, the data suggests that the children not only conform to this principle but also find it important—and fulfilling—to prioritise the collective. Fundamentally, for these children, human existence is relational, rooted in the interconnectedness of their social and spatial environments.

#### **7.4.3 Reimagining educations with children who speaking by doing**

The last meta-conclusion presented prior to bringing this three meta-conclusion together is the need to revisit the purpose of education and to do so in a manner that includes marginalised voices, including those of children. How does one do this in a manner where the conceived space of educational ‘architects’ do not result in the disregard of the lived space experiences of children and school vendors? How does one do this in a manner where participation by children is deeply theorised beyond just agreeing but participating in deliberations on what is on the agenda, and what are problems and solutions (Clark & Constandius, 2020; Galvin and Simme, 2017; Smith, 2017). From the study, it is clear that while children have much to say, they also speak by doing. In the study, the children had a lot to say about their complex lives, but from this study, what became apparent is their ability to also speak by doing. It's vital, therefore, to watch children in spaces where they have increased agency to choose what to do where and with whom. By doing children communicated their interests, identities and preferences over and above their speaking and writing. Paying close attention to where they went to play, who they played with, what they did when they remained without a teacher in the classroom, what they did in the restroom and what they did seconds before entering the school grounds was telling.

Children’s actions and in particular young children’s actions revealed thoughts, emotions and understandings. As a result watching and listening to children exposed adult assumptions about what matters to a child. For example in the study while adults might assume that

proximity to school is always desirable, the children's preference for longer walks challenges this view as children preferred to travel longer distances to get to school instead of staying very close to school. Similarly as argued in chapter five children in rural context do not necessarily aspire to leave for more developed environments but instead aspire to improve the situation at home manifesting their attachment to their local space and a desire to contribute to it. Watching children also helped see how their subtle acts of resistance to structured, adult-imposed routines like having conversations in the restrooms are pretending to throw away paper in the dustbin by the door so that one can walk or talk with a friend. These actions are not passive responses to their environment but active negotiations of their identities, aspirations, and social spaces. Similarly, these actions reveals children's capacity to reshape their spatial environment and social interactions, pushing back against adult assumptions that children's lives are primarily dictated by proximity and convenience. The third meta conclusion from this study is that it is by this very listening and observing children that we may be able to understand and encourage their deep participation and not overlook the children's lived pace experiences, questions like why do you do this- can help us communicate that the child's lived experience is sufficient basis for participation.

#### **7.4.4 Tangling the meta-conclusions**

The complexity of these three findings becomes more apparent when they are considered in relation to one another. The enduring colonial legacy in South Africa continues to perpetuate inequality by shaping the kinds of relationships that children are able to form. Specifically, the spatial divisions, architectural structures, rituals, and gender and racial hierarchies rooted in apartheid and colonial history still influence who children can interact with in post-apartheid society. In other words, the legacy of apartheid spatial planning and colonial ideology limits the kinds of relationships children are able to form in the present.

This is evident in the case study of children in formal schooling, where they are frequently grouped by age, race, gender, and even language. Although relationships are fundamental to how children experience and produce space, the potential of these relationships is constrained by the lingering effects of the colonial past, which echo apartheid's "separate but equal" doctrine. These historical influences, coupled with traditional views, continue to promote hierarchical structures that may disregard children's lived experiences as a sufficient basis to make contributions when reimagining education.

Coloniality, which privileged the knowledge and perspectives of old white men as the ultimate authority in the world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), marginalised the voices of black children. This legacy endures even after decolonisation and, as a result, can impact the current efforts to reshape education. These efforts often take place without meaningful inclusion of children and other marginalised groups, such as black women or school snack vendors. Education in such a context can easily be for the children but reimagined without children, and this is where mistaken adult assumptions about being a child, including children's life words and mobilities, can prevail along with general ideas about education that may not hold sway in the current context.

A key point of concern is the silencing and marginalisation of certain voices, especially those of children, who are in the process of forming their worldviews. This exclusion risks creating a 'false consciousness' (Engels, 1893) in which colonial ideas and hierarchies are accepted by children as natural and universal truths, reinforcing the idea that only certain voices—those privileged by colonialism—are worthy of attention explaining why a child responds it is the older person who teaches the young and that there is nothing a child can teach an adult (see chapter five). This notion of silencing children and others aligns with the Zulu saying "*ligotshwa lise manzi*," meaning one's attitudes and beliefs are shaped while young and impressionable. Without addressing these deep-rooted inequalities, reimagining education may replicate rather than dismantle the colonial structures that persist today.

In contrast to the persistence of colonial legacies informing relationships and reimagining education, children's actions offer powerful pathways to resist and unmask coloniality, revealing options for reimagining education. For example, children choosing to walk long distances to school, not out of necessity but to maximise their relationships with peers, demonstrate resistance to the colonial framework. Their "talking by doing" — prioritising relational fulfilment — suggests ways to reimagine education that challenge the efficiency discourse by bringing to the fore who really benefits from this discourse. For example, this discourse through the closure of schools has resulted in children travelling long distances and arriving tired for schooling.

These strong relational ties, rooted in collective consciousness, counterbalance the isolation, individualism, and efficiency promoted by colonialism and capitalism. During play, children engage in activities that cross boundaries of age, race, gender, and language, providing a vivid example of how the colonial legacy can be exposed and resisted in everyday

interactions and learning environments. Their actions reveal the potential for a more inclusive and connected form of education that defies the separation and fragmentation typical of colonial legacies.

An illustrative example can be seen in a school with no physical boundary, or "fence," that serves as a barrier like national borders often do. Instead, community members freely cut through the school grounds or sell goods there, and the community itself acts as the 'fence' ensuring the safety of both staff and learners. This cooperative environment highlights an option to the standard colonial framework of division and isolation.

Furthermore, children's willingness to share everything points to a deeper issue. It suggests that the problem may lie with a government that fails to adequately fund education *for those with something different* and not '*those without*', but also with the broader capitalist system that privileges ownership and accumulation over relational well-being. As Ford (2016) argues in his study of Baltimore, the resources necessary to educate, employ, and house people exist, but they are privately owned and distributed unevenly. He notes that "it is the capitalist mode of production that has produced this reality and the radically uneven spaces of Baltimore, and the city is not unique in this respect" (Ford, 2016, p. 190), a statement that resonates in the context of places like Makhanda, where radical inequalities persist.

Children's sharing and collective behaviour offer potential options to the accumulation-driven mindset of capitalism, suggesting that a more relational approach to education might be necessary. Rethinking private education in terms of community and relationality could be key in radically uneven spaces like Makhanda, where the capitalist system has deep roots. As Cunningham (2019) observes, without the space for options, any attempt to reimagine education risks failure, as efforts to break away from the conceived space of capitalism often hit a dead end as the prevailing ideology does not legitimate them. The insights offered by children's actions, then, are vital in rethinking education in ways that resist both colonialism and capitalism, offering new pathways to a more equitable and connected future that are not be efficient or competitive/ individualistic.

These findings come together to form a cohesive argument where both the challenges and solutions coexist in a state of constant tension. It becomes evident that the weight of the past continues to influence both the present and future. However, while the past casts a long

shadow, it is crucial to focus on the present as it offers the opportunity to break away from the persistent influence of historical legacies. The present moment can potentially disrupt the universality of the past's influence, opening space for options.

## **7.5 Reflections on the Research Journey**

Over the seven years of conducting this study, my understanding and appreciation of the schools I have worked with have evolved significantly. At the outset, my awareness of the challenges these schools faced was broad and somewhat generalised. I recognised issues such as inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, shortages of resources, neglect, and limited parental involvement. Moreover, my prior experiences with children highlighted the importance of school-based relationships, particularly friendships, which often endure beyond formal schooling. However, through immersion in the school communities and engagement with participants—learners, teachers, and other community members—alongside generating and analysing data, especially the iterative process of examining time-space diaries, I have deepened my understanding. This journey has shifted my perspective from a generalised awareness to a recognition of the nuanced complexities manifest in the three schools in this study.

Initially, I observed a pervasive sense of neglect, a reality that remains evident in instances such as teacher absenteeism, as discussed in the study. However, this rhythm of neglect is juxtaposed with a visible scarcity of resources and a simultaneous commitment to maintaining appearances. It is not merely an absence of care regarding broken desks, windows, or doors but, rather, a reflection of insufficient funding to counteract the visible signs of deterioration. At the same time, I was struck by the dedication to maintenance practices—learners polishing their shoes, covering their books, cleaning their uniforms, and routinely sweeping and polishing floors. These practices echo the cultural tradition of shining *stoeps* in the community, signifying a form of care embedded within the school environment.

My reflections also challenged my initial assumptions about parental involvement in the schools. The study helped me see the extent to which parents actively contribute to their children's schooling. Parents encourage children to study, assist with homework, prepare packed lunches, ensure their uniforms are clean and polished, and even make sacrifices to fund schooling materials and make it possible for their children to participate in extracurricular activities. Parents even hurried late learners and picked up litter in the school

premises. These efforts highlight a form of involvement that may not align with teachers' expectations but nonetheless demonstrates parental commitment. Upon reflection, the disconnect between teachers and parents may stem from differing perceptions of what constitutes effective involvement. Moreover, while this study did not focus on parental expectations, it is plausible that parents, too, may question teachers' commitment to the schools, reflecting a mismatch in mutual expectations about roles and responsibilities.

My understanding of a typical school day and the experiences of school-going children has also transformed. This study illuminated the complex realities learners bring with them to school—abuse, poverty, familial illness, hunger, and fears of failure. These personal challenges are juxtaposed with the highly routinised structure of the school day, where each spatio-temporal context demands specific behaviours and actions that children have internalised. For an outsider unfamiliar with these routines or holding differing values, this environment can appear rigid and unyielding. Within this structured context, friendships emerge as important and vital. Observing the profound influence of peer relationships on teaching, learning, and overall school life offered insights into the detrimental impact of bullying—a frequent occurrence in these settings—on learners' well-being and academic success.

Although this study primarily focused on learners, it became clear that the rigidity of educational structures often extends to teachers, who are deeply socialised into specific norms and expectations of teaching and learning. Teachers appeared more constrained than learners in their adherence to traditional educational practices and the overarching purposes of education, particularly in how it shapes learners' identities and behaviours. While I initially believed that teachers, by their professional roles, might transcend these limitations, I came to understand the significant influence of architectural, historical, and cultural forces. These include how the built environment reinforces certain hierarchies and how teachers' past experiences as both learners and educators shape their current practices. Additionally, a communal culture that places significant authority on age further entrenches teacher-learner hierarchies.

Despite these constraints, my reflections have deepened my appreciation for the resilience and creativity of the staff and learners. Having never attended schools in similar contexts, I now recognise the unique qualities fostered within these environments—care (or *ubuntu*), resilience, and resourcefulness. These insights prompt me to reflect on what I may have

missed by not being educated in such contexts. Yet, I remain curious about the balance between the time and energy devoted to socialising rituals versus fostering critical thinking and meaningful engagement with the broader social context.

## **7.6 Recommendations of the Study**

In the previous chapter, I discussed five opportunities for spatial production present, focussing on the context of the study. Here, however, I discuss three broad recommendations that move from the narrow and concrete towards the expansive and abstract, focusing on teacher training institutions, teachers and educational policy with a particular focus on context, community and learners.

### **7.6.1 Contextualising Teaching Practices for Community Engagement and Learner Empowerment"**

As a teacher, I wonder how, if I had to teach in one of the schools in this study how my pedagogy would be different given the findings of this study. I wonder how knowing and being sensitive to, for example of the fact that some children come from nearby farms, the fluidity of the lives of the children and parents/guardians, that children demonstrate a deep desire to remain in their community and see it change for the better and the fact that Makhanda is a creative city far from the traditional employment opportunities made available, how different my teaching and learning would be. From this vantage point, this study recommends teacher training institutions equip preservice teachers to perform ongoing **spatial and relational contextual analysis of a school**. This recommendation resonates and brings together two of the several competencies for teachers through its education frameworks, such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025). These competencies are learners-centred pedagogy (including pedagogical knowledge and skill) and collaborative and community engagement (African Union, 2022). By equipping preservice teachers with the ability through an analysis of the context to centre pedagogy on the active learners' context and collaborate with community partners can resist (and unmask) the one size fits all approach that is carried by modernity. This recommendation is articulated in the following quotation:

“In general, children start learning to be responsible at a young age. They are taught to respect all adults, not just their own parents or relatives. City people know neither the hardship endured, nor the joy enjoyed by people in the rural areas” (Nkosi, 2025).

As a result the recommended contextual analysis encourages complexity and resists the one sided narrative that often presents the schools (and communities) in this study as deficit by foregrounding various social ills and ignoring the joy and endurance that is prevalent as context that are with a difference and not without. More than just requiring students to do their work-integrated practice in different learning environments, this recommendation is to equip preservice teachers to untangle, analyse and understand environments collaboratively drawing on what is already apparent in the contexts.

Based on the findings of this study, I reflect on how my own teaching practices would be different if I were to teach in one of the schools featured in the research. The diverse backgrounds of students and context—such as the children coming from nearby farms, the fluidity in the lives of their families, and their strong connection to their community and Makhanda— a creative city removed from industry and as a result from traditional employment hubs would necessitate a shift in my pedagogical approach. The first recommendation is the need for teaching to be deeply contextualised.

Given these reflections, this study recommends that teacher training institutions equip preservice teachers with the skills to conduct ongoing spatial and relational contextual analyses of their school environments. This aligns with the key competencies outlined in education frameworks such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025), specifically collaborative community engagement (African Union, 2022). By fostering these skills, teachers can design pedagogies that are responsive to the specific contexts of their students and communities, rather than relying on one-size-fits-all approaches often promoted by the dream of modernity.

Thus, the contextual analysis approach encourages complexity and resists deficit narratives that often highlight only the challenges these communities face while ignoring the resilience, joy, and endurance they exhibit. Beyond merely exposing preservice teachers to diverse environments through work-integrated learning, this recommendation emphasises the need for future educators to constantly collaborate and analyse their context in order to understand

and engage with the existing and changing strengths and dynamics of the communities they serve.

The second recommendation emphasises the importance of **cultivating and leveraging what learners bring with them to the classroom**. In this study, learners brought their creativity, idealism, and desire to act as agents of change. This aligns with the African Union’s call for learner-centred education, which encourages learners to view their educational success as connected to their communities—where their concerns originate and where their potential for making positive change can be realised. This perspective resonates with the principles of critical pedagogy, which seek to transform society by addressing and overcoming the inequalities faced by marginalised groups (Freire, 2018).

Practically, this recommendation challenges teachers and learners to reflect on how education can empower learners to engage with their immediate social contexts. For example, how can mathematical skills equip learners to address local issues, ensuring their education is relevant to the present and not solely focused on future preparation? If learners are concerned about environmental challenges, why not leverage that concern to enable meaningful action, using education as a tool for immediate impact?

As Finn (2019) argues, failure and success in education can be influenced by how classroom spaces are organised. Disruptive behaviour may often indicate that learners’ agency is being overlooked. Similarly, critiques of “teaching to the test” raise concerns about how this narrow approach limits creativity and problem-solving (Koretz, 2017; Robinson, 2011). Conversely, teachers who make their teaching contextually responsive are better equipped to succeed in any setting. Such teachers should be encouraged and challenged to measure their social impact by providing learners with the space and tools to engage meaningfully with their communities. By doing so, education becomes more relevant and impactful.

Each group of learners brings unique experiences, beliefs, and practices. The goal is to harness these assets to create a transformative learning environment. This recommendation goes beyond simply understanding the context; it calls for actively transforming it. A key resource for driving this transformation is the idealism and optimism learners bring, which can act as powerful drivers of change.

## 7.6.2 Expanding Education Policy for Transformative Change

This study concludes with a call to policymakers and education governance actors—those who operate within the conceived space of schooling, as theorised by Lefebvre (1991)—to fundamentally expand their understanding of educational space and the possibilities it holds. To draw on the metaphorical spirit of Isaiah 54:2, there is an urgent need to “enlarge the site of the tent”: to reimagine the spatial, ideological, and material configurations of schools in ways that are expansive, inclusive, and grounded in justice. Below, I make some practical recommendations aligned with this call, focused on the funding mode, teaching staff, school buildings, school journeys, the needs of diverse bodies and a framework for contextualised education. These recommendations are not prescriptive conclusions, but rather provocations intended to spark dialogue among a range of stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, caregivers, and critically, children themselves.

Contrary to Tyack and Cuban’s (1995) suggestion that education systems tinker towards utopia holding onto deep and lofty aspirations that are followed by small scale changes this study argues that, in the South African context, current trajectories—such as the closure of rural farm schools and the dominance of efficiency discourses—may reflect a gradual tinkering away from utopia. These shifts, often framed as pragmatic or rational, risk disinvesting in the very communities that most urgently require transformative investment. This recommendation in policy relates in particular to the funding and physical construction of schools. A central concern lies in the ongoing bifurcation of the education system. The current **quintile-based funding model** has not resolved the deep-seated structural inequalities between affluent and fee-free schools, many of which are situated in rural and township contexts. These schools, while technically free, remain under-resourced and overcrowded. Since funding is linked to enrolment numbers, there is often an incentive to increase learner intake without a corresponding increase in infrastructure or teaching capacity. Is it possible in such spaces to see school fees in a way that focuses on equity as opposed to equally having no parent pay? Is it possible that guardians/ parents who can pay some fee do so? This is but one way as stated by Christie (2016) we take the perspective of the poorest school in the system as a focal point for policy and to work towards changes that prioritise and value these kinds of schools.

The second recommendation is for policy to move further towards equity-driven staffing—one that centres the lived realities of learners and educators in the most marginalised schools. This could include, but need not be limited to, reviving and enhancing the implementation of incentives for **exceptional teachers** working in remote or difficult-to-staff schools. As discussed in this study there is a large amount of literature pointing to children leaving the rural/ township to the more urban areas and the same can be said of (good) teachers (Cervone, 2017).

Thirdly, at the policy level, this requires a recalibration of **how schools are conceptualised, built**, and embedded within communities. Schools should be viewed not merely as instructional spaces, but as spatial expressions of social values—capable of reflecting and reinforcing communal care, access, and dignity. As this study argues, drawing on decolonial theory and Lefebvrian spatial analysis, architecture is never neutral. When uncritically adopted, school designs often reproduce Eurocentric and institutional norms that alienate learners from their cultural and material contexts. Accordingly, policy should mandate critical and community-rooted design processes—both when constructing new schools and when renovating existing ones. This includes the robust and critical involvement of communities in the planning and design of educational infrastructure, not as passive recipients but as epistemic contributors. Particular emphasis should be placed on including the voices of children, whose creativity and spatial sensibilities offer valuable insights into the kinds of environments that are most meaningful and empowering. Such engagement must be critically reflective, as coloniality is so deeply entrenched that even previously disadvantaged communities may, often unconsciously, rely on colonial frameworks to address their own challenges (Luckan, 2022). Practically, can classrooms be round? So as to dismantle the front and back binary and foster dialogue and shared visibility? Can signage and information in the school go beyond what is in the school grounds but may be useful to the learners/ community? Can school signage be multilingual? Can parents have a space of their ‘own’ in the school? How can architecture problematise the hierarchy in schools and encourage equality? The schools examined in this study that embodied spatial permeability and openness—such as those with accessible grounds—demonstrated the potential for community symbiosis. These spaces were capable of hosting informal markets and weekend activities, and even accommodating livestock grazing. They offer a compelling model for how schools might serve as permanent sites for community centres, social services, and early

childhood facilities—especially in contexts where land is both scarce and contested. Policy should also investigate mechanisms to incentivise local landowners, such as farmers, to support access to schooling. This could include enabling school transport services to collect learners from routes crossing private land. Such measures foster a relational model of care and shared accountability between public institutions and private actors. Fundamentally, this approach reflects the ethic of Ubuntu, a thread that runs throughout the study. It reaffirms the mutual interdependence between schools and communities—where the school is not an isolated institution, but a node within the moral and social fabric of community life. This vision is both decolonial and transformative, as it places epistemic confidence in community knowledge, lived experience, and spatial agency—rather than in formal schooling alone, abstracted from local realities.

Another recommendation to address the persistent racial divisions rooted in South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history, it is imperative that educational policy foregrounds multicultural education from the early years. Not just in textbooks and curricula but in the bodies that make classrooms and schools space. Race must not be allowed to persist as an organising principle in education. Given that early childhood is a formative period for social identity development, schools must be supported to actively cultivate inclusive environments that challenge internalised racial segregation and stereotypes. Educational policies should mandate and resource deliberate, structured opportunities for cross-racial interaction and collaboration—not only through competitive interschool events, but also through making it possible for more schools to enrol and employ a diverse population and through cooperative, curriculum-integrated activities promote shared values, empathy, and mutual understanding. Practically, ‘monoculture’ schools need to ask why other cultures are not coming to the school. What is hindering them? What might we benefit if they shared the space with them? What are we currently missing out on? Drawing from successful initiatives in Kenya and Nigeria (Aydin, 2013; Kibui et al., 2015), these efforts must be designed to enable sustained engagement across racial, cultural, and socio-economic differences.

In essence, the recommendations are towards a bold reimagining of the purpose of education so that macro-level education policy can enable contextually responsive micro-level adaptations. Such flexibility would empower communities to negotiate, imagine, and transform their spatial realities—producing educational environments that are materially just, symbolically resonant, and pedagogically emancipatory.

## **Teaching with Intention: A Framework for Contextualised Education**

As part of its recommendations, this study introduces a Teaching with Intention Framework, which integrates the African Union descriptors (exit competences) of initial teacher education in Africa, drawn from the African Framework of Standards and Competences for the Teaching Profession (African Union, 2019), with the findings of this research. This framework offers practical strategies for teachers to enhance their professional practice. Given its focus on the African context, the framework aligns with the study's emphasis on education that is both contextually relevant and resonant with local realities.

The proposed framework centres on Professional Values, Attributes, and Commitment, encouraging teachers' praxis in enacting these exit competencies through practical applications in pedagogy and lesson planning. It emphasises transformative education that promotes social justice by leveraging the concept of space—encompassing the material, relational, and mental dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991)—in teaching and learning.

Focusing on one of the five professional domains, the framework is designed to support teachers in planning, implementing, and reflecting on their teaching practices. It highlights four key aspects: Care (Respect), Context, Diversity, and Partnership (see Appendix L). Each component is accompanied by two reflective questions for educators to consider during the planning stage, throughout the teaching and learning process, and after the lesson is delivered. These reflective questions are also designed to be explored collaboratively with learners and fellow teachers. For instance, within the Care (Respect) aspect, teachers might engage learners in discussing how the lesson encourages care for environments or relationships.

Crucially, the framework does not mandate that every lesson address all four aspects simultaneously. Instead, throughout a series of lessons, teachers are encouraged to ensure that their teaching and learning practices collectively address all four dimensions, fostering a balanced and holistic approach to education.

## **7.7 Recommendations for Further Research**

In conducting any research, certain decisions must be made to define the scope, which in turn shapes the understanding of the study's findings. As mentioned in the introduction, this study focused on the lived experiences of children attending schools that reflect the 'typical' primary schooling experience in South Africa. Given this specific focus, there are several opportunities for future research to build upon and expand the study's findings. This section outlines three key recommendations for further research: engaging with the perspectives of parents and guardians, exploring a wider variety of school contexts, and incorporating a stronger focus on educational policy and interventionist research.

### **7.7.1 Engaging the Voices of Parents and Guardians**

This study concentrated on three schools in the eastern region of Makhanda, situated in rural and township contexts, primarily foregrounding the voices of children through methods such as time-space diaries, mobile ethnography, and interviews. During some interactions with parents or guardians, particularly in facilitating mobile ethnography, opportunities arose for informal discussions. In some cases, parents, guardians, or siblings expressed a desire to engage with the researcher regarding their child's or younger sibling's behaviour, indicating a level of trust and belief that the researcher might relate to the child more effectively.

Given the significant role parents and guardians play in the transitional space between school and home—where much of a child's identity is formed—the first recommendation for future research is to include parents and guardians more deliberately in the data collection process, particularly in the production of space. Their perspectives could offer valuable insights, which would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the educational environment alongside those of teachers, caretakers, and community members. Triangulating these insights with children's experiences would deepen the analysis and enhance the robustness of the findings.

### **7.7.2 Exploring Diverse Schooling Contexts**

As noted, this study focused on three primary schools within the same socio-economic quintile, located in peri-rural areas. Over time, it became evident that these schools shared many similarities. Future research could benefit from expanding this scope to include different schooling contexts, such as quintile 5 schools, urban schools, or secondary

education institutions. By doing so, it would be possible to test whether the themes identified in this study—such as relationality, idealism, and porousness—persist in different educational environments.

The decision to exclude schools from other quintiles and focus only on primary education was made to avoid a comparative approach, opting instead to focus on one context and fully explore its particularities. However, future research could explore if and how colonial legacies manifest in different school settings, as the findings from this study may not be fully generalisable across various contexts.

### **7.7.3 Integrating Educational Policy into the Analysis**

This study primarily examined lived experiences and the production of space within schools, without engaging deeply with educational policy. A more direct analysis of educational policy, understood as a form of ‘conceived space,’ would have enriched the study by illuminating the connections between macro-level policy directives and micro-level understanding and experiences within schools. As part of the conceived space, educational policy plays a significant role in shaping the perceived space within schools, which was described as being ‘colonised’ by this perceived space (Middleton., 2016; Schreiner, 2016). Future studies may benefit from drawing on spatial theory to analyse how educational policies contribute to the production of space. This approach could help clarify the relationship between broader policy frameworks and localised educational experiences, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how policy shapes schooling environments.

### **7.7.4 The Potential for Interventionist Research**

The findings of this study align well with the possibility of interventionist research, though this was not a primary focus of the current study. Future research could explore the practical implementation of decolonial approaches in primary schools, as suggested by the study’s findings. Such interventionist research would provide valuable insights into the practical challenges, outcomes, and implications of decolonial actions in the education sector.

Engaging in interventionist research would distinguish future studies from purely theoretical work and align them more closely with the transformative goals of spatial theory, particularly those influenced by Marxist thought. This would also address key questions surrounding the practical difficulties of decolonising primary education. Future research could draw on socio-cultural research methods or Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which offer

frameworks for conducting holistic, social, collaborative, and transformative research (Engeström, 2018; Roth & Lee, 2020). In line with this study's findings, future research should adopt contextualised, collaborative, and responsive approaches that recognise and cultivate collective knowledge to transform education.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This study has made significant contributions to the fields of decolonial and spatial theory by bridging the gap in research related to primary education in South Africa. By applying Lefebvre's spatial theory and decolonial thought to primary schooling, this research offers novel insights into how colonial legacies continue to shape children and their broader everyday school environments - **Ligotshwa Lise Manzi**. The integration of these theories has revealed how the spatial production of schools, even in the context of primary education, perpetuates coloniality, limiting opportunities for social transformation.

The findings of this study highlight three critical meta-conclusions: the persistence of colonial legacies, the centrality of relationships in spatial production, and the transformative potential of recognising children's agency. The enduring influence of colonial spatial arrangements and ideologies continues to impact how children relate to one another and experience schooling. At the same time, this study has emphasised that relationships—among children, teachers, and communities—are fundamental to spatial productions, suggesting that educational transformation must be deeply relational and contextually grounded.

Moreover, the study reveals that children resist colonial frameworks through everyday actions, offering powerful insights into how education might be reimagined. Children's lived experiences, as observed in their social interactions and resistance to structured routines, challenge adult assumptions and reveal alternative pathways for thinking about education that are more inclusive, collective, and relational. The children in the study have demonstrated that agency, expressed through their actions, is key to reshaping their social and educational environments.

In summary, the study calls for reconsidering education policies and practices that continue to be shaped by colonial and capitalist frameworks. It emphasises the need to create space for children's voices and actions in reimagining education. Teachers, policymakers, and communities are urged to resist deficit narratives, recognise the richness of local contexts,

and embrace pedagogies that are responsive to the lived experiences of children. In doing so, there is potential for decolonising education and fostering more equitable and connected futures for all learners.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Letter



Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee  
Main Admin Building, Drostyd Road, Makhanda, 6139, South Africa  
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa  
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7314  
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za  
<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>  
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045

14 August 2024

Mr Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi  
Education  
Rhodes University  
Email: s.nkosi@ru.ac.za

Review Reference: Nkosi20180906

Dear Mr Nkosi,

**Re: Human ethics renewal application: The production of social space in a rural socio-spatial system as is informs teaching and learning.**

This letter confirms that the above Annual Report has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC). Your Approval number is: Nkosi20180906

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period.

Please ensure that the Human Research Ethics Committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Human Research Ethics Committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

This approval is valid from 14 August 2024 to 14 August 2025.

Sincerely,

**Dr Janet Hayward**  
Chair: Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix B: Permission letter from the Eastern Cape Education Department



**STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY RESEARCH AND SECRETARIAT SERVICES**  
Steve Vukile Tshwete Complex • Zone 6 • Zwelitsha • Eastern Cape  
Private Bag X0032 • Bhisho • 5605 • REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: +27 (0)40 608 4773/4035/4537 • Fax: +27 (0)40 608 4574 • Website: [www.ecdoe.gov.za](http://www.ecdoe.gov.za)

Enquiries: B Pamla      Email: [babalwa.pamla@ecdoe.gov.za](mailto:babalwa.pamla@ecdoe.gov.za)      Date: 28 January 2019

Mr Nkosikhona Nkosi  
1 Drosty Street  
Grahamstown  
6139

Dear Mr. NS Nkosi

### **PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE DOCTORATE THESIS: THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL SPACE IN A RURAL SOCIO-SPATIAL SYSTEM AS IT INFORMS TEACHING AND LEARNING**

1. Thank you for your application to conduct research.
2. Your application to conduct the above mentioned research involving three (3) selected primary schools under the jurisdiction of Sarah Baartman District of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) is hereby approved based on the following conditions:
  - a. there will be no financial implications for the Department;
  - b. institutions and respondents must not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation;
  - c. you seek parents' consent for minors;
  - d. it is not going to interrupt educators' time and task;
  - e. you present a copy of the written approval letter of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) to the Cluster and District Directors before any research is undertaken at any institutions within that particular district;
  - f. you will make all the arrangements concerning your research;
  - g. the research may not be conducted during official contact time;
  - h. should you wish to extend the period of research after approval has been granted, an application to do this must be directed to Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation;

- i. your research will be limited to those institutions for which approval has been granted, should changes be effected written permission must be obtained from the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation;
  - j. you present the Department with a copy of your final paper/report/dissertation/thesis free of charge in hard copy and electronic format. This must be accompanied by a separate synopsis (maximum 2 – 3 typed pages) of the most important findings and recommendations if it does not already contain a synopsis.
  - k. you present the findings to the Research Committee and/or Senior Management of the Department when and/or where necessary.
  - l. you are requested to provide the above to the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation upon completion of your research.
  - m. you comply with all the requirements as completed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE document duly completed by you.
  - n. you comply with your ethical undertaking (commitment form).
  - o. You submit on a six monthly basis, from the date of permission of the research, concise reports to the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation
3. The Department reserves a right to withdraw the permission should there not be compliance to the approval letter and contract signed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE.
  4. The Department will publish the completed Research on its website.
  5. The Department wishes you well in your undertaking. You can contact the Director, Ms. NY Kanjana on the numbers indicated in the letterhead or email [nelisa.kanjana@ecdoe.gov.za](mailto:nelisa.kanjana@ecdoe.gov.za) should you need any assistance.



**NY KANJANA**  
**DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY AND RESEARCH**  
**FOR SUPERINTENDENT-GENERAL: EDUCATION**



## Appendix C: Letter to learners

Dear Learner

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a student and a teacher at the Department of Education in Rhodes University. I am doing some exciting research on: your learning experiences as a child and a learner in Grahamstown. The research I would like to do with you is interested in how you and your classmates learn in your daily lives in Grahamstown both inside and outside of school. I was wondering whether you would give me some of your time to start this discussion. I would like to spend time with your grade six classroom in your school for 1 week to learn how it is like learning in your shoes. During the one week, you and your classmates will be asked to write down:

1. **What** you enjoyed doing or found interesting?
2. **Where** you travelled to and **how**?
3. What you **learned**?
4. And **who** you were with?

To help me I will also video record your lessons. In all the video recordings, I will block out your faces and ensure that nobody sees the videos except my supervisors, research assistant and myself. I may also request an interview with you. I will record all interviews but will still make sure no one knows that what you said was said by you.

I also be running a generative workshop with you, your peers, parents, teachers, principals and other community members at the end of the research to present the findings to the research community. This will be followed by a discussion on recommendations you and the rest of the participants can make towards transforming teaching and learning. These recommendations will be shared with various schools and educational communities. Remember, this is not a test, it is not for marks and it is only if you want to, which means that you do not have to do it. Also, if you decide halfway through that you want to stop being involved in this research project, this is completely your choice and will not affect you negatively in any way. If you do wish to stop then I will not mention or use anything you have said or done in my work.

I will not be using your own name but you will be given the opportunity to make one up so no one can identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely in a secure locker and be destroyed 5 years after I have completed my project. I am also hoping we have fun doing this and that you and your classmates feel comfortable as we get to know each other. Your parents or guardians have also been given an information sheet and consent form, but at the end of the day it is your decision to join us in the study. This means even if your parent/s or guardians say yes to you participating you can still say no.

I look forward to working with you! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you

SIGNATURE

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: [s.nkosi@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.nkosi@ru.ac.za)

0812721346

## Appendix D: Letter to school principal

DATE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a Ph.D. student and staff member at the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project. My research will focus on the grade 6 children's' learning both inside and outside of the school.

The purpose of the research is to understand and explore children's' learning experiences both inside and outside of the school: what they learn, how they learn and who they learn with as well as the moods, feelings, and attitudes towards learning in different places with differing power relations and affordances.

The objectives of the research are

- Understand how 'in school' learning relates to out of school learning,
- What learners imagine learning to be and be like,
- What opportunities for learning learners' movement patterns make possible?
- How is power distributed in learners learning process?
- Finding out where, apart from school, learners go to learn?

The prospective benefits of the research are a greater understanding of children's' learning that could improve the curriculum and encourage learners to exercise their voice, think critically and encourage parental involvement. The prospective benefit also includes a list of recommendations to the school from the entire groups of participants on how we can enrich, improve and/or transform aspects of teaching and learning.

I would like to invite your school to participate in this research which I hope will add to the knowledge in our field of work and also be interesting to both you and those involved. The reason why I have chosen your school is because it is a government school in the east of Grahamstown with teachers and grade six learners. Working closely with the grade 6 teacher, I shall ensure this research does not infringe upon teaching and learning.

In the research, I would like your permission to spend one week on the school premises for around 4 hours a day. In this week, I would like to sit in one of the grade six classrooms and observe and take notes of the lessons offered to grade sixes. During this time, I would also like the permission to attend assemblies and walk around the school to get a feel of the school ethos and the spaces that the children have access to on a daily basis at school.

During the week, I will request the grade six learners to complete time-space diaries. This would help generate information on where they go and what they do daily, as well as what they are interested in and what they are learning in these spaces. I would also like to interview the teachers, and conduct informal interviews with the learners on their time-space diaries.

In the second phase of the research project I will then select 1 or 2 grades six learners to work closely with. The selection criteria will be based on data (observations, time-space diaries and interviews) that provides insights that help understand how learners learn inside and outside of the school as what they learn and how they feel about learning. I and my research assistant would then desire to accompany these learners in their daily routines in and outside school provided they invite me and do not mind having me join them. This would only be in groups and only in public spaces (to ensure that I am never alone with the learners). This will be for one week and in relation to the insights made available in the data: observations, time-space diaries and interviews.

In this phase I may also interview the selected learner's friends and/or family to better understand a particular activity or exercise with their permission. The learner/s will also be given a camera to take photos of images of the places that they visit and enjoy visiting that may later be used to elicit a discussion on their learning in these spaces.

After the data from phase one and two has been analysed the third phase will be scheduled. This phase consists of a generative workshop that I would like you to be part of focused on providing feedback to the research community (learners, parents, teachers, principals and other community members) and transforming teaching and learning. This generative workshop that forms phase three will have two goals. The first goal is have the co-researchers hold the 'primary' researcher (i.e. me) accountable by providing feedback to the learning/ research community comprising of teacher, parents, learners and other community members. The second goal is to begin a collaborative deliberation that will generate recommendations that will feed into the transformation of teaching and learning. The recommendations from the workshop will then be shared with yourself as well as any other educational institutions or initiatives in hope to provide schools with research that contributes to possibilities for improving, enriching and/or transforming teaching and learning. These groups include but are not limited to other schools in Grahamstown, the Rhodes VC's schools project and Gadra Education.

Throughout the research I would like to collecting data via observation sheets, video recordings and semi-structured interviews. In all the data generated learners, teacher and school's identity will not be revealed, pseudonyms will be used and faces and any signs that may revealing the school will be blurred. At the end of the write-up I will also ask you to read through what has been written before any final submission is made. The research participants will not be disadvantaged in any way. All participants and the school will be reassured that they can withdraw at any time and have their input excluded from the published work without any penalty. Participants will not be paid for this study.

All research data will be kept in a secure locker and then it will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely

SIGNATURE:

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: [s.nkosi@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.nkosi@ru.ac.za)

0812721346

## Appendix E: Letter to parents

DATE

Dear Parent

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a Ph.D. student and a teacher in the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project, which is titled “How the production of social space in a rural socio-spatial system influences the learning of grade 6 learners”. The purpose of the research is to understand and explore children’s learning experiences both inside and outside of the school: what they learn, how they learn and who they learn with as well as the moods, feelings, and attitudes towards learning indifferent places with differing power relations.

I would like to ask for your permission to have your child join me, the grade 6 teacher, and other grade 6 learners in what I think will be an interesting and insightful journey as a participant and co-researcher in the research. The research will involve me observing the grade 6 class your child is part of as they learn for one week. During the one week learners will also record the places they travel to, what they do and who they spend time with and what they learn as they move from place to place. The reason why I have chosen your child’s class is because it is situated in Rhini a rural township east of Grahamstown with several challenges and I would like to see how the grade 6 learners including your child learn in such environments. If I interview your child I will audiotape it so that I may later analyse it. I may also video record the teaching that takes place during the week. All faces on the video will be blurred so that your child and any other child’s identity is not revealed.

At the end of the research a generative workshop focused on providing feedback to the research community (learners, parents, teachers, principals and other community members) and transforming teaching and learning will take place that I would like to invite you to be part of will take place. This generative workshop that forms phase three will have two goals. The first goal is have the co-researchers hold the ‘primary’ researcher (i.e. me) accountable by providing feedback to the research community comprising of teacher, parents, learners and other community members. The second goal is to begin a collaborative deliberation that will generate recommendations that will feed into the transformation of teaching and learning. The recommendations from the workshop will then be shared with various educational institutions or initiatives including your child’s school in order to provide schools with research that can transform teaching and learning. These groups include but are not limited to other schools in Grahamstown, the Rhodes VC’s schools project and Gadra Education.

This process I hope will benefit both your child and the school. All participants including yourself and your child can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and your child will not be paid for this study. I am not interested in your child’s academic performance or participation in school. I am more interested on their daily activities outside of the school and how they learn in different places, in addition to the school. This is so that we can consider how to build strong links between schools and communities and enrich the curriculum.

Your child’s name and your identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. The participants privacy will be maintained in all published and presented data resulting from the study. This is because I will use pseudonyms throughout the research. I will also work closely with your child’s teacher so that we both may do our best to ensure your child’s best interests. All research data will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the project. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNATURE:

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: [s.nkosi@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.nkosi@ru.ac.za)

0812721346

## **Appendix F: Letter to teacher**

Dear NAME

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project.

I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project, which is titled “How the production of social space in a rural socio-spatial system influences the learning of grade 6 learners”. The purpose of the research is to understand and explore children’s learning experiences both inside and outside of the school: what they learn, how they learn and who they learn with as well as the moods, feelings, and attitudes towards learning in different places with differing power relations.

The reason why I have chosen you for the research project is because you are a grade six teacher in a school in the east of Grahamstown. I also believe that you are the best person to partner with in conduct this research, provided you approve, because you are currently residing in Grahamstown and have taught in Grahamstown for five or more years and as a result have knowledge about the place and the learners that is valuable.

The research hopes to explore how learners learn inside and outside the school to see how such knowledge can strengthen the links between schools and communities and enrich the curriculum.

Initially I would like to spend time in your classroom observing teaching and learning for the first week. During this time, the learners will be asked to complete time-space diaries where they will be recording, sketching or taking photos of the places the public places travel to, what they do there and who they interact with, and what they are learning in these places, as well as what they are interested in. This excludes any private information and my focus is on public activities and movements like catching a taxi and playing soccer with a friend. This is to provide me with data that helps me see your daily lives inside and outside the classroom. I may also desire to interview both yourself and some learners after the week and have quick discussions during breaks.

After the week, I will then, with your support, select 2 or 3 three grade six learners who had interesting time-space diaries that may have implications for teaching and learning. I and a research assistant would then like to accompany this smaller group of learners in their daily lives inside and outside the classroom to gain greater insight into their experiences that may relate to pedagogical interactions. As mentioned above this excludes private places and activities and will always be in groups. My focus is largely on what they do and learn at school during free time and what they do and learn with their friends in public.

Data will be generated through observation notes that I will be taking during the week in your classroom space. With your permission, I will also be using a video recorder to record both teaching and learning so that I can analyse it later. Should you wish to reflect on the data with me, I would be happy to include you in this process. In the video footage, all faces will be blurred. The usage of the video recorder is to ensure that I have records of both the verbal and non-verbal communication as well as the usage of the space. All data collected will be kept confidential and will only be seen by myself, the research assistant and my supervisors.

After the data has been analysed a generative workshop will be scheduled. I would like you to be part of this workshop focused on providing feedback to the research community (learners, parents, teachers, principals and other community members) and transforming teaching and learning. This generative workshop will have two goals. The first goal is have the co-researchers hold the 'primary' researcher (i.e. me) accountable by providing feedback to the learning/ research community comprising of teacher, parents, learners and other community members. The second goal is to begin a collaborative deliberation that will generate recommendations that will feed into the transformation of teaching and learning. The recommendations from the workshop will then be shared with your school as well as any other educational institutions or initiatives in hope to provide schools with research that transforms teaching and learning. These groups include but are not limited to other schools in Grahamstown, the Rhodes VC's schools project and Gadra Education

Your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing in the project. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be kept in a secure locker and then destroyed 5 years after completion of the project.

You will not be disadvantaged in any way. Your participation is voluntary, so you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: [s.nkosi@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.nkosi@ru.ac.za)

0812721346

## Appendix G: Letter to parents/guardians

(Only sent to parents whose children have been invited to be part of the purposive sample)

Dear Parent/Guardian

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project, which is titled “How the production of social space in a rural socio-spatial system influences the learning of grade 6 learners”. The purpose of the research is to understand and explore children’s learning experiences both inside and outside of the school: what they learn, how they learn and who they learn with as well as the moods, feelings, and attitudes towards learning in different places with differing power relations. Your child has been selected as one of the five children I along with a research assistant would love to have the opportunity to work with more closely in completion of my Ph.D. project. This is because your child has provided insightful data about their daily lives and learning experiences that I believe can be taken forward and perhaps guide teaching and learning. In order to do the above I would like to request your permission along with your child’s permission to work with your child for a duration of one week doing the following:

1. Joining your child both at school and outside school as a co-researcher of place and learning, as they travel to school and back and as they play with friends or engage in public activity. This will be to understand their views on these spaces and what they are learning as they move around. This will always be done in groups along with me so that I am never alone with your child and I will not accompany or interview your child in any private spaces.
2. Re-Issue your child with diary to continue to document their daily experiences.
3. Issue your child with a camera to take photos of meaningful moments and places in their daily lives.
4. Interview your child on regular occasions along with another learner/s about their movements, and their learning experiences.

Both the principal and the teachers at school are aware of the above and will also ensure that your child’s best interests are always prioritised. Your child will not be disadvantaged in any way. S/he will be reassured that s/he can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and your child will not be paid for this study. I am not interested in your child’s academic performance or participation in school.

Your child’s name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. His/her individual privacy will be maintained in all published and presented data resulting from the study. This is because I will use pseudonyms throughout the research. I will also work closely with your child’s teacher so that we both may do our best to ensure your child’s best interests.

All research data will be destroyed 4 years after completion of the project. I would also love to meet with you to discuss all the above and give you an opportunity to raise any questions and concerns you may have.

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: s.nkosi@ru.ac.za

0812721346

## **Appendix H: Letter to learners**

(Only sent to learners invited to be part of the purposive sample)

Hi

My name is Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi. I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. research project. I am doing research on: your learning experiences as a child and a learner in Grahamstown both inside and outside of the school. I really enjoyed reading what you wrote about your activities, learning and movements in the time-space-diaries. I think a lot of what you said can help teacher and learners in many schools to teach and learn better. I hope you also had fun writing about your life!

I would love to ask you for permission to join you and your friends/schoolmates in the afternoons for one week to understand both you and what you do better, and how you are learning outside of the school. Do not worry this is not for marks and just like the diaries everything you say and do will be kept confidential: I'm not going to share it with anybody and when I write about it we will use a made-up name so that people do not know who I am talking about. This is what would happen for one week:

1. I would be joining you both at school and outside school. This will always be done in groups so that I am never alone with you and I will not follow or interview you in any private spaces. I only would like to accompany you to school and back and join you on any public activities like playing games and sport etc.
2. I will give you back your diaries to complete for another week.
3. I will issue you with a camera to take photos of meaningful moments and places in their daily lives. You will also get an opportunity to talk about these moments and places should you wish to do so.
4. I will also be interview you on regular basis along with another learner/s.
5. You will also get the chance to see what I have written so that you know what I am writing and that I have understood your story, and what you are saying correctly before I hand it in.

Both the principal and the teachers at school your school are aware of the above and will also ensure that your best interests are always prioritised.

I can do any of the above without your permission and your parents or guardians and you can decide to pull out at any point in the research and if you don't want me joining you and your groups of friends you also can tell me

and ill respectfully remain behind. I would love to sit down and talk to both you and your parents or guardians about the whole process so that you and your parents or guardians can ask questions and talk about any concerns they may have.

Looking forward to hearing from you in what I hope will be a fun and exciting week.

Nkosikhona Sean Nkosi

6 Glanville street

Grahamstown

6139

Email: s.nkosi@ru.ac.za

0812721346

## **Appendix I: Observation protocol**

Detailed observation template

All happenings in the class/ school will be recorded to provide a wealth of data and then will be rewritten on the Classroom Observation write-up Form

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| Who is participating in this incident or ritual<br>Why has this happened<br>What dreams and hopes do participants have? |  |
| Rhythm identification   |  |
| Polyrhythmia:<br>Eurhythmia,<br>Isorhythmia   |  |

## Appendix J: Interview

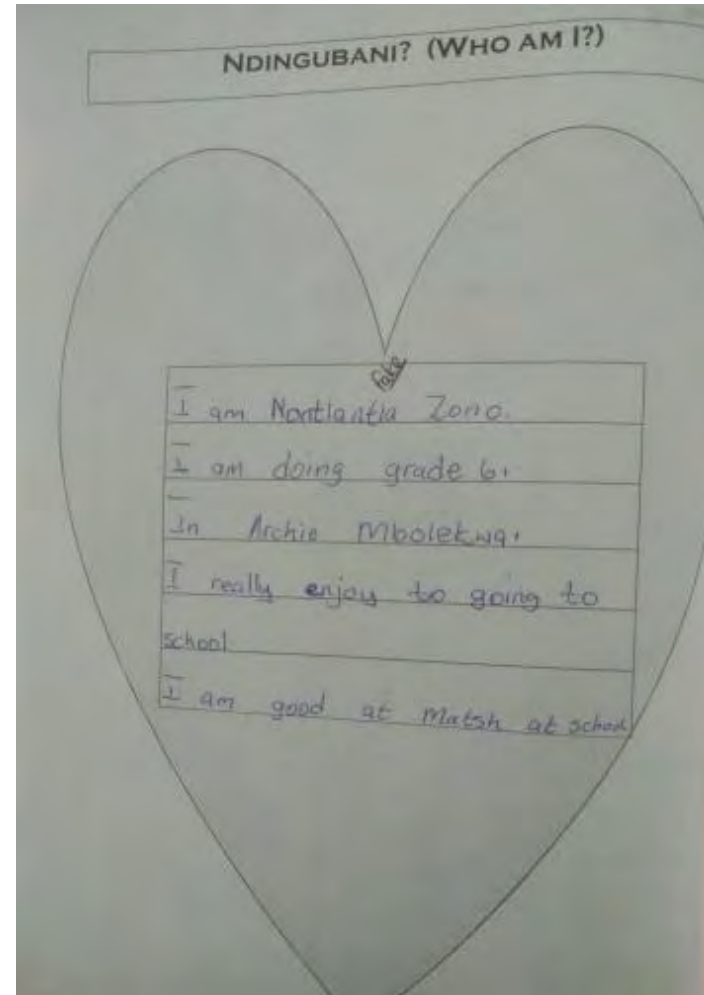
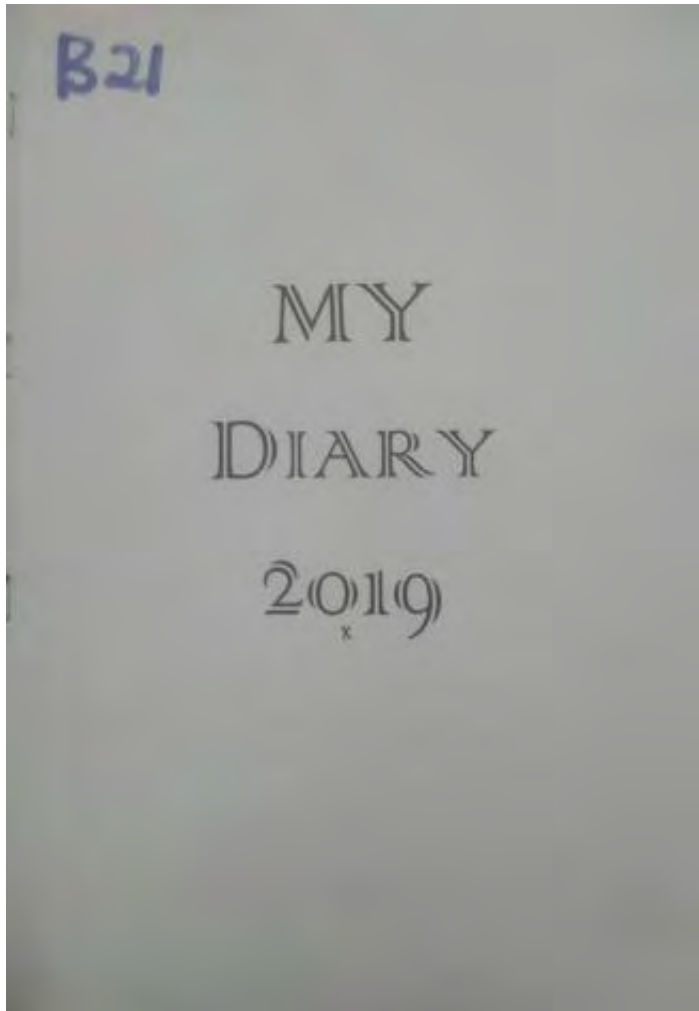
The majority of the questions asked in the semi-structured interview will be based on the time-space diaries and observations as a result the list below serves as a guide and some questions may be adapted. The list is just to show how the questions prioritise the children's learning in space, relationships and experiences.

|  |
|--|
| The interview shall be semi-structured and so the following questions are primarily to guide the discussion and will be adapted. |
| <b>TEACHER: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT</b>   |
| 1. How long have you been teaching for?  |
| 2. How long have you been teaching at this particular school?  |
| 3. What subjects/s and grades do you teach?  |
| 4. How is it like teaching in this school?   |
| 5. What do you like most about teaching in this school?  |
| 6. What do you least like about teaching in this school?   |
| <b>TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT A PARTICULAR LEARNER</b>   |
| 1. How would you describe _____'s behaviour in class?  |
| 2. How would you describe _____'s performance in the subject/s you teach?  |
| 3. Does _____ have any close friends in the class?   |
| 4. Does _____ participate in any extramural activities?  |
| 5. Is there anything you feel I should know about _____ that maybe important to their identity, learning and experiences etc.    |
| 6. How would you describe _____'s behaviour in class?  |
| 7. Is there anything you would change about this school or the learners? If yes what would you change and why?                   |
| <b>PARENTS/ COACHES/ COMMUNITY MEMBERS/ FRIENDS AND SIBLINGS</b>   |
| 1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? –Who you are, where you are from and what you are doing etc.                            |

|  |
|--|
| 2. What is your relationship with _____?   |
| 3. How would you describe _____?   |
| 4. What do you find most interesting about _____?  |
| 5. What activities do you perform with _____?  |
| 6. What activities does _____ enjoy doing?   |
| 7. What activities does _____ least enjoy?   |
| 8. Is there anything you feel I should know about _____?   |
| 9. How is it like staying in Rhini?  |
| 10. What do you like most about staying here?  |
| 11. What do you like least about staying here?   |
| 12. Is there anything you would change about Rhini? If yes what would you change and why?  |
| 13. Did you attend school? If so which school/s did you attend?  |
| <b>PARENTAL SCHOOL CHOICE</b>  |
| 1. Who selected the school _____ attends?  |
| 2. Was this the first option? Why?   |
| <b>QUESTIONS DIRECTED TO THE LEARNERS</b>  |
| 3. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? –Who you are, where you are from and what you are doing etc.  |
| 4. What do you enjoy doing?  |
| 5. What are your dream/ hopes?   |
| 6. How is it like staying in Rhini?  |
| 7. How is it like going to school at _____?  |
| 8. What activities does _____ enjoy doing and why?   |
| 9. What activities does _____ least enjoy and why?   |
| 10. Do you learn anything during these activities?   |
| 11. In your time-space diary you mentioned _____ can you tell me more about what happens there?  |
| 12. In your time-space diary I noticed you spend a lot of time with _____, why is this the case?   |
| 13. In your group of friends how do you make decisions?  |
| 14. Is there anything you would change about Rhini? If yes what would you change and why?  |
| 15. Is there anything you would change about this school or the learners? If yes what would you change and why?  |
| 16. Is there anything you feel I should know about any of school, home or community?   |
| 17. I want us to play a game, I will start a sentence then you will complete it.<br>a) My favourite time of the day is _____?<br>b) When I walk into school I feel _____?<br>c) When I walk out of school I feel _____?<br>d) I love learning about _____?<br>e) I learn best when I am _____? |
| 18. Is there anything you feel I should know about you and or your learning?   |



Appendix K: A Completed Time-Space Diaries B21



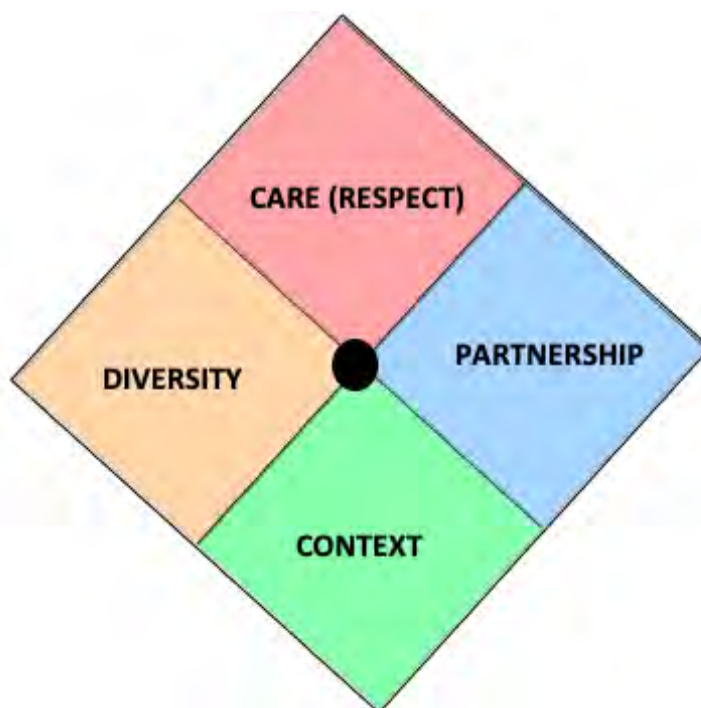


## Appendix L : Transcribed Time-Space Diaries B21

| MONDAY   | TUESDAY  | WEDNESDAY   | THURSDAY  | FRIDAY  | SATURDAY  | SUNDAY   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| BEFORE SCHOOL  | BEFORE SCHOOL  | BEFORE SCHOOL   | BEFORE SCHOOL   | BEFORE SCHOOL   | BEFORE SCHOOL   | BEFORE SCHOOL  |
| ##### I live in Extension 6. I live with my parents at home. I love going to school everyday. My favourite subject is Maths. I love Maths. I use private transport to get to school. In my transport, there are two girls that have a problem with me, every day they like fighting with me. I don't like the things they do to me, I want to change transports because they bully me everyday. They insult me everyday and I feel alone.                            | Today, I woke up, bathed, got on my transport and went to school. Our transport dropped us off in front of the school gate. I saw my friend and we went to class. Afterwards, we played outside of our classroom.  | I go to school with my transport. When I got there, I went to class and Miss Myoyo asked us to write fractions on the board and we did.   | Today, I woke up, bathed, got on my transport and went to school. Our transport dropped us off in front of the school gate. I saw my friend, Lisakhanya, and we went to class. Afterwards, we played outside of our classroom.        | I went to school with my transport and it started at Extension 10 and then drove to school. I got to school and waited for Lisa. We went to go put our bags in our classroom and went to assembly. Then the bell rang and we went to class.   | I went to church choir practice just to listen to the choir sing. It was very nice at the choir practice. We went home at 1 o'clock.  | We woke up, bathed, got dressed ate nice Rice Eriopies that we bought in town and went to church.  |
| DURING SCHOOL  | DURING SCHOOL  | DURING SCHOOL   | DURING SCHOOL   | DURING SCHOOL   | DURING SCHOOL   | DURING SCHOOL  |
| At break time, I played with my friend, my friend loves me a lot. We take our lunchboxes and our tuck money and eat together. It is nice to play with my friend, we share everything. My friend likes English, it is her favourite subject. At all times, we play nicely together. Oh! I thank God for the beautiful and loyal friend I have. I trust her with everything I have. I love my friend because she does everything the right way, she loves me.          | We went outside for break and played. Afterwards, we went to go buy chips, lollipops, sweets and ice- lollies. At second break, we went to go buy chips from the aunties that sell snacks. We stood next to the class and Ma'am Gqoke sent us to her car to put away books.                                    | We went to the first period and we wrote English. The next period was Maths, so we learned Maths. The next period was IsiXhosa followed by short break. Lisa and I went to go buy snacks.   | IsiXhosa was two periods, afterwards, it was break time. We played very nicely with my friend, Lisa until the bell rang for us to go back to class.   | We learned about living and non-living things in the Natural Science lesson. In IsiXhosa, we read nice stories.   | I got home, ate and read my books. My mother and I went to town and went to KFC. At KFC, we ate delicious meat. My mother bought me a nice pair of shoes and a top and we went home at 7 o'clock. | We got back from church and I read my books. Afterwards, I went to sleep, wake again to watch tv.  |
| AFTER SCHOOL   | AFTER SCHOOL   | AFTER SCHOOL  | AFTER SCHOOL  | AFTER SCHOOL  | AFTER SCHOOL  | AFTER SCHOOL   |
| After school, I go to Music class, afterwards, we go home. I use transport to get home from school. They all have a problem with me in my transport, they all don't like me. They never even said "happy birthday" to me on my birthday. I told them that I don't have a problem with them not speaking to me because at home, I am loved and at school, the teachers and my friends love me. I felt very angry but at the end of the day, it was a good day for me. | After school, I went to my transport and our transport driver asked us why we were late. We told them that we had to study Social Science and he told us to never do that again or else he promises to leave us behind next time. We apologised and told him that we will never do it again and he said "okay" | There was one girl that was a problem and I told her that if she continues to bully me, I will tell Miss Myoyo. I felt really alone and miserable. Afterwards, I went to go buy and the bell rang to go back to class. I went to ride my transport and went home. | The last period was Maths until school ended. I went straight to my transport and one child in my transport shouted at me and her name is Mikh; I never spoke to her again. My transport dropped me off at home in front of the gate. | After school, I went to the library and read a book. I told my transport to leave me behind and that I will walk home because I wanted to start the library. It was nice at the library, I read a book with nice stories in it. Even when I got home, I continued to read my books. | When we got home, we had delicious meat and my mother bought Coca-cola from a shop called "NoMutile". We ate and drank very cold cold drink. Afterwards, we went to bed.                          | Later, I watched Channel 309 on DSTV. I went to the shop to buy chips. My mother told us to go to bed because it is school the next day. We had a good night's sleep that night. |

## Appendix L: Teaching with Intention Framework

### Professional Values/ Attributes/ Commitment: Teaching with Intention Framework (TIF)



The four key areas for teachers to consider in their pedagogy and lesson preparation for transformative teaching in line with professional values, attributes and commitments.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Partnership  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who/ What is the lesson encouraging children/ teachers to partner with?</li> <li>• Are the partnerships reciprocal and equitable?</li> </ul>  |
| Context  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is my knowledge regarding the context micro-macro context?</li> <li>• How is what the learners are learning helping them understand/ respond/engage/appreciate/ transcend their context</li> </ul> |
| Care   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is this lesson encouraging the care for people and/ or the environment?</li> </ul>  |
| Diversity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What diverse perspectives are encouraged or presented?</li> <li>• How is this lesson encouraging an appreciation for diversity?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>A framework for applying exit-level competencies for teachers across all subject areas, fostering transformative pedagogy that is socially and spatially just</p> |  |