

## **TITLE**

### **RISK AND RESILIENCY FACTORS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES: VOICES OF LEARNERS AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU - NATAL**

Submitted as a dissertation component in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the the  
Degree of Master of Education

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this work presented in this mini dissertation is my own, and that work done by any other person has been duly acknowledged.



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## **ABSTRACT**

The perspective on the social construction of childhood has dominated research on children and childhood in recent years. The aim of this study was to contribute to these debates and gain an understanding of the vulnerabilities and resiliency factors in the lives of children from a working class schooling context in KwaZulu-Natal. Twenty seven children, twelve boys and fifteen girls were interviewed using interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. Participatory research techniques including children's drawings and mind mapping were used. The children's perspectives revealed that there are various risk factors that they are exposed to which include crime, violence, bullying, racism from teachers, gender stereotyping, child abuse, pollution, HIV/Aids, alcohol and drug abuse. Concerns that children have about their future include possible unemployment of their parents, the rising cost of schooling and contracting HIV/Aids. Despite this, the children identified various resiliency factors in their lives such as grand parents, good neighbours, caring teachers and a comprehensive school programme that includes sport. A common theme across participants in this study was religion as an identifying and resiliency factor in their lives. The findings stress the need for schools to address exclusionary pressures that impact on the well-being of children in this schooling context.

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**“This mini - dissertation is dedicated to my father, Charles Edward Folkard (1930-2004) who passed away while I was editing and refining my work.”**

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## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1. 1. Introduction

The children of South Africa find themselves in a society where apartheid policy has left a legacy of severe disparities.

“Deprivation, violence, malnutrition, poor health, inferior education and discriminatory social security systems have created profound inequalities between children in different race groups and geographical areas and between genders. Rural as well as regional migration to urban centres in search of employment has led to the break up of families as well as the exacerbation of poverty in high density urban squatter settlements.”

(Robinson & Tilley: 1998:47)

I am the principal of an urban primary school situated in Merebank (a former Indian group area) in the Southern industrial basin of Durban in Kwazulu-Natal. My school is a former House of Delegates school, built for the Merebank Indian community in the mid 1960's. It began enrolling children of other race groups in limited numbers from the early 1990's, and the racial composition currently stands at: 65% Black, 34% Indian and 1% Coloured. The main feeder area is Umlazi (an African township), Merebank (an Indian suburb), Lamontville (an African township), a squatter settlement adjoining the Clairwood Racecourse and Wentworth (a Coloured area) providing the remainder of the pupils.

The total learner enrolment is 1186. The school is surrounded by large industries such as the Engen Refinery in Wentworth, the Mondi Paper Mill in Merebank, Sapref refinery in Isipingo and Bayer Chemicals and Lacsa (Illovo Sugar Refineries) are one road away from the school. Many of the parents are employed in this industrial area. The residential areas mentioned were created to provide nearby cheap labour to these industries. The children attending Southwood Primary (a pseudonym is used to protect the identity of the school), bring with them a cultural diversity reflective of South African Society and a richness of experience from their respective communities. By listening to the children it was envisaged that one would be able to find out how socio-economic factors impact on their lives, their opinions on factors influencing their progress in school, and how they can be helped in attaining their full potential as children growing up in a post apartheid South Africa. Learning does not take place only in the school setting, but also within the environments in which the children are growing up.

My research was an attempt to make sense of the lives of the children at my school, and to generate reliable knowledge to enable me to run a school that meets the needs of the learner community that it serves. Our society today is changing at a much faster rate than in the past. South Africa has a Constitution that enshrines the rights of the child, but its translation to practical solutions at grass roots level has been sadly lagging behind.

(Constitution of Republic of South Africa, 1996)

The voices of the children are both a foil and an echo of the ways in which society thinks about them, the assumptions the children make, and the consequences for both the children themselves and those who educate them.

Various questions arise about the lives of the children: how are they able to cope with what is happening in their lives; what do they perceive as limiting factors to their progress within the schooling system; what are their greatest fears that affect their well-being; what confuses them about life, and what do they consider to be factors that keep them safe. With this research, I hope to generate debate on what it means to be a young child in a particular society, and what educational services should be provided to be responsive to their needs. Our society needs children to grow with the capacity to be both independent and well adjusted.

My research thus looks at the children within the context of their families, the communities they live in and the school that they attend. As a point of departure, the study explores the social construction of childhood with the intention of producing new thoughts and fresh angles that will stimulate practice with children at primary school level. These thoughts are echoed by Lindon (1998: 72) who stated that “ Teachers, as practitioners useful to children, need to keep an open mind and look for what they can learn and use from different perspectives”

It was believed that my research will provide a platform for similar research to build upon and to provide evidence for programmes to address factors that impact on children’s lives. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (First Call for Children, Unicef New York: 1990:50) (as adopted by the General assembly of the United Nations on 29 November 1989) states that:

“Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”

The above quote is in keeping with the basis for this research whereby the children discussed their lives and needs in relation to how their education can prepare them for their adult lives. In other words, the voices of the children were listened to.

Childhood as a distinct and intrinsically important phase in human experience. Children are fully formed and complete individuals with a perspective of their own. Children are thus autonomous subjects and their parents and family members’ interests and views are no longer assumed to be identical as their own. Children are recognised as having rights of their own, including the right to protection from harm and the right to voice opinions and influence decisions in matters relating to their lives.

## **1. 2 The Social Construction of Childhood**

“Childhood is culturally and historically constructed rather than universally absolute”  
(Nunes, 1994)

The above quotation is opposite to the views held by other researchers into what constructs childhood.

According to Gittins, (1998), the child is first and foremost a transitory being that is constantly changing, growing and developing. Focused on the general state of being a

child, “Childhood” indicates an ill-defined period of time as it is defined by adults.

Children are born into society as embodied creatures. Bodily needs are then mediated, adapted and controlled by human society.

The historian, Philippe Arie’s first drew attention to the idea that childhood is socially and historically constructed rather than innate and natural.:

“In mediaeval society the idea of childhood did not exist. This is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children. It corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult.”

(Aries, 1986:125)

Linda Pollock, a later psycho historian, stated that emotional relations between children and adults are biologically given rather than socially constructed.

A similar view is reflected by Diana Gittens:

“The history of childhood has tended to concentrate on studying children in terms of child rearing, adult sentiments about children, and the role of children in families. The idea of “the child” suggests a uniform universal being that is to a great extent biologically given rather than socially constructed or differentiated.”

(Gittens, 1998:32)

Gender also plays an important role in the child’s status and treatment in society with bias being reflected towards the male child. Children do not define themselves as a social group

that may often vary, but are born into a cluster of meanings that may often vary and shift both at micro and macro level. Power relations envelop our lives at a multitude of levels. Children are born into webs of power relations as well as of discourse and narrative.

(Gittens, 1998)

She goes on to stress that the life chances of the child in all aspects depends on definitions of “childhood” which are arguably made up of discourses and narratives. Discourses and narratives in turn affect policies and behaviour and become implemented in ways that directly affect the children.

Elliot and Richards (1991) and Kieran (1992) stated that children’s views are crucial for examining the risk factors associated with the diverse ways in which disruption can affect their development.

In this study, the following research questions were explored

- ❖ What are children’s perceptions on health risks in their lives?
- ❖ What fears and concerns do they have regarding their developmental outcomes?
- ❖ What stresses occurs in their lives, that is, issues that they are aware of and think constantly of?
- ❖ What areas in their lives cause uncertainty, puzzlement, or confusion of what they know.

## **CHAPTER 2: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD**

### **2. 1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at current literature offerings on what the changes in perceptions are on childhood research over the years. What emerged in my reading is that South Africa has a long way to go in childhood research, and catering for the needs of children to fulfil the intention of its children's rights and laws, bringing our country in line with international standards.

Recent research in the United Kingdom (Bruner and Haste 1987; Trevarthen 1992) indicates that children live "up" or "down" to societal expectations and they will try to please those around them – both adults and or older children in order to become part of their social group to be valued loved and accepted. Children can therefore be seen as reactionaries to their influence of peers and elders within the family or community. This is in keeping with the old adage that people are the product of their environment and you become like the company that you keep. They can be conditioned to living out what is expected by them from their parents, peers or siblings.

The aim of my research is to provide policy makers and practitioners with assistance in defining what it is they want children to learn and why, and then to help them to evaluate whether their decisions and practices are effective:

“Schools have the power to build academic and personal resiliency in students. Even if barriers to resiliency building in students exist in many schools, individual teachers in individual classrooms can still create havens of resiliency building environments that are strongly associated with academic success.”

(Henderson & Milstein, 1996:31)

To fully comprehend what a child is thinking; one has to understand the framework for child development. You have to make sense of the child as a developing person. One has to be mindful of the child’s personal and emotional development and how it impacts on their learning. This means looking at how children learn and their behaviour in relation to external stimuli. Children also have to be looked at in a social and cultural context, that is, how they interact with their families and the broader community and how they can be helped according to their own perceptions and input:

“Most classroom teachers are concerned about the mental health of their students for at least two reasons: they know that the level of interpersonal adjustments of the student has an effect on his or her academic learning and they accept the health of the student as being important in its own right.”

(Van Dalen, D., 1962:73)

## 2. 2 Researching Children and Childhoods.

*“Within the social study of childhood a comparable questioning has taken place (Alanen, 1998) generated by the concern that children’s voices have traditionally been “muted” within the social sciences”*

(Hardman, 1973:67)

Hardman’s concern arises from the traditional societal view that children should be seen and not heard as their welfare is being looked after by competent adults. In recent years a concern internationally has been that there are few laws looking after the rights of children. Current literature emerging from various studies of children reflect a change in attitudes towards children, and the view emerging is that children are capable of making a positive impact on their own lives. Children are viewed as leading experts in their own needs by some researchers.

Since the late 1980’s, there has been a growing recognition that children and young people can make a major contribution to the adult understanding of childhood and youth. O’ Brein (1996) and Willis (1990) see children and young people as creators and social actors who are active in creating themselves in different social contexts. James and Prout (1996) suggest that there is a shift away to an emphasis on structure to that of agency where children are recognised as children in their “own right”. Children are, therefore, aware of what they want and their role in achieving their goals. The need for and adult “agent” to garner their needs and speak on their behalf has been reduced drastically or is seen as not necessary. Childhood is, thus, a negotiated process where children are active

in constructing their own social world and interpreting the meaning of that world and its significance. Myall (1996) argues that this approach accepts children as competent reporters of their own experiences, takes them seriously, putting their views at the centre of analysis, and enabling research to work for the children rather than on them with a view to influencing social change.

Nunes (1994) and James and Prout (1997) stated that:

“childhood is culturally and historically constructed rather than universal and absolute.”

The above quote relates to how childhood is constructed. South Africa places great store on its cultural diversity. Nunes (1994), James and Prout (1997) argue that childhood is a distinct and intrinsically interesting and important phase in human experience. Children are fully formed and complete individuals with perspectives of their own. They are autonomous subjects, and their parents, and family members’ interests and views are no longer to be assumed to be identical as that of the children’s own. Children are recognised as having rights of their own, including the right to protection from harm, and the right to voice opinions, and influence decisions in matters relating to their own lives.

Understanding the social construction of childhood is important in working with children. Research can produce new thoughts and fresh angles that stimulate practice with children. Teachers as practitioners useful to children need to keep an open mind and look for what they can learn and use from the different perspectives. (Lindon, 1998)

While most researchers have acknowledged that they continue to work within scientific paradigms which treat the child as a subject of research, new lines of research have opened up a place where greater emphasis is given to the children as social and cultural actors.

(Lewis & Lindsay, 2000:60)

For many children, childhood carries no special privileges. In fact, disadvantages can far outweigh advantages:

“For childhood to have a future, we must insist on their rights. While philosophers debate the feasibility of granting rights to those who are unable to exercise them, who among us would not insist that every child has the right to food, shelter, education, love? In other words, the right to childhood itself.”

(Moore, 1993:42)

There are many layers of influence on children’s experiences of schooling from the macro, structural, political and ideological through to the individual and class contexts. These layers fuse and interact to result in the individual conditions that comprise everyday classroom learning. This logic is echoed by Bronfenbrenner (1989) whom stated that the young child exists in an ecological niche and if removed from its natural setting when studied, valuable information relating tom its behaviour will be lost.

This research looks at the immediate family, the school and the immediate cultural environment (community), as well as the influence of the wider society.

A favourable model for understanding the environmental factors is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. He said that environmental influences are nested one within the other, working out from the immediate environment, through influences such as the family and school, to the wider social environments which do not include children but which affect them such as the parent's workplace.

Researchers argue that it is important and appropriate to listen to the voices of children on issues that concern them. There are important insights to be gained from children's opinions and experiences, about their schooling and social issues (race, sex, class; rights and freedoms; self-esteem and subjection).

Two complementary principles underpin this attitude:

- ❖ A belief in children's rights (including the right to be heard, to participate, to have control of their lives) and
- ❖ A belief in children's competence (to understand, to reflect, and to give accurate and appropriate responses).

Together, these beliefs imply that it is both ethical and logical to ask children what they think. Children face greater challenges these days in their normal day to day lives. They are called upon to make informed decisions, and it stands to reason that these decision making skills need to be inculcated at an early age. With the advent of a democratic Constitution in South Africa, the government is promoting a rights-driven society by targeting children to build their capacity and ensure democratic values take root at a very young age.

Davie (1996) argues that, although listening to children's wishes and feelings is an advancing trend, a residual belief still exists that adults do in fact "know best" what is in a child's best interests. Over the years, research has placed too much emphasis on the roles of adults in society and their relationships with children. The thinking was that childhood was a miniature adult phase and children, therefore, were not capable of articulating their thoughts and ideas.

### **2.3 Constructing Childhood**

Early theories were viewed merely as ideologies determined by the needs of society. Aubrey (1999) states that a fundamental principle of childhood research is that it should not be "ethnocentric", that is, it should not take for granted the dominant model or theory, and child rearing in any one culture as a measure against which to judge others. Our constructions of childhood have changed as society has become more complex or that huge differences exist among societies with different socio - cultural and economic circumstances.

Mead (1932, 1934) and Blumer (1969) saw individual identities as being constantly in the process of development, but recognised that the bulk of identity is developed in childhood and adolescence. It is developed through a child's interaction with significant others - initially the parents and family, later with peers and the broader community, and later still with the community in relationship with its broader social environment. We are all

products of our respective environments and our early lives and socialisation determine the adults that we become.

#### **2. 4 Are Children Competent to Speak on Their Own Behalf?**

According to Brooker (1998), childhood is seen as a distinct and intrinsically interesting and important phase in human experience, valued for its own unique qualities rather than for its resemblance to adulthood. Children therefore see the world in a different way to adults and are able to articulate their needs and opinions so that they are understood.

Children show a remarkable awareness of their surroundings and what they want out of life. Spencer and Flin (1990) depict children as reasonable and informative respondents. In reviewing studies which have assessed young children's ability to provide factual evidence in criminal cases, they concluded that there is every reason to believe that the youngest child can recall and describe events and situations as accurately as older witnesses. A child's competence in articulating their thoughts, opinions and intentions improves when they are given control over the content and direction of the conversation.

There has been some research undertaken on how to access the views of children. Wood and Wood (1983), found that direct questions are more likely to make children feel that they are being challenged than indirect discussions. Tizard and Hughes (1984) echoed their sentiments when their research revealed that children being questioned tend to become monosyllabic. Hughes and Grieve (1981) stated that one had to be careful in working with

children as they wish to please adults and will produce “answers” to nonsense questions in an effort to please. To overcome the previous challenges, Piaget observed that the trick was to let children talk freely, without ever checking or side tracking their utterances

(Powney and Watts, 1987)

Children’s rights and the protection thereof is one of the biggest challenges facing research into children. The Bill of Rights for children advocates the right of children to be consulted in matters that affect them and this reflects in part some notable changes to South African law. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in article 12 (Unesco:47) states that to “assure to the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely and to give children the opportunity to be heard in any proceedings affecting the child.”

Davie (1996) cited in McNaughton (2000) argues that, although listening to children’s wishes and feelings is an advancing trend, a residual belief still exists that Adults (parents and professionals) do in fact “know best” what is in a child’s interests.

France, Bendelow, and Williams, (2000) state that children and young people can make a major contribution to our understanding of childhood and youth. Children (O’Brien 1996) and young people (Willis 1990) are seen as “creators” and social actors who are active in creating themselves in different social contexts. James and Prout (1996) suggest that this is a shift away from an emphasis on structure to that of agency where children are recognised as people in their own right.

Childhood is thus a negotiated process where children are capable of constructing their own worlds, and can reflect upon and understand its meaning and significance to their own personal lives.

France et al., (2000) feels that the researcher of children must develop methods that are engaging and challenging to provide opportunities for children to present their own views and explore the complexity of issues under examination.

## **2. 5 Empirical Studies Drawing on Children's Voices in South Africa.**

There are recent studies in South Africa that have explored the lives of children. Two of these studies are by Barbarin and Richter (2001) and HSRC/Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005)

Barbarin et al., (2001) in their analysis of the Birth to Ten Research Project, carried out in South Africa since the release of Nelson Mandela, stated that the family exerts an important influence over child development. The Birth to Ten Project focused on the lives of children born when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison and it traces their lives as they grow to mirror of the social changes in South Africa.

They maintained that the family exists within a matrix of social forces that shapes family organization, values and functioning:

“Family and community life are being reconfigured by a host of demographic and social transformation that include: urbanization, modernity, a weakening of traditional gender roles, the HIV/Aids pandemic, racial inequality, poverty, black political empowerment and community violence.”

(Barbarin & Richter, 2001: 12)

The aforementioned factors affecting children in South Africa affects the lives of South African children by altering the assumptions about the meaning of childhood, and sharpening sensitivities to children’s developmental rights and needs. The prospects for healthy development of children depends greatly on the strains and challenges of social transformation, inequality, violence and securing material need.

South Africa is already on of the world’s most urban societies, with over 54 percent of its population resident in metropolitan areas, and its population is moving towards the cities in increasing numbers. The close proximity to Southwood Primary School to large industries south of Durban, places it in a situation where learners live close by because their parents work in the surrounding industries. Urban living brings with it many threats to health, including pulmonary diseases from smoke and pollution. Families are confronted with the conflicting demands and solutions proposed by a modern world, that is, the world of education and work, the world of urbanization and gender equality and a world with growing sensitivity to the needs ad rights of children. (Babarin et al., 2001).

Urbanization effects family life in that cultural values have to be realigned and gender roles changed when women go out to work. The women stand a greater chance of being employed because they are viewed as amenable and willing to work for less money. The expansion in women's work, both outside the home away from the domain of children, as well as inside the home as single parents, raises the burden on women, leaves them with less energy, and makes it increasingly difficult for them to monitor and nurture their children's development as effectively as possible. (Babarin et al., 2001)

The researchers for the Nelson Mandela Foundation (HSRC/ Mandela Foundation: 2005) focused on building new conversations around complicated issues of schooling and development facing the community in which the research was conducted.

The research was carried out among rural communities using community researchers who engaged the participants in conversation on education and development within their communities. It was presented as a number of conversations and the conclusion were drawn from the various conversations.

They argue that simple dialogue, if driven by participatory and empowering principles, will seed change in those rural communities studied. During the time of the process, the community researchers saw changes in relationships, as well as a shift to community action rather than relying on outside solutions. The Community Reference Group established, continued as a forum for discussion of school development within leadership structures traditionally operating outside the sphere of education. HSRC/ Mandela Foundation (2005)

The voices of the above community researched, led to structures being formed for community action and the breaking open of silences such as those surrounding HIV/Aids. This illustrates the power of articulation by people or children and the positive outcomes generated by interpersonal interaction.

Both studies, commissioned by the Nelson Mandela foundation are forerunners to dramatic and far reaching policy changes necessary in the fledgling democracy of South Africa. These policies will guide the necessary changes to our society that will enable all South African citizens to enjoy life to its fullest.

My study contributes to the above body of research by adding the voices of urban children living in an industrial metropolitan area. Urban schools can improve the quality of their children's lives by implementing policies and strategies to meet the needs of the children as articulated by them.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.**

### **3. 1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to set out the research methodology employed and the design of my study. The qualitative research method I used lends itself to the interpersonal approach needed to gain the confidence of the participants and allow them to contribute their true opinions and feelings. The various methods of obtaining data used were necessary to confirm and complement what the children were saying.

### **3. 2 Research Approach**

This is a qualitative study. MacNaughton (2000) states that research in general is about exploring relationships between events, seeking explanations why things happen, comparing approaches to practice, predicting events, and building new understandings about policy and practice. The qualitative approach was used to encourage complexity and diversity in the research data. The children I worked with came from diverse backgrounds, reflecting a microcosm of South African society. Mouly (1986) cited in Cohen (1994) states that research in general is a process that is aimed at the exploration of problems by means of a systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

Qualitative research studies try to understand human behaviour by observing and communicating with people, by questioning and surveying people's opinions and attitudes,

and analysing documents such as textbooks, reports and diaries. It allows the researcher to view the social world in the same way as the subjects that the researcher is studying. It also aims to understand the meaning of an experience.

(Miles & Huberman, 1994)

I worked with children from grade 5 that is those in the age group of 9 to 11 years old. They were quite articulate in putting their concerns across, and I found their input contrasted greatly with the early opinion of researchers (Oakley, 1998) that children can only express their needs through the voices of adults.

As my research unfolds, you will see that these children are in touch with what is happening around them and they have informed opinions that belie early research conclusions that children are not yet adults, and as such their status and should take cognisance of this fact. The children were able to articulate their opinions on what is going on around them to the extent that they challenged each other's views on what the government was doing about crime and the reasons why some people turn to crime.

In the present study, the aim was to gain an understanding of the life experiences of a group of grade five learners in a particular social context. The qualitative approach by its very structure allowed the respondents to freely express themselves and withdraw a vast amount of information covering a wide variety of concerns by the learners. From qualitative research, one can plot an individual's behaviour by locating the meanings and

interpretations that people place on events, relationships and institutions in the context in which they occur.

Qualitative research is also described as interpretive (Cohen and Manion, 1994). It tries to discover, and understand and explain behaviours, attitudes and opinions. It interprets and analyses other's interpretations in the hope that the researcher will be able to understand behaviours in the context in which they occur, and find patterns of behaviour that will be revealing. Cohen and Manion feel that qualitative research is strong on validity because theories and ideas have been examined in living cultures. This means that one can learn from another's experience, and that vicarious learning saves time and allows for interventions to be made to enhance a specific outcome.

In direct encounter situations such as interviews, or conversations, which occur in qualitative research, it is believed that people are more likely to disclose aspects of their lives, feelings, thoughts and opinions. There are limitations to this method as mentioned earlier where the interviewer can be over enthusiastic and influence the answers from respondents.

Arksey and Knight (1999) stated that the interviewer should ask open - ended questions, but be mindful that they do not necessarily yield data that can be put into numerical form. Qualitative interviews are best suited for childhood research in that the researcher can listen to the participants' accounts of their behaviours, beliefs feelings and actions.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used. Semi-structured interviews fill the gap between structured and unstructured interviews providing versatility: (Wellman & Kruger, 2001).

Triangulation was used, which is the use of different methods to cross check information gleaned, is a means to address some of the problems inherent to the qualitative research approach. Merriam (1988) argued that qualitative research encourages flexibility in its questions that increases understanding by fully exposing a variety of interpretations of the social world.

### **3. 3 Researching Children: Dealing With Ethical Issues**

Coady (1996) cited in MacNaughton (2000) stated that children are heavily represented among victims of research, as are other powerless groups such as prisoners, the mentally disabled and those living in poverty. MacNaughton (2000) explains that there is a history of research littered with examples of harm caused by researchers to their subjects. To address concerns of subjects being harmed, the Nuremburg Code governing research was promulgated and has been incorporated into many codes governing research. MacNaughton (2000).

Arising from this concern was that voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. Before I approached the children to assist me as subjects of my research, I had to obtain the consent of their parents. I submitted a brief outline of the methodology I was to use to enable them to make an informed decision when giving consent. Permission was also

sought from the children themselves and they were asked to co-sign the agreement with their parents if they were willing to take part in the research.

The children were also told what would take place and the research explained. They were given the choice to withdraw at any time or not take part if they felt pressured or uncomfortable with the process. Pictures and diagrams were used in explaining the research to the children to convey the nature of the research.

Mahon and Glenning (1996) stated that when interviewing children, it is important that children understand the questions asked of them and that researchers understand what children are saying, that the children are understood as well as understanding. The children were assured that confidentiality about themselves and their families was to be maintained. Because of the diversity of the target group, the research and the process was explained in isiZulu to those children approached to participate. Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings between the researcher and the participants. This was to be avoided at all cost.

Power relationships confine children to subordinate roles in their societies. (Morrow and Richards, 1996) warn that researchers may find themselves the recipients of sensitive information about which difficult decisions needs to be made. Divedi (1996) explains that the sensitive researcher will plan his/ her questioning to be appropriate and acceptable for her respondents, bearing in mind the participants' emotional and social maturity and their family background.

Permission was first obtained from the Department of Education to conduct the research among the grade five children. A letter was then sent to the initial thirty five children requesting permission from the parents and guardians to work with the children. The scope of the research and methodology to be employed was explained in the letter requesting permission to work with the learners. Eight of the parents asked that their children not take part as they were concerned that the children may be prejudiced in some way or the other.

Where permission was granted, those children were then called to a meeting and the process of the research explained to them. They were then told that they can withdraw at any time and they need not answer anything that made them uncomfortable. Once they were in agreement of what was to be done at this stage, they were asked to re- affirm their permission, and confirm their willingness to participate, and they were assured that all information given by them will be treated in the strictest of confidence. It was further explained to the children that when the research is written up, their names will not be mentioned, assuring their anonymity.

Any session that the researcher senses that is causing distress of any kind to the participant must be terminated and every session concluded with debriefing, reassurance, thanks, praise or whatever appropriate to sustain the self esteem of the individual child. Cohen and Manion (1994 :353) point out that consent involves giving children not only a “credible and meaningful explanation of the research intentions,” but also a real and legitimate opportunity to say that they do not want to take part.

Where children became upset, or emotional when speaking, they were allowed time to recover. A debriefing between me and the participants was done after each session, and where a child became emotional, a one on one debriefing was done.

### **3. 4 Context of Study**

Southwood Primary falls in the Durban South industrial basin. It is plagued by pollution from the Durban International Airport, a paper mill, two large oil refineries and chemical manufacturing companies. The area in which the school falls and the surrounding areas that feed learners to the school were created during the apartheid years to supply the industries with localised cheap labour.

The largest number of pupils (64%) comes from Umlazi and Lamontville outside the Merebank area which was the original community for which the school was built. A former Indian school, Southwood Primary's learner ratio has changed making Black learner's the majority within the school. Despite being the majority, the language of teaching and learning is still English with Afrikaans as the second language. isiZulu is taught as an additional language at conversation level only. The teaching corps is still Indian in the school with a Coloured principal and a single Black isiZulu teacher.

The gender ratio on the staff is twenty two females to six males with four females and two males in management. The school fees are set at R375-00 per annum and the average percentage of parents granted exemption from school fees is thirty percent.

The majority of homes in all the areas feeding the school were constructed by the municipality with few homeowners building their own homes. The council homes in Merebank have been altered with large additions made while the homes in Wentworth, Umlazi and Lamontville are still recognisable as council built homes.

### **3. 5 Participants in the Study**

Thirty two children were chosen from a grade five class group. The learners' ages ranged from ten to twelve years old. Learners were selected at random from the class register. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure even spread between learners from the Indian, Black and Coloured communities.

The eventual group totalled twenty seven with three Coloured children, ten Indian children and fourteen Black children. The Black group was further refined to include four children from the nearby Racecourse squatter camp. The final group chosen was similar to the demographics of the school.

Interviews were conducted in English with isiZulu translations being done by those children who have a good command of both languages. When an exercise was done, it was also explained in isiZulu to the children. At times questions had to be modified and translated so that all children had the same understanding of what was required.

### 3. 6 Research Techniques

Methods of eliciting information from the children included questionnaires, drawing and labelling of drawings, group interviews or focus groups, mind mapping, drawing of cultural symbols, interviews and write and draw exercises.

The questionnaires used were general to elicit background information. Where the participants answered specific questions such as what they perceived to be risky behaviour, they were asked to illustrate their answers and label the illustrations to assist me in understanding their answers.

See appendix (picture of smoking)

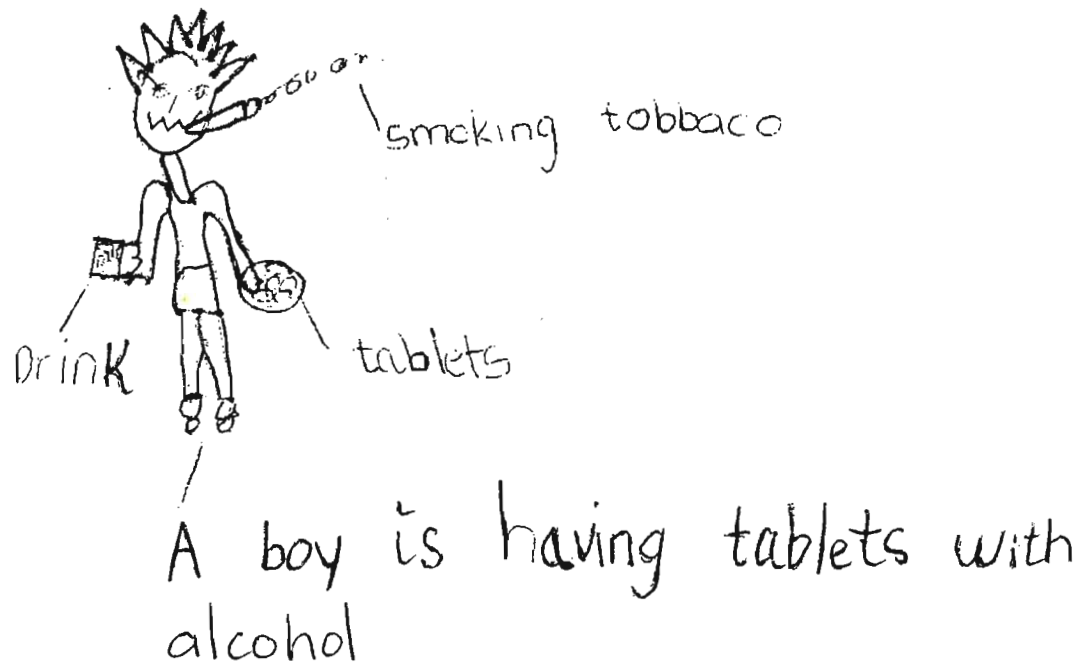
The questionnaires were designed to collect aggregate data on the learner's beliefs about health, lifestyle and risk taking. They were constructed so that the learners can read them while they had a strong emphasis on being "open - ended" thereby encouraging the learners to define the issues for themselves.

See appendix 2 (copy of questionnaire)

A pilot study was done by giving five learners in the same age group similar questions used in the study to test their effectiveness in eliciting the desired responses. Piloting measures the interview questions to see whether they measure what they intend to measure. This was done with a separate group to measure the effectiveness of the questions and whether they would elicit the desired responses. This control group was not part of the main group of participants. From the initial thirty two children three children dropped out of the study due to absence or their parents being concerned about their participation.

The draw and write technique was used to encourage children to report on their own personal experiences. This method involves asking the children to draw a response to a question and then they write a short explanation on what is happening and who is involved.

Illustration 1: A Child's depiction of Risky Behaviour



Participant "SL" Umlazi, 10 years old

Focus group interviews were used to generate discussion among the children giving them a chance to express their views and opinions. When a topic relevant to the study was raised, for example, the prevalent crime in the communities being a stress factor in their lives, the children were asked what can be done to reduce crime or what made them feel safe despite the high amount of crime in their communities. Their solutions to the current wave of crime ranged from stricter penal measures by the government to educating children so they have other choices in life rather than turning to crime. The use of education to combat crime and provide a lasting solution is indicative of the thought the children put into their responses.

Illustration 2: A Depiction of Religion as a Resiliency Factor



Participant "BG" Umlazi, 11 years old

The illustrations above show that drawings are a good way to get children to express themselves and elicit information at the same time.

Focus groups are a good method of gaining a group's views about particular issues. Each group consisted of six learners composed of members from the different communities, which is three blacks, two Indians and a Coloured. The children were asked to talk about what stressors existed in their lives, their fears for the future, those resiliency building

factors such as culture, religion, the family unit and friends. They were also asked to discuss what they would like to see in the future at school or within their communities.

The focus group and individual interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed. While the interviews were taking place, I made notes of individual reactions and nuances in the conversation so that a follow up can be done where a participant wanted to say more, but was side tracked or intimidated by another participant. Welman and Kruger (2001) encourage note taking but warn that it should not inhibit the spontaneous behaviour of the participants.

Where a child wanted to talk, but felt intimidated by the group, they were allowed to talk to me on a one to one basis. This method was used where the child felt that the information he was offering was sensitive and could get him into trouble. The child spoke about a tavern next to his home and the underage drinking and violence that takes place there. The owner of the tavern's children attend the same school and he(the owner ) is known for being violent to his wife and children. The child did not want to speak in front of the other children in case something was carried back to his neighbour and he got into trouble.

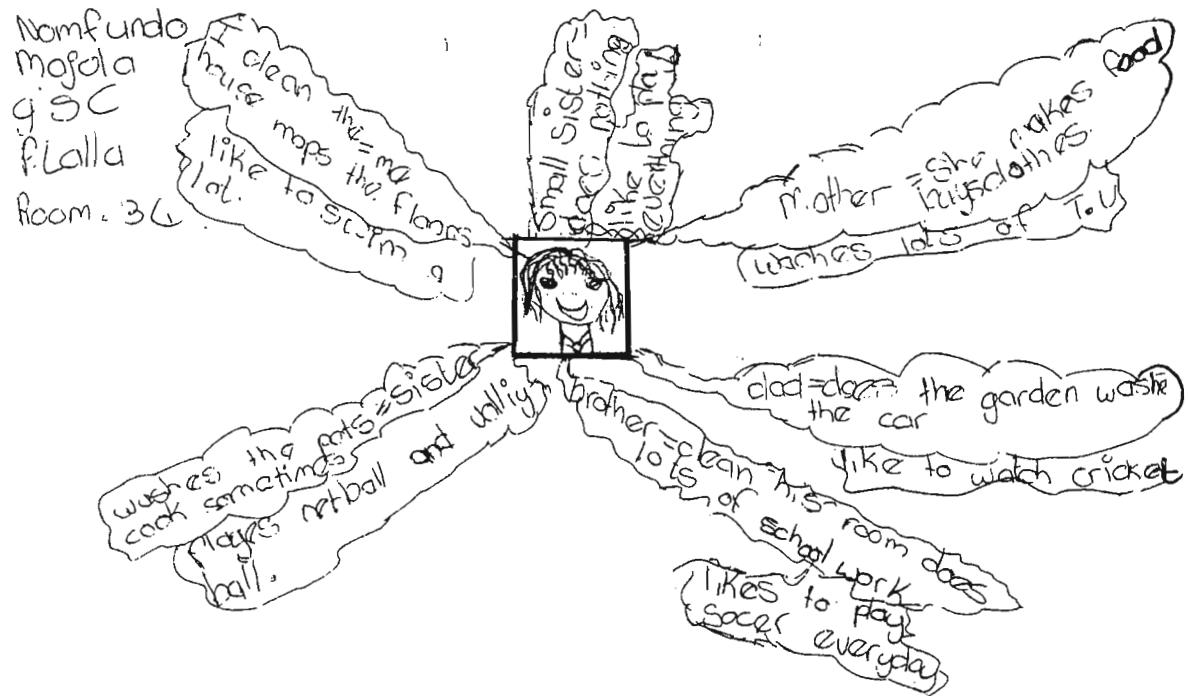
Issues discussed by the groups were topical such as the need for more effective crime fighting, or burning issues such as racial bias by teachers within the school. The issues explored included what makes them feel safe within their communities, what stressors were present within their lives, what were their fears and worries for the future and things that they wished to learn more about. The learners were told that their contributions would help

the school to get a better understanding of what their needs are, and it would help shape the school's policies around health, education and the access to information. The focus groups also allowed the children to think aloud and bring their thoughts to the fore.

Lewis(1992), James (1993) and Morrow and Richards (1996) argue that group discussions, when children have the support of their peers diffuse the normal adult – child power relationship. The child is relating to their peers whom they are more comfortable with and the adult researcher relegated to observer status.

Mind mapping was used to enable the learner to represent graphically their thoughts by brainstorming and writing down whatever came to their minds on the subject being discussed. For example when asked to illustrate who they are, a learner placed himself (ME) in the centre and drew sub lists around himself depicting his culture, sports, academics, recreation and family to show what he constantly thinks about.

Illustration 3: A Mind Map illustrating what is important to a child.

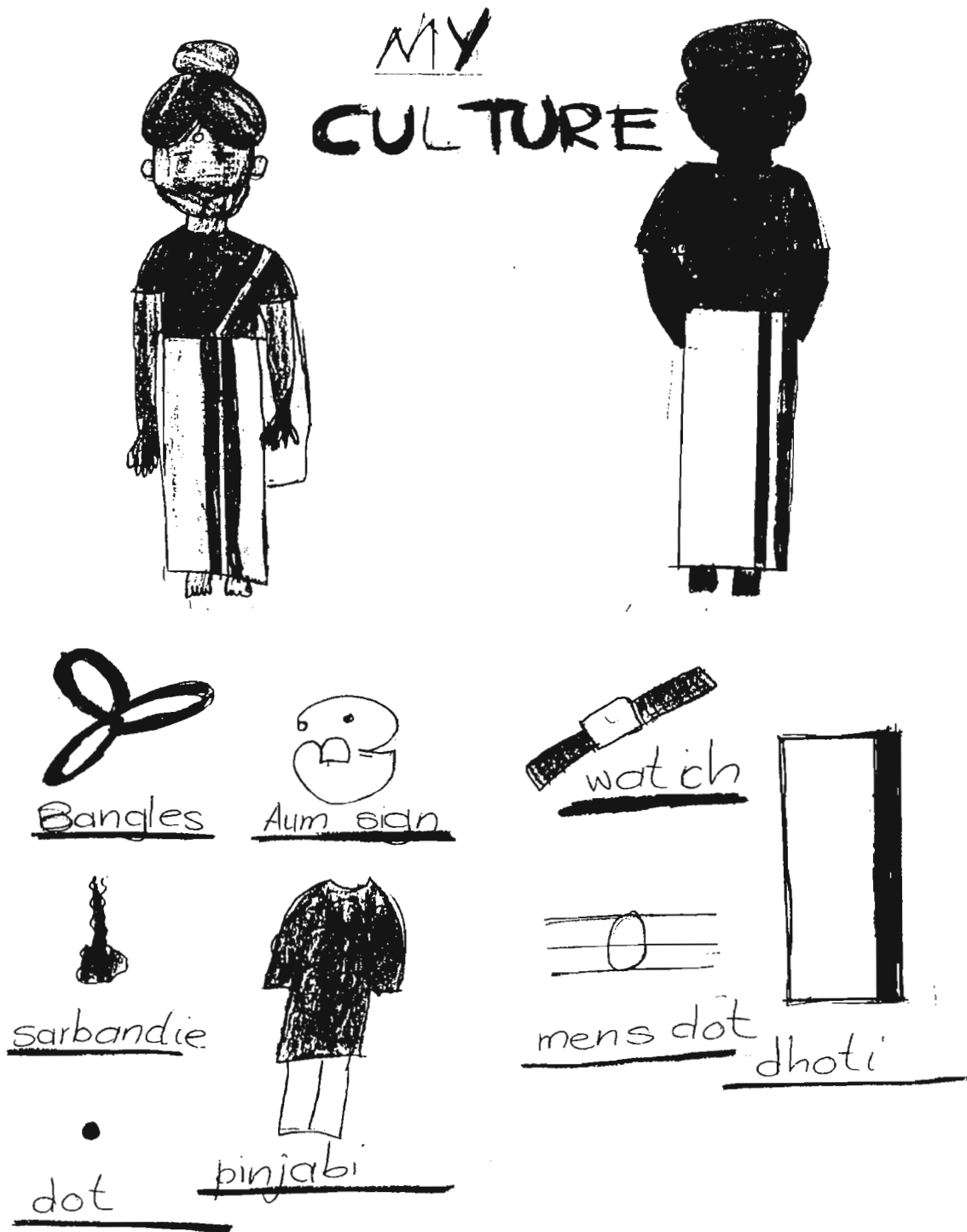


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Participant "AM" Umlazi, 10 Years old

Following on the common answers that culture and religion played an important part in their lives, the children were asked to draw pictures depicting their culture and label them. The interpretation of cultural symbols shows that culture is very important to the learner. Eighty percent of the learners interpreted the exercise on culture as an illustration of their religion and lifestyle.

Illustration 4: A Depiction of how Culture is a resiliency factor in their lives.



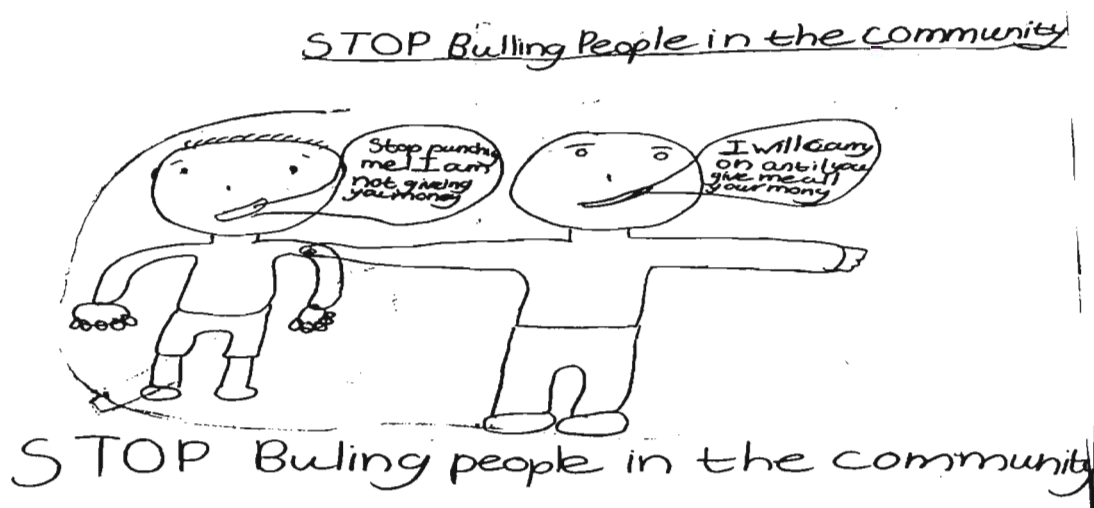
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Participant "KC", Merebank, 10 Years old

Triangulation (the use of more than one method of information gathering) was used to gather information. Children's evidence like all interview data, benefits from triangulation with other evidence, normally from informal or systematic observation of from interviews with others (peers, parents or professionals). The use of more than one method for information gathering was necessary to enable the responses to be free and unencumbered by leading questions. This method also aids the researcher in the understanding of data collected and its interpretation.

The draw and write exercise entailed the children drawing a response to a question under consideration, and then writing a short explanation of what is happening and who is involved. The children were asked to complete a "write and draw" exercise where they were asked to draw someone taking a "risk" or doing something "risky". Once drawn, they asked to label it, outlining what the risk was, why it was risky and if they would take the risk.

Illustration 5: A Depiction of a Stress Factor at School



Participant "SW" Umlazi 10 Years old

As illustrated by the multiple methods employed above, it paid off in the variety of answers gained and the diversity of information received enable every child to make a contribution to the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.**

### **4. 1 Introduction**

This chapter will present a cross section of data collected directly from the children to illustrate the depth and vast area covered by the research. The findings will be presented according to the research questions and will cut across the methods used to obtain the data. Findings will be presented in a series of arguments to illustrate that children have their own ideas on what is happening around them. The questions arising from the children can be grouped in themes such as:

- ❖ What are the vulnerabilities in their lives?
- ❖ What resiliency building factors prevail in their lives?
- ❖ What support systems can they count on?
- ❖ What questions must the school and community ask themselves to cater for the needs of the children?

### **4.2. What are the vulnerabilities in their lives?**

The children's responses revealed that the core cause of fear is crime and its associated problems and consequences. The children were made aware of the incidents of crime by the media, their parents and what they observe within their community. Their reaction to crime differed from community to community and from culture to culture. The reasons for the prevalent crime in their communities was seen as people not being raised correctly by their parents, to an ineffective government and police force, and to life's necessity to provide food for one's family. The abolition of corporal punishment from schools is also seen as a

contributing factor to the rise in crime. Crime affects all parts of society, both victims and perpetrators alike. Fear in the children's lives was brought about by crime, abuse, "muti"-killings, alcohol and drug taking, exploitation of children, gender inequality, aids and unemployment.

*"There is a window in front of our house. Whenever someone went past our window, they would see our video and television. So one day the man decided to steal it. My father asked him about our video machine. He said it was in Johannesburg. His friend wanted it. Some people are rich, just greedy. They take what they want."*

(Participant, "SG", 10 years)

Stealing, rape and robbery were highlighted as fears experienced by the children. Other crimes experienced in the community involved drugs and alcohol that disrupts their lives and the community. They are afraid to leave their homes and go out at day or night in case they become victims of crime. It emerges that those areas where children in the study come from experience a high level of crime. Seventeen out of twenty six children (65%) expressed their disappointment in the police and South African Government in the handling of crime in their community.

*"There is stealing in our community. People are jumping over the fence and stealing our possessions. People tried to steal twice at my neighbour's house. We are scared to leave our doors open in case someone jumps the fence, comes inside and tries to kill us. We are absolutely scared. There are lots of people being killed*

*and killing. We are even scared to sit outside and take a walk to our shop. Crime in Merebank is bad. People's clothes go missing from the line 12 o' clock in the day"*

(Participant, "NN", 9years old.)

*"The crime- people are breaking into homes and they are stealing and murdering others. People do not feel safe in their own homes due to burglaries and hijacking. Rape is another factor that makes me scared. In today's times, rape in our communities is becoming so often. Teenagers are influenced by alcohol and drugs are also involved in these crimes. It is frightening to know that people you know of can be victims of crime."*

(Participant "KG" Isipingo 10 years old)

*"(I worry about) the increasing rate of crime at home, at school, in my community and everywhere. The high crime rate has resulted in the decline in tourism. This results in a lack of foreign currency. Crime is due to the lack of employment. The crime has increased (due to) insufficient co-operation of the government."*

Participant "SA", Merebank, 9 years old

Six out of twenty seven children highlighted crimes within the school such as bullying, fighting and stealing as a problem. Seven learners felt that children who begin stealing at school go on to commit other crimes later on in life. The learners felt that the "good children" were definitely the victims and their freedom has been curtailed by crime. The children offered solutions to combat crime that ranged from education of children against crime to harsher penal measures.

Bullying that involved the taking of lunches, sweets and demanding money was reported by the Indian children. The Black children reported bullying in the form of being made to pick up papers by the prefects and being reported to the teachers for very minor things.

The children differed in their reasons why people turned to crime. A participant felt that people are motivated by laziness and greed to steal rather than out of a need to survive. Taking away corporal punishment has also contributed to the increase in crime because some children are not afraid of the teachers now that they cannot administer corporal punishment.

On the flipside of the crime coin, the children felt crime can be beaten in a variety of ways. Besides harsher treatment of criminals, crime can also be combated by religious organisations which teach people to live good lives:

*“Having religious organization (sic) to pray and combat bad habits, and crime in our community, which makes me feel safe and good”*

(Participant, “KC” 10 years old.)

Woman, especially mothers are focal points in the lives of the children, and their well-being is of paramount importance to the children. The children are concerned by the lack of protection women get and their abuse at the hands of grown children and spouses.

Simphiwe, 12 felt that because the father was the only one working in the house, he should be allowed all the say in the running of the home, and the mother should do as she was told or else it would lead to trouble in the home. The findings revealed that the children have a

keen sense of fairness and three children felt aggrieved that they were unable to influence the balance of power within the home.

*“A woman was raped at 5 o’ clock in the afternoon. I am worried about the woman in case she gets Aids. All rapists should be locked up. Woman should be treated equal to men because all humans have rights. Men treat woman as slaves when they are drunk. They have too much power over women.”*

(Participant “T”, 11 years old)

A fear strong among the black children is the fear of falling victim to “muti” or ritual killings. *“The girl was five years old when her father took her. She asked where they were going and he said that they were going somewhere. The father cut off her neck. When the mother asked where the girl was the father said she was playing outside. Her head was found in a bag and the body up a tree. Would you do something like that to your child? I would never do that to my child. The father went outside and shot himself in the head. I would not do that to my child. I felt very bad. If that happened to me I don’t know what I would have done”*

(Participant “TD”)

When asked for the source of the above story, the girl talking about it said it was in the newspaper and happened near where she stays. According to the child, the community spoke about it for a long time, trying to figure out why such a thing happened.

Drug use and addiction generated a lot of debate among the children because of its topicality and link to other crimes and problems within the community. Drugs are a problem within all the areas where the children live. Four of the children (15%) felt there

was a definite link between smoking cigarettes and smoking “dagga” (cannabis). People start on cigarettes and graduate to dagga then on to stronger drugs. Drug taking has a negative impact on family life:

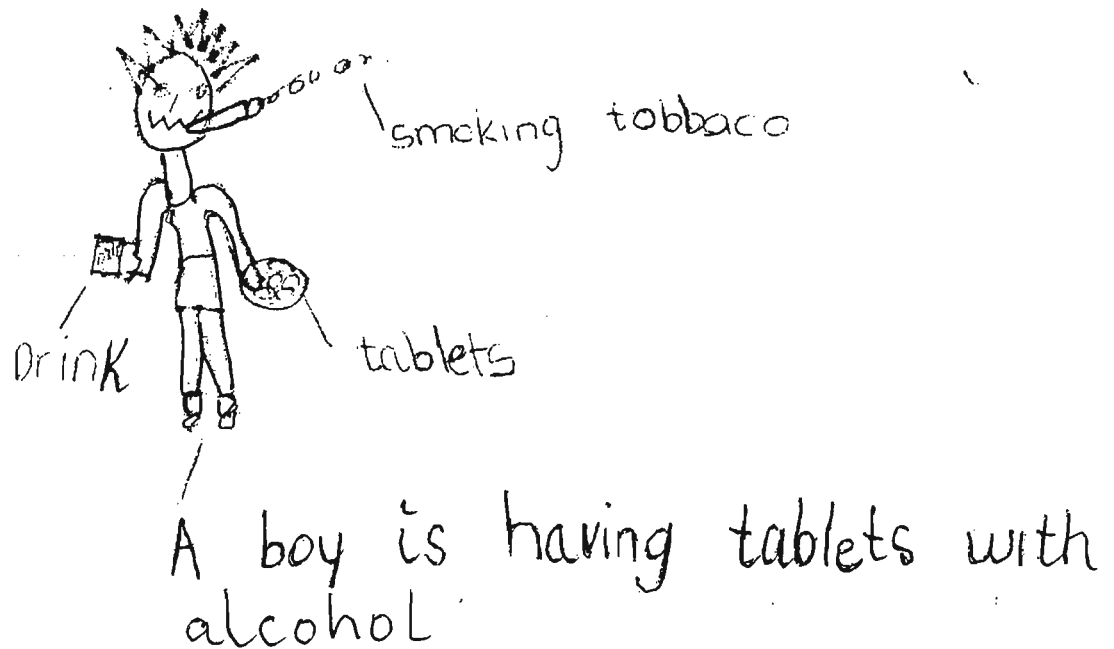
*“My brother was caught smoking at school. We told my aunty that the principal caught him smoking and we saw him smoking too. He carried on smoking. Now he smokes leaves. He smokes all of those other things now. He does not live at home anymore. They took him away. I feel very sad. I did warn him before he started smoking, that he must not smoke with them. Now he is very thin. He is not growing, he is short and he left school.”*

(Participant, “SW”, 11 years old)

*“When children smoke they act like big shots. I think that is wrong. Children should not act like that, they should act their age. There is a time for everything. I think cigarettes should be banned, because it is very bad for small children. They should not smoke if they are under the age of eighteen. Children get asthma when they are small. My father used to smoke next to me and I run away. He says come, come, it won't do anything to you.”*

(Participant, “NR” Merebank, 10 Years old)

Illustration 6: Depicts a child Abuse- Underage drinking and smoking.



The children were very aware of their rights and expressed strong opinions on the violation of children's rights. Although the children spoken to were at school, they were aware that there were children within their communities who were denied access to schools and made to work to help their parents. This problem of child labour cut across the boundaries of the different communities from which the children came. Four of the children from Merebank were more vocal in condemning the practice of allowing children to work. Children from Umlazi said that they would work if they had to, to help out in the home if there was no income, and they were struggling. The following views expressed illustrate the diversity of opinions:

*“Child abuse is a very bad thing. Adults abuse children and make them work when they do not have to. Children have a right to work at a certain age only.”*

(Participant, “RT” Merebank, 10 years)

*“What would you do if you were poor and had to work early? Would you like to be locked up in jail?”*

(Participant, ZG” Umlazi, 11 years)

*“The law is set by the government saying children can only work at a certain age. How would you feel if you worked in a dangerous place?”*

(Participant, “NG” Merebank, 10 Years)

*“People send children to work in dangerous places and a child can get hurt very bad. Children have to work when they are eighteen years or in their teens. Police should take note of this and parents should be locked up if they did this. My father or mother should go out and work, not the children. If they need money they should get it themselves.”*

(Participant, “VP” Merebank 10 Years)

Violence was linked to crimes and four of the children felt that people resort to violence too quickly rather than talking problems out. The proliferation of guns and the influence of television and films were brought up as reasons why people were aggressive. Sixteen of the children felt that guns and violence had a direct impact on their lives. Pictures relating to stress in their lives also depicted scenes of violence where guns were used. (See annexure).

Issues of violence also spilled over into the school, and they were afraid of being bullied.

*“They talk about the movies that they watch and how they like it. They act the violence, then try the tricks and do the bad things. The children next to my house, their parents make them watch anything, any movies and their parents own a bar. It’s in the house. So when we are sleeping they fight all the time. So once in an incident, the one boy stabbed another boy opposite the house. He stabbed a man and another stabbed him.*

(Participant, “TP” Merebank, 10 years old.)

*“When a lot of people have guns they bully people. They know nobody will do anything to them, because they will just shoot them. The people usually carry guns and knives. They think that they are big people when they carry guns.”*

(Participant, “SL” Umlazi, 10 years old.)

Corporal punishment was identified as a form of violence against learners within the school. Although corporal punishment has been outlawed within our schools, the information given by the children showed that it is still being applied by some teachers. The children were split in their views on corporal punishment even though seventeen of them were sure that it was not allowed in our schools.

The following participant felt that corporal punishment could be beneficial if it teaches you right from wrong and if the teacher administering it explains why before administering it.

*“All teachers hit us for a reason; we are naughty, back chat or use vulgar language”*

(Participant, Girl, “TN” Umlazi, 10 years old)

*“The thing that confuses me at school is why did they take away corporal punishment?”*

(Participant, Girl, “KC” Merebank, 10 years old)

*“I feel very bad when my teacher hit me, as the other children will see and laugh at me. I feel embarrassed. There is a good reason if a teacher should hit us. If we trouble a teacher she has a right. If our parents know we make mischief, they should also give the teacher a right to do this.”*

(Participant, Boy “VS” Merebank, 9 years old)

A respondent felt that corporal punishment was not applied equally according to race, and is humiliating when applied in front of the class. This information is in keeping with a belief that corporal punishment is a power issue, and is meant to subjugate rather than discipline. Corporal punishment is thus not applied judiciously to both boys and girls or to the different races within the classroom.

*“I was sitting with the other boys and they said I was laughing and I was not and the teacher hit me. Teachers should not hit children, only if the parents give permission to do this. Sometimes my teacher is raw in the class; only the African boys get hidings. Indian girls and African girls do not get hidings. Indian children talk lies to their teachers. They talk loud and swear, that is why their names get written in the defaulter’s book.”* (Participant, Boy, “TG” Umlazi, 11 years old)

Another issue raised by the children was child abuse.

*“Child abuse is very bad. People that abuse children should be locked up in jail and kept for life because they will carry on abusing the children. They just want to hurt little children.”*

(Participant “AN” Merebank 9 years.)

A respondent touched on the issue of abuse being much broader than just physical child abuse.

*“My name is R\* and I think that child abuse is a very bad thing because adults abuse children and make them work when they do not have to. Children have a right to work when they are a certain age and men rape little girls and also baby boys. Women abuse is not the only abuse. There is also male abuse”*

(Participant “RS” Merebank, 10 years)

Child abuse is seen as a violation of children’s rights, and it does not stop only at children but in some house holds the elderly are also abused. The children were very aware of their rights and are sensitive to their treatment at the hands of family members or parents. They showed a keen sense of what is right and what is inappropriate.

*“Sometimes I think my granny will die and she will leave me alone with my sisters and father and stepmother. I don’t like her because she does things that I don’t like when my father is not at home. I try to tell my father but I am afraid. I know that I don’t have a mother, but she must not treat me as a dog. My cousins hit me because they are older than me. My father doesn’t hit me anymore and my granny.*

*It's very bad. I even cry in my room thinking what I must do. Must I call the police or Child line?"*

(Participant "AM" Umlazi, 11 years old)

The issue of abuse was tied into gender bias. Gender stereotyping begins at home and some parents reinforce inequality. The girls felt that they are made aware that they are different from the boys from an early age. Both boys and girls felt that children should be taught from an early age to treat other people the same regardless whether they are male or female. A gender regime is a description or concept of the gender relations within an institution. It describes the balance of power that exists within the institution. Morrell, R. (1994) stated that schools have their own specific gender regimes.

A gender regime can be repressive, supportive or liberatory

*"Some boys are rude to girls. The boys do something to the girls. Some girls are abused at home. The boys are treated better than the girls. The girls are treated badly, because they are hit by the boys. The boys are not treated equally. Girls are treated badly because boys don't do anything. Some boys hit the girls, rape the girls and do anything to the girls. Girls do everything in the house and still get abused. The fathers and boys in the house let the girls do everything and still abuse them."*

(Participant "NM" Umlazi, 10 years old)

The children were also concerned about HIV / Aids in the community and their families. The children spoke openly and freely, expressing their views about HIV /Aids. HIV / Aids is very topical among the respective communities and a number of families were affected or knew of people who were affected by Aids.

*“My father told me that he knew that my mother had Aids because he had a blood test. My sister and I have different fathers. My father has three children. My mother has two children. Mandisa and I (sic). I think she got Aids like that.”*

(Participant “AM” Umlazi, 11 years old)

*“The thing that confuses me about our community is why people, so many people are infected with Aids”*

(Participant “NN” Merebank 11 years old)

*“I’d like to learn more about HIV/Aids because it is a very big disease in my country South Africa. I want to learn more because I don’t want to get the disease and everybody else in my country. I don’t want to get confused when it comes to0 this disease HIV/AIDS.”*

(Participant “SW” Umlazi, 11 years old)

A participant was concerned about adults not telling children the truth. She felt that she would have dealt better with her mother’s death if it was explained to her rather than have her find out from gossip.

*“My mother had Aids. She died when I was four years old, so they did not tell me what was happened. She was in hospital. They just picked her up and she died at home. I was staying with my father. When I came back to my mother’s house, they*

*said she went to Kwa Mashu and I believed it. So then there was a family member and they told me that my mother died. I wish the adults can tell us the truth.”*

Participant, “TK” Umlazi 12 Years old

Other issues causing fear among the children include the general pollution in the area and job losses among their parents.

*“Meetings with the community were held about the pollution. They dump the dirt and they put it on the side by the train and the train smashes it up leaving the dirt. They then take it far and burn it”*

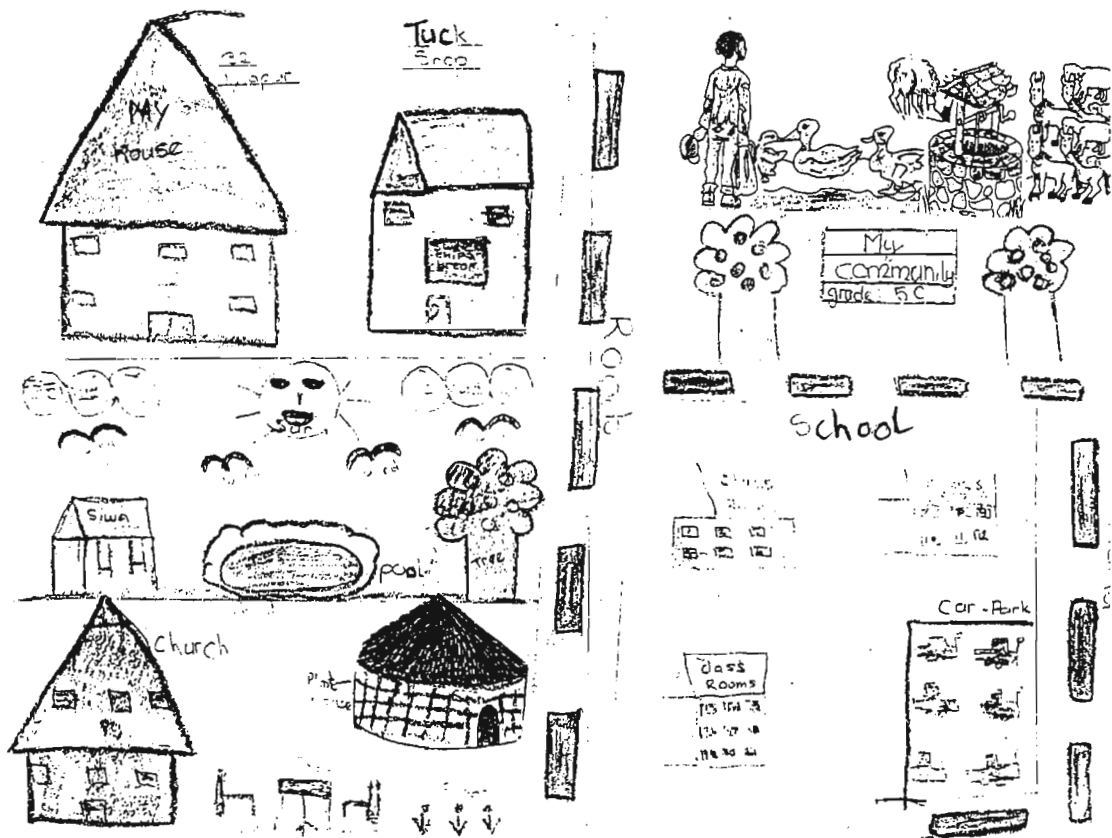
Participant “VN” Merebank 10 years old

They showed a good understanding of retrenchments and a major fear was that if their parents lose their jobs and are unsuccessful in finding a replacement job, it will affect their lives and schooling. The rise in the cost of schooling was also a concern of two of the respondents.

*“Another thing that is worrying me is the fact that I have dreams for the future and because of the way the price of education is going up. I hope and pray that I can achieve all my goals”*

(Participant “SA” Merebank, 11 years old)

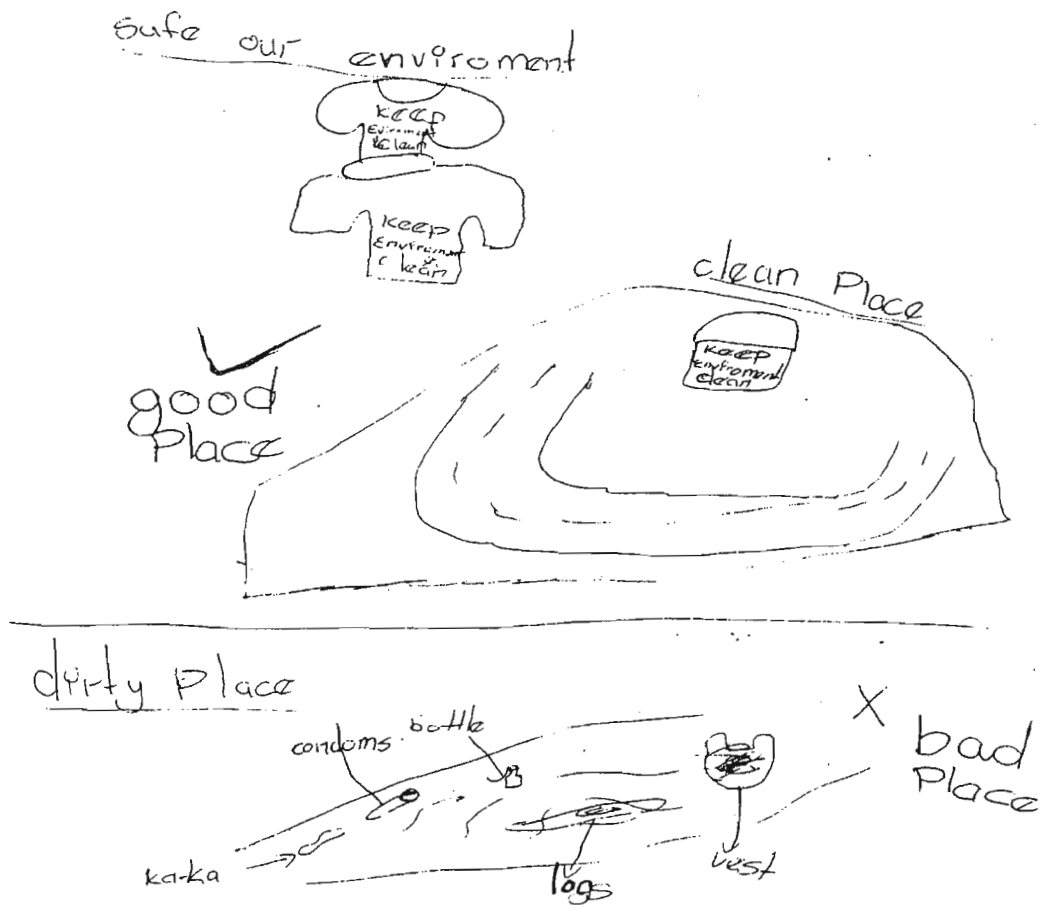
Illustration 7: A Depiction of a Safe Environment



The above drawing shows an ordered community with food being produced and the animals being cared for. The drawing is littered with positive images that denote a positive outlook on the part of the participant.

The following drawing is more explicit in its comparison between what is good and what is unacceptable. A clean environment is seen as something good and is ticked off, while a dirty environment is seen as something bad and is given a cross as if both pictures are part of an exercise with correct or wrong answers.

Illustration 8: A Contrast between a Good and a Bad Environment



The importance of parents being employed was also high up on the list of concerns by the children. A respondent was aware of the effects of labour action on his life.

*"Telkom went on strike. They wanted the people to know how to help them about the jobs. My father went on strike. They wanted to let the bosses know what was going on. After the march most of the people were retrenched"*

(Participant "AD" Umlazi, 12 years old.)

The children residing in Merebank cited pollution as a big worry within the area as large factories emitting pollutants into the air threatened their lives. Illegal dumping was also mentioned as a problem proliferating Merebank. The children's awareness is indicative of the pollution advocacy successes of the community and lobby groups within the area in motivating people against pollution.

Risky behaviour such as children drinking and smoking was also criticised by three of the children. Young children have been observed frequenting game shops, sitting on the corners and patronising taverns among the houses in the community.

*"I think they should open a bar next to a shop and not next to someone's house. It's very noisy. Exam time it is very noisy. It's hard to learn and concentrate. They smoke. I don't join him because he is a very bad influence. Maybe he will ask me to come with him and smoke with him. Smoking damages your lungs. The small children don't know, the children should tell their parents. If the small children smoke, the small child does not know the damages of the smoke."*

(Participant "NR" Merebank, 10 years old)

### 4.3 Resiliency building factors in their lives:

The children counted a stable home, religion, good neighbours, loving parents and grandparents, a good school with supportive teachers and security services as factors which make them feel safe.

Five of the children saw the school as a haven and something good in their lives. The school and its staff is also seen by the children as a positive influence on their lives providing security and safety.

*“When I am at school I feel safe and good knowing that I have my principal and teachers to talk to when I have a problem. Having religious organizations to pray and combat bad habits and crime in our community that makes me feel safe and good.”*

(Participant) “TK” Merebank, 10 years old

*“When I am with many people, for example, friends and family I feel safe. My home is safe because we have a twenty four hour alarm system and three vicious dogs. I feel safe at school because the teachers of my school do not allow us to leave during school hours unless our parents pick us up from school.”*

(Participant) “KG” Isipingo, 10 Years old

Loving parents were seen as responsible for the general well-being of the children.

Grandmothers in the Black community were especially revered because some of them take

care of the children from birth because their parents work elsewhere or their parents are deceased. They are also the final authority in female headed households and their pensions in some cases are the only source of income.

*“My mother leaves me when she goes to church. She sends us to a neighbour who is a granny. Our neighbour gives us food. She is very kind.”*

(Participant) “TZ” Umlazi, 11 Years old

*“I think about things very often. It’s that my father or granny will die. Sometimes I think that the other children at school will tease me and say you don’t have a father, mother sister, grandma and grandpa. I think of my future. What will I be, I ask myself sometimes.”*

(Participant) “AM” Umlazi 11 Years old

The school is seen as a good one by all the children. They were very happy with the school that they are attending. It enjoys a good reputation in all the communities. They were happy with the programme being offered especially the sports on offer. Their school featured in many of the drawings as an ideal. The access to computers at the school was seen as a definite plus. However, three local children from the Indian community felt the amount spent in the library was too little and the lack of more topical English readers was a need that must be addressed by the school.

The staff were seen by all the teachers as supportive and competent in their jobs. One of the resilience building factors was the warm welcome extended by some teachers to the new children, friendly classmates, sports and an outlet for their talent.

*“When I came to school I felt alone. My teacher introduced me to the other children in the class. The teacher tells us to play together and to be friendly. She tells the other children not to bully us.”*

(Participant) “PX” Umlazi, 12 years old.

“My teacher plays the guitar and encourages us to sing. I like him because he is kind. He jokes with us. I feel good in his class.”

(Participant) “NG” Umlazi, 11 Years old

Neighbours featured prominently as a factor for stability within the community. Some children are “latchkey children”, that is both parents work and they go home to an empty house until their parents return from work. Children are given the key to the house as both parents work. When they forget the key at home or lose it, they spend the afternoon with a neighbour. The parents also rely on the neighbours to look after their children when they have to go out in the night.

*“The neighbours and the neighbourhood watch all around me watch for any rogues. If they see any rogues , robbers or kidnapers, they’ll phone the police. Then the whole neighbourhood watch will find out and telephone the person who is getting robbed and tell them what to do. I feel safe with all my neighbours and I trust them all.”*

(Participant)“M’ Merebank 10 years old

*“ The things that make me feel safe at home is always having my parents around. I learnt from the past that you are safe nowhere, but I am lucky to have good parents that do their best for me. Knowing that I have good teachers to support me and always give me good advice makes me feel safe. The most important thing in my life is having God too, because he keeps me very safe. ”*

(Participant) “SA” Merebank, 10 years old

Culture was also seen as a factor in making the lives of the children more pleasant. A notable factor was the request for children to illustrate their culture and many of them answered that request by illustrating their religion. This shows that the children regard culture and religion as being closely intertwined or indistinguishable from each other.

#### **4. 4. What do we need? : “What I see in the future”**

The information gained from the children in this theme reflected their concerns and priorities, and how they perceived their future. Their parents’ mortality, their education, jobs and the economy were cause for concern for six of the participants. Although concerned by a variety of factors within their lives, they were always optimistic that the future will be taken care of. Medical progress and a cure for Aids were also desired by a participant.

*“I’d like to know more about Aids, cancer and any new diseases. I don’t know what causes most of the diseases and how to prevent it. I can also get one of these diseases because I don’t know how to prevent it and what caused it. It really*

*confuses me. I wish I knew how each disease is caused and how I can prevent it”*

(Participant) MG” Merebank 10 years.

The positive influence on the children by the neighbours, parents, teachers and school management were seen as factors that will make things right in the future. The supportive nature of parents, friends and neighbours are resiliency building factors that help the child to cope with challenges in life.

*“The issue that worries me at home is whether I will be successful in reaching my goals in life. Another issue that worries me in the future in school is whether my education will get better. Will the discipline for children be suitable enough to teach them a lesson for what they have done wrong. Also will there be enough jobs for us or will crime stop in our world.”*

(Participant) “KC” Merebank, 10 years old.

*“Drugs are the things that worry me more than ever. They are dangerous and scary. I don’t like a drug environment. In the future drugs will be the only thing people depend upon.”*

(Participant) Girl “NN” Merebank 10 years old

In conclusion to this chapter, listening to the children gives one an insight into how they perceive the world. What was impressive was that they offered carefully thought out solutions to their concerns. Many of the issues raised are very pertinent to their development and well-being. As educators we need to be mindful of the fact that when children enter the school yard, they bring with them their life experiences that do impact on their cognitive abilities.

The gravity of the issues raised and need for the school to set up support structures and draw up policies that will facilitate delivery on what the children need is evident in the voices heard. The school needs to be pro-active in setting up such support structures to aid the children and supply help where needed.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The graphic detail and logical answers obtained from the children is in keeping with the findings of research done by Spencer and Flin (1990) where they assessed the ability of young children to provide factual evidence in criminal cases. They concluded that there is every reason to believe that children can recall and describe events and situations as accurately as older witnesses. Spencer and Flin caution that, although there is evidence that small children's emotional frame of reference is egocentric and that their interpretation of cause and effect is primarily self-centred, this may not constitute that main problem. They feel that the real danger of egocentrism may be the egocentricity of the adult who is unable to appreciate fully the child's perspective in an interview.

(Spencer & Flin, 1990:252)

The concerns raised by the children show that even though they perceive the school to be a safe place, they carry their concerns from their homes and the community with them into the classroom. A health - promoting school will seek to educate the whole child and in seeking to meet the needs of the child, formulate policies and employ strategies that will

allay the fears of the children or teach them life skills to cope and succeed despite the backgrounds from where they come.

The data obtained from the children gave me an insight into the questions I wished to answer on the stressors in their lives and those resiliency building factors that enable them to cope with their every day challenges and still progress academically at school.

The study by Barbarin and Richter (2001) concluded that there is still have time in which social threats to the lives of children can be addressed, leading to them having happy and fulfilling adult lives. Risk factors, protective factors, family coping and self-regulation represent important pieces needed to solve this puzzle.

The children also showed a keen awareness of their rights as citizens of South Africa and children. The linking of corporal punishment to abuse and further linking its administration to gender shows that the children are able to apply a sound logic to their observations.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This research focused on the world of the learner as seen through their eyes. The school has a history of integration going back for over ten years and despite the foresight of the previous management and educators over the years, the school still has a long way to go in addressing the various needs of the learners. The staff demographics have not changed over the same period of transformation of the learner corps, with the exception of a Coloured principal being appointed and a Black educator whose main task is to teach isiZulu.

In this chapter, a summary will be made of the findings and the emergent themes will be explored and discussed. Recommendations will be made that the school needs to act upon to ensure that every learner's needs are catered for and the learner's thrive within the school environment.

The findings of the research revealed that the children are faced with a myriad of challenges daily and the school can be a haven for some and a trial for others.

To meet the needs of the children, the educators, management and school governing body needs to pool their resources and expertise to draw up policies to deal with anti-racism, gender issues, resiliency building and set up structures such as learner forums within the school. This chapter explores solutions that the school can offer to meet the needs of the children.

## **5.2 The Power of Children's voices**

Listening to the children's voices is important because they are the one's who know what they want. Any long term solutions have to include them and their input will guide the powers that be in making relevant decisions to the needs of the children. Life skills have been emphasised in the new school curriculum as a vehicle to democratise South Africa and bring about meaningful change to the lives of its citizens.

South Africa's multi- cultural society and its many components means that solutions cannot be taken from one part of society and applied across the whole spectrum with any success. This is in keeping with Elliot and Richards,(1991) and Kieran (1992) who stated that children's views are crucial for examining the risk factors associated with the diverse ways in which disruption can affect their development. This view is echoed by O' Brein (1996) and Willis (1990) who see children as creators and social actors who are active in creating themselves in different social contexts.

A strong argument for listening to the children is their fundamental right to be heard and have a say in issues that affect them. Article 12 of The Bill of Rights (1996)

Lazarus et al. (1999) in Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht (1999) stated that respecting diversity in the learner population means among other things, acknowledging and supporting the rights of all learners and others to full participation in the learning and teaching process. That means being able to voice their opinions on the learning and

teaching process. An important life skill to possess is the ability to communicate orally and articulate a point of view. Children in the past had problems being heard as a common belief was held that adults represented their best interests and knew what was best for them and were able to articulate the needs of children on their behalf.

### **5.3 Teaching for diversity**

Each educator needs to undergo capacity building to empower themselves to be representatives to the diverse needs of the learner. They need to buy into the concept of a resilient school, and adapt their practices accordingly. Classrooms need to be more welcoming and embrace learner diversity. Anti- racism needs to be actively pursued with wall charts and other resources acknowledging the different races within South Africa. Henderson and Milstein (1996) advocate a clear discipline policy with assistance given to those learners who constantly fail to adhere to the discipline policy.

Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education: 2001) stresses that all children have the right to learn, and the classrooms may no longer be considered homogenous in their composition. This means learners with a variety of needs or challenges are in the same classroom. The aim should be to address system barriers to learning that learners may experience.

#### **5.4 Gender issues in schooling**

Goduka, M. I. (1999:136) states that the role and responsibilities of educators is to ensure that all learners break out of stereotypes to explore and pursue a wide variety of school, university and occupational options. Through this exploration learners will be equipped to resist the continuous bombardment of messages they receive regarding race, class, sex-appropriate behaviours, jobs and roles. Educators have the opportunity to break those cycles such as sexism that may confine and restrict them.

In this study teachers are identified as culprits of gender stereotyping along with parents and the community. This is reflected by the allocation of jobs within the house:

*“My father and brothers leave all the housework to me”* Girl, Umlazi, 10 years old.

Another child highlighted the application of corporal punishment by a teacher to African male learners only. Male learners are also made to do physical tasks within the class such as carrying of chairs while female learners are made to write down the names of talkers or clean the teacher’s desk.

Sports as a resiliency building factor is further hindered by gender issues because parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to remain after school for sports training and fewer female learners take part in sport or any extra – curricular activities that take place after school.

## 5.5 Building Resiliency in schools

Henderson and Milstein (1996:113) stated that resiliency is becoming an increasingly important issue for students, educators, and schools as a result of a number of stressors individuals commonly face, including the pace of change that is occurring across the nation and throughout the world. This reality presents educators with a challenge to do everything possible to respond to the need for resiliency building in schools

Higgins (1994) describes resiliency as the “process of self-righting and growth”. Rirkin and Hoopman (1991) define resiliency building in schools as,

*“ Resilience can be defined as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress that is inherent in today’s world”*

The most critical resiliency builder for every learner is a basic trusting relationship, even with one adult, within the family or without, that says, “You matter” (Werner,1986 cited in Gelham, 1991)

The sheer size of schools is a barrier to resiliency building as it is more difficult to create a caring climate or form strong webs of relationships. This challenge to schools can be met by formulating policies and strategies to create opportunities for bonding in sport, art or cultural activities. (Henderson & Milstein, 1996)

Schools can embark on building resilience within their learners by increasing bonding between individuals, by setting clear and consistent boundaries, by teaching life skills, by providing care and support, by setting and communicating high standards, and by providing meaningful opportunities for participation by all learners.

### **5.6 School community partnerships in fostering child well –being**

Muthukrishna (2001) in Engelbrecht and Green (2001) states that an important aspect of the emerging national and international policy (Department of Education, March 2000; UNESCO, 2000; Ainscow, 1999; Booth and Ainscow, 1998) is to ensure that support is available as close as possible to the point of need.

In South Africa the Department of Education has acknowledged this, and in 2003, launched the lay counsellor programme where every school will have one teacher trained as a lay counsellor to assist the learners and teachers within that school. Southwood Primary is fortunate in this respect because three of its teachers have counselling experience at high school level, and over the years they were re-deployed to Southwood Primary from those schools where they were excess staff. They form the core of the school support team. The school level support team should include other teachers, learners and parents. The primary function of the school support team is to identify and address barriers to learning and participation, and accessing support from the community.

Department of Education (2001)

The school team will be supported by departmental structures such as therapists, psychologists and school counsellors. Special schools within the area can provide their specialised assistance to a number of schools.

### **5.7 School management and the promotion of child wellbeing**

The school management and Governing Body can lend their support by making resources available. Management can assist by ensuring that the timetable allows for the counsellors to have access to the learners during school time. The Governing Body can form a sub-committee to monitor the progress of the school support team, access community support and assist the school in responding to learner diversity by ensuring all school policies are learner friendly and not exclusionist.

Money must also be budgeted for staff development programs. According to Ainscow, (1999) staff development is a complex process that involves attitudes, actions, beliefs and behaviour.

The school management team can also contribute to resiliency building within educators by setting high standards for educators, being consistent and fair, by assessing the needs of the school, by formulating a resiliency building school policy, by creating standards of conduct and providing opportunities for creativity.

In conclusion, the study conducted here and presented in this dissertation contributes to this body of research

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## ANNEXURE. 1.

These appendices link with chapter 4. They are selected examples of the methods used to collect data.

### APPENDIX1:

### QUESTIONNAIRES

4. Tell me about the people who live around you.

.....  
I live very well with the people.....  
I live with the people I live with.....  
My hurt is very very happy.....

5. Tell me about an incident that happened where you live that left you feeling sad

.....  
My brother lost his girl friend.....  
and his girl friend was my big friend.....  
her dad by me every thing I.....  
like and I lost my big father.....  
and he was same like me.....  
and he was sad <sup>like</sup> me and.....  
he sad give me good life.....  
and he buy me every thing.....  
I went to home and he told me.....  
he want to buy me every thing.....  
I like and he want to buy me.....  
a bicycle and he died I miss him.....  
.....

6. Tell about an incident that happened in your community that made you proud to live in that area.

.....  
in the area there are boys who.....  
smoke and do their drugs and.....  
the neances and the drugs.....  
and they drink alcohol and.....  
stand outside stand and they stay.....  
in the corners to take air money.....  
and air clothes and every.....  
thing they want.....  
.....

## APPENDIX 2: DRAWING AND LABELLING OF DRAWINGS

9. Draw a picture of someone taking part in risky behaviour and label it.



-7-

Participant "AM" Umlazi, 10 Years old

### **APPENDIX 3: GROUP INTERVIEWS OR FOCUS GROUPS**

#### Focus Group Three.

S\*\*\*\*\* W\*\*\*\*\* -resident of Umlazi.

Question: Tell me about an experience that really frightened you.

When I was at the Southwood School, I was coming to school one morning. As I was walking that side at Illovo a man came. A man was walking and bought some chips. As he was walking, some boy came. This boy was in standard nine. He had a gun. I think he had some problems with this guy so when he came he took out his gun and shot this man five times in the head. Then he started running. Everyone was scared. All the girls screamed when it happened. I felt very bad because maybe this gun would have shot me, but I was saved because there was a man who had a cell phone, so he called the police. When the police came, they came to school. There were students that told us that they got the boy who shot this man. Mr. S. M\*\*\*\*\* was my teacher. He told us he also heard about this story because Mrs. P. N\*\*\*\*\* was talking about it. Her children had told her. They called my parents and my parents said that if I was not feeling well, then I can come home. The principal saw that I was shocked and there were other children there when this man got shot. I didn't look. I just saw his chips lying on the floor and the blood then I ran. He first shot him once near Spar (a shop) then he came closer and shot him four times. I was scared and the other girls screamed. They just screamed and when they finished screaming, that guy ran away. They caught him in the afternoon.

For young children it is unsafe to carry guns especially around the age of fifteen. All guns should be licensed and the police should take it away if it is used illegally and the people who use guns. I think people have to use guns at certain times because maybe you have a robbery or something, but the police draw the line when you use a gun. I would like to know why they don't allow you to use the guns especially when you need it the most.

Question: Do you know how people get guns?

Some people steal guns or they bought it or maybe they traded in drugs for it so I can't actually say.

Question: What do you think about the use of guns in our society?

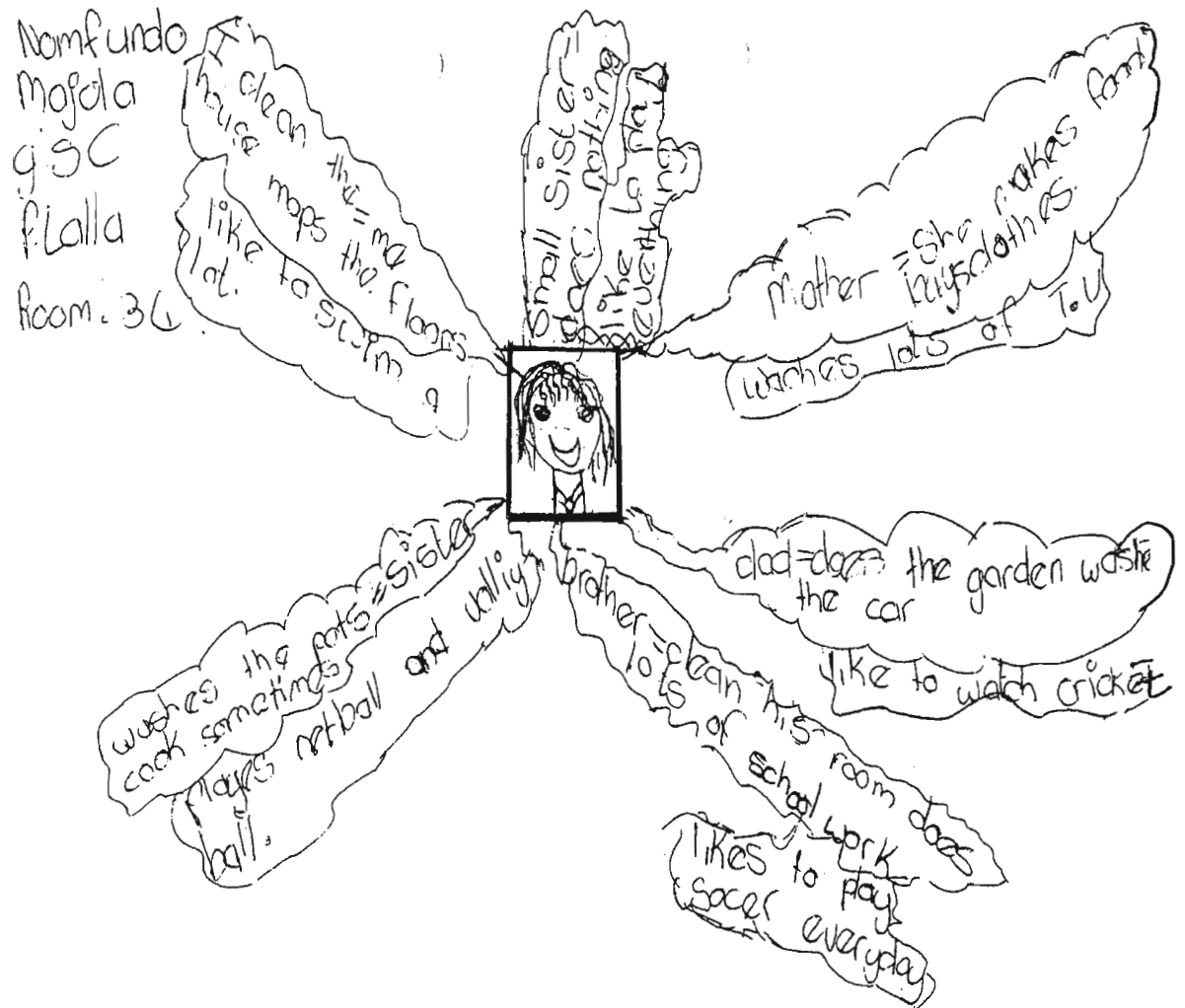
If someone is trying to steal your car and they point a gun at your head then you must take out your gun and defend yourself against him.

Question: How else are guns used?

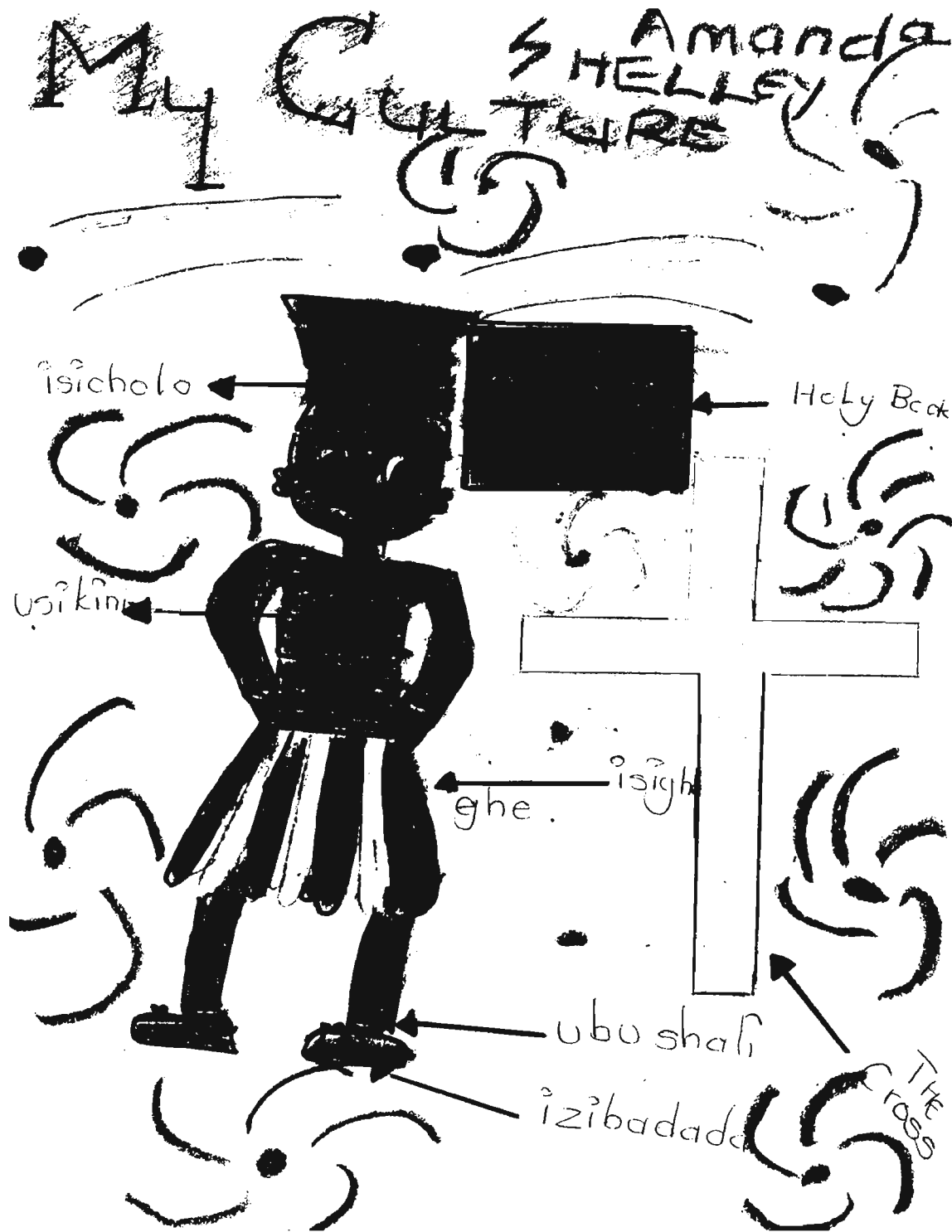
By robbing banks, by joking, some families use guns to defend themselves, guns are used to shoot people.

Participant "SW" Umlazi 11 Years old

APPENDIX 4: MIND MAPPING



APPENDIX 5: DRAWING OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS



Participant "BM" Umlazi, 10 Years old

## APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEWS

more about at home, in school or in your community.

I hope to broaden my understanding in all my subjects and to learn more about my plans for the future. Another thing is the war, it is very confusing. The thing I cannot stand is child abuse and rape, more so rape in babies. How sick can people.

---

1. Discuss those things that make you feel afraid or scared at home, school or in your community where you live.

If my home had to be burgled, I would be very afraid and scared. In school I will be afraid of the boys because they verbally and physically harass. In my community the crime rate, for example: the killing, hi-jacking. It scares me and makes me afraid. Another issues, concerns me is the use of drugs and alcohol that is so freely available in our community.

2. Discuss those things that make you feel safe or good at home, I school, or in your community.

In my home my family prays, play and stay together makes me feel safe. Having a wall fence and gates that are locked at all times, make me feel safe and good. Having both parents that love, listen understand and care for me makes me feel good.

When I am at school I feel safe and good knowing that I have my principal and teachers to talk to, when I have a problem.

Having religious organization to pray and combat bad habits and crime in our community that makes me feel safe and good.

3. Discuss those things that you think about often that worries you about the future at home, at school, or in your community.

The issue that worries about my future at home is, whether I will be successful in reaching my goals in life.

The issue that worries me about my future in school is whether my education will be better. The discipline for children will be suitable enough to teach them a lesson for what they have done wrong.

The issue that worries me at my community about my future is will be enough jobs

## APPENDIX 7: WRITE AND DRAW EXERCISES

What do you consider to be symbols of your culture or identity.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade : 5d

Teacher : \_\_\_\_\_

I consider the symbols of our culture to be important to me because ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> help other people to know more about my culture and my religion. I am happy to know <sup>what</sup> my culture is. My religion book is the Bhagvath Githa. What is so special about my religion is the songs, food, language and prayers. In South Africa there are many cultural groups. Therefore it is called the rainbow nation. In our culture there is many gods which we pray for. And one of them is ~~Perahnie~~ Ganesha.

Homework

GR 150

What do you consider to be the symbols of your culture or social identity?

TRADITIONAL  
CLOTHES



Homework

What do you consider to be symbols of your culture or identity?

The sari / And The Punjabi .  
Dots / red .  
Strings we wear .

