CHAPTER FIVE  CONTEXT OF SCHOOLS

During the field study, I evaluated five different public schools in Gauteng province. The participating schools were diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and social roles. None of these schools could be classified as Section 21 (formally known as Model C) schools. This means that none of them is able to financially cope with the demands of running their schools; neither can they manage themselves without a boost from the central government. They are relatively weak in academic standards and achievements.

In this chapter, my focus is not on their achievements but to present detailed descriptions of the school sites. The aim of doing this is to provide background information on the context within which the teachers, learners, member of school governing boards and principals that participated in this research work and learn.

In addition to the narrative descriptions of these communities and schools, I have included photographic evidence of these research sites.

Of the five schools sampled, two are from areas I could describe as typical South African townships, namely; Alexandra and Thembisa. Another two are located in the Johannesburg city while one is situated in the relatively rich classy suburb of Auckland Park Johannesburg. The public school sites I chose were considered to be serving educators and learners from diverse cultural backgrounds which were vital in this study because it aimed for wider coverage by collecting data from
people of diverse cultures. Also the diversity is important because such model schools often set the benchmark or standard for understanding issues around culture and HIV/AIDS in the education sector.

I selected schools that were not more than two decades old, enabling me to explore long-serving educators’ and students' understanding of the epidemic, and also allowing me to examine the developmental dimensions of the strategies and practices of HIV/AIDS National Policy within the schools. I looked for schools that intentionally incorporated a variety of supports and challenges to facilitate PLHIV, including, for example, guidance and counselling, advice, and biomedical support for learners and educators living with HIV/AIDS. As part of my research process, I examined how the understanding and experiences of HIV/AIDS were expressed by principals, teachers, learners, members of the school governing board and incorporated into the curricula in these schools. I also looked at how the members of these public schools might support and challenge learners and educators with different cultural perceptions and attitudes towards the epidemic and PLHIV.

These schools had lots of learners from poor or working class homes sometimes regardless of the location. For example, the school in Auckland Park is located in a very rich suburb, yet it is home to learners from very poor backgrounds and mostly migrant learners. I selected this school to expand data collection. I
expected that there would be more cultural variety that I would be able to identify from this school than the usual diversity located within South African communities. Finally, I examined the ways in which the participants’ cultural and gender backgrounds influenced their HIV/AIDS lived experiences and the way they put the National Policy into practices. I identify the schools in this thesis using the letters of the alphabet A-E to maintain anonymity. I combined the descriptions of each suburb with the public school visited in that location to prevent duplication.

One of the best features shared by these schools is that they all offer a wide range of subject majors and allow their students to sit for the national examinations with specific major/s for entering universities. Another characteristic shared by all these schools is that they are over-crowded. The number of learners in the class makes it difficult for the teachers to know them by name. It is therefore difficult to judge these schools as places in which to build a strong educational base or as schools where learners are prepared to face the upcoming challenges in the universities (if at all they pass).

I consider the location of these schools vital in this discussion because first, it is as important as academic quality. Apart from the school located in Auckland Park within a calm environment, the rest are located in an environment not very conducive for learning. The schools in Alexandra and Thembisa are very close to
bus stops. Considering that most of them are not well fenced-off, learners are always found loitering on the streets. The two schools in Johannesburg city are equally bad for loitering and worst off is the school in Hillbrow.

School A is located in Hillbrow, part of Johannesburg city. According to Mpe (2001), Hillbrow is the inner city residential neighbourhood of Johannesburg, Gauteng Province. It is known for its high levels of population density, unemployment, poverty and crime. In the 1970s it was an apartheid-designated 'whites only' area but soon became a 'grey area', where people of different ethnicities lived together. It acquired a cosmopolitan and politically progressive feel but unfortunately due to poor planning its infrastructure could not cope with the rapid population growth (Moele, 2006). Today the majority of the residents are migrants from the townships, rural areas and the rest of Africa, many living in abject poverty (Ibid).

Hillbrow is known for the following; it has the most symbolic buildings in Africa. Completed in 1971, Hillbrow Tower rises to a height of 270 metres, thus making it the tallest man-made structure with an elevator in Africa (Griffith & Clay, 1982). Davie (2004) writes that the Tower dominates the Johannesburg skyline, visible to visitors long before they reach the city itself. Davie recognised and paid tribute to the tower’s symbolic power in that it has been incorporated into the city’s official logo. The tower, named the JG Strijdom Tower after a former South
African prime minister (1954 to 1958), was built over three years between June 1968 and April 1971 (ibid). The Tower belongs to telecommunications parastatal Telkom. With the burgeoning of tall buildings in the city in the 60s skyscraper era, the new telephone tower had to ensure that it stayed above the height of the tallest building (Davie, 2004).

Another very significant building is the Ponte city which according to Morris (1999) is the tallest residential building in Johannesburg and one of the city's most striking urban landmarks. The building is distinct both due to its height, rising to 54 storeys above one of the highest points in Johannesburg, as well as its cylindrical shape (Morris, 1999).
Contrary to the initial affluence described above, Hillbrow is also known for its high rates of crime and prostitution. According to Rondganger (2006), dozens of gangs are using Hillbrow as the international headquarters of a multimillion rand drugs and crimes business that is fuelling an entire "second economy". Everything, from hard drugs, white collar crimes, prostitution to foreign currency exchange is driving this burgeoning economy (Ibid). Rondganger observed that many of the crimes are committed out of overcrowded and dilapidated hotels. This, coupled with the fact that there are more than 34 nationalities living in Hillbrow, is making crime fighting an arduous task in the area.

School A is located in this suburb. It has more than 600 learners. The most significant thing about this school is that it is situated almost in the middle of Hillbrow. Learners are mixed up and taught together in hall-like classrooms. The school also accommodates learners with disabilities. There is a barbed wire fence and there are not many buildings. The compound is shabby and quite dirty. However, it has a tuck shop well equipped with snacks for the learners. There was no computer laboratory but there are a few computers in the school for both the educators and the learners. Some of these computers are in the staff room.
while a few are also in a section considered to be the school library though it is poorly equipped. The school has a nurse and a counsellor who takes care of the learners’ and educators’ health related issues and that includes HIV/AIDS. In this school, I particularly noted that learners and educators do not confide in either the school nurse or the counsellor. Learners in particular are always loitering and enjoy the company of the man taking care of the tuck shop. He is known as ‘master’. ‘Master’ seems to know them and their challenges better than their educators do. The relationship and interaction between ‘Master’ and the members of the school made data collection through rumours and gossip feasible.

School B is situated in the Auckland park suburb of Johannesburg. According to ‘Travel Essential’ (2008), the suburb of Auckland Park is described as ‘trendy’. It is situated just west of Braamfontein and can be found on either side of Empire Road. The suburb of Auckland Park has attracted an artsy, media oriented crowd, and the suburb is well known to be among those that house many of South Africa’s finest artists, musicians, and journalists (ibid).

Despite its ‘trendy’ character it is also home to one of the poorest and most dilapidated public schools. Learners in this school are from the poorest neighbourhoods of Johannesburg some of which are near Auckland Park while others are distant. The majority of the learners are migrants and very poor South
Africans. The school, according to one of the teachers interviewed, was aptly named out of the decay of its neighbourhood. This institution has catered for the needs of Johannesburg's growing population of street children since the birth of South Africa's democratic status. According to the principal, the school was originally established in 1992 as a Young Missionary Christian Association (YMCA) Streetwise Project. It offered meals and some literacy classes to its errant clientele. Today, it is a full-fledged school that has opened its doors to also cater to the needs of some of the city's refugee children.

The principal further narrated that, the school was initiated from a past that referred to its children as the "Lost Generation" due to the erratic nature of the education received after the youth-led Soweto Uprising of 1976. This school symbolised hope for the future then. It has more than 600 learners with 22 educators, most of them are part-time educators and volunteers from different faith based institutions and non-governmental organisations. The school has a very well built double-storey building with very few classrooms and a central vegetable garden. This vegetable garden, according to the narrative of the Principal, helps the school in feeding up to 80% of its learners daily. However, the strong wall of the school building is marred by bullet holes from the Anglo-Boer wars.
A government-subsidised institution, School B relies heavily on donations, usually provided in kind, and the odd school fee scraped together under difficult circumstances. The principal concluded by mentioning that some of the refugee learners come from Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region of Africa. Many of the learners’ parents are unemployed or are earning insufficient salaries to pay the fees.

While this school is located in a ‘trendy’ suburb, it is worthwhile to mention that children from this suburb do not attend this school. Learners, according to the principal, come from Hillbrow, and different government ‘shelters’ located in the Johannesburg city. School B enabled me, through the use of focus group discussion, to collect rich data on how culture and gender influence HIV/AIDS treatment. I realised, from this school that most learners lost their parents to the epidemic and the majority believe they are living with the epidemic. However, they were willing and open to discuss issues around the epidemic without feeling stigmatised. Like one of them said; ‘we are all same or similar when it comes to HIV/AIDS. So we are like brothers and sisters here. There is no feeling of condemnation but we feel we have to strive to make senior certificate (grade 12) in order to improve our lives.’ In this school also, there are teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds and they were willing to discuss and share their HIV/AIDS lived experiences.
School C is located in Jeppes town in the suburb known as the city of Johannesburg. According to Freser (2009), Jeppes town was founded by CEG Julius Jeppe, who had moved from Pretoria to Johannesburg in 1886. A 1894 description of the suburb says it comprised of "421 buildings, two churches, a Masonic temple, St Mary's Collegiate for Girls and a library", adding that "there were even rumours of electric light for each house" (Fraser, 2009). By 1896, there were 5,647 people living in Jeppes town which, in 1897 was described as "the most ambitious and the best area" among the "neat little suburbs on the outskirts of the town proper". However, the area was acknowledged as a "mixed area in terms of social class as Jeppe essentially formed part of the mining perimeter of old-established white working-class districts". The Julius Jeppe Oval existed initially as an open piece of land formalised into a park in about 1890 and still boasts the first commemorative monument erected in Johannesburg to the memory of Julius Jeppe (ibid).

Fraser narrated that the east end of the suburb became known as Belgravia, where there existed a number of "desirable residences in a locality where social advantages are to be obtained". It was, in fact, in Belgravia that Julius Jeppe built his mansion, later used as Lord Kitchener's headquarters and later as a boys' hostel serving Jeppe High School. These beauties according to Fraser, ‘has sadly now been destroyed’. The transition between Jeppes town and Belgravia was marked by a tollgate across the roadway next to Salisbury House, and the
toll road was described as "Jeppe House’s long tree-lined driveway". The trees are still there, providing a wonderful shady avenue (Fraser, 2009).

![Stature of Julius Jeppe in JeppesTown](image)

**Figure 3** *Stature of Julius Jeppe in JeppesTown (Fraser, 2009)*

The public school in this suburb is described as school C with a missionary touch. According to the principal, it was first opened on the 10th of January 1882, two weeks after the arrival of some Reverend Sisters with a small number of pupils. There were two houses used as classrooms and they were fine examples of Georgian architecture. House number 18, was reorganised as a new school while house number 19 became the convent. The school began following the Irish Intermediate Act, passed in 1879, which enabled the setting up of a system of secondary education for both girls and boys.

School C according to the deputy principal takes care of at least 1,200 learners with almost 40 educators. According to the school’s official vision and mission statement, the school is concerned with the development of the whole person, and through its educational activities strive to encourage the students’ self-
confidence, self-esteem and self-understanding as they experience the essence of missionary education in a modern world. The Principal, during the interview, indicated that the school has added new programmes over the last eighteen years in order that students should experience a balanced curriculum that caters for their individual needs.

Despite a fundamental shift in the demographic profile of this school so that it is now a public school that caters for children from diverse cultural backgrounds, it still maintains a mostly catholic ethos. Most of the learners are from Jeppetown and Ellis Park environs. The majority are sponsored by non-governmental and faith-based organisations and reside in the nearby government or church funded homes for the needy. There are also learners who are refugees whose parents cannot afford school fees.

During the data collection exercise, I noted that learners were religiously inclined in the information they gave. I could attribute that to the religious influences which characterised most of the school’s culture. However, the educators interviewed were very official in their responses especially on how they deal with learners with HIV/AIDS. Most of the educators in this school, irrespective of the location (not very classy), are predominantly white and the majority are Catholics by religion. In their attempts to be official, I could however notice the hybridisation
of religious and biomedical beliefs in their practices and perceptions of the epidemic and PLHIV.

School D is situated in Alexandra Township in Johannesburg. The key respondent in this study is an educator in this school. When introducing the locality, she stated that Alexandra, or “Alex” as it is generally referred to, is Gauteng’s oldest African township and one of the poorest areas of Johannesburg. She narrated that from the beginning, Alexandra has been a suburb for the poor and the almost complete lack of infrastructure led to it being called ‘the dark city’. After the apartheid era, the high population growth and unemployment resulted in a young black male population moving into the area in search of employment, worsening the living conditions considerably. She added that crime, violence, building speculation and the absence of rent regulations are among a few of the challenges of Alexandra.

Concerning the location of Alex, Smith, (2002) says; ‘It amazes me the short, quick steps – two to be exact – between Sandton and Alexandra. You get Sandton, Wynberg industrial area, Alexandra. Is it really possible to make these steps even shorter?’ Alexandra Township falls within Region 7 of the Municipality of the City of Johannesburg. It is located only 3 km from Sandton, the financial heart of Johannesburg, it borders the industrial areas of Wynberg, and is very close to the Linbro Business Park, where large parts of the city’s high-tech and
service sector is based. Alexandra is also very near to Bruma Commercial Park and the East-Gate Shopping Centre (Smith 2002).

Figure 4  Alexandra Township in 1904 (A) and in 2004 (B)


Alex has no notable features other than dilapidated buildings and shacks. The upcoming government-built houses are not comparable to the structures in Hillbrow which shares with Alex the common social features of being overcrowded. While Hillbrow can be compared with Alex in terms of crime and migrant dwellers, Alex on the other hand cannot be compared with Hillbrow in terms of buildings and history.
These are what the majority of homes in Alex look like. Learners in School D hail from such homes. According to my key respondents, all the learners in the school and some of the educators, live in and around Alex. The principal added that Alexandra is enjoying a sustained period of relative peace with serious crime falling from what was recorded in the past. Even amidst this poverty and congestion, the principal stated that there is a strong sense of social stratification that exists among the residents. He narrated that the key distinction is no longer between ideological enemies but rather between "old" and "new" residents of Alexandra. He clarified that the "old" residents can be defined as those who...
owned the original freehold properties and the backyard shacks that over time occupied the yards. The "new" residents are either those that have settled on the riverbanks, tributaries, schoolyards and road reserves, or those that have occupied the neighbouring factories. Despite these, Nelson Mandela (1994, pp. 71 – 72) in his autobiography, writing about his experiences in Alexandra in the 1940s, observes that 'in spite of the hellish aspects of Alexandra, the township was also a kind of heaven. As one of the few areas of the country where Africans could acquire freehold property and run their own affairs, where people did not have to kowtow to the tyranny of white municipal authorities, Alexandra was an urban Promised Land, evidence that a section of our people had broken ties with the rural areas and become permanent city-dwellers.'

The school area is fairly heavily populated with the large urban centre of Sandton located near the region. Most of the educators have taught in school D for more than two decades and so understand the history of Alex. The majority of the educators (predominantly blacks and migrants) live in Alex. Some have moved out to the neighbouring suburbs. The Principal reported that the pass rate for senior certificate (grade 12) stands at 13%. I noted that the school is co-educational. The key respondent confirmed that the staff strength is 44 (teaching and non teaching staff) for 1,454 pupils. This means a ratio of 1:33. While I judge this ratio to be overcrowded (considering that the 44 is not only the teaching staff), the principal thought otherwise. He said that the ratio is reasonable for a
township school. He stated; '55 learners in the class aren’t that bad for township schools!'

Unlike in the other schools visited, corporal punishment is an obvious culture in this school. I observed that the deputy principal goes everywhere in the school with a cane in his hand. Although corporal punishment is banned by the South African government, the discipline of learners in this school, according to my key respondent, ‘requires’ a sort of corporal touch. The deputy Principal confirmed this during the interview; "You need some extra kind of discipline here. The parents encourage it because the learners have contact with criminals and some bring knives and guns to school'.

Most of the classroom windows are broken and some are replaced with plain wooden planks. Not many books were seen in the library (a small section of a room added onto the staff room). The school has adequate fields but they are littered. The only properly appreciated section in the school is the tuck shop which is very well stocked for both learners and educators. There is an old swimming pool which appears abandoned, signifying that the school at one time was well furnished in terms of infrastructure. One feature common to this school and that of Auckland Park is the great diversity of learners. However, while the school in Alex has more learners from the Southern African region, that of Auckland Park is filled with migrant learners predominantly from Zimbabwe and Congo.
Data collection was a bit difficult in School D especially with the educators. Most of them were reluctant to discuss issues around HIV/AIDS and culture. However, the key respondent was able to link me with some educators who were willing to talk about my topic. According to her, these are educators that often come in as substitute educators whenever there is a need. Learners on the other hand, were willing to discuss the topic, especially how the educators and principals relate to PLHIV. Informal conversations were also easier here because the learners and staff enjoy sitting in the tuck shop when they do not have lessons. During the interviews in this school, indigenous beliefs and practices were predominantly tied to religious views.

School E is in Thembisa. Thembisa is an East Rand township, which in English means Promise, and was established in 1957. Some scholars spell it with ‘T’ alone (Tembisa) while some with ‘TH’ (Thembisa). In this study, I spell it as ‘Thembisa’ but I chose to keep other scholars’ references as they have spelt it. Thembisa is a large township situated to the Northeast of Kempton Park on the East Rand, Gauteng. Alexander, Peter, Dawson, Mercelle, Ichharam, & Meera (2006) noted that residents of Thembisa work in the factories of Isando, Modderfontein and Olifanstein and in the shops and homes of Kempton Park, Edenvale and Pretoria. According to Bonner, Nieftagodien & Kathorus, (2001, pp. 63-64), Thembisa, like that of many other townships which were established in the late 1950s, is rooted in the National Party government’s efforts to control the
influx of Africans into the urban areas and to segregate Africans from the white areas.

There are three reasons why Thembisa was founded by the then apartheid government of South Africa. Seekings (1990, p. 160) explained the reasons as follows: first, it was founded to resettle employees of various municipalities close to the township. These municipalities included Kempton Park, Edenvale, Modderfontein, Clayville, Verwoerdburg, Bedfordview and Germiston. As Seekings remarks; “Tembisa was developed to provide accommodation for Africans drawn in to the area … during the massive industrial and residential expansion in the 1950s” (Seekings, 1990, p. 160). Second, the government also hoped that Thembisa would provide a solution to the problem of squatting. This followed the growth of squatting settlements known as Tikkie-line, Pennyville, Mazambane, Plantation and Brickworks, which were dotted around the Edenvale and Kempton Park areas (Ibid). Third, Thembisa was also seen as a solution to the problem of overcrowding and housing shortages in Alexandra, which was believed to be a contributing factor to the escalating crime rate as well as the general instability in the township (South African Democracy Education Trust, 2004).

University of the Witwatersrand Library historical and literary papers, (1969) narrate that Alexandra and Thembisa, though both townships are different in communal experiences. Thembisa is considered a new township with a life style
starkly different to the life that people lived before. In Alexandra, people of different ethnic groups lived side by side; shared similar experiences as a community and assisted each other whenever called to do so – as a community (ibid). ‘Urban life tended to abrade tribal and ethnic distinctions, and instead of being Xhosas, or Sothos, or Zulus, or Shangaans, we were Alexandrans. This created a sense of solidarity, which caused great concern among the white authorities. The government had always utilized divide-and-rule tactics when dealing with Africans and depended on the strength of ethnic divisions between the people. But in places like Alexandra, these differences were being erased’ (Ibid).

In contrast, this new townships of Thembisa were divided into different ethnic sections (or zones), pupils attended schools specifically designated for their mother tongue. According to University of the Witwatersrand Library historical and literary papers, (1969, p.3), ‘Thembisa was divided into different ethnic sections such that Tsepo, Kopanong, Makhulong, Maokeng, Moriting, Mashimong were all allotted to the South Sotho, North Sotho and Setswana speaking people; whereas, Esangweni, Endayeni, Umthambeka, Wel’mlambo, Ecaleni, Emoyeni, Mqantsa were set aside for the Nguni speaking residents. However, in Tembisa not all sections were ethnically divided. There was a section which accommodated different ethnic groups. This section was called eXubeni (Mixture)(Ibid).
Further, the University of the Witwatersrand Library historical and literary papers, (1969, p. 4) explained that the ethnic division went beyond the sections; it was further enforced in schools. ‘Pupils were obliged to attend schools of their ethnic origin (or schools which taught in their mother tongue). For instance, in Bojeng, Mashimong and Tsepisa Lower Primary Schools only pupils whose mother tongue was North Sothos (i.e. Sepedi) were allowed to attend, whereas pupils whose mother tongue was Isizulu could attend at Ecaleni, Thuthuka, Endulwini, Umthambeka and Welam’lambo Lower Primary and Higher Primary Schools. Some schools, however, made provision for two mother tongue languages. For example, Sedibeng Lower Primary admitted pupils whose mother tongues were South Sotho and North Sotho. Similarly, at Isithame Lower Primary, pupils whose mother tongues were Venda and IsiZulu were allowed to attend school there’ (University of the Witwatersrand Library historical and literary papers, 1969, pp. 4-5).

Alexander, Dawson, Mercelle, & Meera (2006) recently stated that as with many South Africans urban townships, Thembisa is characterized by informal settlements. They identified the high rate of unemployment and crime as major challenges. They blamed these crises on the lack of recreational facilities, together with other socio-economic constraints, and noted that the government blamed these challenges on the rapid large scale urbanization, which drew many of the young people in the townships into crime. These young people came to be referred to as tsotsis (Graser, 1990). Tsotsi according to Straker (1992) is a term
used in black communities to describe persons who consistently engage in antisocial behaviour including theft, gangsterism, intimidation and harassment of the community.

In the townships, *tsotsi* behaviours was caused, following Brooks and Brickhill’s (1980, p. 369) explanation, “by the relative paucity of police in the townships, and their lack of interest in the well-being and safety of the inhabitants, and [that] allowed crime to be rampant”. Bonner and Segal (1998, p. 42) observed otherwise and noted that “most employers were reluctant to employ urban youth whom they believed to be lazy and undisciplined; [instead they preferred to employ youth from the rural areas because they believed that they were docile, hardworking and they did not choose jobs]”. Because of this many of the youth in the townships were left without work. Thus, for them the only option to survive was to engage in crime. However, the gangsters in Thembisa operated differently from the individual *tsotsis*. Their activities were focused more on material gains rather than on the killing and maiming which characterised *tsotsi* behaviour.
According to the Principal, School E is doing its best to meet a sizeable community need. He (the principal) stated that many of the learners’ parents are unemployed and this makes it difficult for the school to generate enough income to expand its facilities on its own. The curriculum of the school is broad based and includes subjects such as English, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, Human and Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Afrikaans, Mathematics and Science, History and Geography, Accounting, Business Economics/Economics and Management Sciences, Typing and Technical subjects.

During the interview, the Principal narrated that School E was established in 1970. With 24 teachers it caters for almost 1500 learners in grades 8 to 11. This means the grading of the school is S4 (South Africa, Department of Education, 1999). According to this report, in 2003, the School had 24 pre-fabricated
classrooms, which were supposed to accommodate 50 learners each but due to the increasing demand for education, each class has to seat more than 60 learners. There are 1080 chairs and 540 desks for all the learners in the school. No new information is available on this school. At the time of data collection in 2007, there was serious overcrowding in the classes suggesting the need to build more classes. This challenge is not made any easier by the fact that the proposed introduction of grade 12 in 2009 would require additional classrooms. There are presently two blocks of toilets for learners, of which one block with 24 cubicles is used by the girls and the other block with 16 cubicles is used by the boys. The school has only one soccer field for extracurricular activities.

**Conclusion**

There was a sharp contrast between the responses of the learners in School E in Thembisa and the learners in Alexandra. The learners in school E understood HIV/AIDS as a medical and supernatural disease. Most of the learners here adopted the indigenous cultural approach to the disease and PLHIV. For instance, a learner believed that the ‘reed dance’ festival is one of the ways to save the youths from the mistake of getting infected while young. She stated, ‘...parents could insist on the reed dance festival to protect the youths from getting infected. It is wise to do so while they can make decisions for them. God knows what they will do when they are old. For now, as youths, let them be protected till then.’ Although her comments are biased towards protecting the girls (who take part in the reed dance), the combination of the medical and
indigenous approaches is unmistakable. No single explanations on its own can account for the differences between this experience and that of the learners in Alexandra considering that they are urban townships that share much in common.

If one accepts that the environment plays a significant role in the education and experiences of the members of the public schools within their locality, it would appear that to some extent, the environmental culture and belief systems influence the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of the members of these public schools. On the other hand, considering the case of School B, the host locality did not influence the members of this school as much as the residential environment. Most of the learners came from Johannesburg suburbs that contrast with the host suburb in terms of social status. With this level of influence, it could be argued that the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of these members of the public schools are not only influenced by the biomedical and human rights discourses, but by the individual cultural beliefs and practices learnt from their environments and families, and these surpassed that of the discourses of the National Policy.

This chapter has also shown that interactions between the members of public schools and the people within their environment such as ‘Master’, tuck shop dealers and shop dealers littered around these schools also influence their lived experiences of the epidemic and PLHIV. This could be explained by the informal
relationships that exist as a result of the loitering common among the members of these schools.