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# Critical literacy and children's "out-of-school" spaces

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# CRITICAL LITERACY AND CHILDREN'S "OUT-OF-SCHOOL" SPACES

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# Abstract

The aim of the research was to deepen my understanding of the conceptualizations of childhood, as well as exploring the notion of the bedroom as a belonging space within the context of privilege or poverty. Spatial theory, theories of multimodality and critical literacy provide a theoretical framework for this research. The research was conducted with twenty two pre-school children in an affluent, private school. Data was collected through group discussions, informal discussions and focus group discussions which were recorded and transcribed. Children's art as well as photographs were also collected. Findings reveal that children's conceptualization of the bedroom as a belonging space is tied to constructions of identity. Identity is formed by relational ties, materiality of objects, gender and to some extent, the commodification of the bedroom space. In addition, a privilege upbringing shapes the children's understanding of social oppression, but this does not necessarily become an embodied understanding. In order to foster critical thinking, it is important to adopt a critical literacy approach which is integrated into the curriculum on an on-going basis.

# Declaration

I, Karen Hearn, declare that the research work reported in this project is my own except where otherwise indicated and acknowledged. It is submitted for the M. Ed Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This research project has not, either in whole or part, been submitted for a degree to any other universities.

_____ _____

Karen Hearn Date

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# 1. Introduction

I am a teacher of four to five-year olds in a private Christian nursery school. I work within the framework of early childhood education, which encompasses an informal, play-based approach to teaching and learning. This particular approach to early childhood education has been supported over the years, through extensive research by the likes of Pellegrini, (1991), Spodek, Saracho and Davis (1991), Moyles (1984, 1994) and Gordon & Browne (2008).The benefits of a play-based approach is that it affords children many opportunities to learn, explore, investigate and develop their full potential.

However, as a teacher who has been teaching for many years, I have realised that there are limitations to this play-based approach in that the children are not necessarily learning to think critically about themselves and the world .This is the impetus for the research as I am interested in examining what it might look like to include critical literacy in a Grade 00 classroom. Janks (2010, p 41) defines critical literacy as "a set of theorised practices that constitute a pedagogy" which sees "language and literacy as social practices that produce effects." She adds "its' social justice agenda and its commitment to social action, however small it be, that makes a difference" (Janks, 2010, p 40).

In addition to this I am also interested in the ways in which spatiality is an aspect of critical literacy which I had explored during my honours research. McGregor (2004, p 351) says that space has to be viewed more than the "inert juxtaposition of physical and material entities" or a "passive container for social action" but rather embodies "the dynamic tension between the social and the material." McGregor (2004, p 351) adds that spatiality "is an important tool for explaining relations and patterns of power and agency." In the context of my research, the theory of spatiality will be used as a lens to examine the bedroom space in the home.  More in-depth reference will be made to both critical literacy and spatiality in chapter two.

This research therefore aims to deepen my understanding of conceptualizations of childhood as well as adopting a critical literacy lens to examine the bedroom as a site of belonging within a context of privilege or poverty. It is access to space, control of space and design of space which become markers of identity and power for children (Dixon, 2011). It is the physical space of the bedroom as well as the interactions within that space that contribute to different

conceptualisations of identity for the child, such as “Who am I, how should I live, who do I want to become” (Baumann, 1988 cited in Kehily, 2009, p1).

From a critical literacy perspective, this sense of self is also tied in to relationships with others which need to be underpinned by ethics of social justice. Social justice revolves around concepts such as fairness, equity, diversity and access. As a teacher, I would hope that my engagement with the children around these issues would provide them with a better understanding of how these concepts are shaped by their own life experiences and by their relationship with the broader community of which they are a part. The children in my research are not denied access to housing or education and do not experience hunger or poverty which is the experience for many children in South Africa. Whilst I may feel that it is necessary to protect young children, and in my research, “privileged” young children, from the harsh realities of our country, Kuby (2012) reminds us that children are not mere onlookers but live in this world and it is therefore important that I provide space in my school curriculum, to dialogue about social justice issues**.** In order to achieve this, I need to problematize the Grade 00s notion of privilege as not being normalised for all children so that they question their “taken-for- granted status and common-sense assumptions”, in order to “explore and find other voices and truths about social and class relations, about forms of oppression and about injustices of the social and economic system” (Luke and Woods, 2009, p 5).

Within this critical literacy framework, I will also examine how children explore a notion of a just and fair world, through a creative medium such as art, so that the children understand that “it is not about luck; it is about an unfair playing field” (Dixon & Janks, 2018, in press).

## 1.2 Research questions and aims

### 1.2.1 Aims

There are two parts to the research. The first part of the research aims to explore how children conceptualize their bedroom as a belonging space. Comber (2016) among others, have conducted research in this field with young children and this provides a framework for my research.

The first part of the research serves to inform the second, which has a pedagogical focus and is influenced by the work of researchers such as Vasquez

(2004), Kuby (2012) and O'Brien (2001). This aspect of the research aims to examine how the Grade 00s, respond to a critical literacy approach and the kinds of insights this provides me as a teacher in developing this approach in my classroom. Much of the research around a critical literacy approach has been conducted with children who are not affluent, but I am interested in using a critical literacy approach in a school where the children do enjoy a privileged lifestyle.

### 1.2.2 Research Questions

1. How do young children in a Grade 00 class conceptualize the "bedroom" as a belonging space?

1.1. How is the belonging space represented multimodally? What do multimodal representations of bedrooms as belonging spaces provide?

1.2. Does using a critical literacy lens to examine belonging spaces disrupt the notion of privilege and the understanding of privileged bedrooms spaces?

## 1.3 Rationale

Whilst there is a substantial body of research with respect to children's 'spaces' in the home, school and community elsewhere in the world, little research has been done in South Africa. Dixon (2011) has conducted considerable research around children's spaces at school, but there has been less focus on children's belonging spaces at home. Fataar's (2009) work is most probably the closest to this, but he has worked primarily with primary and high school students in the Western Cape. Fataar (2009, p 1) refers to "lived spaces" and defines these as how people live in particular sites and what they become when "engaging their geographies, appropriating space and inventing new practises."

While it is well established that critical literacy work can be done with young children, Comber (2001), Luke (1994) and Vazquez (2004) state that critical literacy is often problematically left for the later years of schooling. Through conducting this research, I would like to introduce critical literacy into my pre-school programme. Vasquez (2007, p 7) says that the value of a critical literacy approach is that it provides ways in which the teacher can help children to "understand the social and political issues around them." Because the modern day child is living in a very complex world, Vasquez (2007, p 6) proposes that it

is only as children are encouraged to engage in some tough conversations that they "learn to become critical analysts of the world who are able to make informed decisions as they engage with the world around them." If young children are to become adept at skills such as those of critical thinking, then the pre-school years are an opportune time to introduce such skills. Once young children have mastered critical thinking skills then hopefully they will be challenged to disrupt the status quo where necessary, in order to bring about positive change in their world.

The children I teach are in the fortunate position of enjoying the benefits of privilege and comfortable economic circumstances. Kuby (2012) points out that while critical literacy is often undertaken with groups of people who are traditionally marginalized, critical literacy also needs to be undertaken with more affluent communities. She adds that social justice dialogue should take place "with students that are seen as holding power and privilege in society" and by engendering "consciousness-raising with privileged children," so that they can "explore issues of justice from their position" (Kuby, 2012, p 6).

The difficulty with privilege is that it is so often "invisible" and the children that I teach have known nothing other than privilege. As Bourdieu (1991, cited in Janks, 2011, p 55) describes it, the habitus of privilege is their "ingrained, unconscious embodied ways of being." Whilst we may feel that young children should be protected from the harsh realities of the world, all children, even those who are privileged "witness inequities in their lives – if not on a personal level, than certainly within their community" (Kuby, 2012, p 2).Whilst respecting that the socio-historical and economic contexts in which the children live "produces different conditions of possibility and constraints" (Janks, 2011, p 41), as the teacher, I do not want to perpetuate these notions of power and privilege. It is important that I encourage the Grade 00s to negotiate these in a meaningful manner and to help children challenge their "taken-for granted social relations, practices and institutions that work to maintain existing relations of power" (Janks, 2011, p 55). From a position of privilege, it is important that the children question who profits the most and why and for what reason things are the way they are (Beek, 2005 and Comber & Nixon, 1999, cited in Soares & Wood, 2010). As Janks (2011, p 41) proposes, if children are encouraged to grapple with issues of social justice and fairness within the framework of their local community they can be encouraged to make small changes that will positively affect not only their own lives but those of the

people around them and “make the world a better place” (Beek, 2005 and Comber & Nixon, 1999, cited in Soares & Wood, 2010, p 487).

In my teaching context, the lifestyle of privilege is unlikely to change but I can work with the Grade 00s to move them from a position of accepting their situation “as is” to one of greater social awareness, justice and fairness in which they can “re-imagine and effect a better world” (Janks, 2016).

In order to assist the Grade 00 children to engage with social issues in a critical literacy manner, I will be making use of a multimodal approach. The theory of multimodality proposes that many modes, in addition to writing, can be used for meaning-making. Researchers such as Jewett & Kress (2003) and Stein (2009), advocate that ideas can be represented and expressed through the use of a variety of modes, both in isolation or in combination. Because young children do not always find it easy to express their thoughts verbally, a multimodal modal approach opens the door for other forms of self-expression. Art is already an important component of the existing school programme, so it can be repurposed to serve the interests of critical literacy. As Kendrick and McKay (2010, p 111) propose drawing is “a means of investigating what children know” and multimodal representations “allow for the expression of a much fuller range of human emotion and experience” (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, cited in Kendrick & McKay, 2010, p 111.)

The value of this research is that as a pre-school teacher it gives me the opportunity to implement a critical literacy approach in my classroom and thus inform my teaching practice. Armed with this information, I will be better equipped to integrate a critical literacy approach into the existing educational programme and to use it on an on-going basis rather than something which is adopted for a week or two during the course of the year. Having completed the research I also feel that I will be better equipped to recognise and to spontaneously engage with the children around social issues when they arise.

Next year the school I teach at will be introducing “Inquiry learning” in the curriculum and I feel that this style of teaching and learning can be aligned to a critical literacy approach. The findings of the research will enable me to inform school policy as it relates to curriculum design and planning using a critical literacy approach, and I will be in a position to offer advice to other teachers in the school who wish to adopt a similar approach.

The next chapter provides a detailed account of the literature that I reviewed which provided the framework for the research that I conducted.

# 2. Literature review

Because this research looks at the conceptualization of a belonging space in early childhood, the literature review first examines the concept of space in school and at home. This is followed by the notion of belonging and the construction of self in a belonging space. The review then considers the field of critical literacy focusing particularly on research that uses a critical literacy approach with young children and ends with an examination of privilege.

These are important areas of discussion because this research aims to examine young children's emotional, reasoned, social and ethical ways of engaging with the spaces in which they live.

## 2.1 The notion of space in school and at home

A great deal has been written on space and a number of theorists have defined it in different ways. Theorists such as Foucault (1991) and Lefebvre (1974) construct space in terms of its' social dimension. In this regard Foucault (1991) says that we do not live in a void, an empty space but rather "we live inside an ensemble of relations that define emplacements that are irreducible to each other and absolutely nonsuperposable" (cited in Dixon, 2012, p 149). This is important for me, because I am researching a particular 'social' space that of the bedroom, located in the social space of the home.

Researchers such as Dixon (2012) and theorists such as Christensen, James and Jenks (2012), point to the role of space in constructing identity. Christensen, James and Jenks (2000, p 120) define space as an "intense and complex matric matrix together with identity, difference and differentiation" whilst Dixon (2012, p 149) says that the spaces in which we live, "shape who we are, where we can be located and how we behave." Understanding the construction of identity in a particular space is also an important part of my research because identity can positively or adversely impact on a sense of belonging in that space.

The "spaces" most commonly inhabited by children are those of the home, the school and the neigbourhood or community. With respect to the school "space", Dixon's (2007) examination of the relationship between literacy and children in the early years classroom, provides a good example of how a particular space shapes the child's identity and behavior in a particular way. Comber (2016) says that the classroom is the meeting place where children and teachers are thrown

together in order to negotiate spaces of learning. She adds that the child must enjoy a sense of belonging in this particular space if they are to develop and sustain a learner identity at school.

The focus of this research, however, is not the school space but is the 'home' of which the bedroom is an important feature. Relph (2017, para. 4) defines the home as "the most fundamental of all spaces" and "the central reference point of human existence." This notion is reiterated by Hancock and Gillen (2007, cited in Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014) who describe home as "the initial place of attachment and a private place they [children] first explore and get to know." Because my research involves young children, it is this "private" and "fundamental" space and especially the bedroom in this private space, that I want to explore and examine how the child's "sense of belonging" manifests itself in that space.

## 2.2 A sense of belonging

### 2.2.1 The history of theorizing "belonging"

It is in the home environment, that the child most likely fabricates a sense of belonging and it is this notion of belonging that has been researched by academics for a long time. A *sense of belonging* was first highlighted by Adler in the early 1900s who held that people have one basic desire and goal and that is to belong and to feel significant (Adler Graduate School, 2016). Adler also proposed that because humans are socially embedded, they are motivated to find a sense of belonging in a family, at school, work or in society (cited in John, 2011). It is this sense of belonging that Adler proposed would lead to good health (cited in Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014, p 3).

This sense of belonging re-emerged with Maslow (1948) who ranked "belongingness" on the third level in his 1948 five-tiered "Hierarchy of needs." He proposed that once a person's physiological needs of hunger and safety were met, "he/ she will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely for a place in his group or family, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal" (Maslow, 1970, p 43). According to Maslow the gratification of the emotional need of belongingness permitted "the appearance

of such characteristics as affectionateness, self-respect, self-confidence and security" (1970, p 66).

More recent research conducted by Baumeister and Leary (1995) supports the notion that belongingness is a fundamental human need and they propose that the need to belong has two main features. Firstly, people need frequent positive or pleasant personal contacts or interactions with another person. Secondly, these interactions must be characterised by "stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p 500). Conversely an unmet need to belong, results in a sense of alienation, loneliness, maladjustment and psychopathology (Stratigos et al 2014, p 4).

Sumsion and Wong (2011) propose that there are multiple, overlapping and interconnected axes of belonging of which spatial belonging is one dimension. "Spatial belonging" is defined by Read (2000, cited in Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p 42) as being "integrally connected to a place; a place one calls home; a place one leaves and returns to; a place in which one would like to die and be laid to rest" whilst Douglas (cited in Christensen et al., 2000) proposes that a "notion of togetherness" is embedded in spatial belonging.

### 2.2.2 Antonsich: "Place belongingness."

Within the context of spatial belonging, Antonsich (2010, p 4) defines what he terms "place-belongingness" as the "personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place." Antonsich's (2010) notion of "place belongingness" is very important because I have used this as the framework for my research. He highlights five factors which contribute to this feeling of "place belongingness" and these are autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic and legal. They are defined as follows:

. Autobiographical - personal experiences, relations and memories which are part of a person's history and so connect a person to a particular place;

. Relational – this refers to how a person's life can be enriched by personal and social ties in a particular place;

. Cultural - while language is the most important cultural factor, it can also refer to other forms of cultural expressions, traditions and habits;

. Economic – Antonsich maintains that "economic factor contribute to a safe and stable material condition for the individual and his/her family" (2010, p 10) and lastly,
.Legal - issues such as citizenship, are an essential component of producing security for a person.
All of these factors, except for the legal factor, help to define how the children in my research group construct a sense of belonging in the bedroom space. With regards to autobiographical and relational ties, the children enjoy significant relationships with parents, siblings and peers within "the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare" (Baumeister &Leary, 1995, p 497). They also enjoy the economic benefits of a wealthy, middle class lifestyle and cultural factors inform traditions such as "play" which tie in to the construction of identity.

Stratigos, et al (2014, para.5) say that belonging is not something that can ever be achieved with any kind of finality for "it is constantly being enacted, contested and negotiated in the various times, places and groups in which we live our daily lives." For the scope of this research, I wish to explore how this notion of belonging is "enacted, contested and negotiated" in the bedroom spaces of the young children that I teach, taking into account their age and particular stage of development.

### 2.2.3 A sense of belonging in private spaces.

Because researchers such as Adcock (2013) point out that more research has focused on domestic areas such as the kitchen or living rooms and less on the more private and personal spaces such as bedrooms, bathrooms and children's spaces, this highlights the need for research into private spaces. Adcock (2013) does caution however, that the bedroom is probably one of the most problematic household spaces to study, particularly those occupied by younger children.

Comber (2016), Rapport and Dawson (2000) note that the home is not necessarily a comfortable space. Comber (2016, p 36) says that we should not assume that "people automatically feel a sense of belonging where they live" whilst Rapport & Dawson (cited in Christensen et al, 2000) add that the home can be a place of "exclusion" rather than belonging."

Safety is another factor affects a sense of belonging and for many children in the South African context the home is not a safe place. External factors can also impact on a sense of belonging and it is a concern for safety that Piachaud (2007) maintains, drives parents to insist that their children play in their bedrooms, rather than outdoors.

### 2.2.4 The construction of identity in a belonging space

Whilst the bedroom is both a physical location and serves as a site of belonging or exclusion, Kraftl (2006, cited in Adcock, 2013, p 77) maintains that it is important to examine bedroom spaces because "bedrooms are constitutive of and contribute to the "construction … and evocation of [ideas and ideals about] childhood." One such construction of childhood is the role of play in shaping the young child's identity. Extensive research by Pellegrini (1991), Spodek, Saracho and Davis (1991) and Browne (2008) supports the notion that play promotes the holistic development of the child. Likewise Scales et al (1991, cited in Englebright Fox, 2007) note that young children participate in play with enthusiasm and abandon, whilst McArdle and Wright (2014, p 24) argue that if children do not play they are "robbed of their first language for communication and meaning making." As a teacher of pre-school children I have observed the role of play in the context of the classroom whereas in the context of this research, I am afforded the opportunity to explore the role of play in the children's bedrooms.

Whilst belonging spaces can contribute to the child's sense of identity, they also serve to reinforce gender stereotypes for as Blunt and Dowling (2006, cited in Brickell, 2012, p 226) propose, the home is not merely a physical location/place in which people live, but a "nexus between home, power and identity" which means that aspects such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class contribute to how a person is positioned or the experiences they have, as part of a particular household. Research undertaken by Solverud (2012, p 2) also frames children's bedrooms as "material and symbolic sites" in which gender norms and expectations are clearly in evidence.

Another aspect that contributes to the construction of the child's identity is the commodification of the bedroom space. Piachaud (2007, p 8) proposes that television and films are the means by which toys and the related "branded' goods can be marketed and sold to young consumers. Freeman (2007, cited in

Aina and Campbell, 2011, p 12) adds that not only are young consumers being inundated with "branded" goods but these goods, whether duvets, clothes, soft toys or furniture, serve to reinforce gendered messages. Both gender-based and "branded" soft furnishings were in evidence in the photographs of the bedrooms that I examined for my research. In keeping with a critical literacy approach, I need to challenge these negative stereotypes with my Grade 00s, so that as Aina and Campbell (2011, p 18) point out, these children will be "less likely to perpetuate the stereotypes and can help end the cycle of prejudice."

## 2.3 Critical literacy

This research on belonging spaces is located within the framework of critical literacy which is based on a sociocultural theory of language. There are many researchers who have contributed to the concept of critical literacy, amongst others, Bourdieu (1991), Gee (1996) Lankshear and McLaren (1993), Luke (2000) and Janks (2002).

Janks &Vasquez, (2011, cited in Vasquez, 2017, para. 6) describe critical literacy as "understanding the relationship between texts, meaning-making and power to undertake transformative social actions that contributes to the achievement of a more equitable social order. Freire (1985) was the first researcher to propose that "reading the *word"* should not be separated from "reading the *world"* and if students were to view the word and the world in a critical fashion, they would be empowered to "transform lived social relations and material conditions" in which they found themselves. Unrau, Alverman and Ruddell (2013) add that as individuals gain an understanding of daily social and political processes, they are empowered to live more freely in a democratic society, which holds particularly true for those who have become marginalized or subordinated.

Because this research is about bedroom spaces, Blunt &Dowling's (2006) term "critical geographies of home" is useful in constructing the concept of home. Blunt & Dowling (2006) view the home not only as material and a site of power and identity, but also as "multi- scalar" because the "personal relations it plays host to, transect public and political worlds." This space is therefore not to be viewed as an exclusive or idealized space but one which is both ambiguous and politicized (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

Critical literacy offers an important strategic and practical alternative for teachers and students to reconnect literacy with everyday life and with an education that incorporates debate, argument and action over social cultural and economic issues that matter (Luke & Woods, 2009, p 9). Many teachers have built their literacy classroom practices on the works of Freire, such as Auerbach, Christenson, Edelsky, Morgan, Harste and Vasquez (cited in Janks, 2010, p 48). What is central to critical literacy pedagogy is that aspects such as domination, access, diversity or design are foregrounded in the pedagogy (Janks, 2000). Comber and Simpson (cited in Kuby 2013, p 2) argue that the process of critical enquiry assists children to question prevailing conditions and is also related to the way that "power, position and privilege plays out in the relationships children have with peers, teachers and other adults."

### 2.3.1 Critical literacy and the young child

While much of the research in the field of critical literacy had been conducted with older children, far less has been done so in the early years. There are nevertheless several researchers, such as Comber (2001, 2016), O'Brien (1994, 2001), Vasquez (2001, 2004, 2010) Sanchez (2011) and Vander Zanden and Wolhend (2016) who have conducted valuable research with younger children within the framework of critical literacy. It is this tradition that I will be drawing on in my research and focusing on the work of Vasquez (2004), O'Brien (2001) and Kuby (2013).

Firstly, Vasquez's (2004) work with young children is useful for me because she focuses on problems that occur spontaneously in the classroom. Vasquez (2004) says that adopting a critical literacy perspective helps children to understand the social and political issues around them because it provides a framework where social justice issues are raised and can be negotiated. Learning, according to Vasquez (2004) is more than accumulating information but is rather a process of adjusting and reconstructing what the children know. In her work with Kindergartners, Vasquez (2004, p1) constructed an "audit trail" or "learning wall" as a means of documenting the issues children raised, had critical conversations about ( such as being a vegetarian) and "the actions they took to resist being dominated whilst repositioning themselves within their community". The audit trail was a public display of artifacts that included

photographs, books, covers, posters, newspaper clippings, magazines, advertisements, transcripts of conversations. The children regularly referred to various artifacts in the audit trail which in turn generated critical literacy curriculum topics such as the rain forest, fairness and the media amongst others.

O'Brien's research is also valuable because it points to how I, as a teacher, can make use of texts within a critical literacy approach with young children. Her seminal work on "children reading critically" (1994) was designed to examine the cultural institution of "Mother's Day" and the junk mail brochures produced for the occasion. O' Brien's (2001, p 47) concern was to probe the representation of women and to move the children towards rereading the "limited life options for women suggested by the Mother's Day catalogues." O' Brien (2001, p 53) proposes that neither the texts themselves nor the relationship between the text and the reader are neutral and therefore the teachers must "adopt a pedagogy that makes it possible for them and their students to investigate the position taken up by the texts and the sort of readers they produce in the process". By drawing on their family and cultural knowledge about Mother's Day, the children were able "to question the representation of mothers, to identity gaps and to suggest possible changes" (O'Brien, 2001, p 52).

Kuby (2013) is another researcher who has worked extensively in the field of critical literacy with young children and I resonate with her focus on relationships. She argues that conducting critical literacy with young children is not so much about social and political revolution or national development, but rather reflects personal changes in the children's relationships with one another. Kuby's (2013) research revolved around a playground incident where children were asked by a teacher to vacate a bench during lunch break. This led Kuby (2013, p 4) to explore racial segregation in the United States and in particular with reference to Rosa Parks, to "discuss power relationships and think more deeply on issues of fairness". Kuby (2013) says that it is important for teachers to be alert to unexpected moments, such as the playground incident, that can lead to a critical exploration of issues such as social justice and equal rights within the early childhood classroom setting.

## 2.4 The theory of multimodality

Amongst others, Kuby is one of the early childhood researchers who made use of multimodal texts in her critical literacy approach for meaning-making. The theory of multimodality proposes that many modes, in addition to writing, can be used for meaning-making. Rowsell (2017) cites researchers such as Flewitt (2008), Jewitt & Kress, (2003), Kress, (1997), Lancaster, (2003) and Stein (2009) who advocate the use of a variety of modes, both in isolation and sometimes combined, to represent and express ideas.

In Kuby's (2013) research around racial segregation, the children used painting to respond to discussions around the issues. As Kuby (2013) proposes, social action within the constraints of the early childhood classroom does not always have to take on a "visible" form such as that of a petition or a survey. This is particularly useful in the South African context, because the children in the Grade 00 class have not yet learned to read or write. Kuby (2013) suggests that in addition to painting pictures about an experience to share with their classmates, children could also role-play different perspectives of book characters and in this way gain a better understanding of how people experience injustice.

McArdle and Wright (2014, p 27) propose that "young children have been using multimodal forms of communication long before Facebook and mobile forms existed" and the arts and play are the child's "modes for these first languages." Multimodal activities embody "constructive thinking in action" for through drawing, "children simulate actions, bodily sensations and feelings through a kind of empathetic engagement" (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007 cited in McArdle & Wright, 2014, p 27). In this research, the use of multimodal texts is an important one, because as McArdle and Wright (2014) propose it is through this medium, that children can express complex meanings about themselves and the world they live in. As the pre-school child is not yet a fully literate reader or writer, I have chosen to use multimodal texts and activities to be the channels through which they able to express their thoughts and considerations.

## 2.5 The notion of privilege

Because the children in my research come from affluent backgrounds and enjoy privileged spaces both at home and at school, the notion of "privilege" emerged as a theme in my findings and is an important concept to unpack. The Cambridge dictionary defines the word "privilege" as "an advantage that only one person or group of people has, usually because of their position or because they are rich." Privilege, along with notions of access, power and diversity, are aspects that are explored within the context of a critical literacy approach. Janks (2012, p 150) , says that privilege occurs because "difference is structured in relation to power [and] unequal access to resources based on gender, race, ethnicity, language, ability, sexuality, nationality and class."

This results in a sense of inclusion or exclusion and whilst much of critical literacy research has focused on those who are marginalized or excluded, Vasquez (2007) says that *all* children, whether privileged or not, should understand the social and political issues around them. Within the context of my research, the notion of privilege is in many ways 'invisible." Without undermining the benefits of the situation in which the children find themselves, it is important to disrupt their notion of privilege so that unfair dominant practices are not perpetuated in years to come. Comber (cited in Vasquez, 2007, p 7) argues that children who are privileged "*can* be moved from a comfortable position of privilege to questioning practices of privilege and injustice." Kuby (2012, p 12) describes this process as "consciousness-raising" and as such, young children are encouraged to question the way things are, to examine who profits the most and then to act in a way that brings about social change for the better.

Having examined literature which speaks to the notion of space, the notion of belonging and construction of identity in that space, as well as a critical literacy approach and the notion of privilege, what follows is the methodology that shaped the implementation of the research.

# 3. Methodology

The focus of this research project is to explore how children conceptualise the bedroom as a belonging space.

Below I discuss the research design, research site, research participants, phases of the research, and data collection, research instruments, data analysis and ethical requirements.

## 3.1 Research design

This research is qualitative in design. Leedy & Ormond (2010) explain that the qualitative approach to research has two aspects. The researcher firstly "focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings, that is, in the real world". Secondly the researcher needs to study these phenomena in all their complexity and must "recognise that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers" (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p 145).

I am adopting this approach because my research involves an examination of Grade 00s conception of bedroom spaces in their 'real' home environments and how they conceptualise their ideas of belonging bedroom spaces through discussion and art work. This particular research project also requires the type of data collection and data analysis that is associated with the qualitative approach.

Discussion and art work are both features of early childhood education which focuses on an informal, play-based approach to teaching and learning. This research is further more underpinned by critical literacy studies and in particular the use of a multimodal approach, which aims to develop "useful, powerful mastery of texts lived in social relations and material conditions" (Luke and Woods, 2009, p 2). This research is important because, as has been mentioned, there is little work that has been done in South Africa that focuses on critical literacy in the preschool classroom.

## 3.2 Research site

The research took place in the Grade 00 classroom, in the school where I teach. This pre-school is an Independent Christian school situated in a middle class

suburb in Johannesburg. All the children in the class, with the exception of two come from middle class, affluent homes. The pre-school consists of three grades, namely Grade 000, Grade 00 and Grade 0/Grade R. There are five classes in the Grade 00 section, comprising twenty-two boys and girls. I teach one of the classes in this grade. The pedagogy of the school reflects an informal, play-based approach to teaching and learning which is underpinned by Christian values and ethos. The language of instruction is English.

Because I am a part-time student, I chose to conduct my research in the school where I teach. This is a familiar context and proved most convenient, given the time restraints of the research. More importantly, because this research has a pedagogical focus and has implications for me as a teacher, it was important that I be able to develop my own practice. In addition, I enjoy a good relationship with the children in my class as well as their parents, which facilitated the research process.

### 3.3 Research Participants

The research was conducted with all twenty-two children in my class, comprising of twelve girls and ten boys. Only five children in my Grade 00 class moved up from the Grade 000 section, whilst all the other children in the class were newcomers to the school. All of the "new" children in my class had attended other pre-schools or playgroups the previous year. Sixteen of the children in the class are White, three are Black and three are Indian. Only seven of the children had turned five by the time the research was conducted while the other fifteen children were still four. I included every child in the research activities, and this provided me with a wide range of data. In the daily execution of the educational programme, the children are familiar with the whole group discussions, which was a main part of my data collection. Having worked with children as a researcher before, I kept in mind the need for the children to have a sense of agency and power in the research relationship. Children of this age do not like being excluded from activities, so including all children in the research activities was a way of making them feel that they were included in the research process. On the other hand, because of the nature of the pre-school programme and activities, no child is forced to participate in an activity or offer an opinion in a discussion. As there is also no 'reward' offered for participation, there is no pressure on the children to please the teacher and they are therefore free to participate as they wish.

As is the nature of the pre-school classrooms, there were some days when data was not collected from all children because they were absent. Table 3 provides a demographic of the children in my Grade 00 class.

**Table 3.1 The demographics of the Grade 00 class.**

| Child's Name | Gender | Age | Race | New To The School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rose | Girl | 5yrs | White | Yes |
| Taylor | Girl | 5yrs | White | No |
| Jessica | Girl | 5yrs | White | Yes |
| Emily | Girl | 5yrs | White | Yes |
| Tshiamo | Girl | 4yrs | Black | Yes |
| Wenyasha | Girl | 5yrs | Black | Yes |
| Nikaiya | Girl | 4yrs | Indian | Yes |
| Aimee | Girl | 5yrs | White | No |
| Denise | Girl | 5yrs | Black | Yes |
| Daniella | Girl | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Kathy | Girl | 5yrs | White | Yes |
| Penelope | Girl | 4yrs | Indian | Yes |
| Bongani | Boy | 4yrs | Black | Yes |
| Stan | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Christopher | Boy | 4yrs | White | No |
| David | Boy | 5yrs | White | No |
| Kevin | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Peter | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Blake | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Neil | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |
| Sahil | Boy | 4yrs | Indian | No |
| Mark | Boy | 4yrs | White | Yes |

## 3.4 Phases of the research and data collection

The research took place towards the end of May, 2017. This allowed me enough time to establish a relationship of trust with the children in my class. By this stage, the children were also well acquainted with the weekly educational programme, consisting of discussion rings and art work, two of the main methods used to collect data. I collected the data over a period of two and a half weeks. Table 3.2 indicates the phases of the research and the data collection in week one.

**TABLE 3. 2 Collection of data in week one**

| Data | Activity | Date | Participants | Data Collection | Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group discussions | 1.My bedroom | 15/05/2017 | The teacher and 16 children | Video recording; photographs of the children's bedrooms | GD1 |
| | 2.The favourite item in my bedroom | 18/05/2017 | The teacher and 18 children | Video recording; children's bedroom items | GD2 |
| 1-on-1 discussions | 1. What are the favourite items in my bedroom picture? | 16/05/2017 | The teacher and each 16 children | Video recording; 16 Bedroom pictures with stickers added | D1 |
| Small focus group discussion | 1.What is not special about my bedroom | 17/05/2017 | The teacher and groups of four or five children at time | Video recording | SFGD 1 |
| Art activities | 1.Children draw a picture of their bedrooms | 16/05/2017 | 20 children | Collection of 20 drawings; Informal discussion | A1 |
| Photographs | 1. Photographs of the children's bedrooms | 15/05/2017 | 16 children | 16 children's photographs | P1 |

In phase one of the data collection, I set out to explore the first question of the research which was what the children's construction of the bedroom as a belonging space are. The data collected derived from a combination of whole group discussions, individual discussions, small group discussions and a whole class art activity.

At the start of the week, the children in my Grade 00 class were asked to bring a photograph (P1) of their bedroom to school. The first group discussion (GD1) took place in which they were given the opportunity to talk about their bedroom and why it was special to them.

The following day twenty children in the class engaged in the first art activity (A1) of the research which was a free drawing of their bedroom. As sixteen of the children finished with their drawings, I engaged them in one-on-one discussions (D1) about the favourite items in their bedroom and why they had made these choices. The children placed stickers on the drawing to indicate their favourite items. (The other four children finished too late to place stickers on their drawings.)

This was followed by small group discussions (SGFD 1) consisting of between four or five children at a time, in which I asked them to talk about what made them unhappy or scared in their bedrooms.

The last part of phase one of the data collection, involved another group discussion (GD2). On this occasion the children were asked to bring their favourite bedroom object to school and to share the significance of this item with their peers and the teacher. Table 3.2 below indicates the second phase of the research and the data collection.

**TABLE 3.2 Collection of data in week two and three**

| Data | Activity | Date | Participants | Data Collection | Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group discussion | 3.Discussion about Mollison's (2010) photographs | 25/05/2017 | The teacher and 18 children | Video recording; Photographs | GD3 |
| | 4a) Which item would you rescue if your house was on fire? | 26/05/2017 | The teacher and 18 children | Video recording; Photographs | GD4a |
| | 4b): Comparing your bedroom and those of the children in the photographs: Is it fair? | 26/05/2017 | The teacher and 18 children | Video recording; Photographs | GD4b |
| 1-on-1 discussions | 2. Which bedroom items do I not need to make me happy or sad? | 25/05/2017 | Teacher and 20 children | Video recording Collection of 20 pictures | D2 |
| Art activities | "Select and paste" activity | 15/05/2017 | 20 children | Photographs 20 "select and paste" activities | A2 |

Whilst similar types of data collection were employed in the second week of the research, the focus shifted in order to make use of a critical literacy lens when foregrounding the group discussions or one-on-one discussions around the "select and paste" activity.

The second phase of the data collection started with the Grade 00s being shown a selection of Mollison's photographs (2010) of children's bedroom around the world and engaging in a group discussion (GD3) about these bedrooms. This

was followed by the second art activity (A2) which required the children to make a "select and paste activity" of the items they have in their bedroom. During one-on-one discussions (D2) with the children I asked them to cross out any items in the bedroom picture that they didn't need to make them feel safe or happy. The research ended with the last group discussion (GD4a and GD4b) which examined concepts of fairness, justice and access to bedroom spaces.

The research instruments used in the collection of the data are examined in more detail in the next section.

## 3.5 Research instruments

### 3.5.1 Discussions

With reference to the data collection section, I have separated the 'discussions around the research instruments' (3.5) as follows, from the explanation of 'the phases of the research and the data collection'(3.4) to make for a clearer reading style.

One of the main sources of data collection in the research was obtained through group discussions, because this fits into what I do in the daily programme and the children are familiar with this format. As Vasquez and Wood (2013, p 23) propose, the value of group discussions is that it allows for the "knowledge, assumptions, experiences, values and opinion" of the various children in the class to be heard.

In order to address the first research question around the conceptions of bedroom spaces, I had a group discussion (coded as GD1) so that every child was given the opportunity to talk about their bedroom. In the second group discussion (GD2), the children talked about their favourite bedroom object. By involving all the children present on the day in the discussions, I was able to gather a wide range of data in a relatively short period of time.

Because the second phase of the research had a critical literacy focus, the group discussion rings (GD3, GD4a and GD4b) were structured, so that texts, in this case, photographs of bedroom spaces round the world, were interrogated and discussed, multiple viewpoints and perspectives emerged and the children were encouraged to "explore and confront the inequities of the texts within and across contexts" (Vasquez and Wood, 2013, p 23).

The disadvantage of large group discussions, however, is that they are quite long, usually about half an hour and children might feel reluctant in the large group setting to share their views. Conversely they may also merely copy what another child in the group has said. In order to address this shortcoming, I therefore followed up the whole group discussions with smaller groups (coded as SFGD).

According to Lobe, Livingstone, Olafsson and Simoes (2008) a focus group has value because it more closely resembles the pre-existing social groups in the classroom (Lobe et al, 2008, p 10). Because I make use of small group work in the school setting, the children are comfortable with this arrangement. I used the small focus group when discussing with the children what made them unhappy in their bedrooms. This setting afforded more children the opportunity to express their views without having to wait too long or lose track of their thoughts.

The disadvantage of the whole group discussions is that they can be dominated by the same children whilst the small group encouraged those less verbally competent or confident to join in. Because of the intimacy of the small group discussion I could also observe the interaction amongst the children and the ways in which they negotiated their account of reality with others, "showing divergence or convergence between their views" (Lobe et al, 2008, p 10).

The limitation of the small focus group, as is the case with the individual discussions, is that it is very time consuming and I had to conduct the various aspects of the research within the time constraints of the daily programme.

Nevertheless, by providing the opportunity for the Grade 00s to express their thoughts in different large and small group settings, I was able to gather a data set that captured their experiences and understandings of their bedroom as belonging spaces.

During the whole group discussions and small focus group discussions, I videotaped the children. This added depth to my observation because I could hear in their own words the children's construction of their "bedroom space." I also videotaped the children when I engaged in one-on-one conversations with them after they had concluded their art activities. I later transcribed what the Grade 00s said, from these videotaped recordings and this provided the body of my data collection and analysis.

In addition to videotaping the children, there were occasions when I also took photographs of the children, for instance when they were busy with the art activities or during the discussion rings. I then referred back to these photographs at a later stage because as Flick (2002, cited in Holm, 2008) maintains, the value of using photographs is that they are available for reanalysis and record things that are not observed or noticed at the time. Analysis of the photographs in conjunction with the other data contributed towards "meaningful links between the different experiences and materials" (Pink, cited in Holm, 2008).

### 3.5.2 Photographs

As well as taking photographs of the children during the research, I also made use of the photographs the children brought of their bedrooms (coded as P1) as well as Mollison's photographs (2010) of children's bedrooms around the world. When using photographs of the children in my class, I blurred their faces in the photographs and made use of pseudonyms when labelling the photographs. I also received permission from the parents to make use of the photographs of their children's bedrooms that I used in the research document. The parents gave me hard copies of the photographs and it was clear these were for the research. Some parents chose not to send photographs.

The photographs ( 3.1 – 3.9) below that I selected from Mollison's (2010) collection, depict a variety of 'bedrooms' in different countries of the world and range from those with an excess of possessions to those depicting abject poverty.

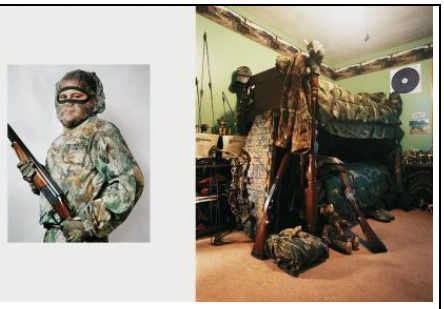
**3.1**. **<u>Mollison's photographs (2010): "*Where children sleep"*</u>**



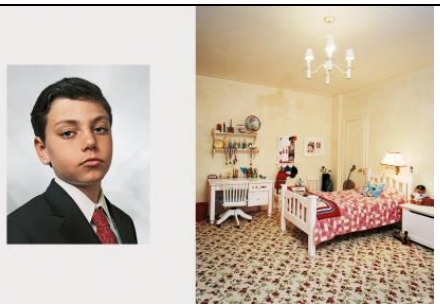
3.1 Kaya, 4, Tokyo



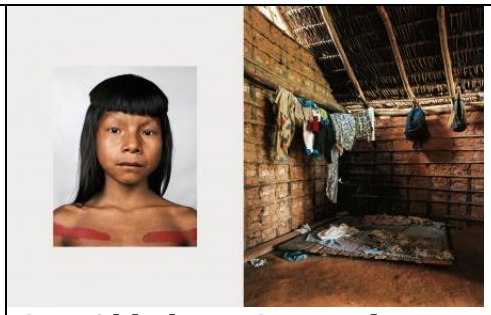
3.2 Tristan, 7, New York



3.3 Joey,11, Kentucky



3.4 Jaime, 9, New York



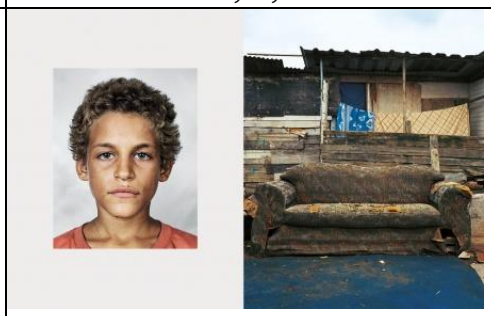
3.5. Ahkohxet, 8, Brazil



3.6 Lamine,12, Senegal



3.7 Roathy,8, Cambodia



3.8. Alex, 9, Brazil



3.9 Anonymous, 4, Italy

The use of *art activities* was another method that I employed to gather data for the research because the children in my research group are emergent readers and writers and are still developing their ability to express their thoughts verbally. Ring (2001) says that the value of children's drawings is that they mediate between the outer and inner world of the child and drawing "extends and makes visible the inner thought processes of their creator." The Grade 00s also participate in art activities every day at school, so this is a familiar method of meaning- making for them. On completion of the artwork, the children were able "to remember and communicate those ideas with others" (Ring, 2001).

After I had gathered the data using the variety of research instruments described above, I then set out to analyze the data as detailed in the following section.

**3.6 Data Analysis**

In order to analyse the data, I firstly transcribed what the children had said during the whole group discussions, small focus groups and on-one-one discussions. Because my research was qualitative in nature, I made use of thematic content analysis (TCA) because it is "the most foundational of qualitative analytic procedures" and is used to present the data collected in a qualitative research project (Anderson 2007, p 1). Anderson adds that the value of TCA is that it focuses on the common themes in transcripts "in order to give

expression to the communality of voices across participants." By using TCA, I was able to identify patterns and recurring themes in the data collected and in this way, answer my research questions.

In response to the first research question that focuses on children's conceptualisations of the bedroom as a belonging space, the themes that emerged were firstly that the child's notion of a belonging space is grounded in relational ties and centred in materiality and play. Secondly, a sense of belonging impacts on the child's sense of identity in the bedroom space, of which gender identity is a critical aspect and is also shaped to some degree by commodification. Lastly, belonging spaces do not always feel safe to the child.

In order to address the second question which was "how is a belonging space represented multimodally", I triangulated findings with the children's drawings, their responses to the Mollison's (2010) photographs as well as the children's "select and paste" activities, in order to see how they complemented one another and supported the findings

In order to analyze the drawings, I adopted the visual text analysis suggested by Kalantzis and Cope (2016) in "Analysing the Design of Images" which suggests that firstly one must examine what the picture/ drawing is about; then focus on what the people or things in the picture are dong together; how the picture hangs together; pay attention to spatial layout; what is the context of the picture and lastly what was the intent of the picture or in this research context, the intent of the drawing. Analyzing the drawings in this manner enabled me to balance my written observations with a visual one and to compare how the children constructed their special bedroom space through art activities in the first week and then again in the second week.

Two patterns emerged when I analysed the children's drawings. The first was the significance of "self" and others in the drawings and the other was the significance of "objects" represented in the drawings. Yet again, the importance of relational ties came to the fore and objects are imbued with significance because of these relational ties.

The third research question asked "does using a critical literacy lens to interrogate belonging spaces disrupt the notion of privilege?"

By analyzing the children's oral response to Mollison's (2010) photographs using CTA as well as analysing the "select and paste" art activity, two findings

emerged. The first relates to how the children's own privileged context, as it relates to their possessions, life experiences, wealth and relational ties, shapes what they see. The second finding reveals that while the Grade 00s are beginning to adopt a more critical approach, it is still challenging for them to disrupt the notion of privilege.

## 3.7 Ethics

In addition to gaining permission from the parents (Appendix A) and the principal (Appendix B) with regards to the children participating in the research, I also gained permission from the children themselves.

The children filled in a simple consent form (see Appendix C) which I explained to them in a ring. The consent forms were then filled in by the children, one at a time, with assistance, where necessary, from the teacher. As a teacher-researcher, I was aware of the power dynamics of both of these roles as I conducted my research. Children took part in all of the activities, because they were set up as class activities. Not all children participate in all the tasks because this is the nature of a play-based curriculum and they were not required to do so. Children who were reluctant or did not give permission to be part of the research were not included in the data analysis.

In undertaking this research, I was aware of the sensitive nature of the "bedroom space" and that it could prove to be problematic. I waited for at least four months before starting my research because in this time period I could gain the parents' trust and also build a comfortable, trusting relationship with the children in my class. As such I would be able to negotiate awkward comments or sensitive issues were they to emerge. By the time I conducted the research, I had also gained a better understanding of the children and their home background, so it seemed unlikely, although not impossible, that problems would arise. The children in m Grade 00 class were also afforded many opportunities to express their own thoughts and considerations and I tried not to steer them in a particular direction or influence their thinking.

Ethics approval was granted by the ethics committee before I embarked on the research.

## 3.8 Conclusion

The limitations of this study are the fact the research was conducted in a privileged school, with one class only and in a particular age group. Another limitation of the research is that it took place over two and a half weeks only. Going forward, it would be beneficial to conduct the research in a number of different schools, both those that are affluent and those that are not. In order to widen the perspective, researching different age groups of children within the pre-school would also be beneficial. Conducting the research over a lengthier period of time would help to develop the children's critical lens and make them better 'readers of the text and the world they live in' (Paulo Freire).

Having outlined the methodology used in conducting the research, the following two chapters provide a detailed analysis of the data.

# 4. Data analysis: Belonging Spaces

## 4.1 Introduction

The aim of my research was firstly to examine how Grade 00 children construct and conceptualize their bedroom as a "belonging space." In order to do this, I engaged in multiple discussions with the Gr 00 children in my class, examined photographs of their bedrooms and analyzed video recordings of the pertinent discussions.

In addition, by examining the children's bedroom photographs and two pieces of art work that they completed in class, I was able to gain an understanding of how children represent this belonging space in a multimodal manner.

Lastly, I aimed to extend the child's personal perspectives of belonging spaces in order to consider the broader, social and economic relations for other children, so that notions of privilege may be disrupted. In order to achieve this, I exposed the children to a variety of photographs of children's bedrooms from around the world and used a critical literacy lens to engage the Grade 00s in discussion about these photographs.

The key findings that emerge from the first part of the research, reflects the importance of 'relational ties' and the role of 'play' in the construction of a child's "belonging space." Secondly this sense of belonging impacts on the child's sense of identity, of which gender identity is a critical aspect and is also shaped to some degree by commodification. Thirdly, in line with Comber's (2016) work, a belonging space does not always feel safe.

## 4.2 The child's bedroom as a physical space.

As the starting point for my research, I aimed to understand how the children conceptualize their bedrooms and consider them belonging spaces. By examining the photograph of the children's bedrooms, I gained a sense of the physical environment of this particular space. Table 4.2 reveals items that are common in the children's bedrooms.

## Table 4.2 Items on display in the photographs of the children's bedrooms:

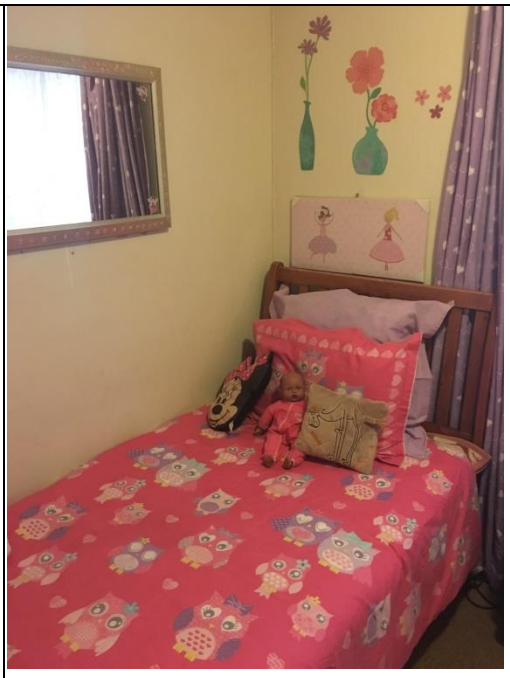
| Child's Name | Bed | Curtains | Night light / Lamp | Mirror / Dressing Table | Carpet | Toys | Bookshelf |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Taylor | x | x | x | | | x | x |
| Nikaiya | x | x | x | | x | x | |
| Denise | x | x | | x | x | x | |
| Daniella | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| Tshiamo | x | x | | | x | x | |
| Aimee | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| Kathy | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Jessica | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Rose | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Wenyasha | x | x | x | | | x | |
| Neil | x | x | x | | x | x | |
| Peter | x | x | x | | x | x | x |
| Christopher | x | x | | | x | x | x |
| David | x | x | | | x | x | x |
| Blake | x | x | | | x | x | x |
| Sahil | x | x | x | | x | x | X |
| Total | 16 | 16 | 9 | 6 | 14 | 16 | 11 |

The items common to all the children's bedrooms are a bed, curtains, carpets/ rugs and toys whilst the dressing table or mirror is an item found only in some of the girl's bedrooms and none of the boy's bedrooms. Some of the bedrooms have a night light or lamp. The photographs of the bedrooms reflect what Pilchaud (2004, p 7) describes as "child- orientated" environments and care has been taken with the décor of the bedrooms in order to make them an inviting and special place for the child.

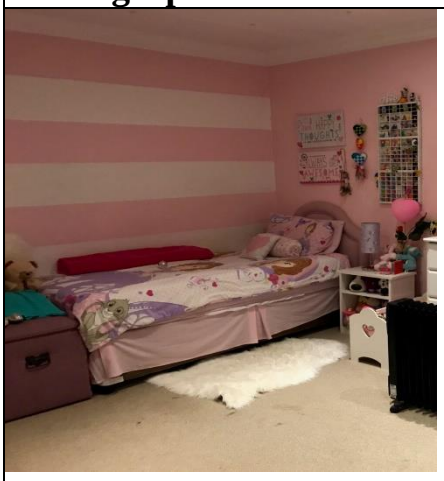
I selected the photographs of four bedrooms of the Grade 00s in my class because they are representative of the bedrooms that the children in my research have. The bedrooms in the photographs (4.1- 4.4) show physical spaces that Antonsich (2010, p 8) would describe as "well-appointed." Antonsich (2010, p 8) argues that economic factors are important because they "create a safe and stable material condition for the individual and his / her family" as well as "individual feelings of place belongingness." Most of the children in my class, with the exception of two children, come from affluent, middle class homes, and therefore enjoy comfortably furnished bedrooms.



**Photograph 4.1 Peter's bedroom**



**Photograph 4.2 Wenyasha's bedroom**



**Photograph 4.3 Jessica's bedroom**



**Photograph 4.4 Blake's bedroom**

While only some of the children accompanied their parents when purchasing their bedroom items, all except Nikaiya, were happy with the items purchased and the choices made on their behalf. Nikaiya said that she didn't like her pink duvet cover because *"pink is not my favourite colour. I'd like yellow."* Yellow is the colour of the giant Minion toy which is her favourite bedroom item. Sibley (1995, cited in Adcock, 2013, p 52) contends that "adult rules ultimately determine what can take place within and when" and therefore, with respect to the choice of furnishings in her bedroom, Nikaiya may have had to give way to parental authority and regulation.

### 4.3 The importance of relational ties in creating a sense of belonging

Several findings emerge from the analysis of the bedroom photographs and the children's discussions about their bedrooms (G1) and particular items in the bedrooms (GD 2). The predominant finding is that a sense of belonging in this space is constructed through what Antonsich (2010) refers to as *relational ties*. Antonsich (2010, p 8) describes *relational ties* as the personal and social ties experienced with friends, family members and even strangers which serve to enrich the life of individuals in specific places and contribute to what he refers to as individual feelings of place "belongingness."

In the case of these young children, their long lasting and significant relationships are those they have with their parents, their siblings and extended family in the form of grandparents, aunts, cousins and family friends. In all the group discussions, the children make continual reference to their parents, siblings or extended family members. When we were discussing their bedrooms (GD1), Emily said that it makes her happy when *"I play with my little sister with my toys."* Stan, the only child in the group whose parents are divorced, spends time between two homes and said of his dad's house *"my dad's also sleeping there, so I don't get worried"* (SGFD).

Relational ties also find material meaning in the form of the child's favourite object. Because of the unseen thread of relational ties that connects with the materiality of objects in the bedroom space, the objects themselves become imbued with emotional and social value and contribute to the child's sense of belonging in the bedroom space. As Pahl and Rowsell, (2010, p 10) propose "objects carry emotional resonance" so the children's favourite bedroom object serves as a tie with members of their family.

When I asked the children to select a favourite item from their bedroom to bring to school, six of the eighteen children chose a toy such as a doll or car that had been given to them, *not* by friends, but instead by their parents, sibling or extended family member. Eleven of the children were given their favourite item by their mothers, three were from grandmothers, one from a sister and one from parents. Only two of the children could not remember who had given them the favourite bedroom item they had selected. Blake said of his 'Cars' pillow that it was his favourite item because *"my ganma gave it to me"* whilst Penelope said

of her dolls, *"they're special cause me and my sister share my dollies."* Neil who loves music was enamoured by the recorder which his granny had given to him whilst Taylor loved her toy dog which was likewise a present from her granny. Both David and Sahil were attached to special items, a book and a toy penguin, that had been purchased for them by family members on recent holidays.

Whilst one might assume that the children would also select items of a more recent vintage or of greater monetary value, some of the children's toys had been given to them many years ago and were still cherished because of relational ties. Aimee said of her special dolls' cot that had been given to her by her mom, *"I got it on my birthday since I was one"* and added that her cherished dollies were also given to her by her mom *"when I was one."*

Kathy and Emily didn't choose toys as their favourite bedroom items but instead, their "blankies." These items hold greater significance for them because they were *made* rather than purchased for them by their mothers and they had also had them since they were born. When we had a discussion (GD4a) at a later stage about which items the children would rescue if their bedrooms were on fire, it is not surprising that both Kathy and Emily chose to rescue their "blankies." Winnicott's account of *transitional objects* (cited in Keefer et al, 2012, p 913) proposes that "children cope with the awareness that caregivers can occasionally be unavailable largely by virtue of the perceived reliability of their cherished material belongings (e.g. blankets.)" Emily and Kathy both have parents who work full day and they have to remain at school in the afternoon at the aftercare. These "blankies" serve as the emotional tie with the "absent" mother until they fetch them after work because they are imbued with what Pahl and Rowsell (2011) refer to as "emotional resonance."

Table 4.2 gives an indication of the children's favourite bedroom items which they selected to bring to school for a discussion ring (GD2).

**Table 4.2 The child's favourite bedroom item and the family member who gave it to them:**

| Child's name | Toy/ Favourite item | Significance of these items |
|---|---|---|
| Kathy | "Blankie" | Made for Kathy by her mother when she was born |
| Emily | " Blankie" | Made for Emily by her mother when she was born |
| Aimee | Baby doll | Given to Aimee by her mother on her first birthday |
| Daniella | Toy dog | Mother |
| Rose | Toy ponies | Mother |
| Taylor | Toy dog | Present from her grandmother |
| Denise | Baby doll | Present from her "sister" (she is really a cousin) |
| Tshiamo | Barbie doll | Mother |
| Wenyasha | Barbie doll | Mother |
| Neil | Recorder | Present from his grandmother |
| Blake | Pillow | Present from his grandmother |
| Stan | Toy truck | A birthday present (He didn't indicate who it came from.) |
| Christopher | Remote control car | A birthday present (He didn't indicate who it came from.) |
| David | Toy penguin | David's parents bought it for him on a recent trip to Dubai |
| Sahil | A book about aeroplanes | Sahil's mom bought it for him on a recent trip to Mauritius |
| Kevin | A toy teddy called "chocolate" | Mother |
| Mark | Dinosaur chalk board | Mother |
| Bongani | Teddy bear | Mother |

## 4.4 The construction of identity in the belonging space

Christensen, James and Jenks (2000, p 120) propose the [bedroom] should not only be viewed as a physical location but as "an analytical construct in which individual identity can be explored." The second finding relates to how the bedroom plays a part in children's individual identity construction.

Stratigos, Bradley and Sumison (2014) propose that when a child feels that they are "valued by, needed or important" and has "a place within a group" this also contributes to the child's sense of identity, belonging and positive self- esteem. One way in which this valuing of children was evident in their bedrooms was the display of their names. Five children had their names displayed as a string of banting letters strung up against the wall or a series of cut- out wooden

blocks or free standing wooden initials. The children are also made to feel special through the display of their art work in their bedrooms. In Blake's case he even has a clock on his bedroom wall with his face on it!

Whilst the clock in Blake's room serves to positively construct his identity, the photograph in Nikaiya's bedroom has the opposite effect. Nikaiya told me that the huge photograph of the baby on her bedroom wall is a photograph of her sister, whereas her mother told me that it is, in fact, a photograph of Nikaiya herself. Whilst the confusion is understandable because she and her sister looked almost identical at birth, it would seem that Nikaiya feels disconnected from the items in her bedroom. The photograph, in the same way as her bedroom furnishings, does not necessarily positively construct her identity or sense of belonging in this space.

### 4.4.1 The role of "play" in the bedroom in shaping the child's identity

To this effect, when examining the bedroom space, it is important to note that children's identities are also shaped by the play that happens in this space as well as broader social relations and practices, particularly gender and commodification and this identity construction is not always a positive one.

For four and five-year olds one of the things that makes the bedroom a belonging space, is that it is a place where they can play. When I asked the children what they liked to do in their bedrooms, most were unequivocal in their response that they *"liked to play."*Jessica, Denise and Tshiamo said that they enjoyed playing with their Barbies whilst Daniella and Aimee enjoyed playing with their baby dolls. Emily said that it made her happy when *"I play with my little sister with my toys."* Taylor, on the other hand said that she enjoyed reading books in her bedroom whilst Nikaiya couldn't play with toys in her bedroom as her toys were kept in the playroom. When I asked the boys about what they did in their bedrooms, they did not mention specific toys, but said instead *"I like to play"* (Sahil) or I *"play with my toys"* (Blake).

The concept of the bedroom as a place to play is also intertwined with the notion of agency. Within this space, the children can exercise a sense of agency in deciding whether their bedroom functions as a communal or private space. In being afforded a sense of agency in their bedroom space they also "come to

realise the boundaries between their own time and space and family time and space" (Sibley, cited in Christensen et al, 2000, p 127). Four of the girls in the discussion group, Taylor, Daniella, Wenyasha and Tshiamo, share their bedrooms with younger siblings. For the others however, they are accorded agency in deciding to play alone or with their siblings. Peter said of his brother *"If he smacks me, he must play in his own room"* whilst Jessica said that if her brother wants to play with his cars he must play in his own room, but *"if he wants to play, I let him in."* David also makes the choice to open the door for his sister to come into his bedroom and then *"she plays with all my toys."* Emily obviously has a close attachment to her younger twin siblings and says she is happiest when *"I play with my little sister and my little brother in my bedroom."*

For those children who do not have siblings, other relational ties are enacted when parents are invited to function as the playmate. Kathy is an only child who enjoys having mom and dad play with her and assigns each a specific role as the playmate. Samantha, (Kathy's mother) told me (11th August, 2017) that Kathy chooses the games she wants to play but mom has to play imaginative games whilst dad must do the art and craft activities with her. Chryssa (Denise's mom), likewise told me that Denise also invites her to come and play and when she does so, it is Denise who initiates the games (14th August, 2017). Both mothers told me however, that there are times when they insist that their daughters play on their own in their bedrooms.

### 4.4.2 Gender roles and bedroom spaces

Blunt and Dowling (2006, cited in Brickell, 2012, p 226) claim that the home is not merely a physical location/place in which people live, but "multi- scalar" because the people who reside in the home are "differently positioned and have varying experiences based on age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class." Interpretation of the visual data that follows is strongly informed by the literature that I consulted. Aspects such as gender roles in the bedroom space as well as the commodification of this space are highlighted by researchers such as Solverud (2012) and Piachaud (2007) and are themes which also emerged in my analysis.

Firstly**,** it is the notion of gender that comes to the fore in the construction of the children's bedroom space. Solverud (2012, p 2) proposes that "children's rooms are material and symbolic sites in which children and their parents construct, materialize and perform gender" and that the bedroom functions as "a powerful site of identity construction and communication, especially regarding gender norms and expectations." When examining the photographs of the children's bedrooms in conjunction with the children's description of their bedrooms, it is clear that there is a marked gender difference between the girls' and boys' bedrooms, as visible in the photographs (4.5 and 4.6) of Peter and Jessica's bedrooms.



**Photograph 4.5 Peter's bedroom**



**Photograph 4.6 Jessica's bedroom**

In the photographs of the girl's bedrooms there is a predominance of the use of the traditional, feminine colour "pink" (and mostly a pastel version thereof) which manifests itself in the duvets, soft furnishings, carpet, curtains and even the colour of the paint on the wall (table 4.3) The patterns of the duvets are also traditionally "feminine" and "ethereal." Kathy has fairies, Rose has ballerinas, Emily has birds and flowers, Aimee has butterflies, whilst Daniella has a combination of flowers and butterflies depicted on her duvet cover. Hand painted murals of trees and mobiles displaying butterflies or flowers are also in evidence whilst Aimee, Denise and Emily have sheer butterfly curtains hanging at their bedroom windows. Solverud (2012) says that the décor in the girl's bedroom is thus designed to foster an attitude of compassion towards nature and others and girls are being fashioned to "co-operate with nature rather than to overpower it "(2012, p 38).

All the girls also have an abundance of soft toys and / or dolls as well as the paraphernalia associated with baby dolls in the form of a pushchair, cot or pram. Thus, the role of home-maker and caregiving tendencies becomes adopted into the everyday aspects of the feminine existence (Solverud, 2012). In addition, the display of furnished doll's houses in the girl's bedrooms serves to construct the little girls as the "ideal homemakers" and "extremely other-centered and selfless" (Solverud, 2012, p 37). Whilst I believe that these attitudes of empathy and selflessness are valuable, they limit the way girls can construct their identities.

Eight of the eleven girls in the research group also have dressing tables with mirrors in their bedrooms. Solverud (2012, p 59) maintains that the presence of mirrors underscores the notion of self- surveillance and "the ongoing training of girls to become women who are conscious of their image." Berger (cited in Solverud, p 18) adds that because "woman live as the object of the male gaze" the presence of a mirror in the girls' bedroom encourages her to observe herself and evaluate how she looks. Thus, the foundation for gender stereotyping are embedded in the physical environment of the bedroom and a little girl is fashioned to construct her identity on the 'externals' of how she looks and how she is expected to behave, rather than who she as a person or what she can accomplish thereby.
Table 4.3 provides a description of the "gendered" spaces in the girl's bedrooms.

**TABLE 4.3 Girl's bedroom spaces**

| **Child's Name** | **Dominant Colour in bedroom** | **Duvet – brand name or not** | **Brand - Other** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rose | Pink | Not branded; Duvet with ballerinas and the words "Twinkle toes" | Minnie mouse toys; 'My little pony' toy; Three Barney toys |
| Jessica | Pink | Not branded; Duvet: splotches of colour | Minnie mouse toys: Barbie poster |
| Kathy | Pink | Not branded; Duvet: fairies | Minnie Mouse toys |
| Aimee | Pink | Not branded; Duvet: Butterflies | No |
| Tshiamo | Pink | Yes – Little Miss Kitty | Dora Explora curtains |
| Daniella | Pink | Not branded; Duvet and pillows: hearts, flowers and butterflies | Tigger and 'My little pony' toy |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Denise | Pink | Not branded<br>Duvet: Dogs | Two Barbie doll houses; Many Barbie dolls; A Barbie kombi and a Barbie bus; A "little Miss kitty" couch |
| Emily | Pink | Not branded;<br>Duvet: birds and flowers | Barbie pillow; soft Barney toy |
| Nikaiya | Pink | Not branded;<br>Duvet: Little girls; hearts and butterflies | Minnie mouse toys; Minion toy; Barney toy; 'Little Miss Kitty' toy |
| Taylor | Pink | Yes – Little Miss Kitty | Tigger toy |
| Wenyasha | Pink | Not branded;<br>Duvet: Owls | |

In contrast to the girls' bedrooms, the boy's bedrooms display a strong use of primary colours, evident in the choice of paint colour for the wall, the duvet covers, the bed, carpets and curtains (Table 4.4.) When contrasting the décor of the girls and the boys' bedrooms, the nurturing and respectful relationship promoted between girls and nature is absent from the boy's bedroom décor (Solverud 2012). This lack of respect for nature is replaced "by a tendency to view spaces and places as territory to be conquered" (2012, p 46).

In order to conquer territory, transportation is required. Modes of transport make their appearance in the duvets, mats, toys, and wall décor displayed in the boys' bedrooms. Sahil even has a bed shaped like a racing car. A large proportion of the toys that are present in the boys' bedrooms also reflect some or other form of transport and seem to mirror the adult South African male obsession with cars. When the children were asked to bring their favourite bedroom item to school, Blake brought a pillow decorated with pictures of trucks which his grandmother had given to him, Stan brought a truck and Christopher brought his remote-control car.

Not only are boys imbued with a sense of agency because of the transport imagery and objects in their bedrooms but also one of "domination and unstoppable power" reflected in the symbol of a "superhero" (Solverud, 2012 p 51) Superheroes, alongside transport symbols, make frequent appearance in the boys' bedroom décor. In the photograph of Blake's bedroom (4.5) there is a duvet cover displaying a variety of superheroes such as "Hulk" and "The Green

Lantern." These superheroes represent to the boy the idea of adventure and of being imbued with power which enables him to achieve something far bigger than himself. Christopher's bedroom displays Spiderman curtains hanging in the window while Blake, Peter and David all have superhero duvets on their beds.

This notion of what Solverud (2012) refers to as domination and unstoppable power is also in sharp contrast to the construction of the girl's identity as one of empathy, selflessness and service to others. Where there is an abundance of soft toys in the photographs of the girls' bedrooms, Neil's was the only boy's bedroom in which two soft toys had pride of place on the bed. In the other boys' bedrooms, soft toys were housed on a book or toy shelf close by. It seems that the need to be "other-centered and self-less" is absent from the construction of the boy's identity in the bedroom space.

Likewise, it is only in the photographs of the girls' bedrooms, that the mirror and a dressing table makes its' appearance. Thus the boys are able to escape as it were, the restrictions of self-surveillance as it pertains to identity construction.

It is thus clear that the dominant social codes of gender are a strong influence on the design of bedrooms. The consequence of this is that the role of the material environment cannot be underestimated in how it serves to construct a sense of what it means to be a girl or a boy, often for the girl in a deficit manner. Table 4.4 provides a description of the "gendered" spaces in the boy's bedrooms.

**Table 4.4 Boy's bedroom spaces**

| Child's Name | Dominant Colour in bedroom | Duvet – brand name or not | Brand - Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sahil | Red and blue | Yes - Cars | Minnie mouse; Barney and Winnie the Pooh toys |
| David | Red, blue and Green | Yes – Ninja Turtles | Barney toys |
| Blake | Red, blue and green | Yes - Hulk | Angry bird and Minnie mouse toys |
| Christopher | Red, blue and yellow | Yes - Cars | Minion canister and statue; Superhero figurines and backpack; Spiderman curtains; and a Cars mat on the floor |
| Peter | Blue and green | Yes - Superheroes | Pictures and statues of superheroes on the walls. |
| Neil | Yellow, blue, green and red | No | A barney soft toy |

### 4.2.3 Commodification of bedroom spaces

In addition to the gendering of the bedroom space, another aspect that is also informed by the literature is the commodification of the bedroom space. Piachaud (2007, p 8) proposes that commercial pressures are put on children to buy certain products and often films and television are used to sell these "toys and spin-off branded goods." The photographs of both the girl and boys bedrooms in the research feature branded goods. Whilst only two of the girls' bedrooms feature commercial brand duvets in the form of "Miss Kitty", "Barbie" makes her appearance on cushions, in pictures, doll's houses and toy cars. The boys' bedrooms are also inundated with branded goods promoted by films and television programmes such as "Cars," "Spiderman", "Hulk" and "Ninja Turtles." One of the consequences of this is the need to own these branded goods, which in turn fosters a materialistic attitude among children (Piachaud, 2007). These branded goods also often embody gendered messages. These stereotypes and sexism limits the child's potential growth and development and has a negative impact on their self-esteem (Aina & Campbell, 2011).

## 4.3 When the bedroom does not function as a belonging space

Comber (2016, p 36) cautions that we should not "romanticize place" or "assume that people automatically feel a sense of belonging where they live." Whilst the bedroom for the most part functions as a belonging space, it is childhood fears that can transform the bedroom space into an unwelcome place. Childhood fears are more frequent in younger rather than older children because of their developmental stage and perception of reality.

Sorin (2003, p 128) proposes that there are several "categories" of children's fears. Among these is a 'fear of the unfamiliar, of which a fear of the dark is a feature, a 'fear of insects and animals' and lastly, a 'fear of the intangible.'

A number of children expressed these fears. Firstly, Taylor says that closing her curtains makes her scared because she can't see and Denise says when she's scared her doll protects her in the dark. Blake is both scared of the dark and of animals and said that when it's dark *"I think there's a snake in my bedroom. Then I wake up and go to mommy."* Stan expressed a fear of 'insects' and said that he was afraid when he was at his old house because *"I woke up and there*

*was a big spider on my wall. My dad killed it."* He admitted that he's much happier in his new house, because *"my dad's also sleeping there, so I don't get worried."* Sahil's fears center on the intangible and he says *"when the lights are out, I think there's a dragon in my bedroom."* He did add though that he has good eyes and *"and can see what's there."*

It is important to note that these fears are a normal part of the child's development, are temporary in nature, do not disrupt a child's life and should dissipate by age 7 or 8 (Fox & Shonkoff, 2012). So, while children may express their fears at certain times (such a bedtime) their overall behavior does not otherwise suggest that they are generally fearful or distressed (Fox & Schonkoff, 2012). This certainly ties in with the behavior of the children in my class who do not appear anxious at school, because of their night time 'fears' and their bedroom spaces are usually happy spaces.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how children experience a sense of belonging in the physical space of their bedroom and how the bedroom space serves to construct a sense of identity through relational ties, play and a sense of agency. Gender roles and commodification of the bedroom space also impact on the construction of identity in this belonging space. Aside from nighttime fears, the children in the research experience the bedroom as a belonging space. However, Statigos, Bradley & Wong, (2016) argue that belonging is not something that can ever be achieved with any kind of finality but rather it is "being enacted, contested and negotiated in the various times, places and groups in which we live our daily lives."

In the following chapter, I will examine how the bedroom space is represented multimodally and how the notion of a belonging space can be disrupted.

# 5. Conceptualising a belonging space multimodally and disrupting the notion of privilege using a critical literacy approach

## 5.1 Introduction

This part of the research seeks to address the last two questions of the research. The second question examines how a belonging space is represented multimodally. In order to answer this question, I asked the children to represent their bedroom in a multimodal manner, which took the form of a drawing of their bedroom as well as a "select and paste" activity. Because the pre-school child is not yet a fully literate reader or writer, multimodal texts are the channels through which they are able to express their thoughts and considerations as well as communicate and comprehend complex meaning (McArdle & Wright, 2014, p 27).

The use of art activities also had a critical component to them and in order to answer the last question, the multimodal representation of bedrooms spaces is combined with a critical literacy approach. The last question seeks to examine whether the use of a critical literacy lens to examine belonging spaces, disrupts the notion of privilege. By adopting a critical literacy approach, Rowsell (2017) says that when meaning-makers engage with texts, they bring their identities with them. Within a context of privilege, the Grade 00s were exposed to photographs of children's bedrooms from around the world. They were asked to critically engage in discussion about bedroom spaces that differ from their own in order to consider the broader economic and social aspects. In response, the last part of the research aimed to explore whether the children could (re) conceptualize their own bedroom space using another multimodal activity.

## 5.2 Multimodal texts

When analyzing the drawings (A1), I focused on what Cope and Kalantzis (2012) outline as the main features of visual analysis: the significance of the items in the picture, the structure of the picture, the context and lastly the purpose or intention of the drawing. Two themes emerge from the visual

analysis of the bedroom drawings. The first relates to the human figures depicted in thirteen of the drawings (A1) and the second revolves around the inanimate objects included in sixteen of the pictures (A1). Table 5.1 shows the "people" and "objects" that the children included in their drawings (A1).

**TABLE 5.1 Items the children featured in the drawing of their bedrooms**

| Child's Name | Self | Other People | Bed | Toys / Toy Cupboard | Door | Window | Other Items |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Girls:** | | | | | | | |
| Aimee | x | x | x (2) | | | | |
| Kudziashe | x | x | x (2) | | x | x | |
| Kathy | x | | x | x | x | x | |
| Jessica | x | | x | x | | | |
| Denise | x | x | x | | | | Roof of house |
| Nikaiya | | | x | x | x | | Pillow; chair |
| Taylor | x | | x | x | x | x | |
| Daniella | x | x | x(many) | | | | Ladder |
| Rose | x | x | x (2) | | x | | Fish tank; cupboards; dressing table |
| Tshiamo | | | x(2) | | | | Basin |
| **Boys:** | | | | | | | |
| Neil | x | x | | | | | |
| Stan | | | x | | x | | Ladder |
| Peter | | | x (bunk) | | | | |
| Kevin | x | | | | x | | |
| Sahil | x | x | x (bunk) | x | | | Toilet; Ladder |
| Blake | | | x(bunk) | | | | Ladder; Slide; Mom's room |
| Christopher | | | x (bunk) | x | x | | |
| Mark | | | | x | | | |
| David | x | | x | x | | | |
| Bongani | x | x | x | | x | x | Sun |
| **Total** | 13 | 8 | 17 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 8 |

## 5.3 Multimodal representation of bedroom spaces

### 5.3.1 Multimodal representation of self and others in the bedroom space

The first finding emerging from the multimodal representation of the bedroom space is the inclusion of *self and others* in the bedroom space. Analysis of the bedroom drawings (A1) points to the construction of self as tied to a sense of agency and play. Representation of family members in the bedroom drawings (A1) constructs the bedroom as a communal space which is framed by relational ties. The second finding relates to the inclusion of inanimate objects in the drawings (A1) and the materiality of objects in constructing the child's sense of self in this space. The third finding which pertains to a multimodal analysis of the bedroom space is that this space can be represented in a realistic or "wished-for" manner.

Of the twenty drawings analyzed, thirteen children included themselves in their drawings (A1). In eight of the drawings they depicted other family members such as sisters, grandmothers or cousins in addition to themselves. Rose is the only one of the eight children, who included her three friends as well as her sister in her drawing. The six children who did not depict themselves in their pictures are all the younger children in my class and may have been hampered in doing so by a lack of fine-motor skill or did not consider it necessary to draw themselves.

Jessica's drawing (Figure 5.1.) is representative of the four children who chose to draw only themselves in their pictures, thus representing their bedroom as a private space.

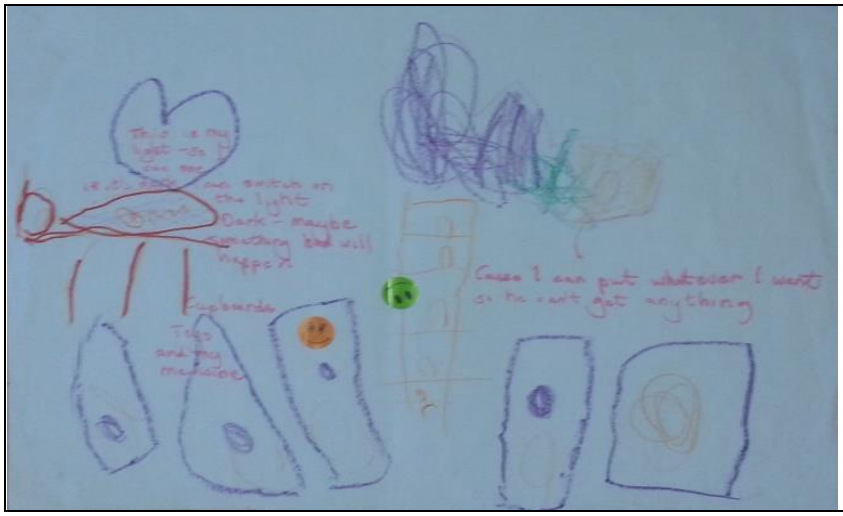


**Figure 5.1: Jessica's drawing: The bedroom as a private space**

In her picture, Jessica has included a cupboard and says *"cause I can put on whatever I want, so he [her brother] can't get anything."* Kathy, David and Kevin also drew only themselves in their bedroom pictures and expressed a sense of agency in allowing or refusing others entry into this private space. Jessica said that her brother must play with his cars in his bedroom but *"if he wants to, I let him in."* David said that only when he opens the door can his sister come in and *"then she plays with all my toys."* Whilst Kevin conceded that he preferred having his sister sleeping in his room he drew only himself in his picture and said that he was content to sleep on his own if his bear called 'Chocolate' *"sleeps in my bed."* Whilst these children enjoy the privacy of their bedroom space, the tie with other family members is enacted upon, if on their own terms and conditions. The data from the whole group discussion (GD1) about the children's own bedrooms aligns with the data from the bedroom drawings (A1) in respect of the role of agency in constructing a sense of self.

Daniella and Denise's drawings (Figure 5. 2 and Figure 5.3) are representative of the nine drawings which depict the bedroom as a communal space and the importance of family members in that space. Whilst the children spoke about their treasured bedroom objects (GD2) and the family members who had given them the objects, in the drawings (A1) by contrast, it is the family members themselves who are important.



**Figure 5.2: Daniella's drawing**

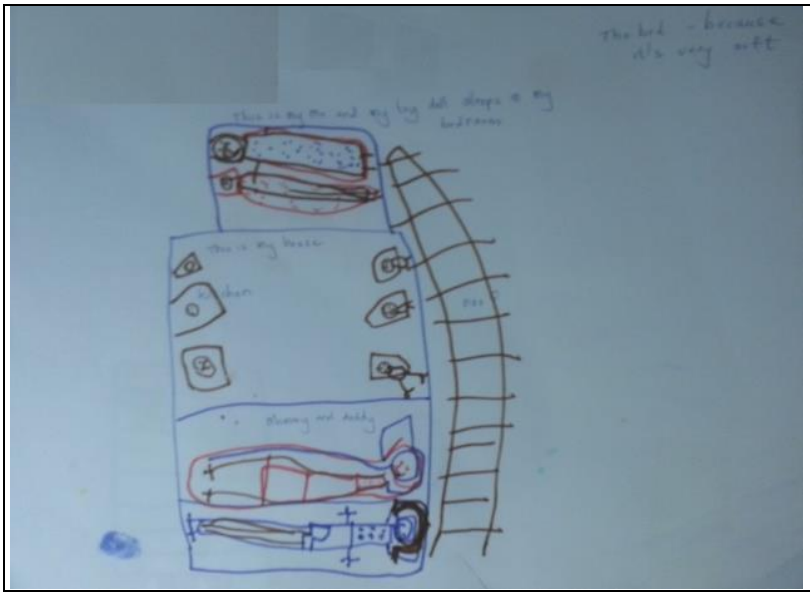


**Figure 5.3:**
**Denise's drawing**

Daniella (Figure 5.2.), Denise (Figure 5.3) Aimee and Rose all included their "mom" in their drawings while Blake drew his mom's bedroom. Fathers were also given a place in the drawings of Daniella, Denise, Rose and Bongani. Aimee said that when her dad's legs get sore (he tore the ligaments in his ankle), he screams and then her mom comes to sleep in the other bed in her bedroom. Rose and Wenyasha both drew their sisters whilst Daniella (Figure 5.2) included her brother and sister as well as her extended family. Rose and Wenyasha both drew their sisters whilst Daniella (Figure 5.2) included her brother and sister as well as her extended family.

One feature of visual analysis is taking note of the structure of the picture and it is this structure which also serves to confirm the importance of relational ties. The size and placement of Bongani's parents in the foreground of his drawing points to "the representation and/ or sign of an affective meaning: affectively, [Bongani] sees his parents as so much bigger" (Kress, 2005, p 14.) In Daniella's drawing she has also included multiple bedrooms in her drawing so that there is enough room for all the members of her family and extended family to stay as well as a ladder so that *"my cousins can get up."*

The representation of self and others in the drawings (A1) of the children's bedrooms is in line with the construction of 'self' which emerged from the analysis of the group discussion (GD1) as well as the discussion about the children bedroom photographs (P1).

### 5.3.2 Multimodal representation of objects in the bedroom drawings

The second finding that emerges from analysis of the bedroom drawings (A1) is the inclusion of the various *objects* alongside the representation of children and family members. In terms of spatial arrangement, the eye is drawn to the bed which is placed in the middle of the page of the drawings (A1) and is the central focus in ten pictures, whilst in seven the bed is drawn on the left-hand side. This could be due to the fact that in traditional, Western pre-schools, emphasis is placed on the top, left hand side of the page as the starting point for all reading and writing which occurs from the left to the right hand side of the page. Drawing the bed in the middle of the page or on the "important" left hand side of the page highlights the significance of this particular piece of furniture. Only in Kevin and Stan's drawings is the bed on the right hand side. Being the youngest children in the class, their sense of directionality is not yet firmly established and so the left and right sides of the page hold equal sway.

Twelve of the bedroom drawings (A1) feature a bed. Wenyasha and Kathy both chose their bed as the favourite item in their bedroom because it is *"nice and warm"* whilst Taylor said hers is *"nice and comfy."* Kevin, Stan and Christopher all have bunk beds and Christopher says "*I can climb up to the top."*
The visual representation also supports the importance of the bed and the way the children frame their bedroom as a belonging space because they can play, rest and relax *"on their beds*." For Blake, his bed is the favourite item in his bedroom because he *"can sleep on it and I can play on it"* while David's reason for choosing his bed is because *"I can sit on it and relax on it."* Kevin said of his bed *"It's special for me to sleep on"* and *"I also sleep at the bottom and the top."*

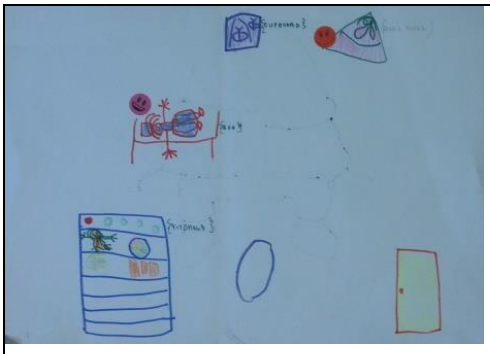
In ten of the drawings, the children have drawn themselves or family members lying on the beds. In the visual representation (A1) therefore, it is not only the object, in this case the bed that is important, but that family members are represented alongside the objects in the bedroom space. Kevin says of his bunk beds that it is better *"when my sister sleeps at the top"* instead of him having to sleep alone.

The visual representation (A1) therefore aligns with the data from the group discussion (GD2) which points to the significance of both special bedroom objects as well as relational ties in the bedroom space.

### 5.3.3 Multimodal representation of the bedroom in a realistic or wished-for" manner

Cope and Kalantzis (2012) argue that another important affordance of the multimodal analysis is the 'context' and this can be either a realistic or an imagined one and links to the third finding that emerges from the depiction of objects in the bedroom space. While most of the bedrooms in the drawings (A1) are depicted in a 'realistic manner' three children drew 'wished- for' spaces.

When I compared the children's drawings (A1) with the photographs (P1) of their "real" bedrooms, there were some accurate similarities such as seen in Taylor's drawing, (Figure 5.5) below which closely reflects her bed, her toy shelves with books and toys and the butterflies on her cupboard which form part of the decor in her real bedroom (photographs 5.1a and 5.1b).



**5.5. Taylor's drawing of her bedroom**



**5.1a Photograph of Taylor's "real" bedroom.**



**5.1b Photograph of Taylor's "real" bedroom**

There is also a connection between the photographs of
Denise, Christopher, Wenyasha and Aimee's bedrooms and the picture they drew. Denise (Figure 5.3) included the doll that she sleeps with at night and Christopher drew his bunk bed, his toys and toy shelf. Wenyasha and Aimee drew the double beds that are on display in the photographs of their bedrooms

with Wenyasha drawing two separate beds side by side and Aimee depicting her bunk beds, drawn one on top of the other.

A realistic representation of the bedroom in their drawings (A1) would seem to indicate that the children are content with their bedrooms as they are and this sense of satisfaction is echoed in the findings from the group discussion (GD1) about their bedrooms. In the discussion (GD1) Blake said *"I like my stuff on my wall"* whilst Emily said that she wouldn't change the décor in her room and Denise expressed happiness with the butterfly curtains that had been chosen for her room.

In contrast, three children drew "wished for objects" in the bedroom pictures (A1) such as the bunk beds in Sahil (Figure 5.6) and Peter's drawings and the rocket ship bed in Nikaiya's drawing (Figure 5.7).

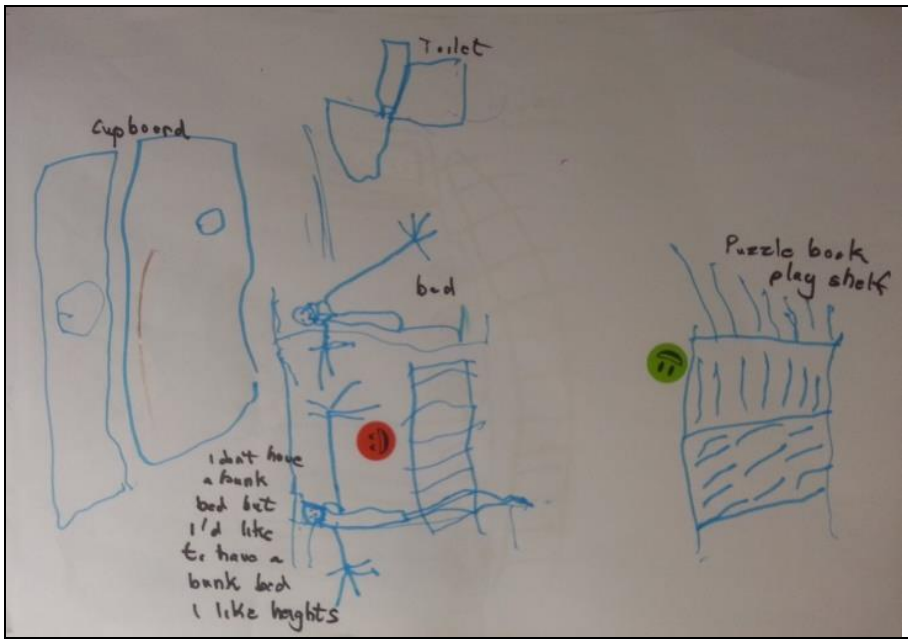



**Figure 5.6 Sahil's "Wished-for" bedroom drawing**

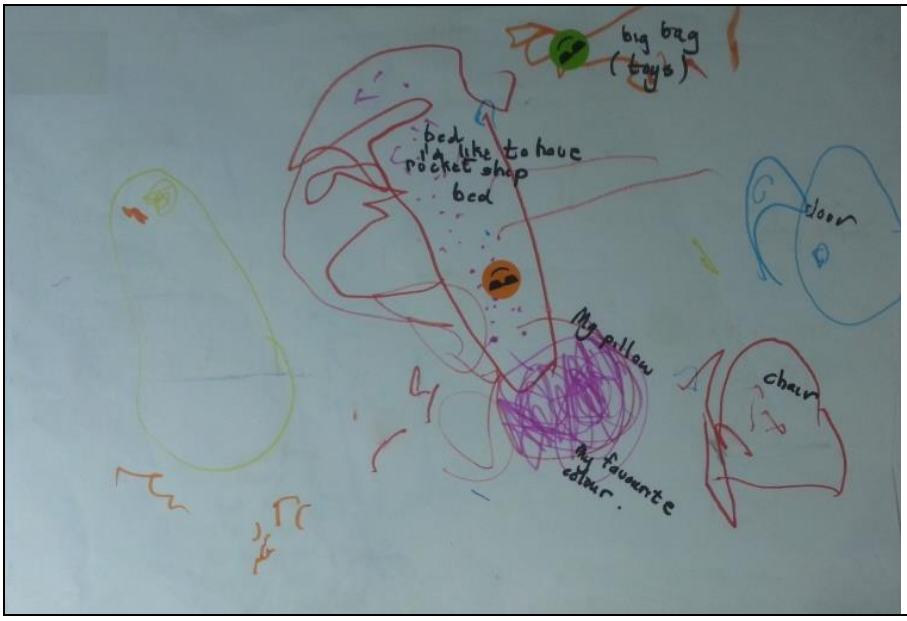



**Figure 5.7 Nikaiya's "Wished-for" bedroom drawing**

Sahil and Peter are quite gentle and timid in nature and so the bunk bed may be seen as a symbol of empowerment, something which has an element of "danger" to it. Sahil also included two people in his drawing, even though he is an only child and this may reveal his longing to have a sibling.

Nikaiya's drawing (Figure 5.7) is most probably the furthest removed from her "real" bedroom and she has depicted her bedroom as "an imaginative and metaphorical space of emotion and belonging" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, cited in Brickell, 2012, p 266.) In the context of her real bedroom, Nikaiya's feelings and considerations have not been taken into account in choosing the type of bed or furnishing she wants or having access to her *"big bag of toys"* (DIS 1) stored there. In drawing a picture of her bedroom nevertheless, Nikaiya is afforded the opportunity to create a belonging space for herself.

## 5.4 (Re)conceptualizing the bedroom using a critical literacy lens.

Having examined the representation of the bedroom in multimodal manner, the final research question has a pedagogical focus and examines bedrooms as a belonging space from a critical literacy perspective and the ways in which children's perspectives are shaped by a context of privilege. Use of whole group discussion rings (GD3 and 4b), as well as a second art activity (A2) were designed to encourage the children to adopt a more critical approach when examining bedrooms as a social construct and to problematize the assumptions that all children have the same ones.

Firstly the children discussed a variety of photographs from Mollison's book (2010) "*Where children sleep.*" The photographs show the teacher and the children engaged in discussion around the photos (Photograph 5.8) and Taylor (Photograph 5.9) examining the photographs of the Grade 00s bedrooms in contrast to the bedrooms from around the world.



**5.8 The Grade 00s involved in a discussion ring.**

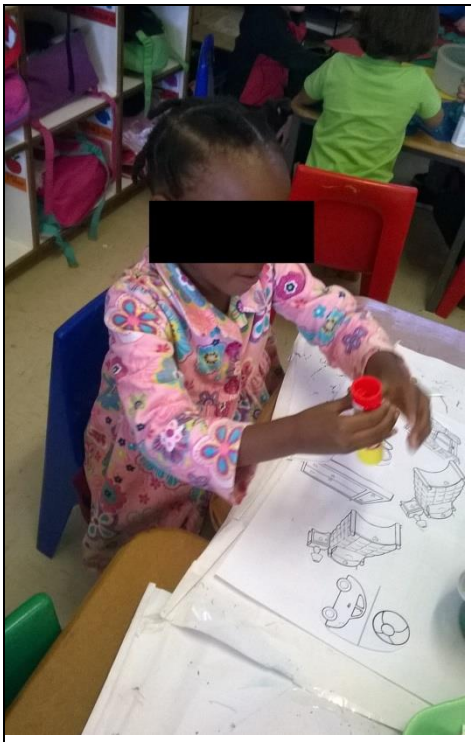


**5.9 Taylor examining the photos after the discussion.**

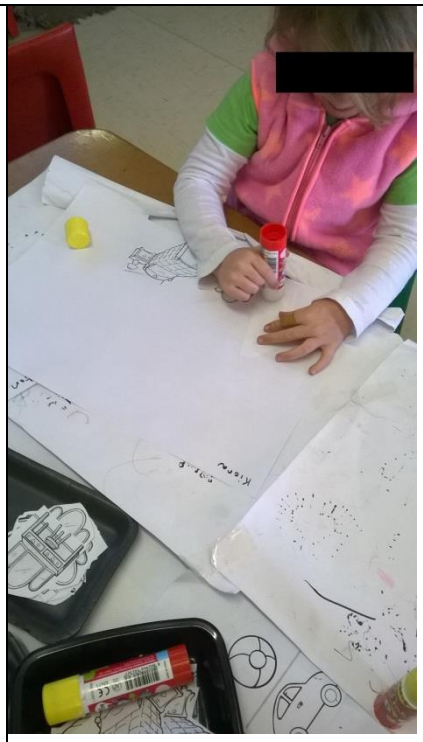
Mollison's (2010) photographs (refer to the methodology section, 3.1) selected for the whole group discussion (GD4b) were chosen to show an excess of possessions (photographs 3.1- 3.4) children living in poverty with only a few possessions (photographs 3.5-3.7) and children who do not have a bedroom at all (photographs 3.8 and 3.9).

After the discussion about the photographs was concluded, the children were given the following six pictures of bedroom items – a bed, a cupboard, curtains, a carpet, a dressing table and toys. These pictures were chosen because they

represent the items that occurred most frequently in the photographs of the Grade 00s bedrooms. The children had to select which items they wanted to include in their "select and paste" activity. This activity was chosen because it is suitable for the age of the children and their fine-motor control at this stage, particularly the younger children in the group who are still in the process of developing their fine-motor skills. The following two photographs 5.10 and 5.11 show two of the Grade 00s busy with the "select and paste" activity.



**Photograph 5.10 Tshiamo completing her "select and paste" activity.**



**Photograph 5.11 Kathy completing her "select and paste" activity.**

Table 5.3 shows the items that the Grade 00s chose to include in their "select and paste" pictures.

**TABLE 5.3 Items included in the children's "select and paste" picture of their bedroom.**

| Name | Bed | Cupboard | Toys | Curtains | Dressing table | Carpet |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tshiamo | 2 beds | x | x | x | x | x |
| Jessica | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Nikaiya | x | x | x (2 pictures) | x | | x |
| Aimee | x | x | x (2 pictures) | x | x | |
| Daniella | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Kathy | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Penelope | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Denise | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Taylor | x | x | x(2 pictures) | x | x | x |
| Emily | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Christopher | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Bongani | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Neil | x | x | x (2 pictures) | x | | x |
| David | x | x | | x | | x |
| Stan | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Mark | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Sahil | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Total | 17 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 10 | 13 |

These items are in evidence (from the photographs and discussion) in their bedrooms at home. Bongani is the only boy who chose a dressing table although he does not have one in his bedroom. After completing the "select and paste" picture, the children were required to cross out any items in their "select and paste picture" that they did not consider necessary for their happiness or sense of security.

What emerged strongly as a finding was the ways in which privilege enabled and constrained children to think beyond their own understanding of bedroom spaces. As Luke and Woods (2009, p 5) maintain, within a situation of privilege, it is important that children should question their taken for granted status and commonsense assumptions in order to "explore and find other voices and truths about social and class relations, about forms of oppression and about

injustices of the social and economic system." In the context of this research, the privilege we speak of, is the 'privilege' of having possessions, life experience, wealth and economic stability and lastly, the 'privilege' of relational ties. This notion of 'privilege 'is explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

### 5.4.1 Privilege and material possessions

As part of the initial discussion (GD4b) around Mollison's (2010) photographs, the abundance of possessions such as in the bedrooms of Kaya, (photograph 3.1) Tristan, (photograph 3.2) and Joey (photograph 3.3) provoked a negative reaction and were described by the children as being *"messy."* Denise said of Kaya that *"her bedroom is messy but she isn't."* Jessica said, *"There's a lot more toys than us"* and Neil responded by saying, *"you can't play with so many toys."* In the case of Tristan's bedroom, (photograph 3.2) Jessica said that it was *"messy"* and the reason he had so many books was that *"he's got lots of bookshelves."* She said that the teacher gave Tristan all the books because he has to do *"lots of homework".* The books, like Kaya's toys, appear burdensome to the children rather than something that brings pleasure.

Despite the fact that many of the boys in my class like to make guns out of the construction toys, none of them wanted to have the army bedroom belonging to Joey (photograph 3.3). Neil said, *"he's an army man"* but there's *"too many army."* Some of the children mentioned that they would like Jaime's bedroom (photograph 3.4) because it was neat, by comparison to the others. Aimee said, however, that it looks like a girl's bedroom because *"it's pink and there's flowers on the floor."* Jessica did concede however that it's alright for Jaime to have a pink, flowery bedroom because *"maybe some boys like girl's stuff*." David also made the comment that Jaime (photograph 3.4.) looks angry and *"big boys can't play"* suggesting that playing should be restricted to children of his own age.

The children went on to use words such as *"old", "dirty" and "unhealthy"* when describing the bedrooms and possessions of Ahkohxet, Laime, Roathy and Alex who are living in poverty. Neil said that Ahkohxet's bedroom (photograph 3.5) is *"not so nice"* whilst Tshiamo said that Lamine's bedroom (photograph 3.6) *"looks very old."* In response to the photograph of Alex's

bedroom (photograph 3.8), the children described his couch as being old, dirty and broken. The theme of relational ties re-emerges in this whole group discussion (GD4b) Jessica recognized that Alex's (photograph 3.8) bedroom was *not* a special belonging space and said *"They haven't made him special"* whilst Neil added there's *"hardly nothing for him."* The children recognise that human beings need "lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, cited in Stratigos, Bradley and Wong, 2014. p2). Denise said that Roathy's bed (photograph 3.7*) "is going to be very stinky, very sore. He might get hurt"* and Neil's response was emphatically *"I don't want it!"* The children have also begun to "develop [an] understanding of the groups to which they belong and the groups which are foreign to them" (Vandenbroeck, 1999, cited in Stratigos, Bradley and Wong, 2014, p3) and of which is echoed by Neil's sentiment, *"I don't want it."*

Whilst the Grade 00s recognise that having an abundance of toys, as in the case of Kaya (photograph 3.1) and Tristan (photograph 3.2) might restrict the freedom to play and does not necessarily make one happy, the "select and paste" activity (A2) nevertheless indicates otherwise. When I asked the children to cross out any "possessions" in the "select and paste" pictures (A2) which they did not need to make them feel 'happy' or 'safe' nine children did not cross out *any* of the pictures. Daniella said she *"wouldn't be safe"* without her toys while Emily said that everything in her room *"makes me happy. When lots of my things are gone, I'm going to be sad. When I'm in my bed, I'm going to be sad."* Jessica was a bit more vehement in the protection of her belongings and said that if they were gone she'd *"try to get them back… cause everything's important."* This strong attachment to personal possessions may be explained by Keefer, Landau and Sullivan (2014, p 528) who suggest that children derive security from material possessions because they do not "resist influence or act unpredictably". The possessions in the children's bedrooms thus give them "a sense of control as they confront their limited influence over their environment" (Keefer, et al, 2014, p 528).

The children who did choose to cross out an item in the "select and paste" activity (A2) selected items which are not integral to a sense of belonging in the bedroom space. Penelope crossed out the carpet because *"my dog pees on it"* whilst Tshiamo crossed out the one of the 'toy' pictures because *"it's boy toys."* Rose only crossed out the picture of the cupboard *"because I have a bookshelf."*

Taylor who prefers reading to playing with the toys in the classroom crossed out one of the pictures of the toys and the carpet and said that her bed was most important. For the Grade 00s it is easy to 'dispose' of a few of their possessions because they have so many, unlike the children in the photographs for whom their limited possessions are integral to their ongoing existence.

The children's responses in the group discussion (GD4b) and the "select and paste" activity (A2) are framed by the context of privilege. This privilege plays itself out in their life experiences, in a context of wealth and with respect to relational ties.

### 5.4.2 Privilege and life experiences

The possessions which were commonly featured in the photographs (P1) of the children's bedrooms, as well as part of the whole group discussion (GD1) around their 'belonging space' were beds, toys, bookshelves and night lights or lamps. From the Grade 00s life experience, these items are integral to making the bedroom function as a belonging space. They noted by contrast, that the bedrooms in the photographs did *not* have toys or bookshelves or even beds. When I pointed out that there was no electricity in the huts either, the Grade 00s realized that these children would not have a lamp or night light and might have a similar fear of the dark, as was raised in the small focus group discussion (SFGD 1). Sahni (2001, cited in Kuby, 2013, p 3) says that "viewed from the perspective of young children, [critical] literacy is not for social and political revolution or national development; it is for people to use in relation to each other." The Grade 00s were able to sympathize with the children in the photographs and offered practical suggestions to remedy the situation. Neil said that Ahkohxet (photograph 3.5) could have a torch whilst Jessica said, *"I could lead him [Ahkohxet] because I know how to move in the dark."*

In addition to the absence of bedroom objects, the Grade 00s were also concerned about the safety of these children. They expressed concern that Alex (photograph 3.8*)* had nowhere to store his belongings and Jessica said that *"one of the animals will break it"* while Kevin added that maybe [his possessions*] "will get lost by bad guys."* Neil suggested that perhaps *"he [Alex] can run to the shelter."* Jessica thought that Lamine (photograph 3.6) might be safe because *"he's big"* and *"he's got an ax."* As part of their 'privileged' life

experiences, the Grade 00s do not have to concern themselves with their safety but assign this role to the caring adults in their lives.

### 5.4.3 Privilege and wealth

Antonsich (2010, p 39) says that economic factors matters because "they create a safe and stable material condition for the individual and her/his family" and it is the Grade 00s particular economic circumstances that have a bearing on how they interpret the photographs. Aimee, in considering the poverty that some of the children live in, suggests that *"we can buy them a mattress, we can give them a mom and dad and granny and grandpa and buy them a house."* When asked what possessions the children in the photographs might like to have, Jessica said, *"a proper bed"* because "where *[Roathy (photograph 3.7)] is sleeping, it's going to be stinky and sore and lots of glass."* Denise thought they might choose a house, Neil said a bath, whilst Aimee and David said they might choose toys, books and a teddy. Taylor said that they would choose a bed and a cupboard whilst Blake and Kevin mentioned a heater *"and a plug where you could plug your lamp."* The Grade 00s choices for the children in the photographs reflect the items that are important to them and which they enjoy on a daily basis as a result of a comfortable and often wealthy home life. However, Blake and Kevin's choice of a lamp also reflects a concern that the children in the photographs may experience a fear of the dark, in the same way that they do, which as Oesterreich (2003, p 2) says "is usually one of the last childhood fears to be conquered."

### 5.4.4 Privilege and relational ties

Because the children in the research enjoy what Baumeister and Leary (1995, p 497) describe as "lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships" they are able to attribute the *"nice things"* in their bedrooms to their *"moms and dads."* They also recognize as Jessica said, that *"people who don't have money don't have bedrooms"* and *"have no moms and dads"* (expressed by Denise.) The absence of caring adults was reiterated by Tshiamo who said that Roathy (photograph 3.7) could be sleeping on the rubbish because *"he doesn't have a mom"* and *"you have to have a family or they will think that you are wild."* For the Grade 00s home is a place of "familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment" (Relph, 1967, cited in Antonsich, 2010, p 6), whereas this is hardly

likely to be the experience of a child such as Roathy (Photograph 3.7).Without considering any of the practical ramifications, Tshiamo offers to transpose her experience of home by proposing that Roathy (Photograph 3.7) should *"stay for a lot of years because I haven't got a lot of family."* She does have a sister but is seems that her sense of belonging is defined by having many siblings and not just one and thus she is keen to 'adopt' another child into her family.

## 5.5. Pedagogical considerations

The first section provides an analysis of the children's responses to the Mollison (2010) photographs as well as the second art activity (A2) whilst the second section focuses on how these insights can inform my pedagogy.

### 5.5.1 How the Grade 00's context shapes their understanding

An analysis of the children's responses during the group discussion (GD4b) and their discussions around the "select and paste" activity, reveals several findings. Firstly, the Grade 00s context of privilege shapes what they see and it is difficult for them to step outside, as it were, of that experience. Poverty is experienced extrinsically rather than intrinsically and their exposure to poverty is limited in most instances, to fleeting encounters with a beggar on the side of the road. As Blake recalled, *"I got a sandwich at Sunday school and I gave it* to *a man on the street and he ate it"* (GD4b).

A limited understanding of "economics" also shapes their context and so Jessica is able to magnanimously suggest that *"we just give them some money",* which is not hers to give, whilst Aimee is even more generous in her offer of buying the children *"a house."* They unsurprisingly tend to make a judgment based on what they can see in the photographs and offer simplistic solutions to the problems. Whilst the Grade 00s may understand that the children in the photographs are experiencing material deprivation such as the lack of electricity, they cannot conceptualize how this deprivation impacts them on a deeper emotional level. According to the Grade 00s these difficulties are easily remedied by simply 'wanting' something such as a *"proper bed"* (Jessica) or "*a plug where you can plug your heater"* (Kevin and Blake). The solutions that the Grade 00s offer, do not, therefore, involve any change in attitude on their behalf

with the ‘onus of responsibility’ as it were, still resting on the shoulders of those in far less fortunate situations than theirs.

The Grade 00s stage of development also frames their responses to Mollison’s (2010) photographs. Four to five year olds are egocentric and see the world from their view point and this stage of cognitive development is what Piaget (cited in Lefa, 2014) terms “pre-operational.” Whilst there are strong critiques against the Piagetian theory, it does provide some insight into why children experience difficulty in distinguishing between their own perspective and that of another person. Because children are egocentric, in the main, this does not mean that they lack the capacity for abstract thought or the ability to show empathy but rather that these attributes are somewhat limited and still developing. When discussing the fact that Ahkohxet (Photograph 3.5) has no electricity in his hut, Jessica offers a solution from her perspective and says, “***I*** could lead *him because* ***I*** *know how to move in the dark.”* In addition, children of this age also find it difficult to think abstractly particularly the younger children and that is why children such as Aimee and Tshiamo suggest purchasing new moms and dads for the children in the photographs. This also links to the importance of relational ties and underscores Aimee’s suggestion that the children in the photographs should be given *“a mom and a dad and a granny and a grandpa”* while Tshiamo feels that they also need to have *“brothers and sisters.”* From this point of view, these Grade 00s have always been part of a family. It is these “emotionally dense relations with family members” (Antonsich, 2010, p 8) that has served to enrich their lives and in turn, what the Grade 00’s hope would be the experience of the children in the photographs**.** They haven’t grasped the fact that family members cannot be purchased in the same way that one might purchase a new toy.

The Grade 00s fierce and deeply affective attachment to their possessions also shapes what they see. Bearing this in mind, their attachment is not necessarily motivated by “greed” or “selfishness” but rather by an emotional attachment to the ‘donor ‘of their possessions, which, in most cases, is members of their family and the connection between objects and a sense of belonging. When Emily says, *“When lots of things are gone, I’m going to be sad”* she is summing up the Grade 00s need for possessions which make them feel special, safe and happy and contribute to what Antonsich (2010) describes as feelings of “place belongingness.” It is not that the materiality of the objects has value, but

that these objects are imbued with a sense of belonging because of "relational ties" (Antonsich, 2010).

Another factor which shapes their attachment to their possessions and to their toys in particular, is the importance of "play" because play is closely tied to the socio-emotional development of a child (Englebright Fox, 2008). Jessica said of her doll, *"This is my baby and I play with her and I play school with my other babies"* while Bongani said that he likes his teddies because they are soft and he can play with them.

### 5.5.2 How a critical literacy approach shapes the Grade 00s understanding

Janks and Dixon, (2018, in press) propose that "young children understand that some people have more than others and the world is not fair." Whilst the Grade 00s are limited in their worldview and by the context of privilege, they are capable of recognizing injustice and a desire to share and set the world to right, as well adjusting and reconstructing what they know (Vasquez, 2004).When I asked the Grade 00s whether it is fair that they have beautiful bedrooms whilst the children in the photographs do not, Denise answered it is not fair *"because our bedrooms are nicer than their bedroom."* Taylor added that it was unfair because the little boy who was living on the rubbish dump couldn't go to school either. The Grade00s demonstrated a willingness to try and solve the problems such as Jessica's offer of leading Ahkoket in the dark or Aimee's offer of buying the children a house. Jessica is also able to appreciate that absent parents, leads to a lack in other areas and concluded that these children would most probably not have a birthday because they look dirty and *"maybe the people don't want to come in because they're scared the babies will get hurt by the wild animals."*

When I asked the children what they could do to make it "fairer" for the children in the photographs, Taylor said *"he [Alex, photograph 3.8] can just find a house"* or *"he could ask the people if he could come in the house"* whilst Denise said *"we can give him his own house."* Jessica suggested *"how about we just give them some money"* and David endorsed this by saying *"we give money to the poor in church."*

## 5.6 Conclusion

The findings from the second part of the research show firstly that the multimodal representation of the bedroom (A1) as well as the analysis of the bedroom drawings adds to a multi-layered representation of the bedroom as well as the factors that contribute to a sense of belonging. The multimodal activities were an "important medium for engagement and a means for the children to depict and, thus, come to know the world and their place within it" (McArdle & Wright, 2014 p 27). This sense of belonging is moreover framed by agency in the bedroom space and situated in relational ties. The materiality of objects in the bedroom space, in particular the bed, also frames the bedroom as a belonging space for it here that the child can play and sleep.

The findings from the final part of the research, show that by adopting a critical literacy lens, the Grade 00s are able to identify forms of social oppression and sympathize with other children's plight.

The second multimodal activity (A2) however, reveal that this perspective does not necessarily translate into an embodied understanding thereof and result in any personal change. The children's one-on-one discussion (DIS2) about their "select and paste activity" (A2) indicates that the Grade 00s are shaped by a context of privilege and thus find it difficult to dispose of their possessions. These possessions are infused with an emotional connection to other people that matter and serve as a source of comfort and security. As a result, the Grade 00s are reluctant to [re]conceptualize their bedrooms spaces.

# 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

## 6.1. Introduction

This research set out firstly to examine how children conceptualize the bedroom as a belonging space. The research design involved the use of photographs, group discussions and multimodal activities. The findings that emerged were the importance of relational ties and how bedrooms object are imbued with an emotional resonance because of relational ties. The notion of identity is also foregrounded in the bedroom space and constructed through play, gender aspects and to some extent the commodification of the bedroom space. Lastly, the bedroom space may not always feel safe.

Examination of the multimodal representation of the bedroom revealed the representation of self and others in the bedroom space as well as the representation of objects. The findings that emerged from the second research question, relate to the bedroom being represented as a private space in which the child is allowed to exercise a sense of agency or as a communal space in which family members are included, thus highlighting the importance of relational ties. The representation of objects in the bedroom drawings, in particular the bed, points to the importance of the material furnishings of the bedroom. The bed as a place to rest, relax and sleeping highlights the role of objects, yet gain, in creating a sense of belonging in the bedroom space. In the art activity, (A1) the bedrooms were also drawn as ‘realistic’ representations or ‘wished- for’ representations of their ‘real’ bedrooms which points to the idea that the bedroom may either be a belonging space or a “metaphorical space of emotion and belonging” (Blunt and Dowling cited in Brickell, 2012, p 266).

Finally, using a critical literacy lens, the children were asked to interrogate bedroom spaces that differed from their own. The findings that emerged where how a context of privilege shapes their experience of a belonging bedroom space and makes it difficult for them to (re)conceptualize this space.

## 6.2. Values and limitations of the research

The use of multimodal activities in the research was useful in that it allowed the Grade 00s who are less capable on a verbal level to share their thoughts and considerations. Nevertheless, I had to modify the multimodal activities that I selected. I had initially decided to include two drawing activities in the research, but found that this was too difficult for some of the children, because of their stage of development. I therefore changed the second activity to a "select and paste" activity in the place of one in which they were asked to redesign their bedroom space. All the children were then able to execute the activity from a fine motor skill aspect but some children did still find it difficult to motivate their choices accordingly.

Because I had the opportunity to implement a critical literacy approach in my classroom during the research period, this has informed my teaching practice. The challenge, however, lies in a commitment to a consistent critical literacy approach which is integrated into the existing educational programme, rather than something which happens once or twice a year. I am also confident that I would be able to offer advice to other teachers in the school who also wish to adopt a similar approach as well as informing school policy as it relates to curriculum planning and design. Next year, we will be adopting an inquiry learning curriculum in our school which will be well suited to the adoption of a critical literacy approach.

Using a critical literacy approach was also of great value because it fostered discussion around the notion of "privilege." In the school where I teach, privilege is a 'taken- for-granted' state and thus 'invisible' and the Grade 00s bring with them, many assumptions around wealth, fairness, access and justice. As their teacher I could not allow the Grade 00s assumptions to go unchallenged. While being sensitive to their history and taking cognizance of where they are coming from, I was tasked with disrupting their notion of privilege but not their sense of belonging. The Grade 00s did display an intellectual understanding that the world is not a "fair" place for all children and a willingness to right these wrongs. This did not however become an embodied understanding and the Grade 00s were reluctant to (re) design their belonging space or give away their possessions.

Sahni (cited in Kuby, 2012, p3),however, maintains that early childhood critical literacy is not so much intended for "social and political revolution or national development" but should rather have its' outworking in the way people relate to one another. So while I may feel that the research project did not have the desired end result of "social transformation" it had value in that I started the process of shifting the Grade 00' egocentric view to become more aware of the world around them and to become more critical of their own 'privileged' position in that world.

I also realised that one must allow enough time for notions of fairness and justice to become more embedded in the children's thinking. I saw the benefits of a critical literacy approach, played out in the children's response in the week following the research. The Grade 00's were asked to donate their "old" pjamas and slippers for the "Slipper day" charity and there was a huge response from the children in my class. When fires destroyed one of the informal settlements in Johannesburg a month a while later, Jessica told me that she had prayed for the poor people and then followed this up by making and selling cupcakes, and donating the money to a relief fund. This made me realize that it is possible to move children from a sympathetic stance to a more empathetic one which motivates them to take action. The photographs in the appendix (5.12 and 5.13) show two of the children in my Grade 00 class dressed up in their pyjamas with their donation for Slipper Day.

## 6.3 Recommendations for further research

It would be useful to conduct the research over a longer period of time. It would also be beneficial to use different age groups or a bigger sample of children of the same age. Conducting the research in a school which is not as affluent as the school where I am teaching, would enable me to compare the findings from the two research groups.

Going forward, I will be more mindful of addressing the issue of gender which played a large role in the construction of the children's bedrooms, in the research. The pre-school environment is in many respects a "non- gendered" environment so this provides the ideal platform for adopting a critical literacy lens and engaging children in discussion around this issue.

In conclusion, this research has served to deepen my understanding of the children that I teach and given me a better insight into their response to social issues. It has also reinforced the value of fostering positive relationships between the children in my class and then working towards broader issues of social change and transformation.

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# Appendix A

Parent's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to allow your child to participate in the research project called "Critical Literacy and children's conceptualization of 'out-of -school' spaces."

I, _____ the parent of _____

**Permission to review/collect documents/artifacts** **Circle one**

I agree that my child's art works can be used for this study only. YES/NO

**Permission to observe my child in class**

I agree that my child may be observed in class. YES/NO

**Permission to be interviewed**

I agree that my child may be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that he/she can stop the interview at any time and doesn't have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

**Permission to be photographed**

I agree that my child may be photographed during the study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop this permission at any time. YES/NO

I know that the photos will be used for this project only. YES/ NO

**Permission to be videotaped**

I agree my child may be videotaped in class. YES/NO

I know that the videotapes will be used for this project only. YES/NO

**Informed Consent**

I understand that:

- my child's name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- he/she does not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- he/she can ask not to be photographed and/or videotaped
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____Date_____

# Appendix B

Principal Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to allow your child to participate in the research project called "Critical Literacy and children's conceptualization of 'out-of -school' spaces."

I, _____ the principal of _____

**Permission for the school to take part in the project**

| **Permission to review/collect documents/artifacts** | **Circle one** |
|---|---|
| I agree that children's art works can be used for this project only. | YES/NO |

**Permission to observe my child in class**

| | |
|---|---|
| I agree that children will be observed in class. | YES/NO |

**Permission to be interviewed individually and in small focus groups**

| | |
|---|---|
| I agree that children will be interviewed for this study and some children will be interviewed in small focus groups. | YES/NO |

**Permission to be photographed**

I agree that the children may be photographed during the study. YES/NO

**Permission to be videotaped**

I agree the children may be videotaped in class. YES/NO

**Informed Consent**

I understand that:

- the name of my school will not be revealed.
- My name and the children's names and information will be kept confidential and safe
- I can have a copy of the research findings if I so wish.
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project and will be stored in a safe place in the interim.

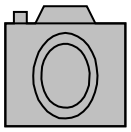
Sign_____ Date_____

# Appendix C

**Learner Consent Form**

Please draw a ☺ or ☹









# Appendix D



**Photograph 5.12 Jessica and her donations for Slipper Day**.



**Photograph 5.13. Kevin sitting amongst the many items donated for slipper day.**