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Literacy Journeys: The language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school

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Abstract

This research aimed to understand the literacy and language experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school. It takes a socio-cultural approach to literacy and emphasizes the intersections between home, school and community. Eight weeks were spent in the school with learners and teachers, guided by the principles of ethnographic research. The data was analysed using a combination of methods. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to identify patterns and themes in accordance with community theory. Narrative Analysis was used as a means to foreground the voices of the research participants in sharing their experiences. The research found that literacy and language practices do not exist in isolation, but rather as part of a complex and distinctive layering of communities: the community in the suburb where the school is, the immigrant community, the school community and community of learners in the school. In addition the ways in which literacy and language are used, are attached to different relations of power within different communities. The study raises questions about the way in which schools operate as part of or distinct from the communities in which they are located.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

South African schools are places where learners, parents and teachers from numerous linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds interact on a daily basis. This diversity exists worldwide where the influences of globalization, political, economic and social changes affect the dynamics of the classroom. Along with these influences, many opportunities, challenges and difficulties have become part of daily learning and teaching. One of these challenges is the issue of language and literacy. South Africa is a country with eleven official languages. This alone has posed a challenge for learners, parents and teachers in the learning and teaching of English which is an additional language for many. South Africa is also a place of refuge for many immigrants and refugees from other African countries. Families from across our borders have come to South Africa in search of a 'better life' which is often sought through education. With the influx of many learners from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Mozambique, foreign languages such as French, Lingala and Portuguese, are also moving into the classroom. This adds to the complexity of literacy and language issues which already exist.

This research is interested in the experiences of immigrant learners as they make the transition from their home countries into South Africa. More specifically, it is interested in the learners' experiences of language and literacy in making this transition. These experiences also include the parallel experiences of parents and teachers and the intersections between home, school and community. I have chosen to conduct this research in a primary school in Johannesburg where many immigrant families reside. This chapter sets out the background to this study and the questions that framed it.

1.1 The Yeoville Story

The Primary school chosen for this research is geographically positioned within the suburb of Yeoville. For many South Africans, Yeoville represents the picture of urban change. The area is rich in history and has always been home to immigrants seeking a new life in Johannesburg. In the 1970s and 1980s Yeoville was home to many artists, musicians, students and political activists and became internationally known for its restaurants, jazz bars, record stores and clothing outlets (YBCDT 2010 - Yeoville Bellevue Community Development Trust 2010).

However, with the influx of activity in the area, came the start of drug dealing and criminal activities which took advantage of the 'buzz' of activity (YBCD 2010).

A dramatic demographic shift in the population of Yeoville occurred when the 85% of the white population became a 90% black population in 1998 (YBCDT 2010). The lack of effective urban management also saw the area entering a period of rapid urban decay and neglect (YBCDT 2010). Banks became unnerved by the change and refused to grant 100% mortgages (YBCDT 2010) to prospective home-owners in the area, most of whom were black. This meant that a greater number of people resorted to renting rather than owning, which in turn resulted in overcrowding and deterioration of the infrastructure. Yeoville is still largely a community of immigrants, mostly economic migrants from all over the country and the rest of Africa (YBCDT 2010). It remains a vibrant, colourful, often chaotic 'pan-African area which has yet to find itself' (YBCDT 2010). Community organisations and individuals have been working since 1995 to try to improve the situation and the socio-economic future of the area.

Within this suburb, is a small primary school. The school is surrounded by derelict flats and potholed roads, yet acts as a 'safe haven' for many of its learners. The school grounds have been carefully maintained over the years and teachers have worked to uphold a high standard of education in spite of changes which have occurred over time.

1.2. The School's Story

This inner-city primary school has also changed over the years in relation to the demographic changes of the area. Anecdotal evidence from teachers reveals that the school has continued to take pride in academic excellence over the years. Today, the characteristics of the school are directly affected by the characteristics of Yeoville. There are both immigrant and local learners and teachers in the school body. This diversity creates a multilingual, multicultural learning environment. In addition to the eleven official languages of our country, learners also speak French, Lingala and Portuguese (*PI*).

As a result of the social situation in the area, the school has become involved in various community projects such as feeding schemes and counseling for refugee families. From only a brief visit to the school, one can see that this is a school concerned with the wellbeing of the child and aware of the vulnerability of some learners. The school ethos is one where a 'stable and nurturing environment' (*School Website*) for learners from 'diverse backgrounds' (*School*

Website) is crucial. The school has also evolved along with the surrounding urban area by embracing the needs of the community and by making attempts to support its diverse learner body. Although multiculturalism and multilingualism create diverse and interesting learning environments, they also create many challenges for this school. However, the teachers, parents and learners interact in interesting ways to support each other in the face of these challenges which is a central focus of this research.

1.3 My story

In 2010, I completed an honours research report on the transition learners make between primary school and high school with a focus on literacy. During the data collection for this project, I met a few learners who had moved to Johannesburg from rural Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN). These learners spoke to me about the difficulties of integrating into a new society which were compounded by learning in English. Talking to these learners about the traumas of saying their first speeches, being teased about their accents and their nightmares before English tests moved me in such a way that I wanted to find out more. When deciding on a topic for my Masters research problem, I started thinking about this experience and how I could pursue it further.

Reflecting on Teaching Experience at a school during my undergraduate degree (see 1.2) in 2008, I remembered being introduced to 'the realities' of teaching. It was here where I learnt how young children had fled war-torn countries in search of a 'better life' in South Africa. From informal discussions with the staff at the school I became aware of how this school had become a community worker where they organized housing for vulnerable children at the Johannesburg Children's home, provided food parcels for struggling families and become a source of information for parents trying to settle into a new country. I became aware of the translated letters sent home to parents, of the translator sitting in on parents meetings and of the code switching that teachers embraced in class. It was for these reasons as well as the interaction with the learners from KZN that I chose to work with immigrant learners at this particular school.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions frame this research:

1. What stories do a group of immigrant learners tell about their language and literacy experiences in South Africa?
2. How are language and literacy practices affected by the intersections between home, school and community?

1.5 Rationale

I chose to conduct research in the field of multilingual literacy education because it is representative of the diverse situation in many South African schools. We have a dominance of English in formal schooling, but in the broader socio-cultural context, English is spoken by only a small percentage of our population (Dornbrack 2009). This is the reality for many schools today; providing English medium teaching to learners who speak English as a second, third or even fourth language. The challenges that this reality creates are widespread and are further compounded when learners have little to no support structures at home. Learners may not have access to English at all other than at school, they may not have parental supervision when completing homework, and they may not have parents at all. The questions I initially asked myself were, 'how do teachers, learners and parents cope with these challenges?' and 'how is literacy developed with this as a background to learning?'

From my previous research study, I became interested in the stories that learners had to tell; more importantly, the stories that learners had to tell about their experiences of moving to a foreign country and of having to learn in English. Not only are the linguistic challenges there, but these are coupled with psychological and emotional challenges. From listening to the perspectives of learners during my honours research, I was interested in the personal literacy and language stories that learners have to tell about learning English. Specifically in terms of my research site, I was also interested in the complexities of being an immigrant in a new country, a new school and having to learn a new language while also dealing with the difficulties of physical and emotional transition.

By choosing to work with learners over an extended period of time, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of learners' experiences in a multilingual learning environment at school and in

the society in which they live. I observed the daily activities in the school and listened to the feelings and accounts shared by the learners. The personal accounts and stories that they told were the central focus of this research rather than a focus on pedagogical strategies. A key moment in my study, which will be further elaborated on in chapters 3 and 4, was when I had to amend my research design as a result of learners expressing willingness to be a part of the study; to share their stories and experiences that they had made together rather than as individuals. To understand this group of eight learners in their school context and to gain access to the feelings and opinions expressed by teachers, learners and parents, an ethnographic approach to research was used as well as Narrative Analysis.

I was also interested in the efforts made by the school to support learners who are learning in an additional/foreign language. By acknowledging social issues and contexts as affecting learning and teaching, I observed how the school works with multilingualism. I observed how home-school interactions are managed, how communication and language barriers are overcome and how psychological support for learners is shown. The research site I chose provided an opportunity for all of the abovementioned challenges and influences to be observed. It was an ideal situation because it represents a school that embraces multilingualism and multiculturalism and does not shy away from social issues.

1.6 Outline of Chapters

The following chapter is the Literature Review (Chapter 2) which explores relevant literature and research frameworks. It is followed by the Research Methodology (Chapter 3) which discusses the details of this research and the Data Analysis (Chapter 4) which discusses the findings of this research. The report concludes by outlining the key findings, limitations and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

For this research, I have explored bodies of literature in various fields which include: a socio-cultural approach to literacy (Pahl & Rowsell 2005; Nomlomo 2009; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Gee 1996, 2000; Street 1984, 1993, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis 2000; Prinsloo & Breier 1996); South African multicultural education and language diversity (Christensen 2009; Nomlomo 2009; Dornbrack 2009; Perry 2008; Kapp 2004); Education and immigrant learners (Dornbrack et al. 2008; Matthews 2008; Berriz 2009; Stormont et al. 2003); Literacy and ethnography (Baynham 2004; Christensen 2004; Street 2004; Heath & Street 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson 2005) as well as Community studies (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1999; Cohen 1985; Crow & Allan 1994; Rohleder et.al. 2008; Sonn et.al. 1999). These bodies of literature are useful in understanding the research questions of this study which are interested in experiences and stories about language and literacy as well as how multilingualism and multiculturalism impacts teaching and learning.

2.1 Socio-cultural approach to literacy

The socio-cultural approach to literacy emerged in the 1970s and 1980s when the notion of 'literacy' started to expand and take into account socio-cultural influences (Heath 1983; Street 1984/1994; Gee 1996; Barton & Ivanic 1991, Baynham 1995). This approach claims that 'Literacy is not a neutral set of skills that we have in our heads and develop through language teaching and learning' (Pahl & Rowsell 2005 p. 3) but rather about 'how different communities use and interact around literacy' (Heath 1983 cited in Pahl & Rowsell 2005 p. 14). Literacy from this perspective is 'primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text [and] does not reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned' (Barton & Hamilton 1998 p. 3).

Literacy researchers across the globe have increasingly recognized that literacy is not merely a cognitive phenomenon; it is closely linked to social and cultural practice, to power and ideology (Gee 1996, 2000; Barton & Hamilton 1998, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis 2000; Street 2001a, 2001b in

Perry 2008p. 58). The view that literacy is a social process, where particular socially constructed skills and knowledge are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes (Street 1984:97; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 1999; Baynham 1995; Street 1993) and about 'how different communities use and interact around literacy' (Heath 1983 cited in Pahl & Rowsell 2005 p. 14). These are key notions of the work of Brian Street, whose work is highly influential in understanding this paradigm.

Street's (1984; 1993; 2000; 2003; 2005) work is instrumental in changing the historically prevailing ideas of literacy which was seen as producing particular universal characteristics and giving rise to particular good effects, regardless of context (Leu et al. 2004; Prinsloo & Breier 1996). This understanding was named the 'autonomous model' of literacy (Street 1984) which assumed that literacy in itself had effects on other social and cognitive practices which were socially neutral and universally applicable and is a vehicle for social outcomes to be achieved (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). The 'autonomous model' (Street 1984) of literacy has been dominant for more than a decade resulting in a view of literacy as individualistic by nature.

In response to this model, Street has contributed the notion of the 'ideological model' (1984) of literacy. This model takes into account the social nature of literacy where it is 'something one actively *does*, in concert with other humans…and the material, social and symbolic world' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). This model of literacy is concerned with the multiple literacy practices that exist and differ from context to context (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). It is also concerned with the ways in which people use and value reading and writing in the conceptions of knowledge, identity and being (Prinsloo & Breier 1996).

This view also suggests that reading and writing should be viewed as social practices rather than as individual tasks and that through social interactions, literacy develops. It is understood that 'our languages are not only a means of communication, they are also carriers of culture and markers of group identity' (Dornbrack 2009 p.25). The 'ideological model' (Street 1984) of literacy also acknowledges the various power relations that exist within each context that contribute to literacy and language development. For example, it acknowledges policy decisions and the dominant attitudes towards literacy (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). In relation to these dominant attitudes, the socio-cultural approach to literacy identifies dominant modes of literacy as text-based and context-neutral (Barton & Hamilton 2000). Instead, this paradigm identifies 'multiliteracies' as means through which individuals interact and use literacy. It views

reading and writing activities as embedded within culturally and linguistically diverse contexts and in multimodal forms (Bartlett 2007; Cope & Kalantzis 2000; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000).

The relationship between the socio-cultural paradigm and the community is integral to this research because it allows connections to be made between the individual and wider society. The notion of 'literacy practices' (Street 1984) allows insight into these connections where one can observe the 'socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). This is an example of how the socio-cultural approach to literacy places much emphasis on context or 'situated literacies' (Barton & Hamilton 2000). For the learners in this study, this context is not homogeneous, but consists of various layers in the form of various communities which I will expand on later in chapter 4.

Socio-cultural theory also introduces the idea that schooling is not just about learning content, but also about cultural reproduction (Kapp 2004; Gee 2000). It is where children learn about the dynamics of society; the behaviours, norms, values and attitudes (Kapp 2004; Gee 2000). Schools allow for social identities to be produced and reproduced in accordance with societal norms and characteristics. Socio-cultural theory then assumes that the classroom becomes an instrument for the development of society and where 'social relations are played out' (Kapp 2004; Gee 2000). The link that this has to language and literacy is important. Social identity is central to language use and development (Kapp 2004) because it is the means through which we negotiate ourselves in different situations. It is therefore valuable to consider the socio-cultural approach to literacy in a South African context where diversity between race, culture and languages exists (Dornbrack 2009; Nomlomo 2009).

Also, the socio-cultural approach allows issues pertaining to identity to be included when thinking about literacy and language development. Within this paradigm of literacy, identity is about 'the purposeful ways in which individuals endeavor to position themselves through literacy practices in social and cultural fields' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). Because language is the tool with which we negotiate our positions and roles in society (Kapp 2004 p. 249) it is important to recognize the role that language plays in identity development. The term 'identity' is not a fixed or unified entity; instead, 'it is developed through an ongoing social process of self-making in conjunction with others through interaction' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53).

The socio-cultural approach to literacy also places much emphasis on collaboration and relationships where literacy practices and identity develop through interaction with others (Gee 1996; 2000) which is representative of the social nature of learning.

By using the socio-cultural approach as an overarching framework, the 'context' in which these girls are situated becomes a central focus. This context is not homogenous and therefore needs to be carefully deconstructed to understand the role that it plays in their literacy and language development. This framework also allows us to consider issues of identity and the social dynamics of learning through engagement in various literacy practices. It is also helpful in understanding the connections between the school and society. The socio-cultural approach to literacy also allows issues of language diversity in the classroom to be explored and has a close relationship to ethnographic research principles.

2.3 Multilingual Classrooms

The question has always been and remains, 'should children be taught in their mother tongues, in a dominant regional language or in a colonial (European) language?' (Perry 2008 p. 62). This question is further complicated in the South African context where 11 official languages exist out of 28 spoken languages (Perry 2008) and where foreign languages are becoming more and more predominant as immigration increases (Nomlomo 2009; Perry 2008). It is therefore a challenge for the South African education system to provide quality education to a multicultural learner population and where English as a first language is spoken by less than 10% of the population (Howie et al. 2008).

By using a theoretical framework established by the socio-cultural approach to literacy, it becomes easier to understand what is going on in South African classrooms. The biggest challenge that South African English teachers possibly face is that less than one South African child in ten speaks English as their first language (Dornbrack 2009). This is closely related to the ideas of socio-cultural literacy where the dynamics of a multilingual South Africa are reflected in the language classroom. Literacy becomes 'enmeshed in beliefs and values; cultures differ in what they believe constitutes texts and literate behavior, as well as the values they attribute to such texts and behaviors' (Perry 2008 p. 59). This perspective on literacy is useful in understanding how South African schools are affected.

It is important to acknowledge the influence of political instability and globalization on literacy where 'low literacy levels in Africa are directly related to the degree to which local languages

have been ignored in favour of international … languages' (Perry 2008 p. 62) The result of this is that many children have to sacrifice their mother tongues when they enter formal schooling. The reality for many South African learners and teachers is that the language of instruction may be a third or even fourth language (Perry 2008; Dornbrack 2009).

South African schools are impacted by their multicultural and multilingual learner bodies where they have needed to shift the roles, rules, social character and functioning (Dornbrack 2009) and motivate their teachers to rethink their own teaching practices. This is often very difficult for teachers who cannot speak the mother tongue languages of the learners and have not had training to deal with multilingual classrooms. Having a multicultural and multilingual classroom should be seen as a resource where all languages are welcomed and valued (Dornbrack 2009; Nomlomo 2009) and not be the cause of exclusion in the classroom (Nomlomo 2009), but it is not uncommon for exclusion and marginalization to occur.

Also, language diversity in the classroom is increasing as many immigrants from countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria [and] Rwanda (Nomlomo 2009 p.75) are entering the school system. These learners not only bring their language differences to the classroom, they also bring cultural and learning differences (Nomlomo 2009). This is central to the context of this research where learners speak minority languages and where teachers struggle to use linguistic diversity as a tool for development. It is understood that language diversity can be used as a valuable resource in social and academic interaction between learners, teachers and parents (Nomlomo 2009), but this becomes more difficult when these languages are not the widely spoken African languages that we hear on a daily basis.

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in South Africa is often seen as a stumbling block (Fleisch 2008; Nomlomo 2009; Dornbrack 2009) to the curriculum. Research suggests that in spite of this deficit view of multilingualism, linguistic diversity should regarded as an asset (Nomlomo 2009) where people can learn one another's languages and expand their linguistic repertoires (Nomlomo 2009; Dornbrack et al. 2008). By promoting language diversity, research suggests that benefits such as language development, motivation to learn other languages, high self-esteem as everyone's languages are recognized and respected, improved communication skills, improved interpersonal relationships, and improved opportunities to succeed can be achieved (Dornbrack et al. 2008; De Wet 2002; Norton 2010)

2.4 The role of English

In the context of multilingualism, the role of English holds a particular position of material and symbolic power for many individuals (Graddol 2011; Norton 2010). English is seen as both the dominant language of global trade and industry and perceived as essential for economic empowerment (Norton 2010; De Wet 2002; Beukes 2004; Graddol 2011). In the education sector, English is also a dominant language and is the LoLT for many schools (Fleisch 2008; Dornbrack 2009; Nomlomo 2009); this in spite of the large number of learners who have a mother tongue language other than English. Beukes (2004) conducted extensive research and found that many black South Africans are unwilling to use mother tongue languages as the Language of Learning and Teraching (LoLTs) out of fear that they will remain 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' (p. 249) if they are not proficient in the English language.

The English classroom is also perceived as a space where learners can debate issues of justice and social engagement (Dornbrack et al. 2008; Stein 2008) and allows both the teacher and learner the space to engage on sensitive topics that affect their lives. Therefore, The English classroom can also have an important role in discussing issues of power, linguistic diversity, linguistic dominance and where learners can be made aware of their position in relation to these issues (McKinney & Norton 2008) Through engaging with these issues of power, learners can critically interpret dominant powers and can, through literacy and language, act on their positions to change unequal or unfair power relations (McKinney 2008; Janks 2010) as Dornbrack et al. (2008) suggests, 'open themselves to the transformative potential of such interactions' (p.1).

The role of the teachers is also significant in multilingual classrooms (Stein 2008; Norton 2010) where classrooms should be areas where multiple languages are valued. Teachers need to model justice in diverse classroom spaces and change their teaching practices to suit multilingualism. Particular practices as suggested by Kalantzis (1990) include; involving the community, including the diversity in the classroom, using experiential teaching methods where learners are actively involved; assessing learners' individual development. Kalantzis (1990) also highlights the collaboration between staff, learners and parents as most essential to supporting multilingual classrooms.

The theories of multilingual education as well as the role of English in multilingual classrooms are valuable in understanding this research because of the elements of the research site. The description above illustrates theoretical perspectives on what should be happening in classrooms. It also suggests ways in which multilingual classrooms can be used effectively. This theory will be used to locate the reality of the research site chosen where multilingualism and multiculturalism are prevalent. English also has an interesting position in this school which will be discussed in chapter 4.

2.5 Language development

Theory that is useful in understanding multilingualism and learning in an Additional Language is that of Cummins (1984; 2000). Cummins (1984; 2000) makes the distinction between two differing kinds of language proficiency. BICS or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are the 'basic' skills of listening and speaking which are typically acquired naturally by many students, particularly by those who spend a lot of time interacting with native speakers. CALP or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is the basis for a child's ability to cope with the academic demands placed upon her in the various subjects. The importance of this for multilingual learners is that many learners do not have a firm grasp of BICS before they are required to have CALP; this often happens when learners have mother tongue education up until Grade 4. Also, if learners' CALP are not well developed, they experience difficulties in conceptualizing academic content of subjects such as History, Biology and Mathematics (Nomlomo 2009; De Wet 2002).

2.6 Language and Identity

An important aspect of language and identity is that language is never neutral and can represent us in certain ways (Dornbrack 2009; De Wet 2002; Nomlomo 2009) and that it plays an important part in 'who we are, how we see ourselves and how we represent ourselves to others' (Dornbrack 2009 p. 39). Our identities relate to our desires (West 1992 in Norton 1997) such as the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation and the desire for safety and security' (West 1992 in Norton 1997 p. 410). Our identities are also shaped by our understanding of our relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how we understand our possibilities for the future (Norton 1997 p. 410). Often, the languages we speak determine the relationship we have with the world and affect possibilities for the future and our positions with society (Norton 1997). Language and identity

are closely linked because of the fact that we use language as a tool to negotiate our position in the world.

Relations of power can either enable or constrain the range of identities that language learners can negotiate in their classrooms and communities. West (1992) speaks of two relations of power that influence language learning. These are coercive and collaborative relations of power. Coercive relations of power refer to 'the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group or country that is detrimental to others and serves to maintain an inequitable division of resources in a society' (West 1992 in Norton 1997 p.412). Dornbrack et al. (2008) and Fleisch (2008) discuss the dominance of policy in the lives of teachers and learners where often, they are subject to policies that hinder language development. Collaborative relations of power 'can serve to empower rather than marginalize. In this view, power is not a fixed, predetermined quantity but can be mutually generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations' (Dornbrack et al. 2008 p. 412). As Nomlomo (2009) suggests, multilingualism can be used to empower learners with new skills and where linguistic repertoires can be expanded.

2.7 Immigrants and Education

According to Matthews (2008), 'while multilingualism, limited literacy in the mother tongue language, unfamiliarity with English, interrupted schooling and limited oral proficiency have been identified as common challenges to many students in the refugee/immigrant cohort, it should not be assumed that the cohort is homogenous' (Matthews 2008 p. 32). It is important to understand what it is like to face education in a foreign country as the research participants of this study have done. This section of literature explores issues of vulnerability in terms of language acquisition and issues of transition to a new education system.

Along with multicultural classrooms and linguistic diversity is the question of the vulnerable child (Kendall & Kinder 2007; Stormont et al. 2003). The definition of a 'vulnerable child' has been expanded to include children who are at an increased risk of failure because of specific characteristics (Stormont et al. 2003). These characteristics include teenaged parents, young offenders, children in public care, asylum seekers, refugees and other minority groups (Kendall & Kinder 2007). In the South African context, the fact that the majority of learners are learning in an additional language may also be a characteristic for vulnerability; learning in an additional language without the necessary support may lead to failure (Nomlomo 2009; Kapp 2004). Also, immigrant learners may be considered vulnerable because 'taken for granted literate practices

embedded in everyday classroom processes and conventions may not be apparent to refugee students' (Matthews 2008 p. 35). This notion is however challenged in this study and will be discussed further in chapter 5.

It is understood that schools are a stabilizing feature in the unsettled lived of refugee students. 'They provide safe spaces for new encounters, interactions and learning opportunities. They also deliver literacy; the key to educational success, post-school options, life choices, social participation and settlement' (Matthews 2008 p. 31). Many students are not from literate communities; 'some arrive with conversational English, others are beginners, many are bilingual and many have no experience of formal schooling' (Matthews 2008 p. 31). Alongside the 'safe world' (Matthews 2008) of the classroom are 'unsafe and unstable worlds where being identified as an asylum seeker can make [one] vulnerable to racist abuse and assault'. The role that the language classroom plays in this is that there is a platform for discussion (Matthews 2008 p. 28).

The idea of a 'whole-school' approach (Matthews 2008) raises awareness about cultural diversity and vulnerability. Along with multiculturalism in classrooms should be the desire to cherish cultural and ethnic diversity which encompasses linguistic diversity (Matthews 2008; Baynham 2006). Schools should pay careful attention to their ethos and create welcoming environments, good induction procedures, home liaisons, community links, pastoral care, ESL and English language support for vulnerable learners from all circumstances (Matthews 2008; Baynham 2006).

The school can also use literacy and language to 'create environments and spaces for participation, communication, relationships, friendships, belonging and learning about oneself and others' (Matthews 2008 p. 42). This is useful in interpreting this research where the lives of the learners have been unsettled as a result of immigration and feelings of displacement. One of the research questions highlights the interest of this research in the school's role in supporting these feelings of displacement and therefore the aforementioned theory can be used as a background to what is observed.

2.8 An ethnographic lens

For the purpose of this research, theories of ethnography and literacy have been consulted. Ethnography of communication (Heath & Street 2008) is a framework that is used by literacy

theorists (Heath 1983; Gee 1996, 1999; Street 2000, 2005) to access the historical and contextual explanations that affect individuals and their actions (Heath & Street 2008).

It is important to recognize that this research does not qualify as a full ethnographic study, but rather makes use of the principles of ethnography or an ethnographic perspective. This is a useful framework to use because it is closely linked to the socio-cultural theory of literacy where context plays an important role in literacy and language development. Ethnographic studies also begin with an interest in some particular area of social life (Hammersley & Atkinson 2005) which in this case is literacy and language learning from an immigrant learner's perspective.

The ethnographic perspective on literacy is a well-established strand of literacy research (Baynham 2004, Heath & Street 2008). Researchers such as Heath (1983; 2008), Scribner & Cole (1981), Street (1984; 2000; 2005) have contributed significantly to this field of research in past years. Other researchers such as Barton & Hamilton (1998), Besnier (1993), Kulick & Stroud (1993) and Prinsloo & Breier (1996) have also contributed to what is called the 'ethnography of literacy paradigm' (Baynham 2004). Because the socio-cultural approach to literacy creates a space for research to be concerned with human life (Heath & Street 2008), ethnographic perspectives assist in gathering useful data that is conducive to exploring human 'realities' (Heath & Street 2008).

Ethnography is a distinct type of research where the knowledge that is produced depends on the researcher taking part in close social interaction (Christensen 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson 2005). It is therefore crucial that the researcher develops a relationship with the participants (Christensen 2004; Baynham 2004). Heath & Street (2008) also speak of the 'recursive process' which is useful in ethnographic research as it allows the ethnographers curiosity to be 'legitimized' (p. 34). The recursive process is the backward and forward interaction between past research and literature and the current ethnographic study. Because ethnographic research is grounded on curiosity, this interaction aids in situating the research within an intellectual framework. (Heath & Street 2008)

Key features of ethnographic work include people's action and accounts being studied in everyday contexts rather than in an artificially constructed environment (Hammersley & Atkinson 2005; Baynham 2004). Studies are kept small scale so that in-depth perspectives can be gained. As (Heath & Street 2008) explain;

> Ethnographers do not begin their research with clearly defined research questions or delimiting hypothesis. Taking their cue from anthropologists, ethnographers have field sites and areas of core interest in front of them as they begin their research, but they do not enter their work with a single fixed question (p. 50).

This requires the researcher to spend an extended amount of time in the research setting. The data of an ethnographic research project is gathered from a wide range of sources and is relatively unstructured. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human action and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson 2005; Heath & Street 2008).

Ethnographic data collection methods include interviews, participant observation and participatory techniques such as drawings, essays, dramatizations and group discussions (Heath & Street 2008; Christensen 2004). Fieldwork should be a practical engagement with local cultural practices of communication, observing children's language use, the conceptual meanings of their actions, social interactions and connections (Christensen 2004).The data is usually collected in an unstructured form allowing the researcher freedom to elaborate or to investigate various issues. Data collection is usually done through means of field notes written in very descriptive terms and through audio or video recordings and a collection of documents or artifacts (Christensen 2004; Baynham 2004; Hammersely & Atkinson 2005). 'Given the nature of the data, a considerable amount of effort and time will need to go into processing and analyzing [it]' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2005 p. 4).

Because this study deals mainly with how children live their everyday lives, their voices and their representation of their own lives, it is important to use ethnographic research principles such as reflexivity and dialogue (Christensen 2004; Baynham 2004). Also, due to the social nature of the environment, issues of power, voice and representation have to be central to discussions of children's participation in social and political life (Christensen 2004). Reflecting on this, it took great effort to be included in the participants' everyday lives, to share explanations of their day-to-day activities and relationships.

2.9 Community Studies

The concept of community is a highly contested, widely researched phenomenon (Howarth 2001; Colombo & Senatore 2005; Sonn et.al 1999; Rohleder et.al 2008). It is therefore necessary to focus specifically on a strand of community research that is useful in the context of

this research. I have chosen a strand of research that is fairly 'new' to community studies research (Howarth 2001) which is embedded in the field social psychology. It is useful to make use of this strand of research as it is closely related to the socio-cultural approach to literacy and to ethnography. The reason for this close relationship is because 'the individual is, in essence, a social being. We cannot *but* live in communities: we need to be in and of communities in order to realize a distinct sense of self, attachment, individuality and commonality' (Howarth 2001 p. 8).

The field of social psychology is a research paradigm with roots in the work of Marx, Mean and Weber (Howarth 2001). Social psychology develops insight into communities because psychology is the study of the social self, how it defends and challenges representations of community: 'how we, in and through representations of communities, we create both a common identity and a located self' (Howarth 2001 p. 7). In terms of community, social psychology looks at 'the way communities are talked about, constructed, and defended by those who reside in them and come into contact with them' (Howarth 2001 p. 4).

Below is a list of common definitions of the concept of community which emerge from various bodies of literature (Howarth 2001; Cohen 1985; Crow & Allan 1994):

- *A community is a group of people who share a common history and set of beliefs*
- *A community is an area where those who live there interact on a frequent and supportive basis*
- *A community is a collectivity of people that share common interests and hobbies*
- *A community is a group of people that co-constructs a common identity and a sense of difference*
- *A community is a body of people that are brought together through similar experiences of exclusion and discrimination imposed by wider society*
- *A community is a group of people that share similar work patterns and a work culture*
- *A community is a collectivity that has a common politics and economics*

From the above mentioned definitions we can see that each definition emphasizes something different, making it difficult to find a singular meaning. In some definitions, the meaning of community is located in physical or tangible ways and in others; the notion of community is more symbolic or abstract. In some definitions a community is something inclusive and in others it can be exclusive. This is the reason why the Crow & Allan (1994) feel there are a

'bewildering variety of meanings associated with the term "community"' (p.1). The field of social psychology contributes an element to these definitions that is particularly relevant to this research (Howarth 2001 p. 28) which is the recognition of the individual in relation to the community.

2.9.1 What is community?

In order to understand community, we need to understand what it means to be part of a particular context or community. This requires the exploration of the shared understandings group members have of their communities and the processes that foster community and lead to community formation (Sonn et.al 1999).

Current levels of urbanization, migration, globalization and the developments of new media and technology have progressively dissolved the significance of place in the late modern world (Howarth 2001 p. 6). This has had an impact on the physical geography of community (Howarth 2001; Crow & Allan 1994) as it is now rare for the boundaries of place to coincide with a sense of community. Increased urbanization has led many to assume that contemporary society is less communal (Howarth 2001). Crow & Allan (1994) argue that 'despite the repeated pronouncements of its inevitable decline in the modern world, community life is still very much a part of our social existence (p. 111) and further research argues that communities are still significant in our understanding of others and of ourselves (Howarth 2001) in spite of global changes.

The central tenet in understanding community from a social-psychological perspective is that communities integrate individuals into society (Howarth 2001; Crow & Allan 1994; Blackshaw 2009). For social psychology, communities connect people in present and past, provide shared meaning and common values, access to shared knowledge, collective identities, as well as individuality and agency (Howarth 2001 p. 9) It also considers how representations, practices and relations of power both construct and restrict the social construction of communities (Rohleder et al. 2008; Howarth 2001; Blackshaw 2009) which is an important issue to consider in human interactions. This has a close relation to socio-cultural theories of literacy.

2.9.2 Aspects of community used in this research

The following is a description of various aspects of community that are adopted in the analysis of this research. These aspects will be used to frame the Data Analysis chapter and act as a summary of how community is defined in this project.

1. **Community as a place or interest** (Crow & Allan 1994; Stephens 2005) is the basic understanding of a 'physical space where people have something in common, and this shared element is understood geographically' (Crow & Allan 1994 p. 6).

2. **Community as a source of social knowledge** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

   In this view, community is needed in order to sustain languages, institutions and traditions, and individuals must share a common means of exchanging meanings and ideas. 'Community members must also share particular symbols, histories and aspirations' (Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998 p.31).

3. **Community as a basis of common identities** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998) or **community as a value** (Cohen 1985; Frazer 1999) is the view that community is something intangible and involves 'feelings of solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust' and where community contributes to a 'sense of belonging' (Smith 2001 p.1)

4. **Community as a means of marginalization and social exclusion** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

   This is the view that dominant groups such as the media, political elite, church, state institutions, and the social groups construct, dispense and impose particular representations of power which support their own interests and their own construction of the world. This is closely linked to the following aspect:

5. **Community as a resource for empowerment** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998; Rohleder et al. 2007) This position holds that ccommunities are unities and are formed by the shared experience of being seen by others as a community. 'It also allows the space between the representations of others and one's own representations to be a

space for challenge, for protest, and for change where communities can shift power representations' (Howarth 2001 p.230).

Through further reading and engaging with the field of community studies, the data is situated within a framework that foregrounds the various communities and community elements that are at play in this research. Using community research as a lens for analysis is also useful because the 'sense of community' is central in understanding the literacy and language experiences of the research participants.

2.10 Conclusion

The literature consulted for this study contributes to the understanding of the research findings in three specific ways. Firstly, the socio-cultural approach to literacy allows the study to be located within a particular context where the dynamics of this context play an important part in the development of language and literacy. Further research into South African education allows issues of multilingualism and multiculturalism to be foregrounded and is useful in understanding the daily teaching and learning practices at a school such as the one in this research. Adopting an ethnographic approach enabled me to become immersed in this context to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants. In terms of analysis, theories of ethnography were also useful in interpreting data through constant consultation with theory during the period of data collection. As ethnography allows, a framework for analysis was located within the field of Community Studies which has been applied to the analysis of this research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This small scale study took place during the third and fourth terms of the 2011 school year. It involved one research site and was done using qualitative research methods, guided by the principles of ethnographic research. A total of eight learner participants and six teacher participants were involved in the data collection where a total of four research instruments were used. Observation notes constituted the bulk of the data collection due to the ethnographic approach adopted by the researcher. The data was analysed using a combination of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) and Narrative Analysis both of which were guided by the theory of ethnography.

3.2 Research Site

For this ethnographic style investigation, a school situated in Yeoville, Johannesburg was chosen. The reason for this choice was because the researcher was interested in learning more about the language and literacy experiences of immigrant learners. Having been to this particular school on teaching experience as a student, the researcher approached the school to conduct research because of their diverse school community. This school is known to have a large number of immigrant learners and represents a diversity of learners in terms of language, socio-economic background and culture. Because this research is grounded in the socio-cultural approach to literacy, the significance of the site and the surrounding environment is crucial in understanding the findings of this research (*See chapter 1: The School's Story*).

3.3 Research Design

This research is a qualitative, ethnographic-style study. It is qualitative because it is concerned with 'obtaining more detailed knowledge or explor[ing] ideas rather than to obtain findings' (Creswell 2003 p. 131). This is relevant to this research which is interested in experiences and in sharing these experiences according to the research questions stipulated in chapter 1. This research is not a full scale ethnographic study because of its small scope, limited number of research participants and data collection time period. It does make use of ethnographic structures where 'the focus of investigation is on the everyday behaviours of the people in the

group…with an intent to identify cultural norms, beliefs, social structures and other cultural patterns' (Leedy & Ormrod 2010 p. 139). These ideas are valuable because it is concerned with experiences, stories and the realities of these immigrant children in multilingual classrooms as outlined by the research questions. Ethnographic data collection methods include interviews, participant observation and participatory techniques such as drawings, essays, dramatizations and group discussions (Heath & Street 2008; Christensen 2004).

It was initially decided that I would work with three learners as case studies in order to focus on their stories and experiences. After ethical clearance was obtained, the principal of the school was approached to assist in the identification of these three learners. According to case study research, 'purposive sampling' (Silverman 2010) allows one to choose a case because 'it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested' (Silverman 2010 p. 139) and therefore I explained to the principal that learners needed to be chosen with specific attributes in mind. In line with research aims, the ideal participants would be immigrant learners with mixed academic abilities, language backgrounds and social contexts. Also, these learners would need to speak a home language that was foreign to South Africa e.g. French or Portuguese. The reason for this is the complexity attached to learn English as a foreign language which is an integral part of this research. The researcher also asked that these identified learners be in either Grade 6 or Grade 7 and part of the school for at least 3-4 years. The intention for this was that the learners would be able to reflect on their literacy and language experiences over some time.

The principal identified three girls in alignment with these requests after consulting with the English H.OD and English teacher. The three girls that were identified were Rebecca, Gina and Caroline. Once these girls had been identified, I met with them at break time to invite them to be a part of the research and to explain to them what their involvement would be. I explained that I would observe them during class and have some discussions with them at break time or after school. I also explained that I would need to interview them individually and that we would also use a journal to communicate. The above were all initially intended in alignment with the design of a case study where the intention was to study a small number of cases in detail, using a method that would provide details and in-depth understanding. According to Punch (1998), the case study's objective is to 'develop as full an understanding of that case as possible' (Punch 1998 p. 150 in Silverman 2010 p. 138) and individual interviews, journal entries

and observations were chosen in alignment with ethnographic principles (Leedy & Ormrod 2010) and as the initial means to develop this understanding.

After approximately one week of observation, informal discussions and journal entries, the girls seemed to become reluctant to write in their journals and relied on prompts for journal entries. I approached the girls during a break time and asked them why they were not writing in their journals. The learners, almost relieved that I had asked the question, told me 'Miss, we just want to talk to you and tell you things, not write them' (*IGD 13/09/10*). I then asked them if they were comfortable with talking to me about their experiences instead of having the privacy of a journal to which they replied, 'Miss, we are not afraid to tell you anything, but we want to ask you if we can bring some other girls to join the group…you really should have them in your study, Miss' (*IGD 13/09/10*). With this request, five other girls were invited to join the research using the same ethical procedures as per the initial three girls.

This key moment would turn out to be pivotal in this research as it revealed a need to modify my research design to suit the needs of my participants. It is also a key moment because it embodies the main finding of this research where experiences became collective and not individual. It was at that point that my research was no longer a case study of three girls as individuals, but about eight girls who had made a journey together from Grade 4 to Grade 7 and the significance of their collective experiences. However, as a researcher this was a challenge because my research sample had grown from 3 to 8, but the focus was still on experiences and stories. With a group of eight girls, these stories became vivid and plentiful and to treat them each as case studies would be difficult with research time and space restrictions. As a researcher, this was a challenge to become flexible and adapt to the research participants and their needs and at the same time to maintain the integrity of data and aims of the research. It was therefore necessary to initiate a redesign of the research methodology which will be discussed below.

3.4 Research Redesign

The increase in sample size made it necessary to review the use of case studies. The design remains a qualitative ethnographic-style study, but the data collection methods required review. The data would still be analysed using qualitative research methods, but would not be presented as three individual cases. Because this research uses elements of ethnography, the design of data collection could be altered to suit the needs of the participants. The learners

expressed the wish to *tell* their stories not *write* them which immediately required an instrument to accommodate the use of the spoken mode. Also, the fact that the girls wanted to tell their stories *with* their friends who were in similar situations, required an instrument which would facilitate group involvement. I managed to secure a classroom space after school for the duration of the data collection period which would allow for group interactions and sharing of experiences and where focus group discussions and informal discussions could replace individual interviews.

Instead of using journal entries, working with the allowances of ethnography which stipulates that the researcher is able to collect artifacts e.g. artistic creations (Leedy & Ormrod 2010 p. 139), I compiled a set of 5 tasks to allow girls to share information with me in a creative form, but maintaining alignment with research aims. This type of data collection is often used in narrative research (Leedy & Ormrod 2010). The five tasks formed a collection of work including an art project, a letter to a new girl, a postcard, a drawing and shared reading (see Appendix 6) as data. These will be discussed in further detail below.

3.5 The role of the researcher

By choosing to shape the research within the framework of ethnography, this had particular implications for me, as the researcher. An ethnographic researcher needs to establish a good rapport with participants and to become immersed in the daily life experiences (Leedy & Ormrod 2010 p. 139). This was an important task as 'stranger' in the lives of these learners and teachers. One of the main objectives was to access learners' experiences in a way that they felt most comfortable. I wanted the girls to feel assured that our discussions and the experiences they shared with me would be treated with care and understanding. For this reason, I became part of the school for 8 weeks where I observed the girls in classroom activities during the day and spent time with them after school in informal discussions. Thus 'throughout fieldwork [I became] a careful observer, interviewer and listener' (Leedy & Ormrod 2010 p. 139).

3.6 Research Participants

3.6.1 Learners

With this change in research design, it is important to understand the composition of the research participants. In the table below is a summary of the eight girls who comprised the sample.

Table 3.1: Participant Information (learners)

Name	***Age***	***Nationality***	***Home Languages***	***Residence***	***Age upon arrival in RSA***
April	*12*	*Zimbabwe*	*Shona, English*	*Bellevue East*	*8*
Caroline	*12*	*DRC*	*French, Lingala, English*	*Rosettenville*	*7*
Fleur	*12*	*DRC*	*Lingala, English*	*Yeoville*	*8*
Gina	*15*	*DRC*	*Lingala*	*Yeoville*	*15*
Rebecca	*12*	*DRC*	*Lingala, English*	*Yeoville*	*8*
Sizani	*12*	*Zimbabwe*	*Ndebele, English*	*Yeoville*	*7*
Stella	*12*	*DRC*	*Lingala, English*	*Yeoville*	*8*
Teresa	*12*	*Zimbabwe*	*Shona, English*	*Orange Grove*	*8*

As presented in Table 3.1, there are significant similarities and differences between these girls. In terms of similarities, most of the girls speak both their mother tongue language and English at home. Most girls also live in the same suburb which is important in terms of socio-cultural theory which will be discussed in chapter 4. Apart from Gina, the girls are the same age and arrived in South Africa at similar ages. Gina's story is significantly different and will be discussed in chapter 4.

Before the other l five girls could take part in the research, a meeting was held with all of their parents, the principal and translator. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that the parents of these girls understood and gave consent for participation in this study. This was done not only because of the ages of the participants, but also because of a language barrier which could impede parents giving informed consent. During the meeting and once the parents were comfortable with the requirements for participation, a consent form was signed (see

Appendix 3). The learners then also signed a consent form for themselves (see Appendix 1). This process was followed for all eight participants.

3.6.2 Teachers

The contributions and experiences of teachers themselves were also integral to the research. I was interested in how teachers have found ways to support learning in the face of diverse learning environments and how they use multilingual classrooms as a teaching resource or to enrich learning. Initially I worked closely with the English teacher (Mr. E) and the HoD for Languages (Ms. H) and as I got to know the different subject teachers, I invited them to be part of the study. Below is a table that summarises the teacher participants:

Table 3.2 Participant Information (teachers)

Name	Nationality	Learning Area	Qualification	Experience
Mrs. P	South African	Principal	Diploma (ACE)	10 years+
Mr. E	South African	English	HDip.Ed	35 Years
Ms. A	Zimbabwean	Arts and Culture	Diploma	5 Years
Mrs. M	Zimbabwean	EMS	Diploma (ACE)	11 Years
Ms. H	South African	HOD Languages	Diploma	10 years
Mrs. C	South African	After care	Diploma	10 years+

The research aimed to understand how teachers understand, support and utilize their multilingual, multicultural learning environment as a way of understanding the girls' experiences. Although I was already working closely with the English teacher (Mr. E) and HOD for Languages and Grade 7 Natural Sciences teacher (Ms. H), I was also interested in the sentiments of the other Grade 7 teachers as issues of language and literacy do not only affect language teaching. The invitation to be interviewed for this research was extended to all Grade 7 teachers. Ms. A (EMS) and Mrs. M (AC) expressed an interest in the study. Three Grade 7 teachers declined the invitation. The school's after-care teacher was approached for an interview because of the after school literacy support that the school provides. Also, this teacher was recommended for the research by the principal because of her personal

interactions with immigrant families. This insight would be valuable in understanding the experiences of immigrant learners from a teaching perspective. All teacher participants were given an information sheet and consent letter to read and sign (see Appendix 2).

3.7 Research Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and informal group discussions. The after-school group sessions below refer to the time spent with the girls after school where learners were engaged in activities such as an art project, writing letters and producing drawings as literacy artifacts.

Table 3.3: Research Instruments

Instrument	Date of Collection	Code for Analysis	Appendix
Reflective Journal	13 – 30 September 2011	**RJ (date)**	
Teacher Interview 1 (ENG)	19 September 2011	**TI1**	4
Teacher Interview 2 (EMS)	21 September 2011	**TI2**	4
Teacher Interview 3 (AC)	21 September 2011	**TI3**	4
Teacher Interview 4 (NS)	20 September 2011	**TI4**	4
Teacher Interview 5 (HOD)	19 September 2011	**TI 5**	4
After-care Teacher Interview	27 September 2011	**ATI**	4
Principal Interview	27 September 2011	**PI**	4
Observation Notes	19 August – 30 September 2011	**ON (date)**	
Informal Group Discussion (Documented in Observation notes)	13 – 30 September 2011	**IGD (date)**	5&6
Focus Group Discussion 1 (General, Being an Immigrant)	14 September 2011	**FGD1**	5&6
Focus Group Discussion 2 (Thoughts about English, School)	19 September 2011	**FGD2**	5&6
Focus Group Discussion 3 (Best and worst moments using English)	23 September 2011	**FGD3**	5&6
After-school Group Sessions (Girls)	13 – 30 September 2011	**AGS (date)**	6

3.7.1 Interviews

Open-ended or semi-structured interviews are defined by Nichols (1991) as 'an informal interview [which is] not structured by a standard list of questions' (p. 131).It is an instrument which 'allows the researcher to deal with the topics of interest in any order and to phrase their questions as they think best' (Nichols 1991 p. 131). This reason was the motivation for the use of semi-structured interviews in this research. Instead of using 'topics,' a list of prompting or guiding questions was used in each interview to guide the progression of the interview. This instrument allowed the researcher to 'probe deeper into the initial responses of the respondent to gain a more detailed answer to the question' (Wimmer and Dominick 1997 p. 156) and participants could contribute in more detail and depth.

The questions (see Appendix 4) that were asked of the teachers were in alignment with issues identified in the classroom and other observations in line with the research questions. The interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms after school where teachers were comfortable to discuss their feelings and opinions. These semi-structured interviews took approximately one hour to complete and the researcher allowed for a free discussion at the end of the interview where teachers could share their feelings about teaching in a multilingual environment. These semi-structured teacher interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed.

Reflecting on the use of these instruments, the interviews worked well in obtaining data from teachers that they may not have mentioned in front of other colleagues. Also, they were useful in gaining further information based on observations I had made in the classroom and in bringing to light issues I had previously not considered.

3.7.2 Observation and Field Notes

In terms of ethnography, 'site based fieldwork is the sine qua non [or] the essence of any ethnography' (Leedy & Ormrod 2010 p. 139.) Therefore, in-depth observation and field notes were the bulk of the data collection. These observations included classroom observations where the researcher observed participants in the classroom environment and field notes where the researcher becomes aware of the daily happenings in [and out] of the site and which affect the lives of the participants (Heath & Street 2008). The observations began during preliminary visits to the school to obtain consent from participants and parents and continued

throughout 7 weeks of classroom observations as well as observations of occurrences which took place outside of the classroom.

From these observations, information about the context (the school and surrounding community) was gained and an in-depth understanding of relationships between research participants emerged. These observations were also useful in making connections between the research site, the participants and the research questions of the study i.e. the learner, the teacher and the context.

3.7.3 Group Sessions

Group sessions were held from 2:30 – 4:30pm every day and were done with the consent of parents, teachers and learners. During these sessions all the focus group and informal discussions were held and the learners were involved in a collection of creative tasks. These creative tasks, as part of ethnographic research, would ultimately provide literacy artifacts as well as written/visual forms of data to contribute to the research. These tasks were semi-structured to allow learners freedom for interpretation, but to still focus them in line with research aims. For each task, a set of instructions and guidelines were provided as well as art materials (paper, scissors, paint stickers etc.) for the girls to use. These tasks were then either photographed (art project & drawings) or transcribed (post-cards & letters) and used in the analysis. These guidelines as well as photographs of some of the tasks can be found in the Appendix 5&6. These tasks are part of a technique used in some narrative research which allows learners to share their thoughts and feelings through different modes. Narrative Analysis, which will be discussed below is one of the main components of the data analysis. These activities provided visual data that often conveys a powerful message through symbols and colour and are thereby invaluable in conveying learners' feelings and thoughts.

The Group Sessions held after school were a valuable part of the data collection process. For, it was during these hours spent after school, that the girls became comfortable with engaging with me. These hours became the time where stories were exchanged not only between learners, but between the researcher and the learners. This was important in developing the relationship with the learners which enabled freedom of expression in a space where learners would not feel judged or compromised.

3.7.4 Informal Discussions and Focus Group Discussions

Informal discussions with the learners occurred on a daily basis. These informal discussions took place during break times or after school when learners were working on their art projects. Key insights that were shared during informal discussions were recorded in the form of observation notes where important contributions were written down.

The focus group discussions were more structured and were guided by a list of questions, but allowed for the learners to discuss and express opinions with each other (Wimmer & Dominick 1997 p. 97). These discussions were underpinned by the research aims and guided by classroom observation as well as interactions with the girls. These discussions were effective because the girls had similar experiences and backgrounds and could therefore support or debate each others' contributions. Also, due to the fact that these girls were friends, they were confident to respond to probing questions which is an important aspect of using focus group discussions (Creswell 2003). The discussion schedules are attached (see Appendices 5&6).

3.7.5 Reflective Journal

According to Heath & Street (2008), the ethnographic researcher is also considered a research instrument and therefore 'conceptual memos or reflections are important' (p. 57). After each day of observation and working with the girls, I wrote down a few key thoughts in a reflective journal. These thoughts included my own interpretations of events that occurred during the day, links between daily occurrences and research aim as well as thoughts that required further pursuing of prevalent issues either with the participants and literature. I also used this journal as an outlet where I could write about issues of concern. Both the school and the participants are situated in a context which is very different from my own and at times I found this extremely troubling.

3.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data is a combination of two methods of analysis namely Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) and Narrative Analysis.

3.8.1 Collection of Data

It was my intention to spend an extended period of time with the children to try and understand their experiences in a social and informal way by observing their attitudes and

listening to their narratives. The main reason for this was because it took time to establish a relationship of trust where the learners and I could get to know each other. This was a complex and challenging task, as the learners needed open up to me out of their own accord and in their own time before any data collection could begin. However, once the learners granted me access (Heath & Street 2008) into their lives, I collected a considerable amount of useful data. As Geertz (1995) expresses, 'For an ethnographer everything is a matter of one thing leading to another, that to a third, and that to one hardly knows what' (p. 20). This quotation rightly encapsulates my personal feelings at the stage of data analysis. However, I have used a combination of theoretical and analysis frameworks which helped me make sense of the data.

During the interviews and focus group discussions, all responses were recorded electronically on a voice recorder. Informal discussions and observations were recorded on paper as observation/discussion notes. After the data was collected, these responses were transcribed into thirteen different data sets supplemented by various artifacts (as described above). After all data had been transcribed and organized, the analysis began by adopting principles of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). TCA is descriptive presentation of the data (Creswell 1998; Silverman 2010). It portrays thematic content which is prevalent in all data through the identification of common themes. These themes usually emerge from the participants and are used to contribute 'commonality across the voices of all the participants' (Anderson 2007 p. 1).

Due to the socio-cultural and ethnographic nature of the study, it was very difficult to categorize the data into countable themes. However, a dominant theme emerged through engaging with the data and various literature. This dominant theme that emerged was that of 'community' which was described with references to 'collaboration' 'togetherness' 'helping each other' and various constructions and interpretations of community. At this stage, the data was divided into four sections or four communities that the participants belong to. These four communities are; the Yeoville Community, the Immigrant Community, the School Community and the Community of Learners.

After consulting with further literature, five aspects of 'community' were identified and applied to each of the four sections of data. These aspects of 'community' were recurrent in the data and could also be considered 'themes' which are as follows:

1. **Community as a place or interest** (Crow & Allan 1994; Stephens 2005) is the basic understanding of a 'physical space where people have something in common and this shared element is understood geographically' (Crow & Allan 1994 p. 6).

2. **Community as a source of social knowledge** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

   In this view, community is needed in order to sustain languages, institutions and traditions, and individuals must share a common means of exchanging meanings and ideas. 'Community members must also share particular symbols, histories and aspirations' (Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998 p.31).

3. **Community as a basis of common identities** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998) or **community as a value** (Cohen 1985; Frazer 1999) is the view that community is something intangible and involves 'feelings of solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust' and where community contributes to a 'sense of belonging' (Smith 2001).

4. **Community as a means of marginalization and social exclusion** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

   This is the view that dominant groups such as the media, political elite, church, state institutions, and the social groups construct, dispense and impose particular representations of power which support their own interests and their own construction of the world. This is closely linked to the following aspect:

5. **Community as a resource for empowerment** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998; Rohleder et al. 2007)

   This position holds that ccommunities are unities and are formed by the shared experience of being seen by others as a community. 'It also allows the space between the representations of others and one's own representations to be a space for challenge, for protest, and for change where communities can shift power representations' (Howarth 2001 p.230).

Each of the four sections of data was analysed by applying the process of TCA and the aspects mentioned above as a framework for analysis. All this has been done in partnership with principles of Narrative Analysis. As outlined in Chapter 3, Narrative Analysis is a method used to interpret narrative data i.e. stories, letters, autobiographical/biographical writing and document collection (Clandinin & Connelly 1990 p. 6). The purpose of using Narrative Analysis is to foreground the voices of the girls and teachers while concentrating on the above five aspects. Narrative Analysis allows reflections, stories, art and autobiographical writing to be analyzed according to themes. In terms of an analysis structure, 'narrative analyses relies on the identification of themes which are mostly drawn from literary theory including time, truth, beauty, character and conflict' (Daiute & Lightfoot 2004 p. 10). This allowed me to include tasks that the learners produced as data.

For this study, I have used narrative not only to foreground voice, but to compare and contrast similarities and differences at key moments in the data collection period. However, due to the space restrictions of this project, the initial three learners chosen to be part of the study become the dominant voices and the other five girls' voices are brought to light in relation to theirs. These dominant voices reflect common themes that were expressed across all participants.

Reflecting on the theoretical frameworks used to guide the structure and analysis of this research, I found the experience to be both challenging an enlightening. Through the use of socio-cultural and ethnographic research paradigms, I could understand the experiences of the learners as situated within a specific context. Through Narrative Analysis as guided by TCA I could foreground this context and unpack important layers of description necessary to understand its complexity. The chapter that follows is the Data Analysis chapter which will discuss each of these layers in more detail and make links between these, the research aims and theoretical underpinnings.

3.9 Ethics

Before any interactions were made with the research participants, ethical consent was obtained from the ethics committee at the University of the Witwatersrand. Also, an informal meeting was held with the principal to explain the purpose of the research and the requirements of the participants before approaching any learners or teachers.

Learner vulnerability was treated with necessary sensitivity. Not only are the girls considered vulnerable because of their age, they are also considered vulnerable in terms of what they have experienced in their lives. To ensure that there was adequate support available for the research participants and the researcher, the school counsellor agreed to be available at any time during the course of the data collection period. However, the need did not arise to consult the counsellor as there were no traumatic incidents which required emotional support.

In accordance with ethical research practice, all participation in the research was optional and informed consent was gained from the principal as well as all the teachers, parents and girls. The researcher met with these individuals in person and ensured that information was shared in a way where nobody was compromised. Translators were consulted for the discussion with parents. Once all the data had been collected, there were regular member checks to ensure that the participants were represented fairly. Every attempt was made to keep the identities of the learners and teachers confidential as they have shared personal experiences which need to be respected. Pseudonyms have been used in field notes as well as transcriptions of discussions and interviews. Any information that reveals the identity of the participants has either be changed in some way (names blurred on art projects) or not used at all. Photographs were taken in such a way that the school buildings/distinctive features were hidden.

The research now turns to the findings in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The central aim of this research project was to understand the language and literacy experiences of immigrant learners in an English-medium, inner-city school. My initial intention as a researcher was to present my findings as individual case studies where I would share the experiences of each girl in the form of individual narratives so as to foreground the individual voices of the learners. I soon came to realize that as a researcher one needs to be flexible and accommodating to the needs of participants. This in turn affected the research design, data collection and analysis which will be elaborated on below. The focus shifted from individual case studies but uses narrative to reflect key moments and provide insight into literacy and language practices. I have therefore structured my analysis in a way where these key moments and experiences that emerge from the data collection foreground the voices of the participants. I begin this data analysis with my own reflection as a means of illustrating the changing dynamics of the study and to highlight my own role as researcher and the challenge of one's own subjective position in working with research participants (Foucault 1997; Peters 2004).

4.1.1 'We just want to talk to you...'

Upon arrival at the school, I was introduced to three girls who had been selected by the principal and language teachers. They were specifically chosen because they were immigrant learners from the DRC and Zimbabwe who could share their experiences of learning English. The first step for me was to develop a relationship with the learners. The girls identified by the school were Stella, Gina and Teresa. Stella and Gina are from the DRC and Teresa is from Zimbabwe. I spent the first few days observing the girls in class, sitting with them during breaks and after school and my focus initially, was to get to know them and to start building a researcher-participant relationship. As part of this relationship-building, I gave them each a journal. I had hoped that these journals would turn out to be powerful data collection instruments. The learners had recently read extracts from the Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl (2007) and were excited at the thought of having their own journal. For a few days, I saw the journals regularly as learners told me about their families, hobbies and daily activities (ON 02/09/2011). However, after about a week, the entries became far less frequent and learners were relying on my written questions to create an entry. I wrote in my observation notes on 2 September 2011

to 'find out why the journals aren't working – perhaps genre or language difficulties?' (ON 02/09/2011).

I had assumed that the learners were not writing in them solely because of language and writing difficulties, but during an informal discussion during break time that week, the learners told me why they were not using the journals. This channel of information-sharing was not their method of choice. They said, 'Miss, we just want to talk to you and tell you things, not write them. It's so much better if we can just sit down and all talk…even better if we are in a group' (ID 3/09/2011). I then asked them if they were comfortable talking to me about their experiences instead of having the privacy of a journal to which they replied, 'Miss, we are not afraid to tell you anything, but we want to ask you if we can bring some other girls to join the group…you really should have them in your study, Miss' (ID 3/09/2011).

It was at this point that my research was no longer about three girls as case studies, but about eight girls who have made a journey together from Grade 4 to Grade 7. This significant change was fundamental in understanding and accessing their stories. Even though I did not anticipate having eight research participants, I realized after a few days of interaction that I needed to accommodate this increase because of the strong ties that existed between them. Most of them had come into the school at the same time and identify each other as their 'first friends' (*FGD1*).

This change is a tangible example that lies at the heart of a socio-cultural approach to literacy: literacy practices do not exist in isolation (Street 1984) and they are tied to relationships with other people. For these girls, literacy and language development is not an autonomous experience it is affected by different relationships; where learning happens with friends, with families and in communities. It was only through the interactions that I had with these girls as a *group not as individuals* that I could gain valuable insights into their literacy and language experience. This is the key finding of this research which I will explore further in the discussion below.

4.2 Community

4.2.1 A socio-cultural approach to literacy

As discussed in the Literature Review, a socio-cultural approach to literacy recognizes that literacy is a 'social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes' (Street 1984, 1993; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 1999; Baynham 1995; Street 1993) and is about 'how different communities use and interact around literacy' (Heath 1983 cited in Pahl & Rowsell 2005 p. 14). Reflecting on the moment when the girls poignantly said 'Miss, we just want to talk to you and tell you things, not write them. It's so much better if we can just sit down and all talk… even better if we are in a group' *(ID 3/09/2011).* This is an example of the social nature of learning and of a micro-community, a community of learners, interacting around literacy. As defined in terms of the socio-cultural approach, 'Literacy is something one actively *does*, in concert with other humans…and the material, social and symbolic world' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53) and in the above example, the girls would prefer to *talk* and actively *do* rather than to write down their thoughts individually about their language and literacy practices.

As part of the socio-cultural approach to literacy, the term 'multiliteracies' is used to refer to reading and writing as embedded within culturally and linguistically diverse contexts and in multimodal forms (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). It is useful to consider the principle of 'multiliteracies' for this study because of the day to day interactions that the girls have in various contexts; for example, taking a taxi ride or interacting with parents and families. These girls use literacy in various ways in their out-of-school environments. This is a key notion in the socio-cultural paradigm, as they are as important as using literacy in the classroom. This is closely related to the idea of literacy practices which refers to the 'socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53) which will be a major focus in analyzing how the girls interact with and use literacy in each layer of their communities.

The socio-cultural approach to literacy places much emphasis on context or 'situated literacies' (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 1999.) For these girls, this context is not homogeneous, but consists of various layers in different communities which I will expand on later in the discussion. These layers or communities play an integral part in their day-to-day literacy practices and in their literacy and language learning experiences as a whole.

Also, the socio-cultural approach allows issues pertaining to identity and identity formation to be included when thinking about literacy and language development. Within this paradigm of literacy, *identity* is about 'the purposeful ways in which individuals endeavor to position themselves through literacy practices in social and cultural fields' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). Because language is the tool through which we negotiate our positions and roles in society, it is important to recognize the role that language plays in the identity development of these girls in a new country, a new society and a new school. The term 'identity' does not suggest that it is a fixed or unified entity; instead, 'it is developed through an ongoing social process of self-making in conjunction with others through interaction' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53).

One of the teachers summed up the role of language and social interaction in the development of identity for these girls:

> When these foreign girls come into the school in Grade 4 they stick together in their groups…ones that speak French, ones that speak Shona, Lingala and other languages. They help each other with everything, they translate to each other in their language if they don't understand….but I have noticed that the more they know how to speak in English, the easier it is for them to leave these groups and to become part of the classroom and to talk to the other learners *(TI5).*

This is an example of how 'literacy practices and social identities develop through mutual interaction (Gee 1996; 2000) and is representative of the social nature of learning and interacting as a defining characteristic of this study. From the example presented above, we can see that a primary element of socio-cultural literacy is prevalent. The girls pool their resources in order to understand what is asked of them; to *make meaning* (Freebody & Luke 1990). This is in direct response to the immigrant learners being considered 'vulnerable.'

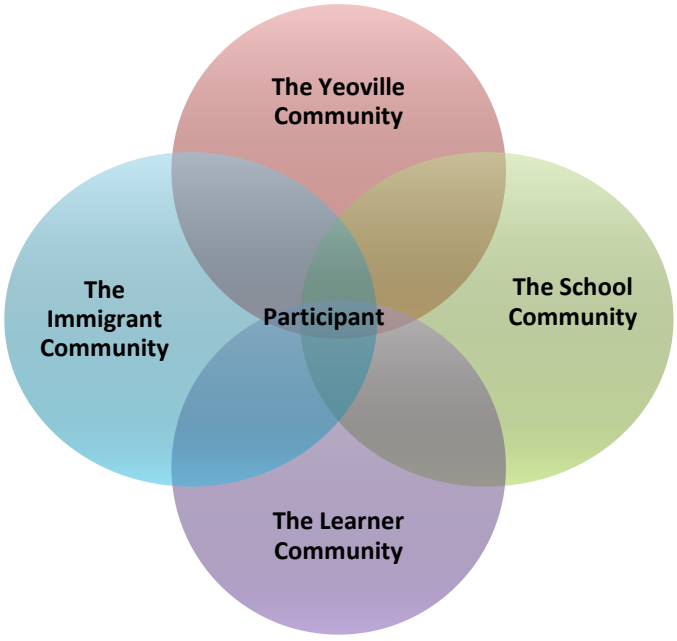
The role of the school from the socio-cultural perspective is where 'children learn about the dynamics of society; the behaviours, norms, values and attitudes' (Kapp 2004 p. 248) in their particular context. Learners in this school come from many different African countries, speak a variety of languages and already possess different 'behaviours, norms, values and attitudes' (Kapp 2004 p. 248) when they arrive. Teachers and peers are faced with the challenge of negotiating cultural and linguistic differences that are eminent in the school environment. With this in mind and in thinking about the example shared above, learning English is not just about

completing school, it is about finding a way to enter a new society and to find one's place within the community.

Therefore, the paradigm of socio-cultural literacy is valuable in understanding how community ties and relationships work in developing language and literacy abilities which are integral in understanding the experiences of these girls. For these girls, literacy and language experiences are not about *my* voice or *my* journal entries, but about *our* voices that we can share with you *as a group.* This is in fact the core of this study and by using the socio cultural approach to literacy as a theoretical framework enables me to integrate issues of context, identity, collaboration and community which are immensely valuable in understanding the experiences of these girls.

By using the socio-cultural approach as an overarching framework, the 'context' in which these girls are situated becomes a central focus. As previously mentioned this context is not homogenous and therefore needs to be carefully deconstructed to understand the role that it plays in their literacy and language development. The diagram below is an illustration of the four specific areas of 'context' that structure this study. Each of the four areas are viewed as equally important in their influence on literacy and language development and overlap and influence each other in complex ways. By means of a further analytic framework which I will discuss below, it is possible to consider these four different areas as 'communities'.

Figure 4.1 Visual Representation of Participant 'Communities'



The girls in this study are part of more than one community and therefore a singular definition or understanding would not suffice. Each layer requires different uses of language and literacy and provides unique opportunities for learning. Each one also presents its own challenges such as 'linguistic prejudice' and 'learning in an additional language.' 'Community' is a term that has been widely researched in social psychology and anthropology (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998; Cohen 1985; Crow & Allan 1994; Rohleder et.al 2008; Sonn et al. 1999) and does not have a singular definition. It is therefore necessary to find descriptions of this idea that are useful in understanding this study. In order to discuss characteristics of each of the four communities, five different aspects of 'community' were chosen:

1. **Community as a place or interest** (Crow & Allan 1994; Stephens 2005)

This aspect is the basic understanding of a 'physical space where people have something in common and this shared element is understood geographically' (Crow & Allan 1994 p. 6).

2. **Community as a source of social knowledge** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

In this view, community is needed in order to sustain languages, institutions and traditions, and individuals must share a common means of exchanging meanings and ideas. Community members must also share particular symbols, histories and aspirations (Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998 p.31).

3. **Community as a basis of common identities** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998) or **community as a value** (Cohen 1985; Frazer 1999)

This is the view that community is something intangible and involves 'feelings of solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust' and where community contributes to a 'sense of belonging' (Smith 2001).

4. **Community as a means of marginalization and social exclusion** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998)

This aspect shows that dominant groups such as the media, political elite, church, state institutions, and the social groups construct, dispense and impose particular representations of power which support their own interests and their own construction of the world. This is closely linked to the following aspect:

5. **Community as a resource for empowerment** (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998; Rohleder et al. 2007)

This aspect is important because human interactions are influenced by issues of power and disempowerment. It holds that ccommunities are unities and are formed by the shared experience of being seen by others as a community. It allows the space between the perceptions of others and one's own representations to be a space for challenge, for protest, and for change 'where communities can shift power representations' (Howarth 2001 p.230).

These aspects of community are used to frame the analysis and narrative extracts are used to represent key moments in the data collection.

4.3 The Yeoville Community

4.3.1 Talking about Yeoville *(FGD1)*

Q: So what is it like to live in Yeoville?

Stella: *Yeoville is so nice…it's the funnest place! I like it because there is a lot of music…and wherever you go, there are people talking, there are people that know your language and you can talk with them.*

Fleur: *It's boring because you sometimes don't understand what people are saying and when you walk past, you can't join in…I don't like it because there is a lot of music! It's also dirty and it SMELLS! There is so much noise at night – especially if you have Nigerian neighbours like me.*

Caroline: *I only lived in Yeoville for a short time when we first moved here…I don't like it because you are around the people like Congolese…and you won't learn how to learn English… and it stinks! There by the market. And if your neighbours are Nigerians! Then you have bad luck…you will never sleep.*

I don't like it when the guys call you like 'hey sisi' and you are alone and there is a whole group of them, I get scared.

Rebecca: *I like it because there is a market where we can buy food from our home country…the bad part is that there are lots of thieves around here and they come into your houses and steal your stuff.*

4.3.2 Community as a place

The narrative extracts above show a variety of feelings towards Yeoville. Stella expresses her fond feelings towards the music and people in Yeoville whereas Fleur and Caroline express reservations about its noise and smell. Where Stella is comfortable with interacting with people, Caroline is cautious of the 'groups of guys' that she encounters on her way home. Rebecca highlights both a positive and negative attribute of Yeoville where it provides a link to her heritage in the form of a food market, but at the same time she is afraid for her safety. In spite of this mixture of feelings, the girls believe that they are receiving a 'better standard of living' and a 'better life' in this community. This is the shared element of the Yeoville community that defines it as a community of place where 'people have something in common, and this shared element is understood geographically' (Crow & Allan 1994 p. 6.) For these girls and their families, the physical space holds both an enjoyment of the atmosphere and the fear of violent crimes. However, the overarching theme is access to a 'better life.'

As explained in chapter 1, this area is home to many immigrant and refugee families from all over Africa. This refugee or immigrant status can also be seen as the 'shared element' which is understood in a geographical space. Considering Yeoville as a place community where people from various cultures and nationalities share a geographical 'space,' immigrants tend to group together and form smaller 'communities' within the larger community of Yeoville. This creates diversity of language and cultures within one community with pockets of separation and unity.

4.3.3 Waving at the 'moms'

In taking on the role of 'ethnographic researcher,' I made a conscious effort to become aware of the immediate surroundings of my study and would also like to contribute my reflections about Yeoville. I do this through a reflection I wrote after thinking about this particular incident:

Coming from an urban, middle class background, it took me a few weeks to understand my site. I wrote in my observation notes, 'It really does not feel like I am in the middle of Yeoville' as I drove to and from the school every day. It was only after four weeks in the school that I started to realize that I was in the inner-city, in 'dangerous' Yeoville. For the first few weeks I hardly noticed the cars parked under the tree across the road from the school gate and I religiously waved to the mothers sitting on the pavement outside the school every morning. During my

fourth week, I arrived at the school later than usual to see that the cars parked under the tree did not belong to the lift club, but where white men in expensive cars paused to exchange packages. Traumatized from this experience and the fact that it was so close to the school gate, I approached one of the teachers and asked if they knew about it. Her response was, 'ohhhh we know those guys…they are always there… this is their spot. We have tried to call the police to tell them to move, but give them a week or so and they will be back…the same with the ladies!' It also turned out that the 'mothers' I had waved to every morning were in fact the local prostitutes who gather outside the school every morning. It all made sense when I observed one of the 'mothers' passed out drunk with everything exposed… (RJ 20/09/2011).

4.3.4 Outside the 'place'

This experience emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics of the community before making assumptions about its characteristics. It is evident that I did not have the same 'shared understanding' of the Yeoville community as the girls did. This is because of my own frame of reference and belonging to a different 'place community' requires a different shared understanding. From this realization, I can now argue that the meaning of community as a geographical space can be undervalued. For within the notion of a 'place community' lies a deeper understanding that is only shared by those living in that community.

This experience is also an example of how ethnographic research is grounded on curiosity (Heath & Street 2008) and how only through engaging in the 'recursive process' (Heath & Street 2008) or the 'backward and forward interaction between past research and literature and the current ethnographic study' (p. 50) could I understand its value. Although I was accepted by the school and the learners, I was still a stranger to these communities. The learners engaged with me by questioning and talking informally, I had to try and understand their lives through observations such as the one above.

The following narrative extracts provide further insight into this place called Yeoville.

4.3.5 The Taxi Stories *(IGD 14/09/2011)*

Caroline:

Miss I hate taking taxis, I would rather take the bus!' [Why?] 'Because I have had so many bad things happen to me on the taxi…like the time when I had to sit in the front because I was young…and when you sit in the front you have to count the money. The guys in the taxi started

shouting at me in their language when I gave them all the money and told me I was stealing…I had to ask them to speak in English because I didn't understand…and then they got more angry! They told me that I must not think I am special by speaking English and that I must not disrespect them. I had to pay twice for that taxi.

Rebecca:

I remember when I was taking a taxi with my dad into town…it is R7.50 each. My dad only had R100 with him so he paid the driver and the driver gave us R95 change…which was wrong…it should have been R85. So we said "sorry you made a mistake" in English and all of a sudden the driver started shouting at us saying "I gave you your change! Just sit down and don't play with money!" Miss, if you make a mistake with money to pay in the taxi, they will stop the taxi and shout at you in front of everyone and say things like, "this is our country, don't come here and do your own thing" and they always say these nasty things in English so they make sure we understand.

4.3.6 Community, Power and Value

April:

Miss, do you know what they call us in the streets? -They call us "Makwerekwere"

One of the most embarrassing things that happened to me was when I went to buy cold drink at a shop near my flat. I remember the shopkeeper was an Indian guy and he spoke to me in English, but at the back of the shop there was a group of black guys all speaking their language...I think it was Xhosa. I could see they were looking at me and laughing while I was speaking to the shopkeeper. I went to the fridge to take out the cold drink than and all of a sudden they ran past me and bumped me so hard that I dropped the bottle on the floor and it smashed! They all laughed. I had to pay for two bottles because of them.

As Howarth (2001) suggests, 'we are not equally placed in the social construction of a community' (p. 232) where some people may be marginalized in relation to others. From the stories presented above, we can see that there are unequal power relations at play where immigrants are targeted for their linguistic differences and are made to feel inferior. As Rebecca, Caroline and April's stories indicate, the use of English in the Yeoville community has a set of negative connotations. Here, the fact that the girls do not speak in the local languages labels them as 'makwerekwere' and English is not an accepted means of communication as in

their English medium school. These unequal power relations manifest in a linguistic prejudice in the community and a tension between the girls' mother tongues, English as a dominant language and the local languages that are spoken in Yeoville. As we can see from the above stories, 'the interplay between languages of power can result in feelings of displacement within the community which is at odds with the view of community that views it as feelings of solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust' (Smith 2001).

As Cohen (1985) suggests, a community can be both inclusive and exclusive in that members of a group have something in common with each other, but are at the same time, distinguished from others (Smith 2001). This is exemplified in the girls' reflections and experiences of Yeoville which illustrate a paradox. The Yeoville community is in one sense embracing of difference where so many people from different cultures and backgrounds all form one community, but at the same time, this community also comes with prejudice which affects the girls' feelings of being secure. What emerges from these stories is how linguistic prejudice is a means through which feelings of 'belonging' or 'not belonging' within the community are created. This in turn affects how the girls 'value' (Cohen 1985) the Yeoville community.

4.3.7 Linguistic Prejudice

The above stories highlight the linguistic prejudice that exists in the Yeoville community where there is an interaction between foreigners and local South Africans. These are only a few of many stories shared by the girls about not being able to speak a local language e.g. Zulu or Sotho and thus becoming the target for hurtful prejudice. As Stella shares: 'Miss I don't understand why they get upset when we speak *our* languages…because when they speak *their* languages it is fine for us not to understand' *(IGD 14/09/2011)*. Within South Africa, arguments have been made about the equality of all languages (Heugh 1999; 2000) However, in many instances as well as in this particular school, learners are required to learn in a language that is foreign to them (Heugh 1999; 2000) whether they come from South Africa or other African countries. This entrenches English's dominant position in the field of education. And, for these girls, English is the priority language needed to succeed at school. As Caroline suggests, 'We need English to be able to finish school, to go to university and to find jobs. It is a difficult language, but it's nice and they speak it overseas' *(FGD2 19/09/2011).*

This represents how English has become associated with power, with success and as the 'global language' (Graddol 2007). However, as Heugh (1999) suggests, those who do not have access to

this language become disempowered. This could be the reason why these learners have had negative interactions with local South Africans when using English in Yeoville. The present backdrop of xenophobia and discrimination gives insight to local South Africans' perceptions that the influx of immigrants is a threat to employment and education opportunities (Landau et al. 2004).

4.3.8 Community, marginalization, exclusion and power

For these girls, English is both empowering and disempowering. As communities can be spaces of both inclusion and exclusion, the use of the English language operates as means through which people become included and excluded. For example, proficiency in English allows the girls to receive a 'better standard of education' *(FGD1 14/09/2011)* which will allow them to further their careers, but it is also disempowering when they are labeled as 'disrespectful' when using English in everyday situations such as in the taxi. The stories also show how using English instead of an African language is not accepted by the local South Africans in the area. However, as Rebecca suggests, they will use English to make sure the immigrants 'know their place' *(FGD1 14/09/2011)* in the society and to make sure they understand the insults being directed at them. These stories illustrate that there is not only hostility towards immigrants because of their nationalities, but also because they have access to English.

The result is that immigrants in our country experience tension between trying to fit into a new education system where English is a valued language in education and the economic sector, but is also an immediate flag of an immigrant status. As Rebecca's story illustrates local South Africans may feel 'this is our country, don't come here and do your own thing' *(FGD1 14/09/2011)* when they hear immigrants speaking English and immediately label them as 'outsiders' 'kwerekwere' or 'foreigners'. On the one hand, these girls feel 'a sense of belonging' in a place where there are 'others like me' *(FGD1 14/09/2011)* and 'where there are other people talking your language' *(FGD1 14/09/2011)*, but conversely, the status that the English language possesses puts them in both an empowered and a vulnerable position. They are empowered because of the notion of power attached to English as a global language, but become vulnerable because they do not have access to local South African languages.

The learners have become aware of this and in an informal conversation with them about the 'taxi stories' presented above, they believe that learning a local African language is just as important as learning English. As Caroline suggests, 'you can make friends with people not from

DRC and you can also understand South African culture like…how people live' *(FGD1 14/09/2011).*

4.4 The Immigrant Community

Figure 4.2 Rebecca's art

4.4.1 'Sometimes I wish I was a fish...'



Q: Rebecca, why have you used that sticker?

A: It's true, Miss. I wish I was a fish because fish are free to move around. If I was a fish, it would be easy to go to DRC and visit my family and to come back here as many times as I want... (IGD 16/09/2011).

Rebecca's wish to be 'free to move around' refers to the plight of many immigrants in travelling across borders and into new countries. This plight includes challenges such as finding food and shelter, employment and being victims of xenophobia and discrimination. Some of their journeys have been alone and some of them have been with family. However, the common factor in their journeys is 'the unknown.' Whether parents have ventured into a new country to find work or whole families have left their homes in search of a 'better life,' all of them had nothing to come to; nothing except people in similar situations who have made this transition before them. This is where the next layer of community has a role to play. This layer of community has a direct influence on identity, on creating a 'sense of belonging' and in sharing resources both tangible and intangible. I will elaborate on each of these in the following discussion of the Immigrant community.

As discussed in chapter. 1, Yeoville is home to many African refugees and refugees who tend to group themselves according to their nationalities. As Fleur explains, 'In Yeoville you will find Zimbabweans living near Zimbabweans and even like in my flat…there are mostly Congolese people' *(FGD1 14/09/2011).* This is important to consider as it is the physical representation of how these immigrants form micro communities within the 'place community' (Crow & Allan 1994) of Yeoville. These micro communities are integral in facilitating both the transition from one country to another, in the integration into a new society with different norms and habits and in creating a 'sense of belonging' (Smith 2001 p.1).

4.4.2 'In South Africa, we have a better standard of living' *(IGD 16/09/2011)*

Caroline:

The reason why we came to South Africa was to get a better standard of education and a better standard of living. Now my dad has a better car, we can live in a house and we can eat fast food… (IGD 16/09/2011).

Figure 4.3: Caroline's art: 'My life in South Africa'



For all the girls, this 'better standard of living' is the reason they came to South Africa. April shared examples of no running water and no electricity in Zimbabwe *(IGD 16/09/2011)* and Stella and Fleur shared stories about teacher and medical doctor strikes during election periods that lasted for months in the DRC *(IGD 16/09/2011).* I asked the girls to elaborate on what they mean by 'standard of living' and they named education, medical care, water and electricity as the main reasons for their families choosing to move to South Africa. The pictures above are taken from Caroline's art project and are visual artifacts of this interpretation. The picture on the left shows a clear distinction between 'my dad's old car' and 'my dad's new car' and the picture on the right is of 'our new house' illustrated larger than 'our old house.' Caroline's theme for her project was 'My life in Jozi' and she chose to illustrate comparisons between her home country and living in South Africa. She has made these comparisons using pictures of cars, food, homes and schools as markers of 'standards of living'.

During an informal discussion, the feelings that the girls expressed about their home countries were unified. All of them wish to be reunited with their friends and families, but say they would never go back and live in their home countries. They see South Africa as a country with opportunity and possibilities. Many of them share good experiences of charity organizations, church outreach programmes into the community and not having to pay school fees. As Stella notes, 'in Congo they will kick you out of the school and embarrass your family if you don't pay

school fees…here it is not the same' *(IGD 16/09/2011).* Some of the girls compare the expectations of living in South Africa to the realities that they find themselves in. They talk about a 'low standard of living' in the DRC but also expressed reservations about living in Yeoville as described in the first section.

4.4.3 Community and Common Identities

From the work of Gervais & Jovchelovitch (1998) the notion of 'community as a basis of common identities' (in Howarth 2001 p.21) is the view that community is something that arises out of 'our need to locate ourselves in the social worlds in which we live' and 'is based on our needs to both belong and to be different (Howarth 2001 p. 21). The Immigrant community can be defined as a community in which its group members have a common identity. These immigrants have all fled their home countries in pursuit of sanctuary or 'a better standard of living' in South Africa. As the immigrant community, these members possess the 'need to belong' in a foreign place as well as the 'need to be different' or to maintain their cultural heritage. Cohen (1985) believes that 'people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity' (p. 118). The Immigrant communities are symbolic of unification in adversity and have an important role to play in the creation of identity for individuals who find themselves displaced in a new country, faced with many difficulties.

The following set of narratives portray experiences of transition from the girls' home countries to South Africa and are an introduction to the discussion about common identities and the relationship between language and identity.

4.4.4 Journeys to Jozi *(IGD 15/09/2011)*

April:

My mom came to South Africa two years before me. I stayed in Zimbabwe with my aunty for two years while my mom was looking for a job. Some other people from Zimbabwe helped her with English and to write when she came here…and they helped her find a job as a domestic worker.

Fleur:

Figure 4.4. Fleur's Art, 'My journey to Jozi'



When we first moved here, we stayed with some family and other people from the DRC...there were so many of us in one small space and it was very difficult at first...but when my parents started working, then we could find a better flat. My aunties and cousins helped us with how to talk in English...otherwise my parents would not find work.

Stella:

Last year we had some people coming to live with us from Congo…they were my father's brother's friends who were coming to look for a job. It was quite tough because we had to share our food and everything and our flat is really small. But it turned out OK because my mom helped them find another flat and now they are working. It's like that with all of us…we help each other.

4.4.5 The need to belong

These narratives are examples of becoming part of a community because of shared identities. These girls and their parents share each others' experiences and can relate to the difficulties that come from moving to a new place.

As April explains, her mother was assisted by 'other people from Zimbabwe' *(IGD 15/09/2011)* or the Zimbabwean Immigrant community who immediately embraced her mother and provided her with accommodation and helped her learn English in order to find employment. For Fleur, the transition into a new country was also facilitated by the DRC Immigrant community where a home was also shared and again where linguistic abilities were imparted in order to assist her parents with finding employment and thereby providing for their family. Stella reflects on being part of the Immigrant community and being the source of aid for newcomers into Johannesburg. The fact that her family helped 'her father's brother's friends' shows that often help is given to people who are not family. Her poignant words 'we help each other' *(IGD 15/09/2011)* are symbolic for the lengths that the Immigrant community members

go to in assisting fellow immigrants. They all understand that the 'need to belong' can only be fulfilled by people who understand your situation or who share a common identity.

During informal discussions and represented in Teresa and Fleur's stories above, the girls explain that cousins, aunties, uncles and grandmothers have all played an important role in helping their parents find jobs and learn how to speak English for the most basic needs e.g. shopping. Caroline raises the point during a discussion that, 'My mother and father work and they need English for this. My aunty has been living here for a long time, so she helps them with their reading and writing' *(IGD 15/09/2011).* During an interview with one of the aftercare administrators at the school, I was told that many of the learners who do extra English lessons after school, use the material they get in class as well as homework activities to teach their parents English *(ATI).*

These stories give insight into how a physically displaced community uses their available resources and skills to create a 'sense of belonging' in the face of an environment where they are made to feel 'foreign'. Thus a symbolic community emerges in the physical space.

4.4.6 The need to be different

An element of Gervais & Jovchelovitch's (1998) definition is also the 'need to be different' (in Howarth 2001 p. 21) which is displayed by members of the Immigrant community. As the 'Taxi stories' illustrate, language is an important element of identity. Using English in the Yeoville community immediately identifies the immigrants as 'makwerekwere' or 'foreigners'. They are faced with a situation where their mother tongue language must take a subordinate position of importance. This is because of the dominant position of the English language in education and the workplace as well as the linguistic prejudice that exists in the Yeoville community where African languages are dominant and necessary for integration. However, because language is an important part of one's identity (Gee 1996; 2000; Bartlett 2007) and cultural heritage, these immigrants still find the space in which to communicate and to share in their home languages. The narrative below shared by Rebecca is an example of how her home language is a bonding tool between her and her father and is something she cherishes as 'just between us'.

4.4.7 Talking freely *(IGD 19/09/2011)*

Rebecca:

I am very close to my dad. I like to spend time with him because then we talk freely to each other in Lingala. We can make jokes and laugh or sometimes we can talk about people without them even knowing! My stepmother and stepsister are South African so we don't speak our language to them. Lingala is just for me and my dad…to keep things between us.

From the accounts above, we can see how the Immigrant community plays a role in integrating individuals into the South African society, and in sharing access to resources. This collaboration is also closely related to the African concept of Ubuntu where 'each child is a child of the community' (Mbigi & Maree 1995 p.7) and where everybody is responsible for the safety and security of new immigrant families. Through creating a space 'to belong' the transition into a new place happens with those who have mutual understanding. Also, within this space, the 'need to be different' which is not accepted in the external community (Taxi stories) can be fulfilled through language. The safety and security of the Immigrant community allows for language to be shared and as Rebecca shares, language becomes the means through which relationships are maintained.

4.4.8 Language and Identity

Because language is the tool through which we negotiate our positions and roles in society (Norton 2000 in Kapp 2004 p. 249), it is important to recognize the role that language plays in the identity development. We have already seen how the Immigrant community is targeted because of their use of the English language and by being unable to speak local African languages. We have also seen how they assert their identities by speaking their mother tongue language to each other. These issues foreground important aspects of language and identity, the first being 'power.' Referring back to another aspect of the definition of community, the Immigrant community is also a resource for empowerment (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998; Rohleder et al. 2008). This position holds that 'ccommunities are unities and are formed by the shared experience of being seen by others as a community' (Howarth 2001 p.230) and is substantiated by the stories shared by Teresa, Fleur and Stella. This definition also allows the space between the perceptions of others and one's own representations to be challenged. This challenge may not be as forthright as any protest, but the fact that Rebecca and her father still cherish their language, their heritage and their

identities as Congolese immigrants, opens up the space for communities to shift power. Through their interactions in Lingala, they assert themselves against linguistic prejudice and identification as 'makwerekwere'.

Another interesting aspect of language and identity in the Immigrant community is the position of English. From the Literature, we know that English has a position of global dominance (Graddol 2007) in terms of education and employment. For these immigrants, English is their tool to find employment and to pursue their education. As Teresa and Fleur illustrate, one of the first things immigrants need when they arrive in this country is conversational English. This becomes part of their identity as immigrants because it is a way in which these individuals 'endeavor to position themselves through literacy practices in social and cultural fields' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). As discussed in the previous community (Yeoville), the English language is a marker for immigrants as 'foreigners' and immediately identifies them as outsiders. However, within the Immigrant community, English has a different role to play and is valued as necessary for both education and employment. In line with the socio-cultural approach to literacy this is an example of how literacy practices and social identities develop through mutual interaction (Gee 1996; 2000). Because the English language allows immigrants access to employment, proficiency is desired and valued as the key to the 'better life' they associate with living in South Africa.

The term 'identity' as used in a socio-cultural approach to literacy does not suggest that it is a fixed or unified entity; instead, 'it is developed through an ongoing social process of self-making in conjunction with others through interaction' (Bartlett 2007 p. 53). From the discussion above, we can see an interesting interplay between languages which empower or disempower in different contexts. It is also interesting to see how literacy becomes something which can be shared as a commodity in the Immigrant community and through obtaining proficiency in the English language, an immigrant becomes able to seek employment, education and become self-sufficient.

From the discussion about the Immigrant community, it is important to acknowledge the collaboration that exists between people who share adverse circumstances. The solidarity that is formed between these people is established within the boundaries of 'sameness' or common identities in order to help each other integrate into a new society. The Immigrant community is a space where people who feel displaced can fulfil their 'need to belong' and is also a space

where they can fulfil their 'need to be different' and assert their identities through language. In terms of literacy and language, we can also see how English has contrasting value between the Yeoville community as an identifier of being 'foreign' and the Immigrant community where having the skill to read and write in English is a positive attribute. The major theme that emerges from this section of community is collaboration and it is interesting to see how this theme emerges again within the Learner community which will be discussed later on.

4.5 The School Community

Socio-cultural theory introduces the idea that schooling is not just about learning content, but also about cultural reproduction (Kapp 2004). It is where children learn about the dynamics of society; the behaviours, norms, values and attitudes (Kapp 2004 p. 248). In the face of many challenges highlighted in the previous sections, this school not only has a responsibility to equip these learners with necessary skills and knowledge needed to progress through school, but also to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to integrate into South African society. Also, it is understood that schools are a stabilizing feature in the unsettled lives of immigrant students. They provide 'safe spaces for new encounters, interactions and learning opportunities' (Matthews 2008 p. 31) which can be applied to this particular school.

In alignment with the various aspects of community chosen for this analysis, the school community can be viewed from three aspects: as a place community, a source of social knowledge (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998) and a community of value (Cohen 1985; Frazer 1999). Each of these aspects will be discussed below in terms of the ways in which the school community operates to attain these attributes.

4.5.1 A source of social knowledge

This aspect of community stipulates that a community can be a source of social knowledge in order to sustain languages, institutions and traditions (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998). For this particular school community, this social knowledge is imparted to both learners and their parents in interesting ways. For both learners and parents, language is an important aspect of social life and as we know from the dynamics of the Immigrant community, English is a language associated with 'a better life.' As Matthews suggests, the school 'deliver[s] the key to educational success; post-school options, life choices, social participation and settlement' (Matthews 2008 p. 31)**.** It also acts as a vessel of social knowledge about 'institutions and

traditions' (Howarth 2001) which are imparted to learners as part of their school ethos. This will be discussed in further detail below.

4.5.2 Parents: Support and Social Knowledge

As discussed in the previous section (Immigrant community) the school plays a very important part in the lives of the parents. Through parent-school interactions, we see the relationship between the School and Immigrant communities. The School community is a source of support for these parents who are part of the Immigrant community. For example, during the data collection period, I was introduced to the 'aunties' in the staffroom. These ladies were responsible for cooking the daily lunch for the learners and cleaning the classrooms and staffroom every day. It was only during an interview with the principal that I found out the 'aunties' were in fact mothers of learners at the school who were given the opportunity to work as cleaners and kitchen staff to supplement the payment of their school fees *(ON 20/09/2011).* This kind of relationship between the parents and the school is one based on mutual understanding. The School community is aware of the difficulties that parents face in terms of employment and finance and the parents are willing to make a contribution in any way possible in order to keep their child at the school.

Working with the notion of the School community as a source of social knowledge, language and literacy are key elements. As previously discussed in the Immigrant community, speaking, reading and writing the English language are valued and seen as essential abilities in terms of employment and education. In terms of literacy and language, the School community is a source of social knowledge because parents approach the school for assistance with reading and understanding important documents. During my interview with the aftercare teacher, it was noted that parents often bring cell phone contracts, property leases and other documents to the school reception for translation and interpretation *(ATI).* Other social knowledge including information about housing subsidies, government grants, welfare programmes, domestic violence, blacklisting and HIV are available at the school reception *(ON 20/09/2011).* Many of these informational documents are translated into French and isiZulu for parents who cannot speak English.

In spite of these efforts, the biggest challenge for parent-school interaction is the language barrier. Most parents are unable to speak English or have access to other South African languages. Often, teachers rely on translators to interpret meetings and discussions with

immigrant parents. In my early field notes, I noted that even 'Learners are translators in meetings with the principal' *(ON19/09/2011)* after observing learners and parents going into the principal's office together. The reason for this is because learners are more proficient in English than their parents as a result of their education. Teachers in the school feel that having the child present for interpretation is both positive and negative. Positively, having the learner translate for their parents assists with communication as a whole. However, on the negative side, teachers do not always wish to have learners present in discussing issues of behavior or academic performance. As Ms M accounts, 'sometimes you don't want the child to be present during parents meetings when you have to talk about discipline…also sometimes they don't translate correctly and you can see that the message has been watered down' *(TI2)* However, this is still part of 'a community of social knowledge' where individuals' share a common means of exchanging meanings and ideas' (Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998 p.31). In this instance, learners become the means through which ideas and meanings are exchanged.

4.5.3 Learners: Support and Social Knowledge

The following is an extract from the interview with the principal which provides a useful account of how the School community imparts social knowledge for the learners.

4.5.4 From the principal's desk *(PI)*

Being the principal, you end up being a social worker as well…many of the learners come from broken families…many are foreign to this country…some of them are living with their fathers and do not know where the rest of their families are. Sometimes you find them having to break down when they tell you about their journey from their home countries, how they have fled…The way in which they have been brought up…we find ourselves shaping the behaviour they are displaying – as parents would.

Figure 4.3: Interest Board - Values



Figure 4.4: Poster - Values



Some of them are taught responsibility at a very early age. Some of them are made to do housework and chores before they come to school – some of them can't even do their homework because they are looking after the house or their younger siblings. This is where our school has a role to play in supporting them emotionally.

Another thing is that the learners struggle with English…even if you give them homework to do nobody at home can help them…so we end up working at school until very late. We have extra lessons and support classes here so that they do as much school work at school rather than at home where we don't even know what goes on.

What worries me is that these learners are being brought up in an environment which is very, very appalling…because they behave well in the school premises…but when they go outside the school premises they become something else.

The interview extract describes the various challenges that the School community is faced with. Firstly, as previously discussed, Yeoville is a suburb where drugs, violence and prostitution are rife and available metres away from the school gates. Here, the school has the responsibility of functioning as a 'source of social knowledge' (Howarth 2001; Gervais & Jovchelovitch 1998) to educate the learners about these external influences and to guide them against becoming involved in 'indecent things'. Essentially, the school is a microcosm of the challenges, opportunities, interactions between cultures and linguistic prejudices that are found in the wider communities. Socio-economic challenges, psychological trauma, xenophobia and discrimination experienced in wider Yeoville and the Immigrant community automatically manifest within the school gates and it is therefore necessary to equip learners with the ability to deal with these challenges and opportunities.

From the principal's interview above, we can see that the concern is with 'shaping behaviour' and 'supporting them [learners] emotionally' *(PI).* As a community of social knowledge, the School community takes on a specific mentoring and disciplinarian role to support the learners as opposed to only an academic role. There is an interesting relationship between social knowledge and visual literacy. As mentioned above, the School community interacts with

parents using visual aids such as posters and documents on the notice board, for the learners, these visual aids are prominent.

4.5.5 The Role of Visual Literacy

Walking through the corridors of the school, there are numerous posters on display portraying information about 'values' and 'behaviour' (*see Figures 4.3 and 4.4*). These literacy artefacts are examples of how the school has used visual literacy to educate learners about how to behave correctly the importance of various values e.g. tolerance. As part of the school ethos (*see Chapter 1*), this 'guidance' forms a central part of the school's relationship with its learners. As the principal describes in the interview, the school is involved in 'shaping the behaviour' *(PI)* of learners as a result of what learners are exposed to 'outside of school property'. Upon observation *(ON 15/09/2011)* these posters were also used as teaching aids or mentioned in assembly when the principal chooses a 'value of the week' *(ON 15/09/2011)* and a learner is awarded a certificate at the end of the week for showing this value. Visual literacy is a powerful tool to engage learners in social knowledge and to guide them against some of the behaviours they encounter in their daily lives (Stokes 2002). These posters and interests boards assist in creating links between 'social knowledge' and literacy.

Below are other examples of an interest board and posters that are displayed around the school.

Figure 4.7: Interest Board – Behaviour



Figure 4.8: Posters - Choices and Effort



4.5.6 Literacy and language as social knowledge

To elaborate on social knowledge it is important to consider literacy and language practices as elements of social knowledge. As previously discussed, literacy and language practices are integral elements of social knowledge for parents. The following section shifts focus to the learners. The following is an excerpt that illustrates learners' feelings about English.

4.5.7 Challenging and fun: *(FGD3 19/09/2011)*

Q: ***What do you girls think about English?***

Fleur: *Sometimes it can be really challenging…but sometimes it's fun*

Like when we do 'work'…like adverbs, conjunctions, adjectives…and they give you words that you have never met before and say 'no dictionaries'.

Caroline: *I like reading English books, I want to be a lawyer one day so I must read as much as I can!*

Stella: *The fun thing is to speak…like after you read a story and they ask you what you think of the story or if you have seen that before or something…but I don't like writing comprehensions.*

Rebecca: *English at school is ok…it's difficult, but I know that I need it to speak to people and to go to high school and university.*

The above dialogue highlights two important issues. The question asked was indeed broad, but the interesting outcome is that English is conceptualized in two ways: in terms of school and in terms of life. Two of the responses refer to language abilities and activities and two of them refer to the value attached to literacy. The girls are aware of the challenges associated with language learning, but are also aware that literacy is an important part of interacting in society ('speaking to others') and in pursuing their career goals ('a better life'). The fact that the girls find 'work' difficult in relation to English refers to difficulties with grammar and language activities in the classroom and the challenge of comprehension and vocabulary which many Additional language learners find difficult (Christensen 2009; Nomlomo 2009; Dornbrack 2009).

It is evident that English has a contrasting role within the School community and within the broader Yeoville community. As presented above, learners know that English is an important

part of their futures and education. Also, as discussed in the Immigrant community, their parents display this value attachment by pursuing reading and writing in English.

4.5.8 English as social cohesion

Within the school community, English is also used as a tool for cohesion. The following extracts from teacher interviews, provide interesting perspectives towards English, language policy and multilingualism.

Ms. A *(TI3)*

I think it is good because it helps those who are struggling…if you allow them to speak their own languages they won't learn…it forces them to learn and not think that they can use their language if they don't understand. The other thing is that there is a lot of fighting about speaking other languages…and because they don't understand each other they think they are talking about each other, insulting each other…so because of the fact that we have people from all over, I think it is best…it puts everyone on the same level.

Mr. E *(TI1)*

One more comment…to have multilingualism in a class…those children already feel displaced – so why do you need to make them feel more 'ill at ease' by focusing attention on them because of their language differences. I like to pretend that everybody in the class is on the same level and it works for me…they are already dealing with other psychological problems, they don't need to be alienated further.

The word 'try' is one that often came up in English lessons or when the girls were expressing themselves in English. Phrases such as 'just try and say it, Gina' *(ON 15/09/2011)* or 'try and explain to me in English' *(ON 08/09/2011)* were very commonly used and this signifies the constant effort that learners need to use English as an additional language. Teachers are aware that learners may not have the necessary exposure to English at home and in the Yeoville community necessary to develop their language proficiencies and therefore, as highlighted by both Ms. A and Mrs. P, school time is valuable in terms of language development and academic development as a whole.

The reason for English as the LOLT is given as 'to help learners coming from diverse backgrounds' *(PI)* by the principal. As the teachers explain, by ensuring that everyone speaks

the same language, 'everyone is on the same level' *(TI2)* and conflict between linguistic groups is seemingly avoided and social cohesion exists among multicultural and multilingual learners. The English teacher also adopts this approach of 'equality' where everyone in the English classroom is treated as 'the same' *(TI1).* Although this could be a means to ensure that learners do not feel any more 'displaced' than they already do, it could possibly be an immersion strategy adopted by the English teacher as a pedagogical approach where girls are almost 'forced to function' no matter what their abilities might be.

It can be understood that English is used as a tool for cohesion in the school and to ensure that learners do not use their languages as means to target other learners from different cultural groups. What is missing is the integration of all languages in a supervised way where the focus is not on insulting and teasing, but rather mutual learning. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the school is affected by a lack of resources and teacher availability which has a profound effect on teaching and learning languages. By seeking to avoid confrontations and unrest caused by language i.e. name calling or exclusion, the School community has tried to create a space for 'belonging' or to be a community of value in the sense where 'everyone is equal' *(TI2).*

While this may be an effective tool to use in creating social cohesion in the school, the danger with this is that the School community views the learners as a homogenous group. From the observations, it is evident that the School community has made assumptions about learners' access to literacy and language at home and use of literacy and language in school. For example, the assumption exists that 'learners perform poorly because they do not hear English at home' or that by enforcing an English-only language policy, the assumption exists that 'everyone is equal' *(TI2)*. During my interviews with teachers, I noticed the deficit discourses that surround the issue of language and literacy. Teachers often told me that 'their parents cannot speak a word of English' *(TI3)* and that 'these girls do not have any access to English at home' *(TI1)* as reasons for poor performance.

In light of this deficit perception about learners' home environments; further assumptions are made about learner capabilities. When talking to the girls about their home literacy practices, the girls spoke of using computers, social networking (MXit and Facebook) in English, watching educational TV programmes in both French and English and reading books and magazines *(FGD2 19/09/2011).* Also, reflecting on the art project that the learners completed for this

research, magazines were provided. These magazines were prized possessions and I soon learnt that many of the girls keep magazine clipping in plastic folders at home where they collect interesting articles or 'fashionable things' *(ON 19/09/2011).* The girls interacted with texts and images they found interesting which showed that these girls appreciate and value magazine texts. The girls commented on issues ranging from pop stars' fashion choices to politicians' controversial statements that they found in these magazines.

As Dyson (1997; 1999) explains, the girls were using 'resources' from their social worlds, including the linguistic and symbolic tools appropriated from popular culture in these discussions. From observing English language lessons for seven weeks, I noticed that the girls follow a routine of comprehensions and vocabulary lists and these dominate the language lessons *(ON 28/09/2011).* The texts they interact out of school are not outdated texts about World War II that are difficult to relate to. Street (2000) suggests that literacy practices link the activities of reading and writing with the social structures in which they are situated and are the ways written languages are used in peoples' daily lives or 'what people do with literacy' (Barton & Hamilton 1998). Interactions with the girls show that they are engaging in literacy practices at home which are not acknowledged in the classroom.

This discussion has brought pertinent issues to light in terms of the School community. Firstly, that the School community is a source of social knowledge for both parents and learners where literacy and language play an important role. However, in spite of this, there seems to be a tension between the picture of literacy and language in school and literacy and language out of school. English is used as a tool for cohesion in the school and is also the dominant language because of learners' 'lack of exposure' to the language at home. Although this may be useful inside the school gates, it does not acknowledge the literacy practices that learners are engaged in at home and assumes that the school is the only source of literacy and language practices.

4.6 The Learner Community

Within the School Community lies another micro community that is perhaps the most intricate and essential in the development of these girls. This community is comprised of the eight Grade 7 girls that I worked with in this study. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, as a researcher I had to adapt my study to suit the needs of the participants. The need in this case was for all eight girls to voice their experiences. These girls have journeyed through primary

school together; a community of immigrant girls from similar backgrounds and similar circumstances. It is for this reason that careful attention needs to be given to both the dynamics and the norms of this Learner Community. This section will include a discussion of particular roles that some of the girls play in the functioning of this learning and supportive community. It will also include a discussion about their reflections on being 'a new girl' in a similar position and conclude with their biggest fears.

4.6.1 'Foreign girls' *(TI5)*

Ms. H:

I have taught at this school for over ten years and I notice the pattern. When the foreign kids come into the school in Grade 3 or Grade 4, they stick together like glue. The French speaking kids stick together, the Portuguese kids stick together and so on…They do this because they do not know English and I think they are also afraid; it's a new school, a new country and new languages. They help each other translate work and instructions into their languages and even sometimes the teacher would ask one who is stronger with English to explain to the whole group. Then we see when they get to about Grade 5 or 6, they start to make friends with other girls. It's like as soon as they have enough English to speak confidently, they make friends and they integrate with the others…

The story that Ms. H tells gives insight into the dependent relationship that exists between these girls. From a young age, they find security and a 'sense of belonging' by forming a small community within the school community and within the classroom. Ms. H's story exemplifies the starting point of how these girls become a unit and experience both education and integration into the community. This information gives one more insights as to why the girls were adamant to have their friends join the focus group for this study. One could paraphrase their thoughts as, 'our experiences are not our own, but are shared by all eight of us.' What is most interesting about Ms. H's comment is that she identifies the role that language plays in the integration of these foreign girls into the classroom and school community. Ms. H explains that with growing confidence in the English language, learners become more confident and able to make friends outside of this close circle. It is evident that English plays an important role in bridging the gaps between the diverse linguistic communities that exist in the classroom. As per the previous discussion (The School Community) English is a tool used to create 'sameness' and where common ground can be found between learners from diverse linguistic and cultural

backgrounds. The following section discusses the girls' reflections on being a 'new girl' which was one of the activities they completed during the study.

4.6.2 Reflections on being a 'new girl' *(AGS 20/09/2011)*

Teresa

When you come here people make fun of you in their language – they say you have long legs and big ears and you talk funny with your accent.

April

When you don't have any friends and you don't understand, you can't fight for yourself because you don't know what to say. That is why you make friends to help you.

Caroline

I remember when I came to this school I was so nervous, I didn't speak to anyone…not even my teacher. That's when I met Fleur and we have been friends since Grade 4!

Rebecca

My first day at this school was very scary. I could hear all these people talking, but I didn't understand a word they were saying! All these funny (clicking sounds) I wasn't used to hearing that…Thank goodness I had Stella with me…so I wasn't alone.

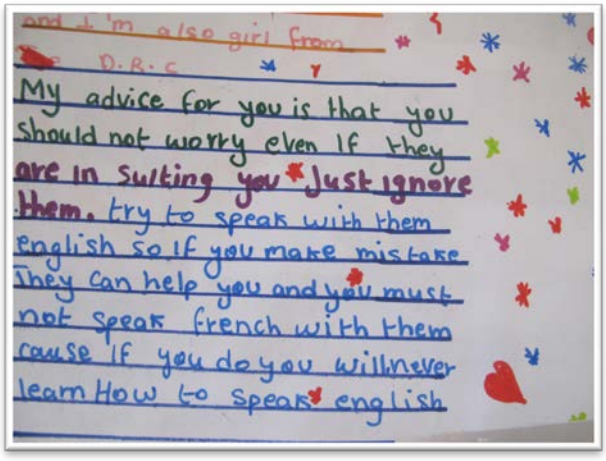
These excerpts came from an introductory discussion to the task, 'Write a letter to a new girl' (see Appendices 6&8). Teresa and April both highlight negative feelings associated with being a 'new girl.' Teresa refers to teasing and mocking that occurs as a result of physical differences as well as linguistic differences. This directly correlates to issues of xenophobia and prejudice that are so rife within the Yeoville and Immigrant communities. As April explains, making friends or forming groups is a means of protection against bullying or teasing where a larger group ensures protection and where being alone can be a form of helplessness. This is another example of how these girls choose from a young age to form groups based on cultural and linguistic similarities. In this case, the group provides security.

Along with sharing these sentiments about being a 'new girl' the girls wrote their own letters to a 'new girl' at their school. The activity required to learners to write a letter to a pseudo learner named, Cecile. I gave the learners a description of Cecile as also being an immigrant from the

DRC who has come to their school this year and who has very little knowledge of the English Language. I asked the learners to reflect on their own experiences of coming into the school and to write down advice for Cecile that they would have like to have received at that time. Each of the letters foregrounded different advice but there were interesting similarities between all of the letters. The purpose of this activity was for learners to reflect on their memories of coming into the school and thereby talk about their feelings and experiences in a non-intrusive way.

In most of the letters, the learners have formally identified themselves with Cecile. They have used phrases such as 'I am also from the DRC' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* or 'I also struggled when I came here' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* which shows that they are positioning themselves as the same as this 'new girl.' This is a dynamic which allows for new learners who are entering the school to feel accepted and able to learn from learners who have been in similar situations. This is the foundation of the formation of groups of learners when they first come to school; they feel comfort in knowing that the other learners know what they are going through.

Figure 4.9: Letter to a new girl (Gina)



In almost every letter the phrase, 'and if anyone laughs at you, just ignore them' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* appears. When we were discussing the girls' first few weeks of school, this was one of the first things that they wanted to talk about. As Teresa explained the girls all recall having different accents to the other learners in the class and struggled to pronounce certain words. As Rebecca describes, 'when I first came here, I didn't know how to say 'r' like everyone said it here…I used my throat to say 'r' and then everybody laughed at me…but that was because I didn't know this 'r' that everyone was saying' *(AGS 20/09/2011).* Other reasons for being laughed at were not understanding instructions, doing the wrong activities for home work out of a lack of understanding and asking for the meaning of 'simple words' *(AGS 20/09/2011).*

Another piece of advice that most of the girls give is to make sure that they find friends who are 'also like you…so that you can help each other with work' *(AGS 20/09/2011).* In every letter, the learners make reference to 'friends' and these friends are identified as 'South African friends' or 'friends that come from DRC' *(AGS 20/09/2011).* The learners also distinguish between the benefits of having South African or Congolese friends. For example, Fleur feels that having Congolese friends will help you 'learn together' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* which points to the collaboration which is necessary in the early days at a new school.



Figure 4.10: Letter to a new girl (Fleur)

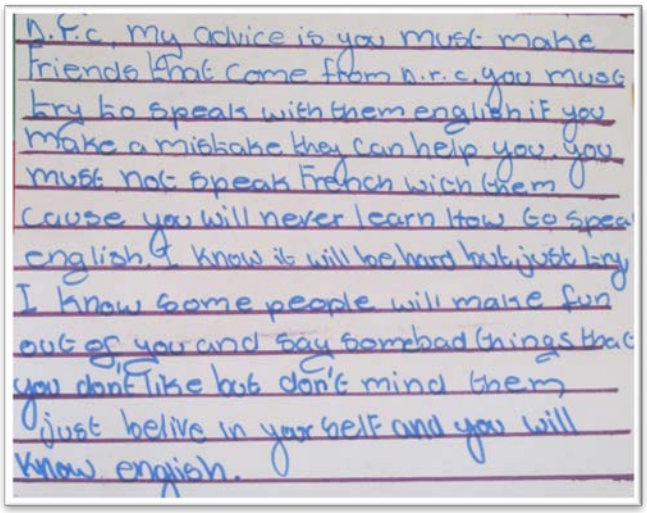


Figure 4.11: Letter to a new girl (Stella)

Rebecca, on the other hand feels that 'you should make more South African friends and less Congolese friends' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* which will 'help you with your English.' This shows the importance of moving out of the comfort of the close circle of friends in order to improve language performance which is relevant to April's description given at the beginning of this chapter. Learners also believe that it is important to also not remain confined in a small group where English is not spoken. They acknowledge that the move beyond friends who are 'the same' is to try and extend their language abilities in both English and other African languages. Here, we can see that the learner community functions as a support structure where learners can help each other with class work and home work activities, but is also limited in its ability in providing opportunities for learners to practice speaking English and learning another South African languages which are both important for in and out of school situations. However, learners are conscious of this limitation and know the value of moving beyond the 'comfort zone' of the small Learner Community.

All of the letters include a motivational sentence such as 'just keep on trying and things will get better for you like they did for me' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* 'believe in yourself' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* and 'try your best' *(AGS 20/09/2011).* During the discussion about the letters, the girls shared similar sentiments about friendship. The girls felt that once they had found their group of friends and their teachers had got to know them, they did not feel as afraid as they did when they first arrived *(AGS 20/09/2011).* The emphasis on self confidence is also very dominant in the letters to Cecile with phrases such as, 'have confidence in yourself' *(AGS 20/09/2011)* and 'believe in yourself' *(AGS 20/09/2011).* In terms of this, learners also make mention of teasing and that you should 'just ignore people who tease you' and 'don't cry because people will laugh at you' *(AGS 20/09/2011).*

These feelings show that the learners find teasing and bullying a challenge in a new environment. Some of them have even accounted instances of teasing and bullying when trying to read aloud or pronounce particular words *(AGS 20/09/2011)*. This points to the relationship between language and identity where even in the school where the tolerance is a core value, girls are targeted or labeled according to language proficiency. This also correlates with the need for English proficiency in order to integrate with other learners in the class.

Photographs of these letters can be found in the Appendix 8.

4.6.3 Dynamics of the Learner Community

During the observation period, I was fortunate enough to see the realities of this Learner Community and the role that each girl adopts within this small group *(ON 29/09/2011).* The observation was enhanced by the presence of Gina. Gina's story is a little different to those of the other seven girls. She has only been part of this Learner Community for one year as she only came to South Africa at the beginning of 2011. This poses many challenges for Gina and the school because of her lack of proficiency in the English language. She is 15 years old and her parents decided to start her in Grade 7 in the hope that she would acquire English and be able to make the transition to high school after a year. Gina's situation is unique because she has missed out on the formative stages of both linguistic and social development (as explained above). She has not been part of this group of girls for an extended period of time and therefore she has not had the opportunity to grow within a group over the course of a few years. This has allowed for a 'replay' of this group formation at a later stage of primary school than usual, the learners are repeating similar protective actions that they would do upon arrival

in perhaps Grade 4. Observations of these mechanisms gave me insight into what it is really like to be a foreign new girl in this particular school, but also into the added complexities of joining a school at such a late stage *(ON 29/09/2011).*

To illustrate the group dynamics that were at play, I would like to describe the roles that three of the learners played in the group. These descriptions are intended to give insight into how each girl has taken on a role and contribute specific skills, knowledge and presence to this unique Learner Community.

As I got to know the group of learners, I could identify particular personality traits in each one of them which determined a specific role within the group. Gina, undoubtedly took on the role of 'the new girl'*(ON 29/09/2011)* and was guided and protected by each of the girls in the group, particularly Rebecca. Gina was very reserved and almost never spoke English unless she was guided by one of her friends able to communicate in Lingala or French. Given the difference between the girls in their ages, Gina was taller and more physically developed than all the girls in the class. The girls understood these differences and are very protective against any teasing and bullying that might come from the physical differences. I recall one incident where one of the learners in their Grade 7 class could not reach the tissue box in the shelf. One learner said, 'call Gina to help, she is the tallest' and another sniggered, 'yes that's because she's 15 in Grade 7!' *(ON 27/09/2011).* Almost immediately Rebecca interrupted and said, 'that doesn't mean anything guys!' *(ON 27/09/2011).*

I would describe Rebecca in this case as 'the mother' *(ON 29/09/2011)* in the group. When I first met Rebecca, I was intrigued at her level of confidence and self assurance. She seemed to be a 20 year old in a 12 year old body. She spoke of situations she has gone through in her life as though they were 'just another day.' These situations included not knowing her mother's name, meeting her father for the first time when she was 8 years old, hearing gun shots while hiding in her house and running away from school because of political riots *(ON 29/09/2011)*. Rebecca also seemed to take charge of the group activities and made sure everybody shared materials and participated to the best of their abilities *(ON 29/09/2011)*. She encouraged Gina to participate in the discussions and almost forced her speak in English as possible. I recall an incident where Gina was confused by a question and Caroline started translating into Lingala for her. Rebecca stopped her abruptly and said, 'no guys, she must try!' *(ON 29/09/2011)* and she proceeded to look Gina in the eye and to ask the question again, very slowly and in English.

Caroline is 'the brain' *(ON 29/09/2011)* of the group. She plays an important role in the group because of her confidence in reading and writing both French and Lingala. Although she was not confident to speak these languages in front of the group, she was always approached to translate or to write words on the board to share with me. She was responsible for translating instructions to Gina and her questions to me. Gina always read and pronounced the Lingala words for the group because she is more confident in the language and with pronunciation. I also noticed that Caroline is passionate about reading and she says 'In this one book I read…' *(ON 29/09/2011)*. The girls in the group look up to Caroline because she is academically strong and wears a 'top ten' sash. They often approached her to ask about homework activities and projects and would rejoice if they were placed in a group with her.

From these descriptions, it is evident that each of the girls has adopted a specific role to play within the group. Whether this role is a source of nurturing, care and protection or a source of knowledge, academic support and language assistance, each girl contributes to the success and development of one another. With this in mind, it is made clear why the girls have all expressed a similar fear for their futures; the fear of being separated at high school.

4.6.4 My biggest fear… High School *(FGD2 19/09/2011)*

Rebecca

They will shout at you if you don't understand.

Caroline

You have to have your eyes open and you must have respect.

Fleur

I'm afraid to be separated from my friends from here and not have anyone to help me.

Teresa

The teachers will also not care – you must just do your work.

Within this supportive and caring community of learners, lies a challenge that they all anticipate. During an informal discussion, the girls brought up the topic of 'high school.' Since they are all in Grade 7, the transition into high school comes up in many conversations both in the classroom and out. From a researcher perspective and after spending time in the school and the neighbourhood from an ethnographer point of view, I believe that the transition for these girls will be a challenge. Coming from the school with neat gardens, a security guard,

sturdy fence, from a community of caring females, a support system of both the Learner and School communities, these girls will encounter a different and perhaps harsher environment in high school. The girls fear that there will be a drastic change in both teaching methodology and in the standard of work, but Fleur highlights something that will be the biggest challenge for all of these girls. Their reliance on each other and the strong relationships that these learners have built over the years are reasons why one of their biggest fears is separation in high school. Most of the learners do apply to the same schools in the area, but as Fleur explains further, 'I am scared that I won't get into the same high school as Caroline because my parents can't afford it and I don't know if I can get a bursary there…' 'I really wish Fleur could come with me to high school, I don't know if I will be alright without her, she is my best friend' *(FGD2 19/09/2011).*

The discussion of this Learner Community has highlighted many challenges that these girls face as both immigrants and 'new girls'. However, it has also highlighted an important coping mechanism that emerges in the light of these challenges. This coping mechanism is embodied in this group of girls and relies on the contribution of unique attributes and abilities of each one. Reflecting back to the key moment at the commencement of the research where the girls approached me to invite other girls to join the group, it can be understood why the girls were more comfortable with working together. These girls can be called a 'community' because they find security in their 'common identities.' They have a mutual understanding for what each other has been through and still what is yet to be faced in the future and thereby mirror characteristics of the Immigrant community where collaboration, sharing and support become values. It can therefore be understood why they are fearful of being separated in the future.

4.7 Chapter Conclusions

To provide a clear conclusion to this data analysis chapter, it is necessary to revisit the research questions.

1. *What stories do a group of immigrant learners tell about their language and literacy experiences in South Africa?*
2. *How are language and literacy practices affected by the intersections between home, school and community?*

The first important thing to consider is the nature of these 'stories.' As the introduction to the Data Analysis describes, these girls tell stories in relation to others. Street (1984) states that literacy practices do not exist in isolation and they are tied to relationships with other people.

For these girls, literacy and language development is not an individual experience. Development is only possible through and with others and is affected by different relationships. Having the girls ask that the project included five more girls, is indicative of how conscious they are about the importance of these relationships. This is the key finding of this research.

Secondly, it should be understood that these stories do not only take place in the classroom, but in the four layers of community. These four layers represent four major influences in the lives of these girls being; where they live (The Yeoville Community), the homes they come from (The Immigrant Community), the school they belong to (The School Community) and the friends they associate with (The Learner Community). The stories that these learners tell about their literacy and language experiences are located within and throughout each of these communities. In each of these communities, learners share different experiences of language and literacy which are summarized as follows:

What is understood from stories of the Yeoville community, is that language and literacy is associated with prejudice, power relations and value.

From the stories shared about Yeoville, it is evident that there are unequal power relations at play where foreigners are targeted for their linguistic differences and are made to feel inferior. The fact that the girls do not speak in the local languages labels them as 'makwerekwere' and English is not an accepted means of communication as in their English medium school. These unequal power relations manifest in a linguistic prejudice in the community and a tension between the girls' mother tongues, English as a dominant language and the local languages that are spoken in Yeoville. While proficiency in English allows the girls access to education, in Yeoville it is disempowering when they are labeled as 'disrespectful' when using English in everyday situations such as in the taxi.

From stories about the Immigrant Community, it is understood that literacy and language are tools for empowerment and identity.

Through their interactions in Lingala, they assert themselves against linguistic prejudice and identification as 'makwerekwere.' Within this community, English has a different position of importance and is seen as empowering rather than disempowering. For immigrants, English is a necessary tool to find employment and to pursue education. The reason why it is empowering is that access to education and employment will result in the 'better life' associated with living in South Africa. In the Immigrant Community, access to literacy and language is shared and

used in order to help others gain access to this new society. The solidarity that is formed between these immigrants is established on the basis of common identities. The Immigrant community is a space where people who feel displaced can fulfil their 'need to belong' and is also a space where they can fulfil their 'need to be different' and assert their identities through language.

In the School Community stories of literacy and language are about social knowledge and diversity. From this community, it is evident that literacy and language allow access to social knowledge. For parents, this is in the form of assistance in understanding procedures and documents which are integral to their livelihoods. For learners, this social knowledge is about behavior, morals and values aimed at educating them against the dangers and influences outside of the school gates. Visual literacy plays an important role for both learners and parents in accessing this social knowledge. The school attempts to be an English-only environment to ensure social cohesion, where 'everyone is on the same level' and where conflict between linguistic groups is seemingly avoided. English is also taught out of an autonomous view of literacy (Street 1984) where a mismatch between home and school literacy practices is highlighted.

In the Learner Community, literacy and language is about integration. English plays an important role in bridging the gap between diverse linguistic communities which exist in the classroom. From stories shared about the Learner Community, it is noted that girls work collaboratively 'like glue' until they reach a level of proficiency in English which allows them to interact outside of their boundaries

From all of the experiences shared in each layer of community, it is important to consider how these experiences are common amongst the girls. They have all gone through similar challenges, difficulties and successes and could therefore share insights in meaningful ways. The second important notion is that literacy and language experiences are complex in that in some ways they are positive and lead to positive outcomes and in some ways they are negative and lead to prejudice and discrimination. Thirdly, it is also interesting to see how languages possess positions of power in various contexts and this power influences how people interact with each other.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project was to share the stories of immigrant learners and their experiences with language and literacy in South Africa. In order to collect these stories, an ethnographic approach was deemed most appropriate. After spending an extended period of time with these learners, what emerged was the ways in which their language and literacy experiences were tightly bound with the notion of community. Along with a socio-cultural cultural approach to literacy, which is the theoretical frame of this research, the concept of community is central in understanding the research findings. This merges with another aim of this research which was to understand how language and literacy practices are affected by the intersections between home, school and community. The most important findings to emerge from this research are discussed in the following section.

5.2 Research Findings

The stories that learners tell about literacy and language are in fact shared stories that reflect their belonging to a community. These learners operate as a community. Not only do these girls form their own community, but they are part of a complex layering of communities namely: the Yeoville Community, the Immigrant Community, the School Community and the Learner Community. In terms of the findings of this study, findings related to these communities will be discussed first. Thereafter, specific links will be made between these communities, language and literacy.

The first finding, in alignment with the socio-cultural approach to literacy, is that the communities in which the girls are situated, are neither homogenous nor do they exist in isolation. It is useful to understand the ways in which they mirror each other and relate to each other as well as how they are in tension with one another.

The Yeoville community has a particular influence on the other layers of community in that prevalent social, political and economic issues permeate the boundaries of the Immigrant, School and Learner communities. As discussed in the data analysis, issues such as xenophobia, discrimination and prejudice infiltrate into peoples' lives resulting in many challenges. Firstly,

much of the prejudice which exists in Yeoville which manifests in linguistic prejudice in this external community or a 'community of place' creates tensions between language and identity. Where much of the Yeoville Community is unaccepting of people who cannot speak African languages and see the use of English as 'disrespectful,' the School, Immigrant and Learner communities hold different values. In these three communities, English holds a position of value. However, what emerges from the Immigrant and the Learner communities is the need to have access to local South African languages such as IsiZulu in order to interact in Johannesburg. This is where the School community does not assist the girls in navigating their way linguistically through and into other communities; the only languages the girls have access to at school are English and Afrikaans.

The Immigrant and Learner community reveal the interesting ways in which immigrants support each other. For new immigrant families, the assistance and support from families already residing in Johannesburg are invaluable. Within this community, English is a prized commodity and is seen as the key to obtaining employment and education in this country. From this community, what emerges are the ways in which common identities bind individuals through shared histories and aspirations. These immigrants see South Africa as providing opportunities for a 'better standard of living' and therefore assist each other in attaining this. It is interesting to see how in the face of discrimination and prejudice and being seen as 'makwerekwere', the Immigrant community provides a space for immigrants to empower each other and where they can feel that 'sense of belonging'. These deeply entrenched practices are mirrored in the Learner Community and speak to the ways in which our ways of being are shaped by people and places.

The School Community plays an important role in both the Immigrant and Learner Communities. Feelings towards the Yeoville Community and 'what happens outside the gates' are framed in deficit discourses where a strong distinction is made between 'outside' and 'inside.' This distinction is based on the understanding that learners are exposed to 'disturbing' things outside of school gates and the school sees it as their prime responsibility to be a source of social knowledge; to guide learners, to shape behaviour and to educate them about good morals and values. This responsibility is important, however, teachers in the School Community conflate the Immigrant and Yeoville communities as one entity. Some of their attitudes and thoughts about learners' homes and backgrounds are thus framed in negative discourses. This results in a barrier between home and school. That said the School Community plays a vital role

in the Immigrant Community in terms of disseminating social knowledge, but the good of these interactions is compromised as a result of this barrier. This barrier has had an effect on literacy and language development in the school where assumptions are made about access to resources, home environment and parental involvement and as result, at times cloud judgment. While learners are engaging in dynamic home literacy practices, the school is under the impression that 'they do not speak a word of English at home'.

Finally, while the Learner Community which mirrors the dynamics of the Immigrant Community in many ways, it also has its own dynamics. The girls in this community pool their strengths, abilities and knowledge in order to face the challenges of transition. They have made the transition into a new country, a transition into a new school and into learning additional languages. As Ms H describes, 'they stick together like glue' firstly as a means to protect each other from external threats, but also to support in order to gain confidence, achieve academic success and learn English. In light of this, the biggest challenge for the Learner Community is their move into high school where the group dynamics will be disrupted. It will be interesting to see how these girls cope in the face of new challenges.

The second finding of this research connects to the ways in which language and literacy are directly affected by issues of power and identity. The most important aspect of power is how it changes and shifts with each different community. In Yeoville, the power is held by those who have access to local South African languages and in terms of identity; English is a marker of a 'kwerekwere' or a 'foreigner.' In the Immigrant Community, mother tongue languages are cherished as the tool to 'keep things between us' and are fundamental in maintaining of many relationships. This allows immigrants to preserve their home languages which are an inextricable part of their identities. In terms of power, English is the language associated with success and wealth, but local South African languages are also desired to interact with people and not be a target of prejudice.

In the School Community, English once again has a position of power where the school property is named an 'English-only' area. This is done to preserve social cohesion between linguistic groups and to provide access to a language which is an additional language for many. In terms of literacy, the autonomous model (Street 1984) dominates the language classroom where learners are subjected to text-based, de-contextualized activities. This is a complete juxtaposition of the literate identities that learners possess in their home situations where they

are engaging in social networking, media texts and digital domains to the old fashioned texts and issues present in the daily life of the classroom.

For the Learner Community, English holds a position of power because of what they observe at home and at school. Without English, education and employment are unattainable and therefore so are those 'better standards of living.' In terms of identity, the Learner Community understand the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage and in maintaining connections with 'home' by speaking their mother tongue, but they also know that it has to take a subsidiary position when it comes to education. This is why they encourage each other to 'try' and speak in English as often as possible. This community understands that through literacy and language in English, one becomes empowered, but they also understand that this would not happen without each other.

5.3 Research Implications

The implications that emerge from this study relate both to the nature of education as a whole and more specifically to literacy and language teaching.

Firstly, from the experiences of these girls, it can be seen that their ways of being are both complex and interesting. The ways in which different communities influence their lives, is indicative of how these ways of being are communal and not individual. From the first week of this research, it was made clear that these girls function as a collective not only in the classroom, but in the school and in their homes. Collaboration is a quality that is deep-seated within these girls and is something that occurs from observing the benefits of helping others who are in similar circumstances. This raises questions for the ways in which we teach and the ways in which children learn. This is related to the understanding of literacy as a social practice.

We cannot refute the fact that human interactions are influenced by issues of power and disempowerment. From observing how the girls have been empowered or disempowered in different communities by having access to English, power becomes something that is often underestimated. It is necessary to consider a 'critical socio-cultural theory of language' (Janks 2010) which allows the relationship between the social context, language and relations of power relations to be understood. Here, learners become aware of how access to language and literacy is affected by power relations. The way in which learners can observe how power affects them is to become critical. Once learners understand their position in relation to power, they can engage in transformation. As Paulo Freire writes, 'To exist, humanly, is to name the

world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to its namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming' (Freire 1972b p. 61 in Janks 2010 p. 161).

A final implication of this study is about literacy and its relationship between home, school and the community. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of literacy and language from the point of view of an immigrant learner. By using ethnographic principles and becoming immersed in the context, the ways in which literacy and language affect the lives of these girls could be understood. From linguistic prejudice to empowerment, language and literacy practices create certain opportunities and certain challenges for the girls, but without understanding their daily lives, these would not be brought to light. Literacy is about 'how different communities use and interact around literacy' (Heath 1983 cited in Pahl & Rowsell 2005 p. 14) and is not only about learning English at school or a 'set of skills to be learnt' (Barton & Hamilton 1998).

It is therefore important to consider ways in which literacy can bridge gaps between home, school and the community. This study has highlighted both the ways in which literacy and language development is achieved effectively between home, school and community as well as the possibilities for these interactions to be improved. One of the means to improve the relationship between literacy at home and literacy at school is through the understanding of 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992). These are the 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (p. 133). It is also about how members of a particular household use their funds of knowledge to deal with 'changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances' (Moll et al. 1992 p. 133). Through understanding how learners interact with language and literacy out of school contexts, learning can become a more appealing and relevant experience.

5.4 Recommendations

Out of the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

In order for issues of literacy and language to be understood and perhaps improved, an understanding of learners' lives; their homes, backgrounds, histories and aspirations are important to consider. With this understanding, issues of power can be identified and unbalanced relations of power can be challenged. Also, the intersections that exist between home, school and community should be valued as opportunities for literacy and language to develop; teachers, parents and learners need to become more aware of these. Finally, this

research finds meaning as a result of our unique context; as Africans. Dominant forms of education such as the 'autonomous model of literacy' (Street 1984) and other western perceptions of education as an individual journey (Tjale & DeVilliers 2004) are not successful in our context because of our unique characteristics. The fact that community is an important element of learning; that learning is situated within a specific context; that prejudice affects literacy and learning and that people are interdependent should be foregrounded as part of education in both policy and practice.

Further recommendations for future research include more attention on visual literacy. Due to the scale of this project, the literacy artefacts and other elements of visual literacy were not a prime focus. However, there is still much that could be analysed and included with regards to these. The expressions made through various modes are interesting and contain much valuable insight on behalf of the learners. Also, it would be valuable to complete a follow up study with the same learners to see if their literacy and language practices are affected by a change of environment in high school. It would be interesting to find out if the interactions across and between communities are similar or if they have changed in any way.

5.5 Reflection

As an individual, I have always been fascinated with the storied nature of peoples' lives. As a teacher and researcher, I have also realised that children have stories to tell and experiences to share. Through interacting with learners from diverse backgrounds, I have realised that the stories they tell are sometimes painful, sometimes joyful, but always educational. This research project was a challenge in many ways; firstly because of the stories that are carried in the hearts and minds of these immigrant girls. Many afternoons I would reflect on what they had shared with me and be filled with emotion and awe at what they had been through as young people. Secondly, it was a challenge because of the nature of the research I chose to do. Taking on the role of an ethnographic researcher challenged my character. Where previously I had gone into schools and met briefly with teachers and learners for an interview or discussion, I now had to delve deeper; to form relationships and to become 'immersed.' At times, this was very overwhelming because while the data kept piling up, I was unsure as to how to understand it. Also, being a flexible to the needs of my participants was another challenge in that it required me to just 'go with the flow.'

However, in the light of these challenges, this research has allowed me to see the importance of story, experience and voice in understanding an issue that affects the lives of many. Through engaging with these girls, I came to understand how they function *as* a community; *within* communities and *across* communities. This shed light on how they learn and how literacy and language is affected and affects their lives. I have grown in the understanding that learning, development and success are not individual goals or gains, but rather things that happen as a result of others. I feel that this study is representative of how learning is not 'one size fits all' and that literacy and language development is not something that occurs through one learning pathway. I hope that those who read the thoughts and experiences shared in this research can change their perspectives about teaching and learning and that in some way, teachers and learners may benefit from the findings and recommendations.

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Please note: The school website has been kept confidential as it would reveal the identity of the school

Appendices

Appendix 1: Learner Consent Form

Wits School of Education

Dear Learner,

Thank you for volunteering to help me! My name is Katherine Wentzel and I am currently a student at the University of the Witwatersrand. To finish my Masters degree in Applied English Language Studies I need to do a research project.

I would like to invite you to take part in this project for 1 term and to share some information with me about your experiences with English and learning to read and write.

For this project, I need your help with three things:

1. I would like to observe you in class. This means I will sit at the back of some of your classes see how you are learning. I will be listening to what you are being taught and seeing how you interact with other learners.
2. I would like to have a few discussions with you during break or after school about your homework, class work, reading and writing at home and at school.
3. We are also going to write in a journal and draw pictures about your experiences with English and your home language.

I would like to tape record our discussions to make sure I don't miss anything that was said. Remember, this is not a test, it is not for marks and it is not compulsory. If you decide halfway through that this is too much for you and would like to stop, this is completely your choice and will not affect you negatively in any way. Everything we talk about will be kept confidential. Nobody else will see or hear the tapes and notes that I make and I will not use your name or show your mini-project to anyone. I will show you everything I write about you and if you are unhappy with it, I will change it or take it out. Your parents have also been given a permission slip to fill out but at the end of the day it is your choice. I look forward to getting to know you!

Please feel free to contact me on (011) 453-5202 if you have any questions

Thank You

Katherine Wentzel

Please fill in the reply-slip below if you agree to let me **observe** you in class, have **discussions** with you and to **audiotape** our discussions

Permission slip for the study 'Literacy journeys: The language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school

OBSERVATION

My name is: _____

I would like to be part of this research **YES/NO**

I agree to be observed in class **YES/NO**

I know that I can stop at any time **YES/NO**

I know that Katherine will keep my information confidential **YES/NO**

Sign_____ **Date**_____

Permission slip for the study ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' **INTERVIEW**

My name is: _____

I agree to be interviewed for this study **YES/NO**

I know that I can stop at any time **YES/NO**

I know that Katherine will keep my information confidential **YES/NO**

Sign_____ **Date**_____

Permission slip for the study 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' **AUDIOTAPE**

My name is: _____

I agree to be audio taped during the interview **YES/NO**

I know that I can stop at any time **YES/NO**

I know that Katherine will keep my information confidential **YES/NO**

Sign_____ **Date**_____

Appendix 2: Teacher consent forms

Wits School of Education

Dear educator, (English)

My name is Katherine Wentzel and I am currently a student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am studying for a Masters Degree in Applied English Language Studies and in order to complete my studies this year I need to complete a research project. The title of my research project is, 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school.' The reason why I have chosen to visit your school is because it represents a diversity of learners' languages and cultures. As a teacher, you are dealing with learners who come from difficult home situations which may affect the way you teach. At the same time, you are accommodating a range of different languages in your classroom. This is why I am interested in coming to observe your teaching. I would like to find out more about these challenges.

I will be working specifically with three learners in your class who have volunteered to work with me on a one-on – one basis and to share their experiences of literacy and language learning. I will be focusing on these three learners in closer detail, but in order to understand the whole picture, I need to see how they are interacting in the English classroom. I request your permission to silently observe your class for approximately one term. I would like to sit in your classroom and observe your interactions with learners and their interactions with each other. I will not ask questions, comment or disrupt the lesson in any way. Things I will be looking for would be: do learners speak in their mother tongue? Do you encourage code switching? How do you facilitate unfamiliar vocabulary? How do learners respond to questions and texts?

From these observations I will make notes and at a later stage may have an individual interview with you. The interview will be approximately 1 hour and conducted privately, at your convenience. It will be tape recorded and then transcribed to ensure accuracy. At any point you may refuse to answer a question or continue the interview. All of the responses will be kept confidential.

I do not aim to carry out an assessment of your teaching style and preferences, but rather aim to discover how you interact with learners in your class, how they interact with each other and how you deal with the challenges that arise when teaching learners from diverse circumstances. All my observations and interactions with you will be kept confidential. I will use pseudonyms in all my notes and interview transcripts. Due to the fact that you have a busy schedule at this time, involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

If you have any question you can contact me via email, katherine.wentzel@gmail.com or phone (011) 453 5202 or you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon via email, kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or phone (011) 717- 3007

Yours Sincerely

Katherine Wentzel

Please indicate below whether you agree to participate in this research study (be observed), interviewed **and** audio taped during the interview.

Permission for Participation in the Study

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **observed** for this study, entitled 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'. I acknowledge that my participation is **voluntary**, that I may **withdraw** from the study at any time and that my input will remain **confidential**. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Permission for Interview

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **interviewed** for this study, entitled 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'. I acknowledge that my participation is **voluntary**, that I may **withdraw** from the study at any time and that my input will remain **confidential**. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Permission to be Audio taped

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **audio taped** during the interview for the study entitled, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' I acknowledge that this is for the purpose of accuracy and that my input will remain confidential

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Dear educator, (Other Learning Areas)

My name is Katherine Wentzel and I am currently a student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am studying for a Masters Degree in Applied English Language Studies and in order to complete my studies this year I need to complete a research project. The title of my research project is, ‘‘Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school’.’ The reason why I have chosen to visit your school is because it represents a diversity of learners’ languages and cultures. As a teacher, you are dealing with learners who come from difficult home situations which may affect the way you teach. At the same time, you are accommodating a range of different languages in your classroom. This is why I am interested in coming to observe your teaching. I would like to find out more about these challenges.

I will be working specifically with three learners in your class who have volunteered to work with me on a one-on – one basis and to share their experiences of literacy and language learning. I will be focusing on these three learners in closer detail, but in order to understand the whole picture, I need to see how they are interacting in your classroom. It is also important to understand the role that language plays in subjects other than English.

I request your permission to silently observe your class for approximately one term. I would like to sit in your classroom and observe your interactions with learners and their interactions with each other. I will not ask questions, comment or disrupt the lesson in any way. Things I will be looking for would be: do learners speak in their mother tongue? Do you encourage code switching? How do you facilitate unfamiliar vocabulary? How do learners respond to questions and texts?

From these observations I will make notes and at a later stage may have an individual interview with you. The interview will be approximately 1 hour and conducted privately, at your convenience. It will be tape recorded and then transcribed to ensure accuracy. At any point you may refuse to answer a question or continue the interview. All of the responses will be kept confidential.

I do not aim to carry out an assessment of your teaching style and preferences, but rather aim to discover how you interact with learners in your class, how they interact with each other and how you deal with the challenges that arise when teaching learners from diverse circumstances. All my observations and interactions with you will be kept confidential. I will use pseudonyms in all my notes and interview transcripts.

Due to the fact that you have a busy schedule at this time, involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

If you have any question you can contact me via email, katherine.wentzel@gmail.com or phone (011) 453 5202 or you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon via email, kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or phone (011) 717- 3007

Yours Sincerely

Katherine Wentzel

Please indicate below whether you agree to participate in this research study (be observed), interviewed **and** audio taped during the interview.

Permission for Participation in the Study

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **observed** for this study, entitled 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'. I acknowledge that my participation is **voluntary**, that I may **withdraw** from the study at any time and that my input will remain **confidential**. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Permission for Interview

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **interviewed** for this study, entitled 'Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'. I acknowledge that my participation is **voluntary**, that I may **withdraw** from the study at any time and that my input will remain **confidential**. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Permission to be Audio taped

I, _____ refuse / give my consent to be **audio taped** during the interview for the study entitled, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' I acknowledge that this is for the purpose of accuracy and that my input will remain confidential

_____ Your Signature _____ Date

Appendix 3: Parent consent form

Wits School of Education

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Katherine Wentzel and I am currently a student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am studying for a Masters Degree in Applied English Language Studies. In order to complete my studies this year I need to do a research project. My project is called, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' The reason why I have chosen to visit your child's school is because there is such a mixture of language and culture among the learners. I am interested in how your child, teachers and the school work together to support literacy and language development. I understand that it is difficult to learn in English when it is not your home language and I would like to talk to your child about their experiences with speaking English and learning to read and write in English.

I request your permission to observe and work with your child for approximately one term. I will sit in your child's classroom and observe their interactions with the teacher and other learners. Things I will be looking for would be; does your child use his/her mother tongue language in class? Does the teacher encourage code switching? How does your child cope with unfamiliar vocabulary? And how does your child respond to questions and texts?

I would like to have informal discussions with your child during break or after school about their homework, class work, reading and writing at home and at school. During the discussions I have with your child, I would like to tape record what is said so that I don't miss any information while we are talking. Also, I would like to complete a mini-project with your child where they use pictures, poems, letters and discussions to tell me their language stories. This will not be for marks and I will make sure that it does not interfere with their other school work.

Your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way if they choose to take part in this study or not. All responses, observation material (tapes and transcripts) and the mini-project will be kept confidential and I will not use your child's name. If at all your child feels uncomfortable in any way, they can choose to leave the study at any point. Your support will be greatly appreciated

Should you have any questions you can contact me via email katherine.wentzel@gmail.com or phone (011) 453-5202. Or you can send a note to the school and I will phone you back. You may contact my supervisor at the university, Dr. Kerryn Dixon via email kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or phone (011) 717 3007

Yours Sincerely

Katherine Wentzel

Please indicate below whether you will allow your child to **participate** in this research study **and** be **audio taped** in the discussions

Permission for Participation in the study

I, _____ the parent of _____refuse / give my consent, for my child to **take part** in the study entitled, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' I acknowledge that my child may withdraw from the study at any time and that their input will remain confidential. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Parent's signature _____ Date

Permission for Observation

I, _____ the parent of _____refuse / give my consent, for my child to be **observed** in class for 1 term for the study entitled, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' I acknowledge that my child may withdraw from the study at any time and that their input will remain confidential. I also understand that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation or publication.

_____ Parent's signature _____ Date

Permission to be Audio taped during discussions

I, _____ the parent of _____refuse / give my consent, for my child to be **audio taped during discussions** for the study, ''Literacy journeys: the language and literacy experiences of a group of immigrant girls in an inner city school'.' I acknowledge that this is for the purpose of accuracy and that my child's input will remain confidential

_____ Parent's signature _____ Date

Appendix 4: Teacher Interview Questions

The nature of qualitative research allows for deviation from these questions into broader discussion and elaboration.

1. How long have you been teaching English? Is it your area of choice? Tell me about your training to become a teacher?
2. Could you describe your English classes to me? How many learners do you have? Are they all Additional Language English speakers? What are their attitudes towards English?
3. Could you name some of the languages that learners speak at home?
4. How do your learners' backgrounds/home situations/ histories affect the way in which you teach literacy and language?
5. Are your learners better at oral or written activities?
6. What do your students enjoy doing in English?
7. What do they not enjoy doing?
8. Do you have to provide additional support for learners who do not speak English at home?
9. What support do they need
10. What do you think the school does to support the needs of multilingual learners?
11. How do you interact with parents that do not speak English?
12. Do you find that learners' home situations affect literacy? E.g. their writing/speeches
13. How do you use your multilingual classroom to your advantage?
14. Do you encourage code-switching?
15. Are you involved in after-school language development programmes?
16. How do you go about choosing texts for your learners? Do you need to be sensitive about certain things?
17. Do you have a particular methodology that you use to teach additional/foreign language learners?
18. What works for you?
19. What are the biggest challenges you face as a teacher at this school?
20. Any final comments about teaching in a multilingual and multicultural classroom?

Appendix 5: Learner Focus Group Questions

Section A: Personal Literacy Practices

1. What language do you speak at home?
2. What other languages can you speak?
3. Do you write letters or keep a diary or journal? What language do you write in?
4. Do you have a cell phone? If so, do you send text messages in English? Who do you text?
5. Do you have access to the internet? If so, do you use Mxit or Facebook? Why?
6. Do you enjoy watching TV or listening to music? What do you watch/listen to?
7. Do you speak English outside of school? When/where?
8. What language/s do your parents/guardians/best friends speak? What language do you speak to them in?

Section B: School Literacy Practices

1. Do you enjoy English? Why?
2. Is there something you do not enjoy at all in English lessons? (e.g. comprehensions, poetry or novels?)
3. Are you reading a book as a class? If so, could you tell me about it?
4. Do you have a favourite book?
5. Do you read books written in your mother tongue? Do you have a favourite?
6. Tell me about your English class, what is it like?
7. What was it like when you had your first few English lessons at this school? Did you feel scared or excited? If so, why?
8. Do you speak English to your friends at break?
9. Do you find comprehensions difficult? If so, how? (are the texts hard? Too long?)
10. Do you ever translate the English texts you are given?
11. Have you written your own stories or poems yet? Have they been in English?
12. Do you think your English teacher helps you understand? If so, why?
13. How could he/she help you even more?
14. Do you speak your home language in class?
15. Are there other learners who speak your home language in your class?
16. Are there any other comments about reading and writing at school?
17. Do you think your school promotes reading? How?

Appendix 6: Tasks Completed in Group Sessions



Task One
Art Project



Choose one of the following topics:

1. My journey to Jozi

Show us your journey: How did you get here? Who did you come with? What was the journey like? What feelings did you have? What was your first impression?

2. My life in Jozi

Show us what your life is like here compared to your home country. You can show us both or you can just talk about now

3. Talking the Talk

Show us what it is/was like to be surrounded by English. Show us what you read and write. You can use examples from in or out of school.

4. Old school, new school

Show us what your old school was like compared to your new one. Can you remember?

Remember to write a 1 page explanation to attach to your artwork.

Date:



Task Two
Let's Talk



We are going to talk about these two words:

Immigrant

Refugee

Think about them, look them up, talk to your parents/teachers about them so that we can have a group discussion.

Date:



Task Three
New in Town

Cecile, a girl from the DRC, has just arrived at your school.

She has come to live in Johannesburg with her granny and aunty.

She speaks French very well, but only knows a few words in English.

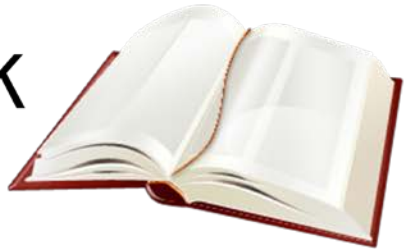
Do you have any advice for her?

Write her a letter.

Date:



Task Four
Let's Talk



We are going to talk about English at school and out of school.

Bring your favourite book, magazine or newspaper to school to share with us.

can be in any language.



Think of:

Your proudest moment in English

Your most embarrassing moment in English

Date:



Task Five
News from the South

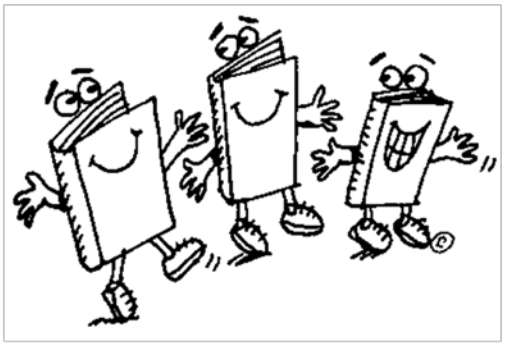
Do you still keep in touch with friends/family in your home country?

We are going to write them a postcard to tell them about your life in South Africa

You will also design the picture side of the postcard

Date:

Task Six
Book Review



We are going to talk about the book you have read and why it is relevant to your life.

The book is called, ‘I hate English!’

Date:

Appendix 7: Photographs of girls' art

Gina: My old school and my new school



Teresa: My old school and my new school



April: My Journey to Jozi



Rebecca: My Journey to Jozi



Sizani: Talking the talk



Fleur: My Journey to Jozi



Caroline: My life in Jozi



Stella: My old school and my new school

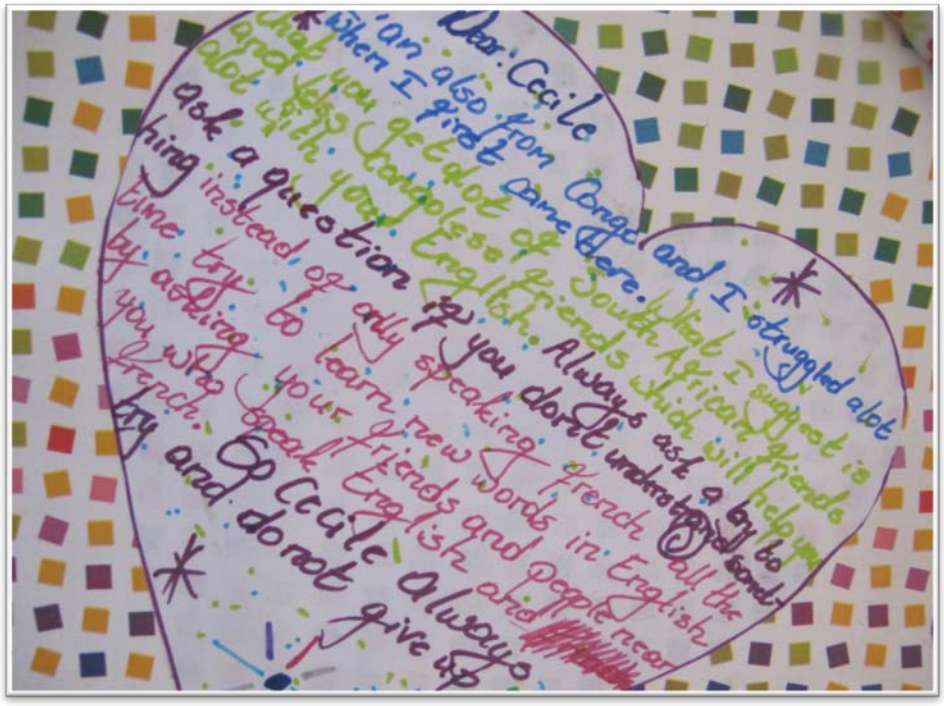


Letters to a new girl:

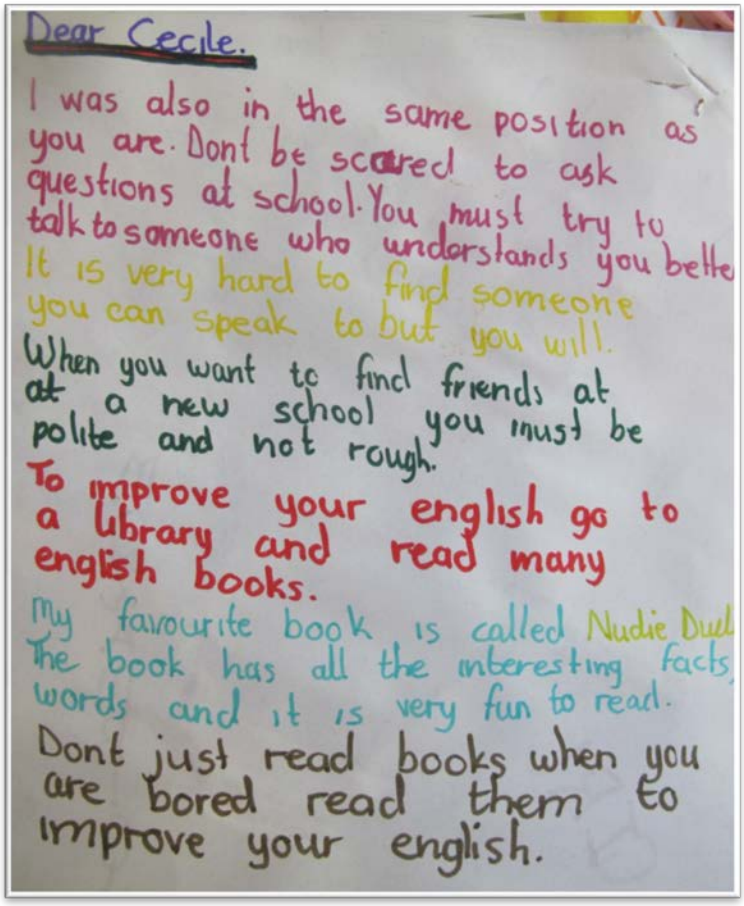
April:



Rebecca:



Sizani:


Dear Cecile.

I was also in the same position as you are. Dont be scared to ask questions at school. You must try to talk to someone who understands you bette It is very hard to find someone you can speak to but you will.

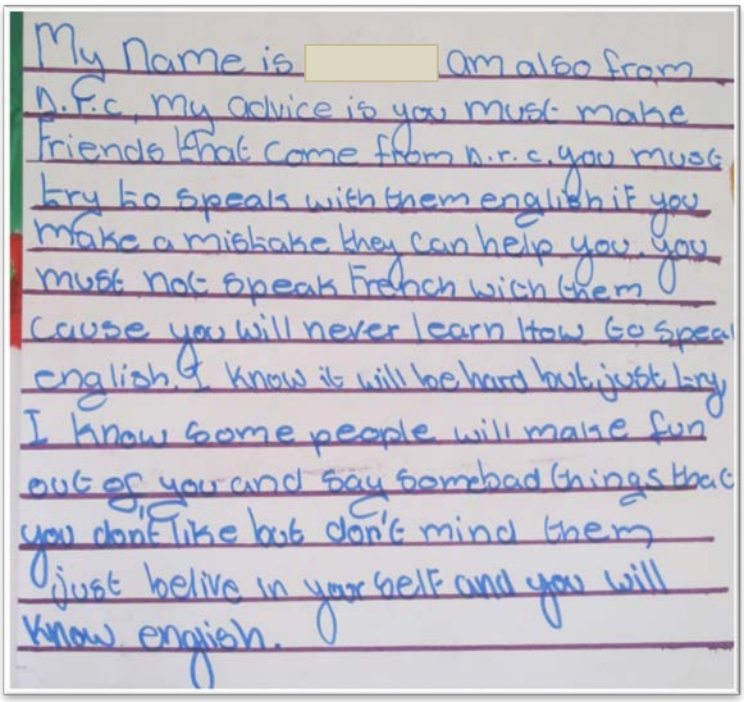
When you want to find friends at a new school you must be polite and not rough.

To improve your english go to a library and read many english books.

My favourite book is called Nudie Duc The book has all the interesting facts, words and it is very fun to read.

Dont just read books when you are bored read them to improve your english.

Stella:


My Name is [redacted] am also from D.R.C. My advice is you must make friends that come from D.R.C. you must try to speak with them english if you make a mistake they can help you. you must not speak French with them cause you will never learn how to speak english. I know it will be hard but just try I know some people will make fun out of you and say sombad things that you dont like but don't mind them just belive in your self and you will know english.