

TOWARDS GENDER EQUITABLE SCHOOLING ENVIRONMENTS: SPACE,  
GEOGRAPHY AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN IN TWO SOUTH AFRICAN  
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

**BY**

**NTOMBIKAYISE NGCOBO**

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School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban,

South Africa

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Supervisor: Professor P. Morojele

## **SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT**

This thesis has been submitted with/ without my approval

Supervisor: Professor P. Morojele

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## DEDICATION

*For hundreds of years women have had power. But the spotlight was on men who lead them.*

*Those days are over, I cannot stand here and pretend to be defending culture.*

*Culture evolves, but perishes when forced to remain static.*

*If we remain stuck in this belief, we would be unjust to our fellow brothers, sons and husbands.*

*I am saying this because this belief accords them power that they do not celebrate. This is the time to realize that girls/women and boys/men are equal partners.*

*Therefore, I call for action to act against this brutal belief. We owe it to our constitution.*

*I stand if women were the weakest link, the saying 'you strike a woman, you strike a rock', wouldn't exist.*

I have embarked through this un-predictable PhD journey in dedication to my mother Jabulisile Mirriam maSibiya kaMwenda, a woman of God who continuously prayed for me. I did it all for you, "you did very well in raising me" and dad in heaven is proud of you.

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of equality among and between girls and boys in education within the process of international goal setting has been emphasised. It is for this reason that the South African government has initiated and implemented a plethora of policies with the aim to address the social inequalities, for instance, gender inequalities in the education system. Consequently, there is a need for action strategies to ensure that the schooling system is equitably responsive to and affirmative of girls and boys from all backgrounds, in a bid to strive for transforming schools into arenas where every child is supported to develop to their best human potential. In South Africa, it is evident that girls and boys have equal access to schooling. However, girls' and boys' experiences differ in terms of how the curriculum is delivered and the conditions existing in the school environment. The dominant images of masculinity and femininity in schools conveyed to learners tend to portray girl learners as having lesser power and status than boy learners. Therefore, there is dissonance between the official policy and the lived schooling experiences of children. There is a need for an investigation to obtain in-depth understanding of girls' and boys' schooling experiences of gender in order to understand what informs the gap between the national policy and children's experiences of gender within the schools.

Therefore, this study sets out to investigate children's experiences of gender in two primary schools in Pinetown District, Durban in South Africa. The aim was to contribute insights into the complex dynamics of gender in these cultural contexts, and to learn from these children's

experiences ways in which to promote gender equality in the schools. Informed by constructionism theory, socialization theory, the new sociology of childhood studies and Butler's theory of performativity, the study was able to examine how gender was constructed among girls and boys in two primary schooling contexts. Constructionist theory served as a tool through which to illuminate insights into the complex relationship between childhood and gender. The socialisation theory revealed how children are socialised by people around them to fit into the categories of feminine and masculinities. The new sociology of childhood studies provided means to explain that children are active social actors who are capable to shape their own individualities. Butler's theory of performativity and alternative gender performances provided an additional lens to specific contexts in which there is the possibility for existing unequal gender relations are reconstituted.

Positioned within the critical interpretive paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative design. The study was conducted in the geographical area of two primary schools in Durban namely: Isiqalo and uZalo Primary (pseudonyms). Individual semi-structured interviews, gender-based focus group interviews, observation, document analysis and photovoice were utilized as methods of data collection with a total of 16 children (nine girls and seven boys). The data was transcribed and analysed manually using the pattern coding method. The findings revealed that in spite of equity policies in the education sector in place, the existing dominant discourses of gender were found to inform how teachers socialised girls and boys into inequitable gender relations. The spaces and places that girls and boys occupied within the school were ascribed with specific gender differences, influencing children to actively perform gender mainly in conformity to dominant discourses of gender. This was evident in teachers' examples which fore-grounded the



role of nurture in shaping gender attributes. This indicated the role that the teachers played as agents of gender socialisation that supported the construction of the dominant discourses of gender. This affected the expectations that teachers place on children's behaviour, choices and performance. Girls were expected to clean classrooms while boys do outdoor jobs. This compromised the quality of children's schooling experience and posed barriers to learning for both girls and boys.

I also found the tendency to simplistically collapse feminine and masculine qualities into male and female, a division that does not serve justice. Instead, this constrained girls' and boys' abilities to perform gender beyond the preconceived gender prescriptions. In spite of all these constraints, during informal schooling girls and boys invented creative ways in which they performed gender in contravention to the dominant discourses of gender. The study recommends a consultative curriculum review and design that includes teachers and communities to embrace the multiplicity and fluidity of gender qualities, and to support girls and boys to develop to their best human potential, regardless of their gender. It recommends the centrality of listening to girls' and boys' experiences of gender and meanings they attached to gender, as a basis for devising strategies aimed at addressing gender inequalities in the schools. Based on the limitations of the current study, it is further recommended that longitudinal research studies be conducted in local school contexts to document patterns and shifts in children's experiences of gender over longer periods of time, in order to generate insights that could be used to ensure sustainable gender equitable schooling environments.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCING THE STUDY OF GENDER WITH SCHOOL CHILDREN**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis, I report on a qualitative study of children's schooling and experiences with the aim of finding out how to work towards the creation of a gender equitable school environment. I draw from the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1997), cycle of socialization (Harro, 2000) and the sociology theory of constructionism (Burr, 1995), to interrogate young children understanding and experiences of gender within a primary school context. Through children's eyes, I set out to narrate the social relationships and to investigate experiences that shape their social positioning and geographies in the stratified hierarchy of gendered social relationships. I reject the dominant constructions of children as passive and immature members of society, and foreground the active and innovative ways through which children navigate gendered spaces and places of their schooling context, and the implications of their experiences for equitable gender relations within the school context of two primary schools in Durban.

I was concerned in understanding the creative ways in which children exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the two primary schools. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology within the critical interpretivist paradigm, and

utilised individual and focus group interviews, observations, document analysis as well as a participatory photovoice technique as its methods of generation. Sixteen (16) purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) Grade 7 children (9 girls and 7 boys) aged between 13 and 14 years old participated in the study. This approach enabled the study to collect rich and valuable stories of girls' and boys' stories in relation to gender in the schools.

This chapter has been organized to address the background of the study, statement of the problem, the rationale, purpose and objectives of the study. It then presents the education contexts of the study namely: the international policy context, the national policy context and the geographical socio-cultural context, tracing the latter back from the era of democracy. The chapter concludes by discussing the theoretical and methodological reflections which guided the study in answering the research questions. The chapter ends by providing the significance of the study and providing a brief summary of each chapter in the thesis.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Through anecdotal personal and professional experience, I have observed that traditionally children were perceived as incompetent, weak, and vulnerable, up until recently when South Africa adopted Curriculum 2005, which emphasized the principles of democracy and empowerment, and sought to surpass apartheid education, which perpetuated race, class, gender inequalities and emphasised segregation. The dawn of democracy in South Africa, with its main values of equality, social justice and equity, bolstered the avant-garde notions of children as active members of society from whom valuable insights about society can be learnt. Indeed, the

role that children play in determining their lives and shaping social values and relations of gender was central to this thesis. As an educator and a researcher it becomes urgent for me to understand children's experiences of gender from children's own vantage point of view as this feeds in the bigger scheme of emancipation, democratization and valuing of children's experiences in their own right (Horton & Krafl, 2005). It was on the basis of this that I focused my study of gender on children, which was also informed by the notion of childhood as a socially constructed phenomenon, hence placing value on how children actively, in their own right, engage and navigate gender as part of their daily schooling experiences.

Schools are institutions of power-laden spatialities and contact zones where gender values, ideologies and practices interconnect in often highly unequal relations ((Moss & Petrie, 2002). For example, heterosexual men are accorded more power than others, resulting in relations of domination and subordination. Issues of language, social capital and power are also central to the question of gender equitable schooling experiences and relations (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Schools clearly reflect power-laden issues where teachers give instructions and girls and boys are expected to behave accordingly otherwise they are reprimanded, in a vicious cycle of gender socialization (Harro, 2000). In contrast, the Constitution of South Africa provides guidance on the values that must underlie the achievement of equitable schools. Such schools would encourage equal access for girls and boys as a social group, arouse passion that is shared in all areas of the curriculum and create a conducive environment whereby academic choices are socially acceptable. Such schools should promote critical consciousness of gender roles and the skills with which to understand and change competence in using and laying claim to conventionally masculine and feminine strengths alike.

### **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Over the previous decade there has been an expansion of research in the field of human geographies that is referred to as ‘children’s geographies’, for example Cahill (2007), Percy-Smith (2002), Matthews (2003), Holt (2011), Ryan (2005), Morrow (2008), Van Ingen and Halas (2006), Morrow (2008), Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2012), Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012). Despite the large quantity of literature on gender research in South Africa there is a major gap in the literature on children’s geographies. Horton and Krafl (2005) prompt that there is a desperate requirement for research in the field of children’s geographies and spaces. So far, the research I have come across is mainly on psychologically models that construct childhood.

From a literature point of view, there is insufficient information to facilitate an in-depth understanding of girls’ and boys’ gender-based experiences. There is not much known about the discourses and practices that affect their geographies. Hence, this study aims to investigate spaces and places within the school context. The knowledge gap calls for a need to establish a deeper understanding of how they navigate their gender-based experiences. Most of the literature about gender equality in schools is focused on either girls as subordinate or boys as dominant or vice versa. For me, it was interesting to study girls and boys together and hear their gender-based stories. Most literature treats them as two separate populations that seem impossible to work with together.

In this study I intended to move beyond psychological perspectives, whereby children have been seen as weak and deprived, perspectives that are based on models that construct childhood as a time of improvement to adulthood. I wish to understand girls and boys in Grade 7 as active agents in their spaces, agents who have valuable knowledge and experience of gender within the school, since they have spent seven years in the context. In this research I take a different stance to research with children and give them a rare opportunity to decide the stories they want to narrate about their own gendered lives. This assists me to have a deeper understanding of girls' and boys' experiences of gender.

My childhood experience of being raised in a patriarchal family as a girl motivated me to pursue the study of this nature. As a principal I suffer the consequences of my upbringing as a young girl, who was always cared for and supported, but who had other people taking decisions for me as I could not voice out what I think. I feel my time has come to break my cycle of socialisation. After 22 years of democracy in South Africa I was agitated when I a Grade 3 girl say “*sesinothisha omkhulu, oyintombazane*” (we now have a principal who is a girl). To me, it meant children still view only males as people who are supposed to be in power. Secondly, it sounded like a rare case to see a woman occupying the position of power. This further motivated me to embark on my PhD journey and work with young girls and boys and listen to their voices and empower them on the issues of gender.

## **1.4 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective behind the study was to research girls' and boys' experiences within the school environment in their primary school years. The study focused on listening to children's voices to interrogate and narrate gendered social relationship. I further explored the discourses and daily practices that shape children's geographies within the school context of two primary schools in Durban. I asked: what are creative ways in which children exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools? The nature of gender in and around the school context where I teach informed my decision to conduct a PhD thesis that aimed to find out more from children about their gender experiences and daily practices at school. The study is located within the new childhood studies (post-structural) paradigm. This is chosen because, from this viewpoint, the call is for the investigation of childhood to move past psychological based models that construct childhood as a time of improvement towards adulthood and that portray girls and boys as weak and deprived, as mentioned earlier (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

Viewing children as dynamic social agents who are skilled to shape their future and whose social connections are deserving of study in their own privilege is further the intention of this study. I view children as social performers that have authority in their own lives; they have a privilege to take an interest in research that will make their lives seen as valuable (Moss, 2001). In this study I viewed children as capable partners that are capable to contribute in research; hence I used participatory research methodology to address the questions below:



1. What are girls' and boys' stories of gender-based experiences in the context of two primary schools in Durban?
2. How do gender discourses and practices affect girls' and boys' geographies within these schooling contexts?
3. In what ways do girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools?

To address the above questions, the study adopted a qualitative research methodology within the critical interpretivist paradigm, and utilised individual and focus group interviews, observations, document analysis as well as a participatory photovoice technique as its methods of generation. The participatory research methodology allowed me to collaborate with children and explore their gender-based experiences as equal partners. A key methodological focus of the study was on children's gender-based experiences and discourses of gender within the schooling context as well as the ways in which children exercise their agency in navigating these experiences and discourses. Sixteen (16) purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) Grade 7 children (9 girls and 7 boys) aged between 13 and 14 years old, participated in the study. This enabled the study to collect rich and valuable stories of girls' and boys' stories in relation to gender in the schools.

## **1.5 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

Education in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal is structured around and informed by various international and national education policies on gender equitable schooling. Within this policy

context, parents, teachers and learners construct gender and navigate daily gendered practices within the school and their communities. This section briefly discusses the gender issues in South African education with an aim to show transformation in gender equality both at the international and national levels.

### **1.5.1 The international educational policy context**

Internationally since the 1990s Education for All has become the cornerstone of educational reform in many countries see for example (UNESCO, 2002; Miles & Ahuja, 2007; Miles & Singal, 2010). In 1990 at the Gathering on Education for All held in Thailand, the countries dedicated themselves to provide basic education to all its citizen as an essential human right and in particular to promote and encourage girls' access to education and gender-sensitive approaches to educational planning and development (UNESCO, 2000). This means the main principle agreed was that schools are about providing quality education for all children irrespective of race, class, culture, language and gender.

The Minister of Education in South Africa launched the Girls' Education Movement (GEM) in Parliament in the year 2003. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) encouraged the National Department of Education to establish the GEM in all nine provinces. The aim of the GEM is to support all schools to become answerable to the needs and rights of the girl child. Hence it is joined in the 'Child Friendly School Plus (CFS+)' which is a joint programme of UNICEF and of South Africa government. This means all schools were motivated and given support to take care of children who were not cared for. For this reason all

schools have institution learner support teams (ILST). Schools are further advised not to treat GEM in isolation or as a new programme however integrate its principles with the already existing activities. Schools understand GEM in their own way as a result activities are not the same. GEM activities includes girls and boys cleaning, taking care of environment and keeping the school yard clean, a suggestion box where girls and boys secretly reporting cases of sexual abuse and acting performances that provide awareness on gender-related topics, etc.

In the Education for All (EFA) objectives (UNESCO, 2000) of gender equality has been stressed and in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (United Nations, 2006). The gender equality issue has been a noteworthy worry in South Africa and other countries, in view of its connections to economic and urban duties. It is the contention of this study, that concept of ‘gender equality in education’ be aligned with the UNESCO (2003) interpretation, which alludes to the thought of girls and boys encountering similar experiences of interest or impediments in going to class, educational programs, and delivering measure up to learning accomplishments and resulting life openings. The following section briefly discusses education policy in South Africa, highlighting in particular the national education policy context.

### **1.5.2 The national education policy context**

The birth of democracy in the year 1994 resulted in transformation in education and curriculum advancement in South Africa. In the Constitution, the values give direction to the removal of apartheid from our schools. Furthermore, Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was introduced in 1997 with the hope of developing girls and boys who are critical thinkers and capable of making informed

decisions and responsible citizens who show the aptitudes important to work adequately with others. More importantly the curriculum encourages girls and boys to show respect to one another as the basic principle of human rights and recognising the reliance between individuals from society and nature. Consequently, girls and boys are therefore empowered to deal with the psychosocial demands of society. The curriculum assists girls and boys to have a comprehension of the financial requests in South African as an individual from a vote based society, in the nearby and worldwide setting.

Enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996 are the values of democracy, social justice and human dignity (Government Gazette, 2003). In tandem with this, the South African government has formulated and adopted numerous policies with the aim to address the social inequalities in the education system that were entrenched during the apartheid era. Furthermore, the South African Government committed itself to gender equality; as a result, a Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) was appointed by the Department of Education to redress issues relating to gender inequalities in education (Wolpe, 2013). White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), on inclusive education, also stresses the need to transform the schooling system in order to provide equitable and inclusive opportunities for all, including girls and boys. It asserts the need for action strategies to ensure that the schooling system is equitably responsive to, and affirmative of, girls and boys from all backgrounds, in a bid to strive for transforming schools into arenas where every child is motivated to grow to their best human possible.

A plethora of policies has also been implemented in tandem with the principles of inclusive and equitable advancement of the quality of teaching and learning and of the schooling experiences

for girls and boys. This includes Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), the National Curriculum Statements (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) and recently the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). Yet studies (Bennet, 2009; Reddy, 2010; Bhana & Pattman, 2010) indicate that gender inequalities are rife in South African schools, and their concomitant adverse effects such as gender-based violence continue to inequitably compromise schooling experiences of girls and boys.

The dominant gender constructions and expectations in South African schools continue to give ascendancy different types of masculinities over femininities in ways that do not uphold the principles of inclusive education and equitable gender relations. In this context, where there is a clear disparity between the official approach and the lived schooling experiences, two inevitable questions that must be answered then are: what role do teachers play in shaping gender relations in the schools? What can be learnt from this with a specific end goal to support teachers in their roles to equitably and inclusively support girls and boys, in the ways needed for them to achieve their best human potential? This study attempts to investigate the schooling and gender experience of both girls and boys, within the context of two primary schools in Durban.

The birth of democratic government in South Africa resulted in massive access of girls to the basic educations. This access was a result of the Constitution which guarantees the right to education for all irrespective of gender, race and age. The Government of South Africa devoted itself to gender relations and empowering women as a previously disadvantage group. As a result, there were policies formulated to prioritise women in all aspects of life beyond primary education that and monitor progress in their implementation.

As a result, the DBE, together with the provincial education departments (PED), initiated an impact to the national needs of advancing gender and make it with regard to societal responsibilities. With an aim to provide girls with support on career guidance the ‘Techno-Girl Programme’ was introduced. Girls and boys, must not be treated as homogenous categories in policy terms because one is not just a girl or boy, but a girl and boy of a particular culture; we therefore have to recognize how different status contrasts adversely on gender outcomes. The following section discusses the socio-cultural context of the study.

#### **1.5.2.1 Geographic and socio-cultural context of the study**

The study was conducted in two primary schools within the Pinetown District office (see Figure 1.1) of the Department of Education in the province of Kwa-Zulu- Natal. The two primary schools are in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit, which comprises 296 schools. These schools are situated in a densely populated semi-rural township in the northern part of the province. Both the schools have enrolled girls and boys starting from Grade R to Grade 7.

Durban is the city situated in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, in the past it was known as the Natal Colony. Durban is situated along the broad Kwa-Zulu Natal coastline and is the busiest port in Africa.

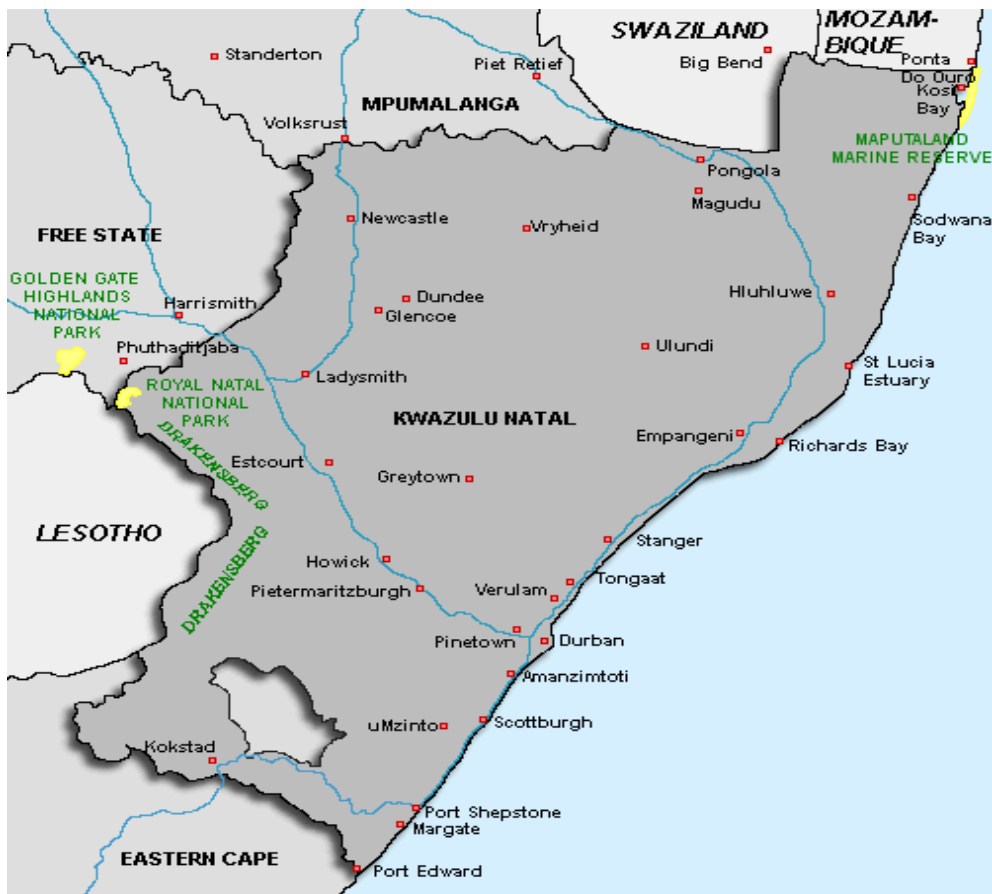


Figure 1: Map of Kwa-Zulu Natal (SA Car Rental, 2003).

Most members of the African community experiences high levels of unemployment and poverty. Within the community adults are the figures of authority in such a way that children cannot answer back or disagree with them. Communities still maintain a culture which regards children as minors who cannot engage in conversation with adults. As an educator in the same community I have observed for a number of years that this cultural belief is also exercised inside the classroom. As educators we are in position of power and authority, we are the ones who ask questions and come up with problems. Therefore, the students' responsibility is to answer

questions and solve the problems. Children in this area do not ask questions; they conform to what is said by adults. The cultural context in Kwa-Zulu Natal is patriarchal, with various traditional, cultural norms and practices. The structure of Zulu society seems to be in addition contributing to gender inequality and injustice.

One such practice is when the father of the house passes away; the son irrespective of age becomes “inkosana” (heir). This means the son will take over his father’s responsibilities like taking decisions and ensuring that the family has all life’s basic requirements. Most of the times a boy who is tasked with this kind of responsibility leaves school in order to fulfil his role otherwise he will be regarded as a failure. In this study, I argue that this puts pressure on boys and is unjust if they have to give up their future plans. I remember when my father passed away in 1990, my elder brother had to leave school and be a bus driver in order to take care of the family needs. At the same time, culturally girls are expected to respect “inkosana” as the father of the family. Inkosana has the powers to take “ilobola” (cows) in exchange for his sister without her consensus. This means a girl will be pressured to marry someone she is not in love with. I argue that Zulu cultural beliefs and practice seem to be perpetuating gender inequality if a boy has to take decision for a girl as if she incapable and absent from her own life. At the same time, boys do not celebrate the inkosana/indlalifa (in heir) privilege as they are pressured to give up their future plans, hence I take a stand that girls and boys equally suffer the consequences of gender inequality.



### **1.5.3 Theoretical context of the study**

The sociological theory of social constructionism and the theory of performativity were used to answer the research questions of this study. The sociological perspective led me to answer questions about girls' and boys' experiences of gender as well as the discourses and practices within the school. The theory of performativity (Butler, 1997) was used to find ways in which girls and boys navigate their gender-based experiences. These theoretical approaches were helpful to empower the study to demonstrate the dynamics of gender with the aim that this would contribute to creating a more equitable schooling environment.

The theoretical constructions, childhood and gender socialisation, illuminate insights into the complex relationship between hegemony, discourses, childhood and gender socialisation, and into the ways these tend to perpetuate gender inequalities within the learning environment. Gender discourses in schools are a vehicle by which gender meaning are created (Bhana, 2005a; Morojele, 2011, 2011a). In this study girls and boys are constructed as conforming to the school discourse as if they come into this world with the concepts that their community holds about them (Morojele, 2011) as discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The fish-in-water metaphor has also been used by a French sociologist, Bourdieu in explaining how the concept of "habitus" operates in social (gendered) relations. He introduces the notion "ontological complicity" in an attempt to undermine dualistic thinking by suggesting a process akin to insinuation. Ontological complicity moves the concept of gender beyond mere discourse, and brings into play the significance of gender embodiment as a critical component of analysis in gender debates (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 320).

This means habitus is not simply a mental schema, in other words gender is also a way of bodily being in the world whose experience goes beyond discursive constructions of gender in a context. It was through applying Butler's theory of performativity that I was able to answer one of my research questions, namely: In what ways do children exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools? Implied in the above is the notion that identity is never complete. Rather, it is always in the process of production within a field of competing discourses, in discursive spaces that do not necessarily carry equal weight or power. I have acknowledged that, in a particular single discourse, there is more than one subject position. Typically, the prevailing discourse portrays males and boys as having power to protect and undermine females and girls. Then the question is, do boys get pleasure from the dominance privilege? Or are they forced to perform the prescribed notion of being a boy?

According to Butler (1997), Foucault's notion of power as that which "presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to the lower order" renders the subject passive. She suggests that the subject is already caught up "in the scene of psychoanalysis" that is, the subject emerges simultaneously with the unconscious and as such there is indecisiveness from the moment the subject is constituted. The two-mindedness at the point of inception presupposes some form of attachment and dependency by the subject. As Butler puts it, she takes for granted "a specific psychoanalytic valence when I consider that no one subject emerges without a passionate attachment on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent" (Butler, 1997, p.7).

#### **1.5.4. The methodological context of the study**

I used qualitative research methodology as my approach of enquiry in exploring the central phenomenon; namely, gender. My own ontological and epistemological orientations have informed the design, research methods and processes, and data analysis in this study. The ontology appropriate to participatory action research reflects a version of the world and reality created by both researchers and participants, guided by their own consciousness and lived experiences within the community. Therefore, the ontology in participatory action research is subjective and links critical interpretivism and an emancipatory paradigm into a framework that guides this study as they both seek to empower and emancipate both the researcher and the participants from the margins of their own community involvement. This perspective is participative in nature and allows for multiple voices to be heard and respected. Hence I brought to this research project my own positioning as a woman, values, power, strengths and weaknesses which have intricately inflected this study.

The use of narrative inquiry in individual and gender-based focus group interviews assisted me in gathering valuable and rich information. The addition of the participatory technique, namely photovoice, empowered and added value to girls and boy's narratives by enabling their ways of illustrating their experiences of gender. The photos that the participants took resulted in the emergence of the subsequent themes through data analysis, namely: gendered spaces and places within the school context, gender discourses and practices and the ways in which girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences within schools. The basic content and thematic analysis was utilised in this study for data analysis.

My interacting with Grade 7 girls and boys within the school and building rapport enabled them to freely expose their experiences of gender, the spaces and places within the school as well the agency to navigate their gender experiences (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The use of narrative inquiry during the individual and gender-based focus group interviews allowed me to easily tell girls and boys life experiences based on gender. This study turned out to be flexible as I allowed girls and boys to freely express themselves and that made them comfortable but that flexibility was expressed within the framework of social constructionism, the new sociology of childhood, and the theory of performativity. This framework was used to maintain the purpose of the study.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The first research question was designed to expose the schooling experiences and constructions of gender of girls and boys. The dynamics shaping their understanding and affecting their gender experiences were also revealed. In addressing the second research question, the study uncovered the gendered spaces and places and the way in which they result into domination and subordination within the schooling context. The last research question addresses the navigation styles used by girls and boys and their contestations of gender. In this study I used thematic and content analysis to analyse data transcripts from the data collected in order to disclose the deep rooted principles. This thesis aims to contribute to knowledge not only about children's schooling and experiences of gender but also about how the discourses and practices affect their geographies in schools. In the light of the above, the findings of this nature present an opportunity for education policy reformists. Potentially, this could impact on social and

pedagogical practice and on further research into the creation of school environments aimed at promoting equitable gender social relations among girls and boys.

## **1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS**

Chapter 2 reviewed literature for the study. It discusses extensive debates on femininities and masculinities in school contexts and how conceptualisations of femininities and masculinities are related to issues of girlhood and boyhood, as well as the ways in which these play a role in the production, reproduction of inequitable gender relations in the school.

Chapter 3 discusses the sociological theory of social constructionism, Harro's gender socialisation and Butler's theories of gender performances used in this study. These theories are used to generate an opportunity to obtain deeper understanding of girls' and boys' experiences on gender within the school context. They reveal the existence and the complex power relations whereby girls and boys are socialised into unequal roles. The concepts developed in the new sociology of children's studies provide a key assumption that girls and boys are active agents, whose gender relations are worthy of study.

In chapter 4, I discuss how I investigated the construction of gender through critical interpretivism and the emancipatory paradigm in creating space for empowerment and change for the oppressed. I also explain the use of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) in which the voice of each participant in the research process was an integral part of the study as a

whole. Thus the personal narratives, not only of the children, but also of the researcher, are a vital component of the research. With that in my mind, I therefore relate my own childhood story and project my own researcher's voice into this study as it too shaped my understanding and approach.

In the chapters that follow I discuss the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides the structural and social settings at school; focusing on the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities. It further highlights the spaces and places where children actively perform gender, mainly in conformity to the dominant discourses of gender within the school context. It for instance reveals how spaces and places are utilized within the school and the kind of gender discourses that boys and girls are exposed to that have a major impact on who are subordinated or who have dominant powers, between girls and boys.

In chapter 6, I focus on the findings that show teachers' roles as agents of gender socialisation in line with the dominant construction of gender, and what this means for children's schooling experiences of gender.

Chapter 7 reveals the role that girls and boys play as agents to find alternative ways to navigate their gender-based experiences. It indicates how girls and boys perform gender and how the dominant discourses of gender compromise their schooling experiences and put pressure on their lives.

In chapter 8, I consider further implications of the study, reflecting on the theoretical and methodological reflection as well as the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter outlines the implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEWING RESEARCH ABOUT GENDER IN SCHOOLING CONTEXTS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to investigate girls' and boys' gender experiences in schooling contexts. The study aimed to listen to their gender-based stories and further explored the discourses and daily practices that shape their geographies and find ways in which they exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences. In this chapter, I engage with the literature review that helped me understand girls' and boys' gender experiences, as well as the gender discourses and practices that affect children's geographies within the schooling context. This literature has enabled my understanding of the ways in which children exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and I am seeking also to identify gaps in the literature which my study hopes to fill. The chapter begins by reviewing the literature on the social constructions of gender. It then discusses the dominant and alternative discourses of femininities and masculinities in schooling contexts. I then present the analysis of schools as places for the maintenance of inequitable gender relations. I focus on school culture, class and children's formation of gender relationship as well as the role teachers plays in reinforcing unequal gender relations.

The above sections are followed by a review of schools as places for the enhancement of equitable gender relations as stipulated in the South African education policies and of the



possibilities of schools promoting equitable gender relations. The chapter then discusses the children's performances of dominant and alternative genders in the school. Under these sections I discuss girls' performances of gender as well as boys' performances of gender.

## **2.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER**

This section address various ways in which gender is understood since the manner on which it is conceptualised has major bearing on understanding how children are socialised into gender roles and identities. The major agents of gender socialisation in Africa are the home, learning and religious institutions and peers. Children make their first interactions with parents. Consequently, it is important to understand the beliefs that guide parents' child-rearing practices, specifically when it comes to gender identity. There is little literature on research into parents' beliefs, unlike the research on teachers' beliefs, which has been voluminous. It has been recognised that the values of parents are influential in the child's holistic development (Kohn, 1969).

I am of the same opinion that Butler (1990) maintains when she claims that people perform gender and what we see is gender performance therefore there is no gender identity. In other words, it means what a person does depend on the situation not on the individuals. In this approach a person is allowed to shape his or her own personality without being forced to act in a particular way that fits the society expectation (Butler, 1990). In the power relations, meanings are sustained and disturbed through the discourse and practices I find it important to investigate the discourses and practices that affect children's geographies.

At school, teachers are more influential people rather than family members. What has been said by the teachers cannot be opposed or blamed by anyone, that's how influential they are. It is therefore safe to say teachers share the responsibility for socialisation with the parents. Martin and Muthukrishana (2011) emphasize that the classroom is the space where gender identities are constructed and the categories of masculinity and femininity. These happen through interaction with people such as parents and teachers. Children spend most of their times at school and at home therefore most of the interaction happens in these two institutions. These institutions function in such a way that girls and boys are initiated into accepted methods of behaviour. For the purpose of this study I therefore find it worth discussing the dominant and alternative discourses of femininities and masculinities in the schooling context.

### **2.2.1 Dominant discourses of femininities in schooling contexts**

In these subsections I do not explore the extensive literature that has flourished in the field of masculinities and schooling. Rather in this section I decided to only explain the following key concepts which helped me to build this thesis, these are, the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities within schooling contexts. In this study femininities refer to behaviours and roles generally associated with girls and women (Crawford, 2006). Personally, I view femininity as being constructed and influenced through social life and made up of features that relate to biologically associated issues, since there are behavioural features which are associated with femininities like delicacy, compassion, affectability, and so on. Martin and Muthukrishna (2011, p. 10) indicate that society constructs women as inherently passive and suppresses their active personalities and gender roles. The genders of women and men have their origin in the process of

conditioning from a very early age where girls and boys are encouraged to conform to specific gender identities. This is how women are judged in terms of the societal ideology of domesticity; their gender stereotyping stipulates the normal attributes of being a woman. The way girls dress is seen as the display of behaviour that reflects her ability to raise children well; this is the dominant discourse of femininity. In other words, if the girl decides to wear miniskirts and hot pants, she is regarded as not good enough to be a responsible mother. On the other hand, girls and women are indoctrinated to accept themselves as weak and therefore dependent on boys and men. Morojele (2009) states that a girl is conditioned to believe that women are inferior to men, that her place is at home and that she is therefore there to be seen and not to be heard. It is the aim of this study to evaluate the gender discourses and practices that affect children's geographies. Therefore, if girls are made to believe that they are inferior it means boys are automatically constructed as dominant. I view being a girl as a question of becoming. Just like boys, girls are active participants in the continual negotiation and production of their gender identities. Hence this study uses the new sociology of childhood to advocate that children are dynamic social specialists who shape the structures and process around them.

Parents and teachers at school have clearly characterized rules for raising girls and these are frequently altogether different from those for boys. Girls are regarded as easy to care for and they provide help at home, for example in later years taking care of parents in old age (Brown & Chevannes, 1995). My childhood experiences consistently reflect this philosophy; as girls we used to do family and childcare errands inside the house while my siblings were appointed substantial work outside. Even today, this philosophy still exists and is followed rigidly as it was in my childhood years. The task of washing dishes and cooking, were and still are considered as

girls and women work, while dealing with the outside, like washing the family vehicle and tending creatures are saved for boys and men. As women we were prepared from a young age to become housewives and to nurture while boys were and still are raised to become providers. Such suppositions are gotten from social generalizations held in Kwazulu-Natal, the setting of this study, where the husband is seen as the provider and the person who figures out where the family ought to be positioned.

It is therefore interesting to find out how girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender experiences if they are deprived of their identity and made to act like someone else. Women and girls face tremendous social pressure to maintain an image of innocence and purity. This poses challenges to them, for instance, in taking precautions against sexually transmitted diseases and in safe sex negotiations (Reddy & Dunne, 2007) this is a result of the expectations placed on young girls by society. Female sexuality is characterized to a great extent inside a talk of quiet wherein girls are compelled to deny their sexuality and sexual action and to maintain positive connections with their mothers. The amaZulu will famously say “*ukhamba lufuze imbiza*” (meaning mother like daughter) therefore girls are obliged to be always near their mothers so as to learn how her mother does things. This perpetuates and ensures that the cycle of socialisation does not break. It is a fact that the dominant discourse of femininity stands in direct contradiction to women and girls’ sexual safety, thus women and girls who unquestioningly conform to traditional femininities are implicated in their own disempowerment and in risking their sexual safety (Reddy & Dunne, 2007). Morojele (2009) alludes to prevailing types of femininities and masculinities as being hegemonic which imply conceded to social qualities. Consequently, cultural and societal expectation place women and girls in vulnerable positions in relation to

sexual abuse, violence and HIV/AIDS infection as they are required to be submissive to their male counterparts, as they are the protectors.

In my 21 years' experience as a teacher, I have observed that the official culture of school professes to be gender impartial, yet is in reality delineated by the ubiquity of gender. This places girls in another opposing position whereby they are required to show an attractive hetero womanliness. As Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005, p.250) state, "young women must submit to the male gaze and yet exhibit responsibility in avoiding unwanted male attention." Thus, it means school culture reproduces the good girl and bad girl distinction, causing a lot of trouble and discomfort between different groups of girls. Schools, in my view, ought to be institutions that advance social connections sufficiently helpful for girls and boys to explore their spaces overtly without limits. Schools are organizations where girls and boys invest the greater part of their energy and along these lines ought to be free of any bias. I want to emphasise that the purpose of this study was not to compare girls and boys but to recommend that schools should be gender equitable environments. In the following section I discuss how gender constructions and expectations in South African schools keep on giving power to hegemonic masculinities over femininities.

### **2.2.2 Dominant discourses of masculinities in schooling contexts**

In this section I discuss the dominant discourses of masculinities within schooling contexts. Masculinity is viewed as a process of endless becoming; gendered personality must be always updated and kept up, through talk and communication with different individuals from the way of

life (Morojele, 2009). Nilan (2000) argues that it is unjust to expect girls and boys to conform to the set norms of behaviour as they are active agents who are responsible for their lives. This view energized me as my essential research technique is interviews, hence I was enthusiastic to listen to the way girls and boys construct gender if they are expected to fit to the already available pattern.

Hegemonic masculinity is probably to be established just if there is some correspondence between cultural and institutional power, as a group, not singular, process. This implies fundamentally hegemonic masculinity is viewed as the socially adequate front of masculinities at school, the masculinity holds control over others (both girls generally and boys of other masculinities). Therefore, it means that at school boys have powers to exercise over girls, resulting in gender inequality. The literature presents different pictures of hegemonic manliness for instance, a man in power, a man with power, and a man of force. Thus, masculinity is connected with being solid, effective, skilled, and dependable and in control. This implies for there to be an intense type of maleness, there ought to likewise be characters which are characterized as powerless. To demonstrate this, at school boys position themselves as manly by situating themselves as "other" to girls, remaining the other way to girls.

Gender socialization assumes that girls and boys are not competent to make significance of their lives yet are socialised by others, including their parents as grown-ups who have control over them (Renold, 2005). The general presumption of researchers is that children in the early years of development don't have the fitness to understand their conduct. Adults like parents and teachers are considered to have control over children and shape children get to be; therefore,

power is made to be negative. Relating this to my current study means that teachers seem to have power to pressure girls and boys to conform to the set attributes of gender. Consequently, the research on the investigation of children's schooling and experiences of gender inequality in the school environment in their primary years is more relevant and urgent, if schools have continued to perpetuate unconstitutional behaviour.

An influential contention has been made against overgeneralised definitions which underestimate the meanings of femininity and masculinity, which accept that they are general, altered and recorded classifications (Mac An, Ghail, 1994) and which can't clarify the confusion of regular lived involvement and the hypothesis failure to handle issues around power. My experience of working in a primary school for 21 years makes me view a school as a site which conveys particular gendered practises and connects with constructions of femininity and masculinity in contradiction to the ways that the South African Schools Act requires. For this reason, there is a dire need of research in the area of gender at school which should aim to understand the complexity of power as the key. In recognizing primary schools as destinations of generally changing disagreements that effectively construct gender identities. I argue against the thoughts of gender orientation as static. In my experience gender power control in primary school settings is changing, which essentialist models tend to discount. Thus I employed photovoice as a data collection method that gave girls and boys power to talk about their experiences of gender at school based on the photos that they took. Girls and boys had power to decide which stories to tell me or not. Hence my stance that power is not static.

There are different kinds of masculinities; they vary according to cultures and times. In other words, there isn't a single pattern of being a boy depending on the surrounding where that particular person is growing (Morrell et al., 2012). Relationships are complex in masculinities depending on the hierarchy that has power and status to give power or take it away. These differences are also further seen between race, class and sexuality therefore, this difference means discrepancy in access to control and in the effects of power. Masculinities which are associated with power are in this manner fluid, constructed and cannot have a place with one individual or gathering. Masculinities are also socially constructed and include a perpetual battle between implications of being a man.

Masculine and feminine characters exist in connection to each other as mentioned earlier. Dominant gender forms indicate masculine and feminine identities as different and therefore benefit a hegemonic type of manliness in connection to femininities and different sorts of masculinities. Presently in the society the hegemonic masculinity type of masculinity is respected more than other types of masculinities. The hegemonic masculinity type is associated with being definitive, forceful, hetero, physically overcome, energetic and focused as further discussed in Chapter 4 and 5. Most boys perform hegemonic masculinity as it is more respected than other patterns. This type of masculinity is the one that has more power and is supported by most boys.

Connell (1995) recognizes four sorts of masculinities including the hegemonic form. The difference between these types of masculinities is that the other three are non-hegemonic types of masculinity, in other ways they do not believe in investing power. They do not dominate the



space like the hegemonic masculinity as a result pecking request of masculinities is recognised. The non-hegemonic forms of masculinities are not respected because of the way they involve race, class, sexuality and ethnicity. For instance, a boy who goes to school in Kwa-Mashu a township which lives black individuals might be unique in relation to a rich boy who goes to school in a rich range in Durban. However even within the same contexts there isn't a single type of masculinity there is a variety of masculinities which exists. The imperative point is that diverse types of masculinities exist together and the hegemonic form must be always battled for and is liable to challenge. I am mindful that not all men encapsulate the basic type masculinity, and many live in a condition of strain with, or remove from, hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012) but the forms of segregation and grading becomes the source violence and conflict amongst boys. Hegemonic masculinity can be calm and understood yet it has a danger of being violent, as in the case of discrimination. In this thesis I decided to use the idea of masculinities in terms of (re)production. This attends to power within the micro contexts and acknowledges the patterns of inequalities that serve as a vehicle that breed power between women and men in unequal ways.

I maintain that girls and boys actively construct gender by either adhering to or subverting the hegemonic masculine and feminine ways of performing gender (Butler, 1990). In order to address the diversity and ambiguities on how girls and boys actively construct gender, we need to transcend our understanding of gender construction as sexual activity is part of an extensive variety of talks through which children characterize, arrange and basically build their gendered selves .In this regard, Bhana (2005a) has shown how primary aged boys construct hegemonic masculine performances in ways that illustrate that hegemonic masculine discourses and

performances are inseparably attached to overwhelming ideas of heterosexuality. I believe interrogating the 'heterosexual presumption' in the ways through which children construct gender will make visible its 'normalization' and subsequent dominance over other forms of masculinities, including femininities.

Renold (2004) asserts that, according to common sense understandings, young children are innocent and do not know anything about sexuality. This argument is set against a growing recognition that assumed, primary school children do not know anything sexual– and as someone who has spent 21 years with children in the primary school, I concur. Renold's argument implies that sexuality particularly heterosexuality is available as well as pivotal to the association of primary schools, and features prominently in the processes through which young children construct gender' (Renold, 2004). Her study illustrates how children (hetero) sexual societies are an important aspect in how they construct gender, and how the organizational heteronormativity of the primary school provides a matrix on which girls and boys construct gender. She also shows how in particular hegemonic masculinities and femininities involve a 'heterosexual presumption' of gendered children. To my understanding, she illustrates how being a girl and includes building up or if nothing else putting resources into and anticipating a conspicuous and hegemonic hetero gendered personality. Boys who did not belong to the perceived hegemonic masculinity are given nasty names like gays and lesbians. They are excluded in the soccer teams and bullied; schools are not a safe environment for them. It is clear that gay and lesbian children do not have a place at school and no one is prepared to talk about this gender category. Therefore, boys who fall into the gay category might have kept it a secret in order to be acceptable as normal boys.

These factors permeate and thus ultimately affect in a negative manner the everyday classroom and playground interactions amongst and between girls and boys, and as such become a significant site for children's active contestation, negotiation and construction of gender. As a result, I argue that in schools there are gendered spaces and discourses that affect children's geographies. This study finds it important to investigate children's geographies (discussed in details on 2.2.4) as a way to find the meanings of gender that girls and boys attach to places and spaces within the school. Butler (1997) agrees that the most disturbing factor in this regard is how girls and boys actively follow each other to ensure that others perform within the expectations of hegemonic masculinities and femininities which do not automatically happen. In these cases, such performances of gender have genuine social and enthusiastic results which are harming for both girls and boys.

From the above discussions, it becomes clear that girls and boys do not have a platform to exercise agency to navigate their gender-based experiences but are forced to conform to the set norms of behaviour. For example, the boys who belong to hegemonic masculinities are not only excluding the non-hegemonic gender identities, but subtly subordinate all things regarded as feminine which is majority of girls.

### **2.2.3 Silencing of alternative gender expressions in schooling contexts**

Prior to the birth of democracy, schools were expected to fulfil the important role of teaching children what the people in position of power view as important. As a result, girls were told to be

feminine and boys to be masculine in order to fulfil the expectations of the society. The thinking behind this was that being a boy implies having a penis and balls; being a girl implies having a vagina, a clitoris, and a uterus. Hence, girls and boys are constrained by these gender codes and students who openly identify as gay, lesbian or transgender, or who dress and act in gender non-conforming ways, are marginalized and bullied (Bisikaa, Ntatab & Konyani, 2009, p. 289). In KwaZulu-Natal, unfortunately the critical and sensitive concerns of bullying and harassment in school have not received a significant amount of attention at school and communities. The issue of bullying has been analysed as detached demonstrations of prodding as opposed to as a type of policing and implementing the standards of our way of life. Bullying should be comprehended as far as the administration of normalizing the gender codes that the school has neatly categorised children's. This act of behaviour supports the dominant identities and suppress the others thus perpetuate bullying that occurs in school environment that is also discriminatory in nature (Morojele, 2009).

The discourses and practice within the school contribute to the strength of masculinity and femininity boundary constructions. To add on this, at home the buying of gender orientation "proper" toys and garments for infants and children are one way grown-ups propagate these lessons. I remember how my parents used to buy us dolls as girls and brothers would get cars for Christmas, as discussed in detail on Chapter 4. The concept of hegemony (Morrell et al., 2012), as explained and discussed in 2.2.2, affirms how groups in power can keep up structures that advantage them through picking up the assent of subordinate groups. It is not done through clear or commanding means, but instead through inconspicuous, yet effective, messages that over and again penetrate day by day life. Butler (1990) provides a framework of post-structural

understanding as to how gender categories work. The concept of gender performativity is of importance in order to understand how sexism works in schools. She explains how gender has been explained in our daily lives through our behaviours the colour of clothes we wear, the hairstyle we do and body language. These are outer elements that the general public chooses with to pick whether an individual falls into the classification of masculinities and femininities. At the point when these desires coordinate the customary society desires of a male who accomplices with a female, they are never questioned. However, if two men are seen intimacy like walking together holding hands, the other members of the society become inquisitiveness also, are frequently subject to other undesirable consideration.

The existence of lesbians and gays is often a silence the topic of thus the taken for granted nature of heterosexuality is enforced unconsciously. The heterosexual messages are send through the charts that are displayed on classroom walls, and infused on teachers' examples as they teach, and all the other relevant stakeholders at school give this message power and neglect to challenge homophobic remarks, subsequently supporting the conduct. Generally, society has developed homosexuality as an ailment, an abnormality, and a wrongdoing. The prevailing stance in Christianity stigmatizes gay and lesbian people as sinners. This is associated with practising sexual relations outside marriage as a result; lesbian and gay relationships are unacceptable. It might be contended that inexorably the media has more impact in shaping accounts and talks on sexuality than the congregation. The AIDS epidemic of the mid 1980s was around then reported as a 'gay torment' and confirmation of God's fierceness against homosexuality. Throughout the literature and my personal experiences within the school I found that the words gay, lesbian and transgender are used in negative forms. The way such words are

used colloquially in schools as insults gives a sliver of insight into the heteronormativity framework in which we operate.

#### **2.2.4 Understanding children's geographies**

Children's geographies refer "to a branch of study within human geography which explores the places and spaces of children's lives experientially, ethically and politically" (Wyness, 2003, p. 225). The notion of children's space is a key concept in the field of children's geography as it incorporates 'the social', which includes children's relationship with each other and adults (Wyness, 2003, p. 225; Van Blerk, 2005, p. 5). The conflict in the field is that children's lives will be experienced about various courses in contrasting times and places, spaces in varying conditions. As indicated by (Cele, 2006) space and place are interwoven, commonly reliant and comprise of solid, conceptual and social viewpoints.

In exploring children's spaces I am concerned with "power relations surrounding the category children" (Weller, 2006, p. 98). For example, Van Ingen and Halas (2006, p. 382) assert that "schools are power laden spatialities of everyday life of children". When one visits a school one often ask questions: Whose school is this? Whose language is important? Whose social background is affirmed? Who is in and who is out? These questions reflect power laden issues (Muthukrishna, 2013, p. 146). Hence, this research will explore children's experiences of gender in the school setting. It is fundamental to know how children shape associations with each at school. The spaces and places within the school might look neutral however as children spend most of their times in school, these spaces have a bearing effect since girls and boys negotiate their peer group relationship in them. These spaces with the school offer the important discourses

and practices within schools that contribute to children's transaction of identities in spaces and places outside of the classroom. Ansell (2009) contends that children are underestimated and they are rejected from civil arguments that will make their longings recognisable. Researchers tend to focus on curriculum inside the classroom space rather than research on tangible effects of teaching and learning. Moreover, they generally regard children as immature and innocent who thus cannot contribute to issues and determine their own social lives (Renold, 2005). It is for this reason that this study seeks a deeper understanding of girls' and boys' geographies within the primary school contexts through listening to their stories of gender.

This study finds it helpful to reflect critically on the meaning that girls and boys attach to spaces and places around the schools. The practices and the discourse have important implications in the formation of meanings for a pluralist, democratic society. The informal curriculum that is available outside the classroom and curriculum school plays an important role in the formation of social relationships. The curriculum suggests that the physical and social environment of schools plays an important a role in shaping gender as does the formal curriculum (Renold, 2005). These spaces are not neutral and how they are interpreted depends very much on an individual's lived experiences in relation to particular spaces as identities are constructed and citizenship negotiated. Butler's theory of performativity (1990) was suitable to show girls and boys illustration of gender experience, identity and place in geography. Geographers have drawn on Butler's work to open up a critique of the performativity status of space; spaces are not gender neutral but performativity invests them with heteronormative structures of power. Hence, this

study finds it important to examine gender discourses and practices that affect children's geographies.

This study finds it important to ponder basically the implying that girls and boys attach meanings to spaces and places around the schools. The practices and the talk have vital ramifications in the development of implications for a pluralist, law based society. The informal educational programs that is accessible outside the classroom assumes an essential part in the development of social connections. The educational programs recommend that the physical and social environment of schools assumes as essential a part in shaping gender as does the formal educational curriculum (Renold, 2005). These spaces are not impartial and how they are translated depends especially on an individual's lived encounters in connection to specific spaces as personalities are developed and citizenship arranged. Butler's theory of performativity (1990) was suitable to show girls and boys illustration of gender experience, identity and place in geography. Geographers have drawn on Butler's work to open up a critique of the performativity status of space; spaces are not gender neutral but performativity invests them with heteronormativity structures of power. Hence, this study finds it important to examine gender discourses and practices that affect children's geographies.

### **2.3 SCHOOLS AS PLACES FOR THE MAINTANANCE OF INEQUITABLE GENDER RELATIONS**

Within the schooling context there are key policies that have been put in place in the new democratic era in South Africa to address practices that maintain inequitable gender relations.



Despite these, gender prejudice and stereotypes in curriculum, teaching methods and learner support materials maintain unequal power relationships between girls and boys and lower self-esteem for girls. All these practices points to entrenched patriarchal attitudes prevalent at the school level which construct girls as weak and boys as stronger. This means gender is constructed so as to promote unequal power relations and continue to privilege certain groups. The unequal gender relations between girls and boys is often treated as simplistic but I see it as complicated; boys may be a dominant group and have power but they have to constantly construct and re-construct their identities to ensure this position. To me this indicates that boys do not have complete agency and do not voluntarily accept the roles that have been assigned to them; rather they are also pressured into conformity (Morrell, 1998; Horowitz, 1997). In the subsections that follow I discuss school culture, class and children's formation of gender relationships. I further discuss the role that teachers play in reinforcing unequal gender relations within the practices of the school.

### **2.3.1 School culture**

In Africa the specific discourses on culture and specific practices are appropriated and re-attempted to effect on the way of social relations in the classroom. Amongst the amaZulu it is a rule that girls sit with their legs tightly close together and the words "*hlala ngentombi*" (sit like a girl) or a sign of putting hands together is a rule for girls. Culturally, boys are expected to sit with their legs wide open as they grow. It becomes a sign of sitting like a grown man, "*umnumzane*". While this seating arrangement is a cultural practice, as a rule at school it maintains inequitable gender relations. For example, when a girl shares a desk at school with a

boy, the girl suffers as the boy sits with his legs wide open, therefore making it difficult for a girl to have enough space to write. Even when girls report this problem to teachers, they do not get help since it is culturally accepted for boys to sit with their legs wide open. What I am looking at, is a central issue of how girls, boys and teachers connect with particular social structures which add to the unbalanced relations of power. This says to me there is a connection between the cultural definition of gender that results in boys and men as having power and girls as experiencing disadvantage. From this I am also learning that culture tends to be unchanging and static while new systems in education are introduced to ensure equality.

The discourse therefore currently favours the “dominant ways of constructing gender at school and evidence of these dominant ways of constructing gender makes it imperative that we seek ways of making the early years of schooling a gender-free political arena” (Renold, 2000, p. 315). This obviously implies it is accepted that girls and boys do not have the ability to change their positions in the public eye in view of the talks and practices that must be thoroughly taken after. At school I see gendering as an indispensable part of the schedules of regular day to day existence to girls and boys, and they do not have sufficient agency to escape from it. What I aim to understand in this study then is whether girls and boys have agency to navigate their gender-based experiences. As a school principal I live through the battle of the sexes as when I have a visitor even parents who will come to school and ask for a principal. When they see me they will have comments like “I thought the principal was a male”. To me this means the society still view women as not capable of being in a position of power. If we are to celebrate the principles of democracy after 22 years, the society needs to be empowered so as to change this kind of thinking because it maintains and perpetuate inequitable gender relations.

The interconnectedness of power with social construction of masculinities is vital in the development of hegemonic masculinities. Consequently, specific positions are occupied in view of the social practice which underestimates others and is harming to girls. Throughout schooling boys are able to occupy positions which reinforce maleness and contribute to unequal power relations. The cultural practices which silence girls' voices do not have an ending point since they continue to objectify the teacher as woman. I say this because it was evident in this study that male teachers have authority as girls and boys respect them more than female teachers. They do not make noise when there is a male teacher in class unlike when there is a female teacher who has to sometimes call for a male colleague to assist her with discipline. I blame all this on specific cultural practices that ensure that power and access are differential and effect extremely on the positions that are made accessible to girls.

In other words, the cultural discourses order a domain of hegemonic male reality whereby the effect is to limit the possibilities of girls and women teachers through their ability to authorise only certain people to celebrate power. Cultural norms seem to police girls and to limit them to the role of being mothers only. Typically, in my experience, girls are expected to be soft, nurturers and caregivers. Their domestic ability in the home further determines whether or not they are good or bad, hard-working or lazy women. When you observe women and girls they are constructed to be able to listen instead of giving instructions, and never challenge a man's instructions. As a principal I am challenged by this kind of upbringing as I was constructed to endorse femininity with its unequal structuring of gender relations and tacitly accept subordination. I must state that I am now empowered and know all my rights; moreover, the

skills that I have acquired make me confident to lead. However, I continue to act gender as there are still situations that compel me to revert to the normal me, that is I am a woman who is surrounded by the strong roots of patriarchal ideology. I remember a day when I overheard a young girl at school who said “*sesinothisha omkhulu oyintombazane*” (our principal is now a girl). While this motivated me to embark on my PhD journey, it also meant women are challenged if they have to be consistently reminded who they are as human beings and find themselves taken them back to the patriarchy of society. Therefore, policy makers still need to initiate policies that will treat the roots of patriarchy rather the core. This system of being overpowered seems to be a particular learned behaviour of submission, it is not natural and it has previously been used by men to maintain their own need for power.

Furthermore, HIV and AIDS and poverty also play a vital role to strengthen some of these cultural values and practices. The manner in which girls and boys are affected by HIV and AIDS, and the role they are expected to play in response to this pandemic, are informed by the cultural values and construction of girls and boys in their communities. For instance, Morojele (2004) found that girls in Lesotho primary schools are taken out of school to care for sick relatives or look for jobs to support their families when parents cannot work due to HIV and AIDS. From these studies I learnt two lessons, firstly that the deterrents of neediness, HIV and AIDS livelihood are strengthened by cultural practices within many African societies which adversely affect girls and boys. Secondly that the adverse cultural practices impede attendance and performance of girls at school, furthermore the challenges of gender inequalities in schooling will not necessarily be reduced as long as these cultural practices persist. The following section

discusses how femininities and masculinities are constructed in ways that gender s standards and remain bolted into particular social condition of class.

### **2.3.2 Class and children's formation of gender relationships**

Friendship is important in terms of individual emotional well-being; however, I have learnt that it may also reinforce geographies of inclusion and exclusion when one does not meet the social standard of that particular group. I therefore agree that friendship can serve to include and exclude operations of power (Dyson, Gallannaugh, Humphrey, Lendrum, & Wigelswork, 2010). Girls and boys within the school negotiate gender identities in different times and in different places like school and community. To me this means that gender and race seem to reinforce or undermine the issues of sameness and difference and nurture the symbolic and social capital for children at school, depending on the gendered discourses and norms, that the children are expose to at school and in the world as such. Most of the studies I read point to gender and how it is interwoven with the process of racialisation as important socio-cultural markers of difference that shape the everyday lives of children as part of the ongoing process of social becoming (see also Hopkins, Olson, Pain, & Vincett, 2011). Notwithstanding chances to develop cross gender friendship in schools as teachers urge girls and boys to share a work area, despite everything they demonstrate a solid inclination to keep up gender standardising limits.

Then again, boys were less worried about appearance and magnificence in choosing friends; they were more worried about the behaviour, for example being strong was an indication of having football skills. This kind of behaviour shows support on the conceptualisation of gender

identities as multiple and fluid (McNay, 2000). This means there are multiple ways of doing womanhood and manhood or girlhood and boyhood, “diverse masculinities and femininities; inflecting or inflected by all other dimensions of someone’s social identity – their age, ethnicity, class and so forth.” (Cameron,2004, p.125). I therefore argue that gender identities are constructed not only in contrast to the opposite gender, but also by contrast with other versions of the same gender if one has to meet certain standards of requirements to belong to the same gender group.

For instance, girls and boys at the school who originate from devastated situations and having a father who is fiscally fortunate assist in forming friendships. As Bhana (2005) shows, nourishment and material security effect on the nature and form of gender relations and friendship and this study demonstrate that it is likewise identified with the formation of friendship. Morojele (2004) found that in Lesotho boys need to leave school at a more youthful age to go and work in the mines or to tend family dairy cattle to sustain the families. Kimane (2005) found that in Lesotho most girls get included in family unit division as they need to leave home and work in view of their part as guardians and so as to bring home the bacon as a consequence of wiped out or dead guardians, professedly because of HIV and AIDS, which was additionally an obstruction to the improvement of the youngsters.

This means that some girls and boys are unlikely to complete school if they have to leave school due to family demands. I find reduced access to education and gendered workloads unjust and unfair since it disadvantages girls from building up the interpersonal organizations that would that would help them to secure more reasonable employments, while boys are more likely to

pursue livelihood opportunities. Therefore, reduce access to education, limited girls since they had to stay at home and take care of the family members until marriage. All those have negative consequences for achieving global development targets in relation to universal access to primary education and reducing poverty. On the other hand, presenting girls and boys as simply victims of gender inequality, creates an unhelpful dichotomy. The following subsection discusses the role teachers' play in reinforcing unequal gender relations.

### **2.3.3 Roles teachers play in reinforcing unequal gender relations**

Osborne (1993) refers to the “power of out-dated ideas that counter policies that are in place. He further mentions that it is easy to dream up new approaches to problems, people do it all the time; the hard part is selling them to those who still see the world through old lenses.” To apply these ideas to this context, teachers seem to be holding on their historically upbringing of gendered social relations in their specific contexts in such a way that they are unable to effectively implement the new approaches. Morojele (2010) brings up how educators' basic consciousness of sexual orientation disparities in the schools is diminished. This results in teachers unwittingly or otherwise socializing girls and boys into unequal gendered desires and exhibitions that strengthen the current gender. In other words, it might be difficult for teachers to treat girls and boys equally because of the way they were socialised; consequently, they will need to be trained thoroughly in order to implement the new policies.

I therefore conclude that teachers' understandings of gender orientation draw on the dominant gender discourses in any given setting. This frame of view in this study construes gender

discourses as a vehicle through which inequitable gender relations are infused. I maintain that the power of gender discourses in society prescribe gender roles and performances which ensure the normalising of the polarised discourses of masculinities and femininities. I regard girls and boys as socialised and pressured through these discourses to perform gender in conformity to what is thought up to be a typical status of undertakings. These discourses legitimise the inequitable gender relations to appear as if they are a normal part of life. As Cole (2013, p. 342) has succinctly summarised, teachers' understandings of gender become dependent upon the available repertoire of gender values and discourses in the schools and society.

Much of the literature I have come across on the reproduction of gender inequality in schools and in developing countries is focused on the issue of violence in and around the school. While many studies focus on sexual violence and harassment of girls by peers and teachers, broader conceptualisations emphasize the use of aggression to assert the power of masculinity. Thus experiences of violence in school may be linked not only to the endorsement of violence but also regarded as an acceptable way to resolve conflict. Hence, violence also serves to assert dominance and control in the context of existing hierarchies and inequalities that exist between teachers and children, and between women and men, or girls and boys. As a result, several studies, primarily from Africa, have revealed a consistent pattern of sexual abuse in school, perpetrated mostly by other students but also by teachers or school staff (Bhana, 2009, p. 39). This means that at present schools seem to be arenas of gender inequality despite all the gender policies in place.



Humphreys (2008) has examined the issue of corporal punishment in school, placing the analysis firmly in the context of theories of gender relations and gendered practice. In his study of corporal punishment in 16 schools in Durban, South Africa, Morrell argues that violent hegemonic masculinities contribute to perpetuating the practice of corporal punishment, which in turn reinforces these notions of masculinity. Corporal punishment both symbolises and secures hierarchical dominance (of adult over child, boy over girl). It teaches boys to be tough and uncomplaining, and girls to be submissive and unquestioning. In the same way, if girls can be offered equal opportunities with boys they can stand up and change the current situation. That is why I decided to use the voices of girls and boys as of paramount importance to change their lives. Corporal punishment involves the performance of masculine authority by both male and female teachers.

Male teachers essentially have uncontested authority while female teachers, on the other hand, have to consistently prove their authority. I contend that attempts to eliminate corporal punishment in schools need to take into account gendered power relations and should therefore provide opportunities for girls, boys and teachers to reflect on their beliefs, and how these related to the practice of corporal punishment. The gendered aspects of various school practices and routines have also been highlighted. The routine behaviour of adults in school, including labelling groups (e.g., a teacher starting the day by saying “good morning boys and girls”) or segregating them (e.g., students grouped by gender to walk home), emphasizes the difference between girls and boys. By frequently using gender labels when they deal with children, teachers make being a girl to self-definition and to the continuous existence of schools. A study of Umutende School in Zambia highlighted the requirement that all students participate in cleaning

the classrooms as an important feature of the school's deliberate effort to transform conventional attitudes about gender (Bajaj, 2009). From Bajaj (2009) I have learnt that the differentiation of tasks and responsibilities is often based on other social positions such as class in addition to gender.

The traditional gender distribution of personnel at the school, with women holding less prestigious positions compared to men (e.g., female teachers and male principal, or female teachers at the primary level and male teachers at the secondary level), reinforces patriarchal patterns of power and authority. For instance, the schools where I conducted have research principals are males, therefore to girls and boys in the primary school it may look as if only males are suitable for high profiled positions. Hence, in my case as a women principal I will find children referring to me as "*uthisha omkhulu oyintombazane*" ("a principal who is a girl") because throughout their lives they are only exposed to males occupying the positions of power. Furthermore, the routine behaviour of adults in school, including labelling groups (e.g., a teacher starting the day by saying "good morning boys and girls") or segregating them (e.g., students grouped by sex in the assembly), emphasizes the difference between girls and boys. The findings of this study concur with those of Thorne (1993) as I observed in the two schools that I visited during assembly or when the announcement is made through the public announce (PA) system. The teacher will start by saying "attention boys and girls". To some children it might sound as if those who were called first are accorded more powers.

#### **2.3.4 How girls perform gender in conformity with the dominant discourse**

In this section I argue that there are ready-made actions and behaviours that girls are expected to play, otherwise they will suffer the emotional consequences of not belonging to feminine society. They are brought up to act as someone else and these actions are policed to make sure that no one deviates from them. Drawing from my childhood, I remember how from birth my mother would make sure that I wear a specific colour of clothes and it was usually pink. For me it was worse because I looked like my father, hence I was named Ntombikayise meaning a father's girl. I had no hair - I was bald and my mother would make sure she covered my head with bright coloured headbands and ribbons. I had to bear the pain of ear piercing when I was 3 months old; she did her best to make me fit into the society image of a girl otherwise I was regarded as looking like a man. Then my mother made sure that I fitted into the society image of a girl. As I grew up, my two sisters and I had to make sure that my three brothers were not hungry and the house was spotless clean, as this was our responsibility.

When I started school, perhaps I thought life will be different as I was in a new environment, but I was wrong. My teachers like my parents, expected girls to clean classrooms while boys did outdoor duties. Teachers divided chores according to gender for example as girls we were sweeping while boys did gardening, during the sports period boys played soccer and girls played netball that automatically created a division between us and constructed to the categories of femininities and masculinities. I witnessed further dynamics that subordinated alternative forms

of femininities in these schools' practices, whereby girls had means perform other forms of femininity got into trouble (for instance, girls who show interests in traditional boys' sports) to the detriment of the individuals who did not. The differential power status concurred to these

exercises, combined with girls and boys assorted capacities in performing them, was regularly a wellspring of subordination and scorn for those seen as not fitting in with centre estimations of gender orientation. For example, at school girls occupy smaller places even when they share a desk with the boys they struggle for freedom to sit and write. Boys do not get reprimanded for taking more space in the desk as teachers regard the wide opening of legs by boys as culturally acceptable. Girls are deprived to strict control of their behaviour while boys enjoy their freedom for example in the large football playgrounds and bigger space in the desk allocated to boys consequently extends the regional limits of young men's flexibility. The above discussion made me conclude that in schools all activities, space, talk, equipment become infused with gendered meaning and the dominant discourses and practices normalize notions of gender identity.

I thus take a stand that there is an urgent need to evaluate these dominant discourses and practices so as to ensure that schooling is towards gender equitable experiences which is the main focus of this study. Girls and boys adapt their behaviours and attitudes in order to fit into the acceptable understanding of behaviours and thus construct their identity; hence I say children perform gender. Schools in particular are criticized as perpetuating the insidious cycle of domestic violence. Gallas (1998, p. 115) refers to this as “codified reality”. Leach (2003) conducted studies in three Southern African countries and suggests that schools are spaces that allow gendered practices that damage the future of the child since this damage remain with children into adult life. Girls are constructed to accept what is in front of them, while boys, have the freedom to continue with the violent behaviour because their violence behaviour is not condemned even when reported. This means that at school there are already set norms and rules

that are set to make a girl. There is a strict policing of these norms and rules; the situation compels girls into conforming to the pattern and there is no alternative route.

My schooling experience is a testimony to the ready-made rules. When I was in the primary school, my teacher said toward the start of term that she would give the class a test, and whoever got the most elevated stamp would be the class prefect. In the event that you were a class prefect, you got the opportunity to record the names of noise makers, which was sufficiently energizing and had control all alone. My teacher would likewise give you a stick to grasp while you strolled around and watched the class for noise markers. I needed power and concentrated hard and fortunately I got the most noteworthy score on the test. At that point shockingly my teacher said that the class prefect must be a boy. She had neglected to make that unmistakable prior in light of the fact that she accepted it was self-evident. A boy had the second most astounding marks on the test and he took a place of being a class prefect. Unfortunately, I was a girl and he was a boy, thus he turned into the class prefect. Up to today I've always remembered that episode, it made me would rather not be a girl. By righteousness of being a boy it implies you have the legacy of power, while girls are made to be subordinates will's identity secured by men who are made to have control.

There are essential inquiries that are brought about the manner in which violence happens in school and about the social and economic factors in South Africa which allow such gender violence (Morrell, 1998, 2001). While concentrating on the courses in which patriarchal structures drawback African women and girls, so far there has been not really any endeavour to examine the routes in which girls and boys explore the setting of schools; subsequently in this

study I aimed to find out how children navigate their daily experiences at school. I argue that presenting schoolgirls basically as victims of violence makes unhelpful circumstance which decreases girls to homogeneous generalizations and disregards the likelihood of various types of femininities, similarly as there are different types of masculinities (see Morojele, 2009). These framings are important however in this study I argue that there is a need for more. I say this because they do not offer clarification of the routes in which primary school girls effectively take an interest in school culture of violence whilst also victims of it see (Bhana, 2005a). In this study I contend that a more profound perspective of primary school girls and boys, will advise the group of their capacities as dynamic individuals, and this can give a viewpoint on the investigation of schooling and gender violence in South Africa, not just as casualties of viciousness. This approach views girls and boys not just as quieted casualties of Africa's vanguard, but rather likewise as dynamic members in ordinary school life inside bigger settings of constant violence and tireless gender imbalances. The following section discusses how boys are made to perform gender within the schooling contexts.

### **2.3.5 How boys perform gender in conformity with the dominant discourse**

Drawing from my childhood experience of growing with my three elder brothers, I witnessed that at home they were assigned chores that was regarded as heavy, like lifting the furniture, cutting grass, etc. They also had the freedom of going up and down the streets till very late and when they come home they will find the house clean and the food ready made for them. I remember at one stage I really wanted to be a boy so as to earn the privileges that they had. When my father passed away my big brother culturally had to take over the family responsibility

at a young age. Therefore, he had to leave school and look for work; hence I say while boys are made to be strong, have powers and protectors, they are also victims of gender in the society. My brother had no option but to leave school and today he is suffering as he could not get a well-paid job and this societal image of a boy (strong, protector, power etc.) took away his childhood. In this study it means he was therefore forced to conform to hegemonic masculine attributes otherwise he would have suffered the emotions of not being man enough.

In general, the existing research suggests that boys tend to dominate the physical and verbal space in the classroom and school. In classroom interactions, boys in school are much more active than girls in terms of disruptions. The disruptions often consist of teasing girls or other boys. For instance, boys restrict girls' movement in class, by, for example, physically blocking a path or not making space on the seating bench (Morojele, 2011b). To me this means girls and boys do not get a chance to live harmoniously together if they always fight. Peer group interactions often serve to separate girls and boys, or to enforce dominant versions of masculinity or femininity. On the playgrounds boys control the larger spaces and the kinds of games they play dominate the playground. When they play soccer they occupy big spaces and girls automatically are excluded in those spaces. Boys also engage in more rough play and frequently get into conflict with different boys now and again prompting to fight. I observed that girls play in isolation and always occupy a small space at school and these limitations were normal and accepted. These perceptions are consistent with those made by Thorne (1993) in his investigation of schools in the United States. Once in a while there was mix group play or cooperation in cross-gender exercises. The dominant values of gender in the schools categorise physical strength as an expected attribute to all boys. Keeping in mind the end goal to be viewed as real

men, the majority of boys carry on in ways that connoted durability and aggressiveness. Not all young men can play out these types of masculinities though. Hence this study aimed to explore ways that children navigate their gender experiences at school if they have to act as someone else.

Some boys' were unable to fulfil hegemonic masculinities diversifies the forms of gender-based violence which normally are directed against girls (Morojele, 2009). In such a way that boys who are being kind, unable or unwilling to fight suffer physical and emotional costs. Boys are under pressure to perform hegemonic masculinities even in situations where they are failing to uphold the society expectation of them like being brave (Morojele, 2009), these values are seen as appropriate. This shows the dynamic part that primary school children take in policing gender performances which do not connote hegemonic masculinities (Epstein and Telford, 2003). Along these lines, this study foregrounds children as dynamic subjects who can shape their own lives. The construction of boys physically more grounded than girls may have sweeping antagonistic outcomes for hetero connections in the schools. Alternately, this inadvertently gives the event to the undermining of the dominant construction that boys are physically more grounded than girls. I have seen some boys persisting physical pressure and confusion in situations when they could not uphold the hegemonic form of masculinities (see Chapter 5 and 6).

I have observed boys fundamentally opposing anything feminine and I believe this is promoted by dominant constructions of gender which perceive boys' attributes (masculinities) as oppositional to girls' attributes (femininities), thus boys conform to act gender in accordance. The following section discusses how the curriculum at school reinforces the gender roles.



Finally, I emphasise that empowering parents, teachers, children and policy makers by means of educative programmes in how gender inequalities are reinforced at various levels like home, school, church etc. is equally important. Hence in the following section I discuss the critical role that schools are expected to play as places for the enhancement of equitable gender relations.

## **2.4 SCHOOLS AS PLACES FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF EQUITABLE GENDER RELATIONS**

In the new dispensation of democracy in South Africa the Constitution and various education policies aimed for equity in schools. Policy statements acknowledge that girls' equal treatment with boys would actually be beneficial for boys in that it would give them an opportunity to see girls as equals partners. They further provide guidance on how both girls' and boys' development as learner-subjects can be improved by educational programs that frontal area the benefits of minding in both public and private life. The obstacles to these positive developments actually are discriminatory practices of gender differentiation in schools that highlight gender boundaries, create awareness of differences and support the separation of the genders.

Thorne (1993, p. 20) advises that "such active deliberation makes gender relationships risky, and increases the social distance between girls and boys". For this reason, I propose that the point of departure should be to dispatch to history the hegemonic discourses that construct girls and boys as sexually innocent. We should overcome the fear that children of today "grow up too soon" through sexual knowledge (Epstein & Telford, 2003, p. 25) and begin to understand how these process can be interrupted. As Harro (2000, p. 16) has posited, how we can break the cycle of

gendering processes that reinforce gender inequalities? This means schools need to raise the critical consciousness of all stakeholders (parents, teachers, learners, etc.) by means of educative programmes on how gender inequalities are reinforced at various levels (e.g. home, church, school).

#### **2.4.1 South African education policies and equitable gender relations**

In South Africa, the social inequalities in the education systems, which were orchestrated during the apartheid era, have been partially addressed. Section 9 of the South African Constitution outlaws all forms of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, cultural origin, age, religion and so forth (Chisholm & September 2005, p. 387). In the education sector, a plethora of policies have been formulated and implemented to enhance equitable gender relations amongst girls and boys in schools. For the sake of space in this section, I mention only some of these policies. The process began with the establishment of the Gender Equality Task Team (GETT) by the National Department of Education in 1996 to advise on the establishment of Gender Equity in the Department of Education and on how to achieve gender equity in the sector. As a result of the GETT report and the requirements of the Constitution, the Department of Education has adopted measures to enhance gender equity at school level, such as the formulation of a core curriculum that is gender sensitive. These measures have resulted in the introduction of gender awareness in teacher training programmes to ensure that teachers' attitudes are not gender biased. These measures were intended to "discontinue gender and sex based harassment in educational settings to ensure that a school is a safe and secure environment for girls and boys" (Pandor, 2004).

The Department of Education (2001) implemented White Paper 6 on inclusive education with the intention to transform the schooling system in order to provide equitable and inclusive opportunities for all girls and boys. It asserts the need for action strategies to ensure that the schooling system enhances equitable gender relations that affirm girls and boys from all backgrounds. Further, the intention was to achieve equitable schooling environments where every child is supported to develop to their best human potential. Together with the principles of inclusivity and equitable advancement, numerous policies were implemented such as Outcome Based Education (OBE), National Curriculum Statements (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) and recently the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). All these curriculum policies are underpinned by the principles of democracy and empowerment. All these policies seek to transform apartheid education, which emphasized inequality rather than citizen hood and nationhood (Department of Education, 1997).

In the year 2000, there was a declaration of the Millennium Development Goals. These set goals to make sure that by 2015 girls and boys would be able to finish their primary schooling (UNESCO, 2000). In particular, Millennium Development Goal number three specifically alludes to the advancement of uniformity between boys and girls (UNESCO, 2003) and advocates the promotion of gender equality. In South Africa, the Millennium Development Goals find expression in almost all legislative and policy imperatives starting with the Constitution and education policies, which all place emphasis on the enhancement of gender relations within the schooling contexts.

The following two subsections discuss the alternative gender performance that girls and boys utilise. These demonstrate their capacity for problematising social relations of femininity and masculinity; these subsections explore how this limit may be prepared in schools to bolster counter-hegemonic practice focused on questioning gender oppression. While it is critical that exploration attracts regard for the onerous routes in which femininities and masculinities are developed, it additionally should be mindful to the ways, settings and times in which girls and boys occupy elective performances of gender in school. A theoretical framework which recognizes the social construction of subjectivity in social relations as used in this study and through discourses does not result in an inevitable lack of agency (Holloway, 1984). In conflict situations, girls and boys in this study exercised their agency within the constraints of their general acquiescence to the feminine and hegemonic masculinity of the school.

#### **2.4.2 How girls perform gender in divergence from the dominant discourse**

Girls who perform gender in divergence from the dominant discourses of feminine attributes such as gentleness and politeness (Crawford, 2006) create alternative ways of performing gender in the masculinity world, as for them conforming totally is not an option. This means girls are divided into categories of conforming to or deviating from the masculine culture. Consequently, this causes tension between those who are in favour and those who are not in favour of the masculine culture. This strain is principally played out through sexuality and is specifically related with the good girls bad girls division, this makes a considerable measure of tension among young ladies. Harro (2000) refers to this tension as horizontal oppression. There is a range of gender discourses and varied femininities in schools that are competing. In such a

manner that girls who are not in favour of masculine culture are regarded as difficult girls; they are by and large more confident, standing up to, boisterous, forceful and wild. As is every now and again shown in the literature, girls' emphatic or troublesome conduct is viewed as hostile to female and has a tendency to be deciphered more contrarily than boys. They are given ugly names like whore, (men) or tomboys. While schools are unquestionably a space in which girls can be oppressed, this confident conduct gives a space of force, albeit one that is liable to talks of denigration.

The masculine values make an opposing circumstance to which girls endeavour to change in various ways. The other group of girls who seem to be conforming to the already available pattern of being a girl, are not immune from the effects of masculine power. They are generally the most behaved and compliant, and respect teacher's authority at school. In addition, hard work is also a practical way to run away from set chores to perform the traditional girls' role imposed by the family. Accordingly, this is by all accounts a created methodology against the dominant masculine culture at school and patriarchal parts in the more extensive society. Ngakane (2010) insists that schools ought to be spots that advance social connections that are great to young ladies and young men. Schools are establishment where children invest the majority of their energy and hence ought to be free of bad form. This implies advancing uniformity and regard amongst girls and boys paves the way to the navigation of places and spaces in gender relationships.

### **2.4.3 How boys perform gender in divergence from the dominant discourse**

In this subsection, my discussion of boy's alternative performances of gender is informed by comprehension of masculinities as social practices that are consulted in complex ways. These social practices are complex in a manner that defies the hegemonic discourses of masculinities. Furthermore, the basis of other possibilities of gender in schools is organized around political strategies that do not rely on emphasizing gender differences for interrupting hegemonic social relations of masculinities. Morojele (2011b) focused his study on boys' stories and encounters of what it means to be a boy and the ramifications of this for girls' and boy's schooling experiences. In this study he innovatively shows an approach that encouraged and supported alternative forms of masculinities as part of a strategy for addressing gender inequalities within the schools. The focus of the study was to show the conventions of Basotho communities and schools which are deeply rooted in the cultural systems of beliefs and social relationships. In this study it shows how the participants had little choice in constructing their identities (Morojele, 2011b). Bhana (2002) draw attention to a range of masculinities and revealed that not all boys are aggressive and violent; she refers to this as "yimvu masculinity". The boys who belonged to this form of masculinity willingly participated in chores that were only assigned to girls at school and even the sports that were traditionally associated with girls like netball and tennis. Yimvu masculinity is less aggressive pattern of conduct and good boys or "*olungile umfana*" (good boys) in Zulu and the boys who belong to this group are described as passive, quiet, harmless boys.

Bhana, Nzimakwe and Nzimakwe (2010) contend that levels of predisposition in girls' and boys' connections in schools are ruined and declined by constructions of masculinity and femininity. These uncover that schools recreate the power relations of male predominance in the general public. Most boys associate toughness and fighting as defining dominant expressions of

masculinity. Their ability to distinguish specific occasions of masculinity demonstrates that they know about practices or decides on practices of masculinity that effect their regular daily existences at school. I comprehend them as drawing on critical discourses about the social relations of masculinity in spite of the way that authors claim that it is next to no endeavour that schools had been made to bring up imperative issues about masculinities (Morojele, 2011b; Swain, 2006).

Generally, there is no intimacy between boys, like a hug; instead they take high fives and aggressive body contact as an alternative gender performance. They show social practices that alert on the strains required in arranging elective potential outcomes and articulation of masculinity while as yet keeping up intact their heterosexuality. “Peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask each other as feminine, as sissies, but boys demonstrate the capacity to interrogate such practices of gender surveillance.” (Morojele, 2011b, p. 677). Although boys are critical of the limitations placed by hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, some questions remain about the social capital that some boys have that empowers them to investigate the guidelines of hegemonic manliness, while as yet keeping in place a satisfactory open execution of masculinity according to different associates.

#### **2.4.4 The possibilities of schools for promotion of equitable gender relations**

It is very important that schools create conducive learning environments that promote equitable gender relations. A review of literature on the aspect of ‘child participation’ suggests that theorizing ‘participation’ has proved to be a complex task. Rampal (2008, p. 316) asserts that the

concept 'child participation' has held diverse connotations. The literature review on 'child participation' indicates that theorizing 'participation' has proved to be a difficult task. However, I am aware that there is agreement that child participation was one of the essential privileges of children installed in the in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2006) This means that children have a right to be actively involved in decisions that patterns to their lives, their community at large. It involves empowering children to be critical thinkers and to express their gender views excellently.

I therefore maintain that in order to address the diversity and ambiguities in how children actively construct gender, we need to extend our understanding of gender construction from sexual action to an extensive variety of discourses and performances through which girls and boys characterise, arrange and basically build their gendered selves. For instance, voice and agency are two key concepts embedded in the new sociology of childhood, part of the framework used in this study. These two concepts improve children's' capacity for adding to society as dynamic citizens. Voice alludes to the group of goals, trusts, grievances, and desires that children monitor as their own particular organisation. Pufall and Unsworth (2004) propose that children are fit for free thinking and are self-deciding performing artists who can add to upgrading their lives. In this study I foreground that it is a child's intrinsic right to participate in the issues that pattern their lives and that this participation should not be in the form of tokenism.

I further advocate the implementation of the GETT report and the requirements of the South African Constitution as discussed in the previous section. Stromquist, Lee, and Brock-Utne (1998) review the literature about the gendered messages transmitted to students through stories



and illustrations in textbooks around the world. They find that the portrayal of women as passive, self-sacrificing, and family oriented, as well as seldom involved in economic or political activities, is consistent across countries.

Moreover, subjects at schools are gendered. I say this because boys were highly invested in the association with mathematics as it served the lifelong project of becoming a boy, hence as adults they could have the potential to be employed in well paying positions. This is something which I noticed in my high school years; there was a great deal of status associated with the classes that majored in Mathematics and Science. My childhood experience relates to this confirmation, as in my primary school all girls had to take sewing and knitting as compulsory subjects while the boys had to do wood-work and girls were not allowed to do the other subjects, even if they were passionate about it or even if they were good. I wasn't good at sewing but I was really fascinated by the excitement and challenge of carving something out of wood, however my desire was forbidden in a subtle manner, because I am a girl.

Wadesango, Rembe and Chabaya (2011) led a study on the evaluation of execution of gender equity policies in schools in South Africa. Their study reveals that teachers were aware that the new curriculum (Curriculum 2005, the Revised National Curriculum Statement and the National Curriculum Statement) was gender-sensitive as it took into consideration issues of social justice and human rights which included gender. The importance of a positive school environment for both academic and health outcomes has been highlighted in research.

## **2.5 MECHANISM FOR ENHANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN SCHOOLS**

Education must be considered in connection to different activities intended to reduce intolerance in light of the fact that educational systems are constantly affected by the setting inside which they are located. As such, policies, programmes and other practices designed to foster tolerance must be vigilant in responding to the realities of students' daily lives and to the broader social and political circumstances that influence education (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005, p. 197).

### **2.5.1 Role of government in enhancing gender equity**

As highlighted in the preceding sections, a plethora of policies have been put in place in South Africa with an aim to transform schools towards gender equitable environment. However, literature reveals that there are challenges in the implementation of these policies. As a result, in this subsection I discuss the mechanisms that can be initiated to enhance gender equality in schools. The government cannot independently from anyone else wipe out the auxiliary, social, and gender inequality that girls and boys confront each day inside schools. The mechanism I propose to enhance gender equality in schools is for Department officials to have an understanding of gender inequality and its effects on girls' and boys' future. This meant conducting assessments and research to reveal the extent of gender inequality. Information need to be collected on continuous in order to understand the gender inequality problem in schools and its effect on children's. There is a need for research to assess the damages of gender inequality on children academically and psychologically. However, research on gender inequality on young children may pose ethical problems and hindrances because of children's powerlessness victims. Before initiating interventions, a deeper understanding and the effect of

gender inequality in communities is essential. Tending to societal constructions and understandings of gender must be at the bleeding edge of projects for change. Therefore, government needs to have different approach to programmes to create the most sustainable change. All the relevant and interested stakeholders in the education sector must be involved in effective programmes. Their involvement has a significant role in changing the structural norm in the society as the main actors. Local leaders may have energy to energise support for the intervention. Policy makers can also play the role through changing the policies that indirectly creates inequalities and motivate for policies that protect against abuse. Involvement of community members can change their attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate inequality of gender. Teachers must be trained on an ongoing basis to recognize the impact of their attitudes, values, and behaviours.

### **2.5.2 School based mechanism for enhancing gender equality**

The literature reviewed indicates that despite the fact that gender equity policies in the education sector are in place, there are failures in the implementation of these policies at the school level. As discussed above, in South Africa girls have equal access to schooling (Redpath, Morrell, Jewkes, & Peacock, 2008). The dominant images of masculinity and femininity schools convey to learners are those which seem to perpetuate gender inequality. This means there is a lack of mechanisms that enable schooling to align to the South African Constitution and education policies in which equality for all (both girls and boys) is guaranteed as a fundamental human right. There is a requirement for various mediations that are nearly receptive to the specific nearby settings. This incorporates express concern with gender equality in learning and

administration, including regard for the educational programs, learning materials and instructive practices.

Gender equality initiatives should emphasise the need for teachers to embrace notions of femininities and masculinities as plural and fluid human qualities. There seems to be a life-demeaning, constraining and brutal consequence that the promotion of stereotypical gender discourses may have on children and on equitable gender relations in schools and society. There should be proper monitoring and support availed to schools by district officials (Unterhalter, 2005). Schools should take issues of sexual violence seriously through the school management taking their responsibilities.

Education and gender awareness programmes need to be implemented on a continuous basis at all levels. Teacher education needs to equip teachers with the skills needed to promote an understanding of the profound nature of gender inequity. Teacher training in gender equality should be included in both pre-service and in-service institutions and in school based programmes. It should also be accompanied with follow up support and monitoring. Teachers also need to work together on the strategy of sustaining training and providing ongoing support to each other and education officials. Handling gender contrasts that negatively affect educational accomplishment ought to be best done at an entire school level and as a feature of the establishment's general ethos. This ought to be done especially with regards to challenging gender cultures, and zero resistance of homophobia and different types of segregation/provocation. Learners ought to be made mindful that the staff nurtures their exertion, advance and happiness.

### **2.5.3 Role of community in enhancing gender equality**

The community members have an important role to play in enhancing gender equality as they are powerful actors in the transformation of cultural attitudes. Different local communities have different social justice priorities, in other words what might be considered as fair in a certain community might not be fair to another community. Hence all together for human rights thoughts to be successful, they should be converted into neighbourhood terms and arranged inside nearby settings of force and importance (Merry, 2006). That is call for a need to include community members as well as children's in the empowerment programme which will bring nearby understandings and learning to educate programming through exchange with a specific end goal to achieve change. Moreover, the attention needs to address the constructions of gender and gender roles that position women as powerless and underneath men.

A clear human right approach could be an effective programme within the schooling system. The Common Understanding on Human Rights-Based Approaches (HRBA) which was adopted by the United Nations Development Group (2003) provides communities with the tools and knowledge to address problems. Moreover, this approach gives people power over their own lives; while they actively participate they gain knowledge and they are able to see the possibility and results of their actions. I strongly believe that the participation of communities enables a culturally relevant approach. The part of HRBA encourages worldwide interest and unites people in the struggle for dignity for every single person. Instructing guardians and giving family

support ought to give guardians clear and informed direction on the best way to converse with their children about gender, relationship and sexual orientation issues.

#### **2.5.4 Children's role in enhancing gender equality**

In order to enhance children's role in gender equality it is important to actively engage them in a process of dialogue in their vernacular and reflect through participatory methods in order to transform their gender attitudes, values, and behaviours. There is a need for more to be undertaken which will focus on exploring children's needs and explore the kind of support they need on their sexual identities, cultures and gender relations. It is important to support children's needs and understand their everyday experiences of gender and sexual cultures. This will include challenging the adults thinking on children's social universes: for instance, boyfriend and girlfriend issue may be comprehended as far as companionships as opposed to as confirmation of untimely sexualisation.

Since this study underscored certain activities that could be helpful to advance fairness and assorted qualities it ought to shape part of a structure of work in schools to advance the social and passionate needs of children's. This ought to incorporate a thought to make post of advocates that will offer the advantages of offering counselling at school. Change ought to be considered in connection to enhancing classroom instructions and learning, reinforcing school initiative, sorting out school change and advancing best practice. There should be on-going workshops and seminars that provide children and young with clear information about equity and differing qualities issues, connections and where they can go for counsel and support about stresses and

worries on these issues, including inappropriate behaviour. Children ought to be included in outlining a crusade and online assets with a specific end goal to bring issues to light of differences issues, including sex and sexuality inside and outside school.

Lastly, curriculum coverage on gender norms could assist children to get an opportunity to share their views. This would deepen children's' understandings of the opposite gender and how their gender influences affect their own lives. These will advance the understandings of gender and its effects, in order to help with building more advantageous connections between children regardless of gender, and to change practices and activities.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have examined the aims and objectives of my study, in order to identify the gaps in the literature that will pave the way for the findings chapters. The first objective is about girls' and boys' experiences of gender within the primary school context. The literature discussion reveals that their experiences are based on the two socially accepted categories of gender, namely femininity and masculinity. The second objective is on the discourses and practices that affect girls' and boys' geographies. The discussion also reveals the patriarchal attitudes that girls and boys are subjected to at school.

The third objective is about the ways girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools. The literature findings reveal that there is indeed an amount of agency that girls and boys exercise. The literature also reveals that there are both

inclusion and exclusion as the discourses within schools perpetuate the positions of dominance and subordination. The literature has not explored in depth the discourses and practices that girl and boys are exposed to in the primary schools and how it affects their geographies. The implications for gender relations within the school discussed in the literature include the need to develop programmes that enhance schools' abilities in achieving an equitable schooling environment, that add value to girls' and boys' lives at primary school level and that empower them.

Chapter 3 discuss the theoretical frameworks guiding my study. The discussion revolves around the following theories: Childhood, constructionism, socialisation and the new concept of new sociology of children's studies. I also discuss Butler's theory of performativity and alternative gender performances (Butler, 1990; 2005).



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORISING GENDER AND CHILDREN IN SCHOOLING CONTEXTS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this study I aimed to listen to girls' and boys' stories of gender and their daily practices in schooling contexts. Moreover, I aimed to understand ways in which they exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences. This chapter introduces the theoretical frameworks that guided my study. My study has used theories of constructionism, socialisation and the new sociology of children's studies. I also discuss Butler's theory of performativity and alternative gender performances. These theories on performativity were not initially part of my theoretical framework but during the data analysis process it was realized that I needed greater theoretical clarity on the patterns that were identified. I have included theory from the new sociology of children's studies as it foregrounds children as active participants who can shape their future (James & Christensen, 2008). I concur with Mayall (2002) as she states that the contribution of children to the social order is important in order to understand their experiences of gender in school. Therefore, this implies there is already available writing on childhood as social position for an investigation of children. The developing literature on childhood concentrates on uncovers the significance of childhood as a social position for the investigation of a once in the past disregarded group.

The new sociology of children's studies addresses the social and cultural background of children hence it is particularly interested in the social relationships of the child. I further discuss globalization and international legislation that protect the rights of children as human beings whose contributions are of paramount importance. This study focuses on girls' and boy's schooling and gendered experiences in two primary schools, with a view to promoting a gender-equitable schooling environment.

The sociological theory of social constructionism is used to highlight the role of discourses in communicating and shaping gender values and meanings. The theoretical construction of gender is discussed to illuminate insights into the complex relationship between childhood and gender socialisation as discussed based on the model developed by Harro (2000). This addresses how girls and boys are socialised by people around them at home, school, church etc. and how such socialisation predisposes them to unequal roles in the dynamic systems of oppression around the world. The concept of new sociology of children's studies centres on the idea that girls and boys are not vacant compartments but rather dynamic social on-screen characters who shape their own distinctions (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012). Hence, in this study I take a sociological stand that foregrounds girls and boys as active agents, whose gender relations are worth of study.

Finally, I discuss literature that theorises performances (Butler, 1990; Skelton, 2001). My understanding of literature revealed specific contexts where the existence of power relations reconstitutes the asymmetrical and unequal nature of gender relations. I also look at the discourses and practices that affect children's geographies. The theories used in this study create

an opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of girls' and boys' experiences of gender, and how they perceive themselves within the schooling context.

### **3.2 THEORIES OF THE HISTORY OF CHILDREN AND GENDER**

Theories of the history of children have provided me with rich knowledge on children as to how the past informs what is presently taking place. Briefly, the theories on children have addressed such issues of child labour and the new media age. Other researchers have also successfully applied theories of children to their studies. Thorne (1993, p. 23), in a U.S based study of children's gender, "drew on ethnographic study techniques to know the social worlds of girls and boys aged nine to ten years in a public elementary school". The study encountered girls and boys occupied in different forms spaces and places on different times. Initially the researcher did not understand girls and boys pattern of playing as they were living things untidy. After various months, children's play seemed well and good. The findings of this study suggest that girls and boys have their own meanings about their lives and the kind of actions they are engaged in their everyday living.

The sociological perspective provided me a theoretical lens in this study to argue that children as a social group offer certain qualities which are critical and without a doubt deserving of study (Morojele and Muthukrishna, 2012). Hence, in this study I aimed at understanding girls' and boys' experiences of gender through listening to their stories of gender as well as their daily experiences of gender in schools. My epistemological introduction was impacted by the previous

civil arguments on originations of children, and the power-laden spaces of their lives. Consequently, I engaged the use of creative methods to listen to girls and boys on their schooling experiences. I foregrounded their voices and their entitlement to take an interest in my study as I trusted that they had critical perspectives on issues in their schooling lives; from this perspective, the link between children and the power laden spaces of adults call, for intervention and change.

As a point of departure, I intended to explore ways of giving children back their future. Children have a future and they represent a future. I therefore move away from viewing children as a subordinate group who need to be protected and be set up for adulthood. Obviously, it is adults that claim the future for children as opposed to children themselves. I say this because the gender-based roles assigned to girls and boys prepares them for their future careers and responsibilities. This leads me to another point, that in this era girls and boys were positioned as passive and as having limited agency to navigate their gender-based experiences. The issues of agency that this study aims to explore remain central to a critical understanding of children. According to this discourse, children are innocent and pure, and their regular goodness is defiled by contact with the degenerate outside world. I differ with this discourse, which I see as based on how adults would like children to be. I argue rather that the society and beliefs of culture create boundaries and in doing so create the opportunity for multiple acts of transgression.

My personal stand is that children are competent partners rather than objects in this study. So, I ask a question: In what ways do children exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools? I am asking this question, because if we believe girls and

boys are social actors as the sociological perspective advise, girls and boys are than entitled to views about issues, and organization in the spaces in which they connect. In other words, girls and boys should be allowed at school to navigate their gender-based experiences on their own without being constructed to fit into the already made pattern of who is a girl and who is a boy.

### **3.3 SOCIOCULTURAL THEORIES OF GENDER AND CHILDREN**

In this section I discuss the social and cultural background of children. I attempt to bring into being the understanding of the version - who is the child? The question that then comes into my mind is, how do we know what we know? Therefore, in this study I argue that there are different kinds of children; there is no single definition, hence not universal. Rather there are products of culture and all things considered they shift across over time and place. A child growing up in KZN is different from a child growing up somewhere else, because of their cultural backgrounds. In this study I therefore position my interest in a child as a member of a social group rather than as an individual. I call for an urgent need for sociological research that views children as active agents. The dire need is for research to investigate the issues of socialisation hence in this study I am aim to understand girls' and boys' experiences of gender within the schooling context.

I therefore take a stand that children are active agents who can take decisions and make meaning of the world around them; therefore, their socio-cultural backgrounds are worth studying. The question that I attempt to answer is 'How do children know what they know?' I acknowledged

that there could be many answers to this question. However, for the sake of space in this study I provide three answers which to me are more relevant in the nature of a study like this one. Firstly, they learnt through culture, as I believe culture is the way of life and something that people do. It was then for this reason that I recognize that girls and boys know what they know and therefore their experiences are worth studying. I believe children constitute an important part of a general public arrangement of perspectives, qualities and social communications therefore I argue that their voices should be heard. Therefore, in this study I view girls and boys as agentic social actors and I study them in their own rights. The media also play a role in what children know, for example, it portrays an image of a slim girl with long silky hair as beautiful and then girls become envious to resemble that image. While seeking to resemble the image they are exposed to risk of pregnancy and HIV infections as they might enter into sexual relationships as a means to get money. It was for this reason that I perceive a strong reason for both a macro and a micro viewpoint, to situate girls' and boys' relationship. In this way they will be empowered on the risks involved as they will all know what they know and what is affordable in their lifestyles.

Thorne (1993) conducted a study on children's gender and play using the ethnographic techniques. Her study concluded that friendships have a structure and an internal logic that make sense to girls and boys. However, Thorne (1993) argues that separating into groups does not mean girls and boys each separate into two big groups. Contexts of power relations in which they exist. This means that friendship pattern makes a spatial separation between girls and boys that they keep up through play and social association. Hence I conclude that girls and boys act or perform gender in order to be acceptable within their peer groups. I argue that girls and boys knew what they know and do what they do as they have learnt it in their friendship and gender

experience. Therefore, in this study I contribute to an understanding of children's experiences of gender as being natural and self-evident feature of a girl's and boy's lives within modern society. For this reason, I critique researchers who view girls and boys as tabula rasa. I take a stance to call for the muted voices of girls and boys to be heard. Girls and boys, when playing, establish bigger examples of disparity, by gender, social class and race, and by substantial attributes like weight. Girls are dealt with as typically debasing in a way that boys are definitely not. This may be because culture sexualises girls at a young age more than boys, and female sexuality, especially when out of place or actively associated with children, connotes danger and endangerment (Thorne, 1993).

As a result of my stance, my methodological approach throughout this study is child-centred and I respect girls' and boys' thinking and behaviour throughout this study. Hence, I claim that my standpoint differs sharply from the psychological perspectives which tend to universalize child development. In the section that follows I discuss issues of policy implications, theories of gender and how they may produce contradictions when they crash realities of children's lives.

### **3.4 THEORIES THAT UNDERLY POLICIES OF GENDER AND CHILDREN**

In this section, I briefly discuss the global legislation on gender and children, and go beyond to discuss the aims of the South African curriculum, since it resonates with the worldwide approaches on children, especially the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child

(UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). These principles clearly suggest that the intervention of an adult in the child's lives should be in the best interest of the child. It places the child's right at the centre of legally binding principles. In this way the rights of children are protected and they are treated as human beings whose active contribution is of paramount importance. This is also evident in the legislation regarding children in the United Kingdom (United Nations, 1989).

In discussing the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in South Africa I am interested in change especially with regard to patriarchal attitudes. I remember during my school years how we were punished if you were seen with a boy, and also how cultural beliefs created difficulties at school. I remember how sharing a desk created problems, when as girls we reported to teachers that boys are taking a lot of space as they sit with their legs wide open. Therefore, we had to occupy a small space in the desk which was making it difficult to write. When we reported this challenge, teachers used to bring in the cultural belief of boys being allowed to sit with their legs wide open. Hence I am interested in finding out whether, when schools implement gender sensitive policies, they only address the symptoms of patriarchy (such as girls and boys sitting together so as to become equal partners) and not the roots (whereby boys are accorded more power to meet the requirements of the dominant masculinity). Teachers do not have to be blamed for patriarchal attitudes; I fully understand that it is not easy for them to automatically change their patriarchal upbringing. Moreover, girls and boys themselves come from patriarchal families whereby boys are constructed to fit into the world of masculinity. Therefore, girls and boys should be understood in their social environment; in the section that follows I discuss the sociological theory of social constructions to determine how they navigate their gender-based experiences.



### **3.5 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM, GENDER AND CHILDREN**

In this section I find it important to address the question that asks: what is it about social constructionism that makes it appropriate as the intellectual basis of the study for the understanding of children? “Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge that considers how genders as social phenomena develop in girls’ and boys’ schooling contexts” (Burr, 1995, p. 53). As a result, I utilize social constructionism in order to understand how gender operates within the school, historically and in present sociocultural constituted relations. Understanding the cultural artefact of gender is fundamental in order to challenge the underestimated gender discourses and practices of gender, hence it is one of the aims of this study to investigate how it affects girls’ and boys’ geographies.

At the centre of social constructionism is the view that our methods for seeing the world are created by relations as opposed to external realities (Gegen, 1999). In any case, this did not imply that there are no external realities; rather, what is imperative is how girls and boys understand and make meanings of their surroundings. Social constructionism does not rule on what was or was not originally however the minute we express what there is or what is really we enter the universe of discourse and in this manner a convention, a lifestyle and an arrangement of significant worth inclination. In this study I critique discourse that views children as weak and vulnerable, as discussed in detail earlier. Instead I advise that gender relations within the school

could be seen better through investigation of the social relations and convictions that teachers and parents credit to gender (being female and male).

This implies discourses are thought up and anticipated through social frameworks of convictions and social connections. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal, the context is dominated mainly by patriarchal beliefs that regards a man as “*inhloko*” (head of the family) while a mother is the care giver in the family. Thus the daily focus tends to be ensuring dominant and subordinate practical livelihood strategies (Molapo, 2006). People living in these communities are resigned to an awareness of gender inequalities and gendered power-related conflicts that ensue as a result of dominant gender discourses. In this province the way of life and social practices, such as giving away the bride in marriage, or assigning roles according to gender are evident in this study, and I argue that it all carries meaning of gender position. Such practices constitute a gendered discourse. Based on these discourses, girls and boys are socialised and pressured to perform gender in conformity to what is thought up to be a typical status of undertakings. This legitimises the inequitable gender relations to appear as if they are a normal part of life. In this study this means the hierarchal structure, for example who occupies leadership positions and the policies within the school. It addresses who does what (males are employed as security staff and women are employed as kitchen staff).

In this way, understanding the cultural artefacts of gender turn into a profitable premise of alarming the underestimated discourses and practices of gender which are frequently viewed as typical, however assume an imperative part in the creation of gender imbalances. Field (2001, p.

223) reflects on “the power of androcentric discourses within learning environments and concludes that all gendered discourses are no more than masculine myths”. In this study, this means that stable human identities have been collapsed into the category of masculinities and femininities and then ascribed to a girl and a boy. The question was what happens to those children whose human qualities do not fit into these two categories. There are alternative performances of gender that exist (Morojele, 2009); therefore, this situation calls for more research to be conducted on gender at school if there are children who are at school but whose needs are not catered for.

I share the same sentiments as social constructionism in that discourse is a vehicle through which inequitable gender relations are infused and taken for granted as normal and the only truth. I remember, how as a child I was always told at home “*hlala njengentombazane*” (sit like a girl). In Zulu culture there is a prescribed way of how a girl and a boy sit and we all grew up taking it as normal and the only way of sitting. Girls were and are still expected to sit with their legs tight together while boys were encouraged to sit with their legs wide open. Therefore, the taken for granted discourse as normal part of life, is just like the water is to fish metaphor that was used by a French sociologist (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 320 ) in explaining how the concept ‘habitus’ operates in gendered relations; as mentioned before. The fish in the water metaphor mirrored the embeddedness of people in their social world with discourse being the primary means by which girls and boys construct their gender idea. I find this having common characteristics with Hence Cole (1996) concludes that girls’ and boys’ understanding of gender depends on the available list of gender values and discourses in the society (including the school) that their community holds to, as unquestionably as infants come washed in amniotic liquid (Cole, 1996). Employing social

constructionism in this study presents more generative conceptualisations, particularly of girls and boys within the school as active agents who construct their methods for drawing in with the world through social connections.

McNay (2000, p. 125) similarly “conceptualises gender identities as multiple and fluid, a lived set of embodied potentialities”. This fluidity could be a source of agency with the potential to enhance the movement of schools towards becoming gender equitable schooling environments. Hence Cameron (2004) affirms that there are different methods for doing womanhood and masculinity or girlhood and childhood, assorted masculinities and femininities, bent by every other measurement of somebody's social personality. Harro (2000) calls these dimensions the Cycle of Socialization. In the section that follows I discuss Butler’s theory of performativity and illustrate the possibilities of breaking the cycle.

### **3.6 GENDER SOCIALISATION THEORY AND CHILDREN**

In this section, I discuss the ways in which girls and boys see their world through lenses created by means of socialisation through people around at home, church, school etc. People are born into a specific set of social identities, including race and skin colour and are therefore predisposed to unequal roles in the dynamic systems of oppression that exist in the world. In other words, people around us help to shape our expectations, values, norms, behavioural roles and it is from them that we eventually also learn stereotypes and prejudice. We cannot blame

them for all what we know as they might have been also uncritically drawing from their backgrounds. According to Harro (2000, p. 45), the Cycle of Socialization can be seen as “pervasive (coming from all sides and sources), consistent (patterned and predictable), circular (self-supporting), self-perpetuating (interdependent), and invisible (unconscious and unnamed)”. In this study, I decided to use Harro’s Cycle of Socialization to explain the ways in which girls and boys are socialised into the social world.

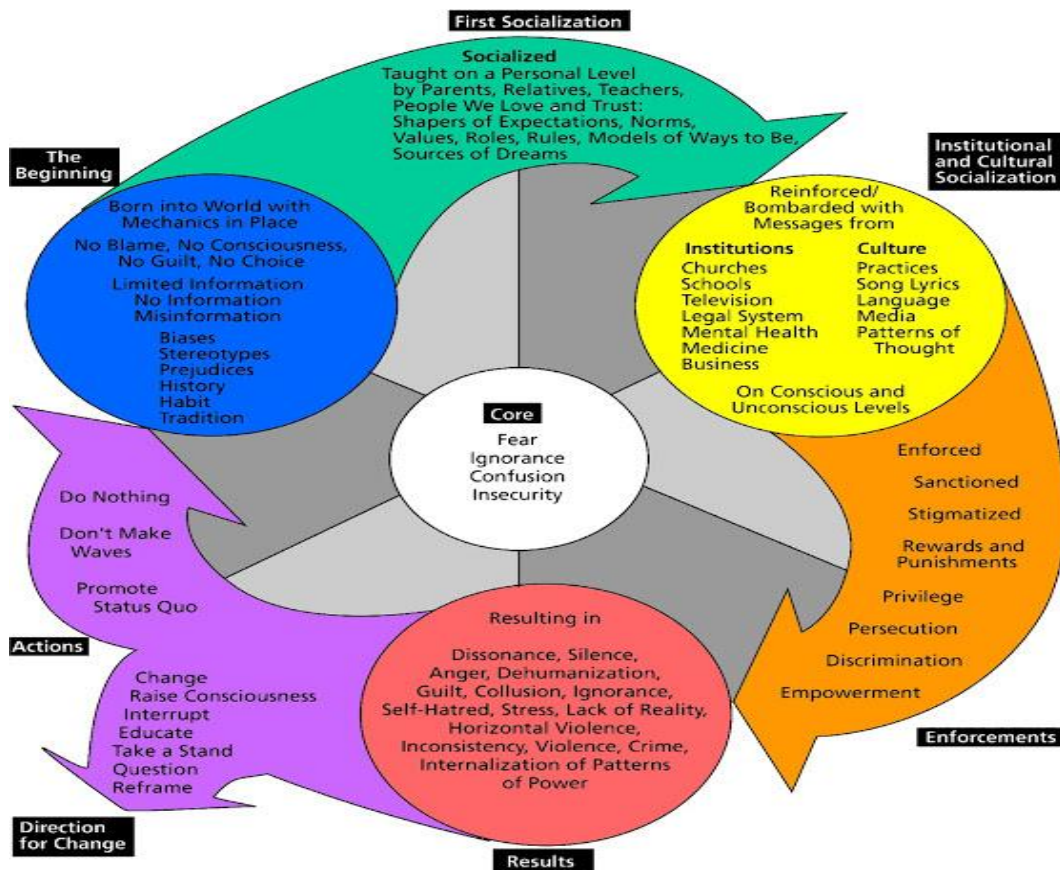


Figure 2: The Cycle of Socialization (Harro, 2000, p. 45)

Harro (2000) alludes to the fact that every individual is born without guilt, blame, biases or prejudice. People are socialised by people close to them like parents, friends, teachers and other people whom “we love and trust” (ibid., p. 45). In other words, people around us help to shape our expectations, values, norms, behavioural roles and it is from them that we eventually also learn stereotypes and prejudice. We cannot blame them for all what we know as they might have been also uncritically drawing from their backgrounds. As a result, consciously and unconsciously our socialisation is continuously being reinforced by the learning that Jansen (2001, p. 271) refers to as the “social curriculum, i.e. messages from religious institutions and services, schools, legal systems, the business community, the broadcasting and printed media, adult conversation, friends, direct observation, sport groups, social customs and practices, language, etc.”

Socialisation theory does not deny the socially developed classifications allocated to girls and boys in our general public and the partnered gender inequality that emerges from this categorisation. However, it challenges the underestimated implications appended to these socially built substances as though they were actuality, static and inescapable. This social approach to children concentrates on understanding children’s experiences as subjects in the world, rather than their abilities to make meaning about the world around them. In this perspective, I was forced to even consider whether and how gender inequality in the schools might be productive. However, this study was grounded on the belief that gender inequality compromises the quality of life experiences for both girls and boys, and therefore, it aims to find ways in which girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender experiences.

In order to understand how gender operates in learning environments, for instance in schools, we also need to examine ways in which stakeholders (e.g. teachers, parents, girls and boys) as construct meaning of their general surroundings in connection to gender issues (Harro, 2000). According to the Socialisation theory, gender relations in learning environments could be understood through analysis of the social relations and values that teachers, parents and children ascribe to gender (being a girl or boy) as mentioned earlier. To me, this implied, keeping in mind the end goal to see how parents, teachers and children construct gender, analysis must concentrate on the social domains within which participants are situated. Within these realms there are systems of beliefs and relationships that constitute inequitable gender relations and categories that girls and boys rely on in order to understand themselves and others. As such, this study investigated children's experiences of gender inequality in the school environment. It explores how gender discourses and practices affect children's geographies.

Inside the subjected position of gender there are few types of hegemonic show up as hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995). In this study I contend that discussing multi-gendered characters and hegemonic masculinity in a school is insufficient if we do not identify with what is occurring in schools. This connection is of essential significance as we expect that schools to mirror the hegemonic masculinities working at the level of general society. Accordingly, from the perspective of this study which concentrates on setting up sexual orientation talks and practices that influence children's geographies, I think that it is important to say only a couple variables. The fact that the school is a special site for the construction of femininities and masculinity is emphasized by several studies. The main contradiction that school girls are confronted with is

the expectation that they should be both feminine and successful at the same time (Renold, 2000). On the other hand, boys should be both masculine and be powerful.

Confronted with the contradictory demand on them between femininity and success, most school girls fall back on the system of feminisation of scholarly achievement, while a few boys resort to hegemonic masculinity; if they choose otherwise they will be victims of emotional exclusion (Renold, 2000). The official culture of the school puts on a show to be gender unbiased however is in certainty portrayed by the omnipresence of gender. The school is the social institution that reinforces and challenges gender inequality through an unfair social order and through gender inequality. Morojele (2011a) follows the association between these practices and proceeding with tyrant states of mind which, thus, keep up the abusive instructive and gender arrange that has a unequal gender imbalance. Gender relations join with gender practices to empower unequal social relations among and amongst girls and boys. This implies gender relations are formed by gender discourses in schools, and a methods by which gender meaning and situating are constituted. Therefore, this means performing or acting a particular role and once the act is finished one reverts back to social reality that perceives and constructs children.

This study aims to establish the gendered spaces and places within the schooling contexts. Our gendered habitus is thus produced through the embodied accretion and effects of gendered dispositions as I have mentioned earlier. A gendered habitus is expressed through durable ways of being, doing or performing gender (Butler, 2005), standing, speaking, walking, clothing, stylisation of the body, and in so doing of feeling and thinking (Reay, 1995). Morojele (2011) finds that boys occupy larger spaces in schools, for example, on football grounds, in the school



yard and even in desks. Consequently, this accords power to them while on the other hand girls occupy small places and they end up spending their break times often inside the classroom. Therefore, the gender differences in roles between girls and boys are socially constructed. Hence, the children have disguised the conviction that girls and boys are not the same; their societal desires have an impact by the way they explore their gender experiences. The fish-in-water metaphor reflects how individuals are connected to their social surroundings. With discourse being the primary means to construct the historically constituted gendered social relations, the likelihood is that our basic familiarity with gender disparities gets to be lessened or compromised. This overlaps with “Foucault’s notion of the docile body, which depicts the social regimes that make human bodies submissive and controllable, and how this is contrived to affect the prospects of gender usefulness which in turn results in gender discipline” (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011, p. 35). Gender discipline in this sense refers to the performance of gender through unquestioning conformity to dominant discourses of gender that reinforce gender inequalities. These notions reflect how people are attached to gender discourses and practices within learning environments, to the point where they do not question the inequitable gender relations.

The taken-for-granted discourses that promote inequitable gendered learning environments is, in part, a culmination of what Foucault (1986) refers to as the seductive operations of power, which attempts to eradicate its presence under the pretext of normalcy, thus positioning what is trivial and what is not worth protesting (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011; Young & Barrett, 2001). In this study I critique the taken-for-granted discourses and insisted that we ought to listen to girls’ and boys’ voices even if what they have to say may not accord with normative understanding of childhood. I advise that girls’ and boys’ voices have something valuable to add to the debates

about their lives. I therefore, call for more researchers to insist the significance of listening to them, even maybe where their perspectives challenge scholarly wisdom and adults. I advocate a view of children as independent knowing subjects whose voices are of paramount importance to bring into debate. I also want to put it clear that by advocating children's voices I do not mean that we should not listen to others who shape children's future like policy makers, teachers and parents. However, I advise that it is critical to regard childhood and children's encounters and expand on the current courses in which children effectively see and draw in with the world. The new social science of children studies as further examined underneath gives knowledge into a viewpoint that sees children's dynamic individuals who are able to make implications about the structures and methods around them.

### **3.7 GENDER AND THE NEW SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD STUDIES**

In this section I discuss the gender studies and the new sociology of childhood studies that have guided me in conducting research on children based on the principles that are set down in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. It centres on the notion that "children are not empty containers but active participants and social actors who shape their own individualities" (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012, p. 220). I therefore take a different sociological stand, as mentioned earlier, that foregrounds children as dynamic social operators who shape the structures and procedures around them, especially at the smaller scale level, and whose social connections are deserving of study in their own particular right.

Hegemonic representations have constructed children as not as much as adults, and as adults really taking shape, as opposed to social creatures in their own rights I criticize this view on the basis that children are essentialised and patronised. Hence, in this study I take a shift into sociological perspectives of the new sociology of childhood studies. I am foregrounding girls and boys as dynamic social agents who shape the structures around them. Young and Barrett (2001, p. 145) note that the “practices that influence children in their relationships are left uncontested, or if they are, it is usually done by not including their views, experiences and emotions of children themselves”. This study endeavours to give the voice of children so that social techniques that force on gender are highlighted.

The UNCRC presents children as defenceless; therefore, children’s rights should be respected (Camfield, Streuli, & Woodhead, 2008). They suggest that the involvement of adults in the life of a child should be aimed at promoting the interest of a child, thus prioritising children’s rights in the setting of human rights; the hugeness of privileges of all children is essential (Moran-Ellis, 2010). I am aligning my conceptualisation of children studies with the principles embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which foregrounds the idea that children are not passive objects. I am interested in gender and the field of children studies and call for more researchers to employ it in their research since it has a significant impact on how children are researched. It makes it clear to me as a researcher that there is a traditional shift from conducting research on children to research with children; hence in throughout this study girls and boys are active participants whose voices are heard telling their gender stories. As mentioned earlier I foreground the view that children are capable of producing meaning about

the world around them since they are members of the society and have vast experience about their lives.

This raises a question about the kind of research methodologies I am going to use in this study. Kehily (2003) analysed children's culture. Her analysis motivated children's voices to be heard and recommended that culture ought to be meant diagrammatically as interconnecting circles in which children establish a greater part of the general public's social collaboration. Throughout this study I attempt to understand children's ideas on their own terms and maintain a child-centred approach which promotes great respect for children's thinking and behaviour. I concur that commitments of children to the social request ought to be remembered; they are gifted at different correspondence while doing their own exercises in making and in keeping connections at school and out of school (Mayall, 2010). Gender is such a sensitive issue and so central to human existence as Harro (2000, p. 16) posited, it is possible to break the cycle of the gendering process that reinforces gender inequality.

### **3.8 BUTLER'S THEORY OF PERFORMATIVITY AND ALTERNATIVE GENDER PERFORMANCES**

In this section, I discuss Butler's theory of performativity and alternative gender performances. There are specific contexts where power relations work in such a way that they are allowed to form extremely limited moments of power and the asymmetrical and unequal nature of gender relations can be reconstituted. The material context provides clues to the marginalisation of

certain voices. In this study, it is important to know the meanings that girls and boys attach to their surroundings and what positions they take up, how they do so and evaluating their choices. It also meant identifying the discourses which position them in certain ways and not others. Hence this study investigates the discourses and practices that affect children's geographies. Research has demonstrated that children can and do take up positions within a context of constraint and possibility (MacNaughton, 2000). For example, Epstein and Telford (2003) in their study of race, shows how children at the age of seven are capable of reflecting on their experiences as long as they are encouraged and supported to do so. Similarly, Davies and Banks (1995) argue that children aged four to five learn to take up their maleness and femaleness as if it were a habitual element of their personal selves, and they do so through learning the discursive practices in which all people are positioned as either male or female.

Gender is an important element of human identity; however, it has a constructed status which is fashioned through culture around individuals. The difference between women and men seems to be founded on nature. This conservative view, however, is challenged by Butler (1997), who insists on a new way of looking at sex and gender she maintains that identity is performativity. Than when we categorise people into a boy or a girl it is the result of their performance (Butler, 1990). By this she meant that gender is not an essential part of people's identity, but a performance that varies according times and situations. In other words, it is how the person acts on certain times rather than who he or she essentially is. This is an innovative approach, where identity is seen as allowing a person to construct his or her own individual identity (Butler, 1990). In this study this means boys for example may not always be given the status of leading the group as a norm because classroom activity maybe a content that they do not know, therefore

the leader can be a girl. I believe power is not fixed but negotiable based on the situation at that particular time.

Butler deals also with the problematical relationship between sex, gender and desire. According to the psychoanalytical theory, gender is a product of our sex, which in turn influences the idea of opposite sex. This is a simplistic way on looking at sexuality which creates only two possible connections where one can either be one particular sex or feel attracted towards the opposite. Butler's ambition, however, is to dismantle this rigid link between sex, gender and desire so that people can be regarded as individual human beings rather than representatives of their sex (Butler, 1990). In this study Butler's work is useful in that she claims the agentic possibility of girls and boys, which I study in the primary schooling context. Thus meanings, power and identity are made through discourse. Power relations are always maintained and disrupted in discourse, hence this study find it important to investigate the discourses and practices that affect children's geographies. Butler (1990, p. 55) also refers to the disruption of identity; "using the idea that gender is a performance serving the interests of heterosexuality." She argues that gender is a repeated stylisation, a set of repeated acts. However, in the performance there are disruptions or violations of norms and this poses a threat of gender performance as less than real and normal. What is also useful about Butler's idea in this thesis is the notion of power which can be turned and used to produce alternate complex modalities of power. In this study this power may result in children experiencing gender equality in the school environment.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical frameworks guiding my study. I addressed the importance of how boys and girls perceive and make sense of the world around them in relation to issues of gender. I further highlighted a more generative conceptualisation, particularly of girls and boys within the school context as active, creative beings who do construct the ways and means through which they engage with issues of gender. Within these contexts of active processes of gender construction, power and agency both play a vital role in enabling children to either conform to or rebel against gendered social relations. It is surmised from this view that the deeply held historical and social constructions of childhood will have impacted on girls' and boys' schooling and gender experiences. This notion has guided me to understand the discourses and practices that result in unequal relations within the schooling contexts.

In this study the new sociology of children's studies and Butler's theory of performativity conveyed the issue of agency. This study has sought to find out if girls and boys have the agency to navigate their gender-based experiences at school. Deeper understanding of girls' and boys' schooling and gender-based experiences as well as the power relations that inform those experiences will provide insights that can be used to construct gender equitable schooling environments. The ensuing chapters discuss the research methodology and design relevant to this study in order to answer the three main research questions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONDUCTING RESEARCH ABOUT GENDER WITH SCHOOL CHILDREN**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate girls' and boys' schooling and experiences of gender within the school. This study was conducted in two Durban primary schools. This chapter focuses on the research methodology and design relevant to this study in order to answer the three main questions which are the following. Firstly, it sought to find out girls' and boys' stories of gender-based experiences in the context of two primary schools in Durban. Secondly it explored the gender discourses and practices that affect children's geographies within these schooling contexts. The emphasis here was on the influence brought about by culture, gender and power relations. Thirdly, the study sought to find ways in which girls and boys exercise agency in navigating gender-based experiences and their positioning within the schools.

In leading this study, I deliberately concentrated on the gendered experiences of girls and boys, and how these experiences are shaped by and shape their schooling experiences. In negotiating this maze of complexity, the intention was to understand how gendered discourses, constructions and practices perpetuate and/or challenge dominant constructions of gender. The analysis of these children's experiences aims to penetrate and get to the core of the origins of how and why these understandings came into being in the first place.



In discussing methodological and design issues informing this study, the chapter foregrounds the following key aspects: the ontological and epistemological location, assumptions (of reality and knowledge) and choices that informed the directions and paths of the study; the critical interpretivist assumptions that influenced the trajectory of the study; the qualitative orientation that served as a template for the design choices that I made; personal reflections on my subjective positions with regards to the processes and dynamics of knowledge production; the considerations that I had to take into account in order to ensure that my interactions with participants remained ethical; and design limitations of the study. This chapter begins with an outline of the ontological dimensions of the study.

#### **4.2 ONTOLOGICAL LOCATION OF THE STUDY**

In this section, I declare my ontological assumptions – “what constitutes reality, that is, how things are and how they work.” (Mason, 2006, p. 20). In doing this, I present my assumptions of how I understand reality in my attempt to respond to the questions that are the origins of this research study. This therefore implies my awareness of the fact that the construction of knowledge in this thesis is, indeed, rooted in my assumptions about what constitutes reality.

Given the above, I therefore present the assumptions that inform my worldview and how these relate to my choices about knowledge and the social world. In order to do this, I pose the following puzzle to myself: What are my assumptions about what constitutes social reality? In order to respond to this question, I decided to deploy a ‘confessional voice’ because I believed it

would be useful in examining the values, knowledge, position and purpose that formed the foundations of my attempts to uncover their influence in the construction and production of research knowledge. Throughout this study, I tried to approach reality subjectively, not as an external reality “out there” that requires the maintenance of a detached, aloof position. My assumption was that truth does not reside out there, but that reality is subjective and can only be constructed through the empathetic understanding of the meaning participants attach to their own social worlds. For me, conceptions of knowledge are likely to be informed by conceptions of how reality is socially constructed, where the key focus is on interpretation and negotiation of the meanings attached to the social world.

Therefore, in this study I adopted a view of reality as influenced and guided by the participants’ consciousness and lived experiences, contrary to the positivist conceptions of reality, where reality is understood as being objective and external to human beings. In view of this, I foregrounded the perspective that treats research as an endeavour that is participative in nature and allows for multiple voices to be heard and respected. In order to give effect to this, I ensured that I remained aware of my own social positioning, which I believe formed part of the substance and trajectory of this study. My positioning in this study is that of both an ‘outsider’ that is at the same time an ‘insider’. My status as an ‘outsider’ originates from the fact that I am studying constructions of gender in schooling contexts that are outside of my immediate experience – that is, I do not work and have never worked in these two schools. However, I am an ‘insider’ in that I am a South African, and well aware of some of gendered intricacies that occupy our country. I am a woman who was born and bred in Durban, went to schools in Durban, and personally experienced some of the issues raised by participants in this study.

I am the fifth of six siblings (three boys and three girls) from the Nkosi family. My father was a bus driver and my mother was what is called a housewife. My father grew up in Nquthu, a rural town in the northern areas of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. He was a gender conservative, and believed there were particular ways of raising a girl to be a woman, which were distinctly dissimilar from those used to raise a boy. He would not directly communicate his rules to us, but would ensure that my mother knew and enforced the rules. If we contravened the rules, our mother would be in trouble with him. For instance, as girls we were not allowed to visit neighbours. If any one of my neighbouring friends came to visit, my mother would ask her if she had finished with her chores. If my mother for any reason learned that I was not at home, she would she would call me “*unokhenke*” (a person who is never home) when I came back, and hit me with a stick from a peach tree in order to punish me for staying away from home. For her, as a girl I was expected to be at home, doing house chores, as being at home was praised and regarded as evidence for being a good girl.

Therefore, I was socialised into the dominant gender constructions from a very young age, being prepared for what my mother called womanhood, as she strongly believed that “*umuthi ugotshwa usemanzi*” meaning that a child must be socialised into proper ways from young age, and that she had to make sure that I graduated with a distinction in womanhood, as she understood it. When I matriculated, my uncle gave me two options, either to attend a teachers’ college as a day scholar (where I would be coming home daily) or as a boarder (where I would come home during school holidays). My elder brother who culturally took over as “*indlalifa*” (heir) when my father passed away took a decision that I had to attend as a day scholar, the

reason being that I did not know how to cut a chicken into pieces. As a girl at the age of 18, he expected me to be able to cut the chicken so that I will be able to cook for my future husband. He believed that being a day scholar will help me improve cooking skills as it meant I will cook every day after school. In this case, the historically constituted cultural discourse (Gregen, 2012) of gender was deployed as a means of control to induce conformity to the dominant values of masculinities and femininities (Morojele, 2012). At the college, as female student teachers we had to sew a dress as our third year project and male student teachers had to do a woodwork project. I enjoyed arts and crafts more than sewing, but girls were not allowed to do woodwork. There was a stage where I hated being a girl and wished I was a boy, but this could only go as far as being a wish; it could not be realised in a world governed by dominant constructions of gender. This indicates how teachers' and parents' expectations of girls may be invested in heterosexual imaginaries as well as how, as Bhana (2010) argued, schools may become places where girls' gender expressions are shaped and regulated.

Dominant constructions of reality are pervasive. Even the books that I read for pleasure stereotyped women into people who should be thin and not gain weight take care of their hair and wear lip gloss and high heels, as objects of male attraction. These constructions continue to this day. Recently, we went out to a restaurant as a family, my husband and two daughters, I settled the bill, and the waitress looked straight to my husband's face with a big smile said, "Thank you, sir", while I was the one who had given her the money. Our society seem to have constructed men to occupy powerful spaces and places, and women to occupy subjugated spaces, while they pretend to be what they are not and discipline themselves in order not to be viewed as women who control their husbands. However, alternative constructions of gender are merging

despite these dominant constructions. For instance, my husband, who is a taxi owner, tells me that they have begun to involve women as taxi owners in the industry. Actually, the emergence of women into the middle class has assisted women to push boundaries, and propelled them into industries that have until recently been dominated by men.

#### **4.2.1 As a women and primary school educator principal**

In this section, I share my story as a school principal in a primary schooling context. I have been recently promoted to be a school principal, taking over from a male principal. As a woman, I have been socialised into viewing my three elder brothers as my protectors and decision makers. As a girl, I was taught to respect boys or men, and unquestioningly subject myself to their authority. Now, in my position as school principal, I am required to make important decisions regarding the running of the whole school, including ensuring that all staff, including my male colleagues, are performing their duties as required. Given my new responsibilities, I sometimes feel inadequate, and that my socialisation has somehow compromised the ways in which I navigate and negotiate my responsibilities as a school principal (Morojele, 2012).

However, I often find that, at the same time, their early socialisation is also putting men at risk of losing their jobs if they dare not take instructions from me, because I have chosen to divert from the map of my earlier socialisation. As a principal, I give instructions as part of my responsibilities. Those who dare to contravene the rules, just because when they see woman leadership, they see no leadership, may see themselves jobless. However, when people visit the school, I am often confronted with comments such as “I thought the school principal is a male”

or “I was expecting to see a tall big size woman”. Even children at the school often say “*sinothisha omkhulu oyintombazane*” (we have a woman principal). This suggests that children may have been mostly exposed to males as leaders. There is therefore a need to raise attention to the more extensive auxiliary connections, on the off chance that we are to do equity to the project of gender equality.

In my 21 years’ experience as a teacher, I have observed that as teachers we seem to reinforce gender inequality at schools as well, despite the government initiatives to improve gender equality. For example, I have observed that when I pair a boy and a girl to share a desk they tend to change the sitting arrangement once I leave the class in spite of the classroom rules. Furthermore, during the Life Skills lessons in Physical Education period I observe that they are still playing sports based on gender. When I ask them the reason for this segregation, they say that at home they are not allowed to play with the opposite gender. Girls and boys in schooling environments continue to be socialised into gender roles and values which support gender inequality (Bhana, 2009; Mahlomaholo, 2010; Morojele, 2010). Such practices call for the use of new sociological approaches to children’s studies in order to contribute to debates and practices in schooling contexts, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

#### **4.2.2 As a child born and bred in a Christian family**

In this section, I present myself as a woman of staunch Christian background, which I think has contributed significantly to my socialisation. My Christian background comes from generations before me. My grandfather from my paternal family was a priest, known as *Grandfather Timothy Nkosi*. He made it a norm that we attend all the church activities, always wearing a church

uniform. We were not allowed to eat with our scarves on; otherwise there was a penalty to be paid; it was a rule and I am still not sure why, and I have not questioned it until now. Therefore, I have contributed to and participated in my own oppression, through what Harro (2000) calls learned helplessness, where we participate in our own oppression instead of challenging it because we have internalised and are exercising the ways of the oppressor on ourselves. Therefore, I come into this study with a baggage from my Christian background.

In church, we are taught that fathers are the head of the family. Therefore, they are people with power to whom we owe our safety. There is an abundance of examples where the Bible makes reference to fathers leaving their sons with treasure before they die. I have not been able to find a verse from the Bible that makes reference to a girl inheriting from their father. Therefore, these structural mechanisms, however small and unintentional, potentially contribute to the perpetuation of the dominant constructions of gender, which continue to subjugate women and pressure boys and men into particular streams of masculinity.

I am aware of the wider social and structural gender inequalities that informed the social structures of the community in which I grew up. As such, I take the view that every process of knowledge production should be informed by the need to locate inequalities that are likely to influence the process. Perhaps this must be located inside the more extensive setting of social and structural power relations, so as to ensure that issues around the construction of gender are re-located within broader inequalities. I resist buying into this perspective since I strongly believe that this can have a paralyzing effect on the potential for changing gender inequalities.

The social constructionist theory discussed in chapter 3 also opposes this perspective of the certainty of given types of oppression: The aim of the social constructionist research is to examine power within social relations within which the humans' experiences is confined and offer an examination which permits individuals agency to encourage change (Burr, 1995). From this perspective, research should discover power networks, which exist at the same time overlay each other. It must also explore "those contradictions in practices and discourses of oppressive gender norms and in the location of participants (who may be parents, teachers and children) that enable them to resist, challenge and subvert forms of gender inequality in a society" (Mohanty, 1992, p. 225). According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport (2011), "epistemology refers to different theories of knowledge and assumptions that inform ontological orientations about social reality;" therefore, it reflects knowledge and how it is produced. This study sets out to explore discourses and practices that are shaped by and that shape girls and boys within the school. Moreover, the question of breaking the cycle in which we are socialised into dominant discourses of gendering processes is paramount if we are to challenge gender inequalities (Harro, 2000).

#### **4.2.3 Ontological implications for valid ways of knowing gender experiences**

In this subsection, I share my own ontological and epistemological orientations as they have informed methodological and design considerations and directions I chose and/or did not choose for this study. In other words, knowledge in this instance is understood as a subjective by-product of reality, rather than an objective phenomenon out there.



Being raised in a patriarchal family and society system subordinated me. As a young girl of the family I was always protected and had taken decisions for me as I was classified as incapable to take decision as a girl. The way I walk, talk, dress and behave was prescribed, the whole community accepted it as normal and I acted accordingly to save my family name. I remember how in isiZulu; you will hear adults saying “*Umendo awuthunyelwa gundane*”. In other words, you cannot send a mouse to check for you how will it be to get married, the thinking being that as a girl you need to meet societal expectations so that you can get a husband. A person who grew up in KZN is used to the words “*Ukhamba lufuze imbiza*” meaning that if you are a girl, you have to behave like your mother. Therefore, it was important to observe the non-verbal and expressions of gender as they played a vital role in being regarded as a normal girl in the society. These experiences have informed my choice of observational methods as part of a reliable data collection strategy. Gender is seen as a social construct, a form of performance (Butler, 2011a) that is historically and culturally rooted in contextual systems of social relationships (Burr, King, & Butt, 2012). Therefore, girls and boys are socialised from home and society to perform gender, and people around them make sure that they do not break this cycle of socialisation as there are everyday known sayings that are reiterated as the only truth.

When my grandmother, uMaZulu, came to visit us she would tell us fairy tales, she would start by saying “*Kwasukasela kwakukhona .....*” and we would reply by saying “*Cosi, cosi,*” and after that we would all be sitting quietly and interested in hearing the story. These fairy tales had a lesson to teach us how to behave and were a silent approach which was highly influential. They compelled me to act within the boundaries of being a girl as they served as the guiding metaphors to make sure I act within the societal prescriptions. This experience emphasised the

importance of discursive narratives as a way to reinforce and express experiences of gender. This understanding has informed my choice to employ narrative inquiry as an umbrella method of data collection approach. Gender was a sensitive topic to openly talk about in the presence of boys and such discussions sometimes delved into issues of gender-based and sexual abuse. My own gender-based conversational experiences informed my choice of gender-based focus group interviews as a data collection method whereby girls were comfortable to share their experiences of gender without boys, similarly boys openly expressed themselves in the absence of girls.

My childhood experiences have informed my understanding of gender and how girls and boys interpret their daily gender experiences within the schooling context. Hence I foreground the importance of considering the particular individual case rather than the general and the collective. According to Holland, Blair, & Sheldon (1995) quantitative methods do not clearly capture girls' and boys' real experiences through their 'mechanical' nature. Gender is qualitative in its nature and individuals express their gendered experiences in complex ways. For example, in this study, girls and boys are able to tell stories about their experiences of gender in the primary school which have not yet been articulated or conceptualised within the social sciences. Therefore, this study is located within the broad area of qualitative research. My 21 years of experience as an educator, working in school which is a natural setting for this study has led me into knowing the importance of recording incidents that happens at school for future reference and formal reporting purposes. Hence, in this study I have used document analysis as a reliable data collection approach that assisted me to know the gender-related incidents that happened before I visited the schools.

Epistemologically I therefore, construct my research as arranged and situated, to investigate the complex power dynamics in girls' and boys' relationships within the schooling contexts. I have employed social constructionism, as discussed in Chapter 3, which explores how gender meanings are constructed to facilitate change in the lives of girls and boys in various and differing ways, and how these are associated with more extensive social or structural relations. I have used ethnographic methodologies (observations, document analysis and informal conversations) to learn about the everyday schooling experiences of girls and boys and participatory methodologies to respect the agency of girls and boys. It is the aim of this study, to find ways in which girls and boys find agency to navigate their gender-based experiences at school. I have adopted a reflexive stance to research to share my childhood experiences of gender and how they shape my views about the best ways we may come to know about gender experiences of children in the primary schools. These experiences have inculcated in my mind the centrality of understanding meanings that individuals make about the lives and challenges that local communities face as a valid means of knowing.

#### **4.3 EMANCIPATORY INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM**

In this section, I share ideas about the assumptions that informed the way in which data was collected, analysed and interpreted. What I suggest here is that a particular way of thinking about and doing research – a research paradigm – was chosen in preference to others. For this study, I chose the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm. This deliberate choice became the source of my decisions and choices about epistemological and ontological assumptions regarding, amongst

others, issues of methodology, design and literature (Neuman, 2000). For this study, I chose the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm.

The primary intention of the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm is the understanding of “the world of human experience” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36) – that is, understanding of the social world, based on the ontology that reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2005). However, the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm has a transformative agenda, which suggests that it is founded on the understanding that doing research needs to be interweaved with politics and a political agenda (Cresswell, 2007), as a mechanism for working for and achieving social justice, particularly for those sections of society that have been relegated to the margins of social life. A transformative or emancipatory agenda suggests that the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm has a reform or action agenda “that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 9-10). Therefore, the emancipatory focus of the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm is the substance of a political agenda that provides options for confronting and challenging social oppression at whatever level it occurs (Oliver, 1992). That is, the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm is not about being neutral in understanding human experience; it is about making a deliberate choice of either being on the side of the oppressor or the oppressed, and not about being objective and independent (Barnes, 1996). That is, it views the research endeavour as part of the struggle to confront and challenge oppression – gender oppression in the case of the current study.

The emancipatory interpretivist paradigm was deployed as a template to understand and interpret the experiences and meanings that children have attached to the world around them, as part of the struggle to identify, confront and challenge root sources of gender oppression. However, this struggle is about the agentic nature of human experience; therefore, it is about empowering the oppressed and the marginalised, women in particular, to participate in their own emancipation. Therefore, this research endeavour was about both the researcher and the participants using research production as a means to identify, confront and challenge hegemonic constructions of gender. In employing this paradigm, the intention was to comprehend the universe of human experience from the perspective of girls and boys who were participants in this research production endeavour. The point here is the location of the struggle for emancipation in the hands of those who are most directly affected by the continued existence of gender inequality, and in the hands of all others serving as allies in the struggle against gender oppression, where social interaction is not merely the means by which consensus is reached, but part of the larger struggle. “This is about research production aiming to dispel the myth that the problems the oppressed experience every day of their lives are as result of their own personal inadequacies and limitations” (Oliver, 1992, p. 101), and aiming to examine the complex and subtle ways in which oppression in general, and gender oppression in particular, operates and attempts to “depoliticise the unavoidably political” (Abberley, 1991).

The emancipatory interpretivist paradigm, by its very constructivist nature, suggests that there are multiple truth regimes, casting truth as a subjective concept that has thus different meanings and contexts for different people (Robson, 2002). The primary focus of this study was to try and uncover the meanings girls and boys bring and attach to their life experiences. However, based

on the above understanding about truth, this was undertaken with a “clear understanding that there would be no clear window into the inner lives of these boys and girls” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35). This was premised on the understanding that my interactions with the girls and boys would be situated in socially constituted instances filtered through a gaze of complex identities shaped by individual experiences, characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Secondly, I understood that the “politics of the researcher” (Griffiths, 1998, pp. 130-134) would further make it difficult to see clearly through the window into the inner lives of girls and boys (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As such, I had to “put the moral issues on the table” (Wolcott, 1995, p.123), as research always occurs in a context permeated by issues of power, emotionality and interpersonal processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Therefore, the understanding in this thesis is that girls and boys construct their own knowledge of gender from their different understandings, interpretations, subjectivities, and lived truths. I was further interested in what teachers and parents think is real, based on their own ontological assumptions about what is real for them. This suggests then that, primarily, production of data for this study was a product of the meanings girls and boys attached to their everyday experiences of gender within their schooling contexts. The intention was therefore to unearth structures of meaning in use in their settings and to try to synthesize, understand and interpret the images of their social reality

Critical sociologists often dispute the taken-for-granted forms of power inequalities propagated by dominant discourses of gender, which tend to cast men and women, boys and girls as victims of the structural aspects of gender identity (Renold, 2005; Mohanty, 1992; McKay, 2000). This study takes a social constructionist stance in explaining practices and discourses that produce

gender inequalities in different contexts, including schools. Critical theorists posit that gender values are produced and/or duplicated by social relations, which oblige, however do not alter, singular activity and personality. However, although gender identities are not fixed, they are not arbitrarily contrived (Burr, 1995). The idea of experience as having “both discursive and embodied aspects evoke the significance of embodiment, which suggests that gender is also a way of bodily being in the world.” (McLeod, 2005b, p.7). Therefore, individuals possess agency to interpret their experience in the world, and are thus affected by such experience in fluid and diverse ways. Such fluidity might allow for spaces to counter dominant gender discourses and ways of performing gender, with the potential to challenge inequitable gender relations in various settings, including learning environments. Adopting the emancipatory interpretive paradigm therefore provided a space to evaluate hegemonic discourses and practices of gender that affect children’s geographies in different schooling contexts.

Habermas (1984) has “criticized and challenged the view held by empiricists that all knowledge is based on things that can be experienced and measured”. His argument is that such a view is oblivious of the fact that it is human beings who construct and produce knowledge, and that human beings do not always fit themselves into ready-made regimes of knowledge and conform to hegemonic social construction of who they are, and believe and accept what Gregen (2012, p. 138) calls “taken for granted” knowledge as the absolute truth. For example, this thesis views boys and girls as active participants, who are capable of constructing their own meanings to issues that affect them and can identify, confront and challenge those issues where their effects in their lives are undesirable. That is, children are quite capable of making their voices heard.

This study utilized focus group interviews with photovoice in order to produce data on gender discourses and practices within school. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2010) assert that knowledge that is produced by human beings within the context of critical theory has the potential to reduce human suffering in the world, depending on how it is deployed. This thesis therefore set to unearth ways in which girls and boys negotiate their experiences of gender, which is the essence of empowerment and emancipation. In order to allow the multiple constructions of reality and truth to emerge, girls and boys were allowed space to freely talk about issues that affect their lives. The important benefit of the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm is that it afforded space for girls and boys to speak about and share their experiences of gender spaces and relations, and participate in advancing the transformation agenda to equitable gender relations, by generating ideas and solutions for their own situations and contexts (Jordan, 2003).

In the above sense, the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm is empowering and transformative in that makes it possible for participants to deliberate on and formulate possible solutions to their problem and to define the conditions under which these solutions work (Nkoane, 2012). Furthermore, its nature of allowing multiple realities and perspectives to be considered and allowing one to go for a deeper meaning, make it possible for the participants to identify the challenges and recognize the possible and plausible threats that construct and leads to inequalities of gender, hence putting measures in place that will help avoid them (Mahlomaholo, 2009).

The emancipatory interpretivist paradigm therefore offers an appropriate theoretical frame to respond to the key research questions for this study, as it has potential to foster mandates for



action and allow for ethical practices, press for social justice, and advance the agenda of expanded epistemologies regarding issues of gender equity (Gustavsen, 2001).

#### **4.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research orientation was deployed in this study for its potential to generate and produce rich, context-bound data (Cresswell, 2007). In addition, the use of the qualitative research tradition resides in the belief that human experiences of the social world are intricate and, thus, should be seen and read through a multi-dimensional focal point instead of a narrow one-dimensional focus (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The goal of locating this study in this custom was to put a focal point on the experiences of girls and boys related to hegemonic constructions of gender, in order to attempt to try not to see one but multiple streams of realities of their experiences (Merriam, 1988).

Qualitative research seeks to delve into the understanding of human experiences of research participants, such as the gendered experiences of boys and girls in a primary schooling context. With qualitative research, the researcher is able to access the world of participants in various ways (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.7). As a result, the relations of the researcher to research participants and their points of view are a crucial consideration in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers are often called to “immerse themselves in points of view they are studying” through “insider understanding” (Babbie, 2007, p. 291; Lofland & Lofland, 1996, p. 61). However, there may be complexities in how researchers may go about immersing themselves in the points of view of their research participants. Firstly, when researchers abandon

their objectivity in order to adopt the perspective of their participants, they run the risk of losing the possibility of seeing and understanding the phenomenon (Babbie, 2007). On the other hand, immersing oneself in and accepting participants' beliefs may allow the researcher to appreciate aspects of the belief that are accessible to the research participants. Adopting a qualitative research tradition allowed me to adopt an eclectic view that uses both the emic perspective, taking on the point of view of research participants, and etic perspective, maintaining a distance from the points of view of research participants (Babbie, 2007).

Qualitative research is useful in describing and examining individual and shared societal activities, and perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), and needed for theory and strategy development, improvement of instructive practice, clarification of social issues and accomplishment incitement (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). This suggests that qualitative research has the potential to open space for researchers to get to in-depth opinions from participants (Loader, 2009; Jack & Baxter, 2008). Therefore, in this study qualitative research provided a template and substrate for focusing on and understanding of the girls' and boys' experiences in their own settings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). That is, qualitative research provided the potential to generate the "most meaningful data" as data was generated from girls and boys who had first-hand information about their own experiences, which assisted in providing me with access to a reasonably holistic view of their experiences (Leedy, 1993, p. 144).

#### **4.5 NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS AN UMBRELLA METHOD OF DATA GENERATION**

In this section I discuss narrative inquiry as the main method of data generation strategy to draw on the voices of girls and boys, in this manner catching the subjective complexities of their daily experiences of gender in a schooling context, with a view to understanding the meanings they constructed and attached to these experiences. My decision to adopt narrative enquiry originates from the understanding that narratives serve as a primary imaginative device for capturing the understandings we attach to our human world of experience and personality (Kerby, 1991).

Narratives constitute verbal acts of people sharing their stories about critical events and happenings in their lives. However, what is described and understood in a narrative is not a direct reflection or consequence of how the human world is, but of the meanings it carries within a particular society (Taylor, 2006). Therefore, the understandings of ourselves and others we commonly referred to as 'identity' are as much "an artifact of communal interchange" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). That is, individuals position themselves within temporary identities when they share a narrative, which becomes who they are seen to be by others, and the perspectives from which they view their human or social world (Davies & Harré, 1990; Taylor, 2006).

In this study I used girls' and boys' stories as the basic units of analysis. My interest on the values of stories has grown as I come to understand more fully how girls' and boys' stories assisted them to share their experiences of gender. Stories have the potential to preserve valuable recollections, provoke reflection and associate imagines without bounds (Cahill, 2007). In this way, stories provided the ability to cohere and structure life experiences of participants, by connecting events, perceptions and experiences. In my exploration of the meanings of these stories in terms of gender equity and equality, I took a conscious decision to understand each and

every story as having a particular perspective that contrasted from different stories. This was a critical decision for me as the purpose of my study was to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences of gender within a particular schooling context.

#### **4.6 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES**

When considering who would be relevant participants in terms of responding to the key research questions, which formed the basis of this study, the primary aim was to select the nearest individuals to serve as participants on the basis of practical criteria such as geographical proximity, availability at specific times, easy access and entry, willingness to participate, and expense (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). For this reason, the study used convenience or opportunity sampling to identify participants. The choice of convenience sampling was based on the fact that the study did not seek to generalise findings about the wider population. However, the major weakness of convenience sampling is that it is likely to be biased, as the researcher cannot predict how well a convenience sample will be representative of the population regarding the traits or phenomena under study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Convenience sampling is therefore susceptible to severe hidden biases. In order to address bias, I prepared the interview questions which I used to guide me during interviews.

A convenient, random sample of 16 learners (nine girls and seven boys) was drawn from two primary schools in Durban, a city in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The 16 participants were selected from Isibaya Primary School (five girls and three boys) and uZalo Primary School (four

girls and four boys)<sup>1</sup>. The two schools were chosen in light of the following criteria: geographical proximity to the researcher; and willingness to participate in the study. All 16 participants are in Grade 7, and ranged from 13 to 15 years of age. The decision to select participants from Grade 7 was based on the understanding that they had already spent seven years in a schooling context, and therefore had reasonable experience of gender issues within a schooling context. Initially, there were 17 learners (nine girls and eight boys) who expressed willingness to participate in the study. However, one boy could no longer participate as his parents refused him permission to participate.

The selection of participants was conducted by the researcher without the involvement and participation of teachers. The intention was to eliminate bias from teachers who could have had a particular personal interest in who got selected. I ensured that the time of their participation in the study did not coincide with their examination time in order to ensure that their examination preparations were not interfered with.

#### **4.7 CONSIDERING DATA GENERATION**

Qualitative research has the potential to allow space for multiples views and perspectives, which allows a researcher to explore and consider various options in the selection of strategies of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This was an important consideration for this study as it is preferable that a combination of research methods is used to generate data in order to get to different dimensions and aspects of reality (De Vos, 1998). The subsections that follow is a

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<sup>1</sup> Isibaya and uZalo are fictitious names that were given as pseudonyms to the two schools.

description and presentation of the research methods that were used, and the rationale for the selection of those methods for the generation of data.

#### **4.7.1 In-depth semi-structured interviews**

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 16 participants in order to understand their experiences of gender in their schooling contexts. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their potential to provide flexibility and to allow the researcher space to probe for more information, where necessary. “Semi-structured interviews are sometimes referred to as guided interviews as they allow the researcher to develop the area of inquiry during the interview.” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). The fact that semi-structured interviews are generally organised around a predetermined set of open-ended questions allows the researcher space for other questions to emerge from the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In other words, semi-structured interviews provide a useful opportunity for interviewer or researcher to obtain better access to the experiences, perceptions and views of participants. However, it is crucial to take cognisance of the fact that the very process of interviewing allows the researcher to assume a disproportionate control of the process (Henning, 2004).

Therefore, according to Henning (2004), an interview is a contrived social interaction, that is steeped in unequal power relations, and is likely to be biased towards the researcher who has conceptualised the process from beginning to end. This is evident in the prefix “semi-” in semi-structured interviews, which suggests that although participants may have some control, the

control of the interview largely lies with the researcher (ibid). Therefore, based on this understanding, the researcher endeavoured to give up and share some of her power by inviting participants to serve as co-directors of the process. This was largely achieved by ensuring a generous amount of questions were open-ended, and that the participants were afforded freedom to express themselves in their own terms.

In order to ensure confidentiality and to afford each participant space to talk freely without the interference and influence from other participants, each participant was interviewed individually. Interviews were conducted after school on the playground for the duration of 20 to 35 minutes, a “standard time for individual interviews” (Naidoo, 2012, p. 85), the length depending on the understanding of the questions and length of responses. Participants sat facing the direction of the researcher in order to allow the researcher access to the participants’ body language, which assisted in deepening and enriching the process of data generation. In order to ensure that participants did not have to struggle with framing their responses in a language with which they were unfamiliar, they were allowed to express themselves in a language in which they were most comfortable. All participants chose to express themselves in isiZulu and questions were also asked in isiZulu (see Appendix E).

Before beginning with the actual interview, I clarified the structure and procedure of the interview to the participants in order to ensure that they had some idea of what to expect. The rationale for doing this was to ensure that participants were relaxed. During the individual interview session, I had to constantly assure them of anonymity and confidentiality. All interviews were sound taped (with the participants’ consent) and transcribed verbatim.

#### **4.7.2 Gender-based focus group interviews**

I conducted gender-based focus group and photo voice data collection with four groups (two groups of girls = nine girls, five from Isibaya Primary and four from uZalo Primary; two groups of boys = seven boys, three from Isibaya Primary and four from uZalo Primary). Gender-based focus group interviews were purposefully done. Each girl and boy had a chance to comment and asks questions to other participants or responds to questions and comments on experiences of gender made by others, who are of the same gender. I chose the gender- based focus interviews to encourage exchange in order to comprehend the elements of masculinities and femininities. GBFGIs were utilized to supplement the individual interviews. Both techniques analysed the experiences of gender from girls and boys own particular viewpoints, as far as the implications they attached to them and the way they make sense of gendered spaces and places (Bhana & Nzimakwe, 2000; Morojele, 2011a). Each of the four gender-based groups of between three to eight members was interviewed two times for the purpose of enhancing constant reflection on the girls' and boys' own and other views. It also ensured the validity of the design used in the study by establishing it as a tool for obtaining credible data (Krefting, 2002). Each group interview was held for an average of 90-120 minutes to enable sufficient coverage of the gender-based focus group interview and give each girl and a boy a chance to express a view (see Appendix H).

The main concerns raised in the individual interviews formed the basis for discussions in the GBFGI. My main aim was to fortify and streamline the answers that had been less attended to during the individual interviews but that would be easy for girls and boys to talk about in the



gender-based focus group. I made every effort to respect and identify each girl's and boy's experiences of gender. This was done to increase the quality of data generated (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

#### **4.7.3 Mixed gender focus group interviews**

I created a relaxed social atmosphere where I mixed girls and boys into a group of eight. It was important for me, in a study of this nature which encourages the enhancement of gender equality, to work with girls and boys together as a mixed gender group. It was interesting to note how girls and boys responded in the mixed gender group interviews; they were motivated to actively participate as this enhanced their thoughts and their awareness of other's expectations. Girls and boys were comfortable to give individual accounts of their interaction within the mixed gender groups. They were committed to the exchange as the subject was important to them. The challenge was that at times they were speaking simultaneously and boys seemed to want to dominate the discussion but I managed to control them by insisting that they should give each other a chance to speak. I allowed them to use isiZulu for discussions and questions during the individual semi-structured interviews and GBFGIs to enable girls and boys to express themselves without restrictions based on language. I voice recorded the interviews and each participant had an opportunity to listen to the audio tape before it was translated into English. Transcripts were also given to girls and boys to validate that all the information was not tampered with.

#### **4.7.4 Observing spaces and places of gender performances**

Non-participant observations were conducted at the two schools in order to generate data that would assist me to understand the context in which participants spent their schooling lives, observe their experiences in situ and discover things that participants might not have said in interviews (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). I used non-participant observation because the intention was to reduce interactions with the participants and to ensure that I was focused on the events (Burns, 2000). I decided to use a semi-structured observation schedule, as I was looking for specific behaviours in specific spaces and places, and my intention was to generate a descriptive record of what was happening and how participants were responding to particular incidents relating to the focus of the study. This schedule was made up of “an agenda of issues”, which were used to guide my observations (ibid). Consequently, a semi-structured technique was used to gather narrative accounts relating to participants in the field.

I observed participants’ interactions in formal (e.g. in class learning) and non-formal (e.g. during breaks in the school premises) settings and recorded field notes in my journal, sometimes with some notes on what to ask about in order to ensure that my understandings were not far from the meanings that participants attached to their actions and interactions. Sometimes it was necessary to cross-check certain instances and events with girls and boys in order to ensure that connections and exercises were effectively deciphered and interactions and recorded in text soon after, adding my reflections relating to the focus of the study. Data generated from the observations was used to inform and enrich follow-up questions in the interviews, to triangulate findings from interviews and to generate tentative interpretations.

Observations afforded me the opportunity to gather data on the interactional setting (i.e. interactions that were taking place, whether formal, informal, planned, unplanned, verbal or non-verbal) (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p.305). As indicated earlier, I observed participants in different physical spaces and places, such as the classrooms, school assembly, playgrounds, the venue for the feeding scheme, toilets and any other spaces where I thought it would enrich data generated in terms of the focus of the study. Through observations, I was able to gather information about their interactions, their lives in context, in real life situations, based on the understanding that lives “are never lived in vacuums” (Cole & Knowles, 2001). For example, I observed that boys tended to occupy a larger proportion of the space at the two schools, and they tended to frequently break rules and rarely asked for help when they were confronted with a difficult situation. In this way, observational data enabled me to analyse the situation that was being described in interviews with participants (Patton, 2002).

#### **4.7.5 Documented incidents, expressions and experiences of gender**

In this study, I decided to request access to and to analyse documents that were available at school and that the schools were willing to share with me. Many of the documents were already in the public sphere and it was therefore relatively easy to request copies from the schools. I also analysed documentary materials relating to critical incidents at the schools, as I believed they formed a critical part of the lives at the schools. Document analysis served as a useful instrument in that it enriched the data generated from interviews as it enabled me to ask specific questions that related to what I had obtained from the documents in order to delve more into the lives of the participants (Plummer, 2001). Again, document analysis was important in that it was enabled

me access to invaluable information that might not have been accessible through other methods that were used in the study. For example, it provided me with information relating to critical incidents that both schools had decided to record, probably because they believed the incidents were significant enough to make a record of. It also provided a written record for those pieces of information that participants could not remember.

Amongst documents that were analysed were such documents as class attendance registers, duty roster, minute books, and record of policies, textbooks and the incident record book. The analysis of documents was useful in generating data that was used to understand issues relating to the context of participants.

#### **4.7.6 Photovoice as a participatory method to document gender**

Photovoice was used for participants to identify and capture specific instances. All the participants were each given a disposable camera and a spool with 27 exposures to “take pictures of what for them best defined how they experienced gender”. Photovoice as a research method rests on the assumption that people are able to identify and represent their own realities (Wang, 1999). Through discussing the subjects of their photographs, girls and boys understand their circumstances and the economic, social, psychological and political forces that shape them. Photographs were valuable tools to engage participants as they enhanced their expression of experiences of gender in their everyday lives at school. One of the criticisms of using photographs in research is not simply that they can be falsified, but that they are highly subjective in that cameras do not take pictures, people do (Byers, 1968). Within the context of

this study, the intention of using photo was based on this quality; the intention was to shift ownership of data generation process from the researcher to the participants or the researched, in order to allow participants to identify and represent their realities without the interference and guidance from the researcher. The rationale for the use of photovoice was based on the following understanding.

*Like our field notes and other forms of empirical data, photographs may not provide us with unbiased, objective documentation of the social and material world, but they can show characteristic attributes of people, objects and events that often elude even the most skilled words (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998, p. 115).*

The use of photovoice was also based on the understanding that photographs have the potential to extend and deepen our understanding beyond the observable or written record (Dowdall & Golden, 1989). The method has been successfully applied in studies researching *with* children and youth (for example, Jacob & Harley, 2008; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009; Findholt & Michael, 2011). In order to ensure the success of this aspect of data generation, I drew from practical suggestions from literature (from, for instance, Wang, 1999; Mitchell, De Lange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005). The research process involved the following four steps:

- Firstly, I clarified again the motivation behind the research project to participants then, each girl and boy were assigned a disposable camera each and a spool with 27 exposures. They were excited to use cameras, however they expressed their concern that they might get lost. They agreed on their own that they will leave the cameras at

school with the class teacher who was supervising the aftercare at school and who therefore was leaving school late. We discussed themes for taking pictures as a guide to keep the participants on track and to avoid diverging.

- As most of the participants were used to using cell phone cameras to take photos, very few participants had ever had any experience with a camera. As a result, I spent some time with the participants at each school to demonstrate how the cameras work, and allowed them to practise taking photographs with them.
- In order to ensure that the exercise was implemented in an ethical manner, participants were instructed to always ask for permission before taking photographs where people were going to be captured in the photographs.
- Participants were then given a period of five days to take as many as they could as long they were still within the guidelines that we had discussed, after which I collected the cameras and had the spools processed.
- Together with participants, a reflective group working session was held, during which photographs were discussed in terms of what they depicted, why particular photographs had been taken, and what participants thought the photographs reflected. The photographs therefore served as a trigger for discussions (Young & Barrett, 2001). The issue of concern was the quality of some of the photographs. For instance, distance when taking photographs was not always correct as some of the photograph were too small to be able to make sense of.

Discussions, explanations and reflections in the workshop were conducted in isiZulu as it was the participant's home dialect. The discussions were voice recorded (with the consent of

participants), transcribed verbatim and translated into English. As with other data generation methods, some challenges were experienced with photovoice. For instance, some educators and learners in the two schools, who were potential subjects of photos as they were not part of the study, raised concerns about the possible use of the cameras to capture incidents and spaces they regarded as private and out of bounds. It took the principals of the schools to address the matter at their school assembly in order to explain the purpose of my project for the second time and to request for calm and give assurance that where photographing involved potential subjects, permission was to be requested before taking the photo (Young & Barrett, 2001; Pink, 2006).

There were some obvious benefits for using photovoice as a method for data generation. For instance, the participants loved the part of taking photos. Therefore, it could be concluded that the technique was both participant-friendly and participant-centred. Photovoice also allowed me to explore affective aspects of the study, particularly those that could not be captured with more conventional language-bound methods. This was also the case with the participants as it made available to them more ways of thinking about and representing their social world without language presenting as a barrier. This point to the importance of action-orientated methods, which are often non-threatening to participants and provide safe spaces for participants to represent their social worlds (Young & Barrett, 2001; Schratz & Walker, 1995). Lastly, photographs served as a valuable trigger of discussions as, it would seem, the participants found it easier to relate to the photographs than to respond to interview questions (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012).

#### **4.8 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DATA PRODUCTION PROCESS**

When I started the process of data generation, I was concerned that participants, because of their young age, would be unable to respond to questions relating to issues of gender, as I regarded the subject of gender as too abstract for learners in Grade 7. That is, I was caught in the trap of believing that children in lower grades would be too young to have useful understandings about gender (Schwan & Shapiro, 2011; Tobin, 1997). I think I began constructing their responses for them, even before the commencement of the study, as I was already concerned about the possibility that they might confuse gender, which is a social construct, with sex, which is a biological construct. I was concerned about teachers' discourses referring to children as children to whom gender does not matter (Bhana, 2003), suggesting that primary schooling contexts are gender-free zones. I had conveniently forgotten Morojele's (2010) contention that educators' originations of essential schooling as gender free zone is a ploy to standardise and institutionalise gender inequality. During our first meeting, the intention of which was to explain the purpose of my study, I just without thinking asked them what gender is.

*Madam it's like when you ask me what my gender is, I always wear pink and colourful clothes and boys wear dark coloured clothes. That's how we tell the difference of a girl and boy. (Bongeka, uZalo Primary School).*

The above quotation suggests that my concern was misplaced as participants knew and understood gender as a social construct. So, when I realised this, it gave me confidence primary schooling contexts, at least in these two schools, were not gender-free zones (Bhana, 2003; Morojele, 2010). Therefore, what was revealed during data generation with regards to this study



was in agreement with Butler's (1990; 1997; 2004) understanding of gender as performative. Moreover, as much as I was well prepared, had read about participatory research methods, had prepared interviews guidelines and had been an educator for 21 years, I was still concerned as I was new to working with learners as research participants. I was particularly concerned about how power relations were going to play out – that power balance was going to largely privilege me over the participants. However, using the participant-centred approaches throughout the period of data generation assisted in producing rich data from the participants.

The following section presents my reflections on my experiences with the research methods that were used for data generation in this study.

#### **4.8.1 Reflections on observations of spaces and places**

I decided to alternate days during my visits at the two schools, so that I could conduct observations for a full day in each school. I realised that the fact that I was taking notes seemed to be making teachers and learners uncomfortable, as I would be asked questions such as “What do you do with the information you are writing in that book?”. I think learners were mostly concerned that I would catch them behind classrooms sitting and standing in what seemed to couples. I explained to them that I was using the information for purposes of my study only, and I that I was not making any reference to specific learners or their school for that matter. I realised that there was a need to remind them that I always ensured confidentiality in everything I did patterning to the study. Regarding my request to address their staff in order to clarify the purpose

of my presence at the two schools, both principals chose to address their staff themselves. However, questions and suspicion continued.

On the days when my focus was on classroom observation, I would inform teachers in advance of my presence, clearly pointing out aspects that I was going to be observing while they were teaching. It is important to note that, teachers did not play a role in the study except that they were present during classroom observation with children. However, this was not possible where specific aspects were not broad enough to cover other aspects that might emerge unexpectedly. For example, I was not generally ready to know ahead of time what might enthusiasm for me to document all the time. Therefore, I found myself going beyond what I had specified to the teachers. I used to show educators what I had written on my notes. However, I soon learned that teachers did not mind what I was writing, and therefore could not detect the fact that I had gone beyond what I had specified. Some educators tended to use me as a tool for disciplining their learners as they would remind them that there is an important person in class who would write how they are behaving in class. I discouraged them in doing that since I felt it would ruin my relationship with participants.

I was initially challenged by the use of pseudonyms as it was not easy to remember the names learners chose when they are featured in another incident later. I was confusing names which resulted in confusing activities thus failing to follow interesting patterns of behaviour. As I continued I decided to use a pencil under the pseudonym to write the real names. This was useful during data analysis to enable me to give pseudonyms consistently throughout the study. Most of the observational data in this study was collected through taking notes see Appendix F; very little

was voice recorded because I was observing learners during breaks when they were eating or playing, assembly and classrooms. I did not want to disturb them.

#### **4.8.2 Document analysis**

I asked Mrs Msomi <sup>2</sup> who is the Grade 7 class teacher at Isibaya Primary to give me her class attendance register. I initially wanted to see the classroom enrolment and note the access on schooling based on gender. While I noted that there is access for girls (Redpath, Morrell, Jewkes & Peacock, 2008) as there were 30 girls and 14 boys, the same group of girls seems to be absent on similar dates every month. When I questioned this, girls mentioned that when they are menstruating they absent themselves as they feel embarrassed when they dirty themselves and become laughing stock of boys. Therefore, while girls and boys might have equal access to the schooling system and their experiences differ in terms of conditions existing in the school environment (Redpath, Morrell, Jewkes, & Peacock, 2008). Girls and boys in the study were interested in the isiZulu reader book and gave me all the examples based on this book which had a girl and boy who were orphans. The boy was made responsible to take care of his elder sister. Bongeka felt the book was perpetuating feminine and masculine stereotypes as she said:

*I do not have a brother and I do not need one. Madam, I can take care of myself, ngiyayishaya inqindi.*

The above comment means the reading material that girls and boys are exposed to seems to affect them as the stories on them make them fear something that they have not yet experienced.

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<sup>2</sup> Not her real name

When I read the staff minute book I realised that educators were not allowed to send girls to the tuck shop which is across the road at uZalo Primary. This is because the principal and the School Governing Body believes sending girls out of school will expose them to lot of risk as one girl from the community was raped during the day when their school finished early. Educators are encouraged to ensure that girls leave schools in groups when they are going home. One of the implications is that girls have very different gender experiences, hence the value of using gender-based focus groups in this study.

#### **4.8.3 Conversations with learners**

On the first day when I came to both schools I introduced myself as, “Kaise Ngcobo, a student from UKZN I am coming to do research on gender with you to fulfil the requirements for a PhD.....” I was aware that in the Zulu culture one is discouraged from calling an adult with her/his name but I wanted to diffuse power between myself as an adult and learners. However, as we started working together I realised that they were calling me “madam”. I accepted the title as I noticed that is how they call their female educators and they seemed comfortable referring to me in that way, even though initially it made me laugh at myself, as I am not used to be referred to as madam. It made me feel belonging to this school as all other female adults are referred to as “madam”. Some learners ended up asking me if I could teach in their school since one of the educators told them in my absence that I am an educator as well. I explained to them that I am in their school as a researcher and I cannot teach in their school as I am permanently employed in another school.

As we went along with our conversations each day, I realised that girls were at ease to confront me and talk to me about the issues relating to gender. This was not the case with boys; they hardly come to me up until I called them. When they come to me, they will be brushing their heads and say “Eish, madam...” (looking down on the floor). I learnt that I needed to start by asking them general questions like:

- a) How is the weather?
- b) How is/ was your day?
- c) Did you play any soccer match during breaks? Etc.

Using this approach assisted me to get boys talking as after these general questions I would notice they were able to raise their eyes and talk freely. Then I would start with my research questions, Mthoko mentioned that:

*While we respect female educators but I still feel more comfortable on men to men.*

*You know madam; sir understands better what happens to us as boys.*

The strong rapport and the maintenance of a child-centred approach as well as the gender-based focus interviews assisted me to collect the valuable and in-depth data from girls and boys.

#### **4.8.4 Use of cameras**

I remember the day I gave girls and boys cameras in both schools as an exciting day for them. After the last workshop session on how to use the camera and expectations on the kind of photos, I gave all of them numbered cameras. They all had big smiles on their faces, giggling and talking to each other. However, they were concerned about the safety of the cameras. At uZalo Primary they agreed that they would leave them at the tuck shop since it closes late and collect them in the morning. At Isibaya Primary they asked their class educator who is responsible for the aftercare to keep them after school. On the day when Mrs Msomi was absent, girls and boys at Isibaya Primary were challenged, they agreed on their own to give it to Nkanyiso who was the class prefect. I did not experience any challenge with learners using the cameras. Instead I felt learners were motivated to participate in my study as all other learners who were not part of the study felt they lost the opportunity of using the camera for the first time in their lives. When I collected the cameras for processing, learners were eager to see the photos they took.

I was challenged to process the films since there are only a few places that still process disposable camera films. Most of the shops are now using the new technology, like digital cameras. Hence processing the disposable camera films is expensive and has a delay. Even getting the stock of disposable camera was a challenge; I planned to buy 20 cameras. I initially got 12 and I had to wait a week to get the 8 cameras as they were not in stock. Fortunately, that did not delay my data collection period since I planned my resources as soon as I received my ethical clearance certificate, earlier than I expected. Asking the person who was processing the films to number the envelopes with the photos according to the numbers on the cameras assisted me when I was giving the photos to the learners. I had to give them time to cool off as they were over the moon to see the photos they took themselves. During the gender-based focus groups I

voice recorded girls and boys as agreed; I felt learners had a lot to talk about and able to add details to each other's photos. I allowed them to debate the issues pertaining to gender, for several times I had to step in and ask them to give each other a chance to talk. I was surprised to hear Thokozani from Isibaya Primary being part of the debate because during the individual interviews I had to use lot of probing questions with her. With a smile in her face she mentioned that:

*“Having photos makes it easy for me to talk because I am able to see what I am talking about, so I can reflect.”*

For this reason, I agree with Wang and Burris (1997) that photovoice is an empowering methodology that allows individuals to reflect up the strengths and concerns of their community.

#### **4.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Validity is the key to effective research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) In a qualitative research data validity can be addressed through the trustworthiness and wealth of the information accomplished, the participants drew closer, employing triangulation and the interestedness or objectivity of the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The following have been identified as the dimensions which increase trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007 ). Validity is improved by part checking of information, persistent observation and prolonged

engagement in the field. Transferability alludes to the researchers' capacity to make express the way of the participants and the setting to enable comparison by other researchers.

For this study, semi-structured interviews, gender-based focus group interviews through Photo voice, and document analysis and observation were the data collection tools of choice. Further I guaranteed that reasonable inside and out portrayals were given. An audio-tape was used to capture all the information amid meeting and translation were done verbatim. Deciphered data was examined with the participants for check of exactness.

#### **4.10 ETHICS AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

MacMillan & Schumacher (2006) state that "since educational research deals with human beings, it is necessary to understand the ethical and legal responsibly of conducting research". The University of KwaZulu-Natal requires that researchers submit recommendations for ethical clearance. Ethical clearance was conceded to me subject to an arrangement of conditions which I needed to conform to before setting off to the field (see Appendix B) for points of interest on the moral leeway allowed for this study). One of the moral issues to address was to ensure that I followed proper procedures for gaining access to the schools, and that all participants in my study gave informed consent to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Further, I asked for participants' parental consent to work with their children (see Appendix D).



I then went to request permission to conduct my research in the schools. The principle was that such schools should be a primary school, operating from Grade 1 to 7 and have girls and boys that were willing to participate in my study. In selecting the two primary schools and research participants I used convenience sampling as the two schools I used were not far from my residence and I thought were likely to yield rich information for the questions under study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). I first spoke to the principals of the schools, and after they had signed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A) I arranged with them when I could have chance to request permission from parents and girls and boys in Grade 7. In both schools I was given the opportunity to present the aims of my research to all Grade 7 learners and parents in a meeting. In these meetings I indicated to the parents what I would expect from them and from the girls and boys, and how I thought my research would benefit them. I also told girls and boys that they were allowed to choose not to take an interest in the study or could withdraw later if they wish, reassuring them that this would not affect them in any negative way.

I wanted to address educators about the aims of my study because I could notice they were concerned to see me coming to their school every day. To make it worse, some of them knew me. However, both principals decided that they will address them on my behalf during their staff briefing meetings since they were busy with assessments. I requested parents to allow their children to participate in my research by signing letters of informed consent. For this I had to wait for parents' meetings to be held in the schools. Most parents signed letters of informed consent indicating their willingness to participate and allowing their children to participate in my research. Children whose parents did not sign letters of informed consent did not participate in the study. The principals also introduced me to the School Governing Body (SGB) members who

also consented that I may conduct research in the schools. I went an extra mile in also requesting children themselves to participate in my research indicating that they might decide to withdraw if they decide to do so, regardless of whether their parents or teachers still wanted them to participate.

In this way I was illustrating that I accept children as responsible human beings who can make their own decisions. I also wanted to rest assured that children were not coerced by parental authority to participate in the study. This only referred to those whose parents allowed them to participate in the first place, not the ones who would not have taken part from the beginning. Once I had procured informed consent of willingness to take part in the study from all the participants, I began full scale data collection and production. But I was afraid to emphasize that even the whole school may decide to withdraw from my research later, as I only had that time to do data collection. I feared that would have huge time implications for the entire research project especially knowing that I was only granted two weeks' study leave, however I knew that giving girls and boys cameras would excite them and motivate them to actively participate. The following schools participated in the study:

- uZalo Primary school
- Isibaya Primary School

I made it clear to all the participants that interest in the exploration was wilful and they were allowed to pull back whenever in the event that they had to pull out (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). After taking time clarifying the whole research, girls and boys were clear about

the contents of my study. The parents of the participants and the principals of the two schools signed consent letters granting me permission to work with participants a week before the study started. Pseudonyms were used as a part of the study to secure the secrecy and namelessness of the schools as well as the girls and boys in the study (Cresswell, 2007). Girls and boys were given chance to pick pseudonyms were utilized as a part of this study. They (girls and boys) felt extremely unique about picking pseudonyms on their own. That increased more certainty and arranged to consider each task that needs to be done important.

Interviews were voice recorded and each participant had an opportunity to listen to the audio tape before it was translated into English. Transcripts were also given to girls and boys to validate that all the information was not tampered with.

#### **4.11 ANALYSING INTERVIEW NARRATIVES, DOCUMENTS, PHOTOVOICE AND OBSERVATIONAL DATA**

The process of data analysis requires creativity and disciplining of the mind when handling qualitative gathered information (Tayla-Powell and Renner, 2003). Qualitative information examination is basically an inductive procedure of sorting out information into classifications and recognizing designs among the classifications. “It is an on-going cyclical process that is categorised into all phases of qualitative research” (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Hence I listened to girls and boys recorded voices in the interviews for several times before these were transcribed. Transcripts were additionally perused and re-read. That was done to check that the interpreted information was of good esteem, not misshaped and not one-sided (Tayla-Powell &

Renner, 2003). Analysis of the data produced during the individual and focus group interviews followed complex, systematic and reflexive processes. The first level of data analysis began every day after each school visit. I typed and translated all the data I produced for the day. Later, I coded data according to themes I identified as I read and re-read the data trying to make sense of it. I evaluated the reason for the analysis, and afterward I gathered data by distinguishing examples and associations inside and between the classes. Niewenhuis (2007) noticed that in a coding framework, codes speak to key ideas and thoughts in the content which empower the scientist to understand the typical substance of the subjective information. This process is designed to ascertain how girls and boys make sense of gender by analysing their understanding, facts, values, emotions and experiences. Thematic and content analysis of narratives and thick descriptions were used in answering the research questions, using the umbrella framework of the study (Tayla-Powell & Renner, 2003).

This illuminated area of similarities and differences in how the participants constructed gender across the two schooling sites. Consequently, analysis unearthed how the participants' ideas, experiences, practices and the social/structural categories of gender in the schools produce/reproduce inequitable gender relations. The study also learnt from the girls and boys in the study how we could challenge and possibly change beliefs, practices and the social/structural categories of gender that instil inequitable gender relations in the primary schools.

#### **4.12 DESIGN LIMITATIONS**

In this study I had anticipated four key challenges. The first challenge was in relation to the power dynamics between me as the educator and children as participants. The second challenge was concerned with the language of communication, since my interview instruments were written in English. The third challenge was the risk of involving children as the study could be seen to be disturbing. The risks stem from the fact that the research is sensitive in nature; it also involves children while I am an adult, and concerns gender, which clearly positioned me as a woman as it also positioned both the girls and boys who were participants. The fourth challenge was the constant use of the labels “girl” and “boy”. Therefore, before the data collection process, Firstly, to overcome the power dynamics I used the focus group interviews and a participatory technique, photovoice, to help to address this issue. Since these techniques are child-centred the issue of power was in my view satisfactorily addressed. It is also important for me to mention that girls and boys were free to express themselves in such a way that at times they will all be speaking at the same time. I remember a few times that I had to stop them and remind them to give each other a chance to talk.

The second challenge was the language barrier which I overcame by translating the data collection instruments into isiZulu. The discussions were then recorded using a voice recorder, translated and transcribed into English. The third challenge was a risk of involving children in discussing gender. I overcame this challenge by seeking permission from all stakeholders involved and moreover told girls and boys that they are allowed to pull out of the research when they feel they are not comfortable to work with me. I have also begun this chapter by discussing the ontological, epistemological and methodological solutions used to address this issue. Lastly, I overcame the challenge of reinforcing the categorising of girls into a femininity group and boys

into a masculinity group by constantly reminding myself that these are not the only two categories of gender that exist, there are alternative ways of doing gender that are available as discussed in chapter 2.

#### **4.13 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has illustrated the exploration outline and methodology. The study was qualitative and based on a critical interpretivism within an emancipatory paradigm due to its strengths in description and the desire to focus on the subjective reality of participants. In this study I took a stand that participants can be self-determined, therefore I offered the participants the opportunity to tell me their experiences. The fact that I believed that girls and boys are the source of knowledge made it easy for me to work with them via individual and focus group interviews. I notice that using pseudonyms as means to ensure confidentiality assisted me to acquire girls' and boys' stories of gender openly. Participatory learning and an activity strategy gave participants enthusiasm to design their photograph along these lines permitting me to pick up bits of knowledge into the setting of a child's lived understanding (Young and Barrett, 2001).

The chapter also discussed the data collection and data analysis methods that I engaged in, to facilitate the production of the final research report. Needless to say, emphasis was placed on girls' and boys' active participation and the need to observe the code of conduct that guided the research process. Of paramount importance in this chapter was my position as a researcher in the whole study and the potential risks that my position could bring into the knowledge construction emanating from the findings.

Subsequent chapters analyse and discuss the data more thematically in order to derive the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **GENDERED POWER DYNAMICS IN CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING SPACES AND PLACES**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to investigate children's experiences of gender in two primary schools with the aim of understanding the discourses and daily practices that shape children's geographies. Of particular interest for this study was to comprehend creative and innovative ways in which children negotiated and navigated the varied and complex spaces and places of their school environments. This chapter answers my first research question: What are girls' and boys' stories of gender-based experiences in the context of two primary schools in Durban? It also addresses the second question. How do gender discourses and practices affect girls' and boys' geographies within these schooling contexts? Hence, in this chapter, I have framed the findings of my study using the gender stories of girls and boys in the primary school. I summarise each of the girls' and boys' stories of gender and then provide a general commentary on common experiences of gender. The chapter focuses on the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities that have informed the children's experiences of schooling, and thus shaped the gendered power dynamics in these children's relationships. The findings reveal that boys' and girls' schooling spaces are places where children actively perform gender mainly in conformity to dominant discourses of gender.



In order to answer the two research questions, the chapter is organised to address two major themes that emerged; firstly, it discusses children's constructions of gender and in particular the ways in which femininities and masculinities are constructed within the school. Secondly, it discusses the spaces and places of children's experiences of gender. The importance of categorising the spaces and places of gender construction was to make explicit the experiences and practices as well as discourses that affect girls' and boys' geographies that need to be tackled in the schools under study in order to address gender inequality. I was also essentially concerned with power relations surrounding the children (Weller, 2006).

## **5.2 CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER**

### **5.2.1 Construction of femininities within the school context**

The findings reveal that traditional Zulu cultural beliefs play a significant role in the children's constructions of femininities. These were thought to be the characteristic attributes of girls. All children who have been regarded as girls have been expected and exhorted to perform gender in ways that uphold the dominant constructions of femininities. The manner in which femininities have been constructed reflects patterns of gender behaviour that have been intricately intertwined with what was regarded as girls' role in society, and thus have defined what girls could or could not do or be. Indeed, the study found how culture has embodied certain societal gender-appropriate norms which have not only defined what the girls could do, but also who they could possibly become. These constructions, based on patriarchal values which affirm a problematic ideology of 'rule by father head', generally relegate girls to subservience and meniality, meaning

that girls have been constructed as being weak, subordinated and with no preparation for them to play critical decision-making roles in their future lives. This is because femininities are mostly juxtaposed to masculinities – constructed as boys’ attributes, which have been exalted above femininities, thus shaping both present and future power relationships between girls and boys.

In this context, femininities have been also associated with hyper-sexuality, wherein girls have been expected to stylise their bodies in ways that display heterosexual attractiveness. The findings reveal how the girls have spent a lot of time and their meagre financial resources beautifying themselves in line with the dominant constructions in a context that associates girlhood with hyper-heterosexual attractiveness. The culmination of such attractiveness has been for girls to get married so their natal parents could get the lobola (pride price) in the form of twelve cows; as the adults would say “*silindele izinkomo la kuwena*”, we are waiting for the cows from you. Therefore, being heterosexually attractive has been one of the main way through which girls experienced and performed femininities, and this was evident in how they wore their school uniform and stylizations of the body like wearing of make-up and ‘relaxing’ – using chemical hair softeners and straighteners, thought to beautify the hair. Being beautiful is an important expectation of being a girl in the culture of amaZulu, as exemplified in this girls’ picture, as well as in the focus group interviews at uZalo Primary School below.



**Picture 1**

*Kaise: Tell me, why did you take this picture*

*Bongiwe (girl, 13 years old, uZalo Primary): I took this picture on Monday morning when we arrived as you can see we are happy to see each other after a weekend so we are hugging each other, that is how we greet. You can also see in the picture our faces are fresh and the hair style is neat unlike after break. The hair style is a pressure to maintain but it is what makes the girl beautiful just like to be slim. But Sazi got into trouble on this day because she did not plait her hair, sometimes we struggle to get money to do our hair because it is expensive. Eyi, this pressure brought Nana into trouble as she had to be sexual active to get money. As for me I am not doing it for anyone but for me.*

*Sindy (girl, 13 years old, uZalo Primary): But madam, some of our teachers do not like it as we are this clean, they believe we are doing it because we want boyfriends. We are not clean because of boys, it is for us*

*Kaise: It is for you; now tell me (pointing at the photo): Why is she putting her hand on someone else's shoulder?*

*Sindy: We hug each other to show how much we love each other.*

*Kaise: Oh, is showing love important?*

*Bongiwe: Oh, yes love is important to us as girls.*

*Kaise: I hear you.*

The data illustrates that to be a girl meant being beautiful and keeping up with fashion as girls had to plait and relax their hair. Moreover, Bongiwe and Sindy were firm and confident to tell me the stories that showed that somehow girls and women are being treated unfairly. This means girls did not straightforwardly conform to the dominant discourses of femininities that give power and wellbeing to masculinities over femininities. I say they were not straightforwardly conforming because they seemed to be aware of such societal stereotypes that, for instance, they were beautifying themselves for boys, whereas they knew they were doing it for themselves. It was expensive to maintain the hair style, therefore these girls had no option but to do anything to get the money and keep up with the societal expectation of being a girl. In other words, they were victims of social pressures; they wanted to be accepted. This was disturbing, especially at uZalo Primary, where most of the parents were not working hence they could not afford to pay school fees. The fact that teachers did not discourage this practice perpetuated the dominant discourses of femininities. Even when indications of danger were there, teachers did not put a stop to this pressure facing girls. The fact that Sazi and Nana became the victims of the pressures of gender

construction should have alarmed teachers to have a talk with girls so as to break this cycle of socialisation. Eventually this societal expectation placed girls in a vulnerable position of HIV/AIDS infection and unwanted pregnancy as they were coerced to be submissive to males as providers.

The mixed gender group interviews below further illustrate:

*Siya (boy, 13 years old, uZalo Primary): You know mam that is why girls get into trouble, they want to be loved.*

*Kaise: What kind of trouble?*

*Vusi (boy, 15 years old, uZalo Primary): Like sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and money pressure.*

*Masie (boy, 14 years old, uZalo Primary): But mam, girls put pressure on themselves.*

*Kaise: Why?*

*Nkanyiso (boy, 13 years old, uZalo Primary): They think too much, they have their natural beauty but they want more. That's why we see them falling in love with taxi drivers, they need money for face cream and hair relaxer.*

The study found that girls did not beautify themselves to advance boys' attentions, despite the assumptions of the prevailing gender discourse. The limiting nature of these values might be an indication of girls' inventive willpower to perform gender beyond the boundaries of these stereotypic perceptions. During formal schooling girls acted in conformity to dominant discourses of femininity. This was because of the school rules which they had to follow otherwise they endured the pain of detention which parents agreed on. I witnessed a number of

fights after school as I stayed behind with girls and boys who I worked with. I observed that after school girls were ready to fight back boys who tried to take advantage over them. The data below illustrate:

*I had come to arrange with Mrs Mdluli (Grade 7 teacher, who the principal delegated to work with me) about remixing the groups since I was ready for the next round of interviews with the second group of learners the following day. On my way back I saw a crowd of boys and girls gathered in a Grade 7 classroom and screaming. I entered and realised that there was a fight. It was a girl and a boy brutally hitting each other. Some boys who were watching shouted uyincence lo (meaning he is weak). The girl was sitting on top of him beating the boy and he was powerless. I looked around, there was no adult. I decided to intervene and stop the fight. Some children ran away but the four boys who volunteered in my study were in the room and did not run away because they trusted that I would not get them into trouble.*

*(Field notes: Isibaya Primary School)*

The following day, when we were in the playground during break I made a follow up on the fight. Therefore, the following notes I made while making playground observations illustrate:

*Kaise: Sizwe, why was that girl and boy fighting yesterday?*

*Sizwe (boy, 13 years old, Isibaya Primary): [Looking down] Eish! Madam Uyabhayisa (meaning he is not thinking properly) uBongani, he associated that girl with Nomzamo.*

*Kaise: Who is Nomzamo?*

*Sizwe: She is a girl in our isiZulu reading book.*

*Kaise: So, what is wrong with Nomzamo?*

*Sizwe: She and her brother's parents died now Nomzamo lives all over the place and his brother has to absent himself from school looking for him. His brother is protecting her against boys like us who are rude and always teasing girls because they are weak and crying babies.*

*Mthoko (boy, 15 years old, Isibaya Primary): Madam, I make sure that I do not tease them when there is no teacher or any adult around. You know our parents and teachers defend us and girls are afraid of them.*

The data revealed that contrary to the construction of girls being 'softer' and 'gentler', it appeared that girls in these schools had created the stance of protecting themselves against boys. They took a stand to fight boys who undermine them as a means to defend themselves. It was a worrying factor to me that teachers' and parents' perceptions of gender conformed to the inequalities of gender between males and females, and associated girls as being physically weak. When I analysed the incident report book I realise that girls mostly reported that boys beat them during break times. This denoted how children's experiences in the schools were severely constrained by teachers' perceptions of gender. The data also illustrate that core values of femininities do not reflect girls' genuine potentialities. For instance, the behaviour of the girl who I found brutally fighting a boy in class was contradictory to dominant perceptions of gender. This meant that girls in these schools do not necessarily conform to dominant values of femininities such as being physically weak, soft, gentle and so forth. Girls are not passively

socialised into these constraining patterns of gender behaviour. They also learn things from their schooling experiences which, regrettably, included performing gender violently.

Meyer (2009), writing from a feminist standpoint, shares these sentiments, maintaining that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum disadvantage girls and increase the risk of being infected with HIV/ AIDS. In concurrence with this view, I assert that in South Africa boys are also disadvantaged as they are pressured by the dominant discourses of masculinities to be dominant. The ideology of gender construction seems to be embedded in the school curriculum especially through text books, the teaching strategies (pedagogy) adopted and teachers' attitudes and expectations of children's' gender roles. The most profound effects of gender construction are evident in the discourses and practices that girls are exposed to at school. These discourses determine girls' appearance and the ways they walk, talk, sit and behave. These practices also reinforce the societal expectation of who is a girl.

### **5.2.2 Construction of masculinities within the school context**

UZalo Primary School is under the Nutrition School Programme which is a programme from government that ensures that learners have a meal at school. On one Monday, I decided to spend the full day at uZalo Primary as I planned to do observations. I realised that Vusi was limping and wearing slop on his left foot. I was concerned as he was looking in pain. This was during the second lunch break as he was waiting for his friend who was assisting him in line during feeding. Learners depend on the food that the school provided; most parents do not afford to give them lunch or money to buy at school (This was evident from the data I analysed from the school's



SA-SAMS programme, which was used to capture school information including the parents' employment status). The extract below illustrates:

*Kaise: What happened to your leg?*

*Vusi: [rubbing his head] Last week Friday we were cleaning our classroom, Sir asked each boy to lift up a desk and put it at the back of the class since girls were ready to wash the floor. It was heavy but I did not want to embarrass myself in front of girls. We as boys have to prove that we are strong and can carry heavy things. So I also lifted, I don't know what happened but I heard the noise of girls laughing and shouting (walala, cheese boy) as the desk slipped and hit my toes so bad.*

*Kaise: I am sorry, you are injured.*

*Vusi: Yes, teachers are putting pressure on us to do things that we do not like, but because we are boys we have to do them, a man has to do what he has to do (smiling).*

*Nkanyiso: mam, this is nothing compared to what my father makes me do at home. You know I carry three cases of beer alone; he insists I carry them so that I can be a man. That's what I want to be a man so I carry the cases as heavy as they are.*

The data above illustrate that boys are constructed to prove the core values of masculinities that boys were physically strong and tough. Being a boy means that boys always have to endure the pressure of having to prove core values of masculinities, for example, physical perseverance and strength even in veritable circumstances where they cannot maintain this. This was exemplified when Vusi put pressure on himself in conformity to the dominant discourses of masculinity. Such is the cost of being a boy and it is unfair. Yet it was clear from Vusi's reflection that it was not within his capacity to continue carry a desk as he could not handle it. Instead, he feared being

teased and laughed at by other children and that resulted in hurting himself badly. Laughing at boys who were not tough and strong is a means through which children police and regulate hegemonic masculinities. This shows the dynamic part that primary school children take in policing and punishing those gender performances that do not naturally imply hegemonic masculinities (Epstein and Telford, 2003).

Parents and teachers mainly uphold stereotypic characteristics of gender and thus formal schooling becomes an environment of gender inequality constructions. As a result, boys have little alternative but to conform to dominant values of masculinities during formal schooling processes. Even if gender-based violence tends to militate against girls, boys too bring about gigantic physical and emotional costs in the process. Some boys narrated stories that reflected on their embarrassment when they could not uphold the dominant values of masculinities. Being boys means that boys always have to endure the pressure of having to prove core values of masculinities, for example, physical continuance and durability even in circumstances where they truly cannot maintain this.

The data below demonstrates one occasion that was used by Sizwe to downgrade girls; further evidence of this was found in document analysis of the classroom duty roster which assigned boys only to carry desks.



**Picture 2**

*Kaise: What is happening in this picture?*

*Sizwe: (Laughing) in this photo madam, you can see two boys are carrying a desk. Mcedisi could not carry a desk because he is useless and soft, Andile had to help him to move the desk and even a girl beat him.*

**Kaise:** What do you mean if you say he is useless and soft?

*Sizwe: I mean he is weak and cannot do anything that boy's do just like girls.*

*Mcedisi (boy, 13 years old, Isibaya Primary): Not all boys are strong.*

This finding shows how boys are constructed to fit into the prescribed category of masculinities as Sizwe and Mcedisi lifted up the desks as they competed with each other. It further revealed how Sipho tried to show his power through undermining girls. Thorne (1993) calls this boundary work; Sizwe validated his strong identity in opposition to girls who he views as weak. He expressed to Mcedisi the awfulness that even a girl can do it and beat you. This execution was an endeavour to re-establish Sizwe's strength over girls which was achieved to demonstrate Mcedisi's powerlessness to perform to the desire. The dread for Sizwe and Mcedisi was that if a boy could not lift up the work area he resembles a girl. Along these lines to Sizwe to be a real man implied having the capacity to lift up the work area or generally confront the danger of being poked and saw as a subordinate. This demonstrates the pressure under which boys distort their personalities. For this situation Sizwe's put-down of Mcedisi was joined by chuckling. Giggling is utilized as a methodology that is utilised to show control chains of importance. Boys are subjected to the pressures of hegemonic examples of conforming in various ways and they battle in the constitution of their gendered personality.

Critical men's studies provide a critique which explains this form of gendering. These studies have criticised constructions of masculinity as a unitary gendered quality which all boys possess (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2010; Morrell 1998). The authors have brought up issues which advance the majority of masculinities, and have contended that gender power relations do not simply work amongst girls and boys but additionally amongst boys (Cameron, 2004).

### **5.3 SPACES AND PLACES OF CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF GENDER**

In this section I discuss the findings of this study that denote the spaces and places of gender within the school context. The study identified spaces and places that girls and boys occupied within the schools as the zones of gender construction, in other words, the places that girls and boys occupied that shaped their gender identity. The findings of this study point to three categories of these spaces and places that I name the gender neutral zone, gender zone and the gender secretive zone. Firstly, I discuss the findings in the gender neutral zone, the computer room. Secondly, I present the findings in the gender zone, the principal's office, assembly area, classroom, and the playground. Lastly I illustrate the findings in the secretive zone that is the toilets and the bush. The sizes of these spaces and places are linked to power, for example, occupying the bigger spaces means more power and then occupying the lesser spaces means being subordinated.

#### **5.3.1 Computer room as a gender neutral zone**

When I visited the computer room I observed that learners were happy to be on the computers as they were working with smile in their faces and sharing information. I realised that Mr Nowel, the computer room teacher, gave each child a number that matches the computer number. Therefore, each child was expected to sit according to those numbers. As a result, gender was not

an issue in the computer room; instead learners were free to use the computers and search for the information that they wanted. This indicates that the computer lessons had a positive influence on girls' and boys' schooling experiences. Moreover, this indicated that the computer room had a significant role in creating a gender space for children to unite as equal partners. This also showed the possibility of children having relationships with others whom they share similar interests irrespective of gender. Research by Bhana (2005b) and Morojele (2010; 2011a) draws attention to the powerful role that schools play in counteracting the curse of gender inequalities.

On a Wednesday, when I was at uZalo Primary with the four girls and boys I was working with, during the first break I observed that girls and boys wanted to go back to class quickly, as soon as the bell rang indicating that the break was over. This was unusual because on other days I had to keep on reminding them that the break is over. They were excited and looking forward to a computer lesson. The following illustrate the children responded when asked about what they like at school:

*Siya: Oh, yes I like computer room; it is the best place ever because I can freely play there. You know mam, the teacher allows us to do what we want on the computer. I wish we had more of the computer periods, now we only go there once a week. Eish! We have grade 7 computer competition next week so we are currently practising.....*

*Bongiwe: Madam, I also like the computer room we sit according to the numbers that Sir gave us. So it doesn't matter whether you are a boy or a girl. Hhhhhe, we sit so quiet and do what we want, lol (laughing out loud). We are not allowed to change computers because we save our work in one computer.*

Implied in Siya and Bongiwe's view is that, the computer room provided a space for freedom and gender equality. This view illustrated that girls and boys are eager to work together and display their outstanding aptitude as Siya looked very happy when she talked about the computer room. For the Grade 7 inter class computer competition, each class had a chance to practise after school since they only had one hour of computer lessons in a week. Parents would normally wait for their children since they were finishing late. Siya and Bongiwe were a team from Grade 7A which was to compete with the other team from Grade 7D. Their parents were excited about the competition and supportive of their relationship even though there were a girl and a boy. The plan was to motivate them to work hard together and win the competition. As Rose (2007) agrees, children can enjoy relationships with their opposite gender peers.



### Picture 3

When I asked what was happening in the picture as I saw the sitting arrangement showing girls and boys sitting next to each other. As mentioned above, in the computer room gender was not an issue.

*Vusi: Oh mam, here this is where I do my school work relaxed. Bongiwe, a girl from our class help me when my computer does funny things. Mr Nowel allows us to do what we want and it helps me because I sit next to Bongiwe and she helps me to search information when we have assignments..... ..*

*Kaise: What do you mean if you say, you do what you like in class?*

*Vusi: I do not mean it in a bad way, we are able to talk to girls and ask for help without anyone telling them we are dangerous. I am also free to talk to Bongiwe because she is a master of computer.*

The above excerpt, illustrated that the computer teacher Mr Nowel (pseudonym) did a significant situation at school because he did not use the taken for granted understanding of gender however acted on the best interest of all children under his supervision. Parents supported his idea of working with children as mixed gender groups. Healy (2011) notes that those “parents that are concerned for the happiness in their children’s relationships; are the same parents who normally are concerned for their children’s educational development”. This indicated an understanding



between all stakeholders at school in presenting an opportunity for girls and boys to value and respect their opposite gender relationships.

To follow up the issue of computer lessons, I analysed the Grade 7-time table and observed that each class had a one-hour period per week. From my teaching experience I was aware that in National Curriculum Statement there is not time allocated for the computer lessons in primary schools. As a result, each school has to be creative on how they allocate time for computer lessons. There was flexibility when it came to computers and less pressure from the educator. The findings also revealed that girls and boys acquired pleasure from the opportunity to be in the space where they were free to be themselves and interact socially without teachers controlling them. Therefore, this further indicates the possibility of an important role that the schools can play in enhancing gender equality.

### **5.3.2 Intensive gendered zones**

The findings indicated spaces and places where gender matters the most, everything available was gendered. For example, occupation of those space and place where how you sit, play, stand, behave, and who washes the floor, cooks and lift the desk was heavily influenced by gender. If one happened to do what is not generally expected to be done by his/her gender children became a laughing stock. I therefore decided to name these places and spaces the intensive gendered zones.

#### **5.3.2.1 Principal's office**

During breaks almost all the boys were playing outside their classroom, running around, playing soccer and chasing each other. However, I never saw any of them playing near the principal's office. The findings of this study revealed that girls and boys understood the office as the space where their male principal as the authority resides. The findings showed that despite the Employment of Educators Act and the Constitution of South Africa promoting equality, males still occupy high positions. While the findings of the study points to men as in the hierarchy of social life it is not the specific aim of this study to compare women/girls and men/boys. Girls and boys at uZalo Primary believed the office is the place where people with authority spent their leisure time.



**Picture 4**

Below is how the girls and boys from uZalo Primary school explained what was happening in this picture:

*Nkanyiso: .....this is where our principal spends his time, you know mam this is a place of respectable people and people with authority. I do not want to see myself in trouble like detention so I do not go anywhere near the office. But as I grow I have no doubt that I will be sitting in the office, it's given I am a man.*

*Masie: To me, our school office is the most beautiful room than any other room; it has air conditioners, phones, and microwave. It's like a hotel; it has everything that a person needs. So a person who occupies it is a king, you know mam indoda yangempela meaning he is a real man.*

The illustration in picture 4 according to girls and boys was associated with men as they mentioned that never been exposed to a woman occupying an office. Therefore, in this situation it was likely that boys viewed themselves as becoming powerful people who occupied authoritative spaces while girls on the hand viewed themselves as people who were subordinates. This further showed how girls and boys are constructed at a young age to view each other unequally and to project such gender inequality onto a space associated with power.

They respected the office in such a manner that the learners from the block of classes that were in front of the office were using a route that took them longer to reach their classes because they bypassed the office. This meant they highly respected the person who occupied the office and did

not want to disturb him. What was obscured in Masie's and Nkanyiso speaking of the office as the space that is occupied by males is that girls and boys will only see a man as a person who deserves respect; many of them mentioned during our focus group interviews that in their schooling experiences they are only exposed to the offices being occupied by male principals. Thus I also view this respect as a way of promoting the dominant discourses of masculinity. Their view of only men as occupying the office demonstrated how girls and boys perceive gender as a static and incontestable human attribute. Associating the office with masculine attributes fundamentally contributed to this attribute (during individual interviews I made a follow on to some of these issues, as stated below). I therefore asked why offices are mostly occupied by men.

*Nkanyiso: Men are strong and are powerful; they are the leaders in everything. Think about it mam, at home fathers are the heads of the family (inhloko). They are the ones who hold the family together and give instructions. So ya men know it all.*

*Bongiwe: I really do not understand where it changes because mam in school we as girls are the ones helping boys. But as we grow they tend to be the ones occupying high positions, look around the world mostly presidents are males. Ever since I started school I have never had a women principal, why? Mrs Msomi could be a better principal; she does all the work here in school but aybo! Somehow bayasirobha (they are robbing us), even when we do group works in class, boys are made group leaders, it is high time that women get a chance to occupy high positions as well. .... just here in class I always get position one; I help boys ask them, they know [frowning].*

The excerpts above reveal that the two schools in the study expose girls and boys to only males in position of power. So the hidden message seems to be; only the males could be in position of power. As children grow, girls are already compromised because they know that being in a position of power is not their place. It interested me to note that these girls were aware that they are capable; they just need a chance to show that they can lead, as Bongiwe confidently articulated. During my visit I also observed that whenever they were doing group work, teachers always made a boy as a leader and this tended to encourage boys to be aggressive when they did not know and understand the activity that they were doing. They did not take it very kindly when girls told them what to do. This meant the school was promoting the dominant gender discourses which viewed men as strong and always capable to lead. At the same time girls did not completely conform to this dominant gender discourse; they had no option but to perform gender in conformity to the school rules dilemma, otherwise they would suffer the pains of detention and being reported to their parents.

I observed during the principal's meeting I attended that, in most schools and institutions, there was a common pattern, and most males were principals. Therefore, from an early age in South African the primary school children are exposed to gender inequalities. Moreover, in my own schooling network, in the principals meeting I observe that there are still more male principals than female principals. This situation continues to disadvantage children's schooling experiences, since they will grow with the perception that only males can be leaders. This also made me realise the gender messages and role models are powerful. Yet there at schools there are no available programmes to empower children on possible impact of gender inequality. The consequences of these have been found to be more unfavourable for girls and have thereby

continued undebated the scheme of gender inequalities in schools. These findings echoed other studies (Bhana, 2013; Morojele, 2013b; Unterhalter, 2000; Bennet, 2009) that have found that schools play a critical role in shaping gender acts (Butler, 2013) in “ways that reinforce unequal gender relations”. This was evident in this study, as findings were further that girls did not accept what was in front of them as it was and kept quiet about it. I say this because Bongiwe challenged patriarchy and disputed the idea that it was men who ought to be predominant figures in the family and work place.

Furthermore, I shared the same experience with girls and boys in this study. In my 12 years’ experience as a student at school I only had one female principal while I was in my lower standards that was in my first year to standard one (Grade 1 to Grade 3). In my 20 years’ experience employed as a teacher I had males as my principal. I have been recently promoted as a principal. I overheard a Grade three child saying we now have “*uthisha omkhulu oyintombazane*” (a girl head teacher/ women principal). Some learners preferred to say “*umemu omkhulu*” (madam principal or head), this saying attached gender to positions of authority and clearly showed how children constructed gender in their lives. They had categorised me according to gender so that they could attach meaning to who I am. I remember learners referred to my retired principal as “*thisha omkhulu*” (head teacher); that saying does not specify gender.

Therefore, in order to understand how gender operates in learning environments, for instance in schools, we need to examine ways in which stakeholders (e.g. teachers, girls and boys) construct or make meaning when relating to gender issues. Hence, my experiences as a principal confirmed the view at the centre of social constructionism, which is one of the theoretical

frameworks of this study, of “seeing the world as generated by relations rather than by external realities” (Gregen, 1999). As per this theory, gender relations in schools can be comprehended through implications of social relations and qualities that teachers, parents and children attribute to gender (being male or female). In the investigation of people, it is imperative to discover how they see and understand their general surroundings, and it is socially and truly constituted relations that decide this. As in my case, learners only picture males as principals; therefore, they use all these words to make sense of who I am. The social constructionist theorist Burr (1995), believed that gender is socially constructed therefore it has nothing to do with an individual since they are expected to perform gender and satisfy the society expectation. Calling me “*umemu omkhulu*” (madam principal) imposes relations of power on the situation, as if it was important to be constantly reminded that I am a woman, who was historically and culturally expected to be submissive and possess feminine characteristics. Hence, I say it was a normal and accepted way of giving me less power than my male colleagues.

I am observing in Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit principals’ meetings, that in the lower primary schools, there were recently also males that were promoted as principals. In the past lower primary school principals were only females as I mentioned before. The rationale behind this was that young children needed a motherly figure to acquaint them to the new environment. The promotion of males to lower primary school to me is another domination strategy to undermine women and continues to disadvantage them. I say this because currently the practically add up to nonappearance of female teachers as school principals is supported by the thinking that females cannot control adolescent boys at school since they do not have the physical quality, and can be effortlessly controlled by teenagers, who could very well not regard them since they were

women. They may have families to look after; and they are viewed as being passionate by nature (Thompson, 1995). I differ with the view reported by Thompson; my experiences as a principal, as discussed earlier, are evidence that not all women were too emotional. The Mafukuzela-Gandhi circuit is divided into six wards (Verulam, Inanda North, Inanda South, Phoenix North, Phoenix South and Tongaat). All these circuits are under the leadership of males. The question is: Where are the females to take over these positions?

### **5.3.2.2 Classroom**

On my first day at Isibaya, after I was introduced to the principal, he delegated the Senior Phase Head of Department to work with. As we toured around the school, Mrs Iris showed me the whole school and allowed me to work wherever I needed to. As we walked around I observed that girls and boys were walking around in their socks and without their shoes. I also observed that girls shared desks with each other, and the same with boys. I observed a rare case in one of the Grade 7 classes where a boy shared a desk with a girl. Fortunately, the girl was Bongwiwe and she was one of the participants. The data below from the mixed focus group interviews at Isibaya Primary, further illustrates the situation:

*Kaise: Who do you share a desk in class?*

*Tarzan (girl, 14 years old, Isibaya Primary): Madam, I share a desk with my friend Sibongile now but at the beginning of the year I sat with Bongani. You know mam; I had to swap places with Musa because Bongani stole my pens and*



*crayons. It was also difficult to share with him we fought several times because he does things his own way. I could not take that.....*

*Kaise: What did you mean if you say his way?*

*Tarzan: Like mam, he sat with his legs wide open and refused to put his bags on the floor so I had little space to write on. Even when I reported him it carried on because Sir said he is a man, that's how they sit. Life was difficult and he never carried a pen.*

*Sizwe: .....girls kept their thing (meaning sanitary pads) that is disgusting and smelling because of blood, what you call it in their bags, ayi I don't want to see it...*

*Mthoko: Eyi, blood smells really bad; I really cannot sit with a girl [giggling and making it a joke].*

The picture below, taken from uZalo primary school exemplifies:



**Picture 5**

*Bongiwe [explaining what the above picture is showing]: You know mam, I asked Sindy to take this photo because here in school it is unusual to find a girl and a boy sharing a desk for a long period. In fact, we broke the record [Laughing] boys are short tempered, and I remember one day I kept on asking him to close his legs so that I can have enough space to write on. We ended up fighting; I am coming from the farm I know how to fight with boys. Ngiyayishaya inqindi (I fight like a boxer). He was bleeding and other boys laughed at him and I think that made him wants to fight more. Others were trying to separate us and I could see he was weak but did not want to be beaten by a girl.*

This clarified that girls and boys experienced challenges when they shared a desk as girls claimed that boys took a lot of space as they widely opened their legs making it difficult for them to write. Even when they reported this challenge to teachers, they did not get help because culturally boys were allowed to sit with their legs wide open. At the same time Mbali, a girl at Isibaya Primary, thought that this cultural belief led to serious challenges as girls and boys end up fighting. This further revealed that girls and boys were culturally pressured as they were expected to act according to specific rules like how men and women should sit. They took the same practice to school and teachers were reinforcing the same practice as they allowed in class. It is not easy for teachers to change their upbringing knowledge as they come from the same society that is characterised by deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes. Therefore, it might not be possible for them to teach gender equity in the classroom without interventions that will enable them to change their attitudes. The fact that gender performance has to be taught, as girls and boys are taught to sit, provides support for the view that gender is a social construct. This approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 as the theoretical framework of this study.

I observed a female teacher at Isibaya Primary, who would stand in front of the class and put together her hands when she entered the class as the sign of reminding girls to put their legs together. Again, the practice compromised girls as they ended up occupying a small space which consequently made them powerless and automatically categorised them into the subordinated group. On the other hand, boys tended to occupy bigger spaces, thus making them powerful and perfectly fitting them into the group that was characterized by power. This meant that the dominant gender discourses in the schools and society became a frame of reference that mediated girls' and boys' understanding and interpretations of their gender experiences. Girls and boys learnt how to contrive their aptitudes, fantasies and abilities in congruence with the socially inscribed dominant prescriptions of gender expectations. However, the view that children are intricately entangled in the social relations within their communities (Burr, King, & Butt, 2012; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) might serve to undermine children's role in challenging gender relations. It was for this reason that in this study I employed the emancipatory interpretivist paradigm and participatory techniques to empower girls and boys to talk about their gender-based stories. Indeed, the vast body of literature as discussed in Chapter 2 awards children little control or power; children are normally conceptualised as passive victims of the processes of gender socialisation (Renold & Ringrose, 2012).

Culturally boys are expected to tolerate pain (Morojele, 2009) as in IsiZulu they will say "*indoda ayikhali*" meaning a man does not cry, this means even when boys feel the pain they cannot cry. Like wise in the case of Bongiwe who fought with the boy and made a circumstance that was unsatisfactory and uncomfortable to the boys who saw the fight as the boy was bleeding. The

boy who fought Bongiwe endures pains but could not cry because culturally as mentioned before, boys do not cry instead he needed to look for different method for winning the fight with a specific end goal to hold the wellbeing given by hegemonic manliness. Clearly the girl was not terrified of the boy as she said that she grew from the farm, where she used to herd cattle with boys. This was uncovered by her demeanour when she initially punched the boy in his mouth; it was a uncomfortable for a boy to be punched by a girl since girls should regard boys, in the prevailing societal perspective of gentility. Bleeding is a core sign being defeated yet blood did not make the boy pull back as he feared being called disturbing names. The discoveries demonstrate how girls and boys perform or act gender as the boy kept on fighting notwithstanding when u he was defeated however the pressures of dominant discourses constrained him to act strong, obviously by society.

The nature of society influences schools and what was done in schools' influence society. This meant the two structures complement the other since at school learners and teachers are part of the society. This also means that both school and society have expectations one from the other, that school enhances and extends the social cords and society does the same for educational goals. If the society is characterised by patriarchal observations this is likely to reproduce inequalities and inequities that might exist in society and be taken further to schools. These may be observed in teacher's expectation on how girls and boys conducted themselves when they are sitting. Furthermore, teachers seemed to encourage girls' and boys' separation during breaks as they believed girls had boyfriends or boys are dangerous.

We also learnt from the findings that at school girls and boys did not get an opportunity to socialise together. Even when teachers sat them according to mixed genders at the beginning of the year, they reverted to the same gender. In this case, teachers also had to play their role and be consistent with classroom rules which would not allow for children to change places. This further contradicted what girls and boys learnt about in the Life Orientation lesson as they mentioned the desire to know each other as they learnt about the importance of social relationships in Life Orientation (LO). Girls and boys made it clear that while they learnt about social relations in Life Orientation, it did not mean they will robotically practise it. In other words, teachers are obliged to play their role and teach girls and boys about each other. The general tendency in society is to treat all girls alike and boys as unitary and having the same gender qualities which are predetermined by children's genitalia.

In this study I contest this view and advance the developments of femininities and masculinities as plural and liquid human qualities. In other words, girls and boys at school should be supported through consistent and firm classrooms rules which are gender conscious to create to their best human potential, in safe and equitable schooling environments. However, I was impressed in both schools when I noticed that teachers arranged the groups according to mixed gender. Bongiwe, a girl at uZalo Primary, believed that the reason behind mix gender groups was to assist boys to grasp or understand concepts quicker as they were slower than girls. For example, when asked to comment on the difficulties she encountered at school, Mbali (girl, 14 years old, Isibaya Primary) gave the following response:

*Hey! We help to boost the boys, because they do not want to put their hands up, when we learn. I think babona ukuthi bazolahla (meaning they think they will lose status) when they say wrong answers. They have girlfriends in class [laughing] but it is difficult to work with them because they feel we want to control them. They do not concentrate on what the teacher teaches us, they are a problem. I think that is why they become aggressive as group leaders; they do not know the answers; at the same time, they do not want to be told.*

The above excerpt illustrated that girls cared for the boys as they were prepared to assist them with their schoolwork. The leaders in most of these groups were mentioned to be boys. This was also compromising boys as it might be challenging to lead the group while they did not understand what was being taught. It further perpetuated typically masculine behaviour as boys tended to be aggressive in their leadership approach as if this was the only means to be in control. In social life, interpersonal relations between various institutions are still structured in a manner that portrays men's as having more power, thus leading to the dehumanizing of women. In contrast, girls mentioned that they were paying attention to the teachers and they were the ones who were active and helping boys. If a girl happened not to know the answer, they get words like "*oooh you now have boyfriends, usuyazitshela*" (meaning you think you are better) from both males and female teachers. Most girls mentioned that after these words they tended to be quiet and reserved throughout the lesson. Consequently, this kind of behaviour indicates that teachers are gender-insensitive in certain aspects of their teaching methods.

This was further revealed in the examples that teachers used in class that portrayed and encouraged girls' and boys' traditional roles. As if all this was not enough, the classroom posters showed only men as heroes, as if there were no women heroes.



**Picture 6**

When Tarzan was asked, what was happening in Picture 6 that she captured?

*You know mam, here in class all the wall posters that are displayed are showing males [pointing with her finger one of the posters in a picture]. Where are the posters with female role models, there are women like mama Nkosaza Zuma who are role models as well. As girls we also want to see them displayed in our classroom every day, which will motivate us to be like them one day.*

The excerpt above meant to Tarzan, a girl at Isibaya Primary, that they were only exposed to males as heroes. She strongly articulated that in their class there were only posters with males

and she found this contradicting with reality as there were a lot of women heroes. She firmly believed that as girls they needed to see women heroes displayed as well everyday so that they could have people to look up to and be motivated to be like them. On the same issue Sindy, a girl at uZalo Primary, mentioned that:

*The posters displayed in our classroom walls are only for men because they want the boys to grow up and be like them, you know be the leaders.... I do not like this because there are many women heroes in the world, we see them on television. Teachers should be displaying them as well as people we also aspire to be.*

The above excerpt indicates that girls seemed to be subjugated in the classroom if they were only exposed to males as heroes and made to be quiet due to the language used to address them. The school perpetuated the societal stereotype that women should be submissive and accept males as dominant over them. The dominant position was also a challenge to boys as Mcedisi mentioned that everybody had freedom and everyone should be enjoying their human rights. If they were than encouraged to take away girl's rights, they did not find joy in that but they felt guilty of taking away what was a right of the girls. The dominant images of masculinity and femininity in schools conveyed to learners were those which portrayed girl learners as having lesser power and status than boy learners (Oxfam, 2005). This was evident when Mcedisi and Mthoko, two boys at Isibaya Primary, felt that such exercise of power over girls meant oppressing them. This data revealed that boys were pressured by the societal expectations to be dominant otherwise they viewed themselves as equal to girls.

However, reality pressured them to treat each other unequally. I am aware that schools have gender equality policies however they are still in favour of a culture of masculinity and



femininity. In the curriculum there are still examples that perpetuate the idea of girls as being weak and need boy's protections which display boys as the tougher ones. Moreover, the school discourses and the classroom wall displays and attitude of some teachers still disadvantage girls in subtler ways. Hence, it was the aim of this study to investigate the discourses and practices that affect girls' and boys' geographies.

I made a follow up on the issue of menstruation and I found that girls were pressured to absent themselves when they are menstruating to avoid embarrassing themselves by messing the uniform as their families could not afford to buy proper sanitary pads. This is how girls responded when they were asked about when they first formally learnt menstruation:

*Bongiwe: Madam, it is really difficult to be a girl and there are days when I really hate to be a girl. We did not ask for menstruation to happen in our lives but the way I am suffering. One at home they cannot afford to buy the sanitary pads for me. Even here at school they do not give us and I remember Mandy messed her uniform and she became the laughing stock. Boys do not understand how it's like and we made a decision with my friends that if we menstruate we do not come to school.*

*Mbali: It is worse with me, mam because I suffer from isilumo (menstruation pain) and I bleed heavy in such a way that I spew often. Therefore, boys would not understand as they are making menstruation a joke but we learn this thing in Life Orientation.*

This showed that while there was an indication that while girls and boys had equal access to the school system their experiences at school were not the same and these practices continued to

enhance inequality if girls had to abandon their studies because of non-acceptance of who they were. This was further clearly exposed during document analysis, in the class register, which revealed a persistent absence of the same girls during the same dates in each month. That would entail at least six days a month away because of menstruation. The official culture of school as mentioned earlier pretended to be unbiased, yet was in reality portrayed by the omnipresence of gender. These set schoolgirls in another opposing position whereby they were contradictory position whereby they were expected to conceal who they are at the same time.

### **5.3.2.3 Playground**

I spent most of my visiting time in the playground after school, as I find it a suitable place for focus group interviews. The pictures below revealed the playground as a site of gender construction. The playgrounds in the picture below were used as spaces for active contestation and negotiation. This meant girls and boys were constructed in divergent routes, in differing times, places and spaces in conflicting circumstances (Van Blerk, 2005). When I analysed the classroom time table I realised that on a Wednesday, at uZalo Primary, all the Grade 7 girls and boys are allowed to wear white shorts and golf shirts as the Physical Education uniform. According to the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) Physical Education is part of the Life Orientation.

At Isibaya Primary school, I asked the question, what do you like the most here at school?

*Owami (girl, 13 years, uZalo Primary): Mina mam, I like physical education period, Mrs Shezi always gives us the netball to play and the boys play soccer, it's a rule. If a boy is seen playing netball, other boys tease him and call him isitabane (gay), sissie or cheese boy and a girl who play soccer we call him "uyihluzi" (calves). You know our teachers always tell us to play netball and stay away from boys because they are rough and aggressive. They like to fight and teachers are afraid they might hurt us. We are fine with playing netball because it is gentle and you know safe for us since we are not so strong like boys. Boys always chase us as you can see in this picture, it's only girls.*

*Gugu (girl, 13 years old, uZalo Primary): You see madam, in this we are looking at the opposite direction while the goal is being scored because there were boys who came into our ground and try to take away the other netball pole. You know it was annoying because if they disturb us on netball we do not have any other sport for girls. We do not go anywhere around them because our teacher told us to stay away from them because they are rough.*



**Picture 7**

The above excerpt indicated that girls were comfortable to play with each other only because of their gentle and polite nature. They did not hurt or compete with each other, which is a feminine behaviour as stated in the literature review (Chapter 2). They revealed that boys were very rough, aggressive and they always wanted to have the ball for themselves. Qualities of femininities were shown by girls in their association with boys. The discoveries of the study by Martin and Muthukrishna (2011) in which they watched that girls are afraid to be seen with young men in view of the way teachers treat them when they are spotted. It was also surprising to find out that disrespect and playing rough was purposefully displayed to show power amongst boys. Morojele (2011) stress, that boy uses the attributes of hegemonic masculinity to overpower their subordinates.

The power relations amongst gender were more complex than any other discourses that influence both girls and boys. Nkanyiso is a boy at uZalo Primary, who expressed the belief that girls are weaker than him as he was in the grounds playing soccer, and this meant proving who he was as a boy. He shared what was happening in picture 8 below.



**Picture 8**

*Nkanyiso: Like this space initially it was for girls, we chased them away because it is the bigger space here at school now we play on it. Girls cannot protect themselves we are abusing them as they are weak. We colonise them, they cry easy and shy to hit us back instead they run to teachers. We are very strong and rough and you see when we play soccer we do not want any girl around because girls are “antekenteke” meaning weak. We are very rude and when we are selecting team members we exclude boys who are not*

*so strong because they make us lose the game. We do not like 'cheese' boys who are like girls.*

*Mthoko: Eyi, mam boys are very rude, we treat girls like nothing. We are not afraid to do anything or speak any how to them because they cannot defend themselves*

*Mcedisi: In this picture I see unfairness, if we as boys chase away girls it means we are taking away their rights. We are oppressing them; it is unfair boys have to be stopped from this bad behaviour.*

This data showed that the boys excluded girls in this space which they used as the playground. The boys in the picture are looking young however they insisted that they are strong. This therefore meant that they strictly hold the rules of masculinity that portrays them as strong (Morojele, 2009, 2011a; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012) in order to gain status at school. The discussion further indicated how dominant discourses of masculinity determine the manner in which the boys treated girls at school. The relationship between girls and boys in the playgrounds was in such a way that boy's shows power on girls as they even chase them away in the space that was previously known as occupied by them. The rules that govern masculinity, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, pressured boys to act hegemonic forms of masculinity in a harsh way. This finding also confirmed that girls' and boys' experiences differ at school even when they attend the same school. Failure to perform any kind of act associated with masculinities negatively affected boys; as Hamlall and Morrell (2009) contend; prevailing talks of masculinities do exist in different genders but also exist in the same gender relations.

Mcedisi was not in agreement with the characteristics of masculinity discourses of undermining girls. He noticed that girl's absence in the photo 8 meant they are being oppressed as they were chased away from the playgrounds. Nkanyiso believed that girls were weak as he kept on referring to them as "*antekenteke*" meaning weak. As mentioned earlier I am an insider in this study; as he articulated this word I got irritated. I had to keep on reminding myself of my PhD ambitions and my responsibility as a researcher.

Mcedisi, a boy who was treated as not fitting in the masculinity group as he most of the times had a soft spot for girls, felt girls should be allowed in the playgrounds as they were human beings with their own rights. However, Nkanyiso strictly followed the rules of hegemonic masculinities and did not want to view any other alternatives. He was always harsh when dealing with girls because to him that meant he was a real boy. Morojele (2011) reports' interacting pleasantly with girls is not upheld in the hegemonic masculinities. This demonstrates that girls and boys consider their gender identities connections in an unexpected way (Rose, 2007), and that has a heading on how their gender identities, are socialised (Harro, 2000). Additionally, the data indicated that most of the space in the primary schools I visited was being occupied by boys. As Thorne (1993, p. 21) notes, "school sports grounds are also structured in a manner that favours boys more than girls as boys' soccer fields are bigger as compared to netball fields". This positioned the girls in an unfairly divided space which they had to adapt themselves to, and which further perpetuated the gender inequalities within the school context.

Space is unevenly distributed between girls and boys in schools if boys have more space to occupy. This meant that the school structure favoured boys more than girls and the issue of

unequal space division is gendered in a way that girls felt less accommodated than boys. This practice is gendered in a way that always sends messages that girls and boys were to operate in isolated manners. My experience in this study revealed that this practice affects the give and take of the relations between them as boys tended to be aggressive towards girls; this further divided the classroom into zones where boys occupied the classroom corners where girls are not welcomed. I also observed that the sporting codes that children played during break are gendered as different sports were played by girls and boys in the schools that I visited. The findings are that in these schools, girls were not supposed to take part in sports that were regarded as male sports such as rugby, soccer, cricket etc. Teachers also discouraged girls who insisted on participating in the traditionally so-called male sports and were given names like “tomboys”, *uyihluzi* (calf muscles) etc. On the other hand, boys who participated in sports considered female sports like netball etc. were referred to as sissies, cheese boys or gays. Consequently, despite the fact in the LO policy document it was stated clearly that all sports in schools were open to both girls and boys, the two primary schools I visited had sports classified according to gender. These findings revealed to me that the schools’ practices and discourses separated girls and boys as opposites.

These findings further revealed that educators were either intentionally or unintentionally contributed to the ways in which children perceived themselves in terms of gender. Girls and boys came to school and met educators with strong perceptions of what constitute girls’ and parts and how everyone ought to act. I should concede that as teachers we still maintained what was practised in our communities where gender roles and stereotypes continued to give women



inferior status. I feel that as educators we disadvantaged both girls and boys in this case, as some boys felt pressured to act as if they had power, when they were powerless.

In these schools, sports such as rugby and football were also gendered and they held a status of masculinity which gave attention to boys more than girls. The role offered to girls was that of being supporters, which was of no significance and placed girls in a submissive role of serving boys. These sports developed boys' physique which posed a threat to girls because boys turned out to be bullies. It appeared that the power inequalities accorded to gendered expectations had the potential to limit girls' acquisition of skills that entailed leadership and responsibilities over others around them. The boys' expectations were linked to the masculine traits and these allowed them to have a wider range of knowledge acquisition in learning subjects. For instance, the common discourses of gender that were found in these schools also included descriptions of boys as violent, rough, tough, strong, loud, naughty, wild and disobedient, untidy, dirty, protective, aggressive and less emotional, as discussed in Chapter 2. This meant the social status ascribed to these traits, knowledge and skills meant that boys were more likely to achieve favourably than girls who were expected to take on subservient character traits.

These findings denoted that the school extended practices of patriarchy which girls and boys were familiar with from their home backgrounds and it positioned girls in a very disadvantaged position in the extended vicious cycle of subordination from home to school. I believe that schools as institutions of learning should be more liberating than oppressing. This situation disadvantages girls and boys. I remember when I grew up, I played indigenous games, like *ushumpu* and *inqathu* (skipping rope) with my older brothers, however, when we went to school,

we were not allowed to play together or even in the same grounds. Therefore, the dominant gender constructions and expectations in schools continued to give power to hegemonic masculinities over femininities (and other forms of masculinities) in ways that do not uphold the principles of inclusive education and equitable gender relations. In this situation where there was a clear discrepancy between girls and boys in their schooling experiences the question that must be answered then was: what role does the school play towards creating a gender equitable schooling environment?

#### **5.3.2.4 Assembly area**

In this study both the schools that I visited conducted their big assembly on a Monday where the whole school from Grade R to Grade 7 prayed together. I observed that girls had their own lines separate from boys even in the assembly area, which further instilled the idea of separateness. When I asked Sannie (girl, 13 years old, Isibaya Primary), why she likes the space in Picture 9, which she took, she answered by mentioning the following:



## Picture 9

*This is the place I like the most here at school; we come here on a Monday only. We walk in our straight lines as girls and our classroom boys walk opposite us in their line. You have to stick to your line, otherwise you will get detention. Teachers can see everything because they also stand in groups but omemu bama bodwa (female educators form their own group). They stand in between those two flowers in front of the door in this picture. Hee sir they stand in that corner, on the left in this picture behind that small round tree. You know we sing choruses here and I enjoy singing so our classroom always shows off.*

Sizwe commented on Picture 9:

*Eish for me, it confuses me why we have to be standing in separate lines as boys and girls. In this place we come to speak to God, in church they made us believe we are one but here in school we are not. Madam, I got detention last week because while we were leaving the assembly area I went to Zinhle my cousin to take a pen. No one asked me if we are related but the teachers just sent me to detention.....*

This data illustrated that the assembly area was a gendered space and sent messages that girls and boys were to operate in isolated manners. We learnt from these findings that this affected the give and take of the relations between girls and boys, and this further divided the classroom into zones where boys occupied the classroom corner where girls were not welcomed. Learning environments have been found to play a vital role in reinforcing (but are also seen as productive grounds for challenging) gender inequalities (Bhana, 2005b; Henderson, 1999; Unterhalter, 2000).

During assembly, I observed that teachers also stood in groups according to gender. Since teachers are role models, their behaviour in front of the learners is significant. As mentioned earlier the big assembly (whole school gathering) was only on a Monday, on Tuesday till Friday they prayed inside their classes. I observed that a teacher conducting prayers will always without fail greet learners saying “Good morning boys and girls”, consistently putting males first; this has always been the case even during my school days, and it was still the case and the school had not taken any initiatives of correcting the manner of announcements up to this day. Despite all the educational changes based on gender equality. I felt this had a hidden message as if the one who was being mentioned first had more power or was more important than the other. Girls might have felt less important because in their daily schooling life, they were mentioned last. Paechter (1998) argues that the announcements in schools communicate the superiority of boys because they are always called first. This is a factor that feeds into the lack of a social relationship between girls and boys.

This finding also reveals that girls and boys had a desire for a social life together. However, they were denied the opportunity to be near each other, despite the fact that the new curriculum (Curriculum 2005, Revised National Curriculum Statement and the National Curriculum Statement) is gender sensitive and takes into consideration issues of social justice and human rights. Furthermore, on sports day, at Isibaya Primary I analysed the programme, I realised that there was an item written “sportsmanship award”. For a girl, this automatically meant it’s a boy who was going to receive that particular award. Therefore, when the girl’s name was mentioned for this award, it was as if there was a mistake because it was for a boy/man.

### **5.3.3 Gender secretive zones**

I understand the term zone as an area establish for a specific purpose. For example, in the two schools where I conducted this study the gender secretive zones are spaces and places occupied by certain groups of girls and boys who are hiding from others and from teachers.

#### **5.3.3.1 Bush**

The bush is an area that is inside both the schools I visited that consisted of trees and long dry grass. It looked like a neglected area which both the schools did not utilise. Pictures taken revealed the bush and the toilet as places and spaces used for gender construction where girls' and boys' lives are practiced in dissimilar ways; in diverse times (Van Blerk, 2005). I was astonished when girls and boys were unwilling to comment on picture 10, it was only Bongiwe who was willing to talk about it. When I asked what was happening in Picture 11, both girls and boys were also reluctant to comment. I was surprised by Gugu, a girl at uZalo Primary because she took the picture so I expected her to comment. However, she also kept quiet, I could not force them to talk about the picture more so because what I read what was written on the toilet doors was disturbing. On the first day when I came at uZalo Primary School I went to two male teachers who were sitting under the tree. I asked them to show me the office; as I walked into the office I noticed a group of boy going inside the bush. During the interviews, I asked Bongiwe, what was happening in the picture below:



**Picture 10**

*Bongiwe: This is the place the boys like to sit. Where they can't be seen, where they hide. They are doing something up there. Something they don't want everyone to see. Yes, especially because it's not all the boys. It is just a group of them.*

The excerpts above indicated a place where boys hide and play together in groups. Surprisingly, they were not willing to comment on Picture 10, even when I asked them during the individual interview. Even the girls seemed scared to be talking about what was happening in the bush. It was only Bongiwe who was willing to talk to me about it; she suspected that boys use this space to enforce loyalty to dominant masculinities. Thus, boys use their free play away from school into strong contexts for gender role socialisation. To me this means hierarchies work as those boys who are at a higher level assist those at the lower level by offering them control in secret places and spaces, for example, in the bush in the two schools where I conducted this study, even though there seems to be no real evidence as to what happens in the bush. In patriarchy in one way or the other males are constructed to control at least some women. This means by virtue of being a man is accorded a superiority status irrespective of capabilities. Therefore, it means the

boys in the study like Mcedisi who viewed girls as having equal rights with them are suffering as they are viewed as abnormal. Hence they had to work hard to fit to the normal social expectations.

### **5.3.3.2 Toilets**

I did some of the individual interviews during break, one day I was pressed to use the toilets. I did not want to waste time and walk all the way to the administration block, where the teachers' toilets were. So I decided to use the girls' toilets; as Sindy and Owami accompanied me they kept on whispering to each other. I suspected that their toilets were dirty so they were embarrassed I was about to see them. I was disturbed to find out that some girls used the toilets as a space and place for horizontal oppression. According to Harro (2000), horizontal hostility is commonly observed amongst subordinate groups' members as a result of the beliefs, assumptions, and ideology internalized from dominant groups. As we entered the toilets there was a group of girls who were acting as if they were fighting each other. They ran away as soon as they saw my face I guess they were afraid I will report them to their teachers. The girls, who spent their times in the toilets, somehow end up writing nasty things about each other on the walls. I tried to obtain a rationale behind this finding however; no one was willing to tell me more about this.



**Picture 11**

*When I went to the toilets at uZalo Primary with Sindy and Owami I did not get enough time to read what was written on the toilet doors and walls because they were uncomfortable with me in their toilets. I also wanted to respect them and keep the trust I had built with them, so I left the toilet. When I realised that Gugu took the photo I thought I am going to get a chance to know what's happening in the girls' toilets. I could not get any information even during the individual and gender-based interviews. I therefore took time to read what was written, girls wrote words that seem ugly in the context of schooling. We need a research about this and find out why it is happening. When I went to my school where I am permanently employed I visited the girls' toilets, the same thing of writing the walls and doors is happening.*

Field notes: uZalo Primary



The excerpt above indicated that the girls' toilets were a space where girls actively acted against each other. It further revealed that girls ended up oppressing each other. An effect of this learned hatred is that subordinate group members attack each other rather than focusing on members of dominant groups or on the systems of oppression as a whole. According to Parr and Philo (1995) "the pain that we feel at the hands of our own people (family, friends, neighbours and allies) is far worse than what we feel from the more distant forces that harm our lives in terrible ways every day".

Pharr and Philo (1995) also note that horizontal hostility not only colludes with oppression, it interrupts organized resistance. Therefore, it means even if girls wanted to be active agencies of making meaning of who they are, in a way the schooling system continue to construct them as subordinates. The school setting can be seen as both a "strong" and "weak" context for gender behaviours. For example, in the bush boys pressure each other to conform into the masculinities and the toilets becomes a space where girls are pressured to conform to the dominant femininities.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the gender significance behind the allocation of spaces and places within the school context based on gender discourses and practices. The chapter has illustrated that the different spaces and places occupied by girls and boys at school had various distributions of power according to gender. In the spaces occupied irrespective of gender, for example, the

computer room, where the teachers had less authority, this study finds that there seemed to be gender equity amongst the pupils due to their being able to exercise their free will. Furthermore, the chapter revealed that in the spaces that are occupied according to gender, for instance, the playgrounds, classroom arrangements, assembly area and principal's office, the boys were observed to be dominant over the girls, due to the gender discourses and practices within the school. However, girls only conform during the formal schooling and revert to non-conformity during non-formal schooling times, such as breaks and after school. This was confirmed in the incident report book as the fights were mostly reported during breaks. For example, according to the participants of the study, the examples used in the classrooms always portray the male as being a dominant figure; the wall posters displayed in the classroom often showed males as leaders and in their schooling lives they were mostly exposed to male principals. Furthermore, teachers seemed not well empowered to implement gender equality policies, as they continued to assign tasks based on gender, for example boys were still allocated to lift desks and girls to wash dishes, purely on gender.

The schools' rules, as discussed in the next chapter, are still gendered as girls were still expected to wear dresses and skirts as uniforms, which might hinder them in performing certain activities. Hence this study argued that gender was constructed at school, as boys were pressured to be dominant and girls to be inferior. This argument was further strengthened by the employment practices for administrative staff. Chapter 6 thus discusses how girls and boys navigate their spaces and places due to their gender-based experiences and practices within school.

The next chapter, chapter 6, focuses on answering my third research question: In what ways do girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF CHILDREN'S GENDER SOCIALISATION**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to investigate children's schooling and experiences with a view towards creating a gender-equitable environment. I further explored the discourses and daily practices that shape children's geographies within the school context of two primary schools in Durban and acquired subjective knowledge. The previous chapter discussed girls' and boys' schooling experiences related to how they were socialised into dominant discourses and practices of femininities and masculinities, as well as the spaces and places within the school in which girls and boys actively performed gender in conformity to the dominant constructions of gender. Unlike the previous chapter that focused on girls' and boys' conformity in relation to performances of gender, this chapter focuses on teachers' role as agents of gender socialisation in line with the dominant discourses of gender construction within the school.

The chapter begins by discussing the role that teachers played as agents of inequitable gender relations by using the gendered labels as a means to reinforce dominant performances of the gender. The chapter further discusses gendered surveillance as a means of reinforcing dominant performances of gender and the gendered classroom practices as a means to reinforce dominant gender performances, for example through the use of classroom examples and assigning gender-

based tasks. Lastly, the chapter discusses the gendered school procedures such as school rules and gendered employment practices (i.e. ladies employed as cooks in the schools).

## **6.2 TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF INEQUITABLE GENDER RELATIONS**

### **6.2.1 Gendered labels as a means to reinforce dominant performances of gender**

The findings revealed teachers as the agents of inequitable gender relations as their practices support the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities. This is revealed for example through what teachers say and the examples they used in the class which portrayed women as subordinates and men as dominant. As mentioned earlier on Mondays both the schools had a big assembly where the whole school prayed together. The field note observations below illustrate the roles teachers played to reinforce inequitable gender relations among children in the school.

*I observed teachers' daily used of gender labels like "good morning boys and girls". For me this meant the teachers were constructing being a girl and a boy as the centre of self-definition. In the assembly I noticed a new face; when I asked the learners about him I was told he is a member of the staff. Just after assembly at Isibaya Primary I witnessed an incident with the male teacher, whose name I could not get, as he was hardly at school. This concerned me however I could not ask anyone as I overheard that he is a union activist. So reading school policies made me aware of the union time off policy. This policy allows teachers who are in the site committee to attend to union matters for 15 days. So in his case I assumed he is applying the same policy. He came to the Grade 7 class while I was collecting the cameras form Mrs Sengwayo (pseudonym). As he entered*

*the door he said “Guys”, after break I need you to line up outside the class. He was under pressure as the Continuous Assessment marks were due, so he wanted an open space where he can do assessment with the whole group at the same time. When the bell rang girls did not line up because they associated a guy with a boy/ men. The teacher scolded them as he felt they were wasting his time.*

Field notes: Isibaya Primary

When I interacted with Sannie at Isibaya Primary, I asked her how she felt about the incident that I witnessed. She said:

*Sannie: Madam, to me a guy is a boy, so if one calls boys I do not see a need to go. It's just that Sir scolded us for nothing, he called boys and we did not line up and then got into trouble. You know mam it's the same thing that teachers do everyday day when they greet us, boys are always greeted first as if they are kings here at school.*

This showed how teachers directly or indirectly perpetuated inequitable gender relations by taking for granted the language they use in the school. Girls felt undermined as boys were given the privilege to be named first every day; therefore, it also gave boys the right to treat girls as having less power than them. In this way teachers acted in line with the dominant discourses of masculinity that accords more powers to boys and less power to girls. Hence the finding of this study those teachers were agents of gender socialisation within the school. The findings also indicated that teachers were people with power to regulate gender; hence they are the ones who categorised girls into performing chores like sweeping, washing the dishes while boys carry the

desk, washing the windows etc. My conversation with girls is relevant; we discussed Picture 12 below:



**Picture 12**

*Londiwe: This is Mrs Ngwenya (pseudonym), she stands here and watch in the whole block to make sure that girls and boys are doing what is expected from them.*

*Kaise: What is expected from girls and boys?*

*Nkanyiso: Girls are expected to dish food for us and make sure the bucket and dishes are washed and put back in the kitchen. Boys relax after food, that is why most of them get time to meet in the bush while others play football in the ground and that group which meets with girls in that corner (using her finger to point). Teachers do not normally go into that corner and you know we are able to see them coming from a distance.*

The findings revealed that teachers are authoritative figures. They instruct girls and boys what to do, for example at Isibaya during the first break, they expect to see girls dishing food and washing the dishes, while boys are relaxing and waiting for food and leaving the dishes dirty. This means teachers domesticate girls at a very young age and promote boys to act within the masculinity characters of being dominant. Hence the finding those teachers are the agents of inequitable gender relations.

### **6.2.2 Gendered surveillance as a means to reinforce dominant performances of gender**

The study found that what teachers do has a significant role in determining who the child was. This study revealed teachers' practice as having a significant role in gender construction. On the other hand, the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Standards stipulate that every day mentalities and convictions about gender relations ought to be conveyed into discussion in the classroom and ought not be permitted to impact what is taught and how it is taught. Teachers partook, with girls and boys, in constructing gender in day by day cooperation's and connections. While I was at Isibaya Primary, Swazi shared what was happening in the excerpt below:





**Picture 13**

*This is our teacher Miss Lovelyn (pseudonym), she is standing in front of the class door. You know madam when she sends us to the spaza she stands like this (pointing at the picture). She is happy to see us coming back with what she sends us to buy. I don't know why when she sends boys she sits inside the classroom. I guess she think we cannot buy the correct thing she sends us to buy and teachers here at school are very protective of us, you know they always find ways to let us stay away as far we can from boys.*

*Londiwe: Teachers only send boys to buy things for them; it looks like as girls we are not clever enough to remember the instructions. They are always trying to protect us, but we also want to show that we can defend ourselves. I mean, they are afraid that we might be raped; you know those kinds of things. But I think it's high time that we show that girls can protect themselves as well but everyone seems to want to protect girls. Even at home*

*I only live with my father, he is very strict. He always wants me inside the yard. When I say I am bored, he asks me to take the book and read. I see he is protecting me from boys, even teachers tell us not to play with boys they are dangerous.*

This excerpt showed how teachers protected girls if they happened to send them out of the class. Londiwe challenged her teacher to send her to the shop, the teacher preferred to compromise teaching and learning time and stood outside the door where she could see Londiwe on the way to and from the shop; this is a sign of over-protection. I was concerned that teachers are also preparing girls to be victims of subordination who for the rest of their lives would depend on others for protections. When I analysed the documents, I realised there were internal and external policies that were implemented to ensure learners' safety. I remember the day at uZalo Primary School I saw a boy who was sitting in the waiting room inside the administration block who was injured during break when they were playing in the swings. I saw his class teacher standing inside the clerk's office writing an incident report. I also had an opportunity to read a number of in school incident reports, which mostly happened during break times. I therefore realised that it was the internal school policy to write an incident report for accountability purposes. Even if teachers want for example to send girls to the shop, they become afraid of being held accountable for anything bad that could happen. Swazi's class teacher, Miss Lovelyn seem to have been pressured by the school policy on the basis that ultimately girls were prepared to be the weaker ones who will always need protection. On the same token, Mthoko mentioned that he was challenged to go to the shop as older boys bullied him. He was afraid to go to the shop but he finds it difficult to tell the teachers because he does not want to look weak as others would

laugh at him. This meant both girls and boys were pressured by gender social expectations and compelled to perform and act gender in ways that are socially accepted.

I witnessed a few settings that encouraged inclusive practices; for example, when teachers were doing group activities, learners were grouped randomly irrespective of gender. This was also evident when Mthoko mentioned:

*...teachers concentrate on those who put their hands up to say the answer, irrespective of gender. Therefore, if you do not put your hand up you do not get attention. Boys normally do not like to talk in class therefore they always they help them by having mixed gender groups. Heee, boys have life given to them on the tray.*

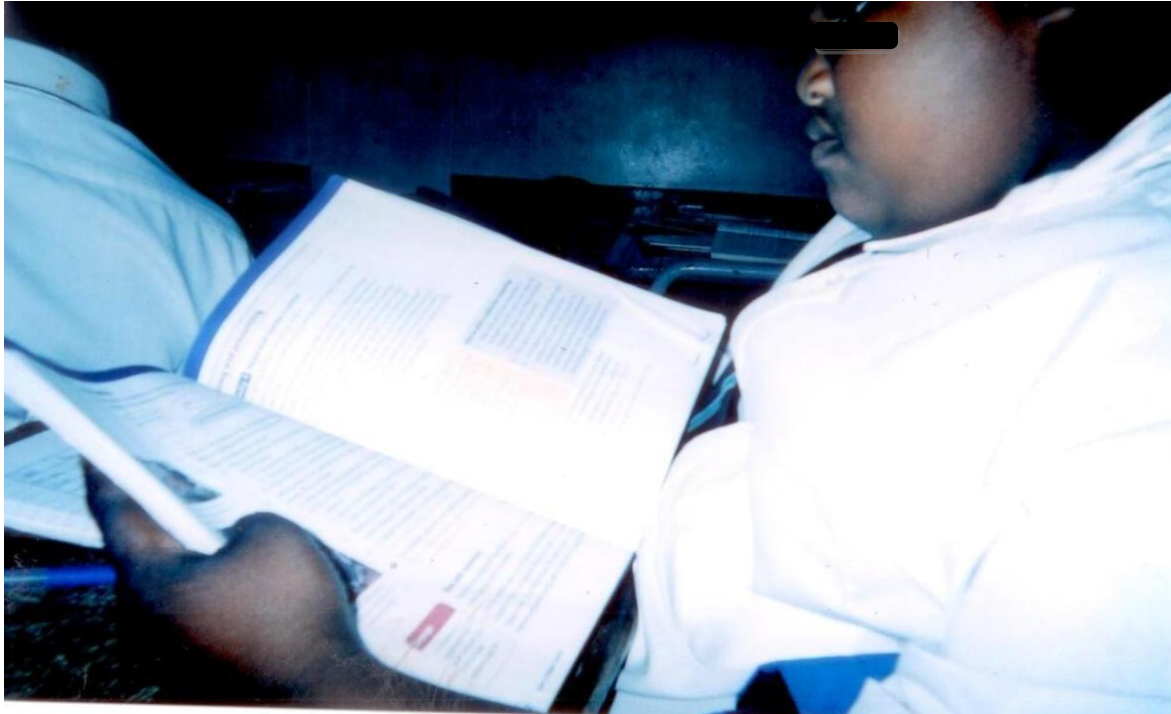
The excerpt above indicated that teachers occasionally used an inclusive approach when they are teaching. Oxfam (2005) articulates the view that the while the curriculum may be good teachers also need to be capable to deliver it. In this study, teachers were sometimes responsible for building inclusive learning practices, environments and settings that positively influenced children's learning. Teachers had control over the practices that took place in their classrooms; however, there were many situations where girls and boys separated themselves into gendered groupings in school. For instance, I observed during breaks that girls and boys played and ate according to gender groups. Bongiwe mentioned that this was because of the way teachers treat them:

*You know Madam, if you are seen with a boy here at school teachers treat you very bad. They give you nasty names so we find it better to sit alone as girls.*

Moreover, these findings revealed that at school and at home there were stereotypical, biased or gendered expectations, behaviour and language. Typically, girls had to be protected from boys as they were seen as dangerous in their lives. My interest and concern was to know how children exercise agency in navigating gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools if both at home and at school they were encouraged to stay far from each other as one party was regarded as dangerous. Moreover, girls were exposed to situations where they were protected at all the times as teachers could not send them to buy at the shop (spaza) as they felt the world outside was dangerous for them. Therefore, it meant girls grew with an inferior mentality. On the other hand, boys were brought up to be protectors; therefore, the school was preparing children for an unequal world where boys will be powerful and girls will be powerless. The same practice happened at home, as Bongiwe articulated; girls are expected to be inside the yard when boys enjoy the freedom in the streets therefore getting exposed to lot of things. Ultimately boys had more experience than girls. It was not the aim of this study to compare boys and girls as mentioned earlier, but rather that teachers played a role in perpetuating the unequal gender relations in schools.

### **6.2.3 Gendered classroom practices as a means to reinforce dominant gender performances**

The gendered discourses and practices within the classroom revealed that the reading materials remained gender biased and continued to disadvantage girls and boys in the classrooms. When I asked Bongiwe why she took Picture 17, other girls and boys said:



**Picture 18**

*Bongiwe: In this picture, this girl is reading a book. In this book there is a story of Nomzamo that we are reading in our isiZulu book. Her parents died and then her teacher decided to adopt her, when her teacher went on holidays and left her with her husband. The teacher's husband tried to rape her. She managed to run away but when she (Nomzamo) told her teacher, she did not believe her.*

*Nkanyiso: Eyi! ya Nomzamo had a problem. It's normal at all the times girls need help. You know if she had a brother, she was going to be protected. I also feel sorry for her.*

The excerpts above illustrated that the reading material at school seemed to portray girls as victims of violence who constantly need boys' protection. This encourages girls to embrace dominant values of femininities and meant that girls were disposed to suffer inequitably from the challenges that the school encountered. In these schools, gender entailed that girls had to endure

the hardship, thus affirming dominant values of femininities. As a result, it perpetuated the abuse of girls in their lives and placed boys in the difficult position of treating girls as weaker ones even when they viewed them (girls) as equal partners. I viewed this influence of books as propagating the patriarchal ideology. Meyer (2009), writing from a feminist standpoint, shared these sentiments, “maintaining that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum make girls to be disadvantaged compared to boys”. In this study I took a stand into foregrounding that girls and boys should not be compared. I believe that girls and boys are both disadvantaged as the findings of this study denoted. Women and children reading materials are in some cases depicted as detached (Sadker and Sadker, 2004) and this stereotyping of women; serves to strengthen a perspective of females as less essential and make girls and boys accept that girls do not have as much fun as boys. The data shows formal schooling as playing the role of socializing girls into gender roles and attitudes that girls were expected to preform later in life. Indeed, patriarchal structures of amaZulu society with their social institutions such as families, churches and legal systems were not meant to enhance equality. Thus girls’ position in such structures was meant to be congruent with the dominant values of femininities that were reinforced in the schools under study.

Another issue which emerged from the interviews was that in the two school I visited teachers treated girls and boys differently. Boys mentioned that in the classroom they were not active; girls were the ones who always gave the answers. Moreover, teachers made use of girls to motivate them (boys) to participate in group activities as Bongiwe mentioned. When boys happened to get the answer correct they would be praised. However, when the girl happened not to know the answer, they were reprimanded and suffered words like “*What do you think you are*

*or you now have a boyfriend that's why you are not talking (usuyazitshela)?*” These words were used by both male and female teachers. I observed that after the teacher said these words to a girl she cried and remained quiet for the duration of that teacher’s period. I observed that other girls in the classroom were also scared as they feared to get the same words. It therefore seemed like girls were denied the opportunity to participate in class despite the fact that they were more hard working. Therefore, the meanings that boys attached to masculinities were fundamentally oppositional to anything feminine.

At uZalo Primary Masie, the head boy, volunteered to keep the disposable cameras that we agreed that girls and boys will only use during breaks and after school. On this particular day I decided to go to his class few minutes before break and fetch them so that I can check how many pictures they had taken. It was easy for me to tell how many each child has taken since I numbered them so I knew exactly which one belonged to whom. As I came through the corridor before I reached his classroom door I heard a teachers’ voice saying *“You now think usuyintombi (girlfriend) you are busy putting lip gloss and no longer saying the answers, siyoyicela ivuthiwe ngoba yona iyanona”* Teachers were the most important people for the child, so what they said and did, sent a message to the child that was more powerful than any textbook activity. The data revealed that there were numerous examples where girls were deprived opportunities to show their capabilities in the classroom; however, I did not witness them. When I asked, what is it that they did not like at school, girls answered like this:

*Swazi:(girl, 13 years old, Isibaya Primary) Madam, I do not know how teachers expect us to behave; when we are quiet they say nasty names to us “siyazitshela” meaning you*

*think you know but we are the ones who always say the answers. We are not super girls, we are at school to tell; therefore, they should expect us not to know things that they have not taught us.*

*Londiwe: You know madam, once a teacher says this to one girl, my heart starts beating fast because I know I'm the next one. Both males and female teachers like to say this to us (girls), we don't like it and after it has been said all the girls in our class shut down.*

*Kaise: What do you mean, when you say "shut down?"*

*Swazi: We opt not to say a word because it lowers our confidence to be told uyazitshela (meaning, you think you know it all) and boys use the same thing during breaks to tease us when we refuse to come to them.*

What is revealed in this data was part and parcel of the hidden culture curriculum, and it means girls were further victims of neglect; girls were often punished for doing what they should and lose ground as they went through school. This affected girls' self-esteem and ensured inequitable gender experiences for both girls and boys in school, denying them access to who they were. Girls were affected by an overabundance of in-school and out-of-school factors: gender role stereotype and socialisation, teacher attitudes and expectations, as well as the level of attention they received from teachers in the school and classroom. Campbell (2002, p. 20) clearly argues that "equity means access and if you do not let people enter the room, nothing is possible for their development". An equitable schooling environment starts with the access of girls and boys to school but goes beyond access.



My observation of teachers' approaches in class revealed that they seemed not to be gender sensitive throughout their teaching despite all the gender equality policies in South Africa. When teaching, they used examples that encourage male and female traditional roles, whereby a woman is portrayed as a subordinate, as discussed earlier. In this context where there is a clear inconsistency between the official implemented policy and the lived schooling experiences, this study aimed to understand ways in which the schooling experiences of girls and boys might be enhanced. In the results of the content and discourse analyses made of some curricular material, specifically the wall charts and pictures in some text books showed that the curricular material used in the schools was full with gender insensitivities. For example, the wall charts on display and the textbooks used by both educators and learners generally tend to portray men in superior positions to those of their women counterparts. I interpreted this to be some of the ways through which girls' and boys' educational and career aspirations are subtly and directly influenced by the curriculum. A prominent example in one classroom was that of different career wall charts on careers available for women and men. This chart showed a woman in the kitchen washing the dishes as if that was the only occupations available for women. This sends a wrong message to children that only women can be found in the kitchen while men can also be found. My conversation with girls about the classroom focused on posters; Bongiwe had the following to say:

*I expected female teachers as mothers to understand their challenges at the hands of boys and male teachers who harass them. We are blamed for the sexual harassment that befalls them. Madam I had a challenge of boys watching me during break time and talk loudly and laugh, saying "I am beautiful and queen of the school". These boys made me shy and uncomfortable even in class, they made comments about my body structure. I*

*decided to keep quiet in the classroom, and did not participate anymore. When I reported them at school I got into big trouble. The teachers, including female ones, said I am a prostitute who seduces boys, at the end I was blamed instead of receiving sympathy. I am smarter fitted by clothes even my school uniform but I was accused of competing with other girls, making the whole case to crumble against me yet I was the victim.*

This finding revealed that girls and boys are socialised and pressured to perform gender in conformity to what is contrived to be normal. While the teacher is imposing the dominant values, it is interesting that she does see Bongiwe as having her own agency. It is not just that children ‘naturally’ grow into the ‘right’ practices. This further highlighted the central role that teachers and schools play in shaping inequitable gender relations, given the centrality of teachers’ roles to the initiatives of inclusiveness and gender equality in the schools. In this case the teacher’s role is to call both Bongiwe and the boys involved, to stop the bad behaviour in future however the teacher seems to be perpetuating gender inequality. The power of dominant (gender) discourses informed the daily perceptions for girls and boys within the school. Teachers were entrapped in the generally constituted gendered social relations in their particular settings, whereby one gender is awarded more powers than the other, irrespective of knowing whether that particular gender deserve power. This resulted in teachers socializing girls and boys into unequal gendered desires and exhibitions which strengthened gender disparities within the school context. This means that the dominant gender discourses in the schools become a frame of reference that shapes girls’ and boys’ understanding and interpretations of their gender experience at school.

Girls and boys learn how to perform or act gender in compliance with the socially celebrated dominant prescriptions of gender expectations. Much of the blame for the abuse of girls by boys was placed on the girls as the following response by Tarzan demonstrates:

*Teachers blame us that as girls in Grade 7 we think we are more beautiful and we provoke boys not to hide their interest on us. Sometimes we compete with them as they are female teachers and this often ignites tension between us and the female teachers leading to accusations and counteraccusations.*

The above excerpt revealed that girls do not only experience gender power as operated by the opposite gender if female educators also suppress them at school. In this case girls whose overall powers are limited in gendered relations are simultaneously complicated in their own defeat if female educators evoke what Harro (2000) refers to as horizontal oppression. Gender is such a sensitive issue to human existence; for example, the current gender inequalities have led to the increase of sexual violence, rape, HIV and AIDS, and school drop-outs in Southern Africa (Morojele, 2009; Mahlomaholo, 2010). By privileging our understanding of how gendering processes are made to appear as normal at school (Butler, 2004), we can readily interrupt these processes and break the cycle of gendering processes that reinforce gender inequalities (Harro, 2000).

The South African schools' systems of beliefs and social relationships still seem not to affirm gender equality (Bhana & Pattman, 2010; Nkozi, 2009; Sanger, 2010) despite the constitutional and policy intentions which support gender equality in schooling and all structures of society. The Constitution and policies aim to rise above the constraining and polarising prescriptions of

the current dominant discourses of gender. In other words, they aim to affirm and support girls and boys to develop to their human ability through the current implemented curriculum, in an equitable schooling environment.

### 6.2.3.1 Classroom examples

Findings made it clear that the examples used during teaching time had a bearing on how girls and boys made meaning of who they were. It has been well documented that those children who had high self-esteem valued themselves and evaluated their abilities highly. It was for this reason that it is logical to accept that children see themselves adversely, they are less inclined to be effective in life. I asked girls and boys what was happening in picture 14 as I saw the girl confidently standing in front of the class with the teacher.



#### Picture 14

*Mthoko: Madam, in this picture there is a girl who was confident enough and volunteered to solve a Maths challenge that mam wrote on the wall. Eyi, for me, that's a no no! What if I write the wrong answers and girls would laugh at me? Just like Nomzamo's brother who absented himself from school for a long time and came back on the test day 'washaya ifambu' (he failed the test dismally).*

*Kaise: What made him absent himself?*

*Mthoko: He was up and down looking for his sister, Nomzamo. Eyi girls are also a waste of time. They don't want to stay at home; they are just all over seducing boys.*

*Londiwe (girl, 13 years old, Isibaya Primary): It's a pity we as girls knows our story. Look at this girl she is standing in front of the class with confidence. She is waiting for the teacher to finish writing and take on the chalk to write the answer. But the books that we read tell a different story about girls, you know mam, Nomzamo's story I really do not like it. It tells boys that we are weak and do not know what we want, but you can also tell we are the confident ones, willing to give answers and actively participate in groups.*

This excerpt showed the confidence that was displayed by girls as teachers gave them a positive attitude by sharing the chalkboard with them. This shows the possibility of equal gender relations within the school, whereby teachers give girls and boys the same treatment that grows confidence and trust. In some children's reading material there are messages of gender inequality that are portrayed as if there are normal and acceptable activities and this affect both girls and boys in the same way. In this way girls and boys through the books that they read, were associated to comprehend that boys were forceful and girls are inactive, boys delighted in enterprises and girls got the chance to catch wind of the undertakings, boys were urged to be

autonomous while girls were required to depend on boys to help them oversee challenges. Consequently, the challenge begins early in life; children learnt that there was a social intending to the name girl or boy, and that by and large boy evoked more positive responses and reactions. This early socialization proceeded as children enter school, as on account of the book Nomzamo, as specified beforehand whereby the educating and learning material fortified society's thoughts regarding gender through composed dialect. The books that children read in school played a conceivably vital characterizing part in their lives and clarify their activities later in their lives since they will acknowledge and hone what they read. Likewise, most societies utilize narrating to transmit qualities and states of mind to children as I mentioned earlier with amaZulu; this includes stories found in children's readers.

Girls and boys were commended and remunerated for complying with society's desires of gender-stereotyped behaviours. The books that children were exposed to demonstrated stereotypic behaviours. While there were gender differences between Nomzamo and her brother, a problem happened when the qualities of her sibling were considered more important than her traits. Gender predisposition did not generally happen in unmistakable, evident ways; it was regularly much subtler.

#### **6.2.4 Assigning gender-based tasks as a means to reinforce dominant performances of gender**

Both the schools I visited were financially challenged, since parents were unable to pay school fees due to unemployment. Therefore, the school could only afford to pay the salary for one support staff member to perform non-teaching tasks. Since both the school are big, one person

could not do the entire task as a result most of the tasks, like general cleaning of the classroom, staffroom, offices and related work were done by learners. The illustrations in pictures 15 and 16, according to both girls and boys, are associated with girls.



**Picture: 15**



**Pictures: 16**

*Sindy: I took this both pictures to show the chores that our teachers give us whether we like it or not. In picture 13 madam, the two girls are sweeping in front of their classroom. It is the school rule that girls sweep and scrub the floor. As you can see in Picture 14 the two young girls are carrying buckets full of water because they were going to wash their classroom floors. [Pointing at the picture] the other two are washing the dishes that are what girls do. Now you can see it's not only our class girls who do this kind of chores, all the teachers at school use the same rule.*

*Londiwe: [commented on the same issue] I just don't like washing the dishes for the boys because they also have two hands. Our teachers are making us their maids; they are like our boss. Sometimes they leave the dishes in the wrong place and we just take the bucket*

*as we assume all the dirty dishes are there only to find that there is one or two on the window sill.*

*Sizwe: We are the man we do not wash the dishes, tell me ...where in the world you have ever seen a man, a real man washing the dishes. That's girls' and mothers' duties to do, we do heavy duties (emphasising) man have muscles that's why we are assigned heavy duties that are difficult for girls.*

The findings indicate that girls at school were expected to do general cleaning of the classroom as sweeping, scrubbing and polishing the floor was assigned to girls. Teacher's expectations on girls could be viewed as an attempt to domesticate girls, in preparing them to assume girl's place as mothers and domestic workers in future. Bhana and Pattman (2010) argue that schools have become places where girls' sexualities are evoked, shaped and regulated as teachers' expectations are framed by heterosexual imaginaries. Boys were expected to do heavy duties that were associated with masculinities like lifting the desk. At uZalo Primary during the second break when I was walking to the grounds to do my observations I witnessed a fight between a boy and a girl. I noticed that boys who were there instead of separating them there were whistling as a sign to motivate the boy to punch the girl more. I noticed that the girl was defeating the boy and the girls shouting in the corner "*mshaye, uyasijwayela*" meaning hit him, he is taking us for granted. I went in to separate them because the boy was struggling, when I asked them why they were fighting. The girl was furious as she told me that boys think they are slaves, the boy ate and threw the dish to the girl for her to wash it. Therefore, the division of roles based on gender was also a vehicle of the dominant gender discourses that contributed to boys upholding hegemonic masculinities in contexts where girls inventively subverted dominant



constructions of gender. However, within formal schooling processes girls had opted to conform to dominant perceptions of gender. They feared teachers who actively reinforced attributes of femininities and masculinities. This meant that during the formal schooling process girls became less assertive and reserved but found a way to revert to their own interests and acted against the dominant perceptions of gender during informal schooling process like break times when teachers are not around.

My conversation with boys showed that being boys were expected to endure the pressure of having to prove core values of masculinities, for example, physical continuance and strength even in circumstances where they could not maintain this.



**Picture 17**

*Masie: I took this picture to show you that some of the boys struggle to put the desk on top of the others. This desk broke from the class, our teacher made it a rule that carrying a desk is our duty, but for me it's really heavy.*

*Vusi: Truth be told mama, carrying a desk on your own is not “makhekhe” (meaning cakes)*

*Kaise: What do you mean it’s not cakes?*

*Vusi: Eish madam, the desk is heavy that is why the boy in the picture is struggling. We are assigned chores like carrying a desk on your own.*

*Kaise: Than why do you carry it?*

*Masie: We do it to prove that we are man enough otherwise girls will laugh at you.*

*Siya: Teachers are also putting a pressure on us, they don’t ask us if we are strong enough to do it (carry heavy things). It is known and automatically that boys are strong and girls are weak.*

*Nkanyiso: As boys we carry heavy staff like carrying 20 litres of water on a Friday for girls to scrub the floor. We also carry desks for them, girls are weak (antekenteke); they can’t afford to carry heavy things. Eyi! It’s like cleaning the windows. They can’t do it otherwise we will sizobapopola (meaning peep on them and see their underwear). [Laughing]) So they are better not cleaning them.*

*Sizwe: weeh madam, today’s girls are strong but eyi! We (boys) have to act strong and not let the other boys. Here at school we are assigned chores like cleaning the windows, lifting up the desk, cleaning of the chalkboard.*

*Kaise: Oh! Failing to carry a desk means letting the boys down?*

*Mcedisi: Yes, because they will be angry at you saying ubajwayeza namantombazane, (meaning you make them to be friends with girls), hey I don’t know.*

The data above showed the cleaning roles that were assigned to boys to perform for example lifting the desk and cleaning the classroom windows. They illustrated that boys were perpetually under pressure to prove the values of masculinities that boys were physically strong and tough. To achieve this boy had to uphold the impression that girls were physically weak. The data also exemplify the pressure that boys were placed under in cases where they genuinely unable to lift heavy things like a desk. Such was a cost for boys as it is clear from Sizwe's reflections that it was not in him to carry a desk that he could not handle. Instead he was frustrated by the fact that he will be a laughing stock at school and uphold to the hegemonic masculinities rules. In a sense, Laughing at boys who could not help substantial things was a method through which children policed hegemonic masculinities. This likewise showed the dynamic part that the primary school children took in policing gender practices which acted against the importance of hegemonic masculinities.

To me, this finding together with the classroom duty roster than I analysed means that assigning duties based on gender was a way to ensure that girls and boys had limited possibilities for agency and choices to perform alternative femininities and masculinities without being ostracized in the schooling context. Furthermore, the gender discourses and practices within the school had the potential to limit girls' and boys' acquisition of skills. Finally, it denotes what it meant for boys to uphold dominant values of masculinities. It also illustrates how boys' attempts to uphold these values during formal schooling processes both affirmed them and caused fights within the school.

## **6.3 GENDERED SCHOOL PROCEDURES**

### **6. 3.1 School rules**

Since the school mainly upheld stereotypic attributes of gender, formal schooling rules became models for the infusion of gender inequality. These included, for example, authoritarian attitudes; unclear, unfair or inconsistently enforced rules; indefinite responses to children's misconduct; inadequate teacher support of students; lack of participation by students in decision making and inconsistent discipline strategies, all of which have a negative impact on both girls and boys.

Dominant values of femininities such as being disciplined, kind, soft, polite and tidy ensured that the meanings of gender for girls were different from how boys were constructed. Within Zulu communities these stereotypic values were supported by ascribing certain conducts (such as ensuring that girls wore skirts and dresses). Formal schooling rules ensured that girls embraced these values; this was particularly the case in cases related to, for example, the dress code of conduct that was socially accepted for girls in the Zulu culture. The following data exemplify:



**Picture 19**

*It was during the day, when I was passing by Grade 7B. I realised a group of girls were in front of the class. I saw that they were happy to be doing what they were doing. The teacher was instructing them what to do, suddenly they were asked to face the chalkboard and bend down. I observed that they were uncomfortable as they had to hold their skirts on both sides to make sure that their bodies do not show as they bend. Fortunately, Nkululeko (pseudonym) was amongst that group of girls who were in front, so after school I spoke to her.*

(Field notes: uZalo Primary School)

I was curious to know what girls were doing in class as they seemed excited. My conversation with the girls explained:

*Kaise: I realised that when you were in front, when the teacher instructed you to bend you were uncomfortable, why?*

*Owami: Yes, I was not happy to do that exercise, you know madam as I bent I felt my thighs will show and boys like to tease us with our underwear. We have no other alternative as a girl, wearing the school uniform as it is, it is the school rule.*

*Kaise: You do not have tracksuits as the school uniform?*

*Sindy Oh you don't know! Here at school we are not allowed to wear pants; culturally it is a taboo to wear pants; we are given nasty names if we wear pants they think we are prostitutes, so it is a shame for a girl to wear pants.*

*Kaise: What is happening in the picture below?*

*Gugu: (girl, 13 years old, uZalo Primary) In this picture, there are girls who were doing an activity in front of the class, we like to do different activities unlike sitting down the whole day and listen to the teacher. This is when we get a chance to show what we know, yabona nje madam.*

The above excerpts show how girls are being disadvantaged by the school uniform. It is the rule of the school that girls were a skirt or a dress at school. When girls have to do certain demonstrations in front of the class, they had to first think if it is suitable based on the kind of clothes that they are wearing. Therefore, for these girls, it meant the school uniform was a challenge in the daily life of a girl at school. It also meant they were limited to show their potential in class as opposed to boys. The data further illustrates the effect of the cultural ascription of some clothing as a shame for girls, resulting in girls becoming uncomfortable to do

the classroom assessment activity. Shaming girls took away their confidence and it was supported at different levels (both cultural and social). Indeed, such a context meant that girls could not show their full potential and capability in the class as wearing pants, which would make the activity possible to do, was seen as shameful. Surely it was not in the best interest of the school to disadvantage girls. Yet dominant values of femininities had unintended consequences such as inadequate performance on assessment due to lack of confidence. In these schools, gender entailed that girls had to endure suffering, thus affirming the values of femininities. In a sense they were prepared for a world of limited opportunities. Certainly, the patriarchal structures of Zulu society with their social institutions such as family, church and school were not meant to enhance gender equality. Thus within the school girls were expected to lack confidence and assertiveness congruent with the dominant values of femininities perpetuated in the schools of this study.

The school rules inscribed different meanings to boys who were expected to play a dominant role within the school, in addition to attempting to exercise physical advantage over girls such as toughness and uncaring cast that opposed any thing feminine. The data below exemplifies the role that the gendered school rules played in embracing the dominant values of masculinities, Mthoko mentioned that:

*As boys, teachers, punish us more than girls. At all the times we are made to feel more pain and teachers do not understand we do not like that. On Fridays as a class (girls and boys) they are expected to clean the class. Last week on Friday we all decided to run away without cleaning. On a Monday when we came to school Mr Y, our class teacher*

*punished the whole class. While he was busy punishing us when it came to girls he was not using the same energy he used when he punishes boys. Boys were punished harder than girls.*

The above excerpt reveals that the school had authoritative atmosphere and unequal gender relations in schools were reinforced through discipline, as Mthoko observed, their teacher punished girls less than them as boys. He further mentioned that teachers use pipes when punishing them as boys and use small sticks when they are punishing girls. I was concerned with the use of pipes to punish boys in a school as it was the most substantial image of a dictator school administration. Then again, it instructed girls that they must be meek and unquestioning. Corporal punishment endures in schools in numerous settings despite the fact that it is illicit. In this study I contend that corporal punishment understudies that savagery is the arrangement when one objects to other individuals' activity. The peril is that a brutal social setting breeds savagery and that is why corporal punishment was abolished in Section 10 (1) (2) of the SASA, Act No. 84 of 1996.

It appears that for boys, being boys necessarily meant conformity to dominant values of masculinities, which school rules affirmed. Surprisingly in this way, I find that the school strategy set out that children in schools could not utilize isiZulu, their native language, as a medium of correspondence inside the school premises. Children were regularly punished in the event that they were found speaking isiZulu. I trust that dialect is a key part of social reconciliation and one that propagates strengthening. Along these lines, an arrangement that



prevents a man from talking his or her native language is a hindrance. Inside the school setting, children use dialect to share thoughts, manufacture connections, and speak with companions and educators (Asanova, 2005). The findings of her study suggest that maintaining fluency in the students' home language (in the case of this study, isiZulu), while the primary teaching and learning is done in English, resulted in students performing better academically. I was concerned that the use of corporal punishment was abolished long ago but it is still happening. Schools need to start using other strategies to discipline learners. Therefore, this would mean teachers enhance the schools' effectiveness to e gender equality.

### **6.3.2 Gendered employment practices**

It was clear from the findings that the schools had gendered employment practices. This was revealed in both the schools that I visited as the schools are categorised as falling under Section 21 with function C, meaning they are able to employ non-teaching staff and pay their salaries in terms of the South African Schools Act (1996). The school has employed both male and female non-teaching staff.



**Picture 20**



**Picture 21**

*On my first day at Isibaya Primary, a gentleman opened the gate for me and asked how he can help me. As I was explaining the purpose of my visit I realised that there was another male security sitting under the tree. On the far left of the gate there was a garden and two ladies were ploughing. I felt sorry for them because it was hot and they were old to be in the sun. On my way to the principal's office there were two big containers, one was red and the other one was blue. There were ladies inside peeling vegetables, after few days I realised that these containers were used as the school kitchen.*

(Field notes: uZalo Primary School)

However, in my discussion with girls and boys, Bongiwe had a different view on the school employment policy as illustrated below:

*Madam as you can see in the pictures below that I took. In picture 18 there are two gentlemen who are our school securities and in Picture ..... are ladies that are cooking*

*food for us. People here at school are also employed according to gender, just like how classroom duties are assigned. When you look at it Mr T and Mr S are responsible for security here at school. As you can see when they are walking around they are always carrying some stick to hit anyone who is misbehaving.*

*Mthoko: Eish you cannot employ a mother to be responsible for security and tuck shop, where there is money involved. Mothers are weak, they cannot catch the thieves, you know amajita angabagcwalisela (meaning the boys will steal from them). You need someone who is very strong to do that, look at Mr T angeke udabule (meaning you cannot escape him).*

*Gugu: My uncle is a very good chef but when she came here at school looking for a job to work in the kitchen, they made it a joke. Then they employed Mama Gumede, now he is embarrassed to go to other schools. It's unfair because he is the master chef; he cooks for us at home.*

The above excerpts clearly reveal that the school's employment rule is gender-based. They assigned chores that are known as hard to men; for example, security and being charge of the shop (and handling money) are associated with masculinity. Employment responsibilities that involve things like cooking and ploughing in the school garden are made the responsibility of women as it is associated with femininity. In this case the school becomes the role model to the learner's future employment choices. Girls and boys grow up knowing that employment is based on gender, as a girl or a boy they cannot take the opportunity in employment associated with the opposite gender. This also perpetuates gender inequality as males remain the stronger ones, who

are capable of stronger responsibilities. Therefore, in life as a whole they will remain as the stronger ones who will be taking decisions and be listened to more than the females.

On the other hand, it was clear that males are also suffering in this gendered employment; as Gugu mentioned, her uncle had the best cooking skills but he cannot be employed because of his gender. His (uncle's) family is poverty stricken while he has skills. Walker (2005) argues that the new law based request in South Africa has made a stage for males to do the thoughtfulness and that would offer ascent to new ideas of masculinity. In a study of violence and the gendered transaction of masculinity in a South African primary school Bhana (2005b) found that many of the boys were not happy to be identified as 'rough and tough' boys. These boys positioned themselves as gentle, belonging to what she termed 'yimvu' masculinity (p. 215). Yimvu masculinity was associated with good behaviour, respect for authority and in most occasions friendliness with the other gender. As Morrell (2002) points out, referring to a research project in the USA, five out of each six men were not fierce towards their accomplices. Morrell encourage reports that his review of men's developments and sex change has discovered proof that men are as of now occupied with connecting and grasping characteristics of minding, regard, peacefulness and peace, along these lines breaking free from the patriarchal models of men in control, the aggressors and extollers of violence. There is no basic standard of being a man that aide all male conduct, including violence (Hamlall & Morrell, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2000). Therefore, there is a dire need for intervention in schools if South Africa is aiming towards gender equity in schools. The findings of this study further revealed that the daily practice at school seemed to contradict the existing national and provincial policies.

The gender divisions of labour which most girls would anticipate to exist in their marriages often reflect that which they witness in their communities and homes. These findings are consistent with those cited by Francis (2002) where participants agreed on the view that girls were equipped to work till they get married. When they get married they were supposed to leave their work and take care of their families full time. The results of studies such as this one should be used to contribute to the programmes that will be used in the more extensive setting of gender socialization to stress the child rearing part of women and urge girls to make profession sacrifices.

#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

The role that teachers play within the schooling context signifies that their daily practices within the school is crucial in the life of a child. In this study the findings revealed teachers' stereotypes and their backing the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinity traits that accord more power to boys. Consequently, girls and boys did not have alternatives but to conform to the set norms of behaviour otherwise they would be ostracized and punished. This was further supported and perpetuated through the school rules which failed girls as they had to wear the uniform that hindered them from achieving their full potential. At the same time these accorded boys the powers that they did not deserve, as a result they found themselves in various predicaments.

Furthermore, the gendered employment practices within the school were in line with the gender stereotype that alleged men are stronger than women, as men were employed for responsibilities

such as security (perceived as dangerous) and women were employed as cooks (as women's place is in the kitchen). However, girls and boys were able to conform to the feminine and masculine behaviour during formal schooling as most of the alternative behaviour was witnessed during breaks and after school when teachers were not around them. This is further discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CHILDREN'S AGENCY AND TRANSGRESSIVE GENDER PERFORMANCES**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I address the creative ways in which children exercised agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning. The chapter focuses mainly on girls' and boys' divergent, subversive and non-conforming performances of gender within the schooling contexts, while in the previous chapter I focused on teachers' role as agents of gender socialisation in line with the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities within the school. The aim of this chapter was to explicate children's exercise of agency in navigating gender-based experiences within the schools, and to denote the limiting and adverse effects of dominant discourses of gender that demanded conformity in children's schooling experiences. The emphasis is here on how children creatively navigated negotiated and positioned their gendered selves and performances in ways that undermined the dominant understandings of gender.

This chapter begins with discussing the children as agents of transgressive performances of gender (in response to teachers' imposition of gender-biased chores, children responded by subversion and creative undermining of this), as children used their creative agency to tacitly and sometimes overtly defy teachers' enforcements of school practices and chores that were organised along gender lines. I focus on how girls and boys broke the essentialist gendered

school rules, though inequitable power relations between adult teachers and children limited children's ability to subvert gender stereotypes in a consistent and sustainable manner. I then present children's subversive manipulation of their relationships with teachers. Lastly I discuss heterosexual gender power relationships that diverge from teachers' regulation, thereby still leaving room to beg the question of the critical roles that teachers could play in reinforcing alternative gender performances, which this study believes is a viable basis for promoting gender equality in the schools.

## **7.2 CHILDREN AS AGENTS OF TRANSGRESSIVE PERFORMANCES OF GENDER**

### **7.2.1 Children: Doing it our own way**

The findings revealed the emotional costs incurred by girls and boys as a result of the self-sustaining gender discourse have resulted in resistance and contestation of both subordinated and dominant gender discourse and practices during informal school practices. As the data below illustrates:





**Picture 22**



**Picture 23**

*When I was at Isibaya Primary conducting the individual interviews with Mthoko, he put two pictures next to each other on the table. He insisted on talking about them simultaneously because he strongly believed that the roles that are only associated with girls they as boys are also able to do. I assumed that he also believed that if he talks about all of what is worrying him with me, these will be resolved at school.*

Field notes: Isibaya Primary

*Kaise: What is happening in these pictures?*

*Mthoko: Madam in Picture 20 It's a boy hiding behind the tank and enjoying washing dishes, you can see he wants to make sure it is clean. In picture 21 I took that photo after school, that is why I came late in the rounds because that boy had to make sure that teachers and girls were all gone before he starts sweeping the classroom. You know madam, even baba Dlamini shouts at us as boys if we are sweeping because he believed*

*its only girls who should do it. He always asks if we now want to be girls than we must wear dresses.*

*Kaise: How does that makes you feel?*

*Mthoko: I don't care about what he says because we are able to do the chores that they do not want us to do after school*

*Kaise: What do you think would happen if you are caught?*

*Mthoko: Weeeh, I would be a laughing stock but we make sure no one sees us.*

This finding indicates that boys find a creative way to subvert the teachers' expectation of being a boy. When teachers were assigning roles:

*There was a day when I was at uZalo Primary, after the second break it started drizzling. I was worried how we were going to do the focus group interviews; worse we were to discuss photos that children took. It was a challenge because my photos took longer than I expected to be processed; therefore, time was also becoming an issue. I decided to check if the ground was wet so that I can ask for a permission to use the class instead. I witness a boy who was hiding behind the old school tank washing the dishes. He was shocked to see a person walking in that place because elders hardly come to that place. He was afraid I am going to report him, but I explained my purpose of visit in the school and promised not to tell anyone. I asked him what he was doing.*

Field notes: uZalo Primary

*Lulu: I enjoy washing the dishes and sweeping the floor even at home, my mother knows that I am the one who washes dishes. Hey mina I still want the pots to shine so that I can look at myself in the pot. Here at school teachers don't send us to wash the dishes. Even*

*then, I do wash the dishes even though I hide from other boys because some of them will laugh at me. I am battling to carry heavy things; you can see I am slim so it is difficult in fact playing soccer is also a no; I am afraid of breaking my leg because boys are very rough.*

This finding revealed that boys were expected to perform heavy duties that are associated with hegemonic masculinities and I observed that it gives them access to resources and privileges that girls do not enjoy. Alternately, the pressure of upholding the generally romanticized hegemonic masculinities that ran with being an advantaged boy were intolerable to some boys, however they had to perform them or act it as they were powerless. If they decided to exercise the reality that existed in their own meaning it would mean becoming a laughing stock. Therefore, in order to fit and be socially acceptable as normal they seemed to have no choice or power but to act or perform the social expectation. However, they found a way to subvert the values of hegemonic masculinities in secret spaces like behind the classroom and during informal schooling. There is a cost to them of unresolved feelings of the shame associated with their inability to uphold hegemonic values of masculinities and of their unacknowledged needs, for instance, to sweep the class and be who they really are. These are associated with feminine characteristics, as this is opposing to the dominant values of masculinities. Thus, for all the achievement of their social lives boys remained disappointed and dehumanized. When I asked girls and boys, how do they feel if they are not allowed to do the chores they enjoy, Mcedisi answered like this:

*Mcedisi: But madam, even the girls were fighting with him saying that the broom belongs to them. His passion on sweeping caused lot of problems for him, during breaks when we play football in the school grounds amajita (meaning boys) did not want to pick him as a team member because they felt he will make them lose the game since he is a sissy like.*

*Even girls felt he is not completely a boy maybe he is gay. He is really having a hard time to be acceptable as a normal boy even though he is no longer sweeping in the class.*

I did not expect girls to complain about the roles that was only associated to boys, as I thought they were comfortable with sweeping, washing the floors etc. However, I my conversation with girls this is what they had to say:



**Picture 24**

*Kaise: What is happening in this picture?*

*Bongiwe: In this picture, there is a girl who is carrying from the stock to her class.*

*Madam, she did not have the desk because she was absent for a week and then when she*

*came back boys were not willing to help her. Madam, we as girls just need an opportunity to show we are capable of doing what boys do. Now, teachers are holding on to the old belief that girls must do easy chores, they say it's a culture ayi thina (meaning we are finding our ways to do things). The sad part is that we are being punished to do what we as humans like to do. They are making us graduate as liars; because once teachers are not around we do what we like. You know we act in front of them and once they are not there we go back to the normal us.*

*Mbali: I just don't understand why teachers are only asking boys to carry heavy things because I can also do it. You know mam at home I am able to carry 20 litres of water from the tap outside the yard to the kitchen. Even the desk I can be able to lift it up, if it is that heavy I can ask my friend to help me lift it up.*

*Kaise: What do you mean by normal us?*

*Bongiwe: Normal us, it's when we do what we really want for us instead of doing what the teacher likes us to.*

The above excerpts reveal that teachers used the historically constituted cultural discourses of gender within Zulu culture to determine girls' and boys' abilities. To me, these were a means of control to stimulate conformity to dominant values of masculinities and femininities, which are regularly constructed as intrinsically to girls and boys individually. Girls endure a compromised quality of life, limited opportunities and subservience as a result of prejudices that imply that they can only do easy tasks, thus constructing them as weak, while inside they know they are not. Bongiwe shared with me her story of how she was regarded as rude when she refused to wash the dishes after break one day. She mentioned that when Mrs Mashiya asked her and the other

girls to wash the dishes she refused because she believed boys have two hands and they were also eating, so it was high time they take turns in washing the dishes. She told her teacher that she also does not mind to take turns in lifting up the desk because whatever boys can do she can also do it. Her teacher got furious calling her names like “*usuwuclever* as you are in Grade 7” (you think you are clever because you are now in Grade 7). She did not mind all that because she wanted equal treatment for both girls and boys. Mrs Mashiya took her to the principal because she acted against her teacher’s instruction and her parents were called to school. It became a case which led her to detention. In this case because of the rapid access to alternative information that girls and boys are exposed to for instance, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, BBM etc., they may construct gender in unanticipated and innovative ways to catalyse social change towards achieving sustainable gender-equitable learning environments. As a result, girls get empowered through these social media and realize that they can also manage to lift the desk as at home they are able to carry 20 litres of water.

Furthermore, they tend to realize that issues like the uniform that they are expected to wear at school was also hindering their potential since they are unable to clean the windows as it might compromise their privacy when boys see their underwear. On the other hand, boys also felt the cost of unresolved feelings of shame associated with the inability to uphold hegemonic values of masculinities and unacknowledged desire (for instance to wash the dishes and to sweep the floor, tasks that are in conflict with the dominant values of masculinities), meaning that boys will remain disappointed and dehumanized for the rest of their successive years (Field, 2001). Five boys in this study enjoyed washing the dishes and sweeping. Therefore, I find the illustration that “girls sweep the floor and wash the dishes; and the boys lift the desk and wash the windows”

does not literally refer to the activities of girls and boys, but instead this is a regulatory fantasy prescribing the cultural expectations, that forces children to conform to what it means to be a girl or boy in the context of these schools. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities and rights in life. The social constructionist framework that I use to guide this study does not deny the socially constructed classifications dispensed girls and boys at school and the related gender imbalances that emerge from this categorisation. Notwithstanding, it challenges the underestimated implications joined to these socially built substances as though they were truth, static and unavoidable (Grogen, 1999). It doesn't likewise disallow taking a political point of view or position, yet involves acknowledgment this is one position and that there are different positions. Since positions are mobile, social constructionism recognizes the potential for change.

Therefore, in order to understand how gender operates in learning environments, for instance in schools, we need to examine ways in which stakeholders (e.g. teachers, girls and boys) construct or make meaning and feeling of their general surroundings in connection to gender relation issues. As indicated by this theoretical framework, gender relations in learning situations could be comprehended through investigation of the social relations and qualities that teachers, parents and children attribute to gender (being male or female). I found that the physical and enthusiastic expenses incurred by girls and boys as a result of the self-sustaining gender discourses led to resistance at times. For instance, girls and boys had invented new gender discourses (which challenge the existing gender inequalities) and thus affirmed equitable gender relations. One example was the case of Bongiwe when she resisted washing the dishes as she believed boys had to do it as well. However, her creative ways were challenged by the schooling system and home

background as teachers and parents did not accept her ways of thinking. It is for this reason that I take the view stand in this study that girls and boys had to act in order to navigate their gender-based experiences.

### **7.2.2 Girls and boys: Breaking the essentialist gendered school rules**

The findings made it clear that teachers' gender stereotypes constructed girls and boys to fit into the already made pattern of who is a girl and a boy. The study revealed that girls and boys in this study did not just conform; there were times when they resisted teachers' gender stereotype thinking, for example, when Bongiwe refused to wash the dishes and was reprimanded and ended up on detention. Further Mthoko made it clear that he enjoyed washing the dishes but was afraid to do it at school as it will mean defying the teacher's rules and being sent to Mr X. Thus all teachers' gender stereotypes resulted in girls and boys acting or performing gender in order to navigate their gender-based experiences. I therefore advise that if teachers break their cycle of socialisation and treat girls and boys as active agents of their gender construction they would be able to find ways to navigate their gender experiences. Consequently, school would be an equitable learning environment for girls and boys.

Teachers tend to praise boys for knowledge and motivate girls to be obedient and praise them for their appearance and boys for achievement. To me these patterns accorded boys the power not to behave well, and send a message that girls are not as clever like boys but would be rewarded for



being good. My interview with girls and boys, showed that boys had created a space where they are able to do what they like, as Siya explained:



**Picture 25**

*Siya: This is the space behind the classroom where we meet with girls because teachers do not allow us to be talking to girls.*

*Kaise: Why do you think they are not allowing you?*

*Vusi: they always tell girls to stay away from us because we are dangerous and rough.*

*We are now Grade 7s and big enough to decide what we want, so we meet here and talk about life.*

These findings revealed a space behind the classroom as a place as a secret place where girls and boys met and enjoyed playing together during break times at school. This is where they were

socializing without interference. If the teacher spots them together, they got into trouble as they are told to stay away from each other. If you were spotted and in class the teacher would ask a question and if you did not know the answer, you would get embarrassed as Owami mentioned:

*Owami: Weh! I remember when Mr X, spotted me with mfana (meaning boy) hhhha he told the whole class how I think I'm a grown up and liking boys. He said when I am crying because the boys have beaten me I must not report to him because they always tell us to stay away from boys as they are rough and dangerous.*

This means that girls were not permitted to play with boys as they are referred to as rough and dangerous. I find this socially inscription of girls and boys into the prevailing gender expectations entangled them in the social relations within their communities. I see this as serving to undermine girls' and boys' active role in challenging gender relations. Indeed, the vast body of literature awards children little control or power, and children are normally conceptualised as passive victims of the processes of gender, as discussed in Chapter 2. The findings of this study concur with Bhana and Pattman (2010), Nkozi (2009) and Sanger (2010) in that South African school' systems of beliefs and social relationships do not affirm gender equality despite the constitutional and policy intentions which support gender equality in schooling.

I made a follow up on the issue of socially inscribing girls and boys as being as distinct from each as possible. I observed at uZalo Primary school, during break times girls and boys who are in the smaller grades like Grade R and 1 they openly played together. When Swazi, took their picture I was eager to know what she was going to say about it; this is what she said:



**Picture 26**

*Swazi: In this picture there are Grade 1 girls and boys. They are happy as you can see them. They are playing skipping rope together. You know madam, teachers are fine with them but when it comes to us weeh they do not want us to see us playing with boys like this. They allow us to be together at young age, but as we grow they are worried about something that they are not telling. They end up hiding behind the culture and if you ask question, you get into trouble. So I rather do what they expect from me when I am in front of them but once they are not, I do as I please.*

In light of the above, the excerpt made it clear that girls and boys viewed themselves as equals who want to play together. However, within the context of this study, where gender inequality was so deeply entrenched in teachers' constructions and expectations, girls and boys had limited possibilities for agency and choices to perform alternative femininities and masculinities without being unaccepted and devalued as social misfits. This is for the most part because of teachers' constructions of masculinities and femininities as intrinsically fixing to being a girl and a boy, and research, for instance by Morojele (2011) and Bhana (2010), finds that this way of gendering is deeply implicated in the perpetuation of gender inequality. The dominant gender constructions and expectations in South African schools seem to continue to give ascendancy to hegemonic masculinities over femininities (and other forms of masculinities) in ways that do not uphold the principles of inclusive education and equitable gender relations. In this context where there is a clear discrepancy between the official policy and the lived schooling experiences, it is then interesting to find out how boys and girls navigate their daily gender experiences at school. This study finds that girls and boys had to fight against teachers' powers and create ways to contravene the normal status of gender. Even though they were able to do this only during informal school they were nonetheless able to perform gender in a way that makes sense to them. I foreground the view that girls and boys can be affirmed and upheld to create to their best human potential, in safe and equitable schooling environments. This could be possible if teachers affirm fluidity and plurality in how children perform gender. I say this because it would allow girls and boys to perform masculinities and femininities in dynamic, alternative and non-conforming ways which prescribe the current dominant discourses of gender.

### **7.2.3 Children's subversive manipulation of their relationships with teachers**

The findings revealed that some girls had to become the teacher's pet in order to protect themselves from boys' powers and the dominant masculinities. Being next to the teacher meant girls were exposed to teachers' instructions only and boys knew that therefore they did not have a chance to tease them. A study by Bhana (2013) has also found teachers' discourses such as "children are children: gender doesn't matter". This implies that teachers construct primary schooling as a gender-free zone. On the contrary (Morojele, 2013b ) asserted the crucial role that primary schooling plays as a gender-free zone is a means to standardise the existing gender inequalities in the schools. Teachers are treating girls and boys as if they were their own children. This means they take the same approach that is being used at home to school, for example the cultural belief on how to raise a girl and a boy, as the data below illustrates:



**Picture 27**

*Kaise: What is happening in this picture?*

*Mbali: In this picture there is a girl who spent her break time with Miss Zama (pseudonym). Her work is marked first as she is always with the teacher. Teachers are like our mothers; she is happy and comfortable to be as close as she can to her. Teachers treat us like their own children, they hug and care for us. If we are sick they take care of us and write us letters to the clinic.[Smiling] and madam, no one is worrying me like Bongiwe and all.*

The excerpt above showed how teachers grow girls in the classroom as if there were their own children at home. The Employment Labour Relations Act states that teachers are in loco parentis, meaning that in the absence of a parent, teachers are obliged to take over the responsibility of being a parent. The difference is that at school while teachers are in loco parentis they should be

guided by policies in their daily practice. When I asked girls and boys at uZalo Primary why they like school, Siya had the following to say

*Siya: I like school because teachers teach us how to grow strong as a Zulu man, as expected in our culture. Girls are also taught how to behave as expected, you know they have to respect us as their future husbands [laughing].*

*Gugu: Teachers treat us like their own children; we are taught how to sit as girls. We close our legs together and expected to keep the classroom clean at all the times otherwise we are punished. After breaks we wash the whole class dishes and at home as well it is the girl's duty to clean the house. Therefore, teachers reinforce what we are basically taught at home.*

This finding indicates that girls and boys were constructed to behave within the category of a girl or a boy and this is an illustration of gendered socialisation in the school and community. For some girls being a teacher's pet was also a creative way to escape from the stereotypic expectation of being a girl, as it meant being safe from being the victim of masculinity traits that boys possessed.

*I observed that during breaks there were teachers who spent their time in class with the learners. I witnessed a teacher whose class was dishing food inside the class while others were all dishing outside. However, she stayed and ate her lunch inside the class while children are also eating. I also discovered that children from her class were called mama's baby, the whole school knows that her class is not allowed outside.*

*Consequently, I discovered that girls and boys are left with limited gender choices but to perform the dominant expectations of what it meant to be a girl or a boy.*

Field notes: Isibaya Primary

The consequences of these have been found to be more unfavourable and thereby to continue undebated the scheme of gender inequalities in the schools. These included constrained chances for girls to continue to attend school due to the social pressure and responsibilities, for example, falling pregnant, contracting HIV and AIDS, and being single mothers at an early age. On the same venture boys did not enjoy the legacy of being powerful as they have to leave school to prove themselves in providing for the unplanned family. Therefore, the limited opportunities to attain success in life are contrary to the purposes of schooling in South Africa, as set out in policy statements of our constitutional and education policies in which equality for all (both girls and boys) is guaranteed as a fundamental human right. The findings resonate with other studies (Bhana, 2013; Morojele, 2013b; Unterhalter, 2013; Bennet, 2009) that schools play such a critical role in shaping gender performances (Butler, 2013), in ways that reinforce unequal gender relations.

#### **7.2.4 Engagements in heterosexual relationships in divergence from teachers' regulation**



In this study findings revealed that the power and oppression in different places and spaces within the school remained with adults. They made sure that children remained powerless in order for them to remain authoritative figures. However, girls and boys subversively decided to show their power over the teachers' dominant expectations of gender through a noticeable habit of carrying on romantic relationships in diverse periods and places where teachers and adults could not see them. The data showed the old school garden at uZalo Primary and the corner behind the boy's toilets at Isibaya Primary as the spaces for romantic relationships.



**Picture 28**

*While I was at uZalo Primary I noticed that as soon as the bell rings that indicated that the break is over, there would be a few Grade 7 girls who will be coming from this old garden in Picture 28 running out towards the classes. They were looking happy as they had smiles in their faces and softly speaking to each other about something that I could tell from the distance that it*

*was of interest to them. I wondered what was happening, however I never find time to observe in the old garden. This garden was far from the school ground; it was quite a distance from the classroom. There were other gardens at uZalo Primary as there were a few ladies working on them. I was told that they are parents who could not afford to pay the school fees. Hence they volunteered to work in the garden and plant vegetables which were used as part of the Nutrition School Programme at school.*

Field notes: uZalo Primary

I asked Vusi, why he took picture 28, he said: My friend, Thabo is in a relationship with a girl. They meet here during breaks or afterschool, it's not only them. When I went to join them his friends asked me to go back to the playground, "*uzosibhemisela lo*" meaning he is going to tell on us. I thought he will defend me but he also asked me go back and play with other boys.

Kaise: Why did they ask you to go back to the playground?

*Vusi: [Pause] terrible things happen in the garden. Boys kiss and propose love to girls. Whenever the break is over and the bell rings, girls are the first ones to run out of the garden to class.*

The old garden was used as a secretive love zone for children in romantic relationships, even though teachers warned girls not to play or be any place near the boys because "they are dangerous". The group of girls and boys who sit in the old garden did not allow children who were not in loving relationships to come into the old garden. (Bhana, Nzimakwe & Nzimakwe, 2010) discovered that girls and boys secretly follow each other and check what they are doing.

That is why they chased Vusi away from the garden because he would see what was happening and maybe report to teachers. He did not receive any protection from his friend; instead, he asked him to go and play with other boys. His friend could not allow him to sit in this space because he was among those who occupy the old garden for illicit reasons. They make sure that they hide their intimate relationships from teachers since they did not approve them. They therefore created a way of seeing each other during break, lunch and after school.

My discussion with Mthoko on Picture 29, demonstrated:



**Picture 29**

*Mthoko: In this picture there is Thobeka and Mazwi, we all know them they are lovers.*

*They are always together during breaks and after school behind the boys' toilets in that*

*corner [pointing]. It is not only them I could not get the otherwise because they did not allow me to have them in the picture. Teachers called them and warned them to stop what they are doing but still they continue. They hug and kiss [smiling], they are really doing their thing and its makes them happy as you can see.*

This finding showed that girls and boys have created ways to subvert the teachers' gender stereotype and dominant discourses of gender. Children were able to hide their feelings in class during normal schooling time, however, during breaks and after school they continue with what they felt were right for them to do. The fact that Thobeka and Mazwi continued with their affair even when teachers had warned them meant they undermined the school rule. However, if teachers were willing to talk about girls' and boys' relationship this would have been avoided. Children would have been empowered about the dangers of early pregnancy, STDs as well as HIV/AIDS.

### **7.3 CONCLUSION**

The findings under this chapter revealed four creative routines in which girls and boys performed gender in contravention to the dominant gender discourses that teachers socialised them along within the school environment namely: children as agents of transgressive performances of gender, breaking the essentially gendered school rules; subversively manipulating the relationships with teachers and forming illicit heterosexual relationships.

In spite of teachers stereotypically assigning chores based on gender, for example, girls were allocated chores like sweeping and washing the dishes while boys lifted up the desks and cleaned

the windows, girls and boys contravened and secretly performed gender in ways contrary to the teachers' stereotyped instructions as they exchanged roles; girls lifted up desks and boys washed dishes. During non-formal school times like breaks and after school, girls and boys broke the gendered school rules and socialised together as they believed there was nothing wrong with that as they are all human beings. They did not see the need to be separated from each other even though teachers believed girls should stay away from boys because they are dangerous. This also put the lives of children in danger as heterosexual relationship put them in risk of HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy as teachers were unable to talk to them about these dangers, given that they took place without the agreement of teachers. Lastly the findings revealed that girls were able to manipulate teachers' relationships by staying as close as they can to them as a means to protect themselves against the dominant discourses of gender as no one was teasing them.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study reported on a qualitative study of girls' and boys' schooling and experiences of gender at school. The study examined the gendered spaces and places of girls and boys, and gendered discourses and practices that affected children's geographies within the schooling contexts. It further aimed to understand the ways in which girls and boys exercise agency to navigate their gender-based experiences within schools.

The study answered the following three research questions:

1. What are girls' and boys' stories of gender-based experiences in the context of two primary schools in Durban?
2. How do gender discourses and practices affect girls' and boys' geographies within these schooling contexts?
3. In what ways do girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences and positioning within the schools?

In this chapter I reflect on the findings and research process of the study. The chapter begins by reflecting briefly on how the thesis has answered the questions it set out to explore, as mentioned

above. It then discusses the theoretical and methodological reflection as well as the limitations of the study. Finally, it outlines the implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

## **8.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This section briefly reflects on how the study answered these questions. It begins by revealing gendered spaces and places as well as the discourses and practices that affected girls' and boys' positioning in gender relations within the schooling contexts.

### **8.2.1 Gendered spaces and places within the school context**

The findings illustrated that girls and boys experience dynamics of schooling which reinforce the dominant discourses of femininities and masculinities. The unequal treatment of girls and boys demonstrated that school rehearses favoured customary discourses of male predominance. In both the schools, positions of power were held by males as principals of the schools. Therefore, girls and boys in their everyday experience at school were exposed to only males occupying the position of power and enjoying the luxury of the office. This situation compromises girls as they will think being in position of power is not their place. It also means that boys were socialised into dominant construction of masculinities. Furthermore, the gendered employment of non-educator staff encouraged the traditional male dominance since the school security staff in both schools were males; this position was associated with being dangerous and therefore suitable for males only. Females were employed to cook for learners as this kind of work was associated

with being easy and did not need power, and were therefore judged suitable for women. Even the sporting codes at schools were categorised in such a way that girls were motivated to play netball and skipping rope since it was not dangerous while boys played soccer which was known as being unsafe. These practices perpetuated gender inequality amongst girls and boys, since boys viewed themselves as stronger than girls. This means girls were socialised into the dominant construction of femininities.

I found boys enjoying relatively similar privileges of dominance in both schools. They occupied large amounts of space in the playground and had a freedom to play without being supervised by teachers. Even inside the classroom, in their desks they occupied bigger space as teachers claimed that traditionally they are allowed to sit with their legs wide open. This was a challenge since it caused fights between girls and boys. This also put pressure on boys as they are forced to maintain the status of dominant masculinity even though they were at times suffering from having to meet unrealistic standards while pretending that they did not feel the pain. I argue that this was not a fair treatment on both girls and boys, since girls also ended up suffering with a small space to write as the space was unevenly distributed. For instance, teachers needed to ask boys to sit in such a manner that both girls and boys are comfortable to write and ensure equal treatment. When girls were sitting with their legs open, teachers disciplined them in a harsh manner. Hence, I stand that it compromised girls' experience at school and perpetuated a patriarchal ideology since occupying a bigger space is associated with having greater power. Even the examples which were used by teachers during the lessons located males in positions of power as well as the posters displayed in the classrooms, which showed only males as heroes. The dominant gender constructions and expectations continued to give power to masculinities



over femininities and upheld inequitable gender relations. The findings revealed three categories of gendered spaces and places: the gender neutral zone, the computer room which was a space where girls and boys united as equal partners; the gendered zone, secondly the principal's office, assembly area, classroom, playground. In these spaces and places of the gendered zone, teachers' power was such that their gender stereotypes put pressure on girls and boys as a result, they had no option but to conform into dominant version of femininities and masculinities.

The secretive zones were the toilets and the bush. During breaks boys enjoyed their lunch in the bush and had a space to share boyhood without being disturbed. Girls preferred to spend their breaks inside the classroom or in the toilets as female teachers also spent their break times inside their classrooms. This was partly due to patriarchal structures within Zulu communities which made it possible for men not to be at home most of the times because they were working far from home and left their wives at home as caregivers. Therefore, women had no choice but were forced to be at home cooking and doing the washing for the children. This finding revealed that schools emphasized the fact that girls should not enter into boys' territory and boys should not enter into girls' zones. Therefore, the school continued to enhance inequality between boys and girls.

### **8.2.2 Discourses and practices that affect children's geographies in gender relations**

The findings revealed the teachers' active role in inscribing dominant values of gender, but also found that girls and boys inventively challenged the dominant constructions of gender. Formal

schooling compelled girls to be subservient and to succumb to dominant values of femininities such as being polite, reserved and quiet. I also found that boys were much under pressure to maintain the dominant values as they were compelled to lead group activities even when girls excelled in giving more answers. Moreover, if they fought girls they would continue with the fight even when the signs of being defeated are clearly visible, in order to prove that they are physically stronger than girls. They maintained the isiZulu saying that says “*Indoda ayikhali*” (a man does not cry) even when they were in pain, consequently performing a boy role. Teachers socialised girls and boys in line with the dominant discourses of gender. This was illustrated through the allocation of chores based on gender. Boys were responsible for outdoor work, for instance, planting and cleaning the school yard and cleaning the blackboard; these are perceived as heavy duties, which are a characteristic of dominant discourses of masculinity; whilst girls were responsible for sweeping, scrubbing, polishing the floor, which is closely related to the dominant discourse of femininities.

The findings showed that girls and boys did not have an alternative but to conform to teachers’ gender beliefs, and this informed how they actively engaged issues of gender and the meanings they attached to them. This means girls and boys had to perform gender in order to obey the school rules or they would be heavily punished during formal schooling. In most cases the teachers’ voices or the school rules emanated from attempts to give meaning to the categories of girls and boys. For instance, there were rigid categories whereby boys were assigned leadership roles which put pressure on them. This was because they were challenged by school work as they did not pay attention to teachers when they taught most of the times. This resulted in boys being aggressive towards girls as they wanted to prove their power. At the same time, girls’

understandings of femaleness were to be peaceful, to be polite, to show regard and not to be equivalent to boys. There were boys who were caring and cooperated well with girls; however, they were criticized by other boys and called hostile names. The schools continued to celebrate gender inequality through putting pressure on girls and boys to perform gender within the boundaries of dominant values of masculinities and femininities. Even though some of the boys were aware that they were oppressing girls and did not get pleasure from the privilege of dominance, they were denied the opportunity to divert from the rigid social categories of gender. Conversely, during the informal schooling times girls and boys performed gender in ways that challenged and falsified dominant values of gender. Girls' and boys' inventive subversion of dominant discourses and practices provided gender-based resistance and questioning. In trying to maintain their stereotypes of gender teachers punished children who acted against their will.

However, the study has argued that this was not an effective means to institute discipline. This study therefore takes the view that in these schools both girls and boys suffered the consequences of gender inequality. Schools need instead to work towards a gender-equitable schooling environment and allow girls and boys to be active participants in constructing their experiences of gender rather than performing the already made available role of a girl and a boy.

### **8.2.3 Ways in which girls and boys navigate gender-based experiences**

Findings further revealed that girls and boys discovered four creative ways in which to contravene this dominant discourses of gender, namely: non-conformance to performances of

gender that teachers had constructing for them, breaking the gendered school rules; manipulation of teachers' gender stereotype by using the relationship to protect themselves against gender troubles by subversively manipulating the relationships with teachers and forming heterosexual relationships. By and large, this study found that the dominant and often stereotypic construction of gender in and around the schools were, indeed, the foundations of gender inequality.

The findings regarding alternative and subversive gender relations were that they took place in different spaces and places at school. Girls' and boys' interaction occurred in hidden and unacceptable ways such as behind the classrooms. This had negative effects on girls and boys since it exposed them to teenage pregnancy, wrongdoings and to devoting an inordinate time to romantic relationships. The findings were also that girls and boys were eager to work together as equal partners as they viewed nothing wrong with that. For instance, at Isibaya Primary during computer lessons they were able to work harmoniously together and shared valuable ideas. This was evident during the Grade 7 computer competitions which were supported by parents as well. Therefore, this finding revealed a need to encourage schools to correct their practices and move away from the traditional thinking of viewing children as passive agents and as a *tabula rasa*. I foreground children as active participants who are capable of making sense about the world around them. Hence, my understanding is that girls and boys in both schools exercised their agency in performing gender and in navigating their gender-based experiences within schools. I took note of the fact that girls and boys acted or performed gender mostly in spaces and places where it was possible for teachers to see them.

However, in secret places like behind the classroom or where teachers were normally not seen they reverted to who they see themselves as. For instance, a boy at Isibaya Primary was able to wash the dishes with girls as he was passionate about it, even though he had to hide from teachers and other boys. Boys who were showing interest in activities that were associated with feminine roles and show interest in girls sporting codes like netball and skipping rope (ingqathu) were named “sissy”. On the other hand, there were girls who showed bravery, like Gugu at uZalo Primary who was lifting the desk when they were cleaning and Bongiwe who would fight and defeat boys were named “indoda” men. Therefore, these findings to me meant that girls and boys were able to secretly navigate their gender-based experiences. Thus there are interventions and strategies suggested by this study aimed at addressing the discourses and practice that affect children’s geographies in Durban primary schools. The more knowledge we have about girls’ and boys’ experiences of gender within the schools the more discourses we have to understand strategies that might be employed to encourage schools towards the achievement of a gender equitable schooling environment.

### **8.3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

This study was drawn from both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the social constructionist paradigm in ways that enlighten our understanding of the school as an arena which produces unequal social relations. This was used to explore girls’ and boys’ schooling and experiences of gender within the context of two primary schools (Morojele, 2011).

### **8.3.1 Theoretical reflections**

My theoretical reflections consisted of insights into girls' and boys' socialisation in terms of how their experiences of gender were constructed. These reflections drew on the cycle of socialisation theory to reveal the ways in which gender inequality was reproduced (Harro, 2000). Further, they were informed by Butler's theory of performativity in illustrating how girls and boys were forced to navigate their experiences of gender.

The dominant constructions of gender have much influence and put pressure on girls and boys, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of gender inequality within the schools. Locating this study within the social constructionist paradigm presented me as the researcher the opportunity to differ from the traditional belief that children are passive agents who do not know about the meaning of the world around them. I consider girls and boys as active participants who produce meaning in their own rights in order to make their lives understandable (Brown & Chu, 2012). The study has highlighted how girls and boys performed gender in ways that challenged dominant constructions of gender. The study advocated practical strategies and interventions to address and break the cycle of gender inequality within the schools.

### **8.3.2 Methodological reflections**

The study used qualitative research methodology as the approach to enquire into the central phenomenon of gender. It draws on the critical emancipatory paradigm, which empowered girls

and boys to tell me their stories on gender and discuss images that relate to their gender-based experiences. Interacting with girls and boys in their natural settings and the rapport between us enabled them to freely tell stories about their experiences of gender, the gendered spaces and places as well as the ways in which they find agency to navigate these experiences. Hence I was able to gather thick descriptions of girls' and boys' experiences of gender, feelings, attitudes and behaviours (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The significance of the use of narrative inquiry in individual and gender-based focus group interviews was that it assisted me in gathering valuable and rich information. The addition of the participatory technique, namely photovoice, added value to girls' and boys' narratives, thus simplifying the way of illustrating their experiences of gender. The study maintained the respectful treatment of participants and kept within the boundaries of social constructionism. These boundaries were used to extract valuable evidence in order to in order to capture the authentic stories based on photos and the gathered data. The photos that the participants took resulted in the emergence of the subsequent themes in the data analysis, namely: gendered spaces and places within the school context, gender discourses and practices and the ways in which girls and boys exercise agency to navigate gender-based experiences within schools. The literature review and the theoretical and conceptual framework were used as strong pillars for the study to interpret the unprocessed data.

### **8.3.3 Personal and professional reflections**

My insider identity in the study made a significant contribution as it assisted me to gather useful and rich data to understand girls' and boys' experiences of gender within the school. I would have struggled to understand their schooling experiences if I did not grow in the same cultural background as them, which accorded more powers to male dominance. The fact that I am fluent in isiZulu further contributed in making sure that we understand each other and made girls and boys more comfortable to tell their gender stories in their mother tongue. Furthermore, I have also experienced the same schooling circumstances as them where teachers are the only people with authority, though I came with a different approach to view children as active participants who are capable of telling their gendered experiences (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). While girls and boys were comfortable to tell me their stories my cultural upbringing which is similar to theirs assisted me in using the gender-based focus group interviews. I am aware that from a young age girls do not feel comfortable to talk when boys are around. The same situation applies with boys; they do not feel comfortable to talk with girls around.

Also, bringing in my experience as the teacher assisted me to diffuse power between myself and the participants. Through the child-centred approach I was able to build trust and rapport with girls and boys. Hence, they were comfortable around me and gave me valuable information. It further assisted me to understand the social and structural context of the schools. For instance, I remember the deputy principal telling me that they were to have a union meeting. Instantly, I knew that I would not be able to do the gender-based focus group interviews I had prepared for that afternoon as schools dismissed learners early when there are such meetings. I was



comfortable in both schools since most of the things that were happening the same way as they happen in my school. However, the study compelled me to do self-introspection on specific aspects of my teaching. I started to view boys differently as it was clear when talking to them that they are also under pressure and suffer from the gender dynamics of femininities and masculinities at school.

## **8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study had limitations which hindered its maximum findings and ought not to be disregarded. The study attempted to address them through reflecting all through the research processes.

### **8.4.1 Conceptual limitations**

The fact that I only concentrated on talking to girls and boys about gender limited this study from adding maximum value to the findings. Gender does not exist in isolation and treating children holistically means that talking to them about more aspects of their lives rather than concentrating on gender alone might have given me a fuller opportunity to know girls' and boys' experiences. The patriarchal background of the learners where one gender is viewed more powerful than the other also limited this study. Each gender was viewed as in opposition to the other, therefore some children might have been uncomfortable talking about it.

Further the practices within the school contributed to the limitations of this study, in a sense that the stereotypical beliefs hindered the understanding of gender. Inequality in gender was noticeable since boys had a hard time to come to me as a woman as they had accepted that they

had misbehaved and they were ashamed at being seen as sexist. There was visible segregation amongst girls and boys, therefore talking about gender made them not sure if the opposite gender is negatively talking to me about them, so I would hear comments like “*ungakhulumi into ongayazi ku madam*” (do not talk about what you do not know to madam).

#### **8.4.2 Theoretical limitations**

A theoretical limitation of the study was a tendency to discuss gender in terms of biological identification: female (for women and girls) and male (for boys and men) even though this study accepted the socially constructed nature of what constituted masculinities and femininities. The study tended to overlook the constraining and limiting dual separation of gender into two sexes – even though the study argues for fluidity, multiplicity and dynamism of gender construction as bases for improving gender equality in schooling contexts.

Secondly, by asking questions on gender only, the study selected one aspect of girls and boys lives and neglected others. Focusing on one aspect of the participants’ lives might provide an incomplete and inadequate representation of their lives. There was a danger that research could present a distorted view about the children’s schooling lives.

#### **8.4.3 Methodological limitations**

The employment of narrative inquiry meant collecting girls’ and boys’ stories. The stereotyped beliefs that girls are soft compelled me to now and again remind them to speak loudly so that the voice record will be clear. In most of the times I had to use probing questions. Girls behaved in a polite, gentle and tidy manner. In contrast, in all the sessions I spent more time with boys since

after school they were usually all over the school, and this wasted lot of time. I had to send for them to come to me and when I was with them, I would need to start with general questions to make them comfortable speaking to me. It limited the time available since I had promised their parents not to keep them for too long at school. The gender inequality treatment that girls and boys experience at school hindered this study as boys' narratives were disruptive as it was an accepted behaviour associated with boys.

The atmosphere in the playground was at times not conducive since girls and boys were easily distracted hence I believed if the study was conducted indoors throughout it could have obtained more data.

#### **8.4.4 Limitations related to the researcher identity**

My identity as a woman and an insider in this study limited me from gathering maximum data. I remember a boy who kept on saying "*amantombazane antekenteke*" (girls are weak), I can still hear his voice. I used to become irritated as it was as if he was talking to (about) me, I had to keep on reminding myself of my position as the researcher. Also, working with girls limited other valuable information that boys contributed.

Boys felt uncomfortable speaking to me as a woman about sensitive issues that pertain to gender. I had to look for them all over the school as they would not be in the playground, where we had agreed to meet. Even when they finally came I had to think of questions or comments to say before I could start with the interviews. It is stereotypically accepted that boys tend to undermine woman's instructions.

## 8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section discusses the recommendations that could help improve gender equality in schools, and possibly reduce some gender-based social ills found in the South African society. This section builds on girls' and boys' recommendations on their experiences of gender and the meanings they attached to the world around them. It includes my own assessment of how the recommendations could be enhanced in the light of my interpretation of their interviews.

- Girls and boys should be empowered to understand that their gender differences do not mean they should stand against each other but they can work together as equals. Respecting the creative ways in which people in localized contexts (especially children) engage with issues of gender is pivotal for sustainable gender-equitable learning environments.
- Initiatives involving the school and communities have to be developed in order to promote transformative learning and confront gender inequality and unjust practices that downgrade girls and women to subservience.
- The Department of Education should continuously run workshops for teachers on how to teach and interact with children in ways that do not promote dominant discourses of masculinities and femininities.
- Gender equality initiatives should emphasise the need for teachers to embrace notions of femininities and masculinities as plural and fluid human qualities (that are not rigidly tied

to children's genitalia), as a central message for supporting equitable gender relations in the schools.

- Teachers should be made aware of the negative consequences that the promotion of stereotypical gender discourses may have on girls and boys in life as well as on equitable gender relations in schools and society.
- Communities and school should encourage a culture of mutual acceptance of human and gender equality. This would entail turning learning environments into safe spaces in which constructions and performances of alternative femininities and masculinities could be freely acted upon without fear of prejudice.
- Gender equality initiatives should build ways that affirm human agency and possibilities for everyone to develop to their full human potential.

## **8.6 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS**

The study explored girls' and boys' schooling and experiences of gender in the context of two primary schools in Durban. This section discusses the implications for curriculum policy and practice in South Africa and finishes with implications for further research.

### **8.6.1 Implications for policy and practice**

These implications should be understood within the context of the findings of this study. The schools that I studied tend to construct spaces and places within the school in terms of gender (for instance boys were allowed to occupy bigger spaces as they were categorised as powerful

and dominant and girls occupied smaller spaces as they did not have power). These were the discourse and practices that formed the foundation of gender inequality.

- Internal school policies should be revised to encourage teachers to implement the curriculum as it is. The CAPS curriculum is sensitive to gender, race, class, etc. and tries to enable alternate performances of gender. However, teachers are still holding on to their childhood socialisation. This revision might be achieved through seminars, workshops and gender equality awareness campaigns.
- There needs to be an end to the practices of dehumanizing girls and boys at school as if they cannot make meaning of the world around them and of excluding them in the decision making processes that concern their lives. For instance, in this study both the schools simply accorded chores based on gender and accorded bigger spaces to boys, without giving girls and boys a chance to decide what they are comfortable with. This results in negative consequences as it makes boys violent as they regard themselves as powerful and oppress girls.
- As part of the strategic plan, gender policy should find ways of incorporating forms of Zulu tradition (specifically Ubuntu) and formal schooling. In this way girls and boys will learn how the current practice at school of undermining another human being is against the Zulu culture, as Ubuntu means taking care of one another and respecting each other irrespective of age and gender. In this way Zulu tradition will complement formal schooling, thus girls and boys will be able to view themselves as equal partners.
- The Department of Education should involve or communicate with teachers in the form of in-service training and regular workshops in initiating gender policies, otherwise

teachers will be misled by their socialisation. This would ensure that policies like those of the South African Schools Act and White Paper 6 of 2006 are successfully implemented and action is taken to achieve a gender-equitable schooling environment.

- Teachers are expected to implement policies that they do not understand as they are rarely systematically trained. The Education Department uses a top-down approach which is unfair to teachers when they have to practise what they themselves do not understand and face the challenges of overcrowded classes. It is therefore impossible for teachers to cater for girls' and boys' diverse needs when their needs as teachers are not addressed. Teachers are faced with heavy duty loads as a result of the post-provisioning standard (PPN) which assigns educators as per enrolment using the mathematical formula that only the Department understands.

### **8.6.2 Implications for further research**

There is a need for more research that will provide insight on the issues stated by this study (see Section 7.4). A study that will look at girls' and boys' life's experiences at school would be helpful. This might extend the findings of this study to know holistically about what is happening in schools. There is so much that we need to know about girls and boys and also to find out other alternative ways that girls and boys use in their everyday life at school.

- This means there is a need for a study that will not be restricted to Grade 7 only; the younger grades could tell more fascinating stories.

- There is a need for further interrogation on the practices and discourses of masculinity and femininity within schools. Moreover, schools need to create safe environments which promote gender equality among girls and boys.
- I depended on girls' and boys' stories; that means I have overlooked other modes of human expression. Thus further studies could benefit from exploring ways of interpreting nonverbal forms of expressions.
- It is of vital importance that further studies further explore the unequal gender pattern with Zulu culture which still strongly views women as powerless and not deserving of respect. This might assist schools in achieving gender-equitable environments.

### **8.7 In conclusion ...**

The chapter discussed the research findings and the focal points of my challenging PhD journey throughout the time of writing this thesis. The most important question which was a worry to me was: How do the children find ways to navigate their gender-based experiences within the schools as the practices and dominant discourses prescribe inequitable gender social relations? In this study it was obvious that girls and boys did not have agency to subvert the dominant values of gender during formal school, but had to perform gender in order to satisfy the teachers' stereotypic beliefs of gender. That is, girls and boys had to hide their performances against the dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity.



This study advocated interventions strategies that might assist to attain fair and just gender social relationships within the school and communities. In this way I hope to open possibilities for further research that would acknowledge the importance of the struggle for gender equality.

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# Appendix A

## Ethical Clearance Certificate



6 August 2014

Mrs Ntombikayise Ngcobo 204516007  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Ngcobo

Protocol reference number: HSS/0881/014D  
Project title: Towards Gender Equitable Schooling Environments: Space, Geography and Experience of Children

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**  
In response to your application dated 10 July 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Prof P Morojele  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele  
Cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [ximbao@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbao@ukzn.ac.za) / [snvmanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snvmanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

1910 - 2010  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE  
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## Appendix B

### Editorial Letter

Crispin Hemson

15 Morris Place

Glenwood

Durban

South Africa 4001

hemsonc@gmail.com

C: 082 926 5333

H: 031 206 1738

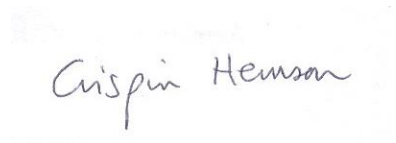
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29<sup>th</sup> November 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have carried out language editing of the article by Ntombikayise Ngcobo entitled *Towards a gender equitable schooling environment: Space, geography and experiences of children*.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Crispin Hemson". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Crispin Hemson



## Appendix C

### Turn It in Report

Ngobo N-204516007

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

%**4**

SIMILARITY INDEX

%**1**

INTERNET SOURCES

%**2**

PUBLICATIONS

%**1**

STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	<b>Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal</b> Student Paper	% <b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Deevia Bhana. "Gender and Childhood Sexuality in Primary School", Springer Nature, 2016</b> Publication	% <b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Pholoho Morojele. "What does it mean to be a boy? Implications for girls' and boys' schooling experiences in Lesotho rural schools", Gender and Education, 2011</b> Publication	<% <b>1</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>www.diva-portal.org</b> Internet Source	<% <b>1</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Ozkazanc, Alev. "Gendered Power Relations in the School: Construction of Schoolgirl Femininities in a Turkish High School", International Journal of Social Sciences/1306973X, 20080101</b> Publication	<% <b>1</b>

Morojele, P. J.. "Basotho teachersâ€™™

## Appendix D

### School Principal Consent Letter

50 Barondale Place

Newlands West

4037

14 July 2014

The Principal ----- School

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **Re: Request for permission to conduct research at your school**

I am Ntombikayise Ngcobo, a PhD student at, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I plan to undertake a study titled: "Towards gender equitable schooling environments: Space, Geography and Experiences of children" .My supervisor is Professor P. Morojele for further enquiries please do not hesitate to contact him. His contact details are: Tel: 031 2603234 (Morojele@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby request your permission to conduct a study at the \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School. The participants in the study will be learners from your school. They will be required to participate in individual interviews and focus group interviews that are expected to last between 90-120 minutes in two sessions. I also plan to give them disposable cameras, to take pictures of places with their experiences.

Please note that

- The school and participants will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- The learners will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- The school's or the participant's identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- All learner responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- The participants will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
- Audio- recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed.

I thank you.

Yours sincerely

---

Ntombikayise Ngcobo

Tel: 0721101530

Email: [kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com](mailto:kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com)

---

**CONSENT FORM:**

If permission is granted to conduct the research at your school, please fill in and sign the form below.

I, ....., (Full Name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby grant permission for the researcher to conduct the research project at the \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School. I understand that learners are free to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E**

### **Parents' Consent Letter**

(The letter will be translated into isiZulu as necessary. The project will be explained to learners first. The letter will be read to and explained to learners in a simple way. Questions and clarification will be encouraged.).

50 Barondale Place

Newlands West

4037

14 July 2014

Dear parent/caregiver

#### **Re: Request your child's participation in a research project**

I am Ntombikayise Ngcobo, a PhD student at, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I plan to undertake a study titled: "Towards gender equitable schooling environments: Space, Geography and Experiences of children". My supervisor is Professor P. Morojele for further enquiries please do not hesitate to contact him. His contact details are: Tel: 031 2603234 ([Morojele@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Morojele@ukzn.ac.za)).

I kindly ask your permission for your child, \_\_\_\_\_ NAME, to participate in the project. The participants in the study will be learners from the various schools. I value what your child thinks about his schooling and how he/she is experiencing schooling. You will be required to allow ME to interview your child individually and in focus groups. The interviews will be approx...

90-120 minutes. I will meet in two sessions on two different days that is convenient for the child. We will be requesting permission from your child to work with him in the project.

Please note that

- The school and learners will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- Your child expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect his/her own personal opinion.
- The school's or your child's identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- All your child's responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (your child's real name and the name of the school will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, your child will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to him/her.
- Your child will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what he/she do not want to tell us.
- Audio- recording of interviews will only be done if you and your child give us permission.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed.

I thank you.

Yours sincerely

---

Ntombikayise Ngcobo

Tel: 0721101530

Email: kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com

---

**CONSENT FORM:**

If you agree to take part in this project, please fill in your full name and sign the form below.

I, ....., (Full Name), the parent /caregiver of ----- (Name of child) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby agree to my child taking part in the project. I understand that he/she can withdraw from the project at any time I want to...

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Parents' Consent Letter (isiZulu Version)

University of KwaZulu Natal

Edgewood Campus

Ashwood

3605

20 July 2014

Mzali

#### **Isicelo sokwenza ucwaningo**

Ngingumfundi waseNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natal owenza ucwaningo ngesihloko esithi **“Ubudlelwane obuphakathi kobulili obehlukene kubantwana abancane esikoleni esihlanganise amabanga KwaZulu-Natal”**. Ngicela ukuba umntwana wakho azibandakanye nalolucwaningo. Kuzoba nemibuzo azobuzwa yona eyedwa noma aseseqenjini.

Ngicela uqikelele lokhu okulandelayo:

- Akukho lutho oluyotholwa umntwana wakho ngokuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo.
- Kulindeleke ukuba umntwana wakho aphendule imibuzo ngokunikeza uvo lwakhe.
- Ngeke lisetshenziswe igama lakhe. Kuyosetshenziswa amagama okungewona awabo



- Zonke izimpendulo zakhe ziyokwamkelwa.
- Imibuzo azobuzwa yona engeke idalulwa.
- Ukuba yingxenye yocwaningo uyazikhethela. Uvumelekile ukuyeka noma ingasiphi isikhathi. Lokho ngeke kumlethele imiphumela emibi.
- Ngeke aphoqwe ukuba akhulume izinto angazithandi uku zikhuluma nezizomenza asabe
- Ukuqopha yonke ingxoxo kuyokwenziwa ngemvume yomntwana
- Ulwazi lonke olutholakalile luyongcinwa eNyuvesi iminyaka emihlanu emva kwalokho lushiswe.

Ngiyabonga

Yimina ozithobayo

---

Ntombikayise Ngcobo

Umbhekeleli: uProfesa Pholoho Morojele

031 5786018

031 2603432

[kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com](mailto:kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com)

Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

**Uma uvumelana nalokhu okubhalwe ngenhla ngicela ubhale leminingwane elandelayo**

Amagama akho aphelele.....

ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngizwile ngezinto eziphathelele nalolucwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuthi umntwana wami azibandakanye nalo.

Sayina \_\_\_\_\_

Igama lomntwana \_\_\_\_\_

Usuku \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Learners Consent Letter

(The letter will be translated into isiZulu as necessary. The project will be explained to parents/caregivers first. The letter will be read to and explained to them in a simple way. Questions and clarification will be encouraged.).

50 Barondale Place

Newlands West

4037

14 July 2014

Dear learner

#### **Re: Request your participation in a research project**

I am Ntombikayise Ngcobo, a PhD student at, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I plan to undertake a study titled: “Towards gender equitable schooling environments: Space, Geography and Experiences of children”. My supervisor is Professor P. Morojele for further enquiries please do not hesitate to contact him. His contact details are: Tel: 031 2603234 ([Morojele@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Morojele@ukzn.ac.za)).

I kindly ask your permission to participate in the project. The participants in the study will be learners from the various schools. I value what you think about your schooling and how you are

experiencing schooling. You will be required to allow me to interview you individually and in focus groups. The interviews will be approximately 90-120 minutes. I will meet in two sessions on two different days that is convenient for you. I will be requesting permission from your parents/caregivers to work with you on the project. .

Please note that

- The school and learners will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- You will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect your own personal opinion.
- The schools or your identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- All learner responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (your real name and the name of the school will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, you will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- You will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what you do not want to tell us.
- Audio- recording of interviews will only be done if you give us permission.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed.

I thank you.

Yours sincerely

---

Ntombikayise Ngcobo

Tel: 0721101530

Email: kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com

---

**CONSENT FORM:**

If you agree to take part in this project, please fill in your full name and sign the form below.

I, ....., (Full Name)  
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby agree to take part in the project at my school. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time I want to.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix H:**

### **Learners Consent Letter (isiZulu Version)**

#### **Incwadi Yabafundi Yesicelo Socwaningo**

University of KwaZulu Natal

Edgewood Campus

Ashwood

3605

20 July 2014

Mzali

#### **Isicelo sokwenza ucwaningo**

Ngingumfundi waseNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natal owenza ucwaningo ngesihloko esithi **“Ubudlelwane obuphakathi kobulili obehlukene kubantwana abancane esikoleni esihlanganise amabanga KwaZulu-Natal”**. Ngicela ukuba umntwana wakho azibandakanye nalolucwaningo. Kuzoba nemibuzo azobuzwa yona eyedwa noma aseseqenjini.

Ngicela uqikelele lokhu okulandelayo:

- Akukho lutho oluyotholwa umntwana wakho ngokuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo.
- Kulindeleke ukuba umntwana wakho aphenandle imibuzo ngokunikeza uvo lwakhe.

- Ngeke lisetshenziswe igama lakhe. Kuyosetshenziswa amagama okungewona awabo
- Zonke izimpendulo zakhe ziyokwamkelwa.
- Imibuzo azobuzwa yona engeke idalulwa.
- Ukuba yingxenye yocwaningo uyazikhethela. Uvumelekile ukuyeka noma ingasiphi isikhathi. Lokho ngeke kumlethele imiphumela emibi.
- Ngeke aphoqwe ukuba akhulume izinto angazithandi uku zikhuluma nezizomenza asabe
- Ukuqopha yonke ingxoxo kuyokwenziwa ngemvume yomntwana
- Ulwazi lonke olutholakalile luyongcinwa eNyuvesi iminyaka emihlanu emva kwalokho lushiswe.

Ngiyabonga

Yimina ozithobayo

---

Ntombikayise Ngcobo

Umbhekeleli: uProfesa Pholoho Morojele

031 5786018

031 2603432

[kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com](mailto:kaise.ngcobo@gmail.com)

Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

**Uma uvumelana nalokhu okubhalwe ngenhla ngicela ubhale leminingwane elandelayo**

Amagama akho aphelele.....

ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngizwile ngezinto eziphathelele nalolucwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuthi

umntwana wami azibandakanye nalo.

Sayina \_\_\_\_\_

Igama lomntwana \_\_\_\_\_

Usuku \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix I

### Individual Interview Schedule

#### Semi-structured interview

This interview schedule is aimed towards exploring the gender equitable schooling environment experience of children in a primary school situated in the greater area of Durban. The instrument will be translated into the specific first language as necessary.

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you doing?
3. Are you a boy or girl?
4. Why are you classifying yourself as a .....
5. What do you like about being in this school?
6. Why?
7. What is it that you do not like about being in this school?
8. Why?
9. What do you think causes these experiences at school?
10. What success do you encounter at school?
11. Why do you think you have this success?
12. What difficulties do you encounter at school?
13. How do you cope with this difficulties (how do you handle the problems that you face at school)
14. Do you like learners at your school?

15. Why?

16. Do you like your teachers at school?

17. What do you like about your teachers at school?

18. What is that you do not like about your teachers at school?

## Appendix J: Zulu Version

### Imibuzo

1. Uneminyaka emingaki?
2. Ufunda liphi ibanga?
3. Uyintomabazane noma ungumfana?
4. Kungani uzibona kanjalo?
5. Yini oyithandayo ngokuba la esikoleni?
6. Ngabe yisiphi isizathu salokho?
7. Yini ongayithandi ngokuba sesikoleni?
8. Ngabe yisiphi isizathu salokho?
9. Ucabanga ukuthi yini eyenza lokhu esikoleni?
10. Iyiphi impumelelo osuke wayithola la esikoleni?
11. Yini ucabange ukuthi unayo lempumelelo?
12. Ibuphi ubunzima osuke wahlangabezana nabo la esikoleni?
13. Ukhona kanjani ukuhlala nalobunzima (Ubhekana kanjani nezinkinga ohlangabezana nazo la esikoleni)?
14. Uyabathanda abafundi bala esikoleni?
15. Ngabe yisiphi isizathu salokho?
16. Uyabathanda othisha bala esikoleni?
17. Yini oyithandayo ngothisha la esikoleni?
18. Yini ongayithandi ngothisha la esikoleni?

## **Appendix K**

### **GENDER-BASED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

#### **The instrument will be translated into isiZulu**

The purpose was to give each girl and boy an opportunity to answer, comment, and ask questions to other participants or respond to questions and comments on experiences of gender made by others, who are of the same gender-based on the photos they took. GBFGI were used to complement the individual interviews.

Each of the four gender-based groups of between three – seven members were interviewed two times for the purpose of enhancing constant reflection on the girls and boys own and other views. Each group interview was for an average of 90-120 minutes to enable sufficient coverage of the gender-based focus group interview and give each girl and a boy a chance to express a view.

#### **Instruction**

I will ask the participants to take photographs of spaces and places that relate to their gender at school. Each participant will be given a disposable camera to use for two weeks during breaks and after school. Participants will choose two pictures which will be most important to them to talk about and the following probing questions will be asked in the discussion of photos.

#### **Probing questions**

Why did you take this picture?

What is happening in the picture?

**Appendix L**  
**Gender-based Focus Group**  
**Inhlolo mibuzo: isiZulu**

Inhloso yalemibuzo ukunika amantombazane kanye nabafana ithuba lokuba baphendule imibuzo, baphawule, baphinde babuze imibuzo kwabanye abonobulili obufana nobabo. Lemibuzo yobulili obufanayo yengeza ulwazi olutholakale kwimibuzo yamuntu ngayedwa.

Imibuzo yamaqembu obulili obufanayo awu-4 izoba nabantwana abathathu kuya kwabayisikhombisa. Bazobuzwa imibuzo kabili ukuqiniseka ukuthi kutholakala isithombe okuyiso semibono yamantombazane kanye nabafana. Inhlolo mibuzo ihlelelwe imizuzu ewu 90-120 ukuze kube nesikhathi esanele sokuthola imibono yamantombazane kanye nabafana esikoleni.

**Inkombandlela**

Umfundi ngamunye uzotshelwa ukuthi akathathe izithombe zezindawo nezikhala ezihlobene nobulili bakhe. Umfundi ngamunye uzonikezwa icamera ukuba ayisebenzise amasonto amabili ethatha izithombe ngezikhathi zamakhefu noma sekuphume isikole. Abafundi bazokhetha izithombe ezimbili ukuba bakhulume ngazo ezibaluleke kakhulu kubona. Bazobuzwa imibuzo elandelayo mayelana nezithombe abazithathile.

1. Kungani uthathe lesithombe?
2. Kwenzakalni kusona?

## **Appendix M**

### **MIX GENDER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

#### **The instrument will be translated into isiZulu**

The purpose was to give each girl and boy an opportunity to answer, comment, and ask questions to other participants or respond to questions and comments on experiences of gender made by others, who are of the same gender-based on the photos they took. Mixed gender groups were used to encourage girls and boys to work together

Each of the two mix gender groups in each school had between four – five members which were interviewed for the purpose of enhancing constant reflection on the girls and boys views. Each group interview was for an average of 90-120 minutes to enable sufficient coverage of the mix gender focus group interview and give girls and boys a chance to express their views while they are together.

Participants will choose two pictures which will be most important to them to talk about and the following probing questions will be asked in the discussion of photos.

Probing questions

1. Why did you take this picture?
2. What is happening in the picture?
3. What does it mean to you as a girl or a boy?
4. Who has more powers?
5. Why?
6. How do you feel about it?

## **Appendix N**

### **Mix Gender Focus Group**

#### **Inhlolo mibuzo: isiZulu**

Inhloso yalemibuzo ukunika amantombazane kanye nabafana ithuba lokuba baphendule imibuzo bendawonye, baphawule, baphinde babuze imibuzo kwabanye abonobulili obufana nobabo nalobo obungafani. Amaqembu obulili obungafani izokwenzelwa ukugquguzela amantombazane kanye nabafana ukuba bakwazi ukusebenzisana.

Imibuzo yamaqembu yobulili obungafani ewu2 izoba nabantwana bane kuya kwabahlanu. Inhlolo mibuzo ihlelelwe imizuzu ewu 90-120 ukuze kube nesikhathi esanele sokuthola imibono yamantombazane kanye nabafana esikoleni.

#### **Inkombandlela**

Abafundi bazokhetha izithombe ezimbili ukuba bakhulume ngazo ezibaluleke kakhulu kubona. Bazobuzwa imibuzo elandelayo mayelana nezithombe abazithathile.

1. Kungani uthathe lesithombe?
2. Kwenzakalni kusona?
3. Lokhu kusho ukuthini kuwena njengentombazane/ umfana?
4. Ubani onamandla kahulu kunomunye la?
5. Ngobani?
6. Kukuphatha kanjani lokhu?

## **Appendix O**

### **Observations Schedule**

The following school events will be observed throughout the research process, and notes will be taken on how issues relating to gender evident. Without interfering I may interrupt some activities to seek clarity from teachers or girls and boys on certain issues.

1. School assembly
2. Classroom activities and seating arrangement
3. Girls and boys play at break and lunch time
4. Feeding scheme
5. School chores
6. Playgrounds
7. Toilet usage



## **Appendix P**

### **Document Analysis**

#### 1. School policies

To document ways in which these documents cover issues of gender equality

#### 2. Minutes of previous and current staff meetings

Capture specific instances or discussions that covered issues of gender

#### 3. School's attendance registers

To document learners' attendance records in Grade 7 in the year 2015. I have to randomly sample three months for further analysis

#### 4. Text books and, Learning and teaching Materials

To document how words and pictures etc. are used to reinforce gender stereotypes or how their usage portrays what messages about gender

## **Appendix Q**

### **GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOVOICE**

The purpose of this process is to move to practical ways in which girls and boys can tell their schooling experiences. They shall use photos to assist them to tell stories that reflect their daily experiences at school. The following discussions with girls and boys will be used as guide for achieving effective photo taking process.

#### **Discussions on Guidelines for Camera Use:**

1. Ethical consideration for example use of the photos for research purposes only.
2. Issues of respect and the need for consent for other peoples' wishes and likes and dislikes
3. Aspects of how and how not to handle camera and effectively capture spaces and places that relate to them.

#### **Discussions on Guidelines for taking Photos:**

- How do the girls and boys see themselves within the school space and place?
- Tell their stories in the photos they take, who do they think has power?
- Tell their stories about themselves and their experiences in school in the photos they take.

- Girls and boys to discuss on aspects of photos they have taken they consider significant, not so significant; aspects that capture their stories and their self-identity within the school space and place.
- Girls and boys to reflect on the photos and talk how their social realities give powers in school as reflected in the photos.
- Girls and boys to provide own interpretation of the photos they take.