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Cross-pollinating multimodal stories: A pathway to engage with learners' pluralistic cultural, linguistic and social resources

Essa, Fatima Vally

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Cross-pollinating multimodal stories: A pathway to engage with learners' pluralistic cultural, linguistic and social resources

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By

Fatima Vally Essa

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University of the Witwatersrand

School of Education

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Supervised by Dr Belinda Mendelowitz and Dr Ana Ferreira

2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. This thesis is submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), at the University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, School of Education in Johannesburg South Africa. It has not been submitted prior to this for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Fatima Vally Essa

2025

DEDICATIONS

To my son, Sulayman…

Your birth, coinciding with the completion of this thesis has shown me that endings and beginnings are always intertwined. This work is testament to the immeasurable strength your presence has already given me. May your life be filled with discovery, bravery, and the freedom to author your own stories.

***

To all the young girls out there…

May you always dare to dream beyond the boundaries set for you. May you find power in your voice, strength in your stories, and courage in your questions. This work is for you - proof that knowledge is not just something we acquire but something we shape, mould, and make our own.

Never stop imagining, questioning, and creating. The world needs your brilliance!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has been one of discovery, challenge, and growth, and I am deeply grateful to those who have walked alongside me.

***

To my supervisors, Belinda and Ana, your guidance, patience, critical feedback, and unwavering belief in my work have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. I am truly grateful for your support and mentorship.

To my family, your love and encouragement have been my anchor. Thank you for the countless moments of reassurance, for celebrating small victories, and for lifting me up when the weight of this journey felt heavy.

To the students/participants in this study, this work exists because of you. Your voices, stories, and perspectives have been the heart of this research, and I am deeply honoured to have been a part of your journey.

ABSTRACT

Educators often ignore the multiplicity and rich cultural, linguistic, and social resources that students bring into English language classrooms, rendering their resources and identities insignificant in the learning process. Instead, the teaching and learning of English imposes dominant Anglo-cultural practices on learners (Paris and Alim, 2014, 2017; Bomer, 2017) which limits engagement with diverse forms of knowledge. The aim of this study is to use a multimodal storytelling intervention that involves telling stories across various modes to create pathways and multiple entry points for learners to draw on their diverse pluralistic resources, repertoires and social literacy practices during their learning which expands on what counts as academic achievement. Building on the concept of transduction, cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) was employed to move across modes of storytelling, enabling a wide range of resources to be transformed to create meaning in each mode.

The methodology of this study was qualitative and involved a teaching intervention conducted with one grade 10 class of English Home Language learners who were diverse in their demographic make-up. The intervention included a visual storytelling activity that required the learners to individually craft an Instagram post to express their identities to their followers. This was followed by two collaborative activities where the class of learners were divided into six groups. The first activity required the groups to craft either a written or verbal story about a social issue prevalent in their communities or in the world that requires addressing, and thereafter, the next activity required the learners to transduce their collaborative stories into the performative mode using any genre. The activities highlighted an overlap between individual and social agendas by encouraging learners to reflect on their own lives, the world around them and to draw on dominant and non-dominant resources and repertoires in a classroom setting to tell their stories. Data in this study is generated from selected Instagram posts, the multimodal stories crafted by the learners, a teacher interview, questionnaires, field notes and a focus group discussion.

All the collaborative multimodal stories crafted during the intervention demonstrated a social consciousness by advocating for silenced and marginalized groups. Through multimodal discourse analysis of the data, I illustrate the affordances and limitations of each mode of storytelling and

how the cross-pollination of stories enabled learners to connect with lived experiences, leverage diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires, and amplify authentic voices. Storytelling across modes bridged the gap between formal learning and the learner's social realities, and this challenged traditional conceptualisations of language education.

The findings suggest that by engaging with multimodal cross-pollination of storytelling, learners found multiple entry points to learning and asserted their positionality and agency within the classroom space. This study highlights the transformative potential of cross-pollinating multimodal stories to create meaningful and inclusive English language learning experiences that honour and mobilise learners' existing identities and resources, ultimately fostering a learning environment that is as dynamic and pluralistic as the learners themselves.

Key-words: *Multimodality, Multimodal cross-pollination, Storytelling, English language education, Identity, Critical literacy*

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Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim/Problem statement

Language, any language, has a dual character; it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture…. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic views, the set of spiritual eyeglasses through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986:14-15).

In the vibrant tapestry of life, language is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture and identity, shaping how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Ngugi regards language as a collective memory bank of people's history and values, which is inextricably linked to identity, functioning as a repository of cultural knowledge and a medium for its transmission across generations. However, English language classrooms often fail to acknowledge this dual character of language, imposing dominant Anglo-cultural norms that marginalise learners diverse linguistic, cultural, and social resources (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Bomer, 2017). This exclusion not only limits the ways that learners engage with academic content but also diminishes the rich pluralistic identities they bring into the classroom.

The imposition of Anglo-centric norms in English language education perpetuates systemic inequalities by prioritising certain knowledge systems over others (Botsis, 2017). This prioritisation of Anglonormativity constrains learners' ability to represent their realities and silences voices that challenge dominant ideologies. The unjust system of apartheid continues to reflect its lingering consequences and influence the lives of the youth through limited access to resources, a lack of schooling and career opportunities, and disadvantages in social interactions (Gachago et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a need for schools to become socially just and equitable spaces that allows learners to engage *"across racial, linguistic, class and cultural divides"*

(Gachago et al., 2014, 1) which create learning spaces that establish peace and respect amongst diverse learners (Jansen, 2009).

Stein (2008) emphasises providing equitable opportunities for learners to represent their worlds in the languages and modes of their choice is not just an educational right but a transformative practice. Enciso (2017) asks, *"With what linguistic, semiotic, and material resources might it be possible to speak and be heard?"* This question highlights the importance of enabling learners to engage with the full spectrum of resources available to them, including those rooted in their cultural and social contexts. This thesis echoes Stein and Enciso's call to reconceptualise language education in the 21st century, advocating for inclusive, multimodal, and responsive approaches to learning that bridge the gap between school and social experiences. The main research question of this study is: *How does the integration of multimodal storytelling in an English language classroom shape learners' engagement with diverse forms of knowledge and resources to create meaningful learning opportunities?* This thesis uses cross-pollination of multimodal storytelling as a tool to engage with learners' diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources to provide multiple entry points to learning and epistemological access.

This study introduces the concept of multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022) to theorise how learners transfer, transform, and expand meaning across multiple semiotic modes in the process of storytelling. The term captures the generative and affective interplay between modes through which learners draw on their plural linguistic, cultural, and social repertoires to represent and reshape their identities and lived experiences. This concept builds on and extends the foundational work of Kress (2000) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), particularly the notion of transduction, which describes the shift of meaning from one mode to another. While transduction has been vital in multimodal discourse, it often treats modal shifts as technical or linear. Multimodal cross-pollination reimagines these shifts as iterative, dialogic, and socially embedded, emphasising the affective charge and agentive potential in learners' storytelling practices.

The work of Newfield (2009), Stein (2008), and Archer (2006) have examined multimodal pedagogies in South African classrooms, and their work informs this concept. These scholars have shown how learners use multimodal forms to navigate identity, power, and representation, especially in contexts marked by inequality and linguistic diversity. Newfield's focus on learners

as designers of meaning, Stein's framing of multimodal pedagogies as decolonial and performative, and Archer's work on social semiotics and multimodal composition provide a strong theoretical foundation. Furthermore, multimodal cross-pollination aligns with Janks' (2010) model of critical literacy, which brings together domination, access, diversity, and design. It recognises that the movement across modes is not neutral but deeply embedded in questions of access, identity, and transformation. In doing so, this concept also resonates with the affective and imaginative dimensions of storytelling as theorised by Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022), who foreground the importance of creativity and critical imagination in meaning-making.

Using multimodal cross-pollination as a driving force for the methodology of this study, I take you on a journey of a multimodal storytelling intervention conducted with one Grade 10 English Home Language class in Johannesburg, South Africa. I conducted a series of lessons and writing activities that were a mix of individual and collaborative activities. The activities involved multimodal cross-pollination of stories, where stories and resources were transduced and transformed across a series of different modes. The first was a visual story where students were required to craft a visual Instagram post as an expression of their identities and youth culture. The second involved identifying social issues in the learners' communities or the world and they were given the opportunity to craft a collaborative print-based or audio story. The third stage of the intervention required the learners to collaboratively transduce their print-based or audio story into the performative mode.

The concept of multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022) builds upon and extends the theory of transduction (Kress, 2000, 2010), which refers to the process of shifting meaning from one mode to another, such as converting a written text into a visual representation. While transduction acknowledges the affordances and constraints of different modes, it is often conceptualised as a linear movement, in which meaning is transferred in a relatively straightforward manner. In contrast, multimodal cross-pollination offers a more fluid, recursive, and dynamic understanding of meaning-making, one that does not simply shift between modes but integrates and transforms them in pluralistic and expansive ways while maintaining threads/links between each multimodal text. Multimodal cross-pollination emphasises interaction and reciprocal influence between modes rather than viewing them as discrete entities. Each mode is a building block that carries forward socio-cultural and linguistic resonances, ensuring that meaning is not

diluted but amplified through its movement across different semiotic landscapes. Transduction often assumes a directional and functional shift between modes, whereas multimodal cross-pollination treats modes as interwoven and mutually reinforcing, enabling meaning to develop in more complex and pluralistic ways. This process does not merely involve transferring meaning but reconfiguring and expanding the semiotic possibilities of communication. As a result, cross-pollination allows for greater fluidity in meaning-making, where learners are encouraged to draw on their cultural, linguistic, and social resources in flexible and creative ways.

By moving narratives across visual, written, oral, and performative modes, multimodal cross-pollination allows learners to blend their individual repertoires into collective and multimodal expressions of meaning. This not only bridges gaps between academic and social contexts but also creates deeper engagement and critical reflection, making learning a more meaningful and inclusive experience. Where transduction may focus on the translation or reinterpretation of meaning within existing frameworks, cross-pollination offers the additional opportunity to amplify voices by integrating diverse resources into entirely new modes of storytelling, disrupting traditional hierarchies of knowledge and representation.

Multimodal cross-pollination transforms diverse and pluralistic resources into powerful tools for storytelling, enabling learners to transcend the limitations of a single mode. This process encourages the blending of perspectives and fosters a richer, more nuanced understanding of complex ideas. Gachago et al. (2014) share that "*storytelling has helped us open up a democratic and inclusive space for our students to share and listen to stories they would usually not hear. In the process, students reported that some of their assumptions and beliefs about the 'other' may have changed*" (1). Therefore, it is a means to create opportunities for learners to share who they are, what they've been through and where they come from which has the potential to create empathy, share diverse knowledge systems and resources with each other, and establish collaborative classroom dynamics of inclusive practices.

The unique contribution of cross-pollination lies in its ability to create such spaces of transformation and connection. It provides learners with opportunities to share their identities, experiences, and histories, fostering an environment where diverse knowledge systems and cultural resources are not only acknowledged but celebrated. This nurtures collaborative classroom dynamics and establishes inclusive practices that affirm all voices as valid and valuable. Unlike

transduction, which might isolate meaning-making processes to the confines of discrete semiotic systems, cross-pollination emphasizes the interplay and co-construction of meaning across these systems. It transforms the classroom into a space of collective exploration, where diverse voices intersect and blend to co-create new, hybrid forms of understanding. By doing so, multimodal cross-pollination extends beyond mere translation of meaning to actively shape how knowledge is produced, shared, and valued, making it a pivotal tool for reimagining English language education in the 21st century.

This fluidity is particularly significant in classrooms where learners bring diverse linguistic repertoires and cultural identities into the meaning-making process. Bomer (2017) states that it is important to incorporate home literacy practices and socio-economic topics in language classrooms to make learning culturally responsive to students. Since multimodal narrative practices are a dominant part of learners' home and social literacy practices and identities (Focus group, 2022), I used a multimodal storytelling approach to language learning that had a social agenda in the hopes to mobilise a range of cultural, linguistic and social resources used to tell personalised stories to achieve social consciousness and move learners towards social action. The theoretical framework of this study offers scope to draw on out of school resources and practices that are commonly used in home and social contexts and link them to curricular content. Warner (2024) and scholars alike have identified that personal, subjective and aesthetic aspects of language learning should be incorporated due to lived experiences and interactions with the self and others to expand on linguistic and imaginative possibilities to include both "*new words*" and "*new worlds*" (2). This offers a humanistic approach to language learning which places the learner at the centre of their education and views the language as a classroom as a space to engage with learning, their lives, and a socially equitable space to explore the world.

Warner (2024) conceptualises language learning as being inherently playful, with play manifesting in three dimensions: 1. creative manipulation of language's material aspects, 2. drawing on everyday literacy practices to foster imaginative engagement, and 3. transformative potential of reshaping language and culture through experimentation. The focus on play as a means of being flexible, creative and effective with language pedagogies challenge conventional/traditional notions of language learning as a transformative practice for 21st century learners. The multimodal cross-pollination of stories in this study encourages learners to play with different conventions of

writing, modes and resources. Warner's (2024) approach to language learning extends the concept of it being solely a tool for communication, and she encourages viewing it as new ways of speaking, thinking and being as this offers potential for imaginative possibilities to be envisioned.

By using multimodal storytelling and a socio-cultural approach to language learning, this thesis seeks to unravel the interplay between culture, and identity in an English language classroom as a nexus where learners capitalise on their multifaceted backgrounds to navigate and assert themselves in this interconnected world. The stories crafted during the intervention reflected the learners' pluralistic identities and highlighted their capacity for critical engagement with social issues affecting their communities and the broader world. The stories crafted by the groups transcend conventional text-based, mono-modal and individualistic writing approaches, and they embraced a multifaceted spectrum of multimodal, collaborative narratives. Their stories illustrate contemporary ways of communicating experiences, identities and pluralistic notions of culture as markers of their individual and collective positionality in the world. In their stories, each group demonstrated social consciousness and some of the groups attempted to move towards social action by advocating for disadvantaged groups. By crafting collaborative stories that advocate for marginalised groups and address pressing social issues, the learners demonstrated their capacity to engage with the world as active, reflective participants. This aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of education as a practice of freedom, where learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but co-creators of meaning who challenge inequities and envision transformative possibilities. Multimodal storytelling acted as a beacon to connect academic literacies with the learner's lived experiences. The data showcases the transformative potential of multimodal storytelling that invite multiplicity of voices that reflect the ongoing dialogue of inclusive and empowering educational experiences.

This thesis situates itself within the broader field of multimodality (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010; Newfield, 2009, 2013, 2014; Pahl & Rowsell, 2011; Stein, 2008; Warner, 2024) and the sociocultural approaches to language learning that emphasise the dynamic interplay between resources, identity, and meaning making (New London Group, 1996). By centring multimodal cross-pollination, it redefines traditional notions of academic achievement to include the ability to navigate and integrate diverse semiotic systems, challenging rigid, monolithic conceptions of

success. It also argues that multimodal storytelling provides an inclusive framework for engaging with pluralistic identities and fostering authentic learning experiences in a globalized world.

Luckett (2019) advocates for the importance of broadening *"the concept of 'epistemological access' to include sociocultural and ontological access and taking into account the effects of our own positionality and institutional roles"* (Luckett 2019, 55). Luckett (2019) advocates for a reconceptualisation of "epistemological access," which traditionally focuses on enabling learners to access disciplinary knowledge, to encompass broader sociocultural and ontological dimensions. This expanded perspective acknowledges that the process of learning is deeply intertwined with the learners' own cultural and social realities. By recognizing the diversity of knowledge systems and the value of learners' lived experiences, this approach challenges the narrow, often anglonormative definitions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge in educational contexts. In the context of this thesis, Luckett's conceptualisation is instrumental in advancing the concept of epistemic access. The focus on multimodal storytelling as a pedagogical tool aligns with this expanded view by providing learners with opportunities to draw on their own cultural, linguistic, and social resources as valid forms of knowledge. This approach disrupts traditional hierarchies of knowledge that privilege text-based, monomodal, and Anglocentric forms of representation. Instead, it legitimises diverse modes of expression such as written, visual, oral, and performative storytelling as academically meaningful.

This thesis also incorporates the idea of cultural capital, which refers to the repertoire of cultural knowledge, skills, and experiences that learners bring to the classroom. By enabling learners to use these resources in their academic work, multimodal storytelling fosters an inclusive learning environment where multiple ways of knowing and being are validated. This approach not only broadens learners' epistemological access but also equips them with the ability to navigate and challenge dominant knowledge systems, thereby expanding their capacity for critical engagement and agency. Through this lens, the study goes beyond merely bridging the gap between school and social contexts. It seeks to create a transformative learning space where learners can mobilise their cultural capital which includes pluralistic resources and repertoires.

This study advocates for a transformative shift in English language education, where multimodality and cross-pollination of narratives and texts becomes a core pedagogical practice to extend entry points to learning and diversify knowledge and the use of resources in English

language classrooms. Through the lens of multimodal storytelling, learners can connect their cultural, linguistic, and social resources to their academic work, enabling them to craft narratives that are as complex and multifaceted as their identities. This process not only amplifies marginalised voices but also positions language learning as a means of engaging with and transforming the world. As this thesis will show, multimodality and multimodal cross-pollination of storytelling is not just an innovative educational strategy, but rather, it is a powerful tool for fostering critical engagement, social action, and meaningful connections between learners and their diverse realities. This thesis invites readers to journey into a world where language learning is not just about linguistic proficiency but about embracing the richness of students' lived experiences and pluralistic identities as part of their learning.

1.2. Rationale

This study emerges at the intersection of personal, professional, and academic imperatives, underpinned by the socio-cultural and educational realities of South Africa. The need to critically examine and transform English language education stems from a recognition of its historic inequities of apartheid, its continued marginalisation of diverse cultural and linguistic resources, and its failure to meaningfully engage with the identities and lived experiences of learners. By introducing multimodal cross-pollination and storytelling as pedagogical tools, this study seeks to reimagine the potential of English classrooms as spaces where diversity is acknowledged and leveraged as a resource for learning to create multiple entry points for learners that enable them to draw on their diverse cultural, linguistic, and social identities as assets in the classroom.

<u>Personal motivations:</u>

As someone who is embedded in South Africa's complex and pluralistic socio-cultural context, I am aware of the disconnect between formal education and the lived realities of learners. Growing up and working in a context where languages, cultures, and identities intersect in dynamic and often contested ways has highlighted the limitations of monolithic educational practices. Personally, this study is a response to the systemic erasure of pluralistic diversity (cultural, linguistic and social) in educational spaces which I have witnessed both as a learner and as an

educator. It is driven by a commitment to affirm the identities of learners like myself, who had to navigate multiple cultural and linguistic worlds and often find these experiences dismissed in formal education.

As a student in a South African context, my social and academic lives were regarded as separate and isolated experiences. My social life represented vibrant parts of my identities that were deeply rooted in multiple cultures, constructed and negotiated identities and a wide range of linguistic repertoires. This domain of my life was the closest representation of who I am. Therefore, I struggled to position myself within academic spaces as it required me to leave who I was outside the classroom space and conform to academic norms and dominant Anglo-culture of 'behaving, thinking and being' in a particular way, and only speaking 'proper' English when I was at school. My experiences and life outside the classroom were not integrated into my learning, as this was not regarded as important to achieve academic success.

Isolating my social and academic lives created struggles of positioning myself in the world as I had to switch between different identities across my personal/social and academic contexts to belong and to be accepted. After many years of this, I felt as if my personal and social identities, cultures and resources were deficits in the academic space, and as a teenager trying to navigate through life, I attempted to eliminate aspects of my identity and replace it with dominant cultures enforced by the schooling system. Therefore, in a diverse society rich in cultural heritage, I am motivated to create educational spaces that provide quality education by honouring and empowering students from diverse backgrounds to mobilise their existing pluralistic resources and identities as assets in the learning space. This is necessary due to South Africa's superdiverse context within the schooling system as it challenges traditional pedagogies and power relations that exist in terms of race, culture and language and it supports a social agenda in education. It expands on ridged notions of academic success to include both dominant and non-dominant forms knowledge which attempts to build a bridge between personal/social and academic contexts.

Professional motivations:

My role as an educator and researcher of language education has revealed how traditional approaches to English language teaching fail to create inclusive learning environments. The

reliance on rigid, monomodal, text-based practices often does not appeal to learners, particularly in classroom contexts that include a diverse youth demographic. We are currently dealing with a generation whose lives are governed by multimodal and digital technology. Learners in the 21st century have become accustomed to sharing their lives and identities online. For example, constructing a WhatsApp status to share an opinion about the daily news, posting a picture on Instagram to show what they had for lunch, or showcasing dance moves to the latest TikTok trend have become daily literacy practices and these are part of youth culture identities. Even though social media and contemporary literacy modes have become integral to how the youth navigate and express their identities, they are frequently undervalued and isolated from teaching that happens in schools (Stein, 2008). This decontextualises education which has negative implications for learners in the 21st century as it disregards their positionality and out of school literacy practices, leaving no opportunities for personalised and authentic forms of learning (Bomer, 2017). Thus, creating a significant gap between the learners' lives inside and outside of the classroom. This study responds to this gap by integrating multimodal storytelling, particularly cross-pollination where stories are remixed across modes (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) to engage with a range of multimodal literacies and capitalise on existing cultural, linguistic and social resources as entry points and epistemological access to learning.

In the research conducted during my Master's degree (Vally Essa, 2019), I have witnessed the transformative impact of multimodal and responsive teaching methods that acknowledge and celebrate students' unique identities, linguistic abilities, and cultural resources that were generated through methodologies of collaborative storytelling. I have seen how students thrive when their diverse resources and lived experiences are recognised and valued, leading to increased motivation to engage in the classroom, and a deepened sense of self-worth, identity expression, and creative and cognitive development. Through this, I also recognised the need for innovative approaches that go beyond traditional methods of English language learning to engage and empower learners. Therefore, I take this further and in this thesis by challenging traditional notions of writing and storytelling by engaging with literacy as a social practice through collaborative approaches of cross-pollinating (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) stories across a wider range of modes and genres to enable multiple access points of learning through diverse social and academic knowledge systems. Cross-pollinating stories with a social agenda across modes draws on an ecological and sociocultural perspective, indicating that diverse resources and repertoires in the language

classroom are not separate entities (Dagenais et al., 2017). It is a contribution that I add to the field of storytelling to capitalise on diverse student resources, and it encourages students to become active participants in their learning by mobilising their existing resources and repertoires which helps to establish agency and positionality within their learning, while engaging with social agendas that ignite social consciousness and social action that values diverse forms of knowledge.

Academic motivations:

The academic motivation for this study lies in addressing the urgent need for more nuanced, context-specific research that applies multimodal and sociocultural approaches to language learning within South Africa. While the body of international scholarship on multimodality has grown substantially in recent decades, as evidenced by the works of Kress (2010), Bezemer and Kress (2008, 2017), Dagenais et al. (2017), Jewitt (2014), Kalantzis and Cope (2023), Low et al. (2021), and Warner (2024), much of this research remains heavily rooted in how multimodality enhances learning and language learning through means of inclusivity and expanding on reading and writing practices within Global North contexts, where educational systems, socio-cultural dynamics, and digital infrastructures differ markedly from those in the Global South. As such, these studies, though pivotal in advancing multimodal literacy, often fail to fully address the specificities of multicultural and multilingual environments like South Africa, which present unique challenges and opportunities for language learning.

South Africa's linguistic landscape is one of its greatest assets, with 11 official languages and countless dialects and cultural expressions. However, the educational system has yet to capitalise on the integration of multimodality and diversity as a resource for learning (McKinney, Carrim, Marshall and Layton, 2015; Posel and Zeller, 2019). In South Africa, where the linguistic landscape is characterized by a high degree of linguistic diversity and a history of inequitable educational access, the application of multimodal and sociocultural theories requires careful consideration of local cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. In particular, the widespread use of multiple languages in the classroom, many of which are not the dominant medium of instruction requires teaching approaches that go beyond traditional textual and oral modes of communication to include a range of semiotic resources such as images, gestures, digital tools, and visual texts. Furthermore, South African learners often navigate complex socio-economic barriers

that impact access to digital technologies, thus necessitating an adaptation of multimodal strategies to suit resource-constrained environments.

Multimodal and sociocultural approaches to language learning have the potential to bridge the gap between these complex linguistic and socio-economic realities and the needs of learners. Multimodal resources allow learners to make sense of their diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultural knowledge, promoting deeper engagement with both the content and the learning process. By integrating multimodal teaching strategies that draw on diverse semiotic modes of communication, it can support learners in making connections between abstract concepts and their lived experiences, thereby enhancing their understanding and retention of language material.

However, despite the promise of these approaches, there remains a scarcity of research that directly examines how these global multimodal frameworks can be localised to meet the needs of South African students. Most of the existing studies focus on contexts in the Global North, where educational systems are often more homogeneous and digital resources are more accessible. These studies may overlook crucial issues such as the need for language learning to occur in settings where learners' home languages and diverse epistemological access are marginalised in the classroom or where digital tools may not be universally available. South African educators and learners face a unique challenge which is the pressure to master a global lingua franca, such as English, while also navigating a multilingual environment where multiple languages carry different social, economic, and cultural capital.

Moreover, South Africa’s sociocultural dynamics, shaped by its apartheid history and ongoing social inequalities, further complicate the use of multimodal strategies in classrooms. Language in this context is not just a tool for communication but a marker of identity, power, and access to resources. Thus, any research on multimodal language learning in South Africa must consider the intersections of language with issues of race, class, and power, which are critical in understanding how learners make meaning in a multimodal, multilingual and multicultural society.

By focusing on these specific challenges and opportunities, this study seeks to fill an important gap in the literature. It aims to provide a more localised understanding of how multimodal and sociocultural approaches to language learning can be effectively adapted to enhance the literacy development of South African students. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the academic

conversation on multimodal literacy and also to the development of more inclusive and contextually relevant educational practices in South Africa. Through this research, the potential of multimodal approaches to foster a deeper, more equitable engagement with language learning in diverse classrooms can be better understood and more effectively implemented.

Academic frameworks such as transduction (Kress, 1997, 2010; Bezemer & Kress, 2008) and multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022) provide critical tools for addressing these gaps. By moving narratives/stories across visual, written, verbal, and performative modes, learners can connect their cultural, linguistic, and social repertoires with academic content, creating richer, more inclusive learning experiences. This study contributes to the growing body of research that argues for the integration of multimodal and sociocultural approaches to disrupt deep-rooted educational hierarchies and foster more equitable pedagogies.

Newfield (2023) acknowledges academic staff at the University of the Witwatersrand, languages, literatures and literacies (LLL) division who were inspired by non-binary *"diversity in classrooms, as well as, crucially, for negotiating the often tricky cultural crossings undertaken by many of the students – between traditional ways of life and those of Eurocentric educational systems"* (5), which resulted in transformative projects and approaches to tertiary education pedagogy and content. I was trained under this division during my Bachelor of Education and postgraduate studies in English and language education. Through my higher education and training at the University of the Witwatersrand, these educators and scholars inspired the role of language and literacies in education, creative writing, multimodality, and diversity and inclusive education with a social justice agenda. I noticed a mismatch between my training in comparison to language curriculum in schools and pedagogy in practice by English language educators in schools.

Post-apartheid education reform policies were structured to engage with student resources as asset pedagogies by celebrating the diversity that learners bring to the academic context. The South African constitution (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996), Language in Education Policy (1997) and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (2011) theoretically encourage and support diversity and transformative education through the inclusion of students' languages, cultures, social practices and multimodality within language learning. While the post-apartheid curriculum emphasises inclusivity and social justice, its implementation often falls short, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms due to Anglo-centric norms that

marginalise learners whose identities and knowledge systems do not align with these standards (Janks, 2010; McKinney, 2017). The details within these policies are narrow and fragmented due to its vague nature and attempts to engage with diversity in a superficial and hyper-inclusive manner which threatens the success of implementing pedagogical approaches aimed at mobilising existing resources. Diversity is closely linked to quality education (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011) and therefore, quality education is at risk because curriculum and pedagogy in practice in South African English language classrooms fails to cater for and engage with diverse cultural, linguistic and social identities and resources that students possess. Another challenge of these policies is that teachers are often not equipped and knowledgeable on how to implement these multimodal and multicultural pedagogies which results in systematic failure within the education system to cater for diverse learners and cultural injustice (Khunou, 2021).

This study contributes to challenging traditional, monomodal approaches to English language teaching, which often fail to address the realities of contemporary South African learners. By using multimodal cross-pollination through storytelling, it redefines what counts as academic knowledge and success by shifting the focus from Anglocentric notions of linguistic success to the ability to navigate and integrate diverse semiotic resources. I argue that storytelling across modes enriches learners' engagement and fosters critical social consciousness, equipping them to interrogate and challenge societal inequalities and notions of power. Through this thesis, I aim to contribute to the scholarly discourse on multimodality and storytelling by offering practical insights and strategies for educators to navigate the complexities of English language teaching in South Africa. My hope is that by focusing on stories driven by learners' multiple identities (i.e.: cultural and linguistic and social) and a social justice agenda, one can create educational spaces that empower learners to mobilise their diverse, pluralistic resources and become active agents of change in their communities and the world.

1.3. Research questions:

How does the integration of multimodal storytelling in an English language classroom shape learners' engagement with diverse forms of knowledge and resources to create meaningful learning opportunities?

1. What types of stories do learners craft during a multimodal storytelling intervention that emphasize a social agenda?
2. How do learners represent and mobilise their diverse resources and repertoires across different modes of storytelling, and how does this impact their learning?
3. To what extent do learners' stories illustrate the transformative affordances and limitations of multimodal cross-pollination?

Building on the introduction that established the need for a more inclusive, context-specific approach to language learning in South Africa, this study now turns to the theoretical foundations and literature that support the exploration of multimodal and sociocultural strategies through storytelling in an English language classroom. In Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review, the study will review key concepts such as multimodal literacy, transduction, and cross-pollination, exploring how these frameworks engage with diverse semiotic resources and can be applied to broaden the scope of academic achievement in language learning. This chapter will also engage with literature on how dominant Anglo-cultural practices in language education can marginalise the diverse linguistic, cultural, and social resources that learners bring into the classroom. Therefore, supporting the need for critical multimodal storytelling approaches to engage with and mobilise diverse resources as entry points to learning. Moving forward, Chapter 3: Methodology will detail the qualitative research design, participant information, the intervention and data collection methods, such as Instagram posts, multimodal stories, teacher interviews, and focus group discussions, used during this study. Chapter 4: Overview of Collaborative Stories will introduce the stories crafted by the groups of learners during the intervention, shedding light on their social consciousness and the issues they chose to address. Chapter 5: Mobilising Resources and Repertoires through storytelling across modes will illustrate a selected range of Instagram posts and analyse in relation to their collaborative stories to understand how learners leveraged a variety of resources ranging from language to critical social consciousness to craft their multimodal stories, thus creating pathways for personal expression and academic engagement. In Chapter 6: Multimodal cross-pollination of stories, the study will explore the process of transducing stories across different modes, examining how this cross-pollination approach enabled the learners to connect their lived experiences and resources to the learning process and challenge

traditional conceptions of language education. Finally, chapter 7: Conclusion will reflect on the transformative potential and limitations of cross-pollinating multimodal stories in fostering a more inclusive and dynamic language learning environment, offering recommendations for further research and practice. Through these chapters, the thesis aims to demonstrate how multimodal storytelling can bridge the gap between formal education and learners' social realities, ultimately providing a more meaningful and pluralistic approach to English language learning.

TWO

Chapter 2:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes a theoretical framework and a literature review. The purpose of a theoretical framework is to provide a structured lens through which the research question, h*ow does the integration of multimodal storytelling in an English language classroom shape learners' engagement with diverse forms of knowledge and resources to create meaningful learning opportunities?* is examined and understood. The theoretical framework situates the study within established theories that guide the data analysis and interpretation while ensuring consistency and coherence in the research approach. The literature review that follows, aims to contextualise the study within a broader scholarly conversation. This chapter reviews the body of literature that informs and contextualises this study's investigation into the role of multimodal storytelling in fostering learner identities, criticality, and agency within a South African educational setting. Grounded in the broader fields of literacy studies, critical pedagogy, and multimodal discourse analysis, the review traces key debates and conceptual shifts around identity as performative and plural, storytelling as a pedagogical tool, and multimodality as a means of meaning-making. It draws on both local and global scholarship to map how learners mobilise their linguistic, cultural, and semiotic repertoires in educational spaces, particularly within contexts marked by inequality and diverse social realities. In doing so, this chapter establishes the conceptual and empirical foundations upon which the study builds and identifies gaps that this research seeks to address through its focus on learner-authored digital narratives.

Theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study which explores multimodal storytelling within the context of English language education. Central to the theory is the socio-cultural turn (Vygotsky, 1978, 2004; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Bodrova and Leong, 2015; Daniels, 2016; Eun, 2017; Gee, 1996; Johnson, 2007; Paris and Alim, 2014; Street, 1993; Tudge and Winterhoff, 1993) which emphasises the role of social interaction, culturally situated contexts,

and learners' diverse resources in meaning-making. Building on this foundation, the concepts of heteroglossia and multivoicedness highlight the multiplicity of voices and diverse perspectives in storytelling which reflects learners' linguistic and cultural diversity. Lastly, the study draws on theories of creativity to examine how learners use multimodal storytelling as a dynamic and imaginative process for identity expression and critical engagement. These interrelated theoretical lenses provide a foundation for understanding how learners mobilise their pluralistic resources and repertoires in English language education contexts (Kress, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978; Bakhtin, 1981).

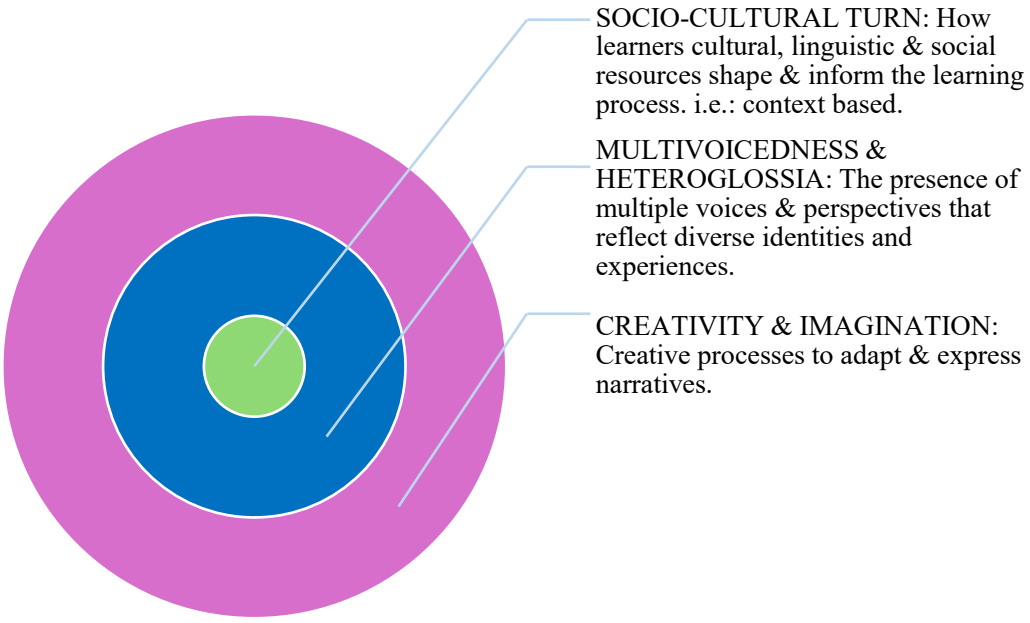


Figure 1: Relation between theoretical framework elements

There is a relationship between the components discussed in the theoretical framework in the context of cross-pollinating multimodal stories to engage with learners diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires. The diagram above captures this indicating that moving from the socio-cultural turn to multivoicedness indicates that diverse cultural and social contexts lead to the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices in the storytelling process. The move from multivoicedness to creativity indicates that the range of voices and experiences represented in the stories provides rich material for learners to use their creativity to develop new meanings and interpretations. Moving from the socio-cultural turn to creativity indicates that the socio-cultural

context shapes the creative processes of learners by providing a framework of cultural resources they can draw from when engaging in storytelling. These components work together in the process of crafting multimodal stories.

2.1. The socio-cultural turn in English language education

The socio-cultural turn in education, particularly in language learning, has reshaped our understanding of how knowledge is constructed, shared, and mediated. It is rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978) which emphasises the social nature of learning that positions culture and context as central to understanding human cognition and communication. Vygotsky's foundational contributions to the socio-cultural turn are grounded in his assertion that cognitive development is inherently social, mediated through language and interaction. Central to Vygotsky's theory is the concept of mediation, where cognitive processes are shaped through cultural tools such as language, symbols, and social practices (Vygotsky, 1978). Language, according to Vygotsky, is not only a means of communication but also a tool for thought, shaping the ways in which individuals understand and engage with the world around them. In the context of language learning,

Vygotsky's work suggests that learning occurs within social interactions and is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical contexts in which learners operate. Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the gap between what a learner can do and achieve independently and what they can do with the help of more knowledgeable others. This approach emphasises the importance of collaboration, and scaffolding the support provided by teachers or peers that allows learners to engage in tasks just beyond their independent capabilities, facilitating their progression within their ZPD. The ZPD highlights the importance of social interaction and sharing of cultural capital in learning to provide multiple entry points for learners to reach their full potential. Thus, the intervention of this study draws on a socio-cultural approach to learning, specifically through collaborative multimodal writing tasks as cognitive development is tied to socially mediated processes of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Just like Vygotsky (1978), Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that learners develop understanding through participation in communities of practice where knowledge is co-constructed through

shared experiences. In an English language classroom, this implies that learners' engagement with their peers, teachers, and cultural, linguistic, and social resources is critical for developing language proficiency. For example, collaborative storytelling activities allow learners to use their diverse resources to craft and share narratives. These activities foster a sense of belonging and identity as learners collectively construct meaning. By drawing on their personal experiences and community knowledge in collaborative settings, learners actively participate in shaping the classroom as a community of practice and draw on each other as essential resources for learning as they build on cultural capital.

Vygotsky's theories of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), cultural mediation, and social interaction have had a profound impact on the way we conceptualise language learning, particularly in environments marked by linguistic and cultural diversity. These theories value the cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires that learners bring into the classroom. This perspective moves away from decontextualised, skills-based approaches to language learning towards understanding how language, identity, and meaning-making are co-constructed in specific cultural and social contexts. This approach positions learners as active agents whose identities, resources, and repertoires play a central role in shaping meaning-making processes. In English language education, the socio-cultural turn challenges traditional emphasis on monolingualism and formal correctness, by advocating for pedagogies that value and mobilise learners' diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires as resources for learning (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014). While its integration into English language education has brought valuable insights, the application of this theory is important in diverse contexts like South Africa as it requires critical inquiry to ensure that it meaningfully addresses systemic inequalities, identity politics, and pedagogical practices.

Gee's (1996) work expanded Vygotsky's ideas into the field of literacy. He introduced the concept of Discourses (with a capital D) to refer to the ways in which language is used to negotiate social roles, identities, and power structures. Gee (1996) argued that literacy cannot be separated from the social practices in which it is embedded. Gee's ideas on literacy highlight the socio-cultural nature of learning, proposing that literacy involves not only decoding written text but also participating in a wide range of social practices that give meaning to language and language learning (Gee, 1996). This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's ideas of learning as a social, context-

dependent activity, highlighting that language learners bring diverse cultural and social resources that shape how they engage with literacy tasks. Drawing on Gee's work, the writing brief of the intervention in this study aligns with his concept of Discourse and uses a social agenda to storytelling as a means to merge literacy and social practices that interrogate social roles, identities and power structures.

Brian Street's (2005) work on new literacy studies challenges traditional notions of literacy as a neutral set of skills to be acquired and argues that literacy is a social practice shaped by context, power, and ideology. Street (2005) views literacy as multifaceted, encompassing various forms of knowledge that learners use in their everyday lives. He argues that literacy can "autonomously" (417) have an impact on social and cognitive practices. Street (2005) states that literacy practices vary across cultures and communities, emphasising the need to consider the diverse social and cultural practices that influence how individuals learn and use language. This notion of literacy as practice aligns with Vygotsky's view that learning is inseparable from the social environment in which it occurs, offering a broader lens through which to view language learning in multimodal, multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) argue that literacy practices are shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts and that the meaning of literacy is not fixed but evolves through social interaction and cultural engagement. Their view of literacy is fluid and pluralistic and they highlight the importance of understanding literacy in relation to real-world contexts, emphasising that literacy practices are not universal but vary across different communities. In line with Vygotsky, Barton and Hamilton (2000) view literacy as a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon, shaped by the roles individuals play in their communities and the resources they have access to, thus indicating that individual experiences and identities play a significant role in literacy practices and shaping meaning.

Johnson (2007) discusses the implications of the socio-cultural turn for second language teacher education. Even though this study takes place in an English home language classroom, consideration with regards to second language learning is important as the participants are diverse in relation to their pluralistic identities, particularly languages that they speak. Johnson (2007) explores how sociocultural theory challenges traditional approaches to second language teaching,

which often prioritises cognitive and behaviourist models. She argues that the socio-cultural turn requires a shift towards more interactive and context-based teaching methods, where teachers view language learning as a process that is co-constructed through social interaction and negotiation. She calls for second language teaching to recognise and draw on the cultural, linguistic, and social resources that learners bring to the classroom, thereby promoting more inclusive and effective language learning practices. This study is a means to address that call by using multimodal storytelling to engage with a range of learners cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires.

2.1.1. Language as a resource for learning

The socio-cultural turn emphasises the role of cultural tools, particularly language, in cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural context in the learning process, positioning language as a crucial mediator for cognitive engagement and meaning making. He argues that learning occurs through participation in culturally meaningful activities facilitated by tools such as language (Vygotsky, 1978). This framework is particularly significant in language education, where language is both the medium of instruction and the object of learning itself.

Language, as a cultural tool, is intricately linked to identity and social belonging. Scholars like Botsis (2017) and Ngugi (1986) argue that language is not merely a means of communication but a vehicle for carrying culture and identity. This is especially pertinent in diverse classrooms where learners bring their own unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds, shaping the way they interpret and engage with new content. The socio-cultural turn foregrounds the role of identity in learning, arguing that language practices are not only a tool for communication but also a means through which individuals negotiate their membership in various social groups. Gee's (2000) concept of Discourse underscores the interconnectedness of language and identity, illustrating how learners' language use reflects their social affiliations and participation in communities. Gee's notion of discourse further supports the view that learners' languages and semiotic practices contribute to their identity construction, which is a critical component in the socio-cultural approach to

education. As learners draw on their multilingual resources, they engage with multiple social and cultural discourses, thus shaping their sense of self and their place in the world (Gee, 2000).

Because of the recognition of the importance of social and cultural contexts, socio-cultural theories can encompass diverse linguistic repertoires such as home languages, dialects, and multilingual practices, which learners can use to foster deeper engagement with content and facilitate more effective learning (García & Wei, 2014). Rather than viewing the diverse languages and linguistic repertoires that learners possess as obstacles to learning English, the socio-cultural turn considers these linguistic resources as assets. Language is no longer seen as a static system of rules but as a dynamic repertoire for meaning making. Warner (2024) traces the shift in second-language learning from comprehension-oriented models to approaches that are more socially and culturally situated. She describes language as a "*dynamic repertoire of resources for making meaning in and out of the world*" (4), highlighting the importance of multiliteracies in contemporary language education. Levine (2020) echoes this, conceptualisation of language as a transformative tool that enables individuals to interact with the complex social systems around them. This evolving understanding of language places greater emphasis on its social and social justice dimensions, as language learning is seen as an issue of identity, power, and representation (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004).

In the context of multilingual education, García & Wei (2014) argue that learners should be encouraged to fluidly draw upon all their linguistic resources. This aligns with the socio-cultural turn, which views learners' diverse linguistic repertoires as resources for both communication and cognitive development. In South Africa, where learners often navigate multiple languages and dialects, these resources can be particularly powerful. The socio-cultural perspective on language learning advocates for the validation of learners' linguistic identities, which are often marginalised in traditional, Anglonormative educational systems which often exists in South African English language classrooms (McKinney, 2017). A multimodal storytelling intervention that incorporates learners' full range of languages and dialects can support this process by fostering agency and recognising the rich diversity of learners' identities, in line with Botsis (2017) assertion that language, whether written or multimodal to construct narratives is a visceral site of identity construction.

However, implementing multilingual pedagogies in English classrooms often presents challenges due to Anglonormative ideologies (McKinney, 2017) that privilege standard English as the sole mode of instruction and assessment. McKinney (2017) critiques these monoglossic ideologies that fail to recognise the value of multilingualism, which often results in tokenistic approaches to language education. To align with a socio-cultural orientation, a multimodal storytelling intervention must embrace multilingualism as a valid practice that honours learners' linguistic identities while critiquing dominant educational and social discourses that perpetuate inequality. This perspective challenges the traditional power structures in language education and promotes a more inclusive approach that views language as a means of identity expression, critical reflection, and a tool for social change. Thus, the socio-cultural turn calls for a more inclusive, dynamic, and critical approach to language education, one that recognises and mobilises the rich linguistic and cultural resources that learners bring to the classroom. By framing language as a social practice that is tied to identity and community, this approach fosters a more equitable learning environment that values linguistic diversity as a means of empowerment, both for learners and for the broader social context in which they live.

While multimodality, multiliteracies, and language are closely interconnected and rooted in the socio-cultural turn, each of these components emphasises distinct aspects of learning and meaning making. Multimodality highlights the diverse modes of communication and their role in shaping understanding, while multiliteracies expand on the idea that literacy goes beyond traditional text to encompass various forms of representation. Language, as discussed, is a crucial tool for identity construction and cognitive development within social contexts. Each of these elements contributes to a broader, more inclusive perspective on learning. Moving forward, the next section will explore the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and multivoicedness, which provide further insight into how language, identity, and social interaction intersect in dynamic and transformative ways. These ideas deepen our understanding of how diverse voices and perspectives influence learning, particularly within multimodal, multilingual and multicultural environments.

2.1.2. Multimodality and socio-cultural theory

A focal point in this study is on multimodality, particularly how multimodal texts enable a wide range of resources to be used as access points to learn. The relationship between multimodality and the socio-cultural turn lies in their shared conceptualisation of viewing learning as a socially situated, culturally mediated process that draws on a wide range of resources and experiences. The socio-cultural turn emphasises that knowledge construction is not a solitary, cognitive activity but one that is deeply embedded in social contexts. It stresses that learning occurs through interaction within culturally and historically situated environments, where language, tools, and social practices shape how individuals make meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Gee, 1996; Street, 2005).

Therefore, in this context multimodality builds on the socio-cultural turn by recognising that meaning making is not confined to verbal or written language alone. Instead, it involves a diverse range of semiotic modes such as images, gestures, sounds, and digital technologies that learners draw on to communicate, interact, and construct knowledge (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010). These modes are social and cultural resources in themselves, reflecting the varied and changing ways in which people interact with the world and express meaning in different contexts (Kress, 2010).

Multimodal theory highlights that modes are not neutral, but rather, they are shaped by the social, cultural, and historical conditions in which they are used. For instance, in a classroom setting, students' multimodal expressions ranging from verbal storytelling to digital representations reflect individual cognitive processes and the broader cultural and social contexts that inform their use of different modes (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). Since multimodal texts are socially and culturally situated, it links to the work of Paris and Alim (2014, 2017) who view multimodality, particularly in contemporary genres as being part of youth and digital cultures that are pluralistic and hybrid in which learners can express multiple aspects of their identities and experiences. This is significant in 21st century language and literacy practices as it considers the social uses of multimodal communication. This aligns with Pahl and Rowsell's (2011) work on artefactual literacies, which emphasises the significance of learners' lived experiences, everyday practices, and resources as entry points into literacy learning.

The emphasis on social context in the socio-cultural turn further supports the argument for multimodality in education. Street (2005) argues that literacy should not be viewed as a set of

decontextualized skills, but rather as practices that vary according to the sociocultural environments in which they are enacted. Multimodal literacy practices, particularly in the context of this study reflects the cultural diversity and social realities of learners, providing multiple points of entry for engagement with content. This view is aligned with Gee's (1996) concept of Discourse where language and communication are understood as social practices that are embedded in particular contexts. In multimodal learning environments, students are not merely acquiring linguistic skills but are engaging in culturally meaningful practices that combine language, image, and other modes of representation.

The socio-cultural turn highlights the importance of learner agency which refers to the ability of learners to shape and direct their own learning. In multimodal frameworks, agency is recognised as central to how learners select and use different modes to express their identities and engage with the world around them. The flexible and dynamic nature of multimodal storytelling, for example, empowers learners to use their linguistic, cultural, and social resources in innovative ways. By allowing learners to move between different modes, such as written text, visual, verbal and kinaesthetic modes, multimodal approaches provide avenues for students to express themselves more fully and creatively, fostering a sense of ownership and control over their learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Cross-pollination of resources, a term used by Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022), illustrates this further by describing the ways in which learners' diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds can be enabled and transformed through different modes. This process of cross-pollination in multimodal storytelling allows for the fusion of various knowledge systems, thereby acknowledging the plurality of learners' experiences and enabling them to draw on a rich array of resources to construct meaning. This aligns with Vygotsky's view that learning is a process of transformation through social interaction, where learners' existing knowledge is recontextualised and extended through cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Multimodality thus serves as a means to enact this transformation by providing students with the opportunity to engage their full repertoire of semiotic resources.

Multimodality facilitates inclusive learning by making space for learners from diverse backgrounds to bring their full range of knowledge, skills, and experiences to bear in the learning

process. This inclusivity is a key tenet of the socio-cultural turn, which seeks to challenge traditional, monolingual, and monolithic approaches to learning (Paris & Alim, 2014). Multimodal approaches recognise that learners use modes distinctively, and each mode offers them the opportunity to learn and express their understanding in ways that are most relevant to their personal, cultural and contextual experiences.

The socio-cultural turn, particularly through its emphasis on multimodality (Kress, 2010), has significantly challenged the dominance of text-based literacy by foregrounding the diverse ways in which meaning is made through multiple semiotic resources. Multimodal storytelling interventions have the potential to empower learners by enabling them to draw on their full repertoire of linguistic, cultural, and semiotic resources. However, the transformative potential of such interventions is contingent on several critical factors: learners must have access to multimodal tools and resources, educators require adequate training in multimodal pedagogies, and institutions must provide the structural support needed to implement and sustain innovative approaches. Without addressing these prerequisites, such interventions risk reproducing rather than disrupting existing inequalities.

While multimodality is often celebrated for its inclusivity and capacity to enrich learning, it is essential to critically examine its limitations. The affordances of multimodality should not be uncritically valorised, as this can mask unequal power dynamics. For example, interventions that engage with learners' cultural and linguistic practices should not be superficially praised as additive, and instead, it should be integrated into meaningful asset-based pedagogies that genuinely enhance learning and challenge deficit narratives. Superficial engagement may reinforce hierarchical valuations of modes and resources which privilege some forms of expression while marginalising others, rather than fostering equitable participation.

2.2. Multimodality and multiliteracies

Multimodality and multiliteracies are both critical frameworks for understanding contemporary communication and learning, particularly in the context of English language education. While they are interconnected, these concepts differ in scope and focus. Multiliteracies is a term introduced

by the New London Group (1996) which expands the notion of traditional literacy to include a variety of literacy practices that arise from cultural, linguistic, and technological diversity and advancements. Multiliteracies highlights the importance of being literate across multiple contexts, particularly in a globalised and digital world. This refers to the ability to read and write across a range of traditional and contemporary modes and genres. Unlike multimodality, which emphasises the integration of semiotic resources, multiliteracies focus on the skills and competencies needed to navigate diverse textual and cultural landscapes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Multimodality, as theorised by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) refers to the use of multiple modes such as text, image, sound, and gestures to create meaning. This framework highlights that communication is inherently multimodal where different modes working together to convey complex meanings.

This section of the literature review explores the theoretical underpinnings and application of multiliteracies and multimodality with a particular focus on semiotic resources, language/s and identities. The discussion begins with multiliteracies which lays the groundwork for examining multimodality, which is integral to understand how multimodality operates within similar frameworks of meaning-making, but has a particular focus on modes, whereas multiliteracies is focused on the ways in which these modes are enacted. This study focuses on diversity, inclusion, and the cultural or linguistic dimensions of literacy practices therefore starting with multiliteracies grounds the discussion in the sociocultural and educational contexts that inform multimodal practices. Thereafter, the discussion shifts to outlining the foundational theory of multimodality and semiotic studies (Kress, 2010; Newfield, 2011) to contemporary applications in digital and multimedia contexts. Following this, the concept of transduction and multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) is examined, highlighting its significance in enabling dynamic and fluid movement across different modes of communication.

2.2.1. Multiliteracies in education

The relationship between multimodality and multiliteracies lies in their shared emphasis on diversity and agency in meaning-making. Multimodality is a subset of multiliteracies, and it foregrounds the critical and creative interpretation and creation of multimodal texts. Multiliteracies brings attention to the diverse modes, media, and discourses in language learning (Warner, 2024).

The concept of multiliteracies was introduced by the New London Group (1996) to address literacy challenges due to an evolving globalised and technologically driven world. Traditional literacy practices foreground monolingual and monomodal reading and writing which is insufficient for diverse and contemporary means of communication. Therefore, the aim of multiliteracies in education is to accommodate diverse ways of knowing and communicating which reflects the realities of multilingual and multicultural societies (New London Group, 1996). In an attempt to move away from monomodality and towards multiliteracies, the New London Group suggests that literacy practices must integrate modes beyond written text, to include visual, audio, spatial, and gestural modes of communication. The focus on these modes recognise that meaning making is not limited to linguistic systems, but involves an interplay of semiotic resources that learners navigate in their daily lives, particularly in digital contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). This intersection is particularly relevant to 21st-century educational goals, where competencies in multimodal and multiliterate practices are essential for participation in globalised and interconnected societies.

Within a South African context, Newfield (2024) outlines three generations of multiliteracy eras. The first generation was from 1994-2000 which focused on experimental pedagogies in teacher education. These include the use of local texts, dramatization of canonical literature, and integration of multimodal tools at a basic level. The second generation was from 2000-2010 and involved the expansion and implementation of multiliteracies, such as projects that emphasise storytelling, multimodal teaching strategies, and inclusive curriculum. The third generation began in 2010, and we are still currently experiencing this era of multiliteracies. This includes broader applications of multiliteracies which include non-traditional socio-cultural resources and contents such as plurality, and both dominant and non-dominant languages and life experiences. Application of this generation of multiliteracy involves breaking down barriers to merge classroom and informal literacy practices and contexts. The focus of this study to include diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources as entry points to learning resonates strongly with the conceptualisation and aims of multiliteracies in this era as it aims to provide holistic language learning by bridging gaps between home, social and school contexts.

Multiliteracies explicitly acknowledges and incorporates contemporary learners' everyday literacy practices, which are often shaped by digital technologies and social interactions. Scholars such as

Pahl and Rowsell (2012) have highlighted how learners bring rich, multimodal repertoires from their lived experiences into classrooms. Bomer (2017) is not a multiliteracies scholar, but there are several overlaps between the work of some multiliteracies scholars and those working in the field of socio-cultural approaches to education. Bomer (2017) writes from a culturally responsive pedagogy perspective and states that integrating learners' home and social literacy practices into academic work is important as it values literacies that learners already use and makes teaching and learning responsive, while fostering an interest and engagement to learn. In the 21st century, these multiliteracy practices include social media platforms, multimodal narratives and hybrid forms of literacy that include integrating semiotic resources for communication.

Multiliteracies addresses two key challenges which are the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of societies and the proliferation of multimodal communication technologies. It advocates for pedagogies that empower learners to navigate and produce meaning in varied semiotic landscapes. The critique of multiliteracies being reduced to digital literacies underscores the importance of retaining the framework's broader scope. Kalantzis and Cope (2020, 2023) advocate for integrating multiliteracies into digital and collaborative learning environments, emphasizing their potential to engage learners and address the complex multimodal demands of 21st-century education. However, there is a risk that such emphasis could narrow the framework to primarily digital competencies, neglecting its foundational aim of inclusivity across diverse modes of communication. As Kress (2010) argues, multiliteracies extend beyond digital technologies to encompass a range of semiotic resources, including visual, oral, gestural, and spatial modes of meaning-making. This broader perspective is crucial in contexts where access to technology is unequal, or where cultural practices are rooted in non-digital modes, such as oral storytelling or multilingual traditions. For example, in South African classrooms, emphasising digital literacies without acknowledging indigenous and multilingual practices risks perpetuating systemic inequalities rather than addressing them (Prinsloo & Janks, 2002; Newfield, 2011).

To avoid reducing multiliteracies to digital literacies, educators must adopt a balanced approach that integrates digital tools as part of a wider multimodal pedagogy. While digital tools provide valuable opportunities for collaboration and participation, they should complement rather than overshadow other forms of expression. This aligns with the socio-cultural principles underpinning multiliteracies, which seek to value all forms of communication and meaning making (Kalantzis

& Cope, 2020). Critical engagement with digital affordances can help ensure that they enhance, rather than constrain the inclusivity of educational practices. For example, incorporating oral storytelling traditions alongside digital storytelling in South African classrooms can bridge cultural practices with technological advancements, fostering a more inclusive learning environment (Stein, 2008). By valuing the full spectrum of learners' linguistic and cultural resources, multiliteracies can fulfil its potential to create equitable and responsive educational spaces.

Technology has transformed the ways that learners engage with content, offering a range of affordances that enhance learning experiences. One of these affordances of multiliteracies include the ability to access materials and participate in learning activities anytime and anywhere which breaks the boundaries of traditional classroom settings. Digital platforms naturally facilitate multimodality and is part of multiliteracies which enables students to integrate written, visual, audio, and spatial elements into their work. This reflects the diverse ways in which meaning is communicated.

Collaboration is another benefit as digital platforms offer collective knowledge building. As students work together, they enhance their metacognition by becoming more aware of their thinking processes through reflection on their learning. Therefore, collaboration is a key element in this study through the use of digital performative storytelling where learners work with multimodality and multiliteracies to craft and enact performative stories in written, audio and performative modes. Multimodality supports differentiated learning by offering the use of multiple modes and personalised pathways to learning that cater to the unique needs, preferences, and interests of individual learners. These affordances redefine the learning process, making it more dynamic, responsive, and learner centred. Kress (2010) and Kalantzis and Cope's (2020) work positions multiliteracies and design as being central to 21st-century learning, as their approach equips learners with the skills to navigate and contribute to a complex, multimodal, and interconnected world.

While multiliteracies and multimodality offers transformative potential, they also face critiques and challenges. One critique pertains to the theoretical complexity and ambiguity of these frameworks. Scholars like Lillis (2013) argue that the expansive scope of multimodality risks reducing its analytical precision. Similarly, the multiliteracies framework has been critiqued for

its uneven implementation in classrooms which is a result of by systemic constraints such as standardised curricula and assessment regimes (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020). Another challenge lies in the digital divide, particularly in a South African context which exacerbates inequalities in access to multimodal resources and technologies. While multimodality emphasises the affordances of diverse modes, it often overlooks the material and infrastructural limitations that shape learners' experiences (Rowsell et al., 2017). Addressing these disparities requires systemic efforts to ensure equitable access to digital and multimodal resources.

2.2.2. Defining multimodality

Literacy in the 21st century expands beyond reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is about the use and production of texts and communication to meet the demands of various contexts and situations (Wells and Lyons, 2016). This does not mean the removal of traditional approaches, but rather, *"literacy in and for the 21st century is about understanding how we use different mediums to create different versions of meaning*" as it is predominantly multimodal (Wells and Lyons, 2016, 5). Multimodality emerged from the field of social semiotics, and it has influenced contemporary understanding of communication and meaning making. Multimodality refers to the integration and interplay of multiple modes of communication in meaning-making processes, where meaning is derived from a combination of semiotic resources such as text, images, audio, and gestures to create and interpret meaning (Kress, 2010). A "*multimodal approach centres upon the acknowledgment of all the meaning-making resources in human life – spoken, written, visual, gestural bodily, sonic, spatial*" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). This framework acknowledges that communication and representation occur through diverse modes, each with distinct affordances that contribute to how meaning is created, understood, and shared. Grounded in social semiotics, multimodality provides a lens to analyse how these modes interact dynamically within specific cultural, social, and technological contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Each mode is shaped by its affordances, potential uses and limitations. Written modes of communication refer to language as a means of communication. While the written mode is traditionally dominant in literacy and used in isolation for monomodal approaches to education, in practice this mode often operates alongside other modes in multimodal texts (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). The visual mode includes images, colour, and layout. The visual mode can convey spatial

relationships, evoke emotions, and provide aesthetic appeal. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visuals often carry relational meanings that are complemented or anchored by textual/written information. The audio mode includes sound, speech, and music. This mode can add depth to communication through tone, rhythm, and spoken language. Audio modes can also impact feelings and emotions through mood-setting music in performance genres and films (van Leeuwen, 1999). The kinaesthetic mode includes gestures, body language, facial expressions, and movements. Gestures can enhance communication by emphasising points, conveying emotions, or providing visual cues (Jewitt, 2013). The kinaesthetic mode relies on the body as a primary source of communication. Multimodal communication involves the interplay of these modes, and each mode offers distinct affordance and limitations.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue that all communication is multimodal, as it involves integrating various semiotic resources to produce messages or meaning. Meaning is dependent on the relationship and integration of the different modes involved, and each mode or semiotic resource used serves a different function which contributes to meaning (Archer, 2010). In multimodal forms of communication, modes intersect which is a move away from traditional monomodal conceptualisations of literacy that focuses on language as a sole source of communication, meaning making and expression. Therefore, multimodality subverts the mind/body divide that tends to dominate western learning contexts. While Western pedagogies often prioritise abstract, text-based, and linguistic forms of learning associated with the mind, multimodality recognises the importance of sensory, physical, and emotional engagement associated with the body. By incorporating diverse semiotic modes such as gestures, visuals, verbal and kinaesthetic modes, multimodality positions learning as a holistic and embodied activity, bridging the gap between intellectual and experiential knowledge. This approach challenges the hierarchical privileging of rationality over embodied experience and also fosters inclusivity, creativity, and critical engagement, allowing learners to express and develop understanding in ways that honour the interconnectedness of their cognitive and physical capacities. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) approach multimodality through a social semiotic lens, arguing that modes are culturally and socially shaped resources for making meaning. In multimodal teaching and texts, language can still be present, but it is not necessarily the sole focus of a text as meaning is dependent on other modes and elements within the text that are integrated together. This

acknowledges the diverse ways in which learning, forms of communication and expression can take place (Jewitt, 2008) by catering to different learning preferences and reflects complex representations of real-life communication where modes are seamlessly integrated.

Multimodality can be inclusive of technology, but a text does not necessarily require technology and digital equipment for it to be considered multimodal as it refers to diverse and varied means of communication and expression which is inclusive of the role of one's body and senses (Newfield, 2011). Palmeri (2012) discusses that the field of writing pedagogy has "*a rich multimodal heritage*" (149) that does not require digital technologies as it can entail elements as simple as spoken words, pictures or photographs and movement. It requires meaning making using a range of signs, and it can potentially offer physical, material and social affordances by providing different representational and communicative potentials of expressing and understanding information (Kress, 2010) which promotes agency and often encourages individuals to be active designers when constructing multimodal texts and content (Jewitt, 2008). While this is true, the proliferation of digital media has resulted in people being engaged with digital texts that foreground audio, visual and performative texts. Teaching learners to navigate and produce multimodal texts is essential for developing critical literacy skills which are necessary in this century (Serafini, 2014). Serafini calls for educators to expand their focus beyond traditional literacy that foregrounds monomodality, and to include multimodal texts that learners are accustomed to in their everyday lives.

2.2.3. The relevance of multimodality

Literacy practices have shifted globally beyond print-based reading and writing to include multimodality and it has evolved into multiple forms of expression across a range of modes to illustrate meaning (Kress, 2010; Miller & McVee, 2012). It is "*continuously defined and redefined, changing form, volume, and function as its context shifts*" (Morrell, 2014, 12). This indicates the fluid nature of literacy which shifts from context to context as it adopts new modes, languages, and metalanguage which make up the text. With the progress of time, it is evident that literacy has evolved immensely, and it is important for educators to keep this evolution in mind when engaging with learners and texts in a classroom. For example, years ago, people would wait anxiously to

receive daily news in the form of print media in newspapers. Today, with a click of a button, news is instantly accessed using online modes and social media on electronic devices. Through this, we can see that not only do the functions and elements of the text differ, but also the ways of reading and writing as there is a shift in modes, genres and the way that information is communicated and meaning is made. Literacy within the 21st century calls for not just decoding, but rather a critical understanding and critique of what is being read (Morrell, 2014), therefore, also indicating an evolution which has changed radically over time.

In everyday situations and encounters with literary texts, it is almost impossible to establish meaning from just one mode. For example, when reading a poster or billboard, the visual, language, font, colours and space all work together to create meaning for the reader. Maureen Kendrick's (2016) work on multimodality has been influential in highlighting how meaning-making extends beyond language to include multiple semiotic resources, particularly in diverse sociocultural contexts. Her research emphasises that multimodality is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived practice, shaped by the cultural, social, and historical environments of its participants. Meaning in social and cultural contexts in this century is mostly represented multimodally (Kress, 2010; Miller and McVee, 2012). This has been facilitated by technology and a digital revolution which resulted in new forms of communication and meaning making. Multimodal does not necessarily mean digital technology or multimedia, although it may include elements of it. Multimodality is not confined to technology, but it is important to engage with digital modes in classrooms to advance language pedagogies and engage with multimodal and digital modes that most learners engage with outside the classroom space (Bomer, 2017). This is a consideration for a South African context as many learners' face issues of limited resources, making multimodality that is reliant on technology difficult to access. Therefore, this study makes use of a mix between low-resource multimodality that is easy to access by working with the Instagram genre in print base, and I use high-end technology where the learners are required to use their cellphones to video their transduced performative stories. The incorporation of using video in a classroom context is a limitation in low-resource schools. However, multimodal pedagogy is still possible without the use of video, and instead, the transduced performances can be illustrated to the class of learners. Thus, making multimodal pedagogy possible across a range of different contexts.

The rise and adoption of multimodality and digital media across communities has impacted learning, socialising, and identities. The ability to succeed in the 21st century is reliant on multimodal and digital literacy skills in social, educational and work contexts (Wells and Lyons, 2016). Learning can be enhanced and maximised by including multimodality and 21st century skills into curriculum and academic work. Learners access, creation and sharing of multimodality and digital media in online spaces continues to challenge teachers and pedagogy across a range of subject areas (Macken-Horarik, 2009; Jewitt, 2014, Cloonan, 2015). It challenges monomodal print-based approaches to texts and teacher-centred approaches to learning. There is a divide and mismatch between literacy practices in school and out of school contexts and this calls for the recognition and inclusion of multimodality and digital literacies in school texts which offers potential affordances such as "*rich learning environments shown to broaden options for interactivity, multimodal meaning- making and collaboration*" (Cloonan, 2015, 98). These have been found to develop literacy, "*critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding*" (Cloonan, 2015, 98) which are regarded as necessary skills in the 21st century. This makes learning "*an active, negotiated, and dynamic process where students can take some ownership of both the content and mode of learning depending on the purpose and context*" (Wells and Lyon, 2016, 5).

Popular culture influences what people say, think and do which impacts the norms, standards and stereotypes that are reproduced in society (Wright, 2021) and ultimately this influences students' behaviour, thinking and actions. Therefore, since popular culture and social media platforms influence society's actions and thinking, then pedagogy needs to be extended to include diverse possibilities that draw on these platforms in order for 'genuine' dialogue and engagement to take place. By bringing in home literacy practices and a range of modes in a classroom context, learners can locate themselves and their cultures within their learning.

In their study, Bezemer and Kress (2017) engage with the youth designing contemporary texts and they identified that it draws on social, cultural and materially shaped modes and resources. Social changes as a result of digital modes and the use of semiotic text production diversifies the range of meaning makers and is a shift from the audience solely being one writer and one reader (Bezemer and Kress, 2017). A wider audience also means that there will be a wider range of interpretations of the same text. Low et al. (2021) identified a disconnect between the theorisation

of multimodality and how children and the youth make sense of multimodal texts and text production. They argue that the youth's perspectives on multimodality lacks representation as the articles are written from an adult perspective which we may not effectively understand. They imply that children have so much to offer with regards to multimodal insights as they are constantly engaging with this type of literacy and that we as adults can learn from them. Therefore, they suggest an expansion on who is regarded as a multimodal theorist to include children and adults of all ages as it broadens insights and perspectives. They identified that audience and peers influence and affect multimodal composing at secondary level which makes multimodal study complex and worthwhile to research. Therefore, in this study I make use of a social approach to creating multimodal texts where students use their peers as collaborators and audience. They engage with each other to craft stories across modes, and I made it known that they are creating these stories for their classmates and the world, which shifts the focus away from the educator being the audience.

Multimodal theories "*fail to consider seriously and to attempt to recognize the practices, aesthetics, ethics and epistemologies of contemporary forms of text production. New theoretical means are needed for making sense of these to replace the 19th century models underpinning those concerns. Where up to two decades ago maybe, competence in relation to one mode, writing, was seen as sufficient for the task of the composition of a text, we now need to understand the semiotic potentials of all resources and platforms involved in the design and production of multimodal text. Where previously competence in a relatively small set of relevant genres was seen as sufficient for participating effectively in different social domains, we now need to understand how text makers respond to the specific demands and social conditions of a much wider range of different occasions for text making*." (Bezemer and Kress, 2017, 3). This indicates a need to reconceptualise multimodal pedagogy that considers and integrates student resources as epistemological access and engages with wider social domains of their lives. Multimodality cannot exist in isolation, but rather it needs to be used contextually with consideration of social and semiotic influences.

I share the same views as these scholars and identify a need to incorporate contemporary multimodal texts into learning to appeal to 21st century learners and equip them with skills and knowledge to engage in news forms of literacy and culture that they are accustomed to. This is not an attempt to exclude traditional and standard forms of literacy and text production, but rather a

transformation of traditional literacies by working with a range of different texts, modes and languages in the classroom to diversify skills and knowledge. To use contemporary texts and social media in the classroom, the curriculum requires rethinking by looking at all texts as social and cultural artefacts and learners require an understanding of multimodal elements and metalanguage (Bezemer and Kress, 2017). After all, how can learning be productive if language education does not evolve along with the learners and society? Whose interests are we serving if we ignore the social resources and cultures that the learners engage with? Drawing on these gaps and limitations of multimodality as part of culturally sustaining pedagogy, I use a multimodal storytelling intervention as a tool to enable students to engage with their resources and experiences to produce meaningful narrative writing experiences in a language classroom.

2.2.4. The role of multimodality in education

Despite being in a multimodal and technology driven age, school literacies lack multimodal relevance (Andrews and Smith, 2011; Miller and McVee, 2012; Mostafa, 2015; Gleason, 2019). Engaging with the learner's home literacy practices is important to make pedagogy culturally responsive (Paris and Alim, 2014; Bomer, 2017) and in the 21st century, literacies are predominantly multimodal and digital. As a result of the global multimodal turn, Andrews and Smith (2011) and Gardener (2015) state that it is impossible to teach language using a monomodal approach. Multimodal learning environments cater to diverse needs and learning preferences that learners have, and it has the potential to promote deeper understanding and engagement amongst learners (Kress, 2003). It expands the semiotic space of a classroom, making it an agentive space that enables cognitive, social and affective participation amongst learners (Newfield, 2011). Bringing affective dimensions to multimodal learning is becoming increasingly popular, as attention to learners' emotional and motivational responses illustrate the role of affect in facilitating engagement and deeper understanding in multimodal learning environments (Lim et al., 2022). The incorporation of multiple modes creates a comprehensive learning experience as content is presented in multiple ways. Integrating multimodality into language education enhances language skills such as comprehension, communication and language proficiency (Walsh, 2006; Bezemer

and Kress, 2017), and it offers additional benefits linked to creativity, socialisation and understanding of contemporary cultures.

Stein (2008) notes that multimodality recognises and validates diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, enabling students to draw on their own semiotic resources and experiences. This inclusivity is particularly important in multicultural and multilingual contexts, such as South African classrooms, where students bring a rich array of communicative practices. "*To state some of my principles quite early on: I am firmly of the opinion that everything in the new curriculum will need to be judged in terms of its effect in giving young people certain dispositions, confident in the face of difference – cultural, linguistic, ethnic, ethical – and confident in the everyday experience of change, able to see change and difference as entirely usual conditions of cultural and social life; and to see them as essential productive resources*" (Kress 1995: 3). Kress's work on multimodality identifies cultural and social aspects of learning, and he views difference within classrooms as a means of productive learning. This is because each learner brings a unique knowledge pool and diverse resources which can provide new perspectives and entry points to learning. This is an attempt to create an inclusive education system that values diversity by incorporating it into learning, and one that is better suited to current times by considering contextual factors that impact one's sense of self and knowledge. The conceptualisation of diversity in this context aligns with critical literacy theories in its emphasis on valuing varied perspectives and experiences as fundamental to learning. Both approaches recognise that learners bring unique cultural, linguistic, and social resources, which should be leveraged as tools for deeper understanding and engagement. Critical literacy goes beyond acknowledging diversity as a resource for inclusion; it actively interrogates power structures, ideologies, and systemic inequalities that shape educational practices and societal norms. It positions diversity as a site of critique and transformation by challenging dominant discourses. While the quote above engages with diversity through inclusivity of diverse resources, diversity in this study also includes political and transformative perspective, linking diversity to broader social justice aims.

Maureen Kendrick's (2016) work expands on these foundational theories by examining how multimodality manifests in diverse sociocultural contexts, particularly in multilingual and marginalized communities. Kendrick (2016) highlights that multimodal practices often emerge organically in these settings, as individuals draw on a wide array of semiotic resources to navigate

their lived experiences. For example, her research on youth in sub-Saharan Africa illustrates how multimodal storytelling, including drawings, oral narratives, and written text enables learners to articulate complex identities and challenge dominant narratives. Kendrick's work highlights the importance of considering the sociocultural dimensions of multimodality, emphasising that modes are not neutral but deeply embedded in cultural and historical practices.

Lim, Toh, and Nguyen (2022) suggest engaging with multimodal texts from learners' lives. This emphasises and incorporates learners' real-world experiences and culturally relevant contexts into multimodal pedagogical practices. It points to the importance of aligning classroom activities with learners' everyday multimodal interactions. Context is central to meaning as it is "*the sets of values, practices and ideologies of a culture*" (Newfield, 2023, 5) and this has social and affective attachments (Kress, 1995). Context "*includes power relationships, politics, ideologies and practices and meaning are inseparably interconnected*" (Newfield, 2023, 7). Therefore, context plays a significant role in learning and meaning making, making it essential to consider who students are and what they bring into the classroom is necessary and shapes their understanding of meaning. Hodges and Kress (1988) argue that "*texts and contexts, agents and objects of meaning, social structures and force and their complex interrelationships together constitute the minimal and irreducible object of semiotic analysis*" (viii–ix). Thus, contextual factors impact attitude and positionality, which makes meaning a socially and culturally constructed phenomena.

Multimodal theory outlined in the work of Kress and other scholars alike offer "*A central tenet of… change, whether in society or education, with a view to new futures… based on a desire to promote social equity, develop unfulfilled potential and provide opportunities to all*" (Newfield, 2023, 3). The New London Group (1996) also suggests that multimodal instruction should consist of a transformative agenda which is to redesign social features of young people across boundaries of difference (Jewitt, 2008). Newfield (2024) draws on this and regards multimodality and multiliteracies as a counter-hegemonic practice aimed at dismantling monolithic and repressive pedagogies in a South African context by addressing historical and political differences through her projects which align with the aims of this study. She states that multiliteracies provides a theoretical foundation for reimagining literacy education to reflect cultural plurality and communicative diversity amongst learners which is essential in transforming pedagogy and expanding on learners' capabilities. The goal of 'making a difference' through multimodal

engagement in education is evident in multimodal theory and discourse, and this was a central aim of this study as I used multimodal storytelling as an approach to work towards social consciousness and action. Multimodality is a tool to engage with diversity and inclusivity within education contexts through representation within texts, as contemporary genres and mediums of communication enable personalised learning experiences and cross-cultural exchanges, fostering linguistic and cultural incorporation. It is strongly linked to heritage and contemporary youth cultures and identities, making the use of multimodality an interconnected experience to engage with a pluralistic range of identities and cultures through semiotic and creative means of communication. Newfield (2024) regards this as action that merges pedagogy with socio-cultural and political realities.

2.2.5. Multimodality and social media: A step towards advancing language pedagogy

Netflix, online news media, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Social media interactions are governed by multimodal forms of communication, and we are currently dealing with a youth generation whose lives are governed by these technologies. Many learners' have become accustomed to sharing their lives and identities online. For example, posting a picture on Instagram to show what they had for lunch, or by constructing a Facebook status to share an opinion about the daily news. It turns private content and experiences into a public text through images and videos that are anchored by language. Yet, these modern-day literacy practices are isolated from teaching that happens in schools. A reason for this may be because social media is not always safe and many of the youth become victims of the dangers that are caused by social media such as cyber-bulling, leaking of personal information and predators. However, incorporating social media into teaching facilitates access to learners' home/social literacy practices, their identities and experiences and they can learn to use social media effectively and safely which can be illustrated in class and facilitated by the educator.

Mostafa's (2015) definition of social media highlights its capacity to connect people through web-based tools that allow sharing diverse types of content such as text, videos, and images. However, expanding on this, social media can be viewed as a continuously evolving tool that not only provides instant communication but also fosters the creation of multimodal identities. These online

identities are constructed through a combination of linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive elements that allow individuals to communicate in ways that reflect their cultural, social, and personal experiences. In this context, language becomes intertwined with other modes such as emojis, gifs, videos, and images which collectively shape the way people engage, express themselves, and navigate social spaces online.

For language pedagogy, this shift towards multimodal communication on social media presents an opportunity to move beyond traditional, monomodal approaches to teaching language. Educators can embrace these multimodal resources to develop learners' critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in using language across various mediums. By integrating social media into language learning, educators can facilitate students' engagement with diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires, empowering them to express their identities and interact with global audiences in meaningful ways. This approach aligns with contemporary shifts in educational paradigms that recognise the fluidity and interconnectedness of language, culture, and communication in the digital age.

Morrell (2020) advocates for using technology as a way to engage with multimodal and contemporary socio-culturally responsive instruction. This is due to working with millennials who are members of online cultures and communities. He states that this can be seen as a new or popular culture which can impact student engagement and enable academic literacy to be more representative of student identities, when included in the curriculum. The identification and representation of technology and digital spaces aligns with literature by Paris and Alim (2014) and Bomer (2017) who identify digital modes and social media spaces as contemporary practices that resonate with youth cultures. This does not only make learning appeal to learners due to the element of technology, but allows them to have a voice (Morrell, 2020) in their representation and design of texts. This can be a form of empowerment as the youth can use social media platforms to advocate for social causes that are meaningful to them.

Education has been directly impacted due to the development of technology and digital spaces which has created a means for instant and vast access to information (Bicen and Taspolat, 2019). This means that learning is instantly accessible outside of the classroom space and any information can be accessed by learners through platforms such as Google and YouTube due to its instant

access appeal. Allen and Senn (2017) state that one of the main benefits of incorporating social media in the classroom is that it is already an established practice in learners' everyday lives. Thus, we need to take a step towards making school learning relatable and engaging while still maintaining productivity and aiming for student achievement. By engaging with multimodal social media practices in language classrooms, learners can engage with real-world communication practices which fosters skills beyond traditional text-based literacy (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). Social media facilitates diverse language use, linguistic registers, dialects, and cultural practices that are linked to particular modes and discourses (Dixon & Tierney, 2012). For example, Instagram makes use of visual storytelling with captions, hashtags, and emojis, all of which contribute to a multimodal narrative that is made up of signs and symbols that are linked to online cultures and Instagram discourse. This expands on traditional notions of language and includes contemporary linguistic practices which can potentially expand on linguistic practices in language classrooms and contextualise language learning. This categorises learners as designers and active participants in the construction of multimodal texts.

Schreiber (2023) explores the evolving role of Instagram posts which initially focused on being a visual social media platform, but it has shifted to incorporate more multimodal features through stories and reels. Schreiber now conceptualises these posts as a new genre and emergent social practice, as it offers additional multimodal features such as video, music, emojis and broader trends of social media usage. According to Gleason (2019), there are educational benefits to using social media in the classroom. It makes learners' aware of traditional literacy skills such as audience, evolving language use, metalanguage and discourse associated with the genre. For example, Instagram posts become structured according to the type of content that is valued by one's followers. A fashion blogger will share aesthetic and fashion forward content with captions that include language usage associated with this field such as "OMG", "Gorg" and "Hype". This indicates an awareness of audience and jargon associated with the social media application in terms of a visual and linguistic aspect. The use of language categorises Instagram posts as both a creative outlet and a discursive tool (Schreiber, 2023). By using language that is both trendy and familiar to the audience, it contributes to ongoing discussions and trends, making Instagram a platform where language not only expresses creativity but also shapes and influences social conversations. The Instagram genre is incorporated into an activity of this study so that learners can engage with

contemporary forms of multimodal communication. However, its application to diverse cultural contexts and non-Western uses of Instagram remains underexplored. This is a gap that I explore and engage with to encourage learners to draw on diverse resources and repertoires as entry points to their text production in ways that express aspects of their pluralistic identities.

Gleason (2019) mentions that another benefit to using social media is that it facilitates perspectives from diverse voices. Social media allows for instant access worldwide and therefore communication and engagement of content is viewed by a wider audience that goes beyond the confines of barriers which include nationality, race, culture and gender. This allows for different perspectives and gives marginalised individuals and groups a voice and access to worldwide communication and a larger audience outside of their respective communities. However, the internet is a space that is dominated by communication in English which marginalises non-English speakers and cultures. Social media and access to a wider global audience is not always safe for learners due to cyber-bullying and harsh opinionated feedback and criticism. Another limitation is that echo chambers can result in more polarisation as a result of algorithms or similar perspectives and voices (Vally Essa et al., 2023).

Another reason to include social media into teaching is because it values and illustrates the power of social networks (Gleason, 2019). These social networks go beyond technical resources and emphasise the human ability to share information and learn with and from others through collaborative interaction. Gleason (2019) says that this type of teaching is an attempt to make learning inclusive and accessible to all. However, from experience with teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic, I found that online learning is not accessible to all learners, and it can exclude and highlight disparities between students from well-resourced environments and those who lack resources (Vally Essa et al., 2023). Thus, a disadvantage of online social platforms is the potential to exclude learners who lack access to resources which exacerbates existing inequalities.

If multimodality and social media are used within a language classroom, learners need to be equipped with multimodal and critical literacy skills as many of these learners are often addicted to or rely vastly on technology (Morrell, 2020). This will teach them to critically engage with the texts that they interact with and ask important critical questions which may interrogate texts and encourage active engage with online resources. Kellner (2005) emphasises the importance of

critically analysing media and technology to understand how they shape our perceptions, values, and identities in contemporary society. Examples of these critical questions are: whose interests are represented? Who is being marginalised or silenced? What values are being promoted? How do social media platforms like Instagram contribute to the shaping of personal and collective identities? In what ways can social media language be seen as both empowering and limiting? What role do power dynamics play in how language is used and interpreted on social media? (Kellner, 2005). This is a way to make the learners more aware of the kinds of texts that they engage with, the power that a text can have and the socio-cultural elements that are used to influence and create meaning such as language, representations, and images. The shift towards a multimodal pedagogy that includes social media aligns with calls for pedagogical innovation in response to the changing sociocultural and technological landscape of the 21st century (Jewitt, 2008; Morrell, 2020; Kalantzis and Cope, 2023).

2.2.6. Design and agency in multimodal and multiliteracy frameworks

The concepts of design and agency play pivotal roles in the frameworks of multimodality and multiliteracies, underlining the active and purposeful engagement of learners in meaning-making. Gunther Kress's (2010) concept of design is central in his work on multimodality and literacy. He defines design as the integration of various modes such as written, visual, audio and kinaesthetic modes to construct meaning where each mode contributes unique affordances and limitations. Design refers to the intentional arrangement and orchestration of semiotic resources to create meaning, while agency emphasizes the capacity of individuals to make deliberate and critical choices in their communication practices. Scholars like Andrews and Smith (2011) and Gardner (2015) call this multimodal composition. It is a key component through which individuals create and communicate meaning. Design involves the creative combination of resources to achieve specific communicative goals. The choices that designers make are influenced by the semiotic landscapes they operate within. For example, certain colours or symbols may carry specific cultural connotations that affect their appropriateness and effectiveness (Kress, 1993). Therefore, design is a social and culturally situated practice and designers must consider the ideological implications of their semiotic choices as meaning is co-constructed with their audience.

The concept of design is central to multiliteracies, as it positions learners as active creators of meaning who use semiotic resources to suit their social, cultural, and personal contexts (Kress, 2010; Kalantzis and Cope, 2023). In multimodal design, the interplay between these modes creates a collaborative effect, enabling richer and more layered communication than monomodal texts. Thus, the emphasis on design in multimodal communication highlights the learner's role as an active participant in shaping meaning rather than a passive consumer of content. Design and redesign in multiliteracies framework shifts the focus from transmission-based models of teaching to transformative practices that foster creative engagement with texts, and this can include critical engagement, but it is not necessarily a requirement (Warner, 2024). The multiliteracies framework is operationalised through four interrelated pedagogical components which are as follows (Kalantzis and Cope, 2023):

- Situated practice which emphasises the incorporation of learners' real-world experiences and cultural practices into the classroom. By connecting learning to their everyday lives, educators can make instruction more relevant and engaging. For example, analysing social media interactions or community narratives allows learners to bring their diverse 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) into academic contexts.
- Overt instruction involves explicitly teaching the conventions and structures of various modes and media. Learners are guided to understand how semiotic systems operate, such as language and visual design (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Overt instruction provides learners with the tools to critically analyse and produce multimodal texts.
- Critical framing involves encouraging learners to critique the socio-cultural and ideological dimensions of texts. They examine how power, identity, and meaning is embedded in multimodal communication, fostering critical awareness and agency.
- Transformed practice focuses on the application of knowledge in innovative and contextually meaningful ways. It involves using an understanding of multimodal design to create original texts that address real-world issues or personal interests. Storytelling tasks with a social agenda brief have the potential to demonstrate transformed practice, as they require learners to interrogate the world and modes creatively and purposefully.

These dimensions emphasise the integration of learners' diverse experiences, explicit teaching of semiotic principles, critical analysis of texts, and application of knowledge in novel contexts. The

multiliteracies framework enables learners to move fluidly between analysis, critique, and production. It highlights that design is an act of re-invention where learners actively engage with linguistic and multimodal resources to shape these into new meanings that align with their social and cultural contexts. They also encourage moving across modes to work with design which is central to the methodology of this study to integrate diverse resources into learning. In alignment with work on design by Kress (2010) and Kalantzis and Cope (2023), Warner (2024) frames learners as designers of meaning, not just decoders which is a view that I adopt in this study as the learners move across modes to cross-pollinate multimodal stories.

Design and agency differ when framed within multimodality and multiliteracies, compared to critical literacy. Design in multimodal and multiliteracy studies is conceptualised as a dynamic process involving the transformation of available resources into new forms of communication. It involves integrating semiotic resources and modes to create meaning and involves creativity. It centres on the creative and functional use of semiotic resources to construct meaning, with an emphasis on personal expression and contextual adaptation whereas critical literacy focuses on ethicality and criticality (Warner, 2024). This is particularly important for this study as the process of multimodal cross-pollination involves design and redesign which requires transformation of resources across multiple modes to tell stories. While multimodal communication emphasises the orchestration of semiotic resources, critical literacy extends these concepts by interrogating the socio-cultural and political dimensions of texts. In critical literacy, design involves not only the creation of texts but also their deconstruction. Learners are encouraged to critically analyse how texts are structured, whose voices are represented, and whose perspectives are marginalized (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Design in this context becomes a tool for social critique and transformation, moving beyond aesthetic or functional considerations to address power and ideology.

Agency in critical literacy focuses on learners' capacity to question dominant narratives and create counter-narratives. This involves recognising their position within broader sociocultural contexts and taking action to address inequalities or injustices. This study includes design and agency as conceptualised across both multimodal and critical literacy frameworks due to the multimodal nature of the activities in the intervention, and the critical social agenda of the activity briefs. In multiliteracies theory, agency in multimodal communication refers to the learner's ability to make

purposeful choices and decisions about how, when, and why to use specific semiotic resources. This agency is deeply tied to learners' identities, experiences, and cultural contexts. Rowsell and Pahl (2015) emphasise that learners bring diverse semiotic repertoires to the classroom, shaped by their lived experiences and social environments. By exercising agency, learners negotiate their identities and express their voices through multimodal artifacts, creating connections between their personal and academic literacies. Agency refers to empowerment where learners can take control of their learning with regards to how they represent and communicate meaning (Kalantzis and Cope, 2023). This creates learner centred environments where learners become active participants in the learning process. Agency in multiliteracies is a tool for creative and semiotic transformation and innovation that encourages learners to address and challenge social inequalities if classroom activities provide opportunities for this. This ensures that learners have the power and tools to shape their learning and issues prevalent in the world. Agency allows learners to engage with traditional practices while also reimagining them for contemporary contexts. By integrating design and agency into multiliteracy education, it offers a pathway to more inclusive, relevant, and creative learning experiences.

Integrating design and agency in multimodal and multiliteracies pedagogies requires educators to adopt approaches that balance creativity with criticality. This involves providing learners with opportunities to experiment with diverse semiotic resources while fostering critical awareness of the sociocultural contexts in which these resources operate. Kalantzis and Cope (2020) advocate for a multiliteracies pedagogy that combines situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice, ensuring that learners develop both technical proficiency and critical consciousness.

2.2.7. From transmodal semiosis to multimodal cross-pollination

Scholars such as Kress (2003, 2010), Newfield (2014, 2023), Stein (2008), Pahl & Rowsell (2011), and Janks (2014) support the idea of transformation and redesign of texts from one mode to another. This includes, to some extent, a transformation of ideas, content, or resources that are merged with new elements to create a new text. These processes of moving across modes are central to pedagogy, as they offer learners opportunities for literary and linguistic exploration,

particularly in English classrooms, where multimodal texts are used to develop language skills. Such activities encourage creativity and innovation, providing a platform for learners to reimagine texts and meanings in ways that connect personal, cultural, and academic contexts.

Moving across modes serves as a reflective tool, enabling learners to critically assess and reapproach notions of their past and present selves while envisioning their futures. This aligns with pedagogical practices aimed at fostering criticality and agency. However, it is important to acknowledge that the scholars cited do not necessarily share identical conceptions of transformation and redesign. While concepts like remixing, re-semiotisation, and transduction are integral to multimodal theory, they are interpreted and applied differently, reflecting varied emphases on creativity, critique, and context within educational settings. These diverse conceptualisations highlight the rich, multifaceted potential of multimodal approaches in teaching and learning.

Kress (2010) defines transduction as the process of changing and representing meaning from one mode to another. For example, transforming the written lyrics of a song into an audio version of the song. It is called 'transmodal semiosis' (Newfield 2009, 2014), which involves designing texts to convey meanings and ideas across different modes that are linked in some way, either in theme or topic (Newfield, 2009). Newfield (2011) and Stein (2008) imply that even though the same information may be transformed across modes, each mode and each new combination of modes offers and illustrates distinct outcomes and different meanings.

Transmodal semiosis refers to the dynamic process of meaning making that integrates both mental and physical dimensions. This concept emphasises the interplay between internal semiosis, which involves affective (emotional), cognitive (thought-related) processes, and external semiosis, where meaning is conveyed through signs, symbols, and texts in various modes (Kress, 2010; Newfield, 2014; Warner, 2024). In this framework, meaning making is not limited to linguistic expressions but extends to visual, auditory, spatial, and embodied forms, reflecting the multifaceted ways individuals engage with and interpret the world.

Archer's (2010) description of this process as "*a social semiotic metafunctional view of communication*" (207) highlights the interconnectedness between modes and the broader resources employed for communication. This view highlights how each mode contributes distinct

affordances, for example, visual modes can convey spatial relationships, while linguistic modes can articulate abstract ideas, and embodied modes (e.g., gestures or facial expressions) can convey emotional nuance. Together, these resources create layered meanings that are richer and more complex than any single mode could achieve on its own. Expanding the range of modes within communication and pedagogy allows for deeper engagement and the surfacing of meanings and resources which are sometimes overlooked.

The word transmodal categorises "*semiotic movement across modes as an external, material practice*" (Newfield, 2014, 2). Transduction (Kress, 2000, 2010) refers to the process of transforming meaning from one mode to another, such as converting written text into a visual format. This process involves reinterpreting and recontextualising meaning, as each mode offers unique affordances that shape how ideas are expressed. The notion of chains of semiosis (Stein, 2003) focuses on the ongoing journey of meaning making across multiple texts, modes, and contexts and this is most similar to cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). This perspective draws attention to the cumulative and interconnected nature of meaning, with each step building upon and reshaping the previous one. The transmodal moment (Newfield, 2009, 2014) refers to specific instances within transduction which emphasises the creativity and agency required when meaning is reimagined or transformed across modes.

I use the concept of multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) which builds on the theory of transduction, (Kress, 2000, 2010), as well as the notion of chains of semiosis (Stein, 2003) and the transmodal moment (Newfield, 2009, 2014). The concept of multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) highlights the dynamic interaction between different modes, such as visual, linguistic, and auditory, within the process of meaning making. Rather than simply transferring meaning from one mode to another, it emphasises how modes influence and enrich each other while having threads across each shift, creating new possibilities for expression through cognitive, semiotic or/and affective resources and repertoires. Cross-pollination is a multimodal pedagogy that involves moving across a range of different modes and transforming pluralistic cultural, linguistic and social resources across these to construct and reconstruct meaning. Cross-pollination encourages the integration of pluralistic dominant and non-dominant resources and repertoires to be used in a classroom context, and it expands beyond solely semiotic forms of expression, and includes critical, creative and affective dimensions.

While these multiple concepts of moving across modes are closely related, they are not interchangeable. Multimodal cross-pollination emphasises the interaction and reciprocal influence between modes, transduction focuses on the directional shift of meaning from one mode to another, chains of semiosis explore the sequential development of meaning, and the transmodal moment refers to particular transformative instances. These pedagogical approaches contribute to the broader framework of transmodal semiosis, which encompasses both the internal (cognitive and emotional) and external (symbolic and textual) dimensions of meaning making. Together, these concepts complement each other and offer nuanced insights into how meaning is created, transformed, and shared across modes.

All these concepts are interested in semiotic shifts, changes and functions across modes. Multimodal cross-pollination in storytelling extends beyond transduction and modal mixing by rethinking which resources and repertoires are used in a classroom, how these resources are transformed, integrated, and valued at a semiotic level. Multimodal cross-pollination in storytelling introduces a pedagogy that offers movement between modes, the relationship between modes and how they enrich one another. Instead of single-mode transductions, multimodal cross-pollination highlights multiplicity and plurality by drawing directly on each mode's affordances without diluting the original semiotic intent and acts as a scaffolding process. In my conceptualisation, the key difference between single mode transductions and multimodal cross-pollination lies in the conceptualisation of modes as complementary versus substitutive. An example of a single mode transduction is moving a written poem to a digital text. The mode remains linguistic/written, but the medium of the text changes from handwriting to digital. The content is not altered, and no other modes (such as images or audio) are introduced or removed. Single mode transduction can constrain meaning making, as the translation from one mode to another may fail to harness the full potential of either one of the modes, whereas multimodal cross-pollination acts as a scaffolding process where learners' use of multiple modes amplifies meaning and facilitates creative agency. Each mode is not merely a translation but a building block that carries forward the socio-cultural resonances of the initial mode, retaining layers of interpretation that are semiotically and culturally complex. This layered meaning-making process respects the integrity of learners' cultural and linguistic identities, enabling a fuller articulation of their experiences.

The concept of multimodal cross-pollination is situated within and emerges from an interdisciplinary lineage that draws on multimodal social semiotics, socio-cultural theories of learning, critical literacy, and affect theory. Its foundations can be traced to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) theory of multimodality, which foregrounds the idea that all communication is realised through multiple, socially shaped semiotic modes, each with distinct affordances. Transduction, as developed by Kress (1997; 2010) refers to the movement of meaning across modes which is a process that is not merely translational but transformative, shaped by the modal and social context. This notion has been taken up and extended in South African scholarship by Stein (2008), Newfield (2014), and Archer (2020), who demonstrate how multimodal meaning-making is inherently tied to learners' identities, cultural resources, and the pursuit of social justice. Their work positions the classroom as a site where learners mobilise diverse semiotic repertoires and where meaning emerges through collaboration, critical engagement, and socio-political awareness. Multimodal cross-pollination builds on this body of work while contributing a more specific analytical lens that captures the recursive, affective, and relational flow of meaning across modes, texts, and social interactions. It highlights how learners transfer, rework, and amplify meanings not just across semiotic boundaries, but across emotional, linguistic, and collaborative spaces which is what Pahl and Rowsell (2010) describe as the funds of knowledge and identity that learners bring into literacy practices. By tracing these dynamic, multimodal movements and the affective labour they involve, multimodal cross-pollination adds to existing understandings of transduction by illuminating how meaning is iteratively re-imagined in ways that are situated, socially resonant, and pedagogically powerful.

Messner (2022) states that dynamic and complex uses of multimodality is underexplored in terms of the integration of multiple modes and the interaction of these modes to create a specific product or text. Modal complexity is a concept that refers "*to the interrelationship of modes in a particular social action*" (Pirini, 2014, p. 83 – cited in Messner, 2022, 2). Multimodal cross-pollination engages with this complexity by integrating and moving across multiple modes of communication which is a complex process due to the incorporation and interplay of including various modes, writing elements and diverse resources and repertoires such as pluralistic notions of culture, languages and emotions to create stories/texts that are complex in their representation. The interplay of modes looks at how dialogic interaction with the text, oneself and others (Mendelowitz et al., 2023) is coupled with a range of diverse semiotic modes to produce a text/s or higher-level

action that develops singular modes of communication into a coherent and complex product (Messner, 2022). This highlights the socio-cultural approach to multimodal cross-pollination which in this study includes the integration of different modes, and due to its collaborative methodology of storytelling, it integrates different ideas, perspectives and resources of the learners to produce a series of linked stories multiple modes. The integration and combination of multiple modes is essential for effective communication, for example, performative modes may require gesture, audio and visual aids which is a fundamental combination of modes to produce an effective performative text.

In addition to modal shifts, the conception of multimodal cross-pollination that this study develops foregrounds transformation of diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources. It intrinsically values cultural and linguistic diversity by making these resources an essential component of the cross-pollination process rather than a separate consideration. Multimodal cross-pollination opens up an expansive learning space where diverse backgrounds are essential to meaning making and amplifies diverse cultural, linguistic, and social voices. Therefore, cross-pollination foregrounds diversity by positioning learners' multilingual repertoires and cultural resources as semiotic assets, allowing the classroom to mirror the complex, pluralistic nature of the broader world. The inclusion and transformation of multilingual and cultural resources in transduction is a key contribution of my work. Thus, cross-pollination is a pedagogised movement across semiotic modes and also a transformation of diverse formal and informal resources as movement occurs. Cross-pollination takes the concept of transduction and modal mixing further and looks at semiotic, cultural, linguistic and critical-affective movements across modes and spaces as an internal, external, cognitive and creative practice by enabling and transforming a range of resources that students possess to engage with notions of culture and identities as epistemological access and entry points to learning. It involves action, agency and critical affective moves to construct and convey meaning.

It involves remixing content, ideas and resources/repertoires from one mode to another to create a new text. Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) concept of multimodal cross-pollination involves moving across modes where the same text is represented in different modes and genres, but the resources and ideas evolve, develop and emerge during the process of transduction. To conceptualise multimodal cross-pollination, think about cross pollination of a bee that moves from

one flower to the next. The bee (a metaphor for a student/s) takes pollen from the first flower (a metaphor for the original text) and moves it to another flower (text 2 which represents a transduction of the original text into a different mode). The process of pollination is infinite and the result of each text yields fruit and seeds (the final text product that emerges from the cross-pollination). As the text shifts across modes, ideas and content are developed, transformed and transduced in different ways to create meaning and resources are either transform across each mode or new resources emerge or fall away as a result of what each mode enables. Multimodal cross-pollination involves moving the same text across modes to engage with cultural, creative, linguistic, social and academic resources and repertoires.

While there are threads and links that run across different modes of representation, cross-pollination results in a transformation of content and resources to create meaning. Each process/mode of the cross-pollination enables students to create different representations and meanings of the text and in doing so, they identified that cross-pollination enables access to multiple entry points of learning which provides learners with access to capitalise on a wide range of dominant and non-dominant cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires to produce texts. Therefore, modes and texts are not worked with in isolation, making the process of cross-pollination one that is fluid and pluralistic which makes use of a range of dynamic semiotic, cognitive and affective dimensions of learning whereas transduction is often used in ways that are linear and singular.

Coyle and Larios (2024) conducted a study of moving across modes in the context of a science classroom which involved the process of design, followed by a digital video, and lastly a written explanation. This is an example of multimodal cross-pollination which involved a series of activities that involve drawing on the same project/ideas and moving across different modes to show various ways of producing meaning of the same text. Similarly to my concept of cross-pollination (2022), Coyle and Larios (2024) call the process of moving the same text across multiple modes "*cross-fertilization*" (628). The concept of multimodal cross-pollination in my study aligns with the intermodal relationships described in Coyle and Larios's (2024) article, as the learners in the science project combine linguistic modes (written explanations), visual modes (drawings), and videos to represent knowledge. In both our studies, modes are intentionally and

creatively blended to achieve richer, more complex meaning making. Both of these concepts engage with non-linear and recursive processes.

Both studies build on learners critical and creative capacities and stress the importance of scaffolding to help learners move across modes towards specialised modes and outcomes of communication. However, the main difference between cross-pollination and cross-fertilization is that cross-pollination focuses on critically and creatively integrating and expanding on the resources, repertoire and experiences that learners bring into the classroom in relation to the academic context, whereas cross-fertilization focuses on developing technical and scientific skills with only a focus on criticality and language, and not the other diverse resources that learners bring into the classroom. Another main difference is that cross-pollination values social approaches to learning through collaborative and dialogic forms of interaction which contribute to knowledge acquisition, whereas cross-fertilization is more focused on individualised learning and assessment.

Coyle and Larios (2024) indicate that moves across modes are a form of literacy and assist with understanding of content, in addition to identifying how learners construct and represent meaning, and how well they do it in different languages (Coyle and Larios, 2024). Thus, even though their study was situated in a science context, it is noted that multimodal cross-pollination has multilingual benefits and values learners' diverse linguistic repertoires. The focus on integrating multimodality and language through cross-pollination is regarded as a comprehensive approach to multimodal communication which looks at how learners leverage diverse semiotic resources and develop knowledge, but there is a need to incorporate critical insights into multimodal communication (Coyle and Larios, 2024), which is what my cross-pollination includes through critical-creative and socially critical considerations. My work has similarities to Coyle and Larios (2024) who draw on genre-based pedagogy, and social semiotics as foundational theories to study multimodal meaning making literacy which offers a contextually based, multimodal framework for understanding how linguistic and semiotic choices communicate meanings. These meanings reflect learners' knowledge, attitudes, and organisational structures through the texts that learners produce.

The process of cross-pollination illustrates representations of the same text in multiple ways which offers creative and social affordances through different pathways to learning (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). This is a practice evident in everyday life as the youth transfer and 'remix'

(Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) ideas, identities and cultures across different platforms. For example, one could type out a Facebook status about their day which foregrounds language, and thereafter they could upload an Instagram post summing up the main event of their day, or they could create a video enacting/reflecting the event. Each of these modes work with the same content but offers different pathways and uses resources in different ways to create and convey intended messages and meanings.

2.3. Dialogism, heteroglossia, and multivoicedness: understanding language in multilingual classrooms

The work of Bakhtin (1981) is crucial in understanding language as a dynamic, socially embedded practice and his concept of dialogism revolutionises how one views communication. Bakhtin (1981) argued that all communication is inherently dialogic, and it is shaped by interactions between multiple voices, perspectives, and socio-cultural factors. In his view, language is not a neutral static system, but rather, he conceptualises language as an evolving entity that reflects ongoing negotiations between different viewpoints. Dialogism refers to the ongoing interaction between students, teachers, texts, and the broader social and historical conditions in which learning takes place. This dialogic framework challenges the notion of a singular, authoritative voice, emphasising the importance of the 'other' in the construction of meaning. He argued that the self is always defined in relation to the other, with the subject's meaning being formed through the interactions between individuals. For Bakhtin, identity is always formed in relation to the other where meaning-making processes occur through dynamic social exchanges. This premise holds significant implications for educational settings, particularly in diverse and multilingual classrooms where learners bring a multitude of cultural, linguistic, and social resources to the learning environment.

Building on this foundational idea, Bakhtin's (1981) notions of heteroglossia and multivoicedness further explores the plurality of voices that shape communication. Heteroglossia refers to the coexistence of multiple voices, perspectives, and languages within a single social or linguistic space or text (Bakhtin, 1986). It emphasises that no language exists in isolation but is always in conversation with other languages, social practices, and ideological systems. This perspective

challenges traditional, monologic forms of teaching, where knowledge is imparted from teacher to student in a one-way transmission model. Instead, it advocates for a more dynamic, reciprocal model of learning where students engage in meaningful conversations with one another and the teacher, co-constructing knowledge through dialogue. This idea has found significant resonance in sociocultural theories of learning, particularly in the work of Vygotsky, who similarly emphasized the importance of social interaction for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Both Bakhtin and Vygotsky reject the notion of knowledge as an objective, isolated entity, instead focusing on how knowledge is always situated within social relations.

Reeder (2004) discusses how this concept has significant implications for understanding the complexity of literacy practices. In the classroom, heteroglossia is evident when students bring their own unique voices, dialects, and cultural perspectives into the learning process. These voices do not simply exist alongside one another; they interact and challenge each other, creating new meanings through their interaction. Heteroglossia acknowledges the varied linguistic and cultural repertoires learners bring into the classroom, and it is always shaped by the diverse, sometimes contradictory, forces at play within a specific social and cultural environment (Reeder, 2004). This idea is reflected in the way students engage with texts and media, actively interpreting and reinterpreting the material in light of their personal experiences, social contexts, and identities. As Paris and Alim (2014) argue, heteroglossic practices such as the use of multilingual resources, enrich learners' engagement with content and challenges monoglossic, dominant language norms that often marginalise non-dominant languages and identities. For example, in South African classrooms, where learners often speak a wide range of indigenous languages alongside English, heteroglossia enables learners to draw on their multilingual resources which offers opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement and meaning making.

Multivoicedness is closely related to heteroglossia, and it refers to the simultaneous presentation of different voices, perspectives, or viewpoints within a single utterance, text, or narrative. It is essentially the existence of multiple voices within the same text. This concept is fundamental in the exploration of how language and identity are negotiated in educational contexts. Bakhtin’s (1981) understanding of voice emphasises that each utterance is shaped by multiple perspectives, which may reflect social positions, power dynamics, and personal experiences. In classrooms, multivoicedness provides learners with the opportunity to articulate their diverse identities,

opinions, and experiences. Mendelowitz et al. (2022) argue that voice serves as a thread connecting various aspects of dialogic engagement. However, building on this work, I believe that multivoicedness is a more important consideration as this concept has gained prominence in understanding how learners express themselves within and beyond the classroom, as each individual voice draws on the voices of others, both past and present, thus making it inherently dialogic and interconnected.

In the context of storytelling, multivoicedness allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, enabling the expression of multiple identities and experiences within a single narrative. This approach resonates with Bakhtin's (1981) view of storytelling as a space where different voices interact to offer a more complex understanding of the world. In multilingual classrooms where learners may come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, multivoicedness fosters a rich environment for the negotiation of identities and the assertion of agency. For instance, learners might combine a narrative in English with cultural symbols or incorporate dialogue in multiple languages, reflecting their lived experiences and engaging in a more inclusive form of communication (Garcia & Wei, 2014). As Canagarajah (2021) points out, recognising the heteroglossic nature of genres and allowing for the integration of diverse resources can challenge monolingual, Western norms and create more inclusive classroom practices.

Bakhtin's framework allows for a critique of monolingual pedagogies that often exclude learners' linguistic and cultural resources. Traditional English language teaching practices typically privilege standard English and neglect the rich diversity of multilingual students (McKinney, 2017; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). However, adopting heteroglossic and multivoiced pedagogies such as those found in multimodal storytelling can disrupt these hegemonic practices and provide opportunities for learners to represent themselves authentically. The integration of multimodality and diverse linguistic repertoires into storytelling broadens the definition of voice, allowing for a broader range of semiotic and linguistic resources to express ideas and identities. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) argue that multimodal approaches expand the concept of voice beyond verbal expression, incorporating visual, textual, performative and digital modes. In practice, these ideas align with the shift from monolingual to multilingual pedagogies, which treat language as a dynamic, socially situated practice. In classrooms where multiple languages and cultural resources are in play, the use of heteroglossia and multivoicedness encourages an environment where learners can fluidly

draw on all their linguistic and semiotic resources. This facilitates language learning and fosters deeper social engagement, critical reflection, and identity formation (García & Wei, 2014). By incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, the classroom becomes a site of democratic exchange and knowledge construction, rather than a place for the mere reproduction of dominant discourses.

The concept of genre also plays a significant role in these discussions, as genres in education are not static but are shaped by social and cultural contexts. Bakhtin's (1986) idea of genre as a flexible, dialogic construct aligns with current educational practices that seek to embrace the fluidity of language and meaning making across various modes of communication. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope originates from his work on the relationship between time, space, and the narrative structure of literary works. He argues that the way time and space are represented is not merely a reflection of physical reality, but a product of cultural and historical forces. Bakhtin identifies the chronotope as a central organising principle in literary texts, influencing both the construction of narrative and the reader's understanding of the world depicted. As he notes, "*the chronotope is a means for articulating the meaning of the world and events in a given society*" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). The concept highlights the idea that literature is not just a representation of external events, but a reflection of deeper, historically grounded social processes. For Bakhtin, time and space are not neutral categories, but dynamic constructs that reveal the tensions and contradictions inherent in human societies.

2.3.1. The carnivalesque and literacy as social action

Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque plays a significant role in understanding the dynamics of literacy and learning. For Bakhtin, a carnival represents a space where the established order is temporarily disrupted. The carnivalesque refers to the temporary suspension of social hierarchies and the inversion of power relations. This concept challenges dominant, hierarchical structures and emphasizes the playful, subversive potential of marginalised voices (Bakhtin, 1984). In the classroom, the carnivalesque invites educators and learners to rethink traditional power structures between teacher and student, offering a space for alternative voices to emerge and challenge the status quo. This links to practices of critical literacy frameworks and was encouraged throughout the storytelling activities in the intervention of this study through its social agenda

aims. Reeder (2004) emphasises how this concept can be applied to the learning environment to encourage critical thinking, creativity, and the questioning of authority. For example, teachers might use the concept of the carnivalesque to foster an environment where learners feel free to express their unique ideas, critique dominant narratives, and experiment with new ways of thinking. This approach aligns with progressive education theories that advocate for student-centred, participatory learning environments that encourage student agency and creativity.

The carnivalesque can also be linked to the idea of play in learning, which Bakhtin associates with the liberation of meaning and identity. In educational contexts, playfulness allows students to experiment with language, meaning, and identity without the constraints of formal rules and expectations. This freedom can lead to deeper engagement with literacy, as students begin to see themselves as active participants in the construction of meaning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Ball and Freedman's (2004) edited volume brings together various perspectives that challenge traditional views of literacy as a neutral or technical skill. In this context, literacy is understood not only as the ability to read and write but as a complex social practice that involves engaging with and responding to a range of voices, discourses, and power relations. Reeder (2004) argues that the essays in the book provide valuable tools for educators to rethink their approaches to literacy instruction, offering an approach that emphasises the dynamic, relational nature of language and learning.

The carnivalesque is relevant to literacy as social action. Through acts of literacy, whether through writing, speaking, or visual expression, people can engage in forms of resistance that challenge the dominant cultural and political order. Literacy becomes a form of 'carnival' in which people can disrupt the norms of society, question authority, and create alternative visions of the world. This view of literacy as social action is consistent with social constructivist theories, which suggest that learning is a collaborative process shaped by interaction and negotiation within social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of literacy and social action, dialogism emphasises that social change is not a top-down process, nor is it driven by a singular voice or ideology. Instead, it is through dialogue and the exchange of ideas, stories, and perspectives that collective action can emerge. Literacy thus becomes a means of facilitating dialogue, allowing individuals to articulate their desires, challenge oppressive systems, and come together to pursue common goals. For example, the rise of social media and digital platforms can be seen as a modern example of

dialogism in action. These spaces allow for a multiplicity of voices to be heard, challenging mainstream narratives and empowering marginalised communities to mobilise for social change. In this context, literacy is not just about the ability to read and write, but also about the capacity to navigate complex digital landscapes, engage in conversations with diverse voices, and use language to challenge power structures. According to these theories, literacy is not just a cognitive skill, but a practice deeply intertwined with the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. The classroom, therefore, becomes a space where students not only acquire technical skills but also participate in the construction of meaning and identity through dialogue and collaboration.

2.3.2. Creativity and imagination in language learning

Creativity and imagination are essential in fostering meaningful educational experiences and holistic learner development, particularly in English language education where storytelling and design is part of the curriculum. Vygotsky's seminal work (1978, 2004) provides a foundational theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between creativity, imagination, and learning. Vygotsky (1930, 1978) argues that imagination is not a spontaneous individual activity, but that it emerges from social and cultural interactions. He emphasised that imagination is linked to reality as it emerges from lived experiences, social, and cultural interactions that serves as a critical function in problem solving, innovation, and cultural development. This perspective highlights the socio-cultural dimensions of creativity and suggests that imaginative processes are shaped by interactions with others and mediated by cultural tools, including language, symbols, and art. Vygotsky's perspective of creativity and imagination highlights the importance of engaging with creativity through social and collaborative learning approaches.

Craft (2005) and Sawyer (2011) build on Vygotsky's work. Craft (2005) introduces the concept of 'possibility thinking', which defines creativity as the ability to envision and explore alternatives within a given context. Sawyer (2011) foregrounds the spontaneous and collaborative dimensions of creativity, and he suggests that classrooms function as spaces for co-constructing knowledge through dialogue and interaction. Both perspectives highlight the need for pedagogies that encourage inquiry, experimentation, and shared exploration. These conceptualisations are

important for this study as the multimodal storytelling intervention engages with collaborative approaches and encourages possibility thinking through storytelling that has a social agenda.

2.3.2. Creativity and imagination in a South African context

In South Africa, creativity and imagination in education have gained recognition in efforts to decolonise the curriculum and promote learner-centred pedagogies. Scholars such as Nkondo (2007) and Msimanga and Lelliott (2014) emphasise the role of creativity in addressing the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of South African classrooms. Nkondo's (2007) work highlights how indigenous knowledge systems and storytelling practices can serve as a means for imaginative engagement which fosters a sense of identity and cultural pride among learners.

In addition, multimodality served as a means to engage with creativity and imagination as Ndlovu and Mhlongo (2020) and Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) explored how modes such as visual arts and performance enable learners to express complex ideas and emotions, which contributes to their cognitive and social development. These studies and pedagogical approaches align with Vygotsky's notion of creativity as socially constructed, where learners draw on their cultural, linguistic and social resources to construct new meanings.

Grounded in socio-cultural theory, creativity and imagination as conceptualised by Vygotsky, Mendelowitz (2017) introduces the concept of critical imagination which provides a transformative lens for understanding creativity and imagination in educational contexts. Critical imagination merges creativity with criticality, which enables learners to use their imaginative capacities to question dominant ideologies, power structures, and social inequalities (Mendelowitz, 2017; Mendelowitz et al., 2023; Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). This concept highlights the importance of reflexivity and agency in the imaginative process. Critical imagination moves away from individualistic notions of creativity and imagination, and situates it within broader social, cultural, and political contexts. In her work, Mendelowitz drawings on Vygotsky argues that imagination is deeply relational and dependent on context. It is through engagement with others, stories, and symbols that learners can envision alternative realities and challenge the status quo.

She examines how learners engage with narratives and writing to critically reflect on their identities, social positions, and the broader world (Mendelowitz, 2016, 2017; Mendelowitz and Lazar, 2020; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022; Mendelowitz, Ferreira and Dixon, 2023; Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). For example, she explores how students use personal narratives and creative expression to grapple with issues of inequality, cultural identity, and belonging. In these contexts, critical imagination is not limited to creative outputs, but it is rather a process of meaning-making and empowerment. By engaging in imaginative practices, learners can articulate their experiences, resist marginalisation, and envision alternate realities and more equitable futures. This aligns with Vygotsky's belief in the transformative potential of imagination as a tool for human development.

Bradbury (2020) argues that narrative psychology and Vygotsky's theories are both based on the dynamic relationship between self, society, and culture. She explores the intersection between narratives and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to bridge societal gaps in South Africa. Bradbury makes a claim that is pertinent to this study stating that narratives are not solely reflections of experiences, but they are central to how individuals and groups make sense of their lives and enact change. Thus, human development is shaped by narratives and the ways that individuals construct identities within socio-cultural contexts. Through a critical dialogue between these two theoretical approaches, Bradbury addresses how people's stories interact with social and cultural resources to shape their sense of self and agency. Her work focuses on themes such as identity, the role of language and meaning making, and the potential for narratives to challenge or reinforce social structures. I take on a similar approach in this study by using multimodal narratives as a tool for learners to reflect on lived experiences, construct identity, and enable dialogue between the self and the social world.

Bradbury (2020) focuses on the dialogic nature of narratives, and she argues that it is constructed through interaction and imbued with cultural meanings. Thus, she challenges traditional conceptualisations of writing and views identity as dynamic and shaped by the interplay of personal stories and broader socio-cultural aspects. Bradbury's concept of *'changing subjects'* refers to the potential of narratives to disrupt and transform social structures and individual understandings of the self. She illustrates how stories can challenge dominant discourses by

addressing inequality and fostering social justice through narrative and dialogic practices which offers new ways of seeing and being.

2.3.3. Implications of creativity and imagination in education contexts

Drawing on these perspectives and scholarly work, it is evident that creativity and imagination are essential for fostering criticality and agency. This is particularly important in diverse and multilingual contexts like South Africa, where learners' pluralistic resources can serve as a foundation for imaginative engagement. There is a need for creativity and imagination to be used in transformative ways that address contemporary challenges. Ken Robinson's (2006) TED Talk, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* is a compelling critique of traditional education systems and their impact on creativity. Robinson argues that schools prioritise academic achievement over creativity, which limits and undermines creative disciplines and multimodal meaning making. He emphasises that creativity is as important as literacy and should be treated with equal status in education. This limits diverse forms of knowledge and possibilities of integrating creative, practical, and emotional dimensions. Robinson (2006) concludes that by failing to prioritise creativity, education systems risk undermining the potential of future generations to innovate and solve complex problems.

Imagination and creativity are also vital for emotional and social development (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). Creative activities often involve collaboration, empathy, and the exploration of emotions, which can enhance learners' interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. The role of emotion and affect, are essential particularly when working with criticality and multimodality. Therefore, to address these issues and engage with a transformative socio-cultural approach to creativity and imagination, this study uses creative and collaborative multimodal approaches to storytelling that includes a brief that aligns with a social agenda that encourages reflectivity and criticality to creative writing tasks.

Literature review

2.4. Storytelling

Huddled around a fire, the children's eyes glisten under the stars as they gaze at the aged, dark-skinned community leader in awe, their jaws drop in amazement as he narrates stories from the inner landscape of his mind.

After a warm bath, the children race to bed. Tucked underneath a cosy blanket, they listen attentively to stories of unicorns and dragons as mum and dad flip the book over to show them pictures that bring their imagination to life.

The characters twist and turn across the stage as they use their voices and bodies to enact the musical.

Strike a pose, pout, snap and add a filter. A quick caption followed by a trail of emojis, the post is ready to upload.

I illustrated above through my own examples, across time and space, stories take on different forms and it is often multimodal.

2.4.1. Defining storytelling and its significance

Storytelling is a fundamental human activity which is rooted in cultural, social, and cognitive practices. It is "a fundamental marker of being human that has always been an integral part of human activities across time, space and cultures" (Mendelowitz et al, 2023, 48). Storytelling can include a range of different forms such as oral stories, written narratives, and digital media which can serve as a means of making sense of the world, transmitting knowledge, and constructing identities. This section will illustrate how scholars emphasise the multifaceted nature of storytelling and its significance in education, identity, and multimodal communication. Storytelling is defined as "*a process where the teller uses a narrative structure, vocalization, and/or dramatic and mental imagery to communicate with an audience, who also uses mental imagery to provide the teller with verbal and non-verbal feedback*" (Dyson and Genishi, 1994 in Lucarevschi, 2016, 25). Walter Benjamin (1936) highlights storytelling as an oral tradition that

fosters a sense of community. He argues that storytelling involves shared experiences and imaginative engagement. Bruner (1991) takes on a similar view and states that storytelling shapes human cognition, which suggests that narrative is a primary way through which individuals organise and interpret experiences. He states that narratives are a recollection of events, and they also construct or constrain our perceptions of reality. This suggests the transformative power of storytelling in shaping how one views the world and their position in it.

"We make sense of our lives through stories and construct our identities through the stories we tell ourselves and others, as well as the stories we hear from others" (Mendelowitz, Ferreira & Dixon, 2023, 48). Bamberg (2006) and Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008) speak about narratives in action which are stories that are imbued with constructions of identities and personal experiences. These stories illustrate how individuals position themselves in relation to their imagined audience and dominant ideologies that exist in society. Drawing on the conceptualisation of stories being intertwined with identities, storytelling is an imaginative recollection of incidents and experiences of one's life and it draws largely on identities as it represents versions of oneself as individuals use stories to (re)construct their understanding of the world, shape their identities, and make sense of their experiences. Imagination serves as a transformative lens in storytelling, allowing individuals to creatively reinterpret their experiences and project alternative versions of themselves that align with their evolving identities. Through imaginative engagement, storytelling becomes a dynamic process where individuals draw on past incidents and future possibilities to construct narratives that both reflect and reshape their understanding of the world and their place within it. Thus, stories are intertwined with identity, culture and the ability to connect people. Storytelling is an important part of identity construction and it "*enables us to explore both our inner and outer landscapes, external events and experiences and the landscape of consciousness, our inner worlds of thoughts, feelings and knowing*" (Bruner 1986, 14). It is a way to make sense of one's life and communicate that to others, and this results in individuals being able to position themselves in the world.

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory aligns with the conceptualisation of storytelling as it emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural tools in learning and cognitive development. This is because storytelling embodies identity formation and cultural expressions that include values, beliefs, experiences and identities. [Stories are] a "*powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them (such as race, culture, gender, and*

social class), penetrate barriers to understanding, and create feelings of kindredness. In other words, stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention on a very personal level, and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are" (Gay, 2018, 2–3) and this makes it a powerful tool for cognitive, cultural and social development for inclusionary and equitable narrative practices. Storytelling includes conveying events, experiences and emotions through narratives.

Several scholars have emphasised the importance of locating stories in specific socio-cultural contexts, without which stories can simply become too individualised and narrow (Goodson & Gill, 2014; Chadwick, 2017). This argument is well articulated by Chadwick who states that "*Stories are constructed in the cracks between multiple and at times contradictory voices and identity/ narrative is thus radically dialogic*" (2019, 11-12). Chadwick highlights the multiplicity of story here. Not only is a story created for an implied audience but also that the writer/ teller draws on different voices from past and present experiences across different contexts. It offers potential to communicate complex ideas, evoke empathy, challenge assumptions, and inspire change. Identities and our place in the world are constructed by weaving stories of the past, present and future to understand who we are, where we come from and where we are going with regards to individual and collective knowledge and cultures.

Storytelling is significant in exploring and constructing identities. Identities are not fixed, but constructed through narratives where storytelling serves as a medium for individuals to negotiate their place in the world. Rowsell and Pahl (2011) build on this idea by analysing how learners use literacies and stories which are embedded in objects and multimodal texts to construct identities. Their work reveals how storytelling enables the mobilisation of personal and cultural resources to contribute to a deeper understanding of the self and others. Enciso (2017) echoes this claim of storytelling reflecting the past and present which enables learners to reimagine their futures and future selves. This multiplicity is reflected in the methodology and data of this study as the construction of narratives and stories were located within specific social contexts, they were collaborative and explored multidimensions of culture, identities, language and remixed these across different genres and modes. Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022, 3) illustrate that social and collaborative aspects of writing that are situated in reality "*provided learners with opportunities to employ an extended range of shared resources, particularly their 'collaborative imagination'*

(Mendelowitz 2016:6)". By emphasizing the social and collaborative aspects of writing, Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) draw attention to how learners' engagement with shared resources enriches the creative process. The notion of collaborative imagination (Mendelowitz, 2016) is particularly significant, as it suggests that imagination is not merely an individual cognitive activity but also a socially situated process, shaped by interaction, dialogue, and shared experiences.

While storytelling offers powerful possibilities for identity construction, it can also limit expressions of it. Storytelling is deeply embedded within power structures that can both enable and constrain identity expressions. Dominant narratives can marginalise certain voices, limiting the scope of identity work. Not all individuals have equal access to platforms or spaces for storytelling. Digital technologies, for example, offer new opportunities for storytelling but are shaped by global inequalities in access and participation due to issues of access, echo chambers and dominance of ideologies. This disparity can exacerbate the marginalisation of certain voices, reinforcing the limitations of storytelling as a universal tool for identity work. While storytelling has the potential to empower, it can also perpetuate existing power structures. Dominant narratives often dictate what is considered a valid or worthy story, which marginalises voices that deviate from the norm. This can constrain identity work by forcing individuals to conform to societal expectations rather than freely expressing their authentic selves. Individuals from marginalised groups may internalize dominant narratives, leading them to self-censor or undervalue their own stories. This limitation arises when storytelling practices do not actively challenge hegemonic discourses, leaving individuals feeling that their experiences are less significant or meaningful. This may impact expressions of voice and limit sharing of authentic identities and stories.

It calls for a critical inquiry of questioning whose stories are told, who gets to tell them, and under what conditions as indicated by Janks (2010, 2014). Therefore, with regards to the risk of marginalisation and silencing through storytelling and aspects of voice, hooks (1994) and Benmayor (2008) advocate for storytelling as a form of resistance where marginalised communities reclaim agency by narrating their lived experiences or where writers represent various groups and challenge hegemonic discourses. By giving learners' the tools to craft and share their stories, educators create opportunities for personal and collective meaning making and it fosters a deeper understanding of social justice issues (Benmayor, 2008). Educators must actively

disrupt these power dynamics by creating spaces that amplify marginalised voices and challenge dominant narratives. This involves not only questioning the stories that are told but also fostering the conditions for diverse storytelling practices that honour a multiplicity of identities. By embracing multimodal approaches, learners can draw on their full range of semiotic resources to tell stories that reflect their lived realities. A critical pedagogy of storytelling should equip learners to interrogate and deconstruct dominant narratives, empowering them to reclaim their voices and advocate for social change. In this way, storytelling becomes not just an act of identity construction but also a tool for resisting oppression and fostering equity.

Storytelling can take on the different forms of expression and genres, which the youth frequently engage with, specifically through social media as each post is a depiction of a narrative story. Multimodal and digital forms of storytelling enhance student engagement and develops skills that are necessary in the 21st century. Multimodal storytelling is described as "*the use of voice, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and interaction to connect a tale with listeners*" (Hsu 2010:7 in Lucarevschi, 2016). Kress (2010) notes that a combination of modes that may include text, image, sound and performance can create immersive and impactful learning experiences, that creates deeper understanding and critical thinking. The "importance of developing new literacies and storytelling acknowledges that stories are at the root of culture and help us to understand alternative ways of seeing." (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017, 497). This is an act of sharing human experiences and can be a reason for social transformation (Bruner, 2003; Lambert, 2013; Anderson and Macleroy, 2017).

In addition to multimodal storytelling through written, audio and performative modes, this study makes use of digital storytelling through visual and performative modes that were expressed through social media genres. "*Digital storytelling and other participatory video techniques have been used for at least a decade in South Africa*" (Gachago et al., 2014, 3) and it has gained increasing popularity in education as a 21st century learning tool (Mitchell & De Lange, 2013). "*A digital story is a personal narrative which combines voice, sound and images into a short video developed by non-professionals*" (Gachago et al., 2014, 3). Individuals can position themselves as "*authors, composers, and designers who are expert and powerful communicators, people with things to say that the world should hear*" (Hull & Katz, 2006:10)" cited in Gachago et al., 2014, 3).

2.4.2. The role of imagination and creativity in storytelling

Storytelling requires imagination and creativity in retelling or crafting a story. Enciso's (2017) definition of imagination grounds it as a critical social practice in the material reality of lives. She is particularly interested in the relationship between past, present and future selves and how storytelling can enable learners to re-imagine their futures by reflecting on their past experiences. I theorise creativity and imagination using a Vygotskian approach. Vygotsky (2004) speaks about imagination and creativity as being interchangeably used and he defines imagination as mental function that synthesises creativity, cognition and affect. Therefore, imagination is an act of mind that generates creative output. Storytelling is an imaginative process intricately connected to the imagination.

Vygotsky (2004) in his seminal work on imagination delineates three kinds of storytelling and explains how they entail different imaginative processes: fictional/ fantasy narratives, narrating other lives and narrating the self. While narrating other lives entails imagining the realities of others, fictional narratives entail inventing an imaginary world while narrating stories about oneself entails reimagining the self through retelling. All three of these types of storytelling are relevant to this study, however, narrating stories about the self through a collaborative lens was most dominant in the data. However, all three types of storytelling draw on the self in different ways. Memory is a form of active selection and makes use of one's imagination by drawing on events or experiences that have occurred followed by reproducing or recreating them (Vygotsky, 2004). While the process of remembering entails drawing on aspects of fact and actual events that occurred, it requires each of us to have a 'created' version of the past (Hampl, 1999).

Vygotsky (2004) provided a model for understanding imagination and creative activity within human activity. The first involves retelling or reproducing a memory that has already occurred, thus not creating anything new. The second is called creative reworking, which is taking something such as a memory that exists and changing it to create new ideas and experiences, thus producing something new out of what already exists. By drawing on this idea, we understand that creativity especially in storytelling is grounded in reality and involves drawing on lived experiences and resources as a source of inspiration. Storytelling can be a powerful tool for social change as it

allows diverse and marginalised voices to be heard which can potentially inspire empathy and action which can contribute to transformative educational practices.

Vygotsky's (2004) socio-cultural conceptualisation of creative reworking is one component of a model for understanding creativity and imagination. Creative reworking refers to taking something that exists, such as a memory or experience and changing it by combining it with other ideas and resources to create new ideas and experiences, producing something new out of what already exists (Vygotsky, 2004). There are limitations to Vygotsky's conceptualisation as it foregrounds creative aspects of imagination and storytelling, whereas I conceptualise storytelling through both a creative/imaginative and critical lens by considering the social aspect to storytelling, the content of the stories and how resources were used. Imagination and emotion intertwine with social, cultural, and personal identities, shaping how individuals interpret and respond to texts and issues. Recognising the role of imagination and affect in intersectionality helps students grasp the complexities of power dynamics and social structures. Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) examined how postgraduate students in a South African higher education context engaged with critical literacies, imagination, and affect to navigate complex power dynamics related to race and gender. The students were tasked with analysing and redesigning university recruitment advertisements, a process that required them to critically assess existing representations and creatively envision more inclusive alternatives. This imaginative redesign process enabled students to enter relations of affective solidarity, fostering a nuanced understanding of intersectional identities and the power structures that shape them. By engaging both their imaginative and affective faculties, the students were able to critically reflect on and challenge dominant narratives, which led to a deeper comprehension of the complexities inherent in social structures and power relations.

By engaging with creative and critical elements of storytelling, I draw on Mendelowitz (2017) term critical imagination which I use to view and understand the multimodal stories that the participants of this study crafted. Affordances of critical imagination include "*self-representations, multivoicedness and expression of the dialogic relationship between self and other*" (Mendelowitz et al., 2022, 136) which offers possibilities to enact and play with multiple representations of imagination and the world. I will be working with critical imagination and counter-storytelling (Mendelowitz et al., 2022) which emerges in the data because of storytelling that involves deeper

connections to other stories. Counter-stories and critical imagination are particularly important as it enables fluid moves between creative and academic genres and contexts. Counter-stories have a social agenda which challenges and writes back to dominant ideologies. In doing so, critical imagination and counter-storytelling develop storytelling skills and social imagination which engages with current realities and inventing alternate realities.

2.4.3. Storytelling to mobilise learners' diverse resources

Brauer (2024) proposes creative writing as a tool to engage with learners' resources and it should emerge from learners' diverse knowledge pools and "*may rouse a strengthened voice, benefit cultural literacy, engender the discovery and exploration of individual funds of knowledge, enhance relational competence, and bring about the critical crafting of and engagement with cultural representations*" (62). Myers' (1993) definition of creative writing "*is the name that might be given to any effort that undertakes to restore the idea of literature as an integrated discipline of thought and activity, of textual study and practical technique*" (p. 279). While all writing can be regarded as creative, creative writing is a term commonly used to refer to literary texts which often involves aspects of imagination (Mendelowitz and Lazar, 2020; Brauer, 2024). Therefore, the practice of storytelling aligns with the definition of creative writing, and it includes a combination of imagination and reality as sources of inspiration. Storytelling can explore knowledge based on cultural frames of reference which creates interest in learning and literacy (Brauer, 2024). This allows learners to be positioned as having voices, cultures and experiences that matter and are the focal point of their learning.

Dyson (2003) focuses on children's storytelling practices and illustrates how they navigate and negotiate cultural and linguistic identities through narrative play. These insights resonate with studies by Gee (2000) who links storytelling with discourse and identity and emphasises how individuals use narratives to position themselves within social and cultural contexts. Thus, storytelling is a critical social practice that powerfully mobilises learners' linguistic, semiotic, and material resources, enhancing possibilities for learners to speak and be heard as a fundamental aspect of writing (Enciso, 2017). This is because narrative ways of knowing foreground the personal, affect and provisional ways of knowing, thus valuing the resources learners bring to the

classrooms (Bruner, 1986). It is regarded as a personal and authentic form of learning (Anderson and Macelroy, 2017). Storytelling also has the potential to generate reflexive and critical thinking when used in conjunction with a pedagogy that pushes boundaries (Mendelowitz, 2017; Darvin 2019; Enciso 2017). The process of telling a story about an experience/incident always entails constructing versions of it and bringing new insights to the process of retelling, resulting in a second reading of the experience.

Storytelling used within education allows a space for ordinary people to tell their stories as a means to develop language and engage with culture (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017), especially stories with a multilingual agenda. Flexible language use such as the use of multilingualism and drawing on language repertoires can support learning, especially in cognitive activities such as writing and developing a story (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017). This benefits both monolingual and multilingual learners because it encourages intercultural learning for those who do not have ties to the languages and serves as a form of language development, but for those who are multilingual it can be an act of representing communication that occurs outside the classroom and it can be a form of representation of community and culture. Moving between languages amongst peers can be stimulating for discussion and feedback as it illustrates differences amongst language and creates an awareness of language and culture (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017).

When engaging with new linguistic experiences through storytelling and collaboration such as intercultural sharing and engaging in multilingualism, it involves extending existing personal 'linguaculture' and re-shapes identity in the process (Risager, 2011 as cited in Anderson and Macleroy, 2017). This is a shift from rigid notions of culture and views it instead as a 'dynamic, relational and plural' capturing 'individual and shared phenomena that are expressed, constructed and mediated through ways of behaving, thinking, feeling, and speaking' (McAlinden, 2014, pp. 74–75 as cited in Anderson and Macleroy, 2017).

Vygotsky (2004) 'banishes the popular image of the lonely genius imagining brilliant new ideas in isolation' (Mendelowitz et al., 2023). He claims that imagination is developed through social interactions and engagement with society. Therefore, to develop imagination through storytelling, in this study I draw on a social approach to learning through collaborative discussions and text production which provided spaces for learners to share their identities, cultures and experiences

with each other and use this to tell their stories creatively and engage with a wider range of student resources. Collaboration plays a significant role in multimodal storytelling to enable "*creative reworking (Vygotsky, 2004), re-imagining and counter storytelling*" (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022, 8).

The link between criticality, narrative, and imagination was not explicitly addressed in Vygotsky's work, but modern researchers have built on his ideas to explore these intersections. Greene (1995) highlights the importance of imaginative thinking and writing in envisioning new possibilities. More recently, Enciso (2017) and Darvin (2019) have investigated the interplay between narrative, imagination, and criticality, emphasizing a social justice framework in their work. Collaboration with peers encourages students to use storytelling as a form of social action, take collective risks and access a wide range of resources and repertoires within their learning, thus making learning agentive and participatory where students establish investment and agency in the academic space (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022).

In this study, I used storytelling as an explicit focus on linking personal stories and experiences to wider social issues with the hope of creating spaces to engage with a wide range of cultural, linguistic and social resources and repertoires as entry points for learning and valuing what learners bring to the classroom space. This methodology drew on the idea that learners are co-constructors of knowledge (Freire, 2005; Hooks, 1994; Gachago et al., 2014) and this creates opportunities for empowerment through learning as learners can critically and creatively participate in transforming the world.

2.4.4. Storytelling and social justice

Storytelling is a crucial tool for advancing social justice as it offers marginalised communities a way to amplify their voices, challenge systemic inequities, and advocate for meaningful change. Recent scholarship highlights the transformative potential of storytelling in fostering empathy (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024), creating counter-narratives that are creative and affective (Boler, 1999; Ahmed, 2014; Anwaruddin, 2016; Govender, 2023; Mendelowitz and Govender,

2024), and building collective solidarity (Liu & Shange, 2018). Scholars recognise storytelling as a form of resistance against dominant narratives that often marginalise or erase certain groups.

Delgado (1989) describes storytelling as a means for racialised communities to present counter-stories that challenge societal stereotypes and expose structural inequalities. These narratives help reframe the lived experiences of marginalised individuals, giving them agency in shaping their own identities and histories. Leung et al. (2021) investigates storytelling within the context of refugee activism, and they demonstrate how personal narratives resist oppressive state policies and foster solidarity. Their work reveals how storytelling operates as a mode of resistance and as a tool for advocacy, which allows individuals to reframe their identities from that of victims to active agents of justice. This shift from victimhood to using storytelling as resistance and social action is particularly important in this study.

Storytelling has the potential to foster empathy, which is critical for promoting social justice. Narratives humanise abstract social issues, which enables audiences to connect emotionally with complex realities and inequalities (Mendelowitz, Ferreira, Dixon, 2023). By centring lived experiences in stories, it creates pathways for dialogue and mutual understanding. Storytelling plays a key role in building collective identities and mobilising social movements. Polletta et al. (2011) examine how narratives unify diverse participants by weaving together stories of shared struggle, hope, and resilience. This storytelling approach has been illustrated in movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, which rely on collective narratives to sustain momentum and drive systemic change. Storytelling has gained prominence as a method for promoting equity and inclusion. Kumashiro (2015) advocates for its use in anti-oppressive education, where students are encouraged to share their diverse experiences and engage critically with issues of power and privilege.

Phillips (2012) focuses on the transformational element of how storytelling can foster active citizenship by engaging learners in critical reflection and ethical action. She integrates storytelling with educational practices by using folktales and personal narratives to address themes of equity, empathy, and social responsibility. Phillips (2012) uses storytelling as a catalyst for active citizenship to make social justice principles accessible and relatable so that learners can see themselves as being able to contribute to social change. Her work is pivotal in taking storytelling

beyond cultural or artistic practices and sees its potential for being a vehicle for social empowerment and systemic change. By creating spaces for such narratives, learners can challenge dominant ideologies and foster critical affective awareness (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). As both a reflective and an action-oriented practice, storytelling continues to play a central role in the pursuit of equity, inclusion, and systemic change. A critical point that Phillips (2012) makes is the challenge of contextualising pedagogy and stories across different cultural or socio-economic settings, which may require localised adaptation to achieve transformative impacts.

This section highlights storytelling as a tool for amplifying marginalised voices, challenging dominant narratives, and fostering social justice, which aligns with my investigation into how learners mobilise their resources to construct counter-narratives. In my research, I focus on how storytelling allows learners to reframe their identities, particularly through creative platforms such as Instagram, and performative modes where multimodal affordances support diverse expressions. The critical point about storytelling fostering empathy and collective solidarity (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024) mirrors my findings on how learners' narratives promote criticality, agency, and dialogue in educational settings. By exploring how multimodal elements intersect with language, I extend the discussion on how storytelling enables learners to critique and reconstruct social realities through narratives.

This section's emphasis on storytelling as a reflective and action oriented practice complements my focus on learners' critical engagement with identity and power structures through multimodal texts. Phillips's (2012) insights into storytelling as a means for fostering active citizenship and social responsibility are particularly significant for my study which aims to contextualise these principles within South African classrooms. The challenge Phillips identifies of adapting pedagogy and storytelling to different socio-cultural contexts is a crucial aspect of my work, as I explore how learners draw on their pluralistic resources in an English language classroom setting shaped by complex linguistic and socio-economic dynamics. My study builds on this by demonstrating how multimodal storytelling not only enables learners to engage with their lived realities but also equips them with tools for imagining and enacting transformative change in their communities and the world.

2.4.5. The limitations of storytelling

Storytelling is recognised as a powerful tool for meaning making, identity construction, and fostering criticality. However, despite its transformative potential and affordances, it also has its limitations. A significant limitation of storytelling is the potential that dominant hegemonic narratives can overshadow marginalised voices which reinforces power hierarchies (Hooks, 1990). This is particularly evident in contemporary literacy practices such as social media which value dominant cultures and voices. The algorithms and infrastructures of digital platforms prioritise stories that align with popular discourses, marginalising narratives that deviate from these norms.

In a South African context, storytelling has historically been a site of both resistance and oppression. While oral storytelling traditions have been central to indigenous knowledge systems, colonial and apartheid-era narratives sought to suppress the voices of non-dominant groups (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). Storytelling in educational and media contexts often remains shaped by these colonial legacies, privileging Western and Anglo-dominant frameworks of narrative construction over local mediums of expression (Prinsloo, 2005; McKinney, 2017). Prinsloo and Janks (2002) critique how literacy education in South African schools often promotes narratives that align with neoliberal ideals which marginalises multilingual and multicultural storytelling practices. This limits learners' ability to draw on their full range of linguistic and cultural resources, as emphasised in Pahl and Rowsell's (2011) work on multiliteracies.

Structural inequities further limit storytelling's potential. Digital storytelling initiatives, such as those implemented in South African schools, are often constrained by resource shortages, unequal internet access, and limited teacher training. This results in unequal opportunities, where South African schools are unable to design pedagogy and storytelling practices to suit 21st century learners and advance education to meet contemporary demands. Multimodal storytelling, which incorporates multiple semiotic modes such as text, visuals, sound, and movement, offers rich opportunities for expression but also introduces new challenges. Kress (2010) highlights that while multimodal approaches can enrich storytelling, it requires a level of multimodal literacy and skills that not all learners and educators have.

The integration of modes can lead to cognitive overload or a lack thereof for the learners and audiences. Jewitt (2013) points out that balancing the interplay between text, visuals, and audio

often results in some modes dominating while others remain underutilised. This is evident in storytelling and narrative practices in South Africa which values written modes and this is ingrained in learners (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). The imbalance of modes where some modes are more dominant than others can dilute the intended message and can potentially limit the effectiveness of the storytelling.

2.5. Identity

Identity is an important aspect of storytelling as it examines how individuals define themselves in relation to group membership and the world. Exploring identities can be useful for understanding who learners are in and outside of a classroom setting. The conceptualisation of identity in this study will focus on how people position themselves and others in conversations and narratives.

2.5.1. Defining identity and its role in an English language classroom

"*We use language to articulate our sense of belonging in the world and for this reason we need to understand the relationship between language, identity and belonging*" Botsis (2017, 17) and this interrelationship is important in this study as the focus is on multimodal stories that were told collaboratively by a diverse demographic of learners. Norton (1997) uses the term identity "*to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future. … I take the position that identity is related to desire – the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation and the desire for security and safety*" (410). Identity involves one's sense of self, and how others view you (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). This may change across time and space, indicating the fluid and hybrid nature of identity which can be pluralistic. The way that others view you is positioning and linked to desire – the desire to be recognised and to belong. This indicates that identity can potentially be a social construct, marked by relations of power which shapes future possibilities.

In literacy and language research, identity used to be regarded as fixed in relation to personality, learning styles and motivation which meant that who one is does not change across time and spaces. However, post-structural views of identity conceptualise identity as "*fluid, context-*

dependent, and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances" (Norton and Toohey, 2011, 419). My conceptualisation of identity is based on a post-structuralist and sociocultural definition of identity that frame the literature in this study. This takes into consideration the complex and pluralistic identities of language learners and aims to make meaningful connections between social and academic contexts to form notions of investment in their learning. Identity is a multifaceted construct that plays a crucial role in language education, influencing the way individuals see themselves and this impacts learners' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Norton, 2013).

Identities are inclusive of linguistic identity, cultural identity and social identity. Linguistic identity refers to how individuals regard and assert themselves in terms of their languages, proficiency, accent, dialect, and use of different languages as *"[l]anguage is, and continues to be, a visceral site of identity construction, where people position themselves and others in relation to their particular beliefs, needs and politics of language*" (Botsis, 2017, 16). Cultural identity refers to how individuals identify with and express aspects of their cultures (heritage and contemporary). This includes their cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Social identity refers to how individuals position themselves in social groups based on language, ethnicity, nationality, and other social categories that influence their interactions and sense of belonging.

Norton (2000) has emphasised the sociocultural nature of identity, highlighting how language learners' identities are shaped by social interactions, power dynamics, and cultural contexts. This perspective highlights the dynamic and fluid nature of identity which challenges traditional views of identity as fixed (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). She believes that the construct of investment in language learning is linked to identity as "*learners 'invest' in the target language at particular times and in particular settings, because they believe they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital. As the value of learners' cultural capital increases, so learners reassess their sense of themselves and their desires for the future*" (Norton and Toohey, 2011, 420). Investment is a sociological construct aiming to make meaningful connections between what a learner desires and their commitment to learn a language. Therefore, identity is an important concept to consider in language classrooms as it is a driving force to language learning. Studies have shown that learners' identities can influence their language learning strategies, attitudes towards the target language, and willingness

to engage in dialogic activities (Norton, 2013). For example, learners who regard themselves as competent speakers in a language may demonstrate higher levels of confidence and participation in classroom activities (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

In a South African context, the study of identity within language education is especially rich and complex due to the country's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. This diversity within English language classrooms have created a need for language education practices that include and empower learners from diverse cultural linguistic backgrounds. "*Identity is an important part of both CRP and creative writing*" (Brauer, 2024, 70) as it relates to how one makes sense of the world and their place/role in it. It is important to incorporate learners' home languages and cultural knowledge into the curriculum to promote positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging.

Social relationships are crucial to how one constructs subjectivity as it relates to one's sense of self and the understanding of their relation to the world (Norton and Toohey, 2011). It implies power relations exist, depending on how one is framed in terms of their subjectivity and this is expressed through language. "*A conceptualization of subjectivity as multiple, non-unitary, and dynamic leaves room for the view that individuals need not be locked forever in particular positions*" (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Therefore, identity writing through storytelling offers language learners dynamic opportunities that are transformative in offering opportunities for empowerment through narrative and expressions of voice. Dimensions of identity are interconnected and shaped by personal experiences, societal influences, and language (Norton, 2013).

Identity negotiation is a crucial aspect of language learning, particularly in diverse educational settings where learners navigate multiple linguistic and cultural identities (Norton, 2011). This process involves learners' active engagement with their identities, including how they perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and how they negotiate these perceptions in various social contexts (Block, 2007). Identity negotiation is important in South Africa's multilingual classrooms, where learners navigate complex linguistic and cultural identities. Studies have explored how learners construct hybrid identities that bridge their heritage and socially constructed identities, highlighting the dynamic nature of identity (Kaschula, 2008). Hybrid and fluid identity negotiation will be illustrated in the data sections of this thesis by engaging with the stories produced in the multimodal intervention of this study.

Identity is not an individual construct, and it is shaped by institutional practices, policies, and societal expectations (Norton, 2013). Pavlenko (2017) and Cummins (2000, 2007) theories of language proficiency and identity highlight the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity in educational contexts. This study engages with those concepts further by focusing on the interplay between identity, language, culture, and education, to create inclusive and empowering language learning environments.

2.6. Critical literacy

Critical literacy is a transformative approach to education that encourages learners to engage deeply with texts as critical analysts who interrogate and challenge the messages embedded within them. Critical literacy seeks to uncover how language and communication shape social norms, identities, and power relations. It positions literacy as a social practice, intertwined with issues of ideology, equity, and justice. In doing so, it offers learners the tools to deconstruct dominant discourses, recognise their own positioning within societal structures, and reimagine possibilities for change.

In this study, critical literacy serves as a foundational lens for exploring how learners use multimodal storytelling to create and convey stories and counter-narratives with a social agenda. Critical literacy has expanded to include a broader spectrum of semiotic resources, which include visual, auditory, performative, and digital modes of communication. This multimodal turn in critical literacy is particularly significant for addressing the complexities of contemporary meaning making, as learners increasingly engage with and produce texts that are not confined to linear or print-based modes. By incorporating images, symbols, gestures, and digital tools, critical literacy becomes a dynamic framework for interpreting and producing stories that resonate across diverse contexts and audiences. The integration of critical literacy with multimodal storytelling is particularly relevant in fostering learners' ability to critique and reconstruct the socio-political landscapes they inhabit. These frameworks encourage learners to draw on their cultural, linguistic, and social repertoires to produce artefacts that challenge dominant ideologies and foreground marginalised voices. Through this process, learners are not only interpreting existing discourses but also contributing to the creation of new discourses and literacy practices that advocate for inclusion, equity, and justice. Therefore, critical literacy aligns with the social agenda of this study

by empowering learners to position themselves as active agents of change who can speak back to power (Govender, 2019) and reimagine their realities.

By engaging with the work of scholars such as Janks (2010, 2014), Luke (2000), and Vasquez (2014), this section explores the nuances of critical literacy theory and its applicability to contemporary social and educational contexts. It further situates critical literacy within the context of this study, arguing that its focus on questioning, critique, and redesign provides a powerful tool for examining how learners mobilise semiotic resources to craft stories and counter-narratives that challenge systemic inequities and imagine alternative futures.

2.6.1. Defining critical literacy

Critical literacy is "*an evolving repertoire of practices of analysis and interrogation which move between the micro features of texts and the macro conditions of institutions, focusing upon how power relations of power work through these practices*" (Comber, 2013, 589). Janks defines 'critical' as analysis that questions "*the hidden ideologies of texts… to reveal how power works and to denaturalize 'common sense' assumptions*" (2010, 35 – 36). No text is neutral, and every text has multiple meanings that aim to position readers towards a specific perspective or ideology (Govender, 2019). Since texts are not neutral, those reading the text do not read it in a neutral way either as identity categories influence how individuals read a text and it impacts what kinds of social issues and power relations they are able to identify. Janks (2006) offers a model for critical literacy education and "argues that the theoretical concepts in the field of critical literacy: domination or power, access, diversity and design/redesign are crucially interdependent" (1). These components work together to analyse a text, inquire and critique, and thereafter redesign to engage with transformation. This model highlights that critical literacy involves active learning and engagement which leads towards social consciousness and transformation.

Critical literacy is a sociocultural concept that focuses largely on the relationship between language and power by focusing largely on "domination, access, diversity or design" (Janks, 2000, 176). It helps "us read the texts that construct the politics of everyday life" (Janks, 2014, 349). Examining issues of power is part of the critical literacy discourse where learners can address issues of power

and inequalities. Critical literacy is an important construct, specifically in multilingual contexts due power dynamics across languages and this calls for a more equitable and inclusive learning environment as difference amongst learners increases the creative resources that students can draw on (Janks, 2000). It is an education tool that "enables young people to read both the word and the world critically" (Janks, 2014, 349) by inquiring and understanding how communication plays a role in positioning people and reproducing social norms, ideologies, stereotypes and inequalities. Thus, highlighting that no text is neutral. Social categories such as race, class, gender, ethnicity and religion are social constructs that give privilege to some groups at the expense of others. The multimodal storytelling intervention in this study involves empowering marginalised students to represent themselves in narratives from which they are excluded and treated unequally by giving them a platform to tell their stories and incorporate their culture, personal identity and experiences.

Critical literacy views language as a social practice and focuses on the role of texts and discourse to maintain or transform these issues (Janks, 2014). Critical literacy involves critical thinking which is defined as the "capacity to make appropriate and informed choices about one's life and group or team work, which is based on values of empathy and mutual recognition, compassion, respect, dignity and meaningful relationships with peers" that "*should enable collective problem-solving through processes of critical dialogue, respect, inclusion of diverse perspectives and 'reasonableness', that is the willingness to listen to others whose views, histories, and experiences differ from one's own*" (Walker, 2003, 174). This creates spaces for learners to engage with their identities and learn collaboratively in classrooms that engage with inclusivity. To be a critical reader, you should ask the following questions: "*1. Why did the (text designer) make these choices? (Look at the language, the images, the sound, the movement) 2. Whose interests do they serve? (Who benefits if the images is designed in this way?) 3. Who is empowered or disempowered by the language used?*" (Janks, 1993, iii). These questions and the potential for transformation that critical literacy offers creates possibilities for social action, and Janks (2014) notes that no action is too small to have a larger impact elsewhere.

It is important for educators to develop "the dispositions, discursive resources and the repertoires of practice to do critical literacy work in classrooms" (Comber, 2006, p. 51). Janks works with a framework that offers four components, "*The first focuses on language and power, the second on language identity and difference, the third on access to socially valued goods, and the fourth on*

representation or design across a range of semiotic modes in relation to options for re-design or transformation" (Janks, 2014, 350) which offers a range of perspectives for looking at critical literacy. Critical literacy is also important due to technology and changes in communication which are now predominantly multimodal. Language works to position people in the interest of power, noting that power is negative in this context as it produces unequal social relations (Janks, 2000).

Critical literacy in practice needs to help learners: "*1 . Make connections between something that is going on in the world and their students' lives, where the world can be as small as the classroom or as large as the international stage. 2 . Consider what students will need to know and where they can find the information. 3 . Explore how the problematic is instantiated in texts and practices by a careful examination of design choices and people 's behavior. 4 . Examine who benefits and who is disadvantaged by imagining the social effects of what is going on and of its representation/s. 5 . Imagine possibilities for making a positive difference*" (Janks, 2014, 350). This emphasises that critical literacy has the potential for social engagement with communities and real-world problems, and transformation to enact social change through student activism.

Luke (2000, 453-454) cautioned against "*a formula for 'doing' critical literacy in the classroom*", which reduces critical literacy to a prescriptive formula or rigid methodology for classroom practice. This emphasizes the importance of flexibility and contextual responsiveness. While critical literacy theory provides valuable frameworks and strategies, these should not constrain the dynamic and context-specific nature of meaning-making. In this study, I move away from traditional, linear applications of critical literacy by integrating it with the concept of multimodal storytelling. This approach embraces the unique and fluid nature of each story produced, resisting standardised processes of analysis and allowing for the integration of diverse semiotic and narrative resources that learners bring to the classroom. Rather than explicitly teaching the metalanguage of critical literacy, I draw on its principles to encourage learners to produce counter-stories that challenge dominant discourses and foreground alternative perspectives. This methodology encourages spontaneity and also creates a space for new cognitive insights and semiotic possibilities which enables learners to engage critically and creatively with their identities and the world around them.

Critical literacy has a social justice agenda (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2017), but as a critique, much of the literature and practice sidelines or lacks engagement with imagination/creativity and affect/emotion (Mission and Morgan, 2006; Lewis and Tierney, 2013; Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). It is critiqued for disregarding "*affective responses to texts…and for its backgrounding of aesthetic texts and creativity*" (Mendelowitz, 2017:181). Therefore, conceptualising criticality, creativity and affect as interlinked, Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) trace critical-creative-affective moves during analysis and redesign of texts which foregrounds "*affect and imagination in critical literacy (CL) in order to open up the possibilities for creative and affective engagement*" (1) and call for an affective turn in critical literacy.

Emotion is often separated form cognition in schools and regarded as something that is irrational, however, Boler (1999) states that emotion is located in a "*socially and collaboratively constructed psychic terrain (p. xxi), emerging dynamically through interactions between people, objects, narratives, beliefs and histories (Micciche, 2007)*" cited in Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024, 2). Affect is important in critical literacy, particularly in a study like this that involves multimodal storytelling because "[t]o study emotion allows us to explore the revealed "space" between ideology and internalised feeling" (Boler, 1999, p.13) as affect is "an integral part of the lived experiences, identities, histories, and resources (bodily, emotionally, symbolically, and otherwise) that we and our students bring to teaching and learning" (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024, 2). The stories that are told and the ways in which they are told are informed by emotions that one feels, and this can either cause resistance or oppression (Boler, 1999). She argues that it is important to establish "creative spaces to develop flexible and creative modes of resistance involving emotional breadth and exploration that are not prescriptive" (1999, p.4), but empowerment is also important through resistance of dominant ideals and notions of power. Therefore, I argue that emotion and affect should extend beyond resistance and has value in being acknowledged as part of the resources that learners bring into the classroom.

Just like Govender and Mendelowitz (2024), in this paper affect "*extends the 'emotional breadth' provided by Boler (1999) to include desire, joy, frustration, assertion, affirmation, pleasure, sadness, anger, ambivalence, and confusion (to mention just a few). Of these, we consider desire to be a particularly important element as this points to what students want and need, their hopes, dreams, and fears*" (2). The moment of contact (Ahmed, 2014) in which learners engage with each

other and their stories is driven by their desire and this shapes the direction that their stories take. Their desires position the audience of their stories in particular ways since it is filled with emotions, emphasising that no text is neutral. Therefore, the audience may not accept these positions and will resort to reactions of "*towardness*" or "*awayness*" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 8).

2.6.2. Critical literacy and positioning – counter-narratives and speaking back to power

"*Critical literacy is an orientation to teaching and learning language that understands language as a function of ideology and power*" (Govender, 2019, 7). The practice of critical literacy deconstructs texts to reveal constructed versions of reality. Texts are designed and understood from specific positions relative to identities which may resonate with readers/viewers, or it could create forms of resistance that move them away from the text. This comes down to positionality, and individuals read texts and the world in accordance with who they are, the emotions they feel and the experiences that they had. "*Students must be able to communicate and learn from those who hold different perspectives*" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004) and being open to listen and understand different perspectives is important as part of the critical literacy discourse which learners should be able to do (Lewison et al, 2002; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Opening classroom spaces to different perspectives establish that all perspectives and experiences are valued, and this enhances awareness of learners' own viewpoints (Fajardo, 2015). Collaborative multimodal redesign tasks enable learners to draw on a range of ideological stances to make meaning (Archer, 2011; Fajardo, 2015).

While critical literacy is often primarily associated with reading, the analysis, deconstruction, and critique of texts, this study shifts the focus toward writing and redesign which emphasises the production of multimodal artefacts and stories/counter-stories by the learners. Through the emphasis on redesign across multiple modes, the study extends critical literacy beyond text consumption, enabling learners to engage in transformative practices that reimagine and reshape their socio-cultural landscapes. Educators use counter-stories to explore race, class, gender, and other social dynamics, enabling students to critique dominant ideologies (Hooks, 1994). Counter-stories are narratives that challenge dominant or mainstream stories, often providing marginalized groups with a platform to share their perspectives. These stories disrupt dominant discourses by highlighting lived experiences and systemic inequities that are often silenced or overlooked. They

serve as tools for resistance, validation, and the creation of inclusive spaces for voices that historically have been excluded (Govender, 2019). Counter-stories align with critical literacy theory, and can be used to foster critical reflection, challenge stereotypes, and develop empathy. affirm the identities and experiences of marginalised individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and resilience. They serve as acts of resistance against hegemonic systems, offering alternative worldviews and reclaiming narrative power (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024). In the teaching intervention of this study, these counter-stories are then deconstructed and re-designed across a range of modes using resources in pluralistic and transformative ways. Janks (2010) and Luke & Freebody (1997) emphasise that while deconstruction is an essential component of critical literacy, it is only the first step in a larger process aimed at fostering critical consciousness and transformative action. Deconstruction involves breaking down texts and discourses to uncover underlying power dynamics, biases, and ideologies that perpetuate inequalities or marginalise certain groups. By identifying problematic issues, learners develop the analytical skills needed to question and challenge dominant narratives. However, stopping at deconstruction creates the risk of leaving learners in a space of critique without offering pathways for change or empowerment. Therefore, after deconstruction, the concept of redesign becomes crucial.

Redesign builds on the insights gained through deconstruction by encouraging learners to reimagine and recreate texts or discourses in ways that resist oppression and promote equity. Through redesign, learners are not just passive consumers or critics of existing narratives but active participants in creating alternative texts, for example, counter-narratives that reflect values of inclusion, diversity, and social justice. Redesign includes deconstruction which analyses how texts encode power relations, stereotypes, and ideologies, and reconstruction which produces new texts that subvert or challenge the original messages. Therefore, there is a link between counter-stories and redesign, but every redesign is not necessarily a counter-story. In order to be a counter-story, it needs to address and challenge and/or disrupt dominant representations of power and discourse.

Norman Fairclough's (2001) model for Critical Discourse Analysis (see figure below) offers a model for counter-storytelling and redesign by using "*the function, form and power of language to develop their own capacity to read and construct the world around them*" (Govender, 2019, 8).

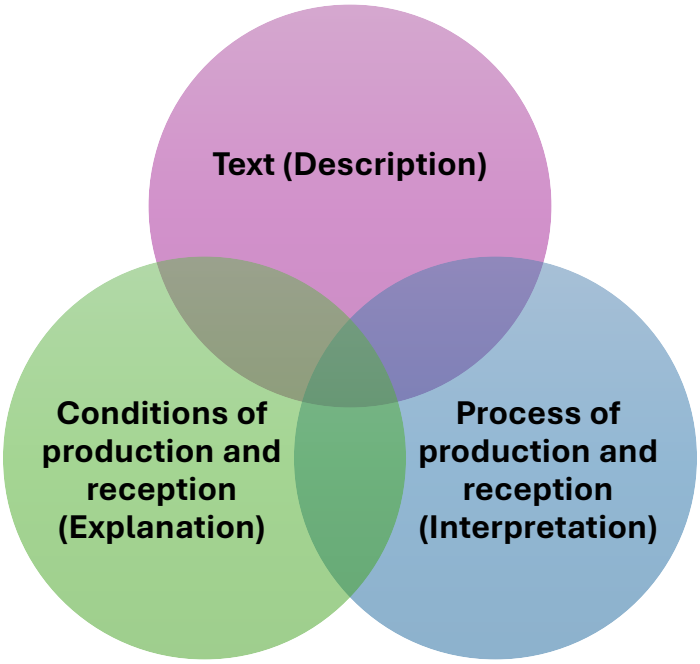


Figure 2: Critical discourse analysis model adapted from Fairclough (2001)

Fairclough's (2001) model demonstrates critical discourse analysis. The model provides a framework for examining the relationship between language, power, and society. Fairclough's (2001) model provides a valuable framework for understanding how discourse operates within social structures and how it can be used to challenge power relations, making it highly relevant to the critical literacy dimensions of this study. Fairclough's three-dimensional model offers a way to analyse how multimodal stories are produced, interpreted, and situated within broader social contexts. It provides tools for analysing how discourse both reflects and shapes social structures, ideologies, and power relations. Fairclough's model (2001) "*outlines that moving from description to interpretation to explanation enables a text analyst to see how the grammar of a text contributes toward the whole meaning of a text, the intended meaning by the text designer, the possible meanings that readers/viewers can make, as well as the ideologies that shape meanings*" (Govender, 2019, 11).

In relation to critical literacy and positioning, this study aligns with Fairclough's (2001) emphasis on the role of discourse in both reinforcing and contesting power. By enabling learners to create counter-narratives, cross-pollinating multimodal stories highlights the potential of texts to reflect

societal norms and also to resist and reshape them. Fairclough's focus on discourse resonates with this study's aim to empower learners to speak back to power (Govender, 2019), using their multimodal texts to challenge dominant ideologies and assert alternative perspectives. In terms of speaking back to power (Govender, 2019), Fairclough's (2001) notion of discourse as a form of social action supports my approach to foster critical agency among learners. Through the production of multimodal stories, learners actively engage in reimagining identities and contesting marginalisation, positioning themselves as authors of new narratives that critique and disrupt hegemonic discourses. This aligns with Fairclough's (2001) argument that discourse is not just a reflection of social practices but a means of transforming them. Fairclough's attention to the interplay between micro-level textual analysis and macro-level social structures parallels my study's examination of how individual learners mobilise their linguistic, cultural, and multimodal resources to address systemic issues. By framing learners' multimodal stories as both personal and political, my study builds on Fairclough's (2001) insight into the ways discourse mediates and negotiates power, making critical literacy a tool for both individual empowerment and broader social change.

"*Critical literacy as implemented in classrooms has two components: 1) deconstructing texts through critical analysis using the CL toolkit of analysis, and 2) redesigning texts, counter-storying (Morrel, 2008) and writing back to power*" (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024, 2). Deconstruction and redesign in critical literacy has been described as a reflection practice (Nieto, 2008; Morrell, 2008), that involves counter-texts or counter-storytelling (Chun, 2009) and social action. Redesign and counter-storytelling is meant to develop learners' social consciousness and lead to social action or change as part of the discourse, but it is important to note that while social transformations are the intended goal, it may not always occur and instead, individuals who engage with critical literacy may have a personal transformation that enable "*practices of seeing, and the continued development of a critical consciousness*" (Govender, 2019, 7). Because texts serve some at the expense of others which enables power to work across texts, language and modes, critical literacy interventions should provide opportunities for learners to question, resist, and reconstruct textual representations that do not correspond with their own identities (Farjardo, 2015; Govender, 2019). This creates reflexive experiences that make learners aware of their own identities and those of others in relation to social environments as it is problematic when power representations become normalised and go unnoticed.

The way that we read and design texts "*is informed by our beliefs, identities, our privileges and insecurities, as well as the dominant ideologies of our contexts. In a turn toward critical literacy (where language and meaning are intrinsically connected to power), seeing the social issues that are already present in the texts (the world) around us is the first step. Without first seeing, one cannot necessarily act in more equitable and socially just ways*" (Govender, 2019, 12). Govender (2019) recommends speaking back to power which involves interrogating "*texts in ways that reveal how power and ideology gets encoded into everyday practices and spaces*" (6). He suggests deconstruction and redesign as a means of speaking back to power so that texts can be represented in ways that are socially just and engages with "*diversity, difference and plurality as resources*" (6).

2.6.3. Design and redesign

"*[T]ext design is a means to construct the world*" (Govender, 2019, 6) and it will either challenge or maintain problematic power relations and representations when designing a text with a critical literacy focus. There is limited focus on the use of multimodal texts to foster learners' critical literacies (Chun, 2009). Design and redesign are important components of multimodality and critical literacy, particularly when dealing with multimodal texts which involves inquiry, critique and then text production, but across each of these frameworks, redesign is conceptualised differently. Janks (2014, 350) notes that critical literacy in practice focus on beginning with questioning everyday texts, ideologies and the world, but this needs to go beyond inquiry and critique when reading and deconstructing texts, as *"[i]t is not enough for them to learn how to interrogate the world; they need to develop a social conscience served by a critical imagination for redesign*".

Writing is a term that cannot be associated with all modes, for example you can write a story, but performance cannot be regarded as writing. Therefore, Janks refers to design instead of writing as *"[t]he word 'design', unlike the word 'write', does work across multiple modalities - multiple forms of meaning making or semiosis*" (Janks, 2006, 2). Design includes imagining the design and producing the text, but the boundary between design and production is blurry due to ongoing revision and redesign which is part of the critical literacy discourse as no text is ever neutral (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Janks, 2006). "*Taking both a Freirean and Hallidayan understanding of*

language and textual design, it becomes possible to see that text designers can choose what and how to represent the world by making selections from the range of resources offered by available ways of communicating: from word selection that takes into account the effects of particular connotations, to how bodies are arranged in images and artifacts as objects rather than people" (Govender, 2019, 6). Therefore, the resources that designers chose to include are used to communicate and reinforce meaning with the intention of positioning the reader/viewer towards a specific perspective.

"*Because all texts are constructed from a range of semiotic options, they can be deconstructed, unmade, unpicked and then re-constructed, to offer a different representation of the world*" (Janks, 2006, 4). The process of deconstruction and redesign captures the work of Freire (1972) who speaks about writing, reading and re-writing the world and the word for moves towards social transformation. In practice, educators and learners work with reading a text, deconstructing it, followed by redesign of the text. Deconstructing texts involves taking a text apart to understand notions of power and identity are constructed, whereas reconstruction involves making ethical judgements to change the text so that it corrects problematic representations and designs to make it more socially just (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024; Janks, 2010). However, every reconstruction presents new positions of power relations which makes the cycle of deconstruction and redesign an ongoing one.

Janks (2010) and scholars who draw on her critical literacy model offer a rational conceptualisation of redesign which excludes affect. Cited in Govender and Mendelowitz (2024), "*scholars working within the critical-creative nexus (for example Mendelowitz, 2017; Enciso, 2017; Mendelowitz et al., 2022; Vally Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022; Cartun and Dutro, 2020; and Mendelowitz, Ferreira, & Dixon, 2023a), imagination enables thinking, being, and doing beyond the current conditions of oppression, marginalisation, and even privilege (Govender, 2019a)*" (3). By working with deconstruction and redesign in non-rigid ways that interlink the critical-creative-affective nexus, it opens critical literacy practice to new possibilities that enable learners to use their multiple dominant and non-dominant resources across a range of semiotic modes to construct texts in ways that are socially just that shift power dynamics.



In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical framework and reviewed key literature that underpins this study, particularly focusing on multimodality, storytelling, critical literacy, and identity construction. I have highlighted the transformative potential of storytelling as a tool for fostering agency, criticality, and social justice. The review foregrounded the significance of multimodal cross-pollination with a critical literacy redesign focus as mechanisms for challenging dominant narratives and enabling learners to reimagine their identities and social realities through storytelling. These theoretical insights inform the lens through which this study examines learners' multimodal texts as sites of creativity, resistance, and meaning making. The next chapter moves from theory to practice, detailing the methodology employed to explore how learners represent and mobilise their cultural, linguistic, and social resources in storytelling. It outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches that align with the theoretical framework and literature discussed, ensuring a coherent and reflexive connection between the conceptual framework and the empirical investigation. By doing so, the methodology chapter provides the foundation for understanding how these theoretical concepts materialise in the English language classroom where learners are expected to engage in a cross-pollination multimodal storytelling intervention.

THREE

Chapter 3:

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study involves working in tandem with storytelling and multimodality through a socio-cultural approach to English language learning. This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in this study, which explores the potential of multimodal storytelling as an intervention to create multiple entry points and foster epistemological access in English language learning. It provides a detailed account of the research design, site, participants, data collection methods, data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research design

In this study, I used a qualitative research design to investigate how learners engage with multimodal storytelling to draw on their pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and social resources. Qualitative research is particularly suited to studies seeking to understand complex, human-centred phenomena, as it prioritizes depth over breadth and captures the nuances of participants' lived experiences, identities, and meaning-making processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Sutton and Austin (2015) note, qualitative approaches aim to uncover why individuals think, feel, and behave in particular ways, providing insights that go beyond statistical trends. This study, therefore, emphasises the richness and multiplicity of learners' experiences, aligning with the qualitative tradition's recognition of the layered and multifaceted nature of social phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Key features of qualitative research include that it *"seeks to convey why people have thoughts and feelings that might affect the way they behave"* (Sutton and Austin, 2015, 226). Its focus on *"phenomena that occur in natural settings"* and *"studying those phenomena in all their complexity"* (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, 135) align with the study's objectives. These features enable a thorough examination of learners' engagement with multimodal storytelling within their classroom, providing a holistic perspective on how cultural, linguistic, and social resources intersect in the production of creative narratives.

Within the qualitative framework, this study employs a case study methodology, concentrating on one Grade 10 English Home Language class. Case studies are particularly effective for investigating unique instances in depth and for drawing on multiple sources of data to construct a detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Cohen et al., 2007). As Stake (1995) highlights, the case study approach is well-suited to exploring the interplay between specific contexts and broader theoretical concerns, such as the dynamics of language, identity, and culture in multimodal storytelling. A case study approach provides the opportunity to explore, in depth, the complex interplay between language, identity, and culture in learners' multimodal storytelling (Stake, 1995). Multimodal storytelling is not an isolated classroom activity, but a socially situated practice shaped by the diverse cultural, linguistic, and social resources learners bring with them. A case study allows the research to capture this situatedness by examining the processes, interactions, and meaning-making choices within the natural context of the classroom. It also enables close attention to the specificities of the school setting and its mixed socio-economic learner body, showing how context influences storytelling practices. By foregrounding learners' voices, artefacts, and lived experiences, the case study approach aligns with the study's social justice orientation and commitment to recognising and valuing the full range of participants' repertoires and identity performances.

This study is framed as a phenomenological case study because it explores the lived experiences of learners as they engaged in multimodal storytelling, with a focus on how they mobilised their cultural, linguistic, and social resources to shape identities, express affect, and exercise agency. The phenomenological dimension lies in the study's concern with meaning-making as it is experienced and interpreted by the participants in their everyday lives. Phenomenology, particularly in its interpretive form, is grounded in the belief that experience is always subjective, contextual, and mediated (van Manen, 1990; Smith et al., 2009).

The study is shaped by key phenomenological principles, including:

- Intentionality: The idea that all consciousness is directed where learners' storytelling was viewed as an intentional act of self-expression and social engagement.
- Lifeworld orientation: Learners were invited to draw on their everyday realities, memories, and emotions, allowing insights into how they experience and make sense of the world.

- Essence-seeking: While each group's narrative was unique, the analysis traced recurring themes and patterns to understand what it means to engage in storytelling as a critical-affective practice.
- Reflexivity: As researcher, I remained attentive to how my own assumptions, background, and role shaped the research process, recognising that meaning is co-constructed.

The case study design provided the bounded context which was the Grade 10 English Home Language classroom within which these rich experiential insights emerged. The phenomenological orientation allowed me to move beyond observable behaviours and products to understand the emotional, relational, and identity-related dimensions of learners' storytelling processes. Phenomenology, which "*focuses on understanding how human beings experience their world*" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226), provides a framework for examining the stories learners craft as representations of their realities, identities, and social contexts. These stories, which are told across multiple modes, encapsulate complex, multilayered phenomena that reflect learners' diverse resources, lived experiences, as well as their positionalities within the world.

A central feature of this study was my positioning as a teacher-researcher, a dual role that allowed me to engage directly in both the facilitation of learning and the generation of data. This role involved designing and implementing the storytelling intervention, facilitating lessons, observing learners' interactions, and documenting their responses through video recordings and field notes. This insider role enabled me to cultivate a supportive, dialogic classroom environment where learners could experiment with language, identity, and creativity in meaningful ways. The teacher-researcher position is particularly well-suited to critical and participatory forms of qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to observe classroom dynamics in real-time, adapt pedagogical approaches responsively, and form more nuanced understandings of learners' experiences and meaning-making processes (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). During the storytelling activities, I joined the different groups for brief periods of time to engage with them, where I listened to their discussions, asked questions, and conversed with them about their ideas, stories and emergent dialogue. This provided a holistic experience where I submerged myself into the teaching and research process which gave me an insight into the innerworkings of their stories. Engaging directly with learners provided an immersive experience that enabled me to capture the intricacies of their storytelling processes. The significance of the learners' stories extended beyond the

classroom, as they reflected broader aspects of their lived experiences, community dynamics, and sociocultural realities. This alignment between classroom-based activities and the learners' external worlds is essential for understanding the depth and complexity of their narratives.

Although I took on the role of a teacher, I maintained critical distance as I had no prior interaction with the participants, ensuring that my dual role did not compromise the integrity of the research. This detachment, combined with my active involvement in classroom discussions and collaborative activities, allowed me to simultaneously engage with learners' stories and reflect critically on their emergent narratives. The teacher-researcher role was pivotal in navigating the pedagogical and analytical dimensions of the study, enabling me to cultivate an authentic classroom dynamic while sustaining analytic rigour and critical reflexivity (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

While my teaching position allowed for close engagement with learners, it also carried power dynamics that could influence participants' responses. To mitigate this, I was deliberate in creating an open and inclusive classroom ethos where learners felt encouraged, rather than compelled, to participate. I also maintained ongoing self-reflection and documented my positionality, assumptions, and interactions through fieldnotes and reflective journaling. Importantly, I had no prior relationship with the participants, which helped to establish a degree of analytical distance and reduce potential bias. This dual role, while complex, proved pivotal in bridging the pedagogical and research aims of the study, allowing for a richly layered understanding of how learners engaged with multimodal storytelling in context.

3.2. Research site

The research site includes one public secondary school, located in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. I conducted the study with one class of grade 10 English Home Language learners, and I was not an educator at the school, but went in as an independent researcher. The research was conducted at a Quintile 5 public high school located in an urban area of South Africa. Quintile 5 schools are generally classified as better resourced in comparison to lower-quintile schools, and

they often serve learners from households with relatively higher average income levels. In this regard, the school could be considered relatively privileged in terms of infrastructure, access to educational materials, and overall institutional capacity. However, the term "privileged" requires a more nuanced understanding within the South African context, where stark inequalities persist even within higher-quintile schools. While the school is well-resourced compared to many others, it accommodates a diverse learner population, including students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Some learners come from middle to upper-income families, while others travel from surrounding areas and townships, navigating complex material and social realities to access better schooling. This heterogeneity of backgrounds provides a rich and layered context in which to explore how learners mobilise their pluralistic linguistic, cultural, and social resources.

The social justice orientation of this study might traditionally be associated with low-income or under-resourced school contexts. However, this research challenges the assumption that pedagogies foregrounding social justice, identity, and criticality such as multimodal storytelling are only appropriate or impactful in such settings. This study argues that socially responsive pedagogies are equally relevant and necessary in relatively privileged or mixed-income schools. Privilege, in this case, does not negate the need for learners to engage critically with identity, power, and representation, nor does it imply homogeneity in learner experience or epistemic access. This research takes the stance that multimodal storytelling as a pedagogical approach can be fruitfully implemented across a range of schooling contexts, precisely because it is rooted in learners' diverse semiotic repertoires and lived experiences. It recognises learners as meaning makers with access to multiple modes and discourses, and it creates space for these resources to be validated and explored in educational settings, irrespective of socio-economic categorisation. Thus, the school's relative privilege does not diminish the relevance of the study's social justice aims. Rather, it allows for an examination of how such pedagogical approaches can foster critical, affective, and agentive engagement in a broader spectrum of contexts.

The school is located within a superdiverse community which means that it is inclusive of multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial community and this mirrors the type of learners' who attend the school. Thus, the school represents the pluralistic nature of South African society, with learners from varied linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. English is taught as a Home Language at this school, even though most learners do not speak English as their home language,

but rather a variety of languages, including isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and Portuguese. This often reinforces dominant Anglo-cultural and linguistic ideologies within the learning environment which is a pattern common in many ex-model-C schools across South Africa.

The selection of the school was strategic as it offers multiple dimensions of diversity that range from race, cultures, gender and sexuality, languages and social class which is valuable as this study aims to integrate diverse resources and repertoires in English language teaching. Due to an 'asset pedagogies movement' that began in the 1990's (Garcia, 1993; Woodard, Vaughan and Machado, 2017) the notion of engaging with learners' cultural and linguistic resources is a popular teaching approach, especially in urban classrooms in the 21st century as learners can engage with their diverse funds of knowledge as a responsive pedagogy. By working with diverse learners in a dominant English context, the research site epitomises the challenges and opportunities associated with fostering inclusivity and critical engagement in English language classrooms within a multilingual and multicultural context (McKinney, 2017).

Academic lessons in the English class are mostly conducted according to traditional pedagogical approaches, particularly using written print-based modes to teach, but through informal conversations with the educator and other staff members, they expressed their interest in expanding their teaching to include multimodal and culturally relevant approaches. In conversation with the English teaching staff, the faculty expressed their awareness of the growing needs of their diverse learners and the contemporary multimodal demands of this era but explain that limitations in transforming their pedagogical approaches are due to a lack of knowledge, training and time to implement significant and impactful changes.

3.3.Participants

The participants included 27 Grade 10 English Home Language learners and their teacher. The learners were between the ages of 15 and 16. The participants were in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of schooling, which includes Grades 10 to 12. Including grade 10 learners in the study was a conscious selection due to requiring multimodal and digital competence and repertoires to engage with contemporary literacy practices in the classroom. Another reason that they were selected as participants for this study was because they matched the criteria of having a range of diverse backgrounds, and they were learners of the same English Home language class.

According to gender identification details on the class register, there were 14 females and 13 males who participated in the study. The learners were diverse in terms of their demographic and linguistic backgrounds, representing the multilingual and multicultural realities of South Africa which offered different knowledge systems. The table below shows the linguistic repertoires of the participants, detailing both their home languages and the languages they use in social contexts, exactly as recorded in the language logs in the questionnaire. The learners who speak English as their home language have been highlighted.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LOG					
PARTICIPANT NO.	**GENDER**	**RACE**	**CULTURE**	**HOME LANGUAGE**	**SOCIAL LANGUAGE**
1	F	Coloured	Cape Malay	English	English & Slang
2	F	Indian	Indian	English	English & Slang
3	F	Black	Xhosa	Sesotho & isiXhosa	isiZulu, Sesotho & English
4	F	Indian	South African Indian	English	English
5	M	Indian	Indian	English	English & Slang
6	F	Coloured	Cape Malay, Indian	English & Afrikaans	English & Portuguese
7	F	White	I don't know	English	English
8	F	Coloured	Coloured, Nigerian	English & Afrikaans	English, Afrikaans (slang), isiXhosa, isiZulu
9	M	Indian	Indian, Mauritian	English & Urdu	English, Urdu, Slang
10	M	Indian	Muslim Indian	English	English
11	M	Asian, Arab	Emirati, Saudi	Arabic, English & Urdu	English, Arabic, Urdu
12	M	Black	Tsonga	English & Tsonga	English & Afrikaans
13	F	Black	Zulu	isiZulu	isiZulu (slang) & English

14	M	Mixed	Sotho, Indian	English	English & slang
15	M	Black	Venda, Zulu	Venda & isiZulu	English, Slang, isiZulu (slang)
16	M	Black	Tsonga, Sotho	English & Tsonga	English
17	F	Black	Zulu, Xhosa	isiZulu & English	English, Slang, isiZulu
18	M	Black	Sepedi	Sepedi	English & Sepedi
19	M	Black	Zulu	isiZulu & English	English & isiZulu
20	M	Indian	Indian	English	English
21	F	Black	Congolese	French & English	English & Slang
22	M	Black	Zulu	isiZulu	isiZulu, English, Tswana, English, isiXhosa
23	F	Indian	Indian	English & Hindi	English & Slang
24	F	Black	Sotho	English & Sesotho	English, isiZulu & Sesotho
25	M	Indian	Indian	English	English & Slang
26	F	Black	Sotho, Swati	English & Sesotho	isiZulu, Sesotho & English
27	F	Coloured	British, Griekwa	English & Afrikaans	Slang, Looser English & formal English

Most learners were of South African nationality, but there were some who were from neighbouring and international regions. Majority of the learners did not speak English as their home language, and from the cohort of 27 participants, only 9 (33.3%) of learners were English home language speakers, while 18 (66.7%) of these learners spoke a range of official, heritage and foreign languages. This is indicated in the pie chart below.

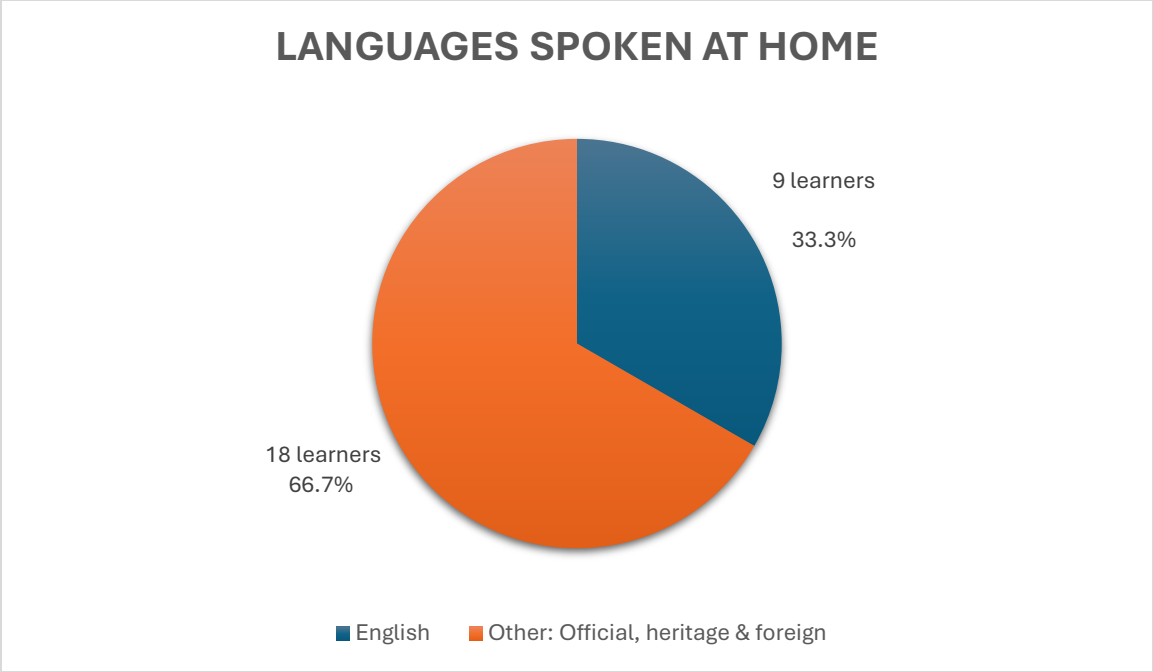


Figure 3: Languages spoken at home

These statistics indicate a problematic mismatch between the language spoken at home and the language of teaching and learning which is English. To remedy the issue of language mismatch, I encouraged the use of multilingual repertoires to be used during the intervention.

During a class discussion, a male learner, Tshepo expressed that his culture and the language he speaks at home are different. He is a member of the Tsonga culture, but he speaks English at home. He shared that he only *sometimes* speaks Tsonga with his father, but he cannot always communicate effectively in Tsonga because the language is rarely used to communicate (Field notes, 2022). This is an indication that in the 21st century, languages cannot be automatically associated with cultural identities and that learners construct new, hybrid and fluid identities alongside their heritage cultures and languages. Therefore, this study was approached with no assumptions of the learners' identities, and instead, I used narratives and stories to unpack who they are and the constructed identities that they negotiate across spaces.

Reflecting on the questionnaires that were completed by the learners in this study, the amount of time spent on digital applications was confirmation that multimodal and digital literacies is a significant part of their home and social literacy practices and its usage extends to a vast range of

purposes (Questionnaires, 2022). Therefore, making multimodality and social media genres an essential component in the design of the lessons and activities, I expanded on the conceptualisation of literacies to include multimodality, social media, and digital media as contemporary literacy practices that are part of youth culture. The multimodal literacy practices of the learners are expressions that are responsive to and sustains their multiple identities, cultures and life experiences that may emerge from text engagement and production (Paris and Alim, 2014; Bomer, 2017). Contemporary literacies such as social media are pivotal to incorporate in 21st century pedagogies as it is linked to learners' identities, self-esteem and interests which are tied to contemporary cultures.

In a questionnaire, the cohort of 27 learners who participated in this study were asked about their modal preference and they could select more than one option from the list. 26 learners indicated their preference to use videos during their learning; 24 learners indicated that they want to use visuals and images during learning; 23 learners want to use audio modes and music during their learning and 18 learners indicated that they want to use their bodies and space also known as the kinaesthetic mode during learning. These preferences were taken into consideration in the methodological design of lessons and text production activities within this study. The storytelling activities focused on written and performative modes, and the Instagram post engaged with visual and written modes. The figure below illustrates the modality preference statistics collected from the questionnaires.

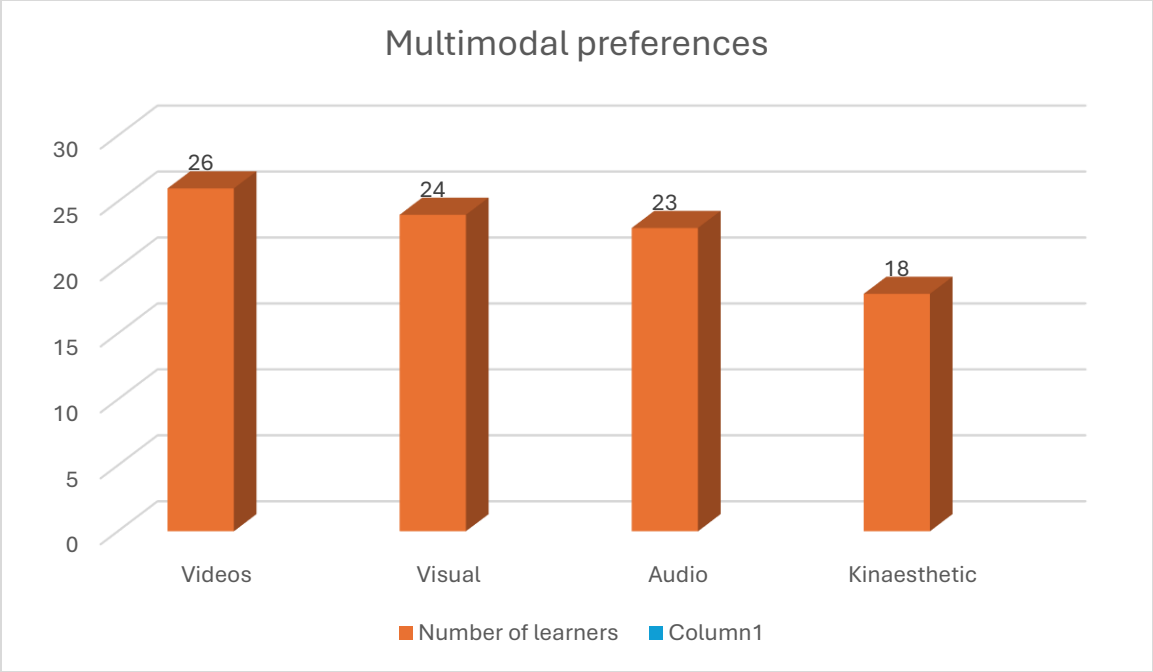


Figure 4: Multimodal preferences

These statistics indicate modal preferences that the students want to include in their English language learning, and it suggests a need for multimodality to be included in teaching and learning due to high levels of preference and the perception that multimodality can aid understanding and support learning. During an interview with Charlotte, the grade 10 English educator, she explains that she is aware of a multimodal need and preference amongst the learners, but she struggles to include multimodal resources often during her teaching because "*there's so much to get through it's almost unrealistic, so then to incorporate fun is a little bit difficult*" (Teacher interview, 2022). Charlotte is a young educator with only three years of teaching experience, and she acknowledged that her learners have different modal requirements for learning "*I try to approach the different styles of learning so, we have a lot of conversations. I'll try and play videos for them every now and then. I try [to] engage them through writing, through visual. I try [to] engage especially those learners who struggle with writing. They'll have an opportunity to express themselves orally. Those learners who are a bit more shy, they'll always have that opportunity through writing*" (Teacher interview, 2022).

It is obvious that Charlotte is aware of the different modal needs of the learners' and tries to include multimodal approaches to pedagogy, however, she cannot always cater to this need due to time

constraints, skills that need to be taught and pressure to complete the curriculum. Even though she expresses value in multimodal pedagogy, Charlotte's understanding of multimodality is problematic because she views it as a form of 'fun' when incorporated into learning, and she conceptualises it as a means to make lessons exciting for the learners instead of using it as a pedagogical tool to aid learning and develop a wider range of skills. While multimodal texts are more appealing due to their diverse features, incorporating it into pedagogy certainly has a wide range of benefits for language learning. Charlotte's conceptualisation of multimodality perpetuates associations that multimodal texts are regarded as fun which disassociates its value in academic contexts.

In comparison to Charlotte's perspective of using multimodality as a means of appeal and "fun", the learners did not conceptualise multimodal pedagogy in the same way (Questionnaire, 2022). When asked in the questionnaire (question 5.b) "Is there anything else you want to be included in your English lessons?" a learner responded by saying "movies and videos that will explain the work better" (Questionnaire, 2022 - Learner 4). In support of this response, performative movies and videos were a popular request indicated by most of the participants. This indicated that multimodal resources and cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) of using the same text across different modes are required by these learners to support their understanding of written texts and pedagogy. Representations of the same content across different modes offers multiple entry points for understanding.

From a cohort of 27 learners, 25 of the learners who participated in the questionnaires requested for the incorporation of social media during their lessons. This request comes as no surprise because social media is a huge part of youth culture and is a commonly used literacy practice that they engage with outside the classroom space for communication, expression and as a means to engage with learning that extends to various forms of knowledge. A section of the questionnaire required the learners to state how many hours they spend on social media apps over a period of one week, and most learners tracked the duration by referring to the screen time and application usage on their cell phones which makes the data reliable. The results collected from the questionnaires were striking Across the cohort of individual questionnaires, some of the records include 100 hours on Whatsapp, 100 hours on Instagram, 90 hours on TikTok, 70 hours on YouTube, 43 hours on Spotify, 30 hours on Pinterest and 28 hours on Netflix (Questionnaires,

2022). These responses are in addition to hours spent on other digital applications. Thus, as reflected in the data, social media is a dominant literacy practice amongst the youth participants. Due to ethical constraints of not being able to use digital social media modes to craft narratives due to working with minors, the modes and genres included in the study were adapted to include alternative expressions of the modes and genres associated with social media applications. For example, the Instagram posts in the intervention was done in print-based modes and the performative videos were recorded, but they were not posted to any online social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

In addition to these popular social media applications, the learners in the cohort make use of other applications that range across different purposes. Some of the applications that were listed in the questionnaires include:

Digital applications used by learners	
Application name:	**Purpose:**
Muslim pro	A lifestyle and prayer application for people who follow the Islamic religion. This app conveys prayer times, the Islamic Hijri calendar date, halal food locations and mosque locations.
Bible	An electronic version of the bible. One student engages with this app and says that he reads it “to keep parents happy”.
Finch	A self-care app that provides you with a digital pet to care for. The pet is a representation of you, and you need to take

	care of the pet by taking care of yourself by completing a variety of self-care exercises.
Bereal	An app that sends one daily notification at a randomly selected time during the day that encourages users to share a photo of themselves and their immediate surroundings within a two-minute window. This app emphasises authenticity as there is no time for filters due to the time limit.
Tachiyomi	An app that allows you to access and read a wide range of manga on your device, Manga includes Japanese comics or graphic novels.
Notepad	A digital version of a notebook. One learner uses this app to write notes for school and used for journal about life.
Inkitt	A reading app that gives you access to thousands of novels for free, most of them written by new and unknown authors of different genres.
Photomath	This app uses the camera on your smartphone or tablet to scan and recognize a math problem. Once the problem is recognized, the app will display steps to solve the math problem, by showing a variety of methods or multiple approaches. The app explains the

	scanned problem step-by-step and teaches users the correct mathematical process.
Duolingo	A multimodal language app that teaches new languages and provides activities to assist with language learning.
Among us	An app that requires social deduction skills. It is a game of teamwork and betrayal that is set in space. Users can play online with 4-15 players and attempt to prepare their spaceship for departure, but one or more random players among the crew are impostors focused on killing everyone. Players need to find the imposters before they get killed.
Chess	A digital chess app used by one student which allows him to play online with people around the world or with the gaming system. Players do not have to be physically present to play with each other.
Microsoft visual studio	An app that is used to edit, debug and create digital apps using digital code. This app is used by one student due to his interest in coding which is the development of computer games, websites, web apps and mobile games.

Table 1: Digital applications used by learners

"[L]earning is not confined to the mainstream school classroom" (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017, 513). The learners engage with social and digital applications for a variety of purposes. These include reading and writing for pleasure and learning on apps such as notes, Inkitt, and Duolingo; developing knowledge and skills by using Microsoft visual studio; self-care and personal development on apps such as Finch and Bereal; improving cognitive, critical and problem-solving skills on apps like Among us and chess; and some apps include socialisation by playing online with other people. One of the main benefits of incorporating social media in the classroom is that it is already an established practice in learners' everyday lives (Questionnaires, 2022). Thus, looking at the data that illustrates app usage amongst the learners, it is important to take a step towards making language learning in schools relatable by including the learners contemporary home literacy practices while still maintaining productivity and aiming for student achievement.

It was fascinating to identify that traditional written religious texts have been transformed from print to digital modes and that students engage with these apps as part of their religious and spiritual identities. The social and digital applications that the learners engage with promote multimodal and digital learning that happens outside classroom spaces. Contemporary modes and genres such as digital literacies and social media encourages a participatory approach that offers transformative education by enabling *"students to develop powerful social identities, and recognizing that meaningful education includes both offline and online activity"* (Gleason, 2019, 28). Duolingo and Photomath are applications that teach language and math through multimodality and digitisation that students can use to practice their skills in these content areas. The apps provide multiple attempts and different pathways to improve and support learning. For example, Duolingo makes use of written words, followed by images, and audio that tells the user how to pronounce words, and lastly it requires short written activities.

These digital applications are used outside school practices, but they show potential for being incorporated into leaning to aid understanding and reflect contemporary literacy practices in language classrooms as some of these apps potentially align with learning skills and goals. Morrell (2020) states that incorporating multimodality and social media in academic contexts can be seen as a new or popular culture which can impact student engagement and increase academic equity to be more representative.

3.4. Data collection

To capture the richness of the learners' experiences and the dynamics of the multimodal storytelling intervention, the study employed multiple data collection methods:

3.4.1. Pre-intervention:

Semi-structured interview with the educator:

I began the study by conducting a semi-structured interview (appendix 3) with the English educator as a baseline to understand the existing teaching practices, modes and resources that are used in the classroom. A semi-structured interview makes use of prepared questions which are flexible due to allowing for elaboration and explanation by the participant based on following up on interesting developments (Dornyei, 2007). The semi-structured interview questions are attached in this thesis as an appendix, and the questions are related to multimodality, culture and identities, and language. The interview aided me to gain an understanding of how the learners were accustomed to receiving academic content and the kinds of pedagogical approaches that were used in the classroom during teaching and learning. The interview with the educator was recorded and transcribed. Selective data from the interview was used to substantiate and make sense of the data and findings that emerged from the intervention to reflect on the choices that the learners did/did not make during the lessons. The educator was not the focus of this study, but her pedagogical approaches and perspective was important to consider when implementing a new approach to teaching which was part of the intervention.

Discussion and questionnaire with the learners:

The first interaction with the learners included a classroom discussion that investigated the kinds of content and teaching approaches that they would be interested in. I asked questions about home literacy practices, the use of social media and their access to multimodal literacies. The discussion was followed by a *factual questionnaire* which was used as demographic information and baseline data. The questionnaire (appendix 4) is attached as an appendix to this thesis and factual

questionnaires are used to find out facts about the learners and perspectives that they have (Dornyei, 2007) such as their language histories, which social media applications they use, home literacy practices and pedagogical preferences, and the amount of time they spend on social media. The questionnaire also documented the learners current multimodal, language and literacy practices that they engage with and preferences around the focal topics of culture, multimodality and language/s. The information captured in the questionnaires was taken into consideration during the activities, and it was woven into the intervention activities as access points to learning, particularly with regards to using modes and languages fluidly and pluralistically while crafting their stories. Some of the findings of the questionnaire are illustrated and discussed in the data sections of this study.

3.4.2. Intervention

Multimodal storytelling intervention:

The multimodal storytelling intervention was central to the data collection process in this study, providing a dynamic framework to explore how learners engage with storytelling across modes. Grounded in multimodal and sociocultural theories of meaning-making (Kress, 2010; New London Group, 1996), the intervention was designed to offer learners multiple entry points for expressing their identities, cultural experiences, and social realities. By integrating visual, verbal, and performative modes of storytelling, the intervention leveraged the learners' diverse linguistic, cultural, and social resources to create a rich, participatory learning experience. I used the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) document as a guide to include listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the intervention.

The intervention aimed to achieve the following:

- Enable multimodal meaning-making: Encourage learners to move between modes (e.g., written, visual, audio, and performance) to express their stories and identities, fostering creative agency and critical engagement.

- Harness pluralistic resources: Allow learners to draw on their cultural, linguistic, and social repertoires, creating a space where their diverse experiences could be validated and mobilised as academic resources.
- Promote critical reflection and social action: Use storytelling as a tool for learners to reflect on their lives, communities, and broader social issues, fostering a sense of agency and advocacy.

The multimodal storytelling intervention formed the central pedagogical component of this study and was conducted over a period of two months. It was designed as a series of lessons (appendix 1) that were spread out over time and implemented during the Grade 10 English Home Language class periods, making it an integrated part of the official school curriculum. This allowed learners to engage meaningfully with the intervention in a familiar learning context and ensured that the work they produced was aligned with their academic requirements. The study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on both the implementation of the intervention and the overall data collection process. All lessons were conducted under strict Covid-19 health protocols, including physical distancing, mask-wearing, sanitisation, and limits on group interaction. These measures, while necessary for safety, inevitably affected the dynamics of classroom interaction and the types of collaborative activities that could take place. In addition, access to the school was highly regulated, and contact time with learners was restricted. As a result, I was unable to spend extended periods with the participants or return for follow-up engagements, which limited the scope and depth of the intervention as initially envisioned. Despite these challenges, the intervention still yielded rich data and offered critical insights into how learners engaged with multimodal storytelling under complex and constrained real-world conditions.

Each stage of the intervention was designed to scaffold learners' engagement with multimodal storytelling while deepening their exploration of identity, culture, and social issues. The series of lessons and cross-pollinating stories across modes was relevant because *"[t]he methods used in a social semiotic approach to multimodality therefore involve breaking down the object of study into its component parts, working out how the components – or modes – work together to make meaning, and understanding in what ways particular modal choices are shaped by the interpersonal, social and cultural contexts of their use"* (Flewitt, Price and Korkiakangas, 2019,

3). The PowerPoint slides of the lessons are attached to the thesis as an appendix, and the lesson outlines are as follows:

Lesson 1: Individual visual storytelling

All the learners in the class participated in this activity, but not all the learners submitted their work for this study. They were tasked with individually crafting an Instagram post to visually represent their identities and youth culture. This activity drew on the popularity of social media as a contemporary literacy practice and provided a familiar platform for learners to express themselves. By incorporating elements like captions, hashtags, and imagery, learners could creatively merge textual and visual resources to tell personal stories through elements linked to social media discourse and youth linguistic practices. However, the Instagram posts were crafted in print-based visual modes that mimicked the template of the post but lacked engagement with digital tools. This has implications with regards to design elements and creativity, but it was necessary due to ethical reasons of working with minors. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5. This lesson offered introspective engagement with identity and served as a foundation for the collaborative activities that followed. The table below includes the lesson plan.

LESSON:	**1 – 'Showing' the world who you are.**
CAPS ALIGNMENT:	Informal discussion and conversations; multimodality; creative writing and storytelling
LESSON OUTLINE:	Representing oneself through visual modes. This is an individual activity. The participants will be instructed to draw on their knowledge of social media and visual narratives to create an Instagram post as a form of multimodal literacy. The Instagram post must be a representation of who the learners are, and it should serve the purpose of showing their multiple identities to the world through a visual narrative. The participants are not expected to engage with digital devices, nor the social media application, but rather to construct a visual representation of their Instagram post by drawing or using printed images to work with the genre in print mode instead of a digital device. Their post requires a username, visual, and caption

	that could include a range of linguistic repertoires such as words, symbols and emojis. The Instagram posts create opportunities to engage with contemporary youth cultures and it draws on home and social identities and literacy practices. **NB: Working with the genre in print-mode was due to digital safety concerns and ethics regulations. When showing the world who they are, the participants could include the following categories (but not limited to) to illustrate various aspects of their identities: • Cultures/communities that they belong to. • Hobbies • Likes/dislikes • Family and friends • Experiences • Home environment
PEDAGOGICAL FOCUS:	• Identity affirmation and assertion. • Incorporating home literacies into teaching: Using genre and online forums for text production. • Developing cultural competence through engagement with contemporary youth cultures. • De-centring associations of English with whiteness.
MODES:	Engaging with digital genres through visual, print-based, and linguistic modes.

Table 2: Lesson 1 outline

Lesson 2: Collaborative written or audio storytelling

In groups of either 4 or 5, the learners were tasked to collaboratively craft a written or audio story addressing a social issue relevant to their communities or the broader world. The brief in lesson 2 of engaging with social issues served as encouragement for the learners to craft counter-narratives and become active agents of change. Using a social approach to writing, I draw on Vasquez (2004)

who demonstrates how everyday interactions and issues raised by children can serve as the foundation for a curriculum that encourages young learners to critically engage with the world around them. I used a collaborative approach to this socially oriented storytelling intervention as literacy and language in the 21st century have shifted to processes and outputs of meaning making with an emphasis on what texts mean to different people and communities, connecting it to intercultural learning (Warner, 2024). While there is a focus on intercultural learning, these are not static notions of constructing meaning, but rather, it indicates the value in co-creating meaning and language as a means to actively shape meaning.

The groups chose either a print-based written story or audio mode, enabling them to draw on their strengths and preferences. This stage emphasised collaboration, dialogue, and collective meaning-making, allowing learners to share perspectives and co-construct narratives that reflected their diverse realities. The audience was inclusive of their peers in the group. The table below includes the lesson plan.

LESSON:	**2 – Multimodal storytelling to create social consciousness.**
CAPS ALIGNMENT:	Key features of texts, literary genres, creative writing/storytelling, critical literacy.
LESSON OUTLINE:	In groups of 4 or 5, the learners have a choice to collaboratively craft either a written or audio story that highlights a social issue in their communities or in the world that they feel requires addressing. Each group can select any social issue/topic of their preference, and they are required to write any story, of any length and incorporate a range of linguistic repertoires of their choice. Through critical conversation with peers, writing and storytelling, the activity aims to create a social consciousness with the aim of leading to social action. The pedagogical reasoning behind these guidelines is because *"[s]tudents should meet with subject matter which they can connect with, scrutinise, challenge and otherwise react to in a multitude of ways and from a multitude of perspectives"* (Brauer, 2024, 66). Relating stories to issues that the learners resonate with may create opportunities to engage with meaningful content and learning,

	encouraging positionality in relation to the issues, language development, multilingualism, and voice.
PEDAGOGICAL FOCUS:	• Creating social consciousness and/or social action. • Action to alter the world - interrogating inequalities that exist. • Establishing an inclusive multilingual learning environment.
MODES:	Linguistic/written and audio modes.

Table 3: Lesson 2 outline

Lesson 3: Collaborative transduction into the performative mode of storytelling

The final stage of the intervention required learners to transduce their collaborative written/audio stories into the performative mode, using any genre of their choice. This activity involved redesign, where counter-narratives were redesigned across modes. This process of transduction involved cross-pollination of stories as the same story was transduced across modes which required the ideas/content, resources and repertoires to be transformed across modes (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022), which challenged learners to reinterpret and reimagine their stories in ways that leveraged new resources and modes of expression. The performative mode added a dynamic layer to the storytelling process, encouraging learners to engage with their narratives through embodied and oral practices.

The performances from lesson three were submitted as video recordings. Performances are multidimensional full-body, semiotic expressions that offer dynamic aspects and meanings, therefore, multimodal data collection requires video recording to go back to the event/text production for the purpose of analysis as semiosis is a complex phenomenon of gaze and gesture (Flewitt, Price and Korkiakangas, 2019) that requires analysis through multiple perspectives that only using a researcher journal cannot adequate achieve, especially if it involves different modes, representations and languages. The table below includes the lesson plan.

LESSON:	**3 – Remixing stories across modes**
CAPS ALIGNMENT:	Multimodality, creative writing/storytelling, collaboration.

LESSON OUTLINE:	In the same groups, the learners are required to transduce the stories that they produced in lesson 2 into a performative mode. The story can be in any performative genre of their choice, but based on their responses in the questionnaires, I discussed examples of transducing stories into a TikTok video or movie trailer. This lesson illustrated a cross-pollination approach of transducing the same story across different modes to transform and develop the story and use resources in different ways or engage with new ones which was dependent on the mode as each mode enables the use of different resources.
PEDAGOGICAL FOCUS:	• Engaging with existing knowledge and resources. • Multimodality, contemporary literacy practices and new cultures. • Diverse language repertoires and multilingualism. • Audiences in home languages. • Social awareness to represent communities. • Action to alter the world: Critical literacy – interrogation and critique. • Re-designing texts.
MODES:	Digital literacies and performative/kinaesthetic modes.

Table 4: Lesson 3 outline

The multimodal intervention was informed by Kress's (2010) theory of multimodality, which emphasises the potential of multiple modes to shape meaning in contextually relevant ways. It also drew on sociocultural theories of literacy (Gee, 1996), which highlight the importance of learners' social and cultural practices in the construction of knowledge. By encouraging learners to cross-pollinate stories across modes, the intervention sought to validate their lived experiences and foster a sense of agency in their learning process. Moje and Hinchman (2004) call for the use of student experiences to be used as a means of epistemological access and social change which can potentially reshape literacy practices within the curriculum.

During the intervention, I engaged with various groups by moving between them for short intervals as they planned and developed their stories. During these moments, I listened to and participated in their conversations, capturing these interactions through fieldnotes and video recordings. These recorded observations were later incorporated into the analysis in the data chapters. However, focusing on only specific instances of interactions amongst the participants presents limitations, as it offers insight into only a subset of interactions, leaving other potentially significant dynamics undocumented. Fieldnotes provide a record of important contextual information, verbal and non-verbal cues and interactions that occur (Sutton and Austin, 2015) which was significant for this semiotic study. This multimodal intervention was a data collection tool, and a pedagogical experiment which aimed at bridging the gap between formal education and learners' social realities. It provided a dynamic platform for exploring how multimodal storytelling can create inclusive, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences, particularly in a diverse, multilingual context like South Africa.

Artefacts:

The multimodal stories produced by the participants were used as the main *artefacts* of this study. These include individual Instagram posts, collaborative written or audio stories, and the performance stories. The stories were analysed in depth with regards to the narrative content, identities, social and cultural references, and the language/writing/filming/drawing choices that were made. I used the multimodal stories to investigate if drawing on identities and existing multiple resources and repertoires was a means to provide epistemological access and engage with diverse forms of knowledge and resources to achieve cognitive, critical and creative outcomes.

Video recording:

Video recording was a data collection tool that was used during the planning of the stories where I took videos of the learners during discussion and video recordings were also used to capture the performative stories as each group submitted a video of their transduced story. This is a multimodal study, and video recording was crucial due to the use of language, audio, gesture and movement

as "video is a multimodal record in which talk is kept in context and all modes are recorded sequentially. This enables researchers using video data to rigorously and systematically examine resources and practices through which participants in interaction build their social activities and how their talk, facial expression, gaze, gesture, and body elaborate one another. This kind of record cannot be made available using any other technology" (Jewitt, 2012, 6). The interactions are semiotic, and interaction based where participants communicated beyond words by drawing on a range of resources and the body for communication (Flewitt, Price and Korkiakangas, 2019), thus strengthening the methodology and need for video recordings to capture performative expressions of storytelling.

Video recording was an essential component of the performative stories which was necessary to capture the complexity of the stories, and the resources used to tell the stories. Since the questionnaires indicated vast amounts of time spent on performative digital platforms, particularly TikTok and YouTube which is the most used website worldwide (Wright, 2021), video recording the performative stories mimicked these platforms. The performance apps established an online video culture and have cultural significance because many classify YouTube as an informal learning platform. It remains a digital video platform that is vastly used outside classroom contexts (Wright, 2021). The videos collected during the planning of the stories, and the lessons and during the performances were used to generate transcripts of the intervention and the videos and transcripts were used for multimodal analysis. Only those learners who issued permission to participate in the study were video recorded, and to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the videos were watched and analysed solely by me.

For ethical and safeguarding reasons, the videos of the learners' story performances were not shared in this study. Given the sensitive and personal nature of some of the narratives - many of which engaged with themes such as identity, trauma, and social justice, it was essential to prioritise the emotional safety, anonymity, and dignity of the participants, who were minors at the time of data collection. While the original videos cannot be shared publicly due to ethical considerations, the transcription provides a detailed account of the performance as it unfolded, preserving the integrity of the narrative and the learners' creative choices. To ensure the richness of the data was still meaningfully conveyed, the performances were carefully transcribed, capturing not only the spoken words but also key gestures, tone, pauses, and other performative elements. This approach

preserved the multimodal dimensions of the learners' storytelling while respecting their rights to privacy and protection.

3.4.3. Post intervention

Focus group discussion:

In the final data collection tool of this study, I extended an invitation to all the learners from the various groups to participate in a focus group discussion (appendix 5). This was an optional activity, and only one group of five individuals who were all members of group 1 opted to participate. It was helpful to have the entire group present for the discussion as the focus group discussion foregrounded their collaborative story that was not cross-pollinated across modes, and their storytelling choices and resources.

The focus group provided a platform for students to share their collective attitudes and perspectives about the intervention, shedding light on their experiences with the shift towards storytelling as a linguistic and multimodal pedagogy. Through their discussions, they expressed how this approach encouraged a deeper connection to the learning process, fostering a greater willingness to actively engage. The learners articulated their experiences in ways that revealed both their initial enthusiasm to participate and their hesitation to engage with the performative mode as they explored the creative possibilities of storytelling. They highlighted how integrating multiple modes of expression such as visuals, text, and oral narratives enabled them to draw on their diverse cultural and linguistic resources, making the learning environment more inclusive and meaningful to engage with their lived realities.

The focus group became a dynamic space for the learners to reflect collectively, inspire one another, and challenge preconceived notions about traditional learning methods. As Dornyei (2007) suggests, group discussions can serve as a catalyst for deeper thinking, and this was evident as students built on each other's ideas, unpacking how storytelling gave them agency in their learning. Their reflections guided my understanding of multimodal storytelling as a framework that not only facilitated linguistic expression but also empowered learners to reimagine their identities and learning experiences. This framing emerged from observing how the learners

embraced the interplay of modes to articulate their narratives, often drawing from personal and communal experiences to construct meaningful stories. Their contributions highlighted the pedagogical potential of storytelling to transform participation and engagement in the classroom.

The focus group discussion conducted with group one was done after the intervention, and it provided a valuable platform to reflect on the intervention and process the learners' attitudes toward the pedagogy. By recording and transcribing the focus group discussion, it enabled me to critically and thematically analyse their responses, focusing on key themes such as content, language, modes, resources required for text production, and expressions of identity. It offered deeper insights into the group's processes of multimodal text production, elaborating on how their stories developed across different modes. The discussion was used to interrogate their participation, or lack thereof, their multimodal choices, language usage, and how they asserted their identities within their narratives. It also served as a reflexive opportunity for the learners to critically and creatively engage with their stories, characters, and representations, offering a deeper understanding of their meaning-making processes. This exploration aimed to determine whether multimodal storytelling was an effective and productive tool for engaging learners and achieving the study's objectives, particularly in fostering participation, creativity, and identity expression.

3.5. Data analysis

Due to this being a qualitative study, the data was analysed in a manner that aligns with the research questions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). The main data collection artefacts were the multimodal stories that were produced individually and across groups, and this required data analysis. The multimodal stories were analysed individually and as a semiotic chain across modes. I used thematic content analysis to analyse the stories crafted by each group and also collectively to identify trends and differences that emerge (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). Thematic content analysis aligns with qualitative paradigms (Braun and Clarke, 2021) and is well suited to analyse narrative artifacts such as the stories crafted during the intervention. I draw on a particular approach of thematic analysis called reflexive thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) which *"emphasises the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation"* (330). To engage with reflexive

thematic content analysis of the stories, I use Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase process to engage with the data, code the data and develop themes. The phases are: *"1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report"* (331). Reflexive thematic analysis offers a process of analysing the data, but leaves room for flexibility in capturing analytic procedures, therefore, the stories were analysed according to particular themes that emerged which was informed and discussed in relation to theory to support the data.

Multiliteracies refers to a pedagogical approach that emphasizes how learners engage with and produce meaning across diverse modes and media in their multimodal texts and stories. In contrast, multimodality is a semiotic theory that provides a framework for analysing and understanding the meaning-making processes inherent in teaching and learning, particularly how different modes such as language, visuals, sound, and gesture are used in combination to communicate and construct knowledge. Therefore, in addition to thematic content analysis, I used discourse analysis, particularly storytelling and multimodal discourse i.e.: the data analysis focuses on multimodality and not necessarily multiliteracies. I looked at what did and did not emerge in the stories, and how resources were mobilised across modes and the different types of knowledge and diverse knowledge systems that were enabled and accessed. Multimodal text analysis is important for this study as it indicates how semiotic meaning is made and conveyed through elements of the texts that are produced by the participants. It is used specifically for texts that consist of two or more modes to analyse how the modes are used and what meaning is conveyed through the text (O'Halloran and Smith, 2012). With regards to multimodal discourse analysis, I draw on multimodal theory by Kress (2003), Newfield (2009, 2014), Stein (2003) and I used Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) cross-pollination theory as a tool for multimodal discourse analysis to trace semiotic moves across the different modes of storytelling in relation to histories, societies and notions of power by analysing how these were represented.

As a teacher-researcher, it is important to capture the authenticity and integrity of the data. To limit my subjectivity in the analysis, I used the following guidelines as a model and strategy to structure my analysis.

- Investigate the ***mode*** used: I identified which modes were used during the construction of the text and the affordances, disadvantages of each mode (O'Halloran and Smith, 2012). Understanding and analysing how meaning is conveyed by each mode is an important step in analysing the data. The groups' choice of modes and their semiotic choices revealed who they are and what they know. I was interested to explore why they used specific modes and resources, and what was achieved by using it.

- ***Themes*** and ***social awareness***: I looked at what themes emerged from the stories and reasons that they emerged. I analysed the stories by asking the following questions: Do power relations exist in the text? Whose interests are represented? Does the participant show a social awareness and critique power relations and social injustice in the text?

- ***Language*** usage: What languages/language varieties are used? I aimed to explore if home languages and a diverse range of social linguistic repertoires can effectively be used in the classroom. What classifies it as 'effective' language usage? I looked at the impact of multilingualism and familiar language practices on text production and socialisation within the classroom.

- ***Traditional*** textual elements: This involved exploring student voice and how it differs from written to multimodal outputs. I looked at the impact of multimodal elements on audience and vice-versa. I identified and analysed the learners' identities, subjectivity, role and awareness of the audience when crafting stories. These all make up layers of a rich writing voice (Canagarajah, 2015).

- ***Culture*** and ***identity***: I analysed the stories across modes for cultural representations that are pluralistic. How does this influence motivation to learn?

- ***Social and linguistic resources:*** I analysed the stories to investigate what resources the learners draw on to produce multimodal stories across modes. Does the inclusion and access to diverse resources make language teaching more accessible to them? Does it allow for representation of their lives and communities?

- ***Conversational analysis:*** I analysed the conversations and discussions that occured during teaching and between the learners during the intervention.

For analysis and discussion in chapter 5 of this study, critical case sampling was used where I targeted *"cases which offer a dramatic or full representation of the phenomenon"* (Dornyei, 2007). The multimodal stories crafted by two groups, and the Instagram posts crafted by their group leaders will be analysed through a *"critical narrative gaze"* which looks at *"moves between past, present and future selves and identities and explorations of how specific cultural and social spaces have shaped the formation of different selves"* (Mendelowitz et al., 2022, 57). A critical case sampling is not only concerned with what is found during the data collection process, but also by what does not occur (Dornyei, 2007). For example, I engage with the stories that the groups crafted, and I also investigate modes that limited storytelling.

3.6.Researcher's positionality

As a researcher working within an interpretive and critical paradigm, I acknowledge that my positionality is shaped by personal, social, cultural, and professional experiences which has significantly influenced this research. Rather than attempting to assume a neutral stance, I recognise that my identity, values, and motivations are deeply entangled in the questions I asked, the interactions with the participants, the data I chose to foreground, and the meanings I made throughout the study.

I am a South African woman of colour, educated in a multilingual and multicultural society marked by the enduring legacies of apartheid and inequality. These experiences as well as my experience in the field of language education have informed a deep personal commitment to educational justice, transformation, and inclusivity. My cultural and linguistic background, shaped by both Western academic traditions due to the dominance of Anglo-normativity in South African schools has sensitised me to the power dynamics that operate within schools, language policies, and dominant literacies. However, professionally, my work in the field of language education, teacher development and student support in education has consistently brought me into close contact with students navigating complex educational, emotional, and social landscapes as part of their English language learning. This has fuelled my interest in how learners make sense of themselves through

storytelling, and how classrooms can become spaces of agency, identity work, and critical engagement. My pedagogical practice and research are driven by a belief in the transformative potential of literacy as a set of skills and as a mode of being, relating, and resisting.

I entered this research as a teacher-researcher. This dual role allowed me to design and facilitate the storytelling project in ways that were pedagogically responsive and ethically grounded. However, it also demanded constant reflexivity, as my presence and authority in the classroom may have influenced how learners engaged, performed, and positioned themselves. Rather than viewing this as a limitation, I see the teacher-researcher stance as a source of insight and relational depth, which enabled a more nuanced and situated understanding of the learners' stories and identities. These commitments influenced key aspects of the research. In designing the storytelling project, I prioritised emotional safety, multilingual and multimodal expression, and opportunities for learners to draw on their lived experiences. My interactions with participants were shaped by a desire to listen deeply and respectfully, especially when engaging with sensitive themes such as trauma, migration, and social injustice. During analysis, I was drawn to moments of affect, agency, and resistance which recognised the learners' and their communities within their to navigate identity within structures that often silence or marginalise.

While my positionality inevitably shaped the research process and findings, I have sought to practise reflexivity throughout by continually questioning how my interpretations are shaped by who I am, what I value, and the context in which I work. I understand that meaning making in qualitative research is co-constructed, and that my voice is not detached from the voices of the learners, but in dialogue with them. My hope is that this research honours the voices of the young storytellers who shared their lives and that it contributes to more inclusive, critically imaginative pedagogies in South African classrooms and beyond.

3.7. Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the use of multimodal storytelling as a tool for engaging learners' cultural, linguistic, and social resources, several limitations are acknowledged.

These limitations highlight the specific contexts and methodological challenges that may influence the interpretation and application of the findings.

The study was conducted in one school with only one Grade 10 English Home Language class, situated within a specific South African socio-cultural and educational context. While the findings provide rich, context-specific insights, they may not accurately reflect the realities of other participants, schools, classrooms, or regions with differing sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics. The diverse nature of South Africa's multilingual and multicultural educational landscape means that learners' experiences and interactions with multimodal storytelling could vary significantly across contexts. This limitation highlights the importance of situating the findings within the unique socio-cultural context of the research site.

Time constraints were another limitation within the study. The intervention was conducted over a limited time frame, which included only a series of lessons. There is a possibility that this may have restricted the depth of learners' engagement with the multimodal storytelling activities and restricts exploring the long-term impact of the pedagogical methods and intervention. Sustained engagement over a longer period could have provided deeper insights into the iterative processes of meaning-making and the development of learners' critical and creative capacities. Additionally, the limited timeframe of the intervention may have influenced the extent to which learners were able to fully mobilise their pluralistic resources and reflect on their stories in depth. Since I was not the educator of the class and at this school, there is no guarantee that the educator will continue to implement the pedagogy introduced during this intervention, therefore the longitudinal aims and benefit of this study are not guaranteed.

I assumed the dual role of being a teacher-researcher during the intervention, which affects the possibility of subjectivity influencing data collection and interpretation. While this dual role allowed for close engagement with learners and enriched the data through direct observation and interaction, it also introduced the potential for bias in how the intervention activities were facilitated and how learner responses were interpreted (Sutton & Austin, 2015). To mitigate this, I made use of strategies such as triangulation, using multiple data sources (artifacts, observational data, questionnaires and focus group discussions) to verify findings and enhance reliability of the data. Additionally, maintaining a reflective journal throughout the research process helped to

critically examine my own assumptions and biases. Despite these measures, the subjective nature of qualitative research remains a limitation as complete objectivity is not possible.

One group did not participate in the written/audio stories in lesson 2, and two groups opted out of the study as they were unable to transduce their stories into the performative mode in activity 3. While the multimodal storytelling activities encouraged learners to draw on diverse resources, there were limitations in access to certain technologies, skills and resources that could have further enriched their narratives. Learners' varying levels of familiarity with multimodal storytelling practices and their comfort with working across modes could have influenced the outcomes of the intervention. Some learners may have been more accustomed to traditional text-based activities and may have needed additional scaffolding to fully engage with audio or performative modes. While the intervention aimed to provide multiple entry points, differences in prior exposure to multimodal practices highlight the need for ongoing, differentiated support in such pedagogical approaches (Kress, 2010). This limitation reflects broader challenges in South African schools, where disparities in skills and access to multimodal educational resources are prevalent. The lack of engagement across various modes of storytelling can also indicate resistance by the learners towards expressing identities and content within the stories due to certain characteristics of particular modes. The limitation that the learners experienced offered significant findings about the transduction and multimodal cross-pollination of stories that impacted the willingness of the learners to participate in the intervention, and this limitation offers new insights which will be discussed in the data sections.

Recognising these contextual and methodological limitations does not diminish the value of the study. Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies across multiple research sites or integrating diverse participant groups to enhance the applicability of findings. Despite these constraints, this study provides important insights into the potential of multimodal storytelling to mobilise learners' pluralistic resources and foster meaningful engagement in English language learning.

3.8. Ethical considerations

The school was contacted in advance with an invitation to participate in the study. The principal and grade 10 English educator were given information and consent forms to complete before the study was conducted. The learners were the main participants in this study and due to working with minors during this research project, information forms were issued to the learners and their parents to provide details about the study, and they were all given consent forms to complete (appendix 2). I ensured that all the participants understood the information and requirements of the study by going through the forms with the learners and clarifying ethical procedures at multiple points in this study. Participation in this study was voluntary, and the learners could withdraw participation by opting out of the study at any time, have the right to refuse to answer questions (Dornyei, 2007) or not participate in activities.

The study did not affect any participant negatively and none of the artefacts and findings collected were used for assessment purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is guaranteed as this is their right (Dornyei, 2007). Any identifying information and name/s of the school and participants was mentioned in this study were not revealed, and the names mentioned are pseudonyms. All data collected during this study is stored safely and will be destroyed within three to five years after the study takes place.

FOUR

Chapter 4:

OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATIVE STORIES

CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATIVE STORIES

This chapter provides an overview of the stories crafted by six groups of learners in an English Home Language classroom during a multimodal writing intervention. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how learners collaboratively utilise multimodal storytelling to craft narratives that emphasize social agendas. By examining the types of stories produced, this chapter seeks to answer the research question: *What types of stories do learners craft during a multimodal storytelling intervention that emphasizes a social agenda?* Through a detailed analysis of each collaborative story, this chapter aims to uncover the themes, structures, and semiotic resources employed by the learners, highlighting their engagement with social issues and the creative ways they express their perspectives through multimodal storytelling.

I will present the data which are the collaborative multimodal stories crafted, and each group will be treated as separate case studies. The groups were tasked with crafting either a written or audio story, and thereafter they had to transduce their story into the performative mode. They were given freedom to use any dominant or non-dominant cultural, linguistic or social resources to tell their stories across a range of different genres of their own choosing.

Due to ethical reasons, the learners were allowed to opt out of the activities at any time, which ensured their emotional safety, but this impacted the study and revealed insights about this multimodal storytelling intervention which will be discussed across the data chapters. As a result, one group did not submit a written/audio story, and two groups chose not to participate in submitting a performative story. The written and audio stories are illustrated exactly as they were written and recorded by the participants to preserve the integrity of the data. The performative stories have been transcribed in accordance with my observations of the videos submitted as a requirement of the activity.

The table below tracks the submission of activities and the modes used during storytelling across all the groups.

Group and title of story:	Number of learners in the group:	Theme/s in the story:	Activity 1 – Crafting a written/audio story:	Activity 2 – Redesign task, transducing story into a performance:
Group 1: **Woman in South Africa**	5	Rape, victimhood and silencing	Written story Short story – personal and collective narrative	No submission
Group 2: **GBV**	5	Gender based violence, crime and drugs	No submission	Documentary trailer
Group 3: Tiaan and Sinawe	4	Religion, gender and sexuality	Written story Romantic short story	No submission
Group 4	4	Xenophobia and Islamophobia	Audio story Realistic fiction	Improvisational drama
Group 5: Corruption	4	Politics, corruption and service delivery	Written story Non-fiction report	Non-fiction documentary
Group 6: The sad case of William Shakespeare	5	Drug addiction and teenage pressure	Written story Realistic fiction	Movie trailer

Table 5: Overview of collaborative multimodal stories

The stories that follow were crafted by groups 1 to 6 and each story will be thematically analysed in accordance with providing a general overview of the different kinds of stories produced, and it will be discussed using the following categories: *i). Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences, and ii). Critical social engagement*. This chapter provides an overview of the kinds of stories that learners collaboratively produced during the multimodal intervention, and chapter 5 will focus on the stories produced by group 1 and group 4 in more detail.

In this chapter, each story provides the learners with unique entry points for exploring identity, shaping the way key themes unfold in their narratives. Consequently, the analysis of each story foregrounds different aspects of identity, lived experience, and social critique, depending on how the narrative develops. For example, groups 1 and 2 engage more explicitly with lived experience, starting with broader social issues and social identity before weaving in personal dimensions. In contrast, identity is a central focus in the group 3 story, which begins in the personal realm of two characters' homes and gradually expands to broader societal issues of gender and sexuality. Group 4 explores ethnic identity through a deeply personal narrative, while Group 5 tackles themes of corruption, emphasising community identity. Group 6 addresses peer pressure which is a broader social issue but connects this theme to the evolving identity of a central character. These variations illustrate how multimodal storytelling enables diverse and nuanced engagements with identity, social issues, and personal experience.

GENDER, SEXUALITY & VIOLENCE

GROUP 1: WOMAN IN SOUTH AFRICA

GROUP 2: GBV

GROUP 3: TIAAN AND SINAWE

Group 1: Woman in South Africa

The written story:

Woman in South Africa

"She enters the rape capital of the world, thinking she is safe. Why would she? Her shorts too short, her top too tight. She is asking for it."

ERROR: this statement is invalid and is not true. Please educate yourself before you jump to such a conclusion.

Castration, cutting off his penis, slicing off the fingers of the assaulters and lynch the mockers. So many solutions, but would this even stop them? Evident in the woman's story, no. This would not stop them.

Entering South Africa, excited and alive, to experience the beauty of the world. Vibrantly strolling along the promenade, illuminated by the moonlight. Her denim shorts keeping her cool and her top protecting her aura. Two men walk by and the uncomfortable feeling of their eyes on her strip her of her safety.

Suddenly, the bubble around her goes cold and numbness pulses through her veins. The same men have grabbed her and she is moving through the dark to somewhere unknown. She screams but the world seems muted as no one comes to help.

Course hands grabbed her clothing and suddenly she is naked. Bare and humiliated in a place she thought would bring her joy, peace and a bright future. Her mouth is covered, her pain sliced dead by forced silence.

Suddenly she feels it. The ripping of her purity as the men jump into her. The continuous hurt, lasting until the men are satisfied against her will. The world goes blurry and her body moves in numbness to the rape rhythm of the men. Her self-love and cleanliness dances away. Away from her and never to be seen again.

She is stranded. Left alone in the now-haunted darkness of the night. The stars do not shine but rather burn in sorrow. She came to the place in hopes of a new beginning, however, she now feels that it should skip to the ending.

Her mutilated limbs help lift her innocent soul to the heavens. The cry of her purity fading up along with it. Her voice is not heard and along with many other victims, alive or dead. Change needs to happen. Woman's day should be everyday. We need to protect our women; the bearers of our future; the holders the holders of the seed to the sprouts of life.

The performative story:

Group 1 did not participate in the performative mode of storytelling. The analysis and discussion of this story will be guided by the categories *Exploring Themes, Identities, and Lived Experiences* and *Critical Social Engagement*, with a primary focus on the written story crafted by this group.

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

The story written by group 1 foregrounds themes of rape and silencing of woman that is portrayed as an epidemic. The story is set in the context of South Africa, and this is reflected in the title "Woman in South Africa". The story depicts South African culture as one of crime and violence, particularly against women and the country is referred to as the "rape capital of the world". South Africa is well known for its rich cultural heritage and scenic landscapes, but a dark reality overshadows the country – a widespread prevalence of rape. South Africa has one of the highest incidences of rape within the world, with low report statistics due to stigma and fear of being killed by their rapists (Cele, 2022). From July to September 2022, over 10 000 rape cases were opened with the South African Police Service (Cele, 2022). This group shows awareness of the rape epidemic against women in South Africa by selecting rape and silencing as the main themes of the story and it is crafted in a way that shares the experience of the rape victim with the audience and illustrates social reactions to the incident. South Africa is used as the setting of the story, and this is further emphasised in the title "Woman in South Africa", and South Africa is regarded as "the

rape capital of the world", which highlights the severity of the issue. The story begins as one that engages with a broader social theme of rape in South Africa, but moves to focus on the lived experience and identity of a single victim, the woman, whose identity is representative of all women who experience rape and silencing.

The group comprised five females who used their story to reflect on their fears of living in South Africa. During a discussion where I moved across the different groups, one participant explained that the inspiration for the story stemmed from the unsettling reality of being a woman in this country, admitting "you just feel unsafe and it's an awful feeling to feel in South Africa" (Field notes - group discussion, 2022). I investigated further by asking her to elaborate and reflect on her fear, and her response was that she is afraid "Mostly of men and I've had my own occurrences in my life. Obviously, I'm more scared coz if it could happen in this safe place, how could I be safe anywhere else?" (Field notes – group discussion, 2022). She elaborated and shared that she had been sexually assaulted in a setting she once considered safe which was a traumatic experience that shattered her sense of security and heightened her fear of men. Drawing on her lived experiences and shared fears amongst the group members and inspiration for their story illustrates Greene's (1995) argument that imagination is grounded in our social realities in which we may draw on our realities to identify these issues and be critical about them despite harsh realities. Greene (1995) views imagination as a powerful tool for acknowledging lived realities and envisioning alternatives where individuals can reimagine possibilities beyond the limitations of their current circumstances. This capacity for re-imagining allows for creative ways of thinking about justice, agency, and transformation, offering individuals a way to envision and potentially realise a world shaped by new understandings and social possibilities.

Through further interaction with the group members, it was evident that the story was inspired by their perception and negative experiences of being females in South Africa and three of the five participants drew on their experience of being sexually assaulted. They wrote this story as an expression of their own experiences, and as a form of shared experience to shed light on assault experienced by women across the world (Focus group discussion, 2022). The story engages with notions of personal and community identity and experience as a source of writing (Bomer, 2017), and it gives the participants a space to reflect on past experiences and re-imagine their sense of

self and future as they use this story to affirm their identities and struggles as women which is expressed through language and emotion in this story (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022).

Since the story was based on the lived experiences of some of the group members, it was a recollection of life experiences. The story reflects real life experiences that were creatively changed by merging collective lived experiences of the group members and prosthetic memories of sexual assault which illustrates imagination in action. Landsberg (2004) describes prosthetic memory as an experience that is not directly experienced by an individual, but rather acquired through media, stories, or cultural representations, becoming part of one's personal or collective identity. The concept suggests that through films, literature, and other forms of media, individuals can adopt memories of historical events, social injustices, or cultural experiences they did not live through themselves (Landsberg, 2004). Even though these memories were not experienced by the individual, it can feel deeply personal, influencing one's perspectives, empathy, and sense of connection to others' experiences. The combination of lived experiences and prosthetic memories to create a new narrative that tells the 'woman's' story is conceptualised by Vygotsky (2004) as creative reworking. Creative reworking involved the intersection of the learners' lived experiences and new ideas generated by their collective collaborative creativity and imagination to create something new i.e.: the story. Collaborative imagination (Mendelowitz, 2016) served as an additional resource that the learners engaged with as they used each other as resources and sources of knowledge during the writing process which emphasises the power of shared, creative processes in educational contexts where learners work together to co-create narratives, explore identities, and imagine new possibilities. In collaborative imagination, students bring diverse experiences and perspectives to group storytelling or creative activities, using these as resources to shape shared meaning and understanding. With this group in particular, there were no limitations to a shared imagination approach as the group members had shared fears and similar perspectives about the topic and themes that emerged in the story, however, this may not always be the case across other groups that include members with differing perspectives. The relationship between imagination/creativity and reality is complex due to the representations of identity, language, perspective and affect which is evident in the multilayered representations in the story. The group pooled together these ideas and resources to craft their story by merging what already exists from their lived experiences with new ideas to produce a new narrative (Vygotsky, 2004).

The collaborative and creative process of writing fiction that was based on reality enabled distance which allowed the group to create a character that reflects their experiences, and this is reflected on by illustrating the traumatic experience of "the woman" in the story in paragraphs five and six, which is followed by themes of silencing and loss that rape victims often encounter. In this story, they reflect on the effects of rape and explore various types of loss; the loss of identity, purity, voice and hope as a result of rape – "Her self-love and cleanliness dances away. Away from her and never to be seen again." The learners capture the erosion of self-worth and agency that the woman experiences, illustrating how trauma can fragment identity. The imagery of self-love and cleanliness dancing away suggests an involuntary detachment from the self, reinforcing the idea that identity is not static but vulnerable to external forces and personal experiences.

Fictional stories allow individuals to approach traumatic topics from a slight distance, making it easier to process and communicate these experiences with others. The learners can engage with difficult topics from a position of relative safety, allowing for both critical reflection and emotional processing. This creative distance enables them to explore identity in ways that might feel too immediate or overwhelming in direct personal narratives. The duality of projection and safety encourages deeper exploration of identity and shared social realities, positioning fictional storytelling as both a personal and social tool for understanding and transformation (Greene, 1995; Anderson & Macleroy, 2017). Projection enables storytellers to distance themselves from direct personal exposure by embedding their thoughts, fears, and emotions into fictional characters or scenarios. This allows them to navigate difficult or traumatic experiences without the immediate vulnerability that comes with personal disclosure. This protective distance does not diminish the emotional and cognitive engagement of the storyteller, but it facilitates critical reflection. By stepping outside of the learners immediate lived realities, storytellers can examine their identities from new perspectives, question dominant social narratives, and experiment with alternative ways of being and belonging.

ii. Critical social engagement

The main themes of the story are rape, victimhood and silencing which are prevalent broader social issues that exist, and the group uses storytelling to speak back to notions of power that exist in

society. These themes are crafted in a way that expresses critical awareness of rape crimes in South Africa by narrating the rape incident experienced by the woman, and also by challenging the rape discourse. The learners demonstrate consciousness of rape discourse on multiple levels through the woman's identity, collective voices of society to silence her and the physical act of assault. The theme of victimhood and silencing experienced by rape victims is illustrated through dialogue to establish collective voices that represent public opinion – "Her shorts too short, her top too tight. She is asking for it." Through descriptions of her dressing, society imposes a particular identity onto the woman, implying that she dresses in an inappropriate or provocative way. They engage with these common phrases used within society and play with the generalisation that rape victims 'asked for it' by dressing inappropriately to justify rape crimes. In doing so, they challenge social ideologies and dominant narratives by engaging with multiple voices within their story which draws on Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualisation of language as heteroglossic as the students shift between their individual voices and those of society to create dialogue and engagement with audience.

The theme of silencing is clearly illustrated in the story through several elements, starting with the omission of the woman's name and voice as she remains unnamed and unheard throughout. By referring to her only as "the woman," the story intentionally highlights how rape victims are often reduced to as statistics, challenging this depersonalisation by emphasizing her as a real, yet unnamed individual. This choice calls attention to the erasure of victims' identities, highlighting the impact of society's tendency and discourse to silence and anonymize women who are raped. "Woman" is a singular noun, indicating that this story is the experience of one woman who is in South Africa. This could be reference to their own identities and experience of sexual assault. However, towards the end of the story, they mention "women" in plural, implying that this story echoes the experience of numerous women all around the world who experience rape and sexual assault as a matter that affects the female demographic at large. The shift from singular to plural indicates critical social awareness that that rape phenomenon is not an isolated experience and extends to a large demographic of woman across the world. The representation of women in this story strongly aligns with Bomer's (2017) culturally sustaining pedagogy tenet of using literacy as action to alter the world.

Other examples of silencing include - “She screams but the world seems muted as no one comes to help”, “Her mouth is covered, her pain sliced dead by forced silence”, “Her voice is not heard”. These depictions of forced silence reveal the learners' acute awareness of social marginalization, and the trauma associated with voicelessness. The woman in the story is physically and emotionally silenced, but the learners illustrate forms of resistance against this silencing and become active participants in allowing their personal and collective voices to be heard as a counter-narrative (Rosario-Ramos & Johnson, 2014). They resist and fight back against this silencing by telling the woman’s story and giving her a voice through their own voices and positionalities. This is an example of the critical-affective-creative nexus which enables students to write back to power (Govender, 2019; Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024) by providing voices to victims of silencing in ways that create empathy for rape victims through the explicit details of the rape scene. This concept of a critical-affective nexus emphasizes the interconnectedness of critical awareness and emotional engagement in resisting oppressive narratives. By articulating the woman’s experiences of silencing through emotive descriptions, the learners position themselves as empathetic allies and advocates by channelling their emotions into a critical stance. Their storytelling becomes an act of resistance as they reclaim a voice denied to the woman, confronting the structures that suppress victims' identities and stories. This active participation in her narrative serves as a counter-narrative, challenging systems of silencing and giving emotional and social weight to her experiences, thereby speaking back to power and highlighting the importance of agency and solidarity in the fight against silencing rape victims.

The plot develops in ways that illustrate critical social consciousness. The assault progresses at a quick pace that moves from a mental and visual act towards physical assault whereby the woman is violently raped. The learners explore issues of dominance and power that rapists enforce by illustrating rapid progression of the assault. They show awareness of the unanticipated act of rape and that rapists act on sexual impulses. The men’s longing gaze and “their eyes on her strip her of her safety” meaning that they stare at her with a predatory and sexualising gaze which is the first act of assault. The word “strip” is powerful and implies the forceful removal of her clothes which protect her body from their gaze. It suggests the men’s inability to control their desire which overpowers the victim.

The story ends with “she now feels that it should skip to the ending”, and the audience are left wondering what happened to the woman. This encourages the audience to formulate their own assumptions about what happened to the woman. Open ended conclusions like this encourage readers to think critically about the narrative, rape discourse and social culture of themes in the story (Janks, 2013; Rosario-Ramos & Johnson, 2014). Such an ending can be a tool to create dialogue for the audience to engage in and can potentially move them towards social justice and action. This story takes asset pedagogies a step further by positioning learners to reflect on their past experiences, realities of the world and re-imagine their sense of self and future.

This story exemplifies critical social engagement by moving beyond personal reflection to a broader interrogation of societal structures and power dynamics. By situating individual and community identities within the global realities of rape, victimhood and silencing, the learners articulate personal and collective struggles and also contribute to a larger discourse on justice, resilience, and social change. Storytelling, in this context, becomes an act of agency that challenges dominant narratives, amplifies marginalised voices, and fosters a sense of solidarity among those who share similar lived experiences. Through this process, learners do not passively recount experiences but actively engage in reimagining their identities and futures, positioning themselves as both critical thinkers and social actors. This aligns with the transformative potential of multimodal storytelling, where learners navigate the intersections of personal and political realities, and use narrative as a tool for awareness, advocacy, and change.

Group 2: GBV (Gender based violence)

The written story:

This group showed potential investment in the activity by dialogically planning their story. They collaboratively decided to select the written mode to craft their story and they were eager to share their ideas, making the space vibrant and filled with chatter, laughter and curiosity as they asked each other questions (Fieldnotes, 2022). Despite engaged collaborative discussions during class, their written story did not materialise and the reason for this was unknown as the group members scurried away in panic when asked about the incomplete submission (Field notes, 2022). This was the only group who did not submit a written or audio version of their story. Their submission included a summary of their planning in the form of a vague mind map that did not capture concrete ideas. The youth tend to foreground contemporary platforms and there has been a decline in traditional forms of writing which is evident amongst this group as they chose not to participate in the written or audio modes of storytelling, but they showed no hesitation to craft a performative story. Categories of analysis and the discussion will predominantly be in relation to the performative story as only this mode of storytelling was submitted.

The performative story:

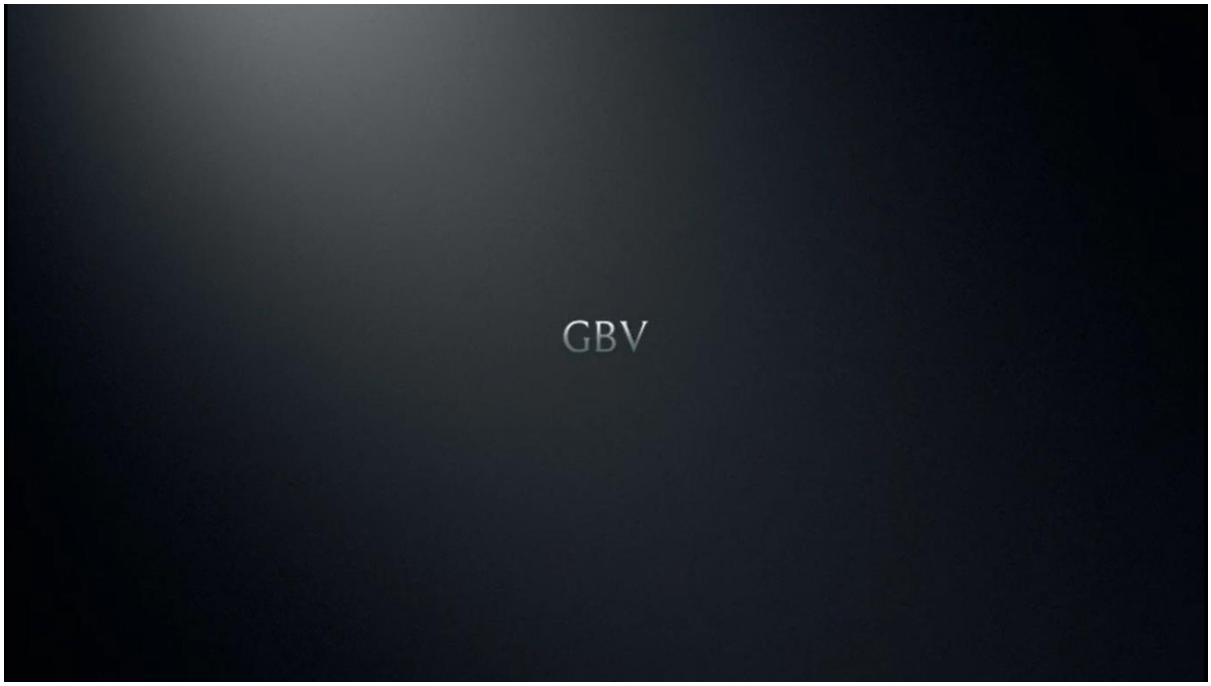
Dialogic planning and the construction of the mind map aided the learners to scaffold and develop their ideas when producing a performative story. Since they did not craft a written or audio story, they had less content to work with when crafting a performative story, and they had to make critical choices about what content and semiotic resources to use. Making choices to communicate meaning and craft a story as they have done is a skill that can be accessed in the classroom and in their daily lives (Bohannon, 2015).

The performative story produced was in the genre of a documentary trailer. The story begins by introducing the title “GBV” which is also the main theme, and it is followed by a brief scene that enforces the theme. Each scene includes written themes which anchors the performance that follows. The linear sequence and anchoring grounds meaning for the audience and positions

them to not deviate from the information that is presented to them. This is a form of positioning the audience, making sure that the message is captured according to the intended purpose. Below are visual screenshots of the performative story. Artistic effects were applied to the stills extracted from the video performance to address ethical considerations. Figure 5 below presents a composite sequence of screenshots from the group's performative story *GBV*, illustrating the key narrative moments and themes.



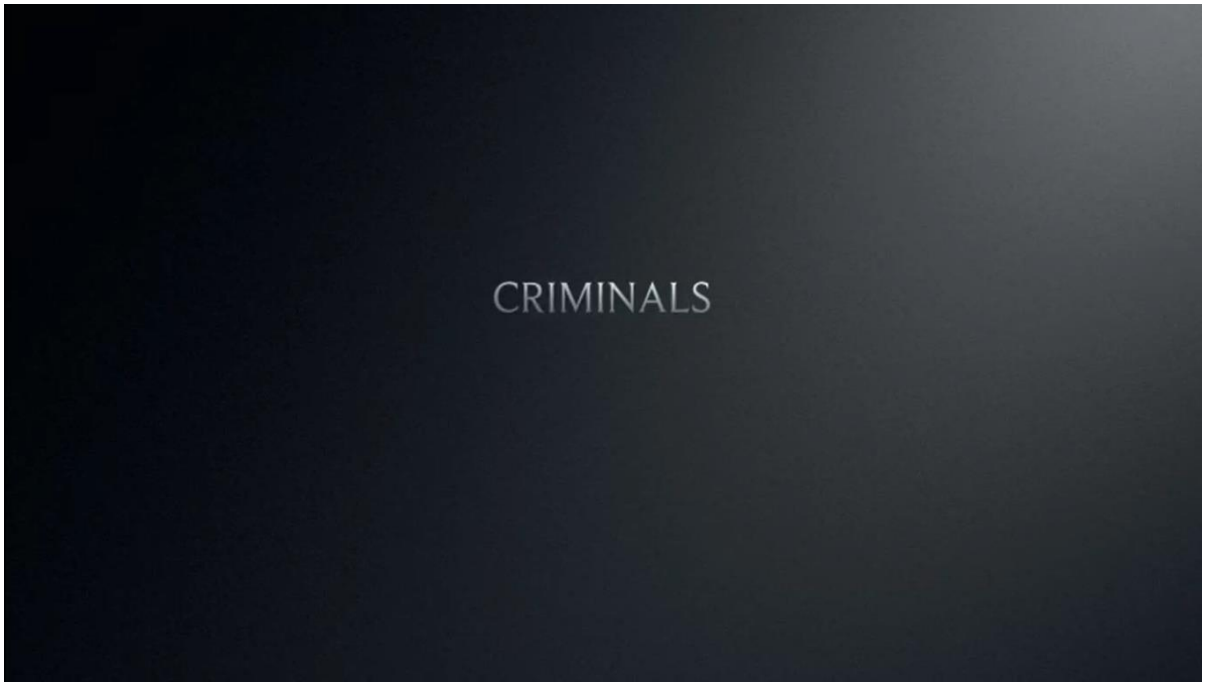
Cinematic introduction of a production company, "Mthombeni productions". The group views themselves as producers of this performance.



GBV, an abbreviation for gender-based violence. This is the main theme of the story, and it is introduced in the first frame.



The first character is introduced. She holds her hand to her nose and makes a slow sniffing motion to illustrate drug use. Thereafter, she brings her hand to her mouth and illustrates a smoking gesture.



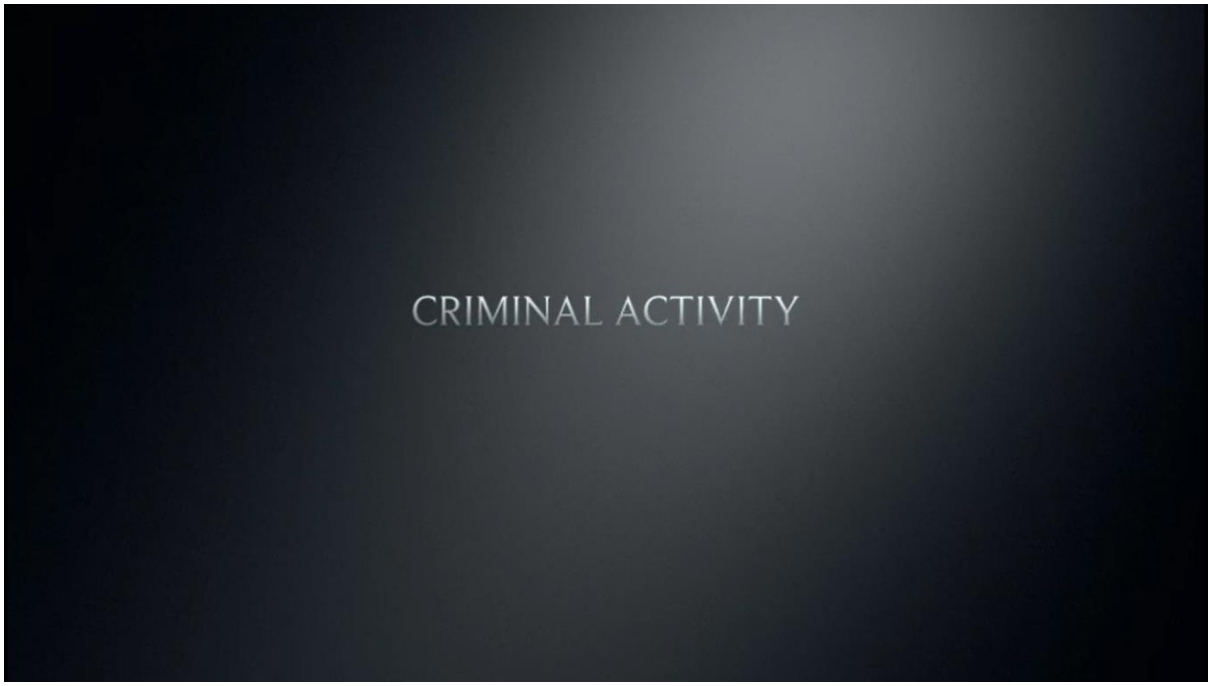
The next theme is introduced, criminals. The frames that follow is an introduction of the criminals and their criminal activities.



Two new characters are shown, one smoking and the other has a bottle in her hand to mimic consuming alcohol. Their dressing is untidy, a tie on the head, baggy blazer, and untucked shirts. The characters walk with a bouncing motion which is stereotypically associated with gangsters.



As the two criminals walk past, the character from the first scene who illustrated drug consumption is shown once again on the side of the frame, rolling a cannabis cigarette. This is the third account of her involved in drug activity, implying that she is a drug addict.



Criminal activity is introduced as a theme. The frames that follow will illustrate the criminal activity within the story.



A male character is introduced. He is looking down at his phone.



The characters that were labelled as criminals approach the man and the one strikes him. The drug addict watches from a distance and has a broad smile on her face.



The criminals hold sticks in their hands to mimic knives which are used to threaten the man. He retreats by holding his hands up to illustrate that he will not fight back.



The man reaches in his pocket and hands over the phone. The criminals still hold the ‘knives’ at him while he does this.



“CITIZENS EXPERIENCE THIS EVERYDAY”. This is not a theme, but the concluding written statement of the story.



One of the criminals scream at the man, illustrating verbal abuse and he turns his body away from them, and holds his head to shield himself.



This frame introduces a female character, but her face is never shown. All we see is her on the ground, her legs in an upward position and another character standing over her. She screams and the other character shouts (it is unclear what is said), the camera continuously shakes.



The female character looks dishevelled and lays on the road, curled up. Her face covered and she cries. The story concludes with this scene.

Figure 5: Composite sequence of screenshots from the group's performative story GBV, depicting a cinematic introduction, recurring scenes of drug and alcohol use, the actions of stereotypical "gangster" characters, a violent robbery, and a final implied sexual assault. Through gesture, movement, costume, and written text, the performance conveys intersecting themes of substance abuse, criminality, and gender-based violence.

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

The themes of this story include interconnected social issues that are prevalent across the world - gender-based violence, rape, drug addiction, and crime. During the group discussion, these themes were said to be issues that the learners see and hear about in the world around them or on

the news, but it was evident that they kept a distance from being associated with any of the incidents they spoke about as they made sure to elaborate many times that it has never happened to them. They made claims such as “I saw” and “I heard” as substantiation for how they know about the incidents that they were discussing (Field notes, 2022). Sharing incidents became a tool for planning as they extracted bits and pieces of content for their story from ideas and stories that each member shared. Veloria and Boyes-Watson (2014) advocates for life experiences to be valued within academic spaces through social and dialogic engagement as it creates a sense of value, voice and understanding for students which offers them access to capitalise on different types of knowledge systems and lived experiences as part of their learning.

As Bakhtin (1984) suggests, truth is not an isolated discovery within one person’s mind but is instead "born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 110), emphasizing that meaning emerges through collaborative dialogue and shared inquiry. Collaboration was an essential tool for learning and crafting the story as the group discussed, laughed and shared knowledge about different types of drugs and how they are made, the cost of drugs, the process of taking it and the effects that it has on people and their families. They constantly questioned each other about their information sources, often asking “but how do you know this?” (Field notes – group discussion, 2022) as new information was shared with each other. Their group discussion included phrases such as “I saw this in real-life”, “I saw this on TV”, “I learned about it in Life Orientation”, or they read about it on the internet (Field notes - group discussion, 2022). Thus, multiple sources of sharing of knowledge was present, and the learners drew on contexts outside the classroom and incorporated this knowledge into their story. This aligns with Vygotsky’s notion of imagination as a socio-cultural process highlights how learners draw on multiple resources and tools within society to construct meaning. In this story, the learners’ engagement with contexts beyond the classroom included cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and social realities which demonstrates how imagination is not an isolated cognitive function but a deeply social and dialogic process (Vygotsky, 2004). The collaborative nature of their storytelling illustrates that learning and creativity emerge through interaction with others where shared knowledge and cultural capital shape new ideas and narratives. By weaving together diverse voices, experiences, and discourses, the learners co-construct meaning and position themselves as active participants in shaping knowledge. This illustrates how imagination enables learners to

reconfigure their realities, critically engage with the world, and expand their sense of possibility through storytelling.

Amongst these affordances of drawing on social experiences for learning, the collaborative interactions amongst the group led to constructing characters that were authentic and convincing.

The first scene of the performance shows the characters making a sniffing motion and swiping their noses with their hands which mimics drug usage. The mention of "nyaope"—a low-cost street drug in South Africa that combines various substances, sometimes including antiretroviral drugs used for HIV treatment—alongside the use of African languages, firmly situates the story within a specific socio-cultural context, reflective of a South African community. Scholars such as Chadwick (2017), Goodson & Gill (2014), and Mendelowitz et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of grounding stories in such localized contexts. By drawing on their lived knowledge of life in South Africa, the group highlights that storytelling and creativity are rooted in reality, shaped by the social practices of their community. This activity gave the group a space to represent negative social practices that occur in communities in South Africa. The group's storytelling process reflects a strong emphasis on collective and social identity rather than individual, personal identities. By situating their narrative within broader societal experiences rather than anchoring it in personal testimonies, the learners engage in a form of narrative distancing that allows them to explore complex and often traumatic issues from a less emotionally vulnerable position. Rather than foregrounding individual subjectivities, the group positions their story within shared social realities, reinforcing the idea that identity is not solely personal but also deeply embedded in community histories, cultural narratives, and collective struggles (Norton, 2013). This choice suggests that storytelling can serve as a means of navigating identity in ways that allow for critical engagement while mitigating personal exposure. In this way, their approach highlights the fluid and constructed nature of identity, where individuals align themselves with collective experiences to make sense of their social positioning.

This story moves beyond merely acknowledging gender-based violence and rape as a prevalent social issue, but rather critically engages with the socio-cultural underpinnings and the structures that perpetuate it. By embedding the narrative within the specific contexts of South African society, it invites learners to examine the systemic dimensions of violence, cultural, and gendered dynamics

contribute to the silencing and vulnerability of individuals. This approach aligns with the principles of asset pedagogy, which views learners' socio-cultural knowledge and lived experiences as invaluable resources in the learning process (Moll et al., 1992). Rather than treating these narratives as detached stories, the asset-based approach positions them as tools for critique and resistance, encouraging students to apply their knowledge of community realities and challenge societal norms.

ii. Critical social engagement

The group illustrated gender-based violence against men by representing two female characters as the criminals, who presumably have weapons which they use to threaten and inflict harm and violence on a male character as they rob him of his cellphone. This shows consciousness of representing violence against men which is often overlooked due to dominant social views about masculinity which regard men as strong, invulnerable and usually the perpetrators of violence and crime. This representation highlights male victimisation and challenges limiting and binary views of gender. The activity brief required engagement with a social issue that required addressing, therefore, by challenging social ideologies and representing violence against men they speak back to power (Govender, 2019) and promote empathy by sensitising violence against males. The theme of GBV includes violence against men which is often under-represented and has social stigma attachments. This is a counter-narrative that challenges social ideologies about masculinity that engages with critical affective approaches in this story (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024).

Immediately after representing violence against men, violence against women is also shown in a rape scene which is brief and chaotic. A female is held down on the ground against her will, screaming in resistance. There is an additional voice, but it is unclear what they are saying and who the voice belongs to as no additional character appears in the scene. The absence of explicit information indicating the rape, combined with semiotic cues like the erratic camera movement, the sounds of resistance, and the portrayal of the victim curled up, trembling and crying, leads the audience to infer the traumatic experience. Such a portrayal demonstrates how a body in action can communicate powerful, often unsettling meanings, even in the absence of spoken language (Mallozzi, 2011; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2014). The choice to obscure the character's face and omit

explicit details from the scene emphasises the trauma of the experience and the broader societal pattern of silencing rape victims and erasing their identities. This approach reflects the disturbing reality that rape victims are often anonymized, seen more as representations of trauma than as individuals with voices, histories, and names. By leaving her identity undefined, the performers highlight the tension between visibility and invisibility, forcing viewers to confront the impact of this silence and the power dynamics. This is similar to the representation of the rape victim in the story by group 1 (Woman in South Africa), where the victim is stripped of her identity, nameless and her identity is based on her experience of being sexually assaulted.

Unlike group 1, in this story, violence against both males and females is represented, framed by the words "CITIZENS EXPERIENCE THIS EVERYDAY," highlighting the frequency and normalization of such violence in society regardless of gender. By representing violence against men through a robbery and physical assault (hitting and stabbing), and against women through a rape scene, the learners illustrate how violence impacts both genders, challenging narrow definitions of victimhood and vulnerability. This approach aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) concept of multivoicedness and Anderson and Macleroy's (2017) perspective that stories can "resist essentialised, monocultural views of citizenship and identity" by rejecting singular narratives in favour of diverse, complex ones (p. 512). It acknowledges that individuals occupy multiple, intersecting social positions and that their experiences cannot be reduced to a single story or perspective (Bakhtin, 1981). By portraying violence perpetrated differently against each gender, men are violated in terms of their possessions, while women are violated through their bodies. Through these representations of violence, the learners bring to light the different forms that violence takes depending on gendered vulnerabilities. This nuanced representation highlights the multiple realities of violence and resists a single story of victimization, advocating for a broader understanding of how individuals experience harm based on gender. In doing so, they challenge viewers to recognize that both men and women are affected by violence in distinct yet equally troubling ways, emphasizing the need to address these issues inclusively. These representations interact with and challenge prevailing social and gender discourses by confronting stereotypes of men and women in the context of violence. Together, these portrayals highlight how gendered expectations shape individuals' experiences of violence, while also critiquing the systemic issues that position men and women differently in relation to harm.

As Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) suggest, the story employs a "*performativity of emotions to achieve social justice*" (p. 5), using visceral imagery and embodied suffering to evoke empathy and disrupt complacency. Through this performative lens, the story compels audiences to confront the emotional impact of these realities, which extends beyond intellectual engagement to an embodied, affective response. This strategic use of emotional performance not only amplifies the visibility of violence against both genders but also challenges viewers to re-examine their own assumptions about vulnerability, masculinity, and femininity. However, while the story raises critical awareness of social ideologies and systemic injustices, it stops short of advocating for direct social action or mobilising practical solutions. By focusing primarily on representation and emotional resonance, it prompts a reflective, rather than an activist response. The positionality that this group takes differs from group 1 (Woman in South Africa) who explicitly challenge the audience through notions of voice, questioning and explicit details within their story which is lacking from the story of group 2. This limitation invites further inquiry into the role of storytelling as a vehicle for not only raising consciousness but also as a catalyst for social change, suggesting that representations need to be paired with actionable strategies to foster meaningful transformation.

Group 3: Tiaan and Sinawe

The written story:

Tiaan's Place

Sunday, July 17

6:00am

"Tiaan!" the loud female voice calls for Tiaan who simply has no reaction to the call. As though the thick brick wall had filtered the voice. Tiaan lays wide awake on his bed with his rugby ball (special to him, supposedly). Staring at the ceiling whilst spinning the ball from its double apex at the ends of the ball. He is lost in thought. So lost that he doesn't even hear the roaring sound of a female beast calling his name once again.

"Tiaan van DeWet!" calls the female voice, only this time from the outside of a half closed-opened door. He remains still for a moment before he answers. "Ja, Ma?" With the look of semi-interested teenage boy. "Does the whole neighbourhood need to know that you are still in bed? Huh… Must everyone now hear me call you and hear me sound like a broken siren that just cannot stop ringing?" One thing that Tiaan's mother knew how to do better than anyone else was how to disturb a person's morning. And mind you, she would do it with so much ease and sarcasm it was unbelievable.

"Maak gou! We leaving in 20 minutes. And also open the window or something. This room is giving me a wonderfully painful headache." She leaves and Tiaan reluctantly gets up from bed and opens the windows as he had been instructed, got into his Sunday best which was the black kargo pants and cream white shirt he wore over his vest, which covered his muscled, strong arms. Down in the lounge sat Mr van DeWet. "Ah look at that, he finally decided to grace us with his presence. You know your mother almost did something I wouldn't to get you down here." He says this with a smirk which was his way of implying towards a sexual reference. "Pa! No man, that is you[r] God damn wife and its way to early for this." One of the things that

differentiated Tiaan from his father and previous generations of men before him was that he had respect for every women regardless of who she may have been. “Come on, Son, you will be a man very soon and you will have to carry the tradition and anchor a woman or two down someday. Just like I did your mother.” He smirks again with a gentle laugh behind his throat. That was just another horrid remark he made about Tiaan’s Mother.

Whilst everyone in the house wonders around the house preparing to leave for church service, Tiaan grabs a bowl and fills it to the top. He tops that up with some cold milk and eats.

Sinawe’s Place

The sounding alarm of a firearm going of[f] had woken him up hours ago. He got up out of his bed and knelt on his knee. Bum rested on his heels in prayer, just like his mother taught him. “Loving Father, who art in Heaven…” he began and went on till it had be cut short due to an impatient mother.

“Sinawe, must you be told to go and get ready to go. You know we have to be at church early. The ladies are counting on me to deliver the good news and for me to do so I need to be early. Don’t you want your mother to succeed?” Manipulation. One of the characteristics his mother always seemed to get away with. He could never say no to his mother then so why start now.

“Ofcourse, I do mommy. Don’t worry I’ll be done soon, just give me 20 minutes max and I will be done.” What a smile that put on his mother’s face. His father was always on time. He had already put his suit on with finely pressed pants which had to have that sharp line running down in the centre. He had his shoes nicely polished and made sure it shined enough to view his reflection. Everyone else was well on time, mainly because they had him for a father, husband, son, brother and uncle who understood the value of punctuality.

Sinawe finished dressing up in his Sunday best which was [a] black suit he received last Christmas that fits him perfectly now. It outlines the muscles he had and still looked decent for church which was the most pivotal element yet. He went up to the lounge and met up with the rest. “Erin dear,” his father called “can you please hurry up. You don’t want to be late.” Mrs

Johonston answers “Five minutes.” Mr Johonston laughed gently and looked at Sinawe, “Five minutes she says before you know it, its an hour. One day you will be married and you will see this, however don’t be mad, rather love you[r] wife wholeheartedly and all will be well. Cherish her and respect her, for women are the power that drive a family forward.”

Mrs Johonston comes out and finally say, “Okay, I’m done, we can now leave.” Mr Johonston smiled and complimented her “And you look stunning.”

Both families had gotton to church and listened to the sermon the priests had given.

At <u>Hoerskool</u> Randburg vir <u>Seuns</u>

8:45am

Monday, 18 July

Another day and another opportunity for both the boys to experience in the Hoerskool Rand vir seun.

Tiaan sits in the front seats next to his mother who drives him to school. He listens to the radio station that he only listened to when his mother transported. It was their way [of] bonding listening to the song the[y] sang along [to] every morning. They arrive at the school and Tiaan gets out of the car. It was as if the drive did not happen at all. He opens the boot and takes out his backpack and sports bag from where it laid. He then goes to the side where his mother rolls down the window and he gives her a comforting kiss on her right cheek. “I love you, Ma.” He says with a smile and as he turns he captures a glimpse of him. His beloved, Sinawe who is also being dropped of by his mother.

“Kom nou, voor jy laat word” calls Mrs Johonston. Sinawe’s mother sits in the car and waits for him to get into the car. At this point she scrolls through the apps of her phone whilst her children take their sweet precious time to get into the car. Sinawe finally gets into the car with his mouth full and half [a] banana in hand and fastens his seat belt. Then their off. Sinawe and his mother have an interesting conversation on their way and laugh as they do so. They arrive at school and

Sinawe's mother kisses him on his forehead and gives him a warm hug. He leaves the car and as he walks into the school he notices Tiaan looking at him.

School begins and the day seem to be going quite well especially now that the boys have seen each other. They had both liked each other for months-on-end and they both knew that they did. Only problem was that bullying roamed the school and if one saw something that allowed for a good bullying scope.

The performative story:

Group 3 did not participate in the performative mode of storytelling. The analysis and discussion of this story will predominantly focus on the written story that this group crafted.

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

Identity is a central theme in this analysis and is explored in considerable depth. It is important to acknowledge that while the same analytical categories are applied across all case studies/collaborative stories, the prominence of specific elements within these categories varies depending on the narrative dynamics of each story. In this particular story, the emphasis on personal identity is particularly pronounced, likely due to the story's setting within family contexts. The intimate nature of this setting provides an insight into each character's home life and fosters a deeper engagement with personal identity, as Tiaan and Sinawe navigate relationships, roles, and their position within their immediate social, religious and school environments. This suggests that the thematic focus of each story is shaped by the analytical framework and also by the context and structure of the story itself.

This story delves into the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, and religion in the South African context, illustrating how these interwoven factors shape and constrain expressions of identity. In a society where cultural and social norms often limit or silence diverse identities, it is crucial for educational spaces to be consciously structured as environments that support learners in freely expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation. As Msibi (2014) argues, creating

safe/comfortable spaces in schools is essential for fostering inclusivity and enabling students to explore their identities without fear of prejudice.

In this case, the activity's brief and its collaborative, small-group format provided a critical scaffold for students to engage deeply with their own and each other's identities. This structure cultivated an environment of trust, encouraging participants to openly discuss and interrogate their perspectives on identity in relation to complex social factors like gender, sexuality, race, and religion. By situating these discussions within a collective and dialogic process, the activity facilitated individual expression and also a shared exploration of diverse viewpoints, allowing students to navigate personal and communal identities in a way that might not be possible in a larger or more formal setting.

This approach highlights the role of pedagogically structured safe spaces as more than merely protective environments, as they can be dynamic opportunities where learners can critically engage with social ideologies, challenge stereotypes, and gain insights into both personal and collective dimensions of identity. Through this lens, the activity moves beyond simple self-expression, positioning identity exploration as a critical practice that acknowledges and responds to the socio-political context of South Africa, where histories of racial and gender-based discrimination continue to impact the ways in which learners navigate and assert their identities.

The group juxtaposes the lives of the two boys and illustrates their families, home lives and provides clues about the socio-cultural context of the story. The structure of the story challenges traditional conceptualisations of traditional linear storytelling structures and how a story should be told. Juxtaposing the lives and stories of both Tiaan and Sinawe generate interest for the reader and it introduces multiple social issues and dynamics. We are introduced to their parents who have distinct parenting styles and relationships with their respective sons and through details of their home lives and interactions with each other, the audience is provided with insights into their lived experiences.

Tiaan's mother knows "how to disturb a person's morning" and she does it with "so much ease and sarcasm". Through this, she comes across as a mother who nags and frustrates her son easily. Tiaan's breakfast is a bowl of cereal with cold milk which he eats alone, indicating that the family does not have breakfast together and this implies an unstructured/non-traditional home dynamic.

Tiaan's solitary breakfast and his mother's sarcasm suggest a degree of emotional detachment or lack of cohesion in the household, possibly contributing to feelings of isolation or frustration in his personal life. Sinawe's story begins with him waking up to the sound of a "firearm". This suggests drawing on lived experiences as his home context suggests that he lives in a dangerous or low-income area where crime and violence is a daily reality. After waking up to the gunshot, he "knelt on his knee" in prayer, implying that he is religious and turns to God for comfort and safety. Sinawe's morning, marked by violence yet followed by a moment of prayer, implies resilience in the face of hardship and a grounding in faith, reflecting a strong sense of agency despite his challenging environment. The contrasting scenes of Tiaan and Sinawe's mornings highlight differences in their family dynamics and subtly reveal how these home contexts shape each boy's personal and emotional landscape. These snapshots of home life highlight how familial and socio-economic contexts can profoundly shape the ways that these characters navigate their identities, relationships, and inner lives.

The sections detailing their home lives is centred on religion and focuses on the family's morning routines of going to church on a Sunday which highlights the role that religion plays in their lives and gaps within this story suggest the possibility that religion may be a factor in their hesitance and limiting expression of their sexuality. Traditional views about sex introduced in Christianity are moralistic and controlling (Bhana, Morrell, Hearn and Moletsane, 2007), and therefore the writers never directly explore the role of religion and its impact that it has on their sexuality due to their ways of life and religious beliefs that constrain queer identities. Instead, the story is written in a way where the reader is expected to make these connections which may be a literary device linked to 'showing' the audience and not 'telling' every detail of the story.

The setting of the story is located in South Africa, and we get clues of this through the use of the Afrikaans language. The group draws on a South African context and foregrounds Afrikaans identities through their character dialogue and language by using phrases like "Ja, Ma?", "Maak gou!", and "Kom nou, voor jy laat word". This establishes unique voices for the characters, and it is also a transfer of linguistic identity that is conveyed from the learners to their characters. In relation to the transfer of linguistic identities, Botsis and Bradbury (2018) identifies that language is an important component in negotiating and constructing identity which reflects onto the characters of the story. The language use and linguistic choices that locate the story in a South

African context authenticates the characters and enriches the story by adding cultural depth. Since the audience are South African, the linguistic choices enable the audience to connect with the characters as language is a critical marker of identity and community belonging (Norton, 2013). Afrikaans is strongly linked to an oppressive apartheid history, and it was a hegemonic language before 1994, however, it could also be the home language of white or coloured community members which the assumed group leader belongs to. In the story, it is unclear if Tiaan is a member of the white or coloured racial group, but it is assumed that he is coloured based on the group leaders identity and home language. Incorporating linguistic identities and heritage into character dialogue creates a space for students to weave Afrikaans into storytelling, and this linguistic representation challenges hegemonic language ideologies that often marginalize non-dominant languages (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), advocating for a more pluralistic and equitable approach to language use in storytelling.

The inclusion of Afrikaans identities and languages reflect the learners' lived experiences and personal histories, which bridges the gap between their real-world identities and fictional representations (Gee, 2000). Notions of voice and character traits demonstrate racial, cultural and social resources that the group has to offer and actively represent. Naming of the characters "Tiaan" and "Sinawe" presents diversity as the name Tiaan implies a white, Afrikaans identity and Sinawe implies a black identity. This draws on different racial backgrounds and cultures of the characters, adding a component of diversity and inclusivity. This practice aligns with the notion that language is not merely a communicative tool but a carrier of cultural values, traditions (Ngugi, 1986), and social meanings (Fairclough, 1989) which is evident through the lives of the two boys as the functioning of their families and focus on religion convey underlying messages of who they are and the role of culture, religion and society in their lives.

The use of multilingualism in this story powerfully reflects and capitalises on learners' home and social literacy practices, especially as it uses translanguaging (Darvin 2020; Garcia and Wei, 2014) which is a practice that mirrors the fluid language uses seen in South African communities and on local television. This translanguaging approach acknowledges learners' diverse and pluralistic linguistic repertoires and it challenges traditional, anglonormative ideologies often reinforced in South African classrooms (McKinney, 2017). By incorporating various linguistic resources into

storytelling within an English classroom, this practice disrupts monolingual norms and promotes a pedagogical environment where multiple languages are integral to learning.

Incorporating translanguaging in storytelling fosters a sense of belonging and linguistic pride, encouraging students to see their languages as valuable tools for academic and personal expression (García & Wei, 2014). This inclusive approach enhanced the groups story and writing skills and deepened their linguistic identities by allowing them to express their voices authentically through multiple languages. When learners make deliberate linguistic choices to reflect character and context such as in this story, they engage critically with the structural and expressive qualities of different languages, enriching their overall communicative repertoire and developing metalanguage awareness which is a critical understanding of language structure and function across languages (Cummins, 2008).

Multilingual storytelling helped students exercise agency in their learning by positioning them as experts of their linguistic resources, which served as an asset-based approach to education. By using multilingualism to create distinct characters and compelling stories, the learners made conscious decisions that enhanced both the depth of their storytelling and their sense of cultural and linguistic identity. This approach not only strengthened the learners' narrative capabilities but also supports a broader, more inclusive vision of education where language diversity is recognised as a valuable resource for intellectual and emotional growth (Heugh, 2018; Creese & Blackledge, 2015).

ii. Critical social engagement

Msibi (2014) suggests that anti-oppressive pedagogy is essential for fostering social change and promoting diversity within classroom spaces. Such pedagogical approaches are crucial for supporting and valuing students' gender and sexual identities, especially those that deviate from dominant norms like heterosexuality. The activity brief in this context facilitated the implementation of anti-oppressive pedagogies, providing an inclusive space for students to critically engage with and explore their social consciousness regarding gender and sexuality issues. By allowing students to confront and discuss these topics, the activity fostered a deeper

understanding of the complexities surrounding identity and social justice. Even though themes and development of the story lacked nuanced engagement at times and the learners do not explicitly engage with the issues raised, this storytelling activity enriched the learners' learning experiences and encouraged them to become more empathetic and socially aware individuals, capable of advocating for equity and inclusion both within and beyond the classroom (Focus group discussion, 2022).

Paris and Alim (2017) regard monolingualism, patriarchy and religion as practices of white dominance and these concepts were explored and challenged in the story. The learners resisted monolingualism by drawing on multilingual repertoires through dialogue, they express critical consciousness about the world by juxtaposing the different family dynamics of the two families, representing Tiaan's father as patriarchal and a misogynist as he makes sexual references about his wife and speaks about having to 'anchor' a woman as a family tradition that is a marker of being a man and expressing masculinity. The dialogue between Tiaan and his father indicate patriarchal views in which he sees women as sexual objects due to his disrespectful approach. Alternatively, Sinawe's father demonstrates patience, being a gentleman and offers his son advice to "love you[r] wife wholeheartedly and all will be well. Cherish her and respect her, for women are the power that drive a family forward." He encourages his son to value women and respect them and he leads by example through his actions and the way he treats his wife. Juxtaposing these differences of masculinity is never imposed on the audience, but rather serves as a reflection.

The group does not explicitly discuss the influence of religion on the boy's sexuality, but this tension is subtly implied through the narrative structure, particularly in the emphasis on preparing for church and when arriving at school. The juxtaposition of religious devotion and emerging sexual identity suggests an internal conflict where the main characters grapple with contradicting identities that exist across different home, church, and education spaces. The expectation to adhere to religious norms while privately exploring a non-heteronormative identity creates a sense of emotional and psychological tension. This struggle reflects broader societal discourses in which homosexuality is often perceived as taboo, leading to fear, self-censorship, and silencing. Through storytelling, the learners engage in a reflective process that allows them to navigate identity related tensions, even when these struggles are not explicitly voiced. This suggests that identity is not fixed but rather fluid and context-dependent (Paris & Alim, 2014; Anderson & Macleroy, 2017).

The reluctance to openly express or act upon this identity within the story highlights the theme of silencing in ways where social structures and cultural expectations shape self-representation and agency. Despite this, the act of crafting the story may serve as a space for negotiating identity, providing an opportunity for learners to explore complex and often unspoken dimensions of the self.

The stories of each boy are unified by introducing the school context. The “Hoerskool Randburg Vir Seuns” is an all-boy’s Afrikaans school, and this emphasizes a male Afrikaans identity. There are connotations of masculinity and heterosexuality attached to all-boy’s schools and this is evident in the story as both boys are described as having “muscles”, which implies physical strength. Along with their religion, the notion of masculinity threatens their sexuality. Being fearful of oppression because of their sexual orientation in an all-boys school reinforces heteronormative ideals of masculinity and sexuality that are often reproduced in schools, and persecution occurs when any person deviates from the standards due to the belief that gender and sexuality conflates (Richardson, 2004) which insinuates that they coexist, therefore it is naturalised by associating males with stereotypical notions of masculinity. The way in which they incorporate sexuality in the story could highlight the difficulty of confronting it in their school environment.

There is brief mention of the attraction between the boys, but this is not explored, and the story ends with the fear of being bullied. This depiction reflects a school environment characterised by heteronormativity, where homosexual identities are marginalised and discriminated against (Msibi, 2014) as the story explicitly states, “bullying roamed the school and if one saw something that allowed for a good bullying scope”. This highlights the pervasive nature of harassment faced by non-heteronormative individuals. Storytelling serves as a powerful medium for students to navigate and express their identities, allowing them to explore who they are within the world (Anderson & Macleroy, 2017). However, in this story, the learners positioning is marked by fear of fully exploring the notion of a homosexual, interracial relationship between two religious Christian boys. Evidence of their fear can be seen in the narrative's mention of attraction which is confined to a single, undeveloped paragraph, indicating a reluctance to take significant risks in their writing. This limited exploration of the characters' relationship reflects broader societal and internalised constraints. The learner’s decision to refrain from developing the relationship further mirrors their characters' struggle to express and act on their feelings. By not extending the narrative

beyond a brief acknowledgment of attraction, the story illustrates the internalised fear and external social and religious pressures that silence non-heteronormative expressions of identity.

The theme of *critical social engagement* is central to this story as the learners' limited exploration of the characters' relationship reflects broader societal silencing and internalised constraints. By choosing not to fully develop the romantic relationship, the story mirrors the ways in which non-heteronormative identities are often marginalised, both in public discourse and personal experiences. This narrative restraint serves as a form of social commentary, illustrating how religious and cultural norms regulate expressions of identity, particularly in contexts where heteronormativity is dominant. Through this omission of exploring the romantic relationship of the boys, the learners engage critically with the structural forces that shape identity and self-expression. Rather than openly challenging these constraints, the story subtly exposes how fear, stigma, and societal expectations restrict the agency of individuals navigating non-normative identities. This resonates with the idea that critical social engagement is not only about direct resistance but also about recognising and making visible the limitations imposed by dominant ideologies and groups (Janks, 2010; Pennycook, 2001). By crafting a story that reflects these tensions, the learners demonstrate an awareness of the socio-political forces at play, positioning storytelling as a means of grappling with issues of power, identity, and agency.

SOCIO-POLITICAL TENSIONS & PREJUDICE

GROUP 4: XENOPHOBIA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

GROUP 5: CORRUPTION

Group 4: Xenophobia and Islamophobia

The audio story:

Osama bin Abdullah bin Mohammed arrives at OR tambo International Airport at 5:00 AM on a Monday for a new industrial project. As he enters the customs, Osama gets dirty looks from everyone around here joins the queue to officially get into the country.

The customs lady is very confused and so she calls one of her colleagues to deal with the young man.

Osama takes his stuff and storms out of the airport and waits outside for a taxi to arrive.

After many taxis drove straight past him one finally stopped.

“Taxi…taxi…”

“Yebo buti, I understand. Mara where? Where's your hotel? Short left, short right? Where in Sandton? Please, if you if you want me to take you there, speak. You know eintlik you're going to a hotel. Do you not have money. Do you not have money? Buy your own car go, go to your own hotel.”

After a while of arguing between Osama and the taxi driver, the taxi driver finally realises where he needs to be and takes him there. When they get to the hotel in Sandton, Osama is being discriminated against for the third time and is so fed up.

The message of the story: Osama came to South Africa in the hopes of having a good project in Sandton, but while he was at this project everyone discriminated against him because of his foreignness or him being different and as a result of this he never experienced the Ubuntu that South Africa is well known for. This shows the lack of Ubuntu that South Africa is currently experiencing and the fact that there is no Ubuntu left in the communities of South Africa

The performative story:

The following text is based on my transcription of the group's performance video of their collaboratively crafted story. The transcription captures the learners' spoken words, gestures, tone, and key elements of their performance, offering insight into how they used voice, movement, and multimodal expression to convey meaning.

Scene 1: Osama says "hello" to a woman he is sitting next to at the airport. The woman looks at him disapprovingly and moves away from him to sit at the end of the bench. She covers her face so that he does not engage in further communication.

Scene 2: Osama's phone rings (verbal ringing sounds made by another group member). Osama answers his phone, and we assume that he is speaking to someone from his origin country. He says "I hate it here. People are giving me shit. I want to come home and eat shawarma."

Scene 3: This scene takes place at passport control in the airport. A black African student plays the role of a passport controller. She checks the passport of the woman from the previous scene and displays a friendly attitude towards her. Osama approaches and extends a greeting by saying "(As-salaamu-alaykum) عَلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامُ" which translates to peace be upon you. The airport employee's facial expression changes to a disapproving look. She takes a quick glance at Osama's passport and says "umm, ha uh, hello. Please go back to your country" and she returns his passport. Osama raises his hand to his heart and shock and confusion spreads over his face as he stares at her. "Ha uh, hamba, hamba!" she continues to say which is her way of telling Osama to leave. Based on her body language and interaction, he moves backwards even though he may not have understood what she meant when she said "hamba".

Scene 4: A black African male takes on the character of a taxi driver and he is enjoying local music that is playing very loudly. A bench is reimagined to be the taxi and a black female passenger is seated next to the driver. They draw on stereotypical behaviour and characteristics in their representation of South African taxi drivers. Osama knocks frantically on the taxi and the driver responds by saying "What you want? What you want?" while clapping his hands to show a sense of authority. Osama responds in a desperate tone saying "Need to go to hotel" and the driver says "I don't understand". Both characters speak simultaneously, Osama says "You take me hotel" and the driver says "Speak properly. Speak proper English". The situation becomes very confusing as

both show levels of frustration due to language and cultural differences that restrict effective communication.

Both characters express frustration and Osama says "الله أكبر (Allahu Akbar), I will bomb you up" and points his finger at the driver as a sign of warning. The driver retaliates and says "Hai wena, foetsek" which translates to 'hey you, go to hell' and he gestures for Osama to move away from him. The story ends and the resolution of the conflict is left to the imagination of the audience.

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

Islamophobia and xenophobia are pervasive concerns in contemporary society, affecting communities globally. These issues form the central themes of this group's story, which uses storytelling as a medium to explore social representations, exclusion, and stereotypes that reinforce discrimination. In doing so, the group challenges ethnic discrimination and myths surrounding minority groups that underpin social and educational systems worldwide. The story explores personal identity through the experiences of the main character, Osama which is also possibly linked to the ethnic identity of the group leader, and through the story, the group expands on these themes and develops the plot to explore broader issues of social discrimination.

The focus on social justice within this activity empowered the group to confront and critique Islamophobic and xenophobic injustices through their story. By engaging in this form of narrative, the youth are afforded access to power, a concept that is intimately tied to effective communication and diverse modes of expression (Paris and Alim, 2014). The storytelling genre and the methodology of this intervention provided a platform for the learners to share their stories in ways that challenge dominant discourses by offering counter-narratives to the prejudices they face (Paris & Alim, 2014). The group uses their story to resist marginalisation of specific identities and assert their agency within educational spaces. The story is based on the lived experiences and identity of one group member who assumed the role of being the group leader. The group leader, Hassan has Middle-Eastern origins which aligns with the main character in the story.

The theoretical underpinnings of this approach can be traced to Vygotsky's (1967) concept of the interconnection between imagination and reality. According to Vygotsky, everything created by

the imagination is rooted in real-world elements, making the imaginative process a reflection of lived experiences. This group's story exemplifies this linkage, as the learners draw from their understanding of Islamophobia which is a global phenomenon, and their knowledge and experience of the recent rise in xenophobic violence in South Africa which is exacerbated by issues of unemployment. By intertwining these harsh realities with critical imagination (Mendelowitz, 2016), the learners craft a narrative that reflects lived experiences and challenges injustices.

The story vividly represents diversity and difference in ethnicity, culture, and language which highlights the element of diversity and challenges what constitutes writing in an English Home Language classroom as it deviates from traditional boundaries. Names are indicators of identity and culture that reflects interchange between individuality and social conceptualisations. The main character, "Osama bin Abdullah bin Mohammed" shows interconnectedness of heritage, identity and culture. His name carries religious and cultural significance as it is a Muslim name and his religion is further suggested by the way that he greets the airport employee in the performative story, saying "(As-salaamu-alaykum) السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ" which is an Arabic greeting practiced by those who follow the Islamic religion. "bin" within the name translates to 'son of' signifying that Osama's father's name is Abdullah and "bin Mohammed" that appears after Abdullah, refers to Osama's grandfather's name which is Mohammed. This is a common practice amongst people with Arab ethnicity to include their father's name as a way of connecting the person to their family and lineage. Thus, naming within the story is a multifaceted expression that reveals complexity of identity, culture and ethnicity. Osama's Arab identity is also implied in the performative story when he says "I want to come home and eat shawarma" which is a popular Middle Eastern food and referring to "home" suggests that he lives in the Middle Eastern region or is originally from that region. Naming in this story is a representation of affirming cultural, heritage and individual identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Through the use of varied ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities, the narrative aligns with Sleeter's (2011) concept of "empowered learning for diverse student populations." This concept emphasises the importance of positioning students within the narrative either through shared experiences or advocacy to create awareness of struggles and to engage with difference through recognition, tolerance, and acceptance.

The central character, Osama, who comes to South Africa legally for work, serves as a lens through which issues of discrimination and exclusion are explored. Throughout the story, Osama

encounters multiple instances of discrimination, depicted through scenes where he receives "dirty looks," is subjected to confusion and additional scrutiny by customs officials, engages in disputes with a taxi driver, and experiences discrimination upon arriving at a hotel in Sandton. The narrative does not explicitly detail the causes of this discrimination but subtly indicates that Osama's difference - his foreign name, appearance, cultural attire, religion, and language barriers sets him apart from the local South African population. These moments of discrimination highlight awareness of how first impressions can lead to judgment and exclusion. The portrayal of difference in this narrative is not framed positively and instead, it is presented as a basis for exclusionary practices. This aligns with broader societal patterns where difference is often treated with suspicion or hostility, rather than as an opportunity for understanding and inclusion.

Osama's "foreignness" and reference to not belonging in South Africa is emphasised throughout the audio and the performative modes of storytelling. Clues of his foreign identity are given as he arrives at the airport and then requires the taxi driver to take him to a "hotel". These indicators suggest a temporary visit within the country. During the performative story, he speaks to someone on the phone and says "I hate it here" which implies that he is not from "here" i.e.: South Africa. As sighted in Trupp (2011), Blanchard et al., (2008) argues that "*to place a man [sic], with the intention that he should be seen, in a specific reconstructed space, not because of what he 'does' (an artisan, for example), but because of what he 'is' (seen through the prism of a real or imagined difference)"* (p.23). Blanchard's notion of placement brings attention to the social and symbolic boundaries drawn around national identity and foreignness. This placement speaks to a form of identity positioning that restricts individuals to certain roles based on constructed perceptions of their difference rather than their capabilities or contributions. Osama's arrival at the airport and his explicit distaste for being "here" suggest his physical dislocation and also underscore an imposed otherness, highlighting how the perception of his identity limits his sense of belonging. This framing confines Osama within a stereotype of being an outsider, a characterisation that resonates with broader social dynamics in which foreign identities are seen as fundamentally distinct or incompatible with national identities (Hall, 1996). The discriminatory incidents that Osama experiences and the way he views himself in South Africa creates conflict due to notions of othering that draw on conceptualisations of 'us' and 'them' as well as 'here' and 'there'. Using a sense of towardness (Ahmed, 2014) by directly confronting themes and incidences of discrimination in the story, the group explicitly reinforces Osama's identity as a foreigner which

separates him from the locals through these associations, and the way that it is illustrated in the story sets up the events for critique.

Through multicultural and multilingual stories "exclusionary barriers have been removed, borders of culture and curriculum have been crossed and a creative space for identity investment has been opened up." (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017, 513). The concept of identity investment (Norton, 2000) highlights how individuals engage with language and storytelling as a means of negotiating and constructing their identities in relation to social structures and power dynamics. This story serves as a space where learners can critically explore issues of xenophobia and Islamophobia by engaging with the social realities that shape exclusionary practices. The group's story created a discursive space where xenophobic and Islamophobic ideologies are questioned and problematized, but this engagement does not automatically translate into the removal of barriers in real-world contexts. Writing a story about discrimination does not necessarily dismantle the structural forces that sustain these prejudices. Barriers to inclusion such as systemic discrimination, institutional biases, and entrenched societal narratives operate beyond the scope of storytelling, requiring more than narrative exploration to be fully addressed. While the act of storytelling can empower learners to voice resistance and assert alternative perspectives, it does not guarantee a fundamental shift in the material conditions that sustain exclusionary practices. The fact that xenophobia and Islamophobia persist as powerful social forces suggests that while storytelling fosters critical engagement, it does not in itself erase the hierarchies and exclusions that learners navigate daily.

Drawing on their own and collective identities, the students draw heavily on stereotypes, cultures and language repertoires of Arabic and African languages to tell their story authentically and represent their characters in ways that reflect their nationality, languages and identities. Storytelling was a means to de-centre whiteness from the curriculum and represent Arab and Black African groups who are often not included in school curriculum. The group leader, Hassan draws on his own personal experiences and ethnic identity, weaving them into the collective narratives crafted by the group. However, the plot and experiences of the main character is not relative to the other group members, and therefore, they engaged in a process of projection, extending their collective narratives beyond their immediate selves to explore the experiences of otherness encountered by the character of Osama. This act of imagination allows them to envision the social,

cultural, and personal challenges faced by a figure whose identity may be markedly different from their own. Through this imaginative engagement, the students are not only reflecting on the lived experiences of others but are also deepening their understanding of social marginalisation and difference. This dynamic illustrates how group resources, both individual and collective are mobilised in diverse ways to construct meaning and foster empathy. It highlights the complex interaction between personal lived experience and the act of collective storytelling, where each participant's identity and worldview inform and shape the collective narrative, enriching the story with multiple layers of perspective.

This nuanced representation of culture demonstrates how storytelling can be a powerful tool for sustaining and interrogating social issues of discrimination. It allows students to draw from their own experiences and those of others, creating narratives that reflect the diversity of their world and contribute to social consciousness and change. By doing so, the learners engage in a form of storytelling that is not just about telling a story but about affirming and sustaining the cultural practices and identities that are often marginalised or overlooked in mainstream narratives and in some instances go beyond their individual social identities, imagining the otherness experienced by Osama (and other Muslims) in Islamophobic contexts.

ii. Critical social engagement

The name Osama, of Arab origin and meaning "lion," symbolises strength and bravery. However, in a global context, it has become associated with Osama Bin Laden, the infamous founder of the Pan-Islamic militant organization Al Qaeda and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. The group’s decision to name their main character Osama is particularly intriguing given this association. While the name Osama carries connotations of terrorism and violence for many, the character in the story subverts these expectations by being the target of discrimination, aggression, and verbal abuse from South African locals, rather than the perpetrator. Their choice introduces a counter-narrative, challenging the stereotypical perceptions tied to the name and inviting the audience to reconsider their assumptions. Through this counter-narrative, the students critically engage with their surroundings, teachings, and perspectives, which, Ladson-Billings (2014) suggests, can lead to cognitive stimulation and new ways of understanding society through

multiple lenses. By highlighting the prejudice that Muslims often face due to their identity and religious affiliations, the story creates an opportunity for reflection and awareness, encouraging the audience to question societal norms and the injustices that arise from them. Through their narrative, the group become active participants in the representation of Islam and Arabs, advocating for a more nuanced and just portrayal of their identities (Rosario-Ramos & Johnson, 2014).

The story is set in South Africa, with specific references to locations like “OR Tambo International Airport” and “Sandton,” which subtly underscore Osama’s perceived foreignness. These locations are significant as they evoke a sense of exclusivity and wealth, particularly Sandton, which is known as an elite area and a popular hub for affluent foreigners during their visits to South Africa. The learners leverage these stereotypical associations, suggesting that foreigners like Osama, are presumed to have money and can afford to stay in such prestigious areas. This assumption reflects broader societal stereotypes about wealth and social class, particularly the notion that foreignness equates to affluence. The repetition in the taxi driver’s dialogue in the audio story, “Do you not have money? Do you not have money? Buy your own car, go to your own hotel” serves to emphasise the aggression and hostility directed at Osama. It highlights the social class differences and wealth disparities between Osama and the taxi driver. The driver’s repeated use of the word “own” indicates a sense of ownership and belonging that he feels is reserved for locals, thereby othering Osama and reinforcing xenophobic attitudes. This implies that Osama is a foreigner and does not belong and he should return to "his" place, which is not in South Africa.

South African culture is discussed collectively, and it is implied throughout the story that all citizens embody the same behaviours and ideologies. The story challenges the concept of Ubuntu, a principle deeply rooted in South African culture that emphasises common humanity, interconnectedness, and mutual care. Ubuntu is a term that is often used to represent South Africa’s collective culture and identity which translates to ‘I am because we are’ to represent the unity and acceptance of diversity across South Africa. Ubuntu is a guiding principle of post-apartheid South Africa as a form of nation-building and reconciliation. The group show awareness of expected Ubuntu which Osama thinks the country embodies, but through storytelling they represent South Africa as a country that does not have any Ubuntu due to issues of xenophobia which is implied by the discrimination that Osama experiences and is explicitly reiterated in the written story by

concluding that “he never experienced the Ubuntu that South Africa is well known for.” Illustrating the behaviour of only three South African characters and concluding that “there is no Ubuntu left in the communities of South Africa” serves a purpose of using the characters as symbols to generalise and to represent the mass of the entire country and culture of the country (Wright, 2011). The group uses xenophobia and ubuntu simultaneously to interrogate social issues by offering multiple viewpoints (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002) as they problematise general assumptions of South Africa’s democracy and culture. Across both modes of storytelling, South African characters inflict discriminatory and exclusionary practices that represents historical and contemporary struggles experienced within the country.

By positioning the audience to engage with these themes, the story not only raises consciousness about social issues but also encourages active citizenship. It challenges the audience to take a stand on issues of belonging and inclusion, prompting them to reconsider how cultural values like Ubuntu should be applied in a diverse and multicultural society (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The stories harnessed imagination as a powerful tool for critically engaging with social issues, embodying what Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) describe as a “*critical capacity for seeing social issues, acting upon them, and reconfiguring or abolishing them toward more socially just ways of doing, thinking, and being*” (3). Through their storytelling, the learners transformed their creative imagination into a form of social action, using narrative to illuminate and challenge the prejudices and othering faced by ethnic groups.

By drawing attention to these issues, the story serves as a medium for raising awareness about the deep-rooted biases and stereotypes that persist within society. It confronts the exclusion and marginalisation that certain ethnic groups experience, pushing the audience to reflect on the social dynamics that perpetuate such injustices. In challenging the notion of Ubuntu, the story interrogates the discrepancy between the ideal of universal brotherhood and the reality of how diversity is practiced in South Africa. It exposes the contradictions within a society that prides itself on inclusivity and democracy yet often fails to extend that inclusivity to those who are perceived as outsiders. By doing so, the learners use their narrative to question the extent to which diversity is truly embraced in practice, rather than merely celebrated in theory. Through this imaginative yet critical approach, the learners contribute to the ongoing dialogue about how to achieve a more socially just world.

Group 5: Corruption

The written story:

Scenario:

The South African budget management issued a R150 million to minister of finance Tito Mboweni, The money will be used for electricity and water for the black township in South Africa called SOWETO.

Once the finance minister has recieved the money from the SABM he is the one responsible for giving all the money to Johannesburg water service and Eskom for electricity. And when it is time for the minister to give in the money he only gives 80% of the budget which was given to him to Eskom an JW. And Decide to keep the 20% to himself.

When the money is now recieved by eskom and JW the amount is only R130 millon And the full budged was to last over 1 year and now it won't because it is shorting. And one of the Eskom CEO decides to take R15 million and keeps it to himself and also the JW CEO also decides to do the same. And now only R100 million rand is left from 150 million rand due to the corruption.

And when the money is then started to be used for the first a months it does well and after that the community has electricity outages and do not have water for 3 weeks, they start to wonder where their needs has been taken to, and they decide to go on a riot, since they think that is the only language the government will understand them by.

They get addressed by the president that the only time they might get electricity is by the following January as their annual budget for their township has been used up.

Everyone now asks the question, *where did all the money go to*.

The performative story:

Scene 1:

Narrator: Good afternoon South African citizens. The SABM has been offered 10 million rand to the citizens of Soweto. Which is going to be offered to their needs and wants for the whole year which is water and electricity. So, this 10 million rand, we are going to take it and offer it to minister Tito Mboweni which is the minister of finance in South Africa.

(The narrator hands over a stack of leaves/money to the minister of finance. The minister puts some of it in his pocket to indicate theft.) The narration states "Puts 2 million in his pocket".

Scene 2: (2 new characters are shown and Tito Mboweni is present).

Narrator - Only 8 million of the 10 million is left.

Tito Mboweni - This is the money for the Soweto people. Water municipality take your share. Eskom take your share.

CEO - Thank you, Tito Mboweni. (Both characters stand up and while walking away, they put some money into their pockets).

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

During a class discussion, I asked the learners to identify some pressing issues in the world that they felt strongly about addressing. Members of this group immediately shouted out "corruption" and "inequality" as significant concerns which were based on their personal reflections and opinion of South Africa's political leaders (Field notes, 2022). Their responses were marked by a sense of frustration, indicating that these issues were not just abstract concepts for them, but rather, matters that they believed urgently needed to be addressed. directly tied to their personal reflections on the socio-political realities of South Africa. The learners' passionate responses to these issues indicated that they are not distant or abstract concerns but are rooted in the learners' everyday experiences and observations of the world around them. Their frustration reflects a deeper personal connection to these issues, suggesting that the learners are not just engaging with theoretical or general concepts but are reflecting on their own identities as members of a society affected by political

corruption and inequality. Their response illustrated recognising and critiquing power relations, identifying marginalised groups, and advancing the interests of the disadvantaged (Bomer, 2017), which they may possibly also be members of. The activity brief encouraged this critical approach, prompting the learners to channel their concerns into their creative work.

The story they produced is titled "Corruption," a choice that directly signals the central theme and intent of the narrative. The title is brief and echoes the seriousness of the issue, setting the tone for a story that aims to address corruption and crime within a South African context. By choosing such a straightforward and assertive title, the students immediately frame the narrative as social critique, mimicking the conventions of a serious, non-fiction genre. While the story is rooted in fiction, the learners craft it in a way that blurs the lines between fiction and reality. They use the genre of a report, complete with detailed information such as the names of politicians, businesses, and specific amounts of money involved. By presenting their narrative in a genre that mimics factual reporting, they effectively critique the corruption they see in the world around them, using their story as a vehicle to question and challenge the status quo. This empowered the learners to use their voices to address and disrupt systems of power that perpetuate inequality (Bomer, 2017). The precise use of names and figures within the story positions the audience to believe that the events described could be based on actual occurrences, thereby encouraging them to adopt the same critical stance as the writers. This approach makes the story authentic, persuading the audience to view the narrative as a reflection of real-world events.

The act of naming within the story serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it attaches blame and expresses the learner’s frustration with authority figures who hold positions of power. Secondly, by assigning names to those implicated in the story’s corruption, the learners are making pointed references to real societal issues and the people they perceive to be responsible. This narrative choice highlights their awareness of the power dynamics at play and their desire to hold those in power accountable. The story is set in Soweto, a predominantly Black township in South Africa that carries a profound history of racial and economic struggle. Soweto, deeply scarred by the legacy of apartheid, continues to experience the long-lasting effects of systemic inequality, which still impact the community today. The learners draw on their understanding of this context, foregrounding issues such as inadequate service delivery and the silencing of Black voices which are realities that persist in many marginalised communities across South Africa. By choosing Soweto as the setting of the

story and writing from the perspective of the Soweto residents, the learners ground their story in a place that is symbolic of resistance and resilience but also highlights the ongoing challenges that the township faces. The narrative reflects community identity, and the learner's awareness of the historical and socio-economic factors that continue to shape the lives of Soweto's residents. The students' portrayal of inadequate service delivery serves as a critique of the government's failure to address the basic needs of the community, a problem that disproportionately affects Black South Africans and they put forth the opinion that it is due to corruption of government officials.

The story emphasises the silencing of Black voices, a theme that resonates with Soweto's history of activism and the struggle for recognition and equality. By drawing attention to these issues, the learners use their narrative to critique power structures and advocate for social justice (Bomer, 2017). The story is a vehicle to explore and expose the ongoing inequalities that affect their community, demonstrating their critical engagement with the socio-political realities of their environment. Through their storytelling, the learners depict the challenges faced by the residents of Soweto and contribute to the broader discourse on race, corruption/crime, inequality, and justice in South Africa. Their narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the ways in which the past continues to shape the present, and it underscores the importance of addressing issues of government corruption and unequal service delivery to create a more equitable society.

ii. Critical social engagement

This group primarily composed of black male students who chose to foreground the issue of white-collar crime in their story. They specifically highlight how such crimes leave the predominantly Black residents of Soweto without essential services like electricity and water. By focusing on this topic, the group engaged with fundamental forms of critical literacy and social justice advocacy, using their narrative to interrogate power relations and raise awareness of social inequalities. Their story serves as a platform to bring attention to the ongoing suffering of communities that continue to face systemic inequities, despite the promises of post-apartheid regimes. The explicit naming of Soweto and the identification of black victims in their story highlight the impact of South Africa's oppressive racial history on previously disadvantaged groups. This narrative choice reflects the learner's awareness of the complex ways in which these historical injustices continue to manifest.

Their story suggests that, despite the formal end of apartheid, the structures of power that perpetuate inequality remain largely unchallenged as they show corruption and crime by the highest government officials and a lack of help to address critical service delivery issues in Soweto, even by the president.

The learners effectively used their story as a tool to critique corruption and the lack of transparency and accountability among those in power. By doing so, they raise awareness of these issues and challenged the integrity of public officials who are supposed to serve the interests of the people. This critical examination of power relations aligns with Sleeter's (2011) concept of "empowered learning," where students are encouraged to identify and challenge the unequal power dynamics that exist in society. Through their storytelling, the group developed a heightened social awareness and empathy for others, particularly those who suffer under the weight of systemic injustices (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The theme of silencing plays a pivotal role in this story, as the voices of the residents of Soweto are systematically marginalised. Their voices are not directly heard despite their attempts to express grievances about the lack of basic services like electricity and water, instead, they are mediated through a third-person narrative. This narrative choice aligns with the profound sense of disempowerment and frustration experienced by the Soweto community. The residents' resort to violent protests as a desperate attempt to break their silence, believing that "they think that is the only language the government will understand them by." This highlights a critical point indicating that due to systemic silencing, action becomes a necessary means of being heard even though it is often futile. The story suggests that even when the people of Soweto resort to drastic measures such as riots, their efforts have little impact. The continued deprivation of essential services implies that their protests, though loud and visible, fail to bring about the desired change. This portrayal reflects a grim reality where the voices of marginalised communities are not only ignored but also rendered ineffective, reinforcing their state of passivity and disempowerment. Reference to the riots as a futile attempt for voices to be heard is a reality experienced by many marginalised and low-income communities across South Africa.

The story concludes with a provocative, open-ended question: "Everyone now asks the question, where did all the money go?" This rhetorical question serves to engage the audience in critical reflection, encouraging them to become critical readers who actively question the story and events

presented to them (Janks, 1993). By leaving the conclusion unresolved, the learners invite the audience to form their own judgments about the corruption and injustice depicted in the story. However, the narrative structure has already positioned the audience to sympathise with the Soweto residents and to feel a sense of shared frustration over their unmet needs. This narrative technique aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of ‘conscientization’ where the act of questioning and critically reflecting on one's reality becomes a step towards social action. By involving the audience in the narrative through rhetorical questions and notions of shared solidarity (Liu and Shange, 2018; Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024), the learners encourage a form of collective reflection that creates a sense of empathy with regards to racialised discrimination and this has the potential to inspire real-world engagement and advocacy. Through this approach, the students demonstrate an awareness of the power dynamics at play and use their narrative to advocate for social justice, positioning the audience as active participants in the fight against corruption and inequality.

In posing this rhetorical question, the learners effectively draw the audience into the narrative, making them complicit in the search for justice. This strategy not only emphasises the gravity of the corruption but also empowers the audience by suggesting that their critical engagement with the story and with real-world issues can make a difference. The story aligns with the principles of critical literacy, which seek to empower individuals to question and transform the social structures that perpetuate inequality (Janks, 2010).

TEENAGERS NAVIGATING PEER PRESSURE & DRUG ADDICTION

GROUP 6: THE SAD CASE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Group 6: The sad case of William Shakespeare

The written story:

The sad case of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was a truly gifted boy. Coming from a poor background, he attended one of Johannesburg's most prestigious private schools on a 100% scholarship, being the top student in academics and the top cricket player in the under 16's cricket league. He would be the man to lift the Shakespeare's out of poverty. This put a lot of pressure on poor William.

One day, William told his friend Shawn about all the pressure he was under. His friend suggested a quick and temporary solution to William's stress. Shawn took out his lunchbox and pulled out a space muffin and encouraged William to try it. William devoured the space muffin, enjoying the effects of the drugs. William got hooked onto the space muffins, using the little lunch money his parents gave him to buy them from Shawn.

William eventually became numb to the effects of the space muffins. One day Shawn offered William weed behind the school hall. This was much stronger and more expensive. William's lunch money was nowhere near enough for him to afford the weed. William decided to sneak out some of his own household appliance and sell them in the streets to afford the new drugs.

Williams results began to plummet. Drugs had taken over his life. He stopped attending his cricket practice sessions and stop studying. William began to spend more and more time with his drug addicted friends. With his life now falling apart, he still turned to drugs. William lost his scholarship in the end, leaving himself and his family hopeless.

The performative story:

Scene 1:

(William encounters 2 friends standing at a corner and they are concealed behind a wall).

William: (Turns towards the boys). Whatsup?

Boy 1: Oh, Whatsup Shakespeare (the boys shake hands using a handshake).

Boy 2: Whatsup Shakespeare (the second boy also shakes hands using the same handshake).

William: No man, I'm so stressed out with school. My father is putting all this pressure on me… I'm supposed to lift us out of poverty. I really just don't know how to deal with it.

Boy 2: We can help you. We got some stuff for you. How much do you have on you?

William: I don't…I don't have anything on me (William taps his pockets to indicate that it is empty).

Boy 1: Listen here neh. We'll give you a sample and then you let us know what you think. You'll be alright, all that stress will go down the drain, my man (he shows a rapid downward movement with his hand).

Boy 2: (He signals to boy 1 with a nod) Check the coast there (he leans towards William and puts his blazer in front of the camera and the exchange of drugs happens behind the blazer to conceal it). Take he drugs (William takes the drugs and puts it in the inner pocket of his blazer, close to his chest).

(The boys smile and look satisfied. The scene ends with an aesthetic 'swish' movement and the next scene begins).

Scene 2:

(William sits on a bench, his clothing is untidy and out of place, he is high on drugs and laughs for no reason).

Father: Where's the toaster? Where's the toaster? Where's the kettle? I tried to make coffee, but there's no kettle.

William: (Giggles) Dad you're trippin', don't worry about it.

Father: (Touches William's chin to get a better look at his face). What's wrong with you?

William: What's your problem, old man?

Father: What's wrong with you? Are you high?

William: I don't know what you're talking about. Go find your toaster (he raises his hands mockingly to exaggerate the word toaster).

(William's father moves forward and gestures his hand towards William and the scene ends unsure if he hit William).

i. Exploring themes, identities and lived experiences

The themes explored in this story encapsulate the typical challenges faced by teenagers, such as drug abuse and peer pressure. The story is set in a South African context and takes place at a private school in Johannesburg, but it transcends local boundaries by addressing universal themes relevant to teenagers globally. These issues are closely tied to writing that resonates with a youth audience (Paris & Alim, 2014; Bomer, 2017). The stories are crafted in a written and performative mode and include events and details commonly associated with youth culture, including experimenting with "space muffins" (cannabis-infused baked goods), marijuana, and engaging in creative handshakes and the use of language specific to youth cultures. Thus, the story reflects broader notions of youth culture which are not confined to geographical or cultural borders.

The story carries a tragic undertone as the protagonist, William Shakespeare succumbs to his drug addiction which is highlighted in the title, "The Sad Case of William Shakespeare." The use of the name William Shakespeare is a reference to the renowned playwright and poet. By assigning such a famous name to the main character, the writers create a deliberate historical, cultural and geographical distance between themselves and the story, suggesting a degree of generalisation. This distance creates a sense of safety in their writing as none of the group members directly claim ownership of the events or characters in the narrative. This is significant, especially because the

teacher expressed concerns that one of the group members might be involved with drugs. Ironically, this same learner that she identified assumed a leadership role in the creation of the story, and took a proactive role in planning, writing, performing, and delegating tasks to the other group members. Therefore, the personal connection to events in the story indicate that learners with investment are more likely to engage in learning activities and retain information. This learner's active participation can be understood through the lens of agency. According to Darvin and Norton (2017), learners exercise agency based on what they perceive as important and beneficial to their existing and imagined identities. In this context, the learner's investment in the story may reflect a personal connection to its themes, allowing him a space to explore and express his lived experiences. The task became a means for the learner to grapple with a problem, navigate and articulate his identity within a structured yet creative environment, highlighting the role of narrative as a powerful tool in identity formation and self-expression (Norton, 2013).

The main character, William, is introduced as a diligent and hard-working learner who attends a prestigious private school on a scholarship. His character embodies the intersection of diverse social class systems, highlighting the challenges of integrating a student from a lower-income household into an elite educational environment. This setting reflects broader societal issues and the pressures that come with advancing social mobility and class systems (Bourdieu, 1986). The group explores the additional pressures William faces as a scholarship student in an upmarket private school. These pressures are not only academic but also social, as William navigates the complexities of fitting in with peers who may come from more affluent backgrounds. The narrative also addresses the notion of "habitus," where William's social background influences his experiences and interactions within the school (Bourdieu, 1977). This tension between his working-class roots and the privileged environment of the private school adds depth to the story, reflecting the multifaceted challenges that are attached to it. The group's decision to focus on William's experiences can be seen as an exploration of identity, social class and belonging. The pressures William faces are not only external and also pertain to his internal struggle with self-identity in a space where he may feel like an outsider. This aspect of the story resonates with broader discussions on the impact of social class on educational experiences and the emotional toll of striving to meet expectations in a competitive academic environment.

ii. Critical social engagement

The story raises awareness about the immense pressure faced by teenagers and destructive avenues of escape available to them. The main character, William, a teenage boy, is thrust into the role of a "man" within his family as he is expected to excel in his new school to elevate his family's social status and relieve them of poverty. This highlights the traditional gender expectations that position males as the primary providers and the reality of financial pressure that many young boys in low-middle class households experience. The pressure to fulfil these gendered expectations creates an intense burden on William, reflecting broader societal issues related to class mobility and the responsibilities placed on young men that rob them of their youth and prematurely enter them into a mode and mindset of providing for their families.

The story's depiction of a poor student attending a prestigious school serves as a form of counter-narrative, challenging dominant narratives that often marginalise or overlook the possibilities for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This counter-narrative is a powerful affordance of storytelling, as it creates spaces for students to reimagine their future possibilities and question the structures that limit social mobility (Greene, 1995; Morrell, 2008; Vally Essa, 2019). However, while the plot touches on these critical issues, it remains largely generic and stereotypical of teenage experiences. Even though the story offers a counter-narrative through social critique, reflexivity and representing marginalised voices, it conveys the negative outcome of Williams drug addiction and does not offer progressive solutions for him. Instead, it concludes with William losing his scholarship, leaving both himself and his family in a state of hopelessness.

This outcome reflects the group's internalisation of societal ideologies, where William's passive submission to drug addiction is portrayed as an escape from the pressures he faces. The lack of agency in William's character and his ultimate downfall suggest that the group members may have shaped the narrative based on a belief that overcoming such challenges is beyond reach (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Even though sombre and negative, this perspective underscores the realities of many teenagers who feel overwhelmed by social and familial pressures and see no viable way out and this creates a reflection on reality and social awareness about the lived realities of teenagers. It uses storytelling as a medium for expression and reflection, bringing to light the serious

consequences of drug abuse and the social pressures linked to poverty and gender roles (Paris & Alim, 2017).

A particularly powerful moment in the performative story occurs when the audience is given a closer insight into the impact of William's addiction on his domestic life. The audience is given an insight into his father's distress when he asks William "What's wrong with you? Are you high?" followed by the violent act of moving in to hit William which encapsulates the intense emotional turmoil within the family. As Ahmed (2014) suggests, emotions have the power to direct us towards certain actions or responses. In this case, William's father is so overwhelmed by anguish and frustration that he resorts to physical violence, unable to find a more constructive way to address his son's addiction. This scene is a critical creative move brought about by the cross-pollination from the written to the performative story, and it leverages the emotional impact of the narrative to deepen audience engagement, allowing them to feel the weight of the characters' struggles and to reflect on the societal forces that shape such outcomes.

Through this emotional and dramatic portrayal, the story emphasises affect by exploring the interplay of emotions, desires, language, power relations, and identity formation which focuses on the performativity of emotions to achieve social justice (Anwaruddin, 2016). The audience is moved by the realism of the story and the emotional resonance of the characters' experiences. This use of affect draws the audience into the narrative and encourages critical reflection on the broader social issues at play, such as the consequences of unmet expectations, the destructive effects of substance abuse, and the often-toxic pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. This was achieved in more nuanced ways in the performative story in comparison to the written story.

Chapter 4 - Key findings and reflections

This chapter engages with the research question, *What types of stories do learners craft during a multimodal storytelling intervention that emphasize a social agenda?* To address this, I examine the stories crafted by six groups of learners as part of a multimodal storytelling intervention. This process involved the initial construction of stories in either written or audio mode, followed by a cross-pollination activity in which the stories were adapted into the performative mode.

The analysis and discussion indicate the following:

The stories crafted across all six groups were based on social issues that mattered to them which was enabled by the intervention brief. The stories were rooted in the learners' lived realities which focused on issues within their personal lives, their communities and the world at large. Even though this was a creative writing intervention, the stories were grounded in the authentic experiences and identities of the students. The learners drew extensively on the realities they encountered in their daily lives, whether it was the socio-economic challenges, the pressures of navigating their youth in a complex world, or the broader social issues that their communities face. Their stories became a means for the learners to process and articulate their understanding of the world around them. By embedding their narratives in real-life contexts, the learners were able to create stories that resonated with a South African youth audience, and it reflected their collective critical social consciousness of their communities and the world. The stories served as a mirror to the learners' environments, offering insight into how young people perceive and respond to the challenges they face. Through this process, storytelling became a powerful tool for both reflection and resistance, enabling learners to navigate and make sense of their lived realities (Bomer, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

The stories crafted by the learners highlighted a range of different identities across all the groups. These identities include gender, religious, ethnic, and local identities, particularly as South Africans and Sowetans. A key distinction emerged between chosen identities, such as gender and sexuality in the story of group 3, and imposed identities, exemplified by the experiences of women in group 1's story, and Osama in group 4's story. The storytelling task allowed for deep engagement with identity, and multimodal storytelling and cross-pollination of the stories (where the opportunity was taken up) provided a space for learners to explore, negotiate, and challenge these

identities. The affordances of different genres of multimodal storytelling also played a significant role. While narrative genres in the performative mode such as drama productions or documentary trailers allowed for rich explorations of identity and lived experience, the report genre (group 5) appeared more constrained across both the written and performative mode. It lacked depth of personal and social engagement, suggesting that more expressive and flexible genres are better suited for fostering critical and identity driven storytelling.

The act of naming played a crucial role in shaping identity across the stories, with each group employing distinct strategies that reflected their thematic and social concerns. Some groups used names to reinforce cultural and ethnic identities, grounding their characters in specific social and linguistic contexts. Others deliberately withheld or anonymised names, signalling broader social critiques or emphasizing universality over individual identity. For example, in the story about Osama, the name carried heavy socio-political connotations, positioning the character within global discourses of Islamophobia and racial profiling. In contrast, stories addressing gender-based violence often focused on the absence of names, reinforcing themes of silencing and erasure. Meanwhile, stories set in local contexts such as the story by group 5 (Corruption) used familiar names of politicians to emphasize corruption and inequality. These varied approaches highlight how naming functions as a powerful tool in storytelling, shaping how identity is constructed, perceived, and contested within different social realities.

The theme of silencing emerged powerfully across all stories, serving not only as a plot device but as a window into the profound struggles faced by marginalised characters and groups. In each story, silencing is engaged with in distinct ways, for example, group 1 deals with silencing through rape and victimisation, group 3 illustrate silencing through suppression of sexual orientation, group 5 illustrate silencing through silencing of community voices. Each use of silencing throughout all the groups highlighted issues of voicelessness, inequalities/injustice, and exploitation, where certain characters or groups were systematically denied a platform to express themselves or assert their agency. Silencing functioned as both a literal and metaphorical force, representing the denial of voice and agency imposed by oppressive societal structures. Characters' experiences of voicelessness and exclusion became a compelling reflection of broader social and cultural injustices, where dominant groups exert control by muting dissenting voices. Learners engaged deeply with this theme, such as group 1 who explored the nuances of silencing more richly than

others. While certain stories portrayed silencing as an overt act of suppression, others approached it more subtly, portraying characters who internalized societal expectations or were quietly constrained by unspoken rules that stifled personal expression. Engagement with this theme reflected the learner's awareness of injustices that arise when people are prevented from speaking out or when their experiences are dismissed or ignored. This recurring theme suggests that the learners engaged critically with broader societal issues, such as power dynamics, inequality, and social justice. The stories were reflections of the learner's realities, and they served as acts of resistance against the oppressive structures that were identified in their worlds (Darvin & Norton, 2017). While there are so many layers of silencing explored across the stories, they all attempt to break societal silencing by expressing social issues and giving voices to disadvantaged and marginalized communities through means of exposure.

Four groups selected the written mode as their selected mode to craft their story, while one group chose to tell their story through the audio mode, and one group chose not to submit a story. This indicated that even when given options, the learners chose the written mode due to ideologies of what constitutes writing and the affordances that print-based modes offer in academic settings. Alternatively, this could also be due to the familiarity of written modes that the learners are accustomed to. For most groups, transforming their stories from written or audio formats into performance allowed for significant developments in plot, character portrayal, voice, and the adaptation of various resources. The performative mode added layers of engagement, utilising a diverse range of cultural, social, and linguistic resources to create meaning through semiosis. This mode invited creativity and enabled unique expressions of identity and context to surface within the storytelling process. However, this shift across modes was not possible for all the groups. Stories centred on themes of gender, sexuality, and traumatic experiences were challenging to translate into the performative mode. The emotional and physical demands of performing sensitive content created barriers and limitations for transduction, as the performative mode can intensify personal exposure and vulnerability due to the permanence of having the performances recorded and expanding the audience to include the rest of the class. Consequently, stories with themes that were highly personal or contained sensitive information revealed a complex interplay between mode, content, and the comfort levels of the participants. This has implications for multimodal pedagogy, because while multimodal storytelling offers diverse means of expression, not all modes provide equal levels of comfort and agency for learners, particularly when dealing with sensitive

or personal topics. The embodied nature of performance can heighten vulnerability, making it crucial for educators to provide scaffolding, alternative modes of expression, and safe spaces for engagement. This finding highlights the need for a flexible, learner-centred approach in multimodal pedagogy that allows for critical engagement while acknowledging the emotional and social constraints that different modes impose.

In the written and audio mode, most of the groups chose to write their stories in standard English due to ingrained Anglo-normative ideologies that exists in English language classrooms (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022; Teacher interview, 2022; Focus group discussion, 2022). However, all the stories included a range of different registers. The written mode offers potential for multilingual engagement, provided that learners capitalise on this. Only one group – group 4, took up this opportunity and included multilingualism by including English and Afrikaans in their story, particularly during dialogue between the characters. This added authenticity to the characters and provided strong character voices. In comparison, the performative mode enabled multilingualism and non-standard varieties and repertoires to emerge. This mimicked language use in social contexts and made the stories engaging through character voices that were developed and relevance to a South African audience.

Group work created a supportive environment for the learners to experiment with and tell their stories across different modes. Collaborative versatility, as defined by Beneke (2018) and further explored by Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022), refers to the ability of individuals within a group to work together flexibly, taking risks and trying out new ideas in a collective setting. This concept was vividly displayed in the interactions and creative processes of the groups as they engaged in storytelling. Versatility was evident in all the stories, even in those groups who only chose to submit one mode of storytelling. The collaborative process offered the learners an opportunity to navigate the challenges of storytelling with the support of their group members. It created a space where they could feel secure in trying out new ideas and telling personal and often unconventional stories. This sense of safety was crucial in enabling the learners to push the boundaries of their creativity and challenge notions of injustice and power, resulting in stories that were more nuanced, layered, and reflective of the group's collective vision. In most instances, collaboration helped learners negotiate and integrate diverse perspectives and ideas. The collaborative process often led to the emergence of new insights and approaches that might not have been possible individually.

However, collaboration did not work as effectively for group three as some of the learners were not invested in the topic of the story, limiting their involvement and engagement. Thus, group dynamics played a significant role in engagement amongst the learners and the success of the story.

Throughout the chapter, I make claims about knowledge being shared and constructed. Although the study did not employ a pre/post-test intervention to trace measurable shifts in learners' writing skills, empathy, or critical awareness, the storytelling intervention was underpinned by a pedagogical orientation that conceptualises learning not as a linear accumulation of facts, but as a dynamic and socially situated process. Greene (1995) argues that imagination is central to education as it allows individuals to perceive alternative realities and to see the world from perspectives beyond their own. In this sense, the multimodal storytelling process functioned as a generative space for imaginative and empathetic engagement, where learners were invited not only to tell stories, but to inhabit them by crafting characters, envisioning consequences, and reflecting on the broader social conditions shaping those narratives. This performative and affective investment in storytelling created opportunities for learners to step into unfamiliar subjectivities, suggesting the development of both narrative empathy and critical insight.

Drawing on Street's (1984) distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy, the intervention can be seen as fostering ideological literacy practices which are rooted in power, context, and meaning making rather than technical correctness alone. While it may not be possible to assert with certainty that learners' writing skills improved in the conventional sense, their narrative work demonstrated an ability to draw from diverse cultural references, engage in intertextuality, and collaborate in meaning-making processes. This illustrates multiliterate learners who can navigate, critique, and compose across multiple semiotic systems with growing awareness of audience, purpose, and social context.

The learners' stories, though at times echoing familiar topics, were not simply derivative. Instead, the process of co-creating them through classroom dialogue and peer negotiation positioned learners as knowledge producers within a participatory learning ecology. The collaborative dynamics, dialogic exchanges, and multimodal expressions that emerged from the intervention was a means through which students were able to reframe experience, interrogate norms, and envision change.

The key findings of this chapter directly address the research question by demonstrating that the stories crafted by the learners during the multimodal storytelling intervention foregrounded a strong social agenda. The findings suggest that the multimodal storytelling intervention enabled learners to construct narratives that reflected their social consciousness and challenged dominant discourses, positioning storytelling as a powerful pedagogical tool for critical engagement and identity negotiation.

FIVE

Chapter 5:

MOBILISING RESOURCES & REPERTOIRES THROUGH STORYTELLING ACROSS MODES

CHAPTER 5: MOBILISING RESOURCES AND REPERTOIRES THROUGH STORYTELLING ACROSS MODES

In a world increasingly shaped by multimodality and digital media, the ways in which learners express and negotiate their identities are constantly evolving. By focusing on the multimodal stories crafted by group 1 'Women in South Africa' and group 4, 'Islamophobia and xenophobia', this chapter will focus on the research question: *How do learners represent and mobilise their diverse resources and repertoires across different modes of storytelling, and how does this impact their learning?* I will explore how learners represent and mobilise their plural cultural, linguistic, and social resources through diverse modes of storytelling, with a specific focus on the intersection of visual and collaboratively crafted stories. During the intervention, all the learners in the class were tasked with individually crafting an Instagram post to show their followers who they are. This was the first activity in the multimodal storytelling intervention, and it was aimed at individual identity representation and crafting narrative texts in the visual mode through a contemporary multimodal genre, an Instagram post. This was followed by the collaborative story activity where written and audio stories were cross-pollinated to the performative mode.

The Instagram posts were crafted individually to align with the practice of how the Instagram genre is engaged with in real-life contexts as an individual practice, and also to engage deeply with the notion of individual identity. The Instagram posts were crafted in print-based mode due to ethical reasons of conducting the study with minors in a school context, but the template and lesson reflected the visual mode and features of Instagram exactly as it appears digitally. Designing Instagram posts in digital mode versus print-based mode presents significant differences that influence how students engage with language, identity, and audience in an English Home Language class. In digital mode, Instagram posts offer students access to multimedia elements such as digital photographs, videos, filters, music, GIFs, and interactive features that can transform a simple image or text into a complex, multimodal narrative. These affordances allow students to explore communication/expression, identity and voice dynamically, crafting nuanced representations that align with both personal expression and digital conventions.

The real-time and interactive nature of digital posts also engages students in active social discourse, as their content can be shared, liked, and commented on instantly. By contrast, creating Instagram-style posts in print limits the interplay of these semiotic resources, confining the learners' posts to static hand-drawn/written images and text. This shift to a print-based format restricts the immediacy and interactivity of communicating with an audience which does not mimic the communicative features of the Instagram platform. Critically, the digital mode reflects the authentic communication environment students encounter outside the classroom, allowing them to develop digital literacy skills that are increasingly relevant to navigating modern social contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) and this is a limitation of using the Instagram genre in print mode during this intervention as it expects students to imagine interaction with their audience.

This activity engaged with contemporary modes of storytelling which excited the learners, but not all the learners in the class submitted their work for analysis in this study. Only two group members in group 1 and two group members in group 4 submitted Instagram stories. I will provide an overview analysis of the individually crafted Instagram posts by all the members of both groups and thereafter focus only on the posts by the group leaders of the two distinct groups. The chapter aims to explore the intricate ways in which these multimodal expressions link, and shape learners' identities, criticality, and agency in their learning journey, and how the learners shape the multimodal texts that they craft.

The first part of the chapter presents the visual Instagram posts. These posts served as powerful tools for identity affirmation of personal and collective identities. The analysis focuses on how visual elements, coupled with language and Instagram discourse, contribute to the construction of the learners' digital identities. The chapter will explore the ways in which these learners harness Instagram's visual and textual affordances to reflect and assert their multifaceted cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds.

The second part of the chapter examines the collaborative cross-pollinated stories that emerge within these groups. These stories, both written/audio and performative, provide identities and cultures woven together through a story. The analysis will highlight categories of analysis and discussion which are titled: *i) Visual social media narratives to affirm identities, ii) The role of language and discourse in Instagram text production, iii) Multivoicedness, and iv) Social*

consciousness and critical affective moves. The discussion builds on existing literature within the respective fields and offers new insights. These categories involve validation of identities and cultures as focal points for learning by embracing who the learners are, and it also points out moments of tension and conflict that emerge from the data. Amplifying voices and plurality of perspectives as a pedagogical practice creates inclusive learning environments that value diversity and multiplicity. Multiple voices and perspectives offer critical affective moves made by learners within these stories, particularly focusing on how social consciousness is expressed as a form of resistance or empowerment. The narratives often reflect the learners' engagement with issues of language and power which nurtured critical thinking skills amongst the learners, enabling them to navigate societal structures and question systemic injustices while empowering them to become agents of change.

1) Instagram posts:

Fatima: What are some of the features of Instagram?

Natasha: You can post pictures, videos and stories.

Aaliya: In addition to that, you can share with your friends' direct message or DM's.

Fatima: So, you can slide into DM's. [The class exploded with laughter because I used this popular phrase amongst the youth to refer to the ability to message any Instagram user provided you have their account name].

Lindiwe: It's a guide about places or anything. [She refers to the feature of 'tagging' places and people in posts so that followers know where you are and who you are with].

Aaliya: Ma'am, you can spice up your stories [the class giggled once again, and she continues to speak] and like adding your favourite chill so it's not just a picture. It's like a picture with music. [She raised both arms up to indicate the obviousness of what she just said].

Fatima: So, it's not just simply a picture, it becomes a narrative. The story gives the picture more meaning. [Learners across the classroom nod enthusiastically in agreement].

In a classroom discussion, students highlighted Instagram's key features such as posting images, videos, stories, direct messaging, and tagging locations or individuals, revealing their understanding of how these elements shape online interaction. Through these features, Instagram allows for multivoicedness where multiple perspectives, voices, and modes of expression intersect, producing rich layers of meaning. Users can blend personal and social dimensions, embedding private or cultural references in a way that asserts individuality and connects them to broader social networks. This interaction between individual expression and social discourse on Instagram exemplifies how the platform operates as a site of performative identity and collective engagement, where identity is constructed by users and validated by others. Visual Instagram posts function as performative identities by allowing users to curate and present aspects of their identity through images, captions, hashtags, and emojis, which shapes how they are perceived by others. This performativity aligns with the collaborative group stories, where learners constructed and negotiated identities through narrative choices, dialogue, and multimodal elements. However, while the Instagram posts were individually crafted and shaped by social media and genre conventions, the collaborative group storytelling process in written, audio and performative modes involved collective decision-making, negotiation, and deeper engagement with social issues which allowed for more sustained and layered explorations of identity, agency, and social critique. It became evident to the learners that social media such as Instagram posts are a form of storytelling as each post is a narrative constructed by the user. This was a significant point in the activity as it expanded on traditional notions of storytelling and highlighted features and elements associated with the genre and discourse that work together to construct meaning.

By examining how young people perceive social media as a tool for visual and creative self-representation, this section will investigate how features like tagging, captions, and multimedia choices become tools for users to engage in nuanced and dynamic constructions of identities (authentic or constructed) for their followers. This reflects the notion of literacy as a social practice (Gee, 2015), where social media platforms facilitate interactions across borders and foster digital communities (Boyd, 2014). This section will present an overview of the Instagram posts not selected for in-depth analysis by group members Suzi and Kayla, as well as the Instagram posts that were selected for analysis which were crafted by the group leaders of each group, Quwa (group 1) and Hassan (group 4).

i. **Masking deeper meanings in posting simple everyday moments - Instagram posts not selected for analysis**

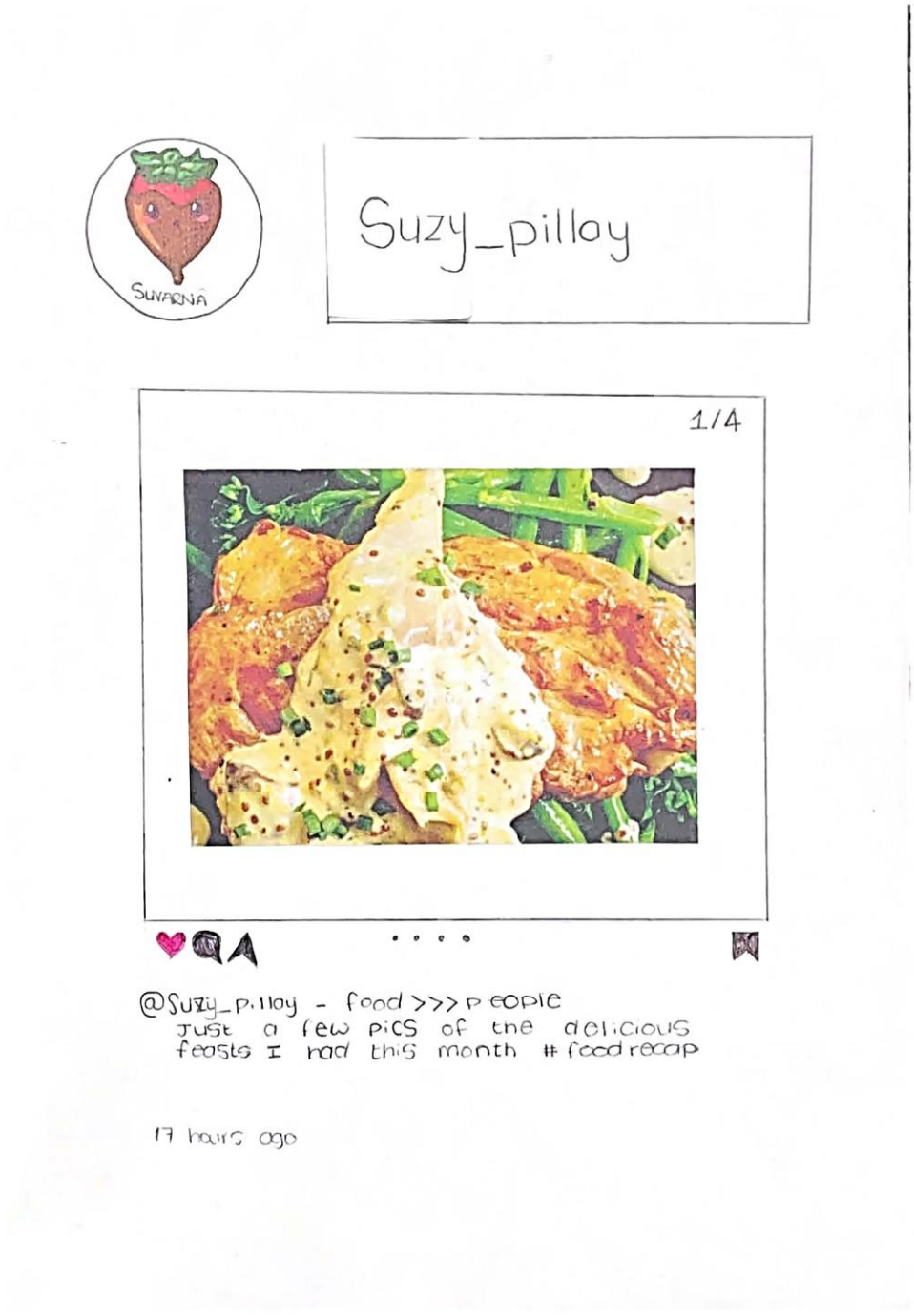


Figure 6: Suzy's Instagram post

Suzy is a member of group 1. Her Instagram post reveals a layered "foodie" identity, constructed through visual symbols, captions, and social media language that communicate her passion for food and nuanced social commentary. The label "foodie" is significant because it not only aligns Suzy with a popular social media subculture but also encapsulates a specific identity centred on culinary passion. Her profile picture, an animated strawberry dipped in chocolate with a face, shows a playful choice that builds a recognizable and curated online persona. Instead of using a self-portrait, she connects with followers through a shared love of food, subtly suggesting a self-protective or modest approach to personal exposure.

The post's close-up image of a chicken fillet on a bed of green vegetables, topped with creamy sauce and garnished with chives, exemplifies social media's emphasis on visual appeal and turns a meal into a desirable object of self-expression. This visual styling transforms the meal from an everyday experience into an object of desire, aligning with broader social media trends where food becomes a medium for self-expression and identity signalling. Her presentation here suggests she's not just sharing a meal; she's communicating taste, refinement, and an ability to find beauty in the details of culinary experiences.

Suzy's caption, *"food>>>people,"* playfully ranks food above social interactions, using the *">>>"* symbol to amplify her sentiment. This exaggerated comparison suggests humour, social fatigue, or even a form of escapism, resonating with followers who may also view food as a comforting alternative to complex social relationships. Her choice of symbols and hashtags like *"#foodrecap"* reflects social media's metalanguage, making her post culturally attuned and relatable. Beneath its casual tone, the post hints at a deeper emotional undercurrent—food as both a passion and a refuge. Her prioritization of food over people suggests possible introversion or a defence mechanism, where food serves as a stable source of comfort in contrast to unpredictable social interactions.

In doing so, Suzy's post uses food as a multifaceted symbol, representing identity, comfort, and possibly escapism, allowing her to share a distinct yet complex persona with her followers. The post reflects broader themes of identity construction, social commentary, and cultural belonging within the mediated context of Instagram, showing how even simple images and captions can reveal complex identity narratives in digital spaces.

While Suzy's Instagram post reveals broader underlying issues, it was not selected for in-depth analysis in this chapter as there are no explicit links to the collaborative story that her group wrote. Her Instagram post depicts personal representations of herself, culinary passion and social disappointments, but unlike Quwa, Suzy's identity is not based on traumatic lived experiences which links to the collaborative story.

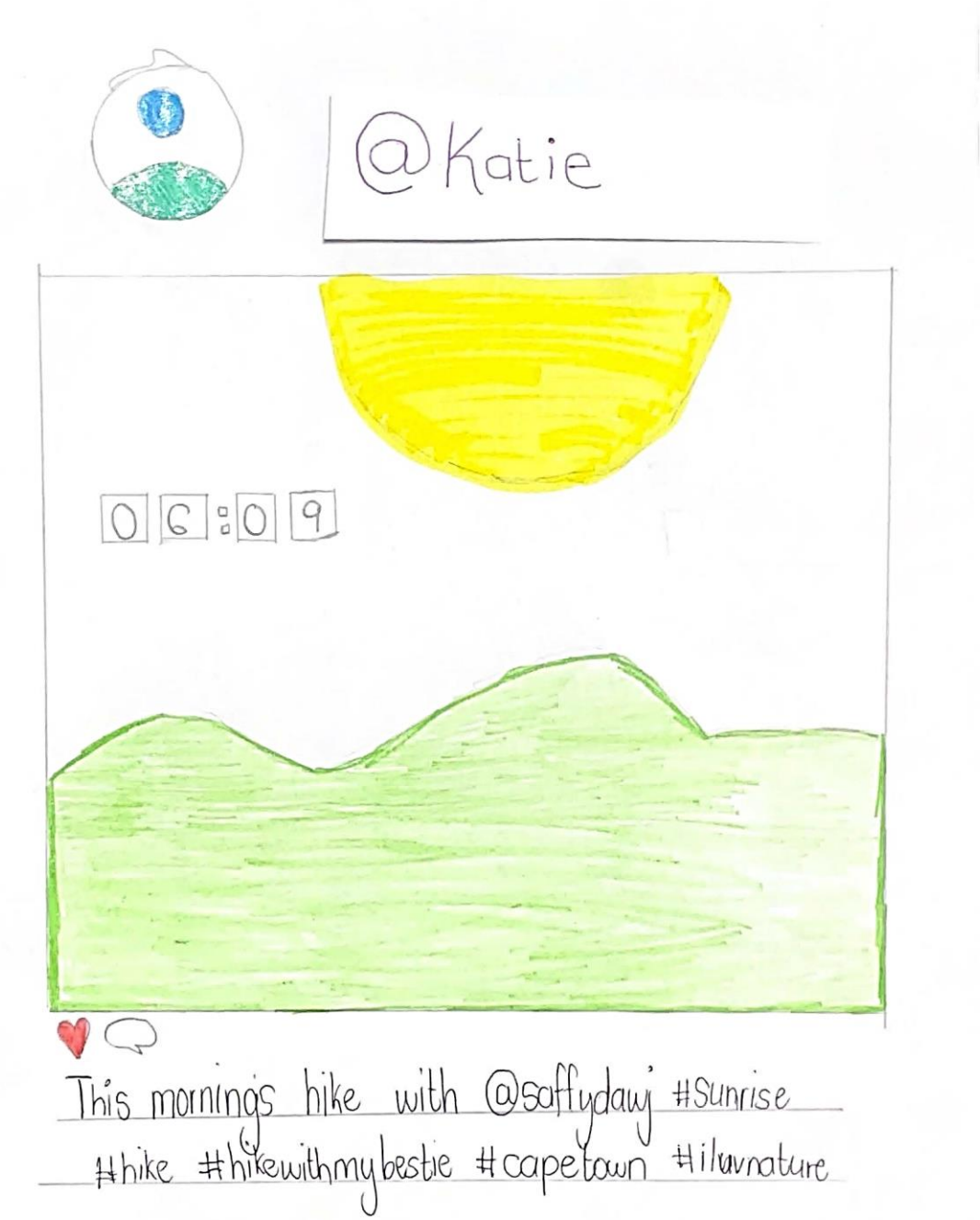


Figure 7: Katie's Instagram post

The Instagram post above is by Katie who is a member of group 4. In the post, Katie shares a scenic view from a sunrise hike, capturing greenery and the sun with a timestamp of 06:09. Her caption is “This mornings hike with @Saffydawj”, indicating that she was accompanied by her friend on the hike. Her caption features hashtags such as “#sunrise #hike #hikewithmybestie #capetown #iluvnature,” which serve to increase the post’s visibility and connect her to broader communities of nature lovers, hiking enthusiasts, and local followers in Cape Town.

The choice of hashtags provides insight into Katie’s identity and interests. Hashtags like “#sunrise” and “#hikewithmybestie” emphasize both the time and social context of the hike, indicating that this experience was shared and meaningful. “#Capetown” locates her in a popular South African travel destination, while “#iluvnature” aligns her with communities that are passionate about the outdoors, signalling a core part of her digital identity as a nature lover. These tags make her post accessible to others with similar interests and deepen the context, letting followers know that Katie values natural beauty, friendship, and possibly an active lifestyle.

Katie’s familiarity and engagement with Instagram norms and discourse is clear in her use of social media metalanguage, including hashtags and tagging. By tagging her friend, she acknowledges and highlights the social aspect of the experience, while also inviting her friend into the digital space of the post. This use of Instagram’s conventions reflects Katie’s active membership within the platform's community, yet her privacy choices indicate she is deliberate about how she engages with her followers.

Her Instagram post reveals a thoughtfully crafted online presence that emphasises her love for nature and engagement in social media discourse, while also balancing privacy and selective self-presentation. Interestingly, Katie has chosen a generic figure as her profile picture instead of a personal image, and she made the decision not to include herself or her friend in the post which suggests a desire for privacy or an aversion to performative self-presentation. This choice to omit personal images while sharing aspects of her life reflects a selective self-presentation strategy, allowing Katie to engage on Instagram while maintaining a boundary around her personal image. This could indicate a preference for a low-profile online presence or a modest approach to self-representation.

Her decision to highlight the landscape rather than herself suggests an emphasis on experiential sharing over self-promotion. By framing the post around the experience rather than personal appearance, Katie aligns herself with an identity that values mindfulness, natural beauty, and shared moments rather than the performative aspects often associated with social media. This emphasis on the scene's natural beauty positions Katie as someone who finds joy in nature and outdoor adventures, constructing an online identity that is more about shared experience and less about individual display.

Katie's Instagram post meets the activity requirements of showcasing herself and her identity to her followers as it personal and aesthetically aligned with her identity, but it was not selected for in-depth analysis because it does not relate to the collaborative story produced by her group which included themes of discrimination through xenophobia and Islamophobia. Her post does not delve into the collective multimodal narrative the group sought to address, focusing instead on her individual connection to nature and friendship. Instead, the group leader's post was selected for analysis as Hassan's post engaged more directly with the themes of their collaborative multimodal stories crafted and clear threads can be made between his individual Instagram post and the stories crafted by the group.

Journey with me to meet the most dominant learners in each group who assumed the role of being group leaders Quwa and Hassan from group 1 and group 4. I will explore their #InstagramPosts, followed by analysis of their posts in relation to their groups' collaboratively crafted multimodal stories.

ii. Visual social media narratives to engage with identities

Group 1 leader: Quwa's story

Meet Quwa, a talkative, confident and fierce 16-year-old Muslim girl from South Africa. Her name is of Arab origin, meaning strength or power. She identifies as a coloured female and follows both Cape Malay and Indian cultures. Quwa speaks English and Afrikaans at home, and she speaks English and Portuguese with her friends at school. Her literacy practices mostly include digital and social media where she spends an average of 12 hours on TikTok in a week in addition to other

digital applications. Quwa wants to use social media and engage with social problems in South Africa in her English language learning. Quwa identifies as a feminist, particularly because she is a victim of sexual assault, and she strives to protect her female friends from encountering the same experiences as her (Field notes and focus group, 2022). She crafted an Instagram story to show the world who she is.



Figure 8: Quwa's Instagram post

During a class discussion about the features of an Instagram post, Quwa and her friend Aaliya from group 1 enthusiastically raised their hands to share their 'creative usernames'.

Aaliya: "So my surname is Asvat. Sorry if this sounds a tad bit rude. My username is Aal.no ass vat" (The room filled with uncontrollable laughter).

She explains the username and says that it is an indication of her being "flat" which means that she has a small and flat backside. Her username is a form of language play to include her name and surname as part of her identity, but she plays with this creatively to also give people a sense of one physical characteristic, her backside, which she feels has become a part of her identity. In one short username she shows the world multiple identities in a humorous way.

Aaliya: "My spam account has a nice name." [Some students look confused, but her friends laugh hysterically as if there is an inside joke to her response].

Fatima: "So when you say spam account, do you mean that you have more than one account?"

Aaliya: [She responds very seriously]. "I have more than one account. So, it's the main account and then there's the spam account [which] is where I post like how I am as myself… with like friends…close friends almost." [She looks at Quwa sitting next to her and signals to indicate that she is part of Aaliya's close friend audience].

This conversation revealed that some learners in the class have more than one Instagram account, and the content that they post is dependent on the relationship that they have with the different audiences. Aaliya indicated that her 'true' personality is reflected on the account with just friends where she can be carefree and quirky, whereas her public account is constructed in ways that portray a certain image to fit the message and identity that she wants her followers to have of her. Thus, she carefully crafts her social identity by controlling her content based on how she wants others to perceive her. Just like Aaliya, Quwa also has two Instagram profiles, but throughout the intervention, she only discusses her public account that has a "rockstar" identity.

Social media, particularly Instagram is a literacy practice that includes multifaceted dimensions. In their discussion of literacy in the 21st century, Low et al. (2021) highlight that no text is neutral and giving learners multimodal texts to work with requires them to draw on their lived experiences,

resources and range of repertoires to decode and make meaning of the texts. This was evident in Quwa's case, as her Instagram post and the written story crafted by her group included aspects of her life, her identity and it was driven by her lived experiences and position in the world.

During the storytelling activity briefing, I asked students to identify pressing social problems in the world. Quwa responded with a stern and confident response saying "men,". The murmurs and nods of agreement from her group highlighted a shared recognition of this concern. Even though all the storytelling activities in this intervention were conducted separately over a period of time, it is evident that there are links between Quwa's Instagram post and the written story crafted by group 1. Both the written story, and Quwa's Instagram identity was fuelled by the same motivations of being afraid of men and having encountered sexual assault (Group discussion, 2022). Upon further discussion, it became clear that Quwa's response was deeply rooted in her personal fear of being overpowered by men, which is a fear that is shaped by her own traumatic experience of sexual assault, that has profoundly influenced her identity. This experience aligns with Butler's (1990) theory of performative identity which led Quwa to construct a new identity as a form of resistance and self-protection from her fear of men. Through her Instagram post and social media identity, Quwa developed a resistant identity as a defence mechanism, an identity that actively challenges the patriarchal structures she perceives as threatening., using Instagram as a site for resistance and asserting agency.

Like her friend Aaliya, Quwa creatively manipulates language in her username, "QUWX" replacing the 'A's in her name with 'X's. When asked about this choice, Quwa explained that she wants people to think of her as a "rockstar" (Field notes, 2022; Focus group discussion, 2022). This playful use of language reflects her engagement with the linguistic practices of contemporary youth culture, where language is often reimagined to align with personal identities and social media aesthetics. As Gleason (2019) notes, "social media provides a powerful way to create engaging spaces of learning and literacy development" (p. 28), extending beyond conventional language forms to embrace the dynamic and innovative expressions typical of online youth discourse which is evident in their usernames.

Quwa's use of "QUWX" as a username is a deliberate construction of a "rockstar" persona. By altering her name, she crafts an identity that embodies the qualities associated with rockstars which

relate to coolness, toughness, and a certain rebellious flair linked to power and fearlessness. This identity construction is further emphasised through her choice of a profile picture, where she displays the ‘sign of horns’ hand gesture, a symbol deeply embedded in heavy metal music culture, accompanied by the words "ROCK & ROLL." Instead of using a personal photograph, Quwa uses imagery that aligns with her newly constructed rockstar identity which signals her desired persona through her profile information before any direct interaction with her posts (Focus Group Discussion, 2022).

This aligns with discussions of identity construction in digital spaces, where users often project aspirational personas that resonate with broader cultural narratives of strength and autonomy. By adopting this persona, Quwa asserts her identity within the social media landscape and engages in a form of identity performance that challenges traditional gender roles, presenting herself as empowered and unafraid. Through these digital practices, Quwa demonstrates how youth use social media to explore and assert multifaceted identities that blend personal expression with cultural symbols and social discourses.

The activity brief focused on using visual social media narratives to "show the world who you are." In response, Quwa crafted a black and white image that depicts the lower half of what appears to be a female body, depicting slender bare legs positioned at the top of the page which made it look like it is hanging, the figure/person wearing a short skirt ending well above the knees, and boots. The image is linked to the themes of femininity, objectification of women, and victimisation explored in the story written by Quwa’s group, where the woman's shorts is viewed by society as being "too short" and is unjustly cited as justification for her rape. The Instagram post is illustrated in black and white against a green background which carries deep symbolic meaning. The monochrome figure evokes a sense of lifelessness, reinforcing the noir and sombre tones of the group’s written story. Positioned in the top left corner, the figure seems to float or hang, mirroring the story's implication that the woman's life may have ended which is a tragic reality for many rape victims.

The floating figure could symbolise the woman’s ghost if she is dead, or metaphorically suggest that the rape has killed her spirit by stripping away her hopeful future and sense of identity. Vygotsky's (2004) concept of "creative reworking" is evident here, as Quwa reinterprets her lived

experiences through both the Instagram post and the written story, weaving them into narratives that reflect the profound impact these experiences have had on her identity. While there are parallels between the two texts, it is not explicitly clear that the woman in the story is Quwa herself. However, the creative overlap suggests a deeply personal connection between the narratives and her own life.

The feminine imagery in the Instagram post contrasts with the rockstar persona that Quwa projects through her profile, such as using symbols like the "sign of horns" hand gesture and a graffiti-style username. This juxtaposition highlights the complexity of Quwa's identity negotiation, and it could be a projection of a present/future identity that she constructs for herself. By blending stereotypical rockstar elements with generalised feminine symbols such as the mini skirt and bare legs, Quwa is actively constructing a hybrid identity. Rather than viewing Quwa's dual representations as a sign of identity crisis, it is more accurate to interpret them as evidence of her pluralistic identity. Quwa's representation of herself on Instagram reflects a fluid, multifaceted identity that draws on past, present, and aspirational elements of who she is and who she wishes to become. This fluidity aligns with contemporary understandings of identity as multiple, hybrid, and constantly evolving (Hall, 1996; Paris and Alim, 2014, 2017). Through her Instagram post, Quwa demonstrates how the youth use social media to explore aspects of their identities by negotiating the tension between societal expectations and personal expression within digital spaces.

Group 4 leader: Hassan's story

Hassan Akhund is a 16-year-old Muslim male who identifies as an "Asian-Arab" (Questionnaire, 2022). Hassan has Emirati and Saudi Arabian origins, but he resides in South Africa. It is unknown for how long Hassan has been in South Africa as he does not publicly embrace this identity and chooses not to reveal details about his immigration history. This creates a gap in the analysis, as Hassan may not be an immigrant, but he may have immigrant roots through his parents which he ties to his identity as he notes in the questionnaire. He speaks Arabic, English and Urdu at home and with the people in his community, but he only speaks English at school. According to his questionnaire, Hassan prefers not to include his identity and lived experiences in his learning, but he wants to learn using the languages he speaks, and he would like to include aspects of his culture

in his English language lessons which is contradictory. He mostly uses digital devices and spends approximately 19 hours on TikTok and 14 hours on YouTube music in a week. He suggests the use of multimodal, spatial and social collaborative approaches in language teaching which will contribute towards his preferred learning interests. He crafted an Instagram post that foregrounds the visual mode to show the world who he is.



Figure 9: Hassan's Instagram post

Hassan's Instagram post is an image of an aeroplane flying upward in the sky as his way of showing the world who he is offers a powerful metaphor for his identity and aspirations. The Instagram post includes vibrant colours, and the aeroplane is set against a bright blue sky, accompanied by a vivid orange sun and a white cloud. The image alone without context is vague which protects Hassan from risk of his audience knowing his identity and deeper meaning of the image. However, when looked at in relation to his identity, questionnaire responses and the collaborative story, these all add meaning to his Instagram image as it provides context of his identity and life experiences. The upward trajectory of the aeroplane, combined with the brightness of the surrounding elements symbolises a sense of optimism, happiness, and the promise of new possibilities in a new place. This image suggests that Hassan views his journey, both literal and metaphorical as one that is filled with potential and hope. It indicates a resilience and determination to overcome the obstacles associated with his identity and to redefine himself in a new context.

The aeroplane in the context of Hassan's identity and story serves as a symbol for new beginnings which resonates with his personal identity and with the character of Osama from the collaborative story. Both Hassan and Osama are depicted as individuals navigating the complexities of being foreigners in South Africa, seeking to establish themselves in a new environment while facing challenges that come with their outsider status. The aeroplane can be interpreted as Hassan's aspiration to rise above these challenges, embracing the opportunities that lie ahead despite the difficulties associated with his foreignness. The use of the aeroplane as a symbol is significant in the context of Hassan's lived experience. The image reflects his journey to South Africa, a journey that likely involved both physical and emotional transitions. This connection between the image and Hassan's identity aligns with the idea that learners' creative outputs are deeply influenced by their backgrounds and their socio-cultural contexts, which shape the way they represent themselves and their experiences in various modes of storytelling (Moje, 2008).

Hassan's Instagram post and his heritage identity reveals that it is deeply intertwined with the audio story produced by group 4 that foregrounds Islamophobia and xenophobia. His full name, Hassan Akhund (a pseudonym that mimics the same association), mirrors that of an Afghan Prime Minister who was a founding member and leader within the Taliban, a connection that Hassan is acutely aware of. The significance of his name and association of his name to the Taliban is relevant to the discussion of the group's collaborative story. To navigate the potential stigma associated with his

name, Hassan strategically introduces himself using only his initials, "H.A.," which is how all his friends refer to him, and he never mentions his full name at school (Fieldnotes, 2022). This conscious alteration of his name to just the initials "H.A." serves multiple purposes. First, it allows him to distance himself from any negative connotations tied to the Taliban leader, thereby protecting himself from the prejudices that might arise from this association. Second, by adopting the initials, Hassan aligns himself with a more "cool" and socially accepted identity. The transformation of his name into something trendier and more neutral reflects Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) idea that identity is not a fixed trait but is rather constructed and negotiated through social interactions.

His newly constructed identity is further extended to his social media presence through his Instagram username, "Hey.itsha," a playful and casual phrase that reflects contemporary youth language practices. The username, which translates to "Hey. It's H.A.," not only reinforces his chosen identity but also signals his agency in controlling how others perceive him. This aligns with the work of Boyd (2014), who argues that social media is a crucial space where young people actively construct and perform their identities, often in ways that resist or subvert societal labels and expectations.

Through the use of his initials and the corresponding social media handle, Hassan takes charge of his own narrative, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of how names and identities are perceived in different social contexts. By doing so, he avoids the stereotypes and prejudices that might be associated with his full name, while still maintaining a sense of his cultural and linguistic heritage. This act of identity construction is particularly significant in the context of Islamophobia and xenophobia where names can often trigger biased reactions. Hassan's strategic identity management on social media becomes an act of resilience and self-empowerment, illustrating the role of social media as a site for negotiation and reconfiguration of identity.

Hassan's choice of using a neutral face emoji "😑" as his profile picture is a subtle yet significant element in his online identity construction. Emojis are cartoon-like faces that are widely recognised in digital communication for their ability to convey emotions and nuanced feelings, often bridging the gap between text and emotions/feelings in online interactions (Danesi, 2016). The specific emoji that Hassan uses is illustrated in black and white, a colour scheme that

traditionally symbolises darkness, melancholy, or depression. Since he used colour in the other visuals of his post, this choice suggests an underlying expression of intense emotions which could be reflective of his complex feelings about his identity as a foreigner in South Africa. His questionnaire responses, Instagram posts, and the modification of his name all indicate his foreign status in South Africa. The audio story of Osama, an Arab foreigner who experiences Islamophobia and xenophobia, parallels Hassan's own experiences, making the emoji a representation of his internal state.

However, there is a complex layer to Hassan's identity construction that emerges during the planning of the collaborative story. While Osama's character could easily be seen as a reflection of Hassan's identity, Hassan offers a contradictory perspective by insisting that the foreigner in the story should be depicted as someone who does not adhere to the rules and regulations "because that's how the foreigners do it in this country" (Fieldnotes, 2022). This statement reveals a negative attitude toward foreigners and echoes generalised comments about foreigners often believed by South Africa's social population. By making this comment, Hassan positions himself as not identifying as a foreigner. Hassan is the dominant member in the group, and he uses jokes and discriminatory comments to position his peers to take the same positionality of negativity against foreigners. He takes the lead to plan the stories and make decisions regarding the representations within, and his peers only add minor details as he assumes a position of power, agency and voice. None of the group members challenge him or disagree with his xenophobic comments because of the dominant role he plays in the group and the extent to which he makes his voice and perspective heard. This comment and prejudice against foreigners illustrate conflict within himself, where he feels compelled to distance himself from his heritage identity to gain acceptance from his South African peers even though they do not discriminate against foreigners which is a result of his fear of rejection and exclusion. Hassan's comment is an attempt to create group membership and a sense of belonging by establishing himself as a South African, even at the expense of his own cultural identity.

This contradictory attitude highlights the complexities of identity negotiation in contexts of social exclusion and prejudice. Hassan's reluctance to reveal his background to his group can be seen as a survival mechanism, one that allows him to cope with the marginalisation he could face. It highlights the role of collaborative storytelling and social media as sites of identity formation and

a space where individuals may feel compelled to conform to dominant social norms (Boyd, 2014). Narrative modes with a public audience entail a higher risk in which learners can disregard and disassociate with their heritage and authentic identities by constructing a new one for social acceptance and group membership even if it is not authentic to their true selves. The resources and experiences that Hassan brings to the classroom which are shaped by his status as a foreigner are crucial in understanding the narratives he constructs, both in his social media posts and in collaborative storytelling. The parallels between Hassan's identity and that of Osama in the group's story highlight the interplay between personal experience and creative expression. The character of Osama can be seen as a fictional extension of Hassan's own experiences where the narrative of migration and the pursuit for belonging are central themes.

Discussion of Quwa and Hassan's Instagram posts

Multimodal representations utilise a social semiotic means of communication (Archer, 2010). The Instagram genre was a familiar literacy practice for the learners to engage with narrative that enabled social and emotional aspects of identity expression in ways that coincide with youth and digital cultures. "Teachers might find success integrating social media when they centre young people's experiences, language, and youth culture as not just valuable but also as necessary to the functioning of the class." (Gleason, 2019, 28). Social media serves as a marker to express, construct and negotiate identities and lived experiences in multimodal and creative ways. The multimodal Instagram post enabled Quwa and Hassan to craft narratives with "*pleasure and play with critique and create intercultural narratives that were creative, entertaining and empowering*" (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017, 513).

Building on Norton's (1997) conceptualisation of identity, she explains that identity *"refer[s] to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future. … I take the position that identity is related to desire – the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation and the desire for security and safety"* (410). In her Instagram post, Quwa utilises a feminine visual image to share her personal identity, but she provides a contradictory fierce rockstar image in her username and profile picture. She desires to embrace her femininity, but her negative emotions and

experience shape her identity to include a rockstar persona. This dual representation suggests a desire to embrace her femininity while also responding to the impact of negative experiences, shaping her identity to include both vulnerability and strength. Like Mendelowitz and Govender (2024), I build on Misson and Morgan's (2006) reimagining of critical literacy, which emphasises the role of desire. They argue that engagement with a text is closely linked to desire and the extent to which the text resonates with and fulfills this desire is through various positive and negative emotions (Misson & Morgan, 2006, pp.132–133). Her lived experience of being sexually assaulted altered her sense of self, causing her to construct a new identity through a public Instagram account in addition to her personal account which is only accessible to friends and family. She shifts across these accounts to express different parts of her identities which is dependent on the audience and her sense of safety. A dependency relation exists between the textual and visual mode (Archer, 2010), therefore while she engages with two different and perhaps conflicting identities that emerged from her authentic self and her lived experience, there is a relation between these two aspects which is conveyed through her profile because she represents both identities in a way that comes across as constructed and negotiated.

Hassan's Instagram post is also linked to notions of desire in his representation of his Identity. He desires expression of his relocation, and desires for a successful relocation to South Africa which is evident in the upward flying aeroplane, clear skies, sunshine and vibrant colours in his Instagram post. However, his negative emotions and fear of not being accepted into society drives him to mask his identity. He uses his Instagram post as a form of expression to establish and assert his authentic identity which he hides to his friends. Therefore, crafting a social media post enabled Hassan to express his authentic self through visuals instead of words and to a wider audience who he may perceive as more supportive of his identity. It was a safer space for him to express who he is in a non-direct manner, without the risk of a digital audience knowing comprehensive details of his identity and lived experiences. He only uses visual images as meaning is interpreted without contextual information, strengthening the ambiguous aspect of visual interpretations.

Using the Instagram genre was a form of digital literacy, even though it was engaged with through print mode as the learners drew on features associated with the online social media app such as usernames, the like function and viewer count during their composition. The Instagram post was only shared with the peers that they sat next to, or small groups of their choosing. Peers as audience

resulted in a safe space for the learners to express themselves through expressions of their Instagram posts and this demonstrates the importance and relationship between digital and non-digital elements of producing texts (Rice et al., 2024). Audience impacted the learner's willingness to share across the different modes of storytelling. The Instagram posts fostered willingness to engage with the activity and share personal experiences through symbolism and creative choices as representation differed from the audio and performative stories. This may be attributed to the nature of the digital space, which creates a sense of distance between the learner, their self-representation, and the audience, thereby reducing the immediate vulnerability of personal expression (Parker et al., 2021). Unlike audio or performative storytelling, which required layered narrative explanation, direct embodiment and vocal or physical enactment of narratives, Instagram allows for curated self-presentation without explicit narration of identities. This detachment can lower inhibitions and encourage more open and experimental identity exploration that manifests in creative ways. In contrast, audio and performative modes demand a level of personal exposure whether through voice, physical presence, or audience reception that makes self-representation more immediate and emotionally charged. Instagram provides a controlled space where learners can construct identities with greater agency and less pressure from direct exposure of identities and experiences. This detachment allows learners to express themselves through symbols and creative elements more freely, as they might feel less exposed and vulnerable than in physical spaces. On a surface level, the Instagram posts seem vague and aesthetic, but when viewed in conjunction with the collaborative stories, they illustrate extensive meaningful experiences and identities.

Both students show awareness of engaging with a social presence through their constructed identities, the like count and comments indicated below their posts. Social presence is linked to digital culture which Garrison et al. (2000, p. 94) defines in the community of inquiry model as *"the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used."* They use their accounts to depict images to establish a social presence and engage with a digital community to illustrate group membership and social acceptance. Quwa shares an image of herself, and Hassan shares a visual of a travel experience which gives the online community a snippet of their lives which humanises their Instagram profiles by creating a shared experience with the online community who are able to see and interact with them and their lives.

The Instagram posts illustrate that Quwa and Hassan's identities and lived experiences were expressed through complex and indirect ways that is not reliant on written language, but rather on images and visual language. Boler (1999) and Ahmed (2014) describe emotion as a social practice, thus "[T]he 'moment of contact' is shaped by past histories of contact" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 194). This means that elements of past experiences, and broader socio-cultural and historical contexts shape identities in Quwa and Hassan's posts may have been included unconsciously due to being driven by emotion which is evident when linking the Instagram posts to the collaborative stories as the main characters in both stories experience struggle and a sense of loss that align with each learner's personal identities and experiences. Visual aspects in the posts are symbols and markers of experiences that are located within particular contexts.

"[D]igital composing can also open new spaces for identities, and they require considerations of new types of resources. Moreover, these ideas of audience, purpose, identities, and materials and resources entangle in new ways" (Rice et al., 2024, 181). We see Instagram posts as a space for identity expression across both posts as Hassan finally embraces his foreign identity by illustrating his story of migrating to a new country for a better life, and Quwa expresses her new constructed identity as a fierce female rockstar. The mix between reality and social media discourse illustrates a fuse of multiple identities and roles that exist simultaneously (Rice et al, 2024). On social media, people often present themselves through a mix of personal truths and curated representations which are shaped by social expectations, trends, or ideals. This mix allows for the expression of multiple identities simultaneously, such as personal, professional, cultural, and aspirational selves which are each influenced by the distinct social dynamics of the platform. By engaging in this blend of reality and social discourse, users navigate and perform complex, multifaceted identities that shift depending on the context and audience (Rice et al., 2024). Imagined audience plays a crucial role in shaping Instagram posts, as users construct their content with an anticipated viewer in mind. Learners posting on Instagram anticipate a specific audience whether it be peers, friends, or a broader social media community and tailor their posts accordingly, strategically choosing images, captions, and hashtags that align with their intended self-representation. The digital space allows for selective visibility, where learners control what aspects of their identity they present, creating an interaction that feels personal yet remains mediated through a performative lens. The imagined audience shapes the balance between authenticity and social desirability. While some posts may

reflect genuine expressions of identity and experience, they are still filtered through considerations of what will be received positively by the expected viewers.

Expanding school writing activities to include the Instagram genre unconsciously revealed power dynamics and social issues that emerged through visual expressions of student identities. The posts from both students shaped their imagined online persona and required them to reflect on their self-perception and constructed identities to influence how they wish to be perceived by others. Both students unconsciously included identity elements in their Instagram posts that related to their lived experiences and can be tied to the stories produced collaboratively with their groups. Thus, the most dominant members in each group inspired stories around their own identities, even when it was not obvious to their group members such as Hassan's.

When constructing digital stories through their Instagram posts, the learners crafted narratives "in hopeful, caring and empathetic ways and created intercultural narratives that are interwoven with their own voices, histories and memories" (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017, 513). The posts were the beginning of engaging with profound personal and social issues linked to Quwa and Hassan's lived experiences which extend to broader communities who have similar experiences of sexual assault and discrimination and xenophobia. Engaging with contemporary social media genres and literacy practices resulted in an unexpected engagement with personal reflections of identities and a social consciousness of the impact that lived experiences has on shifting identities. Thus, engaging with contemporary digital literacy practices in classrooms, even though it was done using print modes, created meaningful text production that links to engaging with culturally sustaining tenets of identities and cultures, drawing on lived experiences and diverse forms of knowledge, social engagement and consciousness which are established through a creative and contemporary lens.

The social media platform allowed Quwa and Hassan to use visual storytelling as a means of resistance against injustice and the silencing of marginalised groups (Gleason, 2019). Through their Instagram posts, Hassan reflects on his journey as a foreigner in South Africa, while Quwa conveys a bold, "rockstar" identity to reclaim her voice after being silenced due to sexual assault. As members of marginalised groups, both learners confront discrimination and silencing in their narratives to establish a form of digital citizenship that aligns with Instagram's expressive culture.

Through their Instagram posts, the learners mimic the establishment of digital citizenship in ways that align with Instagram discourse.

i. The role of language and discourse in Instagram text production

In a contemporary world, literacy texts predominantly draw on several modes and are not reliant on traditional language repertoires and practices for meaning making due to the amelioration of technology which created an expansion of literacy and language (Bezemer and Kress, 2017). With a rise in social media use, language and discourse is central in shaping engagement, information and identity construction in a virtual realm. However, the definition of language is pluralistic and in addition to spoken and written uses of language, it can include a range of contemporary language practices and repertoires that extend to forms of expression and communication across a range of modes. The Instagram activity foregrounded the visual mode and relied profoundly on semiosis to create texts and meaning through multimodality, using images, words and emojis. Language attached to multimodality includes metalanguage where semiotic signs indicate meanings. Social media discourse explores the complex interplay between language and social media text production, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this relationship.

Language is a fundamental marker of communication and expression across time and space and a key component to consider in English language classrooms as it is imbued with links to identities and culture. When analysing Quwa and Hassan's Instagram posts, it is evident that written language was not included in either of their posts which is common with the Instagram genre and discourse as it foregrounds visual and performative modes of expression. They do not make use of their home and heritage linguistic identities in any capacity which was limited by the Instagram genre. There is a possibility that there are no traces of expression of certain aspects of their linguistic identities due to the global audience of their Instagram followers, or in Hassan's case it could be a conscious choice to use English in his username and not provide a caption that includes words as using his heritage language is a threat to his newly constructed identity and social belonging. Thus, audience, purpose and genre impact how learners represent themselves linguistically on social media platforms and how they use aspects of their texts to construct

meaning. In comparison to the written, audio and performative modes, the Instagram genre was linguistically constraining.

Quwa and Hassan's Instagram posts demonstrate the complex interplay between language and multimodal elements, illustrating how discourse is constructed through the integration of text, images, and symbols. This dynamic use of language becomes a tool through which users navigate and negotiate their identities within digital spaces, crafting narratives that reflect both individual experiences and collective affiliations. The visual and symbolic components of these posts, such as the 'rock on' hand symbol in Quwa's profile picture and the neutral emoji in Hassan's, are part of the Instagram discourse and serve as a form of metalanguage which is a system of meaning-making that conveys complex emotions and identities.

The metalanguage embedded in these symbols accommodates various expression of identities and experiences. However, these visual elements contribute to the construction of new, online identities, shaping how the audience perceives and interprets the users. As Gee explains, discourse encompasses "*ways of speaking, behaving, and acting in culturally specific ways*" (cited in Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 27). In this context, Instagram posts are not merely static images or texts, but rather they are culturally situated acts of communication that carry the users' identities, intentions, and social positions. Texts, as Pahl and Rowsell (2005) argue, are motivated signs of cultural artifacts that encapsulate the choices made during their production, reflecting the designer's identity and purpose. Quwa and Hassan engage with social media discourse by employing creative usernames, visual symbols, and strategic social engagement, all of which align with the conventions and expectations of the Instagram platform. These posts are deliberately crafted with a particular audience in mind, designed to convey specific aspects of the users' identities and to position the audience in a way that aligns with their desired self-presentation. Therefore, the posts engage with the broader discourse of social media, shaping how the learners are perceived by their digital community.

Writing is a central way for the learners to construct identity and claim membership in discourses (Weinstein, 2009). I use the term writing differently than Weinstein (2009), as I expand on traditional forms of writing and in this study include a wide range of linguistic resources and repertoires that may be considered as multilingual, contemporary and culturally relevant. Some of the forms of writing in this study expand on traditional notions of what is considered as writing,

and in addition, I look at semiotic ways of writing that extend solely text based written modes. The use of language as a medium for constructing and reflecting identities is prominently displayed in Quwa and Hassan's Instagram posts, particularly through their creative usernames. These usernames, "QUWX" and "Hey.itsha," exemplify the linguistic play characteristic of youth cultures, where language becomes a tool for identity curation and expression within the digital landscape. Bourdieu's (2000) concept of linguistic capital extends seamlessly into the digital landscape as it refers to a person's linguistic skills as part of discourse to form a social position. This engagement with Instagram discourse through usernames reflects how both learners use language to signify creativity and navigate and reshape their identities in response to their lived experiences. In adopting these usernames, Quwa and Hassan are participating in a form of linguistic innovation that aligns with broader social media practices, where identity is often constructed and performed through carefully curated language and imagery. This aligns with Gee's (2005) concept of discourse as a set of socially accepted ways of using language, which in this case, involves the playful manipulation of language to craft a desired digital persona. Their usernames serve as more than just identifiers, they are strategic choices that communicate a particular image and align with the social norms of their online communities to create a sense of belonging.

Social media discourse can develop traditional literacy skills such as awareness of audience, grammar, and voice, and establish new literacy skills such as collaborative storytelling with a digital audience through text, image and videos (Gleason, 2019). Quwa's decision to tag the account @rockstarquwa in her post reveals an understanding of separating different audiences on social media. This alternate account which is targeted at a more intimate group of followers, primarily close friends demonstrate her ability to navigate multiple social spaces (Fieldnotes, 2022). By tagging herself, Quwa reinforces her presence as the subject of the image, asserting ownership of the legs depicted. The absence of alterations to the 'A' in her username on this personal account suggests a deliberate separation from the constructed "rockstar" persona she adopts for a broader audience. This choice signals her comfort in presenting a more authentic version of herself to those who personally know her, highlighting the fluidity with which she manages her online identity. Quwa's nuanced awareness of her social positioning and varied audiences across her two Instagram accounts exemplifies her strategic engagement with Instagram profiles to shape and reshape her identity.

Canagarajah (2015) argues that changes in audience inevitably influence how individuals construct and express their identities, as different social contexts shape what aspects of the self are emphasized or downplayed. This is particularly relevant in Quwa's case, as her Instagram presence is divided between two accounts, each catering to distinct audiences and, consequently, reflecting different aspects of her identity. Her ability to navigate these spaces demonstrates a negotiation between constraint and agency, where she both responds to and reshapes the social expectations of each audience. On one account, Quwa may feel the need to conform to certain norms, presenting an identity that aligns with broader social acceptability, cultural expectations, or peer influences. This could mean curating content that is polished, socially engaging, and reflective of the identity she believes her audience expects. The constraints of this space limit full self-expression, as she must remain mindful of how her posts will be perceived and interpreted by this particular group. Conversely, on her other account, which likely includes a different or more selective audience, she may exercise greater agency in how she represents herself, sharing content that is more personal, subversive, or reflective of her deeper thoughts and emotions. This space may allow her to explore aspects of her identity that are not as visible in her more public account, giving her the freedom to express views, experiences, or emotions that might not fit within the social norms of her broader audience. This dual social media practice illustrates how digital platforms provide both restrictions and opportunities for identity construction. While audience expectations impose certain limitations, the ability to create multiple accounts and tailor content accordingly gives Quwa the agency to craft nuanced, layered self-representations. This reinforces Canagarajah's (2015) argument that identity is fluid and shaped by shifting audience dynamics, particularly in digital spaces where individuals have greater control over their self-presentation.

The post has 189 likes which are imagined, and it indicates positive reception and resonance from her audience. The caption, a solitary question mark adds a layer of interpretive complexity, possibly reflecting the tension between the multiple identities Quwa negotiates. This punctuation could also be read as a sign of uncertainty or even an identity crisis, reflecting the challenges of articulating a coherent self within the performative space of Instagram. The question mark might hint at the ambiguity Quwa experiences as she grapples with the conflict between the identity she projects and the one she feels internally. This raises questions about whether the image, profile picture, and username align or contradict each other, further complicating her digital self-

representation. The post's 91 comments demonstrate what Mendelowitz, Ferreira, and Dixon (2023, p. 54) describe as “multiple dynamic interactions with the self, with others, and with texts and cultural resources,” highlighting the complex interplay of personal and social identity formation in online communities as it involves communication about/on the post between Quwa and multiple followers. These interactions contribute to the creation of an online social media community, where Quwa's relationships with her followers are mediated through likes and comments. As Andrews and Smith (2011) argue, such digital interactions disrupt traditional power structures, allowing for more egalitarian forms of engagement that redefine the role of the audience in identity construction.

Hassan demonstrates an awareness of traditional writing elements of audience and purpose by participating in social media discourse of responding (Rice et al., 2024) through the Instagram ‘like’ function which is illustrated by a heart underneath both posts and a number which indicates the amount of people who like and react to the post. The "30 000" likes on Hassan's Instagram post reflect a substantial level of public interest, suggesting that his post resonated widely within the online community. This high engagement contrasts the experiences depicted in the collaborative stories where the main character who is a foreigner faces rejection and hostility from South African citizens. Therefore, the high number indicated in the like count serves as validation of social acceptance and a supportive online community, which challenges the audio story and its themes of discrimination and exclusion. Gleason (2019) argues that "*learning with social media is the development of a social identity that is recognized by others*" (p. 28). In this context, the like count becomes a powerful tool for Hassan to reimagine his audience within the digital realm, where his identity is recognised and validated by a broad community. Through this representation of “30 000” likes, Hassan creates an alternate reality of being liked and accepted by his Instagram audience of followers. Through his post, he produced a meaningful and engaged text which enabled him to be creative and reimagine his lived experience when writing for an authentic audience (Elbow, 1994; Andrews & Smith, 2012). The effectiveness of Hassan’s post can be attributed to its ability to connect with an audience that recognises and accepts his authentic self, demonstrating the importance of social media as a platform for identity affirmation and expression. His audience could likely consists of followers who share the sane ethnicity, or those who resonate with his journey as a foreigner and his quest for acceptance, making his posts appealing to those who value authenticity and personal stories of overcoming adversity. They could be drawn to his

posts for their relatable themes of self-empowerment, resilience, and the desire for recognition in a new environment. The "30,000" likes symbolise a validation of his identity and experiences, creating a sense of connection with a broad community that appreciates his authenticity and creativity in expressing his lived realities.

Even though Hassan stated in the questionnaire that he does not want to include his lived experiences in his school learning, his engagement with the Instagram task reveals the inextricable link between identity and representation. His post discreetly engages with his lived experiences, heritage and the cultural narratives on social media, illustrating how these elements are interwoven with his personal and community identities. This engagement highlights that learners inevitably bring their multiple identities and lived experiences into educational spaces, often in creative and unexpected ways. As Hassan's post illustrates, these identities emerge in both traditional academic contexts and in the fluid and dynamic spaces of digital media/social media, where they can be explored, negotiated, and affirmed in the presence of an expansive online audience who can often be supportive. The multimodal elements and expressions of identity illustrated by Quwa and Hassan reveal the complex processes of identity negotiation and representation in digital spaces, and they demonstrate how language, discourse, and metalanguage intersect to create rich, multifaceted narratives that go beyond the surface level of online interaction. As Canagarajah (2015) notes, the act of composing in digital spaces is inherently dialogic, involving a constant interplay between self-representation and audience reception. Quwa and Hassan's participation in Instagram discourse reveals how language, both written and visual facilitates access to membership in online communities where diverse perspectives and voices contribute to a richer, more dynamic process of learning and identity formation.

2) Collaborative storytelling across modes:

In a contemporary world, storytelling offers potential to be a catalyst for empowerment and societal transformation. When looking at the Instagram and collaborative multimodal stories in conjunction to each other, it is evident that there are threads that flow across all the different modes of storytelling within the intervention. The Instagram posts revealed aspects of the group leader's identities and lived experiences which were further expanded and elaborated on in the written,

audio and performative modes. This means that the representations in the Instagram posts formed the basis of the collaborative multimodal stories that followed, and it could have been the driving force of the stories as the group leaders had personal connections to the topics and themes included in the stories. This section illustrates the transformative potential and the limitations of collaborative audio/written, and performative stories by highlighting the interconnected pathways where pedagogy intersects with lived experiences, identities, and resources of learners in an English language classroom to foster diverse forms of knowledge, critical thinking, and social consciousness. The collaborative multimodal stories will be discussed in relation to categories of multivoicedness, and social consciousness and critical affective moves. There are noticeable links and interconnectedness between the Instagram posts and the collaborative stories that were crafted. Group 1 only crafted a written story and opted out of the performative activity, whereas group 4 crafted an audio and a performative story which will be discussed in this section.

ii. Multivoicedness

Language plays a crucial role in orchestrating multivoicedness by facilitating diverse perspectives and representations while fostering a connection between the narrative and the audience. In storytelling, multiple voices are woven together to create a rich, dialogic experience that invites the audience to engage with various viewpoints, cultures, and emotions. As Canagarajah (2015) suggests, storytelling allows for the exploration of voice as a social and cultural practice, where the interaction of multiple voices helps to construct meaning and identity. This layering of voices adds depth to the narrative, allowing it to function as a vehicle for exploring and amplifying voices, some which are often marginalised or underrepresented.

Traditionally, the concept of multivoicedness which is rooted in Bakhtinian theory (1981) refers to the presence of multiple social voices, perspectives, and discourses within a single text or utterance. It recognises that individual expression is never entirely solitary, but is shaped dialogically through encounters with other voices in society, culture, and discourse. Multivoicedness has often been examined through spoken or written language, revealing how learners negotiate and position themselves within intersecting ideologies, power relations, and identities. However, in the context of multimodal storytelling, multivoicedness must be reimagined

as not only linguistic but also multimodal. Learners' voices are expressed and negotiated through an array of semiotic resources such as visuals, sound, gesture, layout, colour, font, emojis, spatial design, and digital affordances that together co-construct meaning. These modes do not merely support or illustrate verbal expression, they carry their own weight of meaning, and function dialogically with other modes to express layered and often affective forms of voice.

Thus, multivoicedness in a multimodal framework acknowledges that learners mobilise heteroglossic resources across modes, where a particular image, gesture, emoji, or sound may index cultural, social, or emotional meanings from different communities of practice. It also acknowledges that voice is performed and embodied through these various modes, enabling the expression of affect, critique, resistance, and affiliation that may not always be easily verbalised. That the layering and juxtaposition of modes allows for the expression of multiple subjectivities and positions, as learners engage in meaning-making that is fluid, dynamic, and context-responsive. In this extended sense, multivoicedness becomes a powerful tool for exploring how learners draw on and remix diverse discourses which are linguistic and non-linguistic to tell stories, assert agency, and construct identities. It shifts the analytical gaze beyond spoken or written utterances, encouraging researchers and educators to attend to the full multimodal ensemble of meaning making practices. This approach is particularly crucial in digital spaces, where young people communicate richly through combinations of text, visuals, audio, movement, and symbolic design. By extending multivoicedness beyond language, we are better able to capture the complex, embodied, and affective dimensions of learner voice, and to honour the full repertoire of resources learners use to make meaning, challenge norms, and imagine otherwise.

In the two stories analysed in this chapter by groups 1 and 4, multivoicedness manifests through the interplay between individual and collective voices of the group members, as well as through the interactions in the stories between characters and the cultural and social contexts they inhabit. Multivoicedness existed amongst these two groups even though some voices dominated, particularly the group leaders' which is expected during collaborative processes due to different roles taken-up by students, and group dynamics. In the context of storytelling and multimodal discourse, multivoicedness manifested different characters, experiences, and social identities contributing to a broader, more complex understanding of a subject or issue. The concept of multivoicedness is grounded in Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism which refers to the interplay

and coexistence of various perspectives, identities, or discourses within a text or a conversation. the written, audio and performative stories, the multiplicity of individual and collective voices serves to position the audience within the narrative and reflect on the social and cultural dynamics that shape the characters' lives.

Group 1 – Woman in South Africa:

In the opening lines of the story, "She enters the rape capital of the world, thinking she is safe. Why would she? Her shorts too short, her top too tight. She is asking for it." The use of third-person narration reflects a collective voice that embodies widely held social attitudes and prejudices surrounding sexual violence. This form of narration serves to illustrate societal norms and assumptions, drawing upon what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the "heteroglossia" of voices that emerge in dialogue, where multiple perspectives coexist and interact within a single text. The collective voice mirrors commonly held victim-blaming attitudes, framing the incident of rape through a lens that normalises harmful societal judgments.

By engaging with a generalised societal voice, the story invites readers into a broader dialogic space, where the audience is confronted with problematic social beliefs and ideologies. Mendelowitz, Ferreira, and Dixon (2023) describe this as part of storytelling multivoicedness in which multiple voices whether personal, societal, or institutional are orchestrated to create a complex narrative landscape. The dialogic exchanges in this opening passage forge an emotional connection between the audience and the narrative, encouraging readers to reflect critically on the social positions being presented. The rhetorical question, "Why would she?" serves as an invitation for the audience to engage with the text more closely. As Bakhtin (1984) suggests, rhetorical questions in narratives establish a participatory dialogue between the speaker and the listener, or in this case, the narrator and the reader. The rhetorical question forces the audience to consider their own position within this conversation, fostering a deeper engagement with the moral and social dilemmas at play. The use of collective voice in this opening of the story positions the reader as a participant in the dialogue and heightens the emotional intensity of the story, making the societal critique more personal. This multiplicity of voices deepens the reader's understanding of

the complex social dynamics at play, reinforcing the power of storytelling as a vehicle for social critique and reflection (Canagarajah, 2015).

Immediately after this, the social collective voice in the first paragraph is juxtaposed with collective voices of the group members, illustrating shifting voices and reflexivity within the story. “ERROR: this statement is invalid and is not true. Please educate yourself before you jump to such a conclusion.” Through this statement, they challenge widely accepted social norms and storytelling that challenges societal norms and inequalities, illustrates some form of resistance and the group became active participants in allowing their voices to be heard (Rosario-Ramos & Johnson, 2014). By establishing voice, the positionality that the group members take is evident and they reject and resist the claim and shifting blame onto the victim. The use of capital letters creates a sense of urgency, boldness and convey emotions of frustration and anger. This use of short and direct statements used is in first person narrative comes across as a command to the audience, as they assume that the reader is ignorant about issues of rape and silencing.

“So many solutions, but would this even stop them?” This sentence is written in first person narrative and once again, dialogue establishes a conversation with the audience even though it is a rhetorical question. The purpose of the rhetorical question is to emphasize that not even severe punishment can stop rape crimes. The use of the word “them” indicates a distinction that there are two parties involved in a matter of conflict and opposition which is the group of writers who represent the rape victim and the rapists resulting in the discourse of othering which creates distinctions of ‘us and them’. Despite the involvement of two parties, only the writers are given a voice in the story and the rapists are silenced. This is ironic because rape discourse silences victims, but the story becomes a counter narrative due to silencing of the rapists. Taking away the voices of the rapists indicates a shift in power relations as the rapists have physical power in the story, but through voice the writers who represent the victim express resistance as they take back their power (Govender, 2019) by silencing the rapists.

Silencing emerges as a central theme in this story, with distinct references to the woman's experience of being silenced, both in literal and figurative ways. The literal silencing occurs when her mouth is physically covered, symbolising the immediate and violent suppression of her voice and agency. The figurative silencing in the narrative extends beyond the physical act and delves

into the social and emotional realms. The woman is not only silenced by her attacker but also by a society that refuses to hear, believe, or empathise with her experience.

The woman's scream for help goes unheard and "no one comes to help", which symbolises both her literal and figurative silencing. This lack of response indicates her isolation and powerlessness in a society that chooses not to hear her and remains silent despite this violation. The use of the metaphor describing the world as "muted" deepens this sense of silencing, suggesting her inability to speak and the broader societal suppression of her voice, a theme often explored in discussions of gender-based violence (Hooks, 1984). The metaphor of a "muted" world may reflect the suppression of women's voices in the public sphere, where calls for help are frequently ignored or dismissed.

The imagery of her mouth being physically covered and "her pain sliced dead by forced silence" demonstrates a direct violation of her body and physical voice. By literally covering her mouth, the rapists prevent her from screaming and take away her freedom to express her pain. This act of silencing, both physical and metaphorical reinforces the power dynamics of gender-based violence where the victim is rendered voiceless. According to Butler (1997), the suppression of voice is an essential mechanism of control in systems where power relations exist.

In this section on 'multiple voices,' the woman's voice serves as a collective representation of all rape victims who have been silenced by society. The phrase "[A]long with many other victims, alive or dead" reinforces the idea of a shared, lived experience among many women who have suffered from sexual violence, some of whom have died as a result of both the physical violence and the silencing that follows (hooks, 1984). This collective voice underscores the importance of providing rape victims with a platform to tell their stories, free from societal silencing.

The act of storytelling became a critical space where learners, particularly young women in South Africa, could express and negotiate their voices, sharing personal fears and experiences. By reclaiming these silenced voices, the narrative aligns with a social justice agenda, challenging the oppressive structures that suppress the voices of marginalised groups (Butler, 1997). Engaging with multiple voices in this story enables learners to draw on their lived experiences and social realities as valuable resources for learning. This broadens the scope of what knowledge is valued within educational spaces, reflecting Bomer's (2017) assertion that emotion and critical affect can

be harnessed to advocate for social consciousness and uplift communities. The multiple voices in the story foster critical social engagement and mobilise personal and collective feelings into action.

The decision of the group to opt out of the performative mode of storytelling represents a significant limitation in their engagement with voice, particularly given the sensitive subject matter they were addressing. Performative storytelling offers opportunities for expression, allowing individuals to embody and voice experiences in ways that written or spoken words alone may not capture (Stein, 2008). By choosing not to participate in the performative mode, the group missed an opportunity to further amplify their voices and address their lived experiences in nuanced ways that performativity offers.

Victims of sexual assault may experience profound difficulty in vocalizing their experiences, both emotionally and physically. By opting out of performative storytelling activity, the group may have been reacting to the emotional and psychological barriers that often accompany trauma. This reflects the broader issue of how trauma can silence victims, even in spaces designed to facilitate expression and healing. The group's decision to avoid the performative mode may also speak to the limitations of performative storytelling in addressing sensitive topics. Not all individuals may feel comfortable or empowered by the performative mode, particularly when dealing with personal and painful experiences. This highlights a key limitation of performative storytelling in educational contexts. While it can be a powerful tool for some, it may not suit all participants, especially those who feel vulnerable or fear public exposure. Hence, the importance of providing multiple mode options.

Group 4 – Islamophobia and xenophobia:

The use of third-person narrative in the audio story offers writers the ability to engage deeply with the concepts of voice and audience, providing a nuanced platform for exploring perspectives. Writing in the third person creates a degree of separation between the writers and the characters, allowing for critical reflection on the events being portrayed. This distancing effect enables the authors to examine social issues, personal experiences, and ethical lessons with a broader lens, offering space for dialogue and analysis (Bakhtin, 1981). The audio mode narrated in third-person

narrative positions the narrator as an external storyteller who conveys different characters' voices, creating a dialogic space between the characters' perspectives and the narrator's interpretation of events. This dialogic nature generates meaning through contrasting the narrator's objective tone and the unique perspectives of each character, which allows the audience to interpret the story through a layered, multivoiced lens. In contrast, the performative storytelling crafted by this group uses a first-person narrative, immersing the audience in the inner worlds of the characters. The shift from third to first person is significant as it blurs boundaries between the narrator and characters, and it provides a direct channel for the characters' emotions and thoughts, heightening the immediacy and personal connection to the story. By foregrounding character voices through dialogue and interactions, the first-person narrative highlights the characters lived experiences in a way that encourages the audience to empathise and engage more deeply as it shows their inner worlds. through the narrator's internal dialogue and the expressive dynamics of voice, tone, and rhythm, which convey multiple layers of meaning even within a single perspective. This mode creates a powerful sense of immediacy and authenticity, as the audience are more likely to perceive it to be as an expression of personal truth, inviting empathy and deeper emotional engagement. The contrast between these modes of storytelling reflects the dialogic nature of voice, where the interaction between different voices of both the characters and the writers' generates meaning and understanding in distinct ways (Bakhtin, 1984).

Despite these different narrative approaches across the two modes of storytelling, the learners' own voices are explicitly present in the conclusion of the audio story, when they deliver "The message of the story". This moral conclusion acts as reflective commentary which offers a critical perspective on the themes of the narrative. The story challenges the concept of Ubuntu in South Africa and serves as a commentary on society's failures to live up to the values of interconnectedness and mutual care that Ubuntu represents. The individual voices of the group members represent society's dominant voices and narratives which reflects both personal and collective perspectives. Again, this interplay between individual and collective voice demonstrates the concept of multivoicedness, where multiple layers of voice are interwoven throughout the stories (Mendelowitz et al., 2022). In this collaborative storytelling process, learners bring their diverse histories, identities, and social experiences into the narrative, contributing to the complexity and richness of the story's voices (Canagarajah, 2015). The multiple voices within the

story reflect the characters and their experiences, and it is an embodiment of the learners' own negotiation of identity, society, and moral values (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

This story across both modes includes multivoicedness through dialogue between the characters during interactions with each and expressions of social voices. The versatility of voices provides a deeper understanding of the characters and supports their motivations within the story. The dialogue creates distinct voices and provides particular identities which give clues to the audience and provide insights into the characters identity, sense of self and their positionality. For example, the taxi driver says “Yebo buti”, “Mara where?” and “eintlik” in the written story and “Hai wena, foetsek” in the performative story. This reveals the character’s personality, and his expressions in the situation provide insights into his identity and inner thoughts, helping the audience create meaning and make a judgement on him. His direct words and tone of voice often intensify the conflict through expression of his inner thoughts and internal conflict that he verbalises which advances the plot. Drawing on their multilingual repertoires, the group represents distinct voices and use language to reinforce themes of difference and discrimination, particularly because of the language difference between Osama and the taxi driver whose tone of voice is dismissive, aggressive and develops into vulgar verbal expressions when he says “Hai wena, foetsek”. Here, language is used to as a weapon to discriminate and position Osama as a foreigner.

Dialogue reveals that the taxi driver is South African and suggests that he lives in a township due to his multilingual repertoire and use of language which includes Tsotsitaal. “Tsotsitaal is a township variety of street speech that draws on urban vernaculars from African languages and Afrikaans. It is associated with the expression of youth identities, particularly among young males” (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022, 3). Tsotsitaal is commonly spoken in South African townships, especially in areas like Johannesburg. It originated in the mid-20th century with the purpose of creating a unique, coded language distinct from mainstream society. This language reflects a sense of identity, solidarity, and resistance often linked to urban youth culture and expressions of defiance against conventional authority (Hurst, 2009). Through this dialogue and inclusion of Tsotsitaal, the audience can also gage aspects of the characters personality and motivation. These dialogic cues are supported by the actions of the characters which work together to create meaning. The dialogue between Osama and the taxi driver created a layered experience for the audience. On one hand, the audience acted as spectators, observing the narrative as it

developed. However, the interaction between these characters also invited the audience to go beyond passive observation. It encouraged them to engage affectively, meaning they were drawn to empathise with or emotionally connect to the characters' experiences. This dual role of reading/watching and feeling creates a more immersive experience, allowing the audience to relate personally to the characters, which can deepen their understanding of the story and its themes.

There is a strong link between voice and audience, as voice exists both within the text and at the point of reception which shapes how the audience interprets the story (Thessen, 2014). In audio and performative storytelling, literal voice becomes a significant element due to the oral nature of these genres. By incorporating a range of accents, the group used stereotypical Arab and African accents to give the characters distinct voices, revealing multiple layers of their identities. These literal voices offered deeper insight into the characters, as the accents served to construct a particular social and cultural identity for each character in the stories.

The use of literal voice included attention to tone, accent, and pace/pitch which allowed the group to play with multivoicedness, exploring the characters' outer personas and their inner worlds. For example, the adoption of particular accents functioned as a tool to construct identity and position the audience to interpret the story in specific, intended ways (Bakhtin, 1981). For example, Osama’s struggle with expressing himself in standard English and his Arab accent revealed his status as a foreigner. The voice and accent choices provided semiotic clues that helped convey underlying emotions, power dynamics, and social positions, inviting the audience to engage with the story on multiple levels. While there are literal aspects of identity associated with accent, it was also a form of linguistic play within the audio story.

Meaning in storytelling is often constructed through a range of semiotic resources, and voice serves as a powerful tool in shaping character identity and audience engagement. The interplay between voice and accent added depth to the narrative, creating a more layered interpretation of the characters' motivations and social backgrounds. Accents and voices create a panoramic view of storytelling. They function as semiotic resources that go beyond mere dialogue as they convey underlying social dynamics, power relations, and individual histories, inviting the audience to engage critically with the story on multiple levels.

The affordances of voice in audio and performative stories play a crucial role in shaping meaning. In the audio mode, vocal tone, pauses, and emphasis add depth to the storytelling, allowing listeners to hear the fear, anger, or resilience in Osama's experience, making the narrative more immersive and emotionally charged. In the performative mode, voice is further amplified through embodied expression, where gestures, facial expressions, and movement reinforce the emotional weight of the story. This mode also enables multilingualism and accents to emerge naturally, adding authenticity to Osama's character and highlights how language and voice are integral to identity and in this case, exploration of discrimination experienced by Osama. Unlike written stories which relies on description, audio and performative storytelling foreground the explicitness and urgency of Osama's experiences, making the injustices of xenophobia and Islamophobia more immediate and impactful for the audience.

iii. Social consciousness and critical affective moves

In their work, Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) emphasise the significant role of affect and imagination in critical literacy, arguing for the necessity of situating student work within this transformative space. Achieving social consciousness and moving towards affective social action is an indication of transformative pedagogy that involves criticality. In this multimodal storytelling intervention, the learners navigated different storytelling modes to craft narratives that engaged them in re-reading and re-designing texts through transduction, or the movement of meaning across modes (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). This approach to storytelling facilitated a cross-pollination process, expanding the learners' ability to critically "*read the world*" (Janks, 2014; Mendelowitz & Govender, 2024). However, *"[e]motion is the fuel that drives the engine of criticality, igniting the fire of inquiry and propelling us to question, challenge, and seek deeper understanding"* (Elder, 2007), and therefore emotion and affect plays a crucial role in storytelling with a social justice agenda. In this way, the critical affect and emotion embedded in the stories that the learners crafted is a vehicle for achieving social consciousness and action, serving as both a form of resistance and a source of empowerment for students.

Group 1 – Woman in South Africa:

Group one's storytelling approach aligns with Sara Ahmed's (2004; 2014) concept of shared solidarity (Anwaruddin, 2016; Liu & Shange, 2018), as they construct a narrative that resists dominant discourses on sexual violence and unites women through a collective affective experience. By choosing not to name the main character, and referring to her as the "woman," they invoke a universal symbol that transcends individual identity, allowing her to embody the lived experiences of all women impacted by sexual violence (Focus group discussion, 2022). This decision creates a powerful affective link among women, fostering a sense of shared vulnerability and solidarity that Ahmed (2004) describes as crucial for collective consciousness. Ahmed's notion of solidarity as an emotional and political space resonates here, as the group's narrative invites women to connect through both shared pain and resistance, acknowledging their collective presence within a larger social context. By omitting specific identifiers and focusing on universal aspects, the narrative becomes an inclusive space of empathy and collective strength, enabling an affective alignment that Ahmed sees as essential for mobilising social awareness and action.

Through their collective voices, they enact a form of empowerment by resisting the silencing of victims and reclaiming their power by narrating their experiences. This act of storytelling becomes a space where they assert their voices on an issue that affects them directly. The story opens with a quotation that challenges the perception of safety for women in South Africa: "thinking she is safe" suggests that the character's sense of safety is misplaced, reflecting broader societal critiques. The following line, "Her shorts too short, her top too tight. She is asking for it," invokes the discourse of victim-blaming, where a woman's attire is used to justify the act of rape. Here, the group illustrates a critical awareness of how power operates within society, often shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim, an unjust and harmful practice that frequently discourages victims from reporting sexual assaults.

The group further explores their critical perspective with the line, "Castration, cutting off his penis, slicing off the fingers of the assaulters and lynch the mockers. So many solutions." These suggestions reflect drastic and violent emotions, underpinned by their subjective position of anger towards rapists. Canagarajah (2015) argues that voice is shaped by subjectivity, which is evident in the group's affective and emotional responses as they conceptualise severe punishment for

rapists. The emotional intensity seen here is aligned with the idea that affect and emotion operate as social practices where shared anger becomes a driving force for action (Boler, 1999; Ahmed, 2014). In this instance, the group's emotional mobilisation aligns with Lewis and Tierney's (2013) argument that emotion itself can act as a form of social action. However, the group's critical reflection does not end with violent suggestions as they show self-awareness and a deeper consciousness by questioning the effectiveness of their proposed solutions: "but would this even stop them?" This reflective moment reveals their capacity for criticality and reimagining possibilities, where they confront the limitations of emotional reactions as a tool for enacting real social change. Emotion becomes a cognitive and affective process that engages with imaginative possibilities, allowing the students to critique the social realities surrounding rape and victimhood while advocating for the empowerment of marginalised groups (Bomer, 2017).

The violent solutions they propose function as a form of counter-storytelling which is a significant move towards establishing the beginnings of social action, whether passive or active (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022; Mendelowitz & Govender, 2024). Counter-stories are a powerful means of resistance, allowing one to challenge dominant narratives related to marginalised groups and assert their own voices despite oppressive power structures. The group resists societal norms that silence rape victims by proposing solutions to eliminate the rape epidemic, and although extreme, this demonstrates an attempt to speak back to power and challenge social representations through their emotions and collective voice (Govender, 2019). The group's critical consciousness extends to recognising the desires and actions of rapists, leading them to ultimately critique their own suggestions as they acknowledge "This would not stop them."

The writers capture the progressive violation of the woman through a series of disturbing sensory descriptions: "the uncomfortable feeling of their eyes on her," "grabbed her and she is moving through the dark to somewhere unknown," and "grabbed her clothing and suddenly she is naked." These details trace the escalation of the crime which begins with an objectifying gaze and progresses into a violent physical assault. The rapists' gaze has predatory intent which makes the woman uncomfortable and suggests her resistance to being reduced to a sexual object. Her body is exposed to fulfil what their gaze had already imagined, deepening her humiliation as she becomes "bare and humiliated." This explicit imbalance of power between the rapists and the

woman highlights the gendered dynamics of sexual violence where the men asserting their dominance.

The vividness of the descriptions during the rape scene conveys the learner's perspective and anger towards the injustice, evoking the audience's empathy. The learners explore the psychological aftermath of the rape, depicting the victim's trauma and loss of identity. "Her self-love and cleanliness dances away, never to be seen again" is a metaphorical expression of the woman's loss of self-worth and purity, highlighting the lasting psychological effects of rape. While the choice of words is unusual, it illustrates the deep impact on the victim's sense of self which reflects the low self-esteem and feelings of contamination that often follow sexual assault. By sharing the inner world of the victim, the learners invite the audience to connect with her vulnerability and feel empathy towards her due to her loss of hope and agency. As Boler (1999) argues, emotion is "socially and collaboratively constructed" (p. xxi), and here the text fosters a collective emotional response by drawing readers into the traumatic experience. Their reflection of the rape incident and aftermath engages with the criticality of social reality, as the students challenge and critique the silencing and dehumanizing consequences of sexual violence.

The detailed and unsettling portrayal of the rape scene mobilises emotions through the use of language. Lewis and Tierney (2013) note that "*language is used to mobilize emotion*" (p. 289), and this narrative does this effectively in the written mode by showing how the assault emotionally and physically mutilates the woman through vivid descriptive uses of language that evoke affective responses. Language use in the written mode evokes affect and emotion through carefully chosen words, imagery, and narrative techniques that immerse the reader in a character's experiences, allowing them to feel fear and sorrow. Descriptive language, figurative devices like metaphors, symbolism, and voice create emotional depth, enabling readers to connect with the story on a personal level despite the absence of vocal or visual cues. The learners engage with affect as a social practice (Boler, 1999), linking their emotions to lived realities of their past, present and future. By portraying the woman's emotional and physical injuries, the narrative creates a shared affective experience between the writers and the audience, making the violence tangible and generating collective outrage.

Emotion enables one to explore the revealed "space" between ideology and internalised feeling (Boler, 1999, p.13). Lewis and Tierney (2013) regard emotion as action to change the world and this story embodies the internalised emotions of the writers and the main character which is mobilised as social action against the rapists by taking back their power and voice by telling this story. There is a reflection on lived experiences and reimagining possibilities as they make suggestions that "We need to protect our women; the bearers of our future; the holders the holders of the seed to the sprouts of life." Emotion as action was the driving force of this story, and it enabled a space for writing about realities and engaging with identities which facilitated critical, affective and imaginative engagement to critique social realities and advance disadvantaged groups (Bomer, 2017), particularly rape victims who have been silenced.

Sara Ahmed's (2014) work focuses on emotions, power and ideology that involve reactions of "towardness" or "awayness" (8). The group of students deal with emotion and power directly by engaging with the concept of "towardness" as they use this story as social action which extends to finding solutions to eliminate rape and these are violent and aggressive solutions indicate the student's positionality and anger towards rapists – "Castration, cutting off his penis, slicing off the fingers of the assaulters and lynch the mockers." Lewis and Tierney's (2013) idea that emotion is action suggests that intense emotions, such as anger or outrage, can lead individuals to imagine forms of direct action as a response to injustice. The group's story, which involves violent retribution against rapists describes graphic punishment of castration, and mutilation which reflects a strong emotional reaction to the trauma and anger associated with rape. This mobilisation of emotion into action indicates that emotions are not passive experiences, but rather, they are catalysts for social action even if it is imagined or symbolic. The violent acts proposed in the story are extreme, but it serves as an emotional responses that allows the learners to assert control and confront the systemic issues surrounding rape and the societal silencing of victims. This social action does not extend to practice as they reflect on the effectiveness of their suggested solutions and ask, "but would this even stop them?" Here, we see reflection as a form of consciousness, criticality and reimagining possibilities. Emotion as action was the driving force of this story, and it enabled a space for writing about realities and engaging with identities which facilitated intellectual/cognitive, affective and imaginative engagement to critique social realities and advance disadvantaged groups (Bomer, 2017). However, writing the story from the perspective of

a third person narrative and sharing the experience of "the woman" creates an emotional safety as it offers some measure of distance. This is an affordance of fictional writing, where characters can be set up as proxies for the writers perspective and audience.

The men in the story lack individual description, which strips them of their identities almost in a way that makes who they are insignificant. This is a counter narrative (Butler, 1990; Ahmed, 2004) stripping them of their identities since they altered the woman's identity negatively by taking away a part of who she is through their actions. In response, the group removes their identities by not giving them names, facial characteristics or emotional description, using them as symbols to represent any man. It creates a generalisation that these men could refer to anyone and that rape is part of the nature of a male. The hands of the men are described as being "coarse" implying that they are rough possibly because they do manual labour for work, or they do not take care of their physical appearance which has implications that the rapists have a low social standing. She feels their hands because they physically touch her body to take off her clothes. Their identities are limited to only describing their hands as it was part of her assault and giving the rapists no identity through naming or other physical features is a form of retaliation and speaking back to power (Govender, 2019). The woman's pain and loss become a part of her identity, and it is juxtaposed with the rapists' physical violence and domination which creates contrasting character identities, experience and emotions as a powerful tool to position the audience.

The conclusion contains the key message of the story "Her voice is not heard and along with many other victims, alive or dead. Change needs to happen." In relation to rape discourse, there is evidence of 'towardness' (Ahmed, 2014) meaning that the group explicitly engages with the theme of silencing by showing awareness and criticality about the reality that rape victims face, and directly stating that some victims are killed as a result of rape crime. Juxtaposing the two outcomes "alive or dead" is powerful and it evokes seriousness of the matter as the outcome of rape crime is not shied away from and the writers demand that "Change needs to happen." This statement is explicit, and the group expresses powerful notions of voice and positionality, creating 'critical affective solidarity' (Liu & Shange, 2018) with rape victims, indicating their support and advocating to address this social issue.

Throughout the story, there is both "towardness" and "awayness" which is illustrated through resistance and empowerment. The group of learners' deal with emotion and power directly by engaging with the concept of "towardness" as they use this story as social action which extends to trying to find solutions to eliminate rape and these are violent and aggressive which indicate the student's positionality and anger towards rapists. In addition to examples of "awayness" in the story, the group opted out of the activity and chose not to transduce their written story into the performative mode. Their choice to do so and discussion in the field and during the focus group (2022) illustrated resistance to engage with performative storytelling as it required some of the group members to re-live the experience in practice because of not feeling safe to share their experience with a wider audience. This shows complexity of working with lived experiences as students negotiate critical affective moves across different modes. Cross-pollination to the performative mode resulted in limitations to engage with critical social consciousness in the form of action, however, the opportunity to engage critically through storytelling in the written mode was successful. Thus, the performative mode threatened the learner's safety and expression of voice to tell their story across modes, highlighting that "*no text is neutral, and that texts are themselves discursive instantiations of power, identity, and ideology*" (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024, 2).

Group 4 – Islamophobia and xenophobia:

This group demonstrates a profound level of critical social awareness by creatively representing social issues that resonate with them and engaging with themes of resistance and empowerment through their storytelling. By leveraging dialogue, character voice, and narrative structure, they invoke affective responses from their audience, effectively communicating the struggles and discrimination that Osama, the protagonist faces. This emotional engagement reflects Boler's (1999) assertion that emotion is a social practice, where feelings are mobilised and transmitted through stories which promotes a collective emotional response from the audience.

The group uses their story to question whether Ubuntu truly exists in practice or if it remains an aspirational concept, especially in the face of xenophobia and social exclusion. As Canagarajah (2015) notes, narrative voice and subjectivity are powerful tools for articulating resistance, and

here, the group uses voice not only to depict Osama's struggle but also to critique the failure of Ubuntu to accommodate marginalised identities. By questioning dominant social ideologies and representations, the group engages in what Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) describe as "critical affective moves," where emotion and critique are intertwined to foster a deeper social consciousness. Their story is thus not just a narrative of individual struggle but a broader commentary on social justice, advocating for a more inclusive and empathetic society. The group's use of dialogue and voice in both the audio and performative stories plays a crucial role in making these critical social moves. By allowing the characters to articulate their frustrations and challenges, the group foregrounds the experiences of discrimination that individuals like Osama face, while also positioning the audience to reflect on these experiences.

The naming of Osama, the only character with a specific name serves the purpose of constructing his identity and situating him within larger narratives of xenophobia and Islamophobia. By choosing a name that is widely associated with Osama Bin Laden, the group consciously invokes stereotypes tied to terrorism which positions the character's "foreignness" and religious identity as central to the social tensions in the narrative. This choice reflects a critical awareness of how names and identities can be weaponised in public discourse, and how these associations are used to reinforce systems of discrimination (Fairclough, 1989).

The reference to "الله أكبر (Allahu Akbar), I will bomb you up," which Osama utters in the audio story is symbolic. The phrase "Allahu Akbar" translates to "Allah is the greatest", but this is often used in Western media and discourse to represent terrorism, particularly in connection with extremist groups. By including this line, the students critically engage with how language and religious expressions, particularly those of Muslims, have been distorted and linked to violence. As Hochschild (1979) points out, language is imbued with emotion and significance, and Osama's use of this phrase functions as a tool of resistance against discrimination as he uses this phrase to empower himself in the situation. It becomes a verbal weapon, as he employs it as a scare tactic to challenge the power imbalance between himself and the taxi driver.

The group's decision to have Osama threaten the driver with verbal violence in the performative story reveals the complexity of using stereotypes as a form of resistance. Osama's response highlights that discrimination is not only external but also internalised, as he unconsciously accepts

the identity ascribed to him by society. While Osama's threat temporarily grants him a sense of power in the interaction, it simultaneously reinforces the stereotypes he wants to resist. By deliberately acting in line with the expectations society has imposed on him such as the association of Arabs and Muslims with terrorism, Osama reaffirms the narrative that foreigners are troublesome and dangerous which imposed by dominant power structures. This act of verbal resistance serves two purposes by offering temporary relief from the immediate threat of the taxi driver's dominance, and it also strengthens the social ideologies that frame him as problematic and defiant. This illustrates what Canagarajah (2015) describes as the complexity of navigating identity in contexts where social ideologies and power relations are deeply embedded.

In this instance, the group's storytelling moves beyond a mere portrayal of discrimination, engaging with the critical social awareness of how identities are constructed, contested, and sometimes internalised. As Janks (2010) asserts, critical literacy involves exposing and interrogating the hidden ideologies embedded in texts and social interactions. Here, the group reflects on how Osama's identity as an Arab and Muslim intersects with power dynamics, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of how marginalised individuals navigate oppressive systems.

Osama arrives at O.R International Airport which is a significant representation of South Africa's history and culture. The airport is named after anti-apartheid activist, Oliver Reginald Tambo who played a significant role in the apartheid struggle and stood for equality, justice and freedom as part of the liberation movement. The airport choice and name suggest that South Africa is a country that represents those qualities and is a united and equitable society. However, in the stories Osama experiences challenges "because of his foreignness" which contradict these values. Osama is represented and referred to as a foreigner within the story due to his ethnicity. The term foreigner and the concept of foreignness signals a sense of not belonging and ethnic discrimination. In contemporary South Africa, xenophobia is a pressing issue experienced mostly by black working-class citizens who regard foreigners as a threat to their economic opportunities. In the story, Osama is a victim of xenophobia particularly due to his identity as a Muslim Arab and he is perceived as a threat to the locals due to economic competition as he comes to South Africa to work on "a new industrial project". His identity and foreignness emphasise economic and socio-cultural difference with the aim to other nations who do not fit social norms (Trupp, 2011).

"*We engage in practices of looking to make sense of the world*" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Foreigners from the Global North are often welcomed due to associations of economic and cultural powers attached to their identities, but those outside the Global North are often not welcome as they are perceived as those who seek the same opportunities as the locals. Osama's "foreignness" is visually illustrated in the performative story as his role is portrayed by Hassan who has foreign roots which are masked by an Indian racial identity that he adopts. Meanwhile, the character of the airport employee is played by a Black African female learner, and the taxi driver by a Black African male. Local South African characters were represented by black learners to illustrate belonging and associate racial 'blackness' with South Africa and their identities were represented in a stereotypical way, for example the taxi driver was a black male who played local music loudly. This indirectly associates the driver with behaviours and identities that are associated with the taxi driver profession. Butler (1990) explains that identities are performative which are constructed through repeated actions and discourses rather than inherent characteristics. In this case, identities are performed through characteristics and also through actions and discourse.

In addition to race, they embedded stereotypical behaviours into character traits to make the characters recognisable and get the intended message and representations across. Despite another Indian female student being available to take on any of these roles, these casting choices highlight specific dynamics of racial and cultural identity as they relate to xenophobia. By visually representing the racial differences amongst the characters, the group invites the audience to engage in "practices of looking to make sense of the world" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). This act of looking and interpreting emphasises how visual representations shape perceptions of foreignness and belonging, enabling the audience to recognise and question social biases within the South African context. Through these character identities and interactions, the story amplifies the layered experience of xenophobia, using visual cues to construct a narrative that compels the audience to critically examine how foreignness and cultural identity are perceived and treated. As the learners and characters navigate the complexities of identity and culture, their unique voices and some of their prejudices emerge as powerful reflections of their experiences, beliefs, and values.

Osama experiences multiple accounts of discrimination from various characters who are South African, and this shows critical assessment of the behaviour of the South African society and their attitudes towards foreigners. In the audio story, he "gets dirty looks from everyone" which is a

metaphor to illustrate the unpleasant nature of the way people look at him. The customs lady "calls one of her colleagues to deal with the young man", the word deal has connotations of trying to solve something difficult, thus, implying that Osama is a difficult or problematic person. The taxi driver tells him "Buy your own car go, go to your own hotel." The repetition of the word 'own' amplifies that Osama does not belong and the taxi driver takes ownership of the car and hotel even though it may not be his possessions. This illustrates discrimination as a result of the South African society resisting and rejecting Osama's foreign identity and entry into the country. Thus, critical storytelling based on a reflection of society is used as a social education tool to engage with affect and resistance (Boler, 1999).

Discrimination is more explicit and conveyed through semiotic clues in the performative story. Reflecting on their social realities and crafting counter-stories prompted the learners to question realities by interrogating representations of texts, particularly culture, ethnicity, religion and equity (Comber & Nixon, 2014). Without relying on words, discrimination is seen in the facial and body cues of other characters such as the woman at the airport who moves away when Osama sits next to her, the airport employee looks at him disapprovingly, and Osama says "People are giving me shit." Progression of the discrimination that Osama experiences is seen in the performative story when the airport staff "takes a quick glance at Osama's passport and says "umm, ha uh, hello. Please go back to your country". The interaction and dialogue reveal that Osama does not have a sense of belonging in South Africa due to his identity of being regarded as a foreigner. The quick glance indicates that the employee already made a socially produced judgement about Osama and she acts on it by discriminating against him because of his identity or possibly his ethnicity. This indicates negative resistance by her as she rejects Osama's presence in the country, and she takes on a position of power and attempts to restrict his entry into the country. The shift across modes from the audio to the performative story amplifies the discriminatory acts in a progressive way that 'shows' the audience how discrimination is embodied, and this creates stronger notions of affect. In this story, embodiment is an act of empowerment that has a direct effect on the audience by 'showing' them Osama's lived experience and interactions with the characters.

South Africa has a past of discrimination and claims to redress this, but the students bring awareness that this is not the reality. In the audio story, they explicitly point out that Osama faces discrimination, "Osama is being discriminated against for the third time", and "everyone

discriminated against him because of his foreignness or him being different". In the performative story, referring to this different is not explicitly told, but rather, it is shown. The group engages with discrimination in their story and critically challenges the lack of Ubuntu by interrogating and illustrating the realities that foreigners experience in South Africa, which they conclude that "there is no Ubuntu left in the communities of South Africa." Challenging South African culture and the notion of Ubuntu is empowering for foreigners and gives voices to marginalised groups and those who face social injustices with regards to ethnicity and identity by exposing dominant ideologies. By critiquing dominant cultures and oppressive systems, stories have the potential to create empathy, foster critical thinking, and mobilise collective action against injustice (Solnit, 2004). The group critically interrogates issues of discrimination, and it became a means of social action. The story aimed to create an inclusive, just, and empathetic society that represents minority, marginalised and oppressed groups by resisting discrimination, xenophobia, and Islamophobia in South Africa (Paris and Alim, 2014, 2017; Bomer, 2017).

I conceptualise critical social affect as an active engagement in "*thinking deeply about how one is implicated systematically in the suffering of others and how one can bring about change, even in a small way*" (Mendelowitz & Govender, 2024, p. 3). When analysing the stories crafted by the two groups, I focused on how they engaged with affect, inquiry, and critique to create a heightened social consciousness that culminated in social action. To be critical, as Janks (2010) explains means revealing "*the hidden ideologies of texts… to show how power operates and to denaturalize 'common sense' assumptions*" (p. 35-36). My analysis explored the entanglement of criticality, imagination, and affect (Mendelowitz & Govender, 2024), particularly examining how these concepts engage with the themes of resistance and empowerment, moving along a spectrum from hopelessness to hopefulness, and considering their impact on both the texts and their audience.

Affect and emotion were central driving forces in the stories, shaping the ways they were told. Affect manifested in the design tasks across both groups which created personal and emotional responses (Warner, 2024). Nussbaum (2001) speaks about emotions, and emphasises that it may be unreliable, but she notes the interplay between emotions and reason saying that "*without emotional development, a part of our reasoning capacity as political creatures will be missing*" (3). Social consciousness in storytelling can result in passive or active forms of social engagement, reflecting either resistance or empowerment for the writers, characters, and audience. Boler (1999)

argues that emotions can act as a source of resistance or as a catalyst for social action and empowerment. The stories that were produced by groups 1 and 4 in this study were an "*emotionally-charged space of engagement*" (Gachago et al., 2014, 9) where each group either showed control or resistance by either shying away from addressing the topic or actively engaging through action. Resistance can manifest as a deflection from expression, affect, or engagement, particularly through "awayness," such as group 1 where students resist engaging with difficult topics or texts (Ahmed, 2014). On the other hand, resistance can also involve challenging dominant ideologies which was done by group 4, pushing back against entrenched power relations and representations.

Both resistance and social consciousness/action are significant in the context of youth literacies. In this context, social consciousness/action requires students to critique prevailing ideals and social representations. Providing students with opportunities to write back to power, to critique and creatively redesign texts, fosters "*a social conscience served by a critical imagination for redesign*" (Janks, 2010, p. 350; Govender, 2019). This may involve producing counter-narratives or giving voice to silenced, marginalised, and minority groups, advocating for and empowering these communities by representing their struggles and identities. Both groups resist socially accepted perspectives by challenging the silencing of rape victims and confronting discrimination. Through their stories, they seek to empower marginalised groups by shedding light on the challenges their characters face, giving voice to those who have had similar experiences. Both stories function as a form of social action, aiming to uplift disadvantaged groups and contribute to broader societal change (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Bomer, 2017).

Chapter 5 – Key findings and reflections

This chapter consisted of two parts and focuses on the research question: *How do learners represent and mobilise their diverse resources and repertoires across different modes of storytelling, and how does this impact their learning?* Part 1 presented Instagram stories that were individually produced by the group leaders of group 1 and group 4, and part 2 focused on analysing the collaborative multimodal stories crafted by their two groups. Group 1focused on themes of rape, silencing and victimhood, and group 4 focused on themes of discrimination, particularly xenophobia and Islamophobia. The identity construction of the two group leaders across the different modes of storytelling was striking and distinct. The group leaders Instagram stories were analysed and interpreted in relation to their group's collaborative written/audio and performative stories to trace links of representations, pluralistic identities and discourse between the different modes of storytelling. The discussion included the following categories of analysis:

i. *Visual social media narratives to engage with identities*
ii. *The role of language and discourse in Instagram text production*
iii. *Multivoicedness*
iv. *Social consciousness and critical affective moves*

Through their Instagram posts, both group leaders engaged in creative representations of complex social issues while affirming their individual identities. Group 1's stark and direct language, exemplified by phrases such as, "Her shorts too short, her top too tight. She is asking for it," mirrored the visual representation in Quwa's Instagram post, which depicted the lower half of a female body in a short skirt, emphasizing the discourse of victim-blaming. Hassan from Group 4, whose heritage spans Emirati and Saudi Arabian origins but who resides in South Africa, illustrated an aeroplane in his Instagram post, subtly aligning with his group's story about a foreign worker facing discrimination.

At first glance, the Instagram posts appeared vague, yet when analysed alongside the collaborative multimodal stories, they revealed deeper personal and societal narratives. The multimodal storytelling approach allowed learners to revisit similar themes across different modes over time,

demonstrating how their identities and lived experiences shaped their storytelling. Examining all modes simultaneously exposed common thematic threads, even though Instagram posts were produced individually while the other narratives emerged from collaborative efforts.

Each storytelling mode offered distinct affordances in shaping identity and critique. Instagram posts, with their combination of visual symbols, captions, and engagement features, provided a performative space where learners could curate their identities and engage indirectly with social issues. The written collaborative stories, in contrast, enabled detailed narrative structuring and explicit linguistic articulation of identity and conflict. Through written text, learners could craft detailed character arcs, employ figurative language, and embed critical discourse more explicitly. Audio storytelling, particularly in the case of Osama's story, harnessed the affordance of voice, intonation, and pauses to add emotional depth and nuance, intensifying the affective resonance of discrimination and exclusion. Performative storytelling, in turn, mobilised embodiment and physical expression, offering an immersive and visceral mode of engagement that reinforced themes through gesture, movement, and tone.

The imagined audience played a crucial role in shaping self-representation, particularly in Quwa's case, where she curated different identities across two separate Instagram accounts - one public and one private. Both group leaders engaged with Instagram discourse through their creative use of usernames, engagement metrics, and audience interactions, imagining a sense of belonging and acceptance within these digital spaces. The shift from the individually curated Instagram narratives to the collectively constructed multimodal stories highlighted the fluidity of identity negotiation and the role of audience expectations in shaping expression.

Multivoicedness was integral to the storytelling process. Group 1's story wove together multiple perspectives, incorporating societal voices and attitudes toward rape, juxtaposing the survivor's experience with those of bystanders and perpetrators to expose power dynamics and social injustice. Similarly, Group 4 used dialogue between Osama and a taxi driver to reveal layers of discrimination and resistance, critiquing stereotypes and illustrating how storytelling can surface complex social realities. The use of multiple perspectives in audio and performative modes further accentuated this aspect, as different voices, tones, and expressions brought layers of meaning to the narratives.

Both groups demonstrated critical social consciousness and affective engagement in their storytelling by challenging dominant ideologies and advocating for marginalised voices. Using a written mode of storytelling, group 1 resisted silencing by constructing a counter-narrative against rape culture, evoking empathy and outrage through an emotionally charged portrayal of victim-blaming and survival. Using audio and performative modes, group 4 employed Osama's identity as a Muslim foreigner to challenge Islamophobia and xenophobia, provoking reflections on the limitations of Ubuntu in South African society. However, it was in the performative mode of storytelling where the learners critiqued systemic discrimination and highlighted the power of stories in fostering critical engagement, social critique, and empowerment.

Ultimately, this chapter illustrated how different modes of storytelling afford unique yet interrelated ways of constructing identity, engaging audiences, and critiquing social realities. Instagram posts, with their performative and visually coded nature, provided a curated yet indirect form of self-representation that was linguistically limiting and unclear on its owm, while collaborative written, audio, and performative stories allowed for deeper exploration of collective identities and societal critiques. The multimodal storytelling approach enabled learners to engage with identity, discourse, and social consciousness in layered and meaningful ways, demonstrating the pedagogical potential of multimodal narratives in fostering critical engagement and agency.

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Chapter 6:

MULTIMODAL CROSS-POLLINATION

CHAPTER 6: MULTIMODAL CROSS-POLLINATION OF STORIES

In their seminal work, Jewitt et al. (2001) assert that all communication is inherently multimodal, involving a variety of modes and systems to construct meaning. As societal needs and modes of communication evolve, so too must the literacy and communication practices within language classrooms. These practices need to be inclusive of contemporary literacy and language practices, which are predominantly multimodal and represented across different modes and spaces. This chapter delves into the multimodal shifts observed as six groups collaboratively crafted their stories across different modes. Storytelling across modes represented histories, identities, and aspects of societies through multimodal, multisensory, and semiotic modes of communication that were transduced and transformed across different contexts.

I engaged with multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) as a practice involving a series of multimodal storytelling text production activities. The first activity involved individually crafting an Instagram post, which was a narrative demonstrating personal identities discussed in the previous chapter. The second activity required learners to form small groups and collaboratively craft a written or audio story about issues in the world. The third activity required learners to collaboratively cross-pollinate their written/audio stories into the performative mode. This chapter will focus on the shifts made across the range of all six groups during cross-pollination of multimodal stories from the written/audio mode to the performative modes. In these text production activities, each mode of storytelling yielded distinct affordances and limitations.

I will begin the chapter by presenting by discussing the shifts across different modes of storytelling, which will be followed by discussions of the data in relation to multimodality, transduction and cross-pollination. The chapter aims to address the research question: *To what extent do the stories that learners craft illustrate the transformative affordances and limitations of multimodal cross-pollination?* By examining the shifts in stories told across modes, the chapter seeks to highlight the dynamic interplay between different modes of communication through storytelling and its impact on English language learning.

i. Storytelling across modes

This section will provide a discussion of the shifts in collaborative storytelling across modes which were made by each group.

Group 1 – Woman in South Africa

The group made attempts to transduce their written story into a TikTok video which focused on the theme of silencing. Their struggle to embody and cross-pollinate the content of their written story to the performative mode was evident as they engaged in discussion for a long time, verbally planning their performance to ensure that it will not be triggering discomfort for themselves or the audience. Their discomfort and hesitation were not an issue when crafting the written story, as this mode allowed the learners to vividly narrate a difficult theme, such as a rape scene without confronting the immediate vulnerability of a live audience. The distance afforded by the written mode created a safe space where the learners could critically explore and articulate the story without directly embodying its emotional intensity. The learners' deep engagement with the written mode highlights their emotional and cognitive investment in the storytelling process. According to Darvin and Norton (2015), investment involves not just learners' effort to craft the story, but also their identity and emotional alignment with the task. Krashen (1982) states that affective variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety can significantly influence the efficiency of language acquisition and expression. This is evident in the stories by group 1, as a story that was successfully crafted in the written mode, resulted in the inability to be cross-pollinated into the performative mode.

The shift to the performative mode introduced affective obstacles that significantly altered the learners' ability to engage with the task. The embodiment of the story, where learners had to physically enact scenes removed the protective layer offered by the written mode. As Ahmed (2014) argues, affect is relational, and the performative mode placed the learners in direct relation with their audience and the emotions embedded in their story. This shift from having a distance from the audience towards an embodied performance heightened their vulnerability and discomfort. Their hesitation and prolonged discussions before opting out of the performance

activity indicate an affective struggle which had links to the physical and emotional nature of the performative mode. Unlike writing, performance requires an affective alignment with the audience, as well as a heightened awareness of the impact of one's actions on themselves and on others. The group's concern about triggering discomfort in themselves and their audience suggests that they were navigating affective economies (Ahmed, 2014) in which emotions like discomfort and anxiety were barriers between them, the story, and the imagined audience.

The tension between the group's high investment in the task and their emotional struggle in the performative mode illustrates how affect shapes investment differently across modes. This incident highlights the interplay between modes of storytelling, affect, and embodiment, illustrating how the mode chosen for storytelling impacts the storyteller's investment, emotional engagement and sense of agency. Both modes involved forms of risk and reliving the experience, but the written mode created a space to write about a traumatic event and express pent-up anger which was cathartic and empowering for the participants due to writing about emotions and events in a contained manner of expressing their voices, with a small group of peers as the audience. The performative mode demanded physical embodiment and interaction with an audience which amplified the group's emotional vulnerability and forced them to confront deeply personal traumas in a public and visceral way. Storytelling across the different modes in this story highlight the unique affordances and constraints of each mode where the written mode offered safety and a reflective space which shows that emotion can be a powerful resource, while the performance necessitates an emotional and physical presence that resulted in emotional and performative limitations for the group which was an obstacle to cross-pollinating the story. After much deliberation and planning, they decided to opt out of the activity and not submit a performative story due to the emotional nature of the story being too difficult to express performatively and due to the risk involved in positioning themselves as victims and reliving their own experiences of being raped on camera or in the presence of their peers (Field notes, 2022). Thus, audience impacted each mode of storytelling differently, illustrating that the audience could potentially limit storytelling in the performative mode.

In the story, the victim was not given a name and identity, but having to act out the performance and assume the role of certain characters to retell the story threatened their sense of safety. In this instance, emotion as action was too complex to engage with in the performative mode due to social,

cultural and ideological factors (Lewis and Tierney, 2013) which resulted in a limitation of the performative mode of storytelling when dealing with traumatic lived experiences. In this case, *"[w]e could consider the performative as the emotive"* (Ahmed, 2004, 32), and therefore, the performance was conceptualised as a "nexus of practice" (Norris, 2011, 46) which builds on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of practice as being one that engages with history in action and having to re-live their traumatic histories in a way that 'brought it to life' due to semiotic resources which was too risky and resulted in resisting sharing their experiences and using their voices to take back power in this mode of storytelling.

Group 2 – GBV

The group did not produce a written or audio story, but there was verbal discussions and some written planning, which contributed to scaffolding ideas, re-thinking resources and creative choices when generating the performative story. Since the story was not transduced across two different modes, I am unable to compare and discuss multimodal shifts, and transformation of ideas and resources used across the modes. Therefore, this section will focus on the performative mode and the resources used or those that were not used within this mode of storytelling.

The performative story was recorded in the genre of a documentary, and it began with cinematic music and introduced a production company, "MABHENA PRODUCTIONS". Mabhena is the surname of a learner in the group, and it is of Ngugi origin. This was a production company that the group created for themselves to give them credit for their work. This indicated imagined possibilities for the future (Greene, 1995) as they mimicked this practice from Hollywood movies and envisioned themselves as professional producers of this production. By creating their own production company, the learners engaged in a form of self-validation and showed agency in their creative process. This act of branding reflects an understanding of media literacy and the ways in which media professionals construct their identities and market their productions. This can be seen as empowerment, allowing the students to take control of their narratives and present themselves as capable and innovative content creators. It provided the learners with an opportunity to explore and express their identities in a classroom context which significantly enhanced their motivation and engagement with the learning process which was evident in their process and product of

crafting this performative story as they showed creativity, and agency which was only evident in their storytelling in the performative mode.

Lives in the 21st century have been shaped by new literacy practices that are engaged with daily which include forms of social media, mobile phones and digital technologies that bind people in a social culture of continuous meaning making (Miller and McVee, 2012). This was reflected in the video as it was creatively put together using a variety of different modes that include written, visual, audio, kinaesthetic, and also digital effects as the story moved between scenes and themes. In comparison to all the other groups, it was the most aesthetically pleasing and well-crafted cinematic production. This indicates that the written mode resulted in limitations in storytelling for this group, but the digital performative mode enabled the use of multiple modes and resources to effectively craft their story. It offered new opportunities for text production and enabled creative skills and resources to be showcased, particularly those that are usually unconventional in a language classroom like this.

The learners lacked props to dress their characters as criminals, but they worked with what was available to them and used their uniforms which they wore strategically to convey meaning such as a tie on the head of a character, a baggy blazer and untidy dressing to convey 'ghetto' dressing and reproduce gangsterism stereotypes to aid the audience in their meaning making. The characters walked with a bounce to mimic gangster behaviour and held a water bottle which was re-imagined to be a bottle of beer. This added significant cultural and social insights that were depicted through imaginative and creative resource choices. By working multimodally, this group were able to re-think and re-imagine an extended range of linguistic, cultural, social, and creative resources by using their environments and resources available to imagine alternative contexts, realities and create meaning through semiosis (Miller and McVee, 2012). In comparison to the other groups, their story included multilingualism and relied heavily on semiosis and visual clues for meaning.

Group 3 – Tiaan and Sinawe

Francis and Msibi (2011) emphasize the significance of using creative participatory approaches, particularly when addressing controversial topics such as gender and sexuality. These methods

facilitate a deeper understanding that transcends superficial engagement, allowing learners to explore complex issues in more nuanced and meaningful ways. Creative participation, such as moving from written to performative modes of storytelling provides learners with opportunities to embody and express their ideas in ways that written text alone may not always fully capture. This multimodal approach often encourages greater emotional and cognitive engagement, as it requires learners to consider how different modes such as voice, movement, and visual representation can convey the subtleties of their narratives (Kress, 2010).

One of the group members revealed that she had been a victim of bullying, noting that the story was deeply rooted in her personal experiences and life history (Field notes, 2022). Although the fear of being bullied is not a dominant theme in the narrative and only briefly surfaces toward the story's conclusion, her experience and fear served as the basis for this story. This subtle representation of bullying suggests that the learner explored these issues in a subdued manner and reflects an ongoing struggle to fully confront the social and emotional weight of her experiences. Beneke (2018) defines versatility as a dynamic crafting process that involves risk-taking, adaptability, flexibility, and experimentation. This concept of versatility is crucial in the context of storytelling, where the ability to navigate and integrate different narrative elements often determines the depth and impact of the story being told. The group's decision to address themes like bullying and the struggles of non-heteronormative identities was a step toward taking such risks. However, their approach was cautious, and the narrative did not fully embrace the versatility that could have allowed these themes to be explored more deeply and powerfully. While the group did take some risks in telling their story, particularly by addressing sensitive issues like gender, sexuality, and bullying, these risks were contained within a framework that felt underdeveloped. The written mode, which typically offered other groups a degree of safety and control over how narratives are crafted and presented, was not fully leveraged to explore the more complex aspects of their story. Despite the relative safety afforded by the written mode which allows for careful reflection and revision, the group's narrative remained somewhat constrained and undeveloped.

The group collectively chose not to participate in the performative aspect of the intervention due to sensitive themes of gender and sexuality present in their story as the primary reason for their withdrawal. The fear of bullying that the characters express in their story manifested in real life which limited their participation in the performative mode as it threatened the safety of the learners

in this group. Their reluctance to participate in the performative mode reflects a few underlying factors, including discomfort with public expression of non-heteronormative identities, fear of judgment from peers, and an internalised sense of vulnerability surrounding the themes explored in their story. The group's decision to not participate in the performative mode limited the scope of the multimodal intervention and highlighted limitations that learners may encounter when engaging with sensitive and deeply personal topics in modes that include physical body expressions and a wider audience.

Using multimodality includes embodiment which may lead to a breakthrough in identity through means of communication (Sekimoto, 2012). Embodiment, as Sekimoto (2012) suggests, allows for a more visceral and immediate connection between the individual and the story being told. Moving from a written to performative mode could have helped the student reclaim her narrative, transforming her role from a passive victim of being bullied to an active agent in her story to regain power. By embodying her experiences through various modes of communication, the student would have the opportunity to reconstruct her identity in a way that acknowledges her resilience and strength. This kind of engagement could also serve as a form of resistance against the silencing effects of bullying, allowing the student to assert her voice and identity more powerfully. Through physical expression, vocalisation, or the use of symbolic imagery, the learner could have navigated the complex emotions tied to her experiences of bullying in a way that transcends the limitations of the written mode. However, this opportunity was not taken up, which signals that multimodal affordance, particularly in the performative mode can only manifest if the learners choose to engage with various modes, and opportunities available to them. This highlights the significance in offering learners different modes to choose from which enriches storytelling possibilities and highlights the complexities of personal relevance. This study demonstrates how this approach fosters diverse narratives while also posing constraints when stories become too personal or closely tied to audience perception as the written and audio stories were not shared with the class, while the performative stories were shared with their peers.

Group 4 – Xenophobia and Islamophobia

Group 4 participated in the submission of an audio story and transduced their audio story into a performative video. This was the only group to choose the audio mode instead of the more traditional written format for storytelling. The process of redesign, as Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) suggest, allows for exploration and experimentation *"with a range of semiotic resources to convey (radically) alternative positions and constructions"* (3). The transition from audio storytelling to performance offered the learners a unique opportunity to reflect, deconstruct, reimagine, and reconstruct their narrative in a different mode. Thus, making redesign more applicable to groups who cross-pollinated their stories across modes, and not necessarily those who chose to opt out of cross-pollination activities. The shift across modes prompted the learners to critically engage with the resources used to represent race, nationality, and social class within their story, challenging them to question the realities these constructs uphold. According to Comber and Nixon (2014), such activities that involves moving a narrative from one mode to another encourages learners to reflect more deeply on the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed across different modes.

Through this process, the learners were able to explore how the story's themes might be perceived and understood differently in an audio and performative mode. The redesign of their story allowed them to experiment with new forms of expression and enabled them to critique and rethink the social issues embedded within their story, leading to a richer and more complex understanding of the material they were working with. Verbal storytelling in the audio mode significantly differed from the performative mode, as it foregrounded character voices through dialogue and multivoicedness, offering the audience untold clues about the characters' identities and personalities. The use of accent and language in the audio story served as a crucial affordance, providing the audience with additional semiotic clues that enriched their understanding of the narrative and characters. Voice and sound, in this context, became powerful tools for conveying meaning, as they allowed listeners to infer cultural and social nuances that might not have been as evident in a written or visual modes of storytelling. However, since the audience could only hear the narrator and characters of the story, there was still a reliance on language for meaning which relied on aspects of explicitly ‘telling’ the audience what happens for them to be able to construct meaning as audio and voices were the only elements that could convey semiotic clues.

The performative mode of the story expanded on elements and representations of the audio mode by offering additional details that were not present in the audio story. This expansion was particularly evident in the interactions between Osama and the South African characters, which were further developed in the performance, leading to greater plot and character development. As Bock (2016) notes, when a text and its ideas are shifted from one mode to another, unexpected and unanticipated creations and discoveries often emerge. This was evident in the learners' performance, where the visual and auditory elements were transformed and combined to create a richer, more layered narrative. For instance, the visual element of the taxi driver playing loud music in the performance added depth to the cultural and social dynamics at play through stereotypical depictions of the taxi driver. This detail highlighted the diversity of the characters and provided insight into the cultural practices and personalities of the individuals involved. The music choice, body language, and physical interactions between characters in the performance contributed to a more immersive and nuanced portrayal in comparison to the audio story and it included additional elements that added to diverse and cultural representations.

While the learners attempted to convey these aspects in the audio story, the performative mode allowed for a fuller exploration of these ideas. The limitations of the audio mode such as the inability to visually represent character interactions and settings were overcome in the performance, where visual cues and physical expressions added layers of meaning. The audio story tells the audience about the language barriers between Osama and the other characters through narration and dialogue, whereas the performance shows this and also includes the reaction of the other characters when language impedes communication. "Need to go to hotel" and the driver says, "I don't understand". Both characters speak simultaneously, Osama says, "You take me hotel" and the driver says "Speak properly. Speak proper English". The representation of language in this scene mobilises emotion and the performance can 'show' the ineffective communication between Osama and the taxi driver and the audience are able to gage the frustration that both parties feel.

The move from audio to performance enabled the learners to more effectively communicate the complexities of their characters and the social issues they sought to address, demonstrating how different modes of storytelling can offer unique affordances and opportunities for creative expression and critical engagement. The learners were more semiotically and creatively engaged

in the performance, indicating a more embodied and engaging experience of storytelling that unfolded in creative and transformative ways.

The performance mode of storytelling illustrates how learners' linguistic, cultural and social resources were capitalised on to represent their identities and critique and advocate for social issues by using literacy as action to alter the world through their stories by challenging xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes (Bomer, 2017). Drawing on Enciso's (2017) recommendation to mobilise student resources, performative storytelling can potentially use these resources to create heartfelt empathy (Anderson and Macleroy, 2017) and a sense of affect for others as students become agents of change and advocate for issues and challenges experienced by others. This is done through a critical affective lens (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024) through events of frustration and discrimination which Osama experiences. The performative story engages more explicitly with issues in society, and through this, mobilises resources of language, culture and emotion. While both modes of storytelling drew on diverse linguistic repertoires, only the performative story engaged explicitly with multilingualism through the use of various African languages and Arabic which added to the multiplicity of character voices and identities. This was surprising as the audio mode only made use of different accents, even though oral modes of communication are often linked to enabling multilingualism (Vally Essa, 2019).

Students recognise that they can shape discourse through storytelling and that their knowledge and perspectives are valid, and an important part of critical dialogic learning (Bakhtin, 1984; Freire, 1993) where *"knowledge is participative and generative, not simply consumed"* (Fataar, 2016:19). The performance locates emotion as a social practice (Boler, 1999) which enabled the participants to convey affect in a way that was more nuanced in comparison to the audio story by elaborating on details and the situation in a way that made the audience sympathise with Osama which was restricted by the narrator in the audio story. Alongside the critical affective moves in the performative mode that foregrounded social issues, there were aspects of playfulness that showed the learners personal positions about the stereotypical information that they illustrated. The performers giggled during scenes and exaggerated Islamic stereotypes and associations of terrorism in this performance when acting out scenes that focused on this. South African's are notorious for using satire to shed light on social issues and representations and this notion of satire came through in the way that the issue of terrorism was expressed in the performance.

The humour expressed in the performance plays with the exaggeration of associating Islam with terrorism which is an uncommon association in South Africa. “[I]t just feels like Africa's the vaguest of Islamic terror” (Rath and Noah, 2015). From a South African perspective, the association between ethnicity, religion, and terrorism is often approached with satire, as exemplified by comedian Trevor Noah (2019). He highlights the perceived absurdity of Islamic terrorism within the South African context, where such threats are not as deeply embedded in national discourse as in other parts of the world. This same perspective is reflected in the performance, which similarly presents the theme in a satirical or ironic manner. While the audio story conveyed a serious nature of the themes and events, the seriousness of Islamophobia and Xenophobia is masked by traces of humour in the performance. The performance enabled embodiment which extended to the audience and became an “immersion of bodies and emotions in digital spaces” (Wohlwend and Lewis, 2011) creating a balance between seriousness of the themes and playing with notions of culture and humour to make the story appealing and locate it in a South African perspective.

Group 5 – Corruption

Group 5 submitted a written story and a performative version of it. The performative video crafted by the group mirrors the report style of the written story, essentially summarising the main events without introducing any new information, plot development, or significant alterations to the original narrative. This resulted in a performance that lacks engagement with the diverse cultural and linguistic repertoires of the group members, and minimal transformation of creative resources as there was little to no development in any of the storytelling elements and techniques. The performative video features one learner narrating the scenes of theft and corruption committed by the ministers, while the other group members act out these events with no dialogue. Thus, the audience is reliant on the narrator and semiotic clues in the performance to construct meaning. The constrains the audience’s ability to interpret the story in their own way as the narrator anchors meaning. By adhering closely to the written script when transducing it into the performative mode, the learners effectively position the audience to accept their perspective and representation of

events as factual which limits the potential for diverse interpretations and critical engagement with the text throughout the story until the rhetorical question at the end (Govender, 2019).

The use of leaves as a symbolic representation of money in the scenes where it is stolen is one of the few instances of creative reimagining in the performance. This example of resemiotisation that involves transforming one set of signs into another demonstrates the learner's capacity to rethink and reshape semiotic resources as they transition from one mode to another to create meaning. Stein (2003) argues that resemiotisation is crucial for unleashing creativity and reshaping knowledge which is achieved by using available resources in their environment in creative ways. Although this creative element is present, it is somewhat isolated within the broader context of the performance, which remains largely constrained by the factual and report-like nature of the story.

The choice to remain closely aligned with the report genre across both the written and performative modes suggests that the learners prioritised the expression of their voices and the factual representation of crime and corruption over the exploration of more imaginative or creative possibilities. While this focus on factual representation may align with their intention to highlight social injustices, it limits the scope of their storytelling. The performance reflects the desire to convey a serious, non-fictional account of corruption instead of engaging with the potential for more dynamic, imaginative engagement with the story's themes and characters. In the other stories, characters played a central role in enabling both critical and creative engagement, serving as vehicles for exploring cultural, linguistic, and social complexities. In contrast, this story lacked strong character representation, which limited its ability to function as an effective multimodal narrative. The absence of well-developed characters reduced the narrative complexity, and the emotional and social depth needed to sustain engagement across modes. As a result, out of six groups, this was the only one whose multimodal story did not work optimally, suggesting that character-driven storytelling plays a crucial role in the successful production of meaning across modes. The inability to produce dynamic characters and narrative plot highlights that for multimodal cross-pollination to be effective in fostering critical and affective engagement with social themes, there needs to be dynamic and well-established narrative elements that can link the different modes together. Without it, multimodal compositions risk becoming fragmented which reduces their impact as tools for identity exploration, discourse negotiation, and critical-affective social engagement.

The theme of silencing is a significant aspect of the group's performance, and this is evident in the continued exclusion of the black residents of Soweto from the performance. The people of Soweto, who are central to the story's context, are neither seen nor heard in the performance, effectively erasing their voices and experiences entirely. This exclusion mirrors the power dynamics at play, where those who hold power are the ones deemed important enough to be represented in the story, while the marginalised remain voiceless and unseen. Thus, the performance comes across as more passive than the written story as it downplays the lack of service delivery and suffering of the Soweto community, and instead it foregrounds theft by the ministers. Even though the performative mode offers affordances to capture the essence of the story in nuanced and creative ways, this group fails to effectively capture and express the frustration and violence of the protests described in the written narrative as they focus primarily on narrating the acts of corruption rather than the broader social impact and the emotional intensity of the protests.

According to Cremin and Myhill (2012) and Andrews and Smith (2011), all genres, including transactional ones hold the potential for creative writing. Despite this potential, the group's approach to both the written and performative stories was constrained by their choice of genre and limited engagement with their existing creative, social, and linguistic resources. This decision limited the authenticity and richness of their story. Although the group had the scope to engage in creative linguistic play and utilise a wider range of semiotic resources, they chose instead to focus on exposing corruption and foregrounding their personal perspectives and voices. This problem stemmed from the way that the group perceived and worked with the genre of storytelling. Therefore, this group would have benefitted from receiving feedback on their written story before the cross-pollination process which could have assisted with planning, scaffolding and guiding their storytelling process.

Cross-pollinating stories across modes was the most unsuccessful with this group as they were not able to maximise the affordances of storytelling across both modes. The concept of cross-pollination where learners capitalise on opportunities to engage with and develop existing resources as they move across different modes was not fully materialised in this instance. The activity briefs provided sufficient room for creativity and the incorporation of diverse linguistic, cultural and social resources and repertoires, yet the group opted to exclude these elements from their stories and also use only standard English to narrate the events which limited notions of voice.

Their narrative choices suggest a deliberate focus on social consciousness and action, using the story as a platform to address issues of corruption and inequality rather than explore it using the creative and linguistic possibilities available to them.

Group 6 - The sad case of William Shakespeare

The transition from written to performative modes in storytelling highlights significant shifts in how narratives are crafted, presented, and understood. The stories that this group crafted in both the written and performative modes are successful, but the performative story illustrated plot, character and semiotic development in more nuanced ways which was not present in the written story. The performance allowed the story to unfold in elaborated and creative ways.

One of the most striking aspects of the performative video is the aesthetic choice of a black-and-white, cartoon-like effect. This stylistic decision draws on creative methods of visual representation, immediately capturing the audience's attention and appealing to their visual senses. The monochrome visual, combined with the cartoon effect, produces powerful imagery that foregrounds the visual elements of the story. This choice enhances the emotional impact on the audience and creates a greater sense of seriousness to the narrative (Jewitt, 2008). The absence of colour metaphorically aligns with the effects of drug use depicted in the story, symbolising the hopelessness captured in the story and how addiction can strip life of its vibrancy and reduce it to a bleak shadow.

The group used visual and kinaesthetic effects to influence the meaning conveyed to the audience, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of how different modes can work together to shape interpretation. For instance, the use of transition effects, such as a 'swish' sound indicating movement from one scene to another plays a crucial role in signalling the progression of the narrative to indicate a time lapse and the beginning of a new scene. These transitions are imbued with semiotic meaning, guiding the audience's understanding of the narrative flow and highlighting key moments of change or development in the story (Kress, 2010). The performative mode allows for the exploration of the *"semiotic potentials of all resources and platforms involved in the design and production of multimodal texts"* (Bezemer & Kress, 2017, p. 3). This multimodal

approach leverages the affordances of different media, visuals, sounds, gestures, and spatial arrangements which work together to create a rich, layered narrative experience. The interplay between these elements enables the story to transcend the limitations of any single mode and engage the audience on multiple sensory levels (Stein, 2008). This multimodal shift from written text to performance not only enhances the narrative's impact but also highlights the importance of considering how different modes contribute to meaning making in contemporary storytelling (Serafini, 2014).



Figure 10: Secretly exchanging drugs

Hooks (1996) implies that the language of images is not confined to clarity or perfection, but it is shaped by the nuances, ambiguities, and imperfections within visual or artistic expression. This speaks to the power of images to convey complex, layered messages that transcend direct or literal communication. This idea emphasises the subjective and interpretive nature of visual storytelling, where viewers bring their own experiences and emotions to the act of reading images. Semiosis through embodiment and the imagery in this performative story added to meaning in ways that were not reliant on language. The trading of drugs take place in a corner and behind a wall indicating suspicious behaviour due to the need to conceal the wrongful activity. The boys who offer William drugs check to see if anyone is approaching and the exchange takes place by passing

it through exchange of a blazer which indicates that the characters are aware that using and dealing drugs are wrong and therefore, they make a conscious effort to hide it. These details add implied and internalised meanings to the performative text without the aid of language which is an affordance performance. It requires the audience to read beyond words and rely on semiotic resources to construct meaning.

Through action and the use of body, events may unfold and be internalised to create meaning that was once textually overlooked. The performance offered additional information and details which were not present in the written story. Thus, transducing the same story from one mode to another results in text development and the addition of new information to construct an entirely different meaning (Vally Essa, 2019). For example, in the performance, William sadly expresses to his friends the pressure he encounters, and two friends introduce him to drugs, whereas in the written story, only one friend was mentioned. One of the boys ask him to pay for the drugs while the other offers it to William as a sample and convince him of all the benefits which will take "all that stress down the drain" as a way to get him addicted and continue purchasing from them. The performance also offers voices to other characters as we directly hear from William's father which is not evident in the written story. The performative mode amplified the characters' voices which was developed across the modes, and it also created a space to engage with youth culture and language practices associated with it. This story showed development in terms of plot, characters, voice, language and affect as the students cross-pollinated the same story and ideas across different modes.



Figure 11: Intoxicated William Shakespeare character

The transduction from written to performative modes of storytelling is a deliberate process of redesign and reconstruction where critical affective moves are employed to evoke emotional responses to semiotic representations. This process involves a shift in mode and a transformation in how the story is experienced and interpreted by the audience. As Mendelowitz and Govender (2024) suggest, these affective moves are crucial in creating emotional resonance, establishing new ways of looking at and engaging with stories, particularly through the lenses of criticality and emotion. In the performative mode, the story progresses at a quicker pace, enhanced by the addition of new information, embodiment, and affect. For example, the portrayal of William in the performance where he is sitting dishevelled on a bench, his school uniform untidy and hanging loosely, his speech slurred, and his demeanour erratic as he repeats words and giggles, provides a vivid, embodied representation of his descent into drug addiction. This scene contrasts starkly with the written narrative where the impact of William's actions such as stealing appliances from his parents' home is described rather than visually and emotionally enacted. The performance offers the audience a deeper, more immersive understanding of William's condition through the interaction between him and his father, who, frustrated and concerned, demands, "Where's the toaster? Where's the kettle? I tried to make coffee and there's no kettle."

The shift from telling to showing as writing techniques created a shift from description to enactment, and mobilised emotions in a way that written text alone could not. According to Lewis and Tierney (2013), emotion plays a crucial role in mediating relationships between individuals and collective audiences, creating a shared experience through crafted questioning and social interactions. This shared experience is intensified as the audience witnesses the conversation between the characters as well as embodied emotions of the characters. The father's frustration and concern, culminating in his resort to violence, generate a powerful emotional response from the audience, who are drawn into the narrative through their empathy and understanding of the characters' struggles.

This ability to evoke emotion through performance highlights the semiotic potential of multimodal storytelling, where different modes work together to create a more dynamic and impactful story. Ahmed (2004) discusses how emotions are not just individual experiences but are also shaped by social contexts and interactions, which in turn influence collective responses. In the context of the performance, the father's emotional outburst reveals his personal anguish and parental expectations, the impact of addiction, and the breakdown of familial relationships. This shared emotional experience, crafted through the performative mode, bridges the gap between individual and collective, allowing the audience to engage more deeply with the story on a more holistic level.

ii. Nuanced learning through multimodal cross-pollination and genre fluidity

A central advantage of the multimodal cross-pollination intervention in this study was its capacity to foster transduction across the stories told by most of the groups, which is the process of shifting meaning across modes (Kress, 2010). Transduction invites learners to reimagine and reshape their narratives as they move between visual, textual, oral, and performative modes. This opportunity was taken up by groups 4,5, and 6 which shows that the learners require willingness to engage with transduction to capitalise on its affordances. This transition across modes often resulted in enabling learners to engage critically with content and narrative construction, generating new insights and deeper understandings of how meaning is expressed and reconfigured (Stein, 2008).

The data reveals that each mode of storytelling offered distinct affordances that highlighted different dimensions of the narratives. For example, the story crafted by group 1 was one of the most successful even though they only crafted it in the written mode; however, in the story crafted by group 6 which was transduced from the written mode to performative mode gained additional layers of meaning once it was cross-pollinated. The incorporation of voice, expression, body and props provided opportunities for symbolic representation, creating new layers of meaning that went beyond what the learners could convey through written language alone. This genre fluidity, particularly moving across modes encouraged learners to experiment with how different modal configurations can influence the storytelling process, fostering both creativity and critical reflection on how stories are communicated (Jewitt, 2008).

Reading and writing across a range of modes is important for redefining consciousness. This is because individuals find alternate ways of being when engaging in different discourses which impacts social identities (Janks, 2000). In most instances, the data consistently showed that a socially resonant activity brief and multimodal storytelling, provided learners with critical entry points to engage with the content of their stories and with broader social issues such as rape, corruption, xenophobia, and gender-based violence. This engagement with social issues reflects a critical literacy approach (Janks, 2010), enabling learners to use storytelling as a means to critique social inequalities and power dynamics. For instance, many groups used their written and audio stories as counter-narratives that resisted dominant societal discourses, giving voice to marginalised communities and perspectives (Janks, 2014), and these stories were developed more critically and affectively once transduced into the performative mode.

The genre fluidity that characterised the multimodal intervention allowed learners to experiment with how their stories can be communicated in different formats, which in turn fostered a more nuanced understanding of how meaning can shift and evolve. For instance, in the case of Group 6, the character William's struggle with drug addiction was initially told in a written, third-person narrative, which limited the audience's connection to the character's inner thoughts. However, when the story was transduced into a performative mode, the audience is able to empathise with William as we are able to see his physical and emotional state due to drug addiction. It reveals a sense of his inner-thoughts and gives the audience access to this. William's father is also given a voice, allowing the audience to see the family dynamics and the emotional toll that addiction had

on the family. Particularly when multimodal-cross pollination and transduction is involved, "working with storytelling, students may gain a better understanding of how to frame their experiences, potentially making them clearer for themselves as well as others (Bommarco & Parmenius Swärd, 2018; Piekut, 2018)" (cited in Brauer, 2024, 70). This performative retelling often brought new layers of meaning to the story, illustrating how cross-pollinating modes can deepen narrative development and create opportunities for more critical and empathetic engagement with complex social issues.

The multimodal cross-pollination approach promoted inclusive learning by accommodating diverse semiotic preferences. Learners who may have struggled with traditional, print-based modes were given the opportunity to engage with content in ways that aligned with their strengths, interests and preferences whether through visual storytelling, audio recordings, digital media or performances. This flexibility validated diverse forms of knowledge and learning, challenging the restrictive focus on written text that typically dominates classroom practices (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). The learners responded positively to this multimodal flexibility, with many expressing a preference for digital and performative modes of storytelling as indicated in the questionnaire results (Questionnaires, 2022; Fieldnotes, 2022).

Learning is a dynamic process of sign making that involves *"a process of selection, adaption and transformation"* to reshape meaning according to the interests of learners and the learning context (Jewitt et al., 2001, 5). During learning in this intervention, the learners actively remake and reshape meaning. The cross-pollination was an explicit example of multimodal events that involved moving across verbal, visual, written and performative modes which the learners engaged with through processes of creativity and experimentation. Communication throughout the stories is pluralistic and the transmission of knowledge in the learning process reflects the learners' interests and resources available in specific contexts (Jewitt et al., 2001). Each mode of storytelling reflected different types of interests and forms of communication through modes and choices that added meaning in distinct ways and also in ways that align with discourses of each mode and genre of storytelling. Even though each group received the same activity brief, they all engaged with it in different ways which were based on the transmission of their resources which were motivated by their interests (Jewitt et al., 2001). Thus, the content and representation of stories were informed by different interests of each group and how they chose to transform their existing and epistemic

resources that was reflected in the different themes and genres that the learners chose to engage with during the performance (i.e.: drama, documentary, report).

In each mode of storytelling, the resources used reflected multiple aspects of cultural, social and linguistic resources which reflect different forms of knowledge systems that diversifies the confines of academic success that is informed by school curriculum, and it also expands on the concept of academic success by holistically and contemporarily engaging with resources that are cultural, creative and cognitively beneficial. The multimodal storytelling intervention challenged the ways that the learners were accustomed to language learning which is called the *"bedrock reality"* (Jewitt et al., 2001, 10) which signals a gap between personal experiences and expectations by educators and curriculum which results in conflicts and it *"is in these gaps that variation grows"*. The bedrock reality may have been limiting for some groups such as group 5 who presented their story about corruption across all the modes in conventional ways which constrained diverse expressions of culture, creativity and linguistic expressions. Through processes of negotiation, it is the learners' decision of what to represent and what not to represent.

All texts are constructed and anything that is constructed can be deconstructed. By taking apart a text through deconstruction and identifying representations or problems creates an awareness of the choices that the writer made. Deconstruction was part of the cross-pollination process as stories needed to be critically assessed and taken apart to be put together again in another mode. Having a critical awareness prompts a reader/viewer to consider "why did the writer or speaker make these choices? Whose interests do they serve? Who is empowered or disempowered by the language used?" (Janks, 1993, p. iii). In particular, group 4's story about Islamophobia and xenophobia serves as a clear example of how multimodal storytelling facilitated critical engagement. By using visual and verbal symbolism, dramatic performance, and multilingual dialogue, this group was able to craft a powerful critique of discriminatory power structures. The process of cross-pollination where they moved their story across oral to performative modes, enabled the group to explore the issue from multiple perspectives, deepening their critical engagement and expanding the range of semiotic resources they could draw upon to communicate their message. The shift from audio to performative modes allowed them to vividly depict the emotional and social dimensions of the characters experiences and discrimination that Osama experienced, illustrating how multimodality can provide new avenues for understanding and articulating social critique. As

the story shifted across modes, details were elaborated on, and new information was often introduced. In addition to development in the story and plot, resources were reimagined and used in distinct ways that effectively conveyed meaning successfully across the different modes.

The group leader, Hassan's narrative began as an Instagram post featuring a visual representation of his identity as a foreigner who relocated to South Africa. The use of symbolic imagery and hashtags in the post allowed Hassan to communicate aspects of his personal story in a non-verbal, yet powerful, way. When this story was expanded into a written narrative, it became a more elaborated and structured account, but the shift to a third-person perspective distanced Hassan from his narrative, limiting the emotional depth of the story. However, when the story was later transduced into a performative mode, the plot expanded even further, with the inclusion of multilingual dialogue, new characters, and embodied performance. This performative retelling brought the story to life, allowing the audience to experience the character's journey through a combination of verbal, gestural, and visual modes, leading to a more immersive and engaging experience for both the storytellers and the audience. Looking at connections between representations in texts and the messages that they convey are important as they reproduce ideologies and information that position readers/viewers. Therefore, *"[a]n understanding of how semiotic resources have been deployed in the act of textual representation, together with an understanding of connections between representation and social practices, paves the way for redesign. The act of redesigning enables "readers" to resist textual positioning and to contribute in ways, however small or piecemeal, to the process of creating a world that is both just and sustainable."* (Janks, 2014, 355). The affordances of these multimodal cross-pollination shifts were evident in the stories produced by group 4, *Islamophobia and xenophobia* who advocate through their story for a just South African society that is free from discrimination by accepting and integrating foreigners; and group 6, *The sad case of William Shakespeare* shed light on the effects of social class, peer pressure and substance abuse amongst teenagers. Both these stories are forms of counter-storytelling as they challenge dominant discourses and create voices for marginalised individuals and groups, and the process of redesign helped to make these points and amplify voices more nuancedly.

iii. Multimodal cross-pollination as a bridge between formal and informal learning and resources

It is important to *"read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources"* (Janks, 2013: 227). Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) note that one of the most powerful aspects of multimodal cross-pollination is its capacity to bridge the gap between learners' school-based and social literacies as it offers opportunities to engage with both either separately or simultaneously allowing opportunities to work across boundaries. Lim et al. (2022) state that the most notable contribution of multimodal pedagogies is the ability to bridge learners' in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. Many learners come to the classroom with a wealth of informal knowledge that is often devalued in formal academic contexts (Moll et al., 1992). By incorporating multimodal and contemporary genres, such as social media, audio and performative storytelling into language teaching, educators can validate the diverse literacy practices that learners engage in outside of school. Cross-pollinating stories across modes creates the opportunity for learners to draw on their cultural knowledge, multimodal and multilingual practices, and understand things that are important to different communities (Vasquez, Janks & Comber, 2019, 306; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). The learners engaged in resemiotisation not just as a technical exercise, but as a way of integrating their out-of-school literacies, cultural practices, and personal experiences into the formal school setting. This process of blending formal and informal resources aligns with what Moll et al. (1992) described as *"funds of knowledge",* where learners draw upon their everyday knowledge and experiences to engage more meaningfully with formal education. This approach, grounded in the New Literacy Studies framework acknowledges that literacy is not a singular, monolithic practice but a collection of socially situated practices that vary across contexts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

This connection between the personal and the academic is critical for fostering epistemological access, allowing learners to draw on their lived experiences and each other as valid sources of knowledge. In this study, learners were encouraged to critically reflect on social issues of their choosing such as gender-based violence, sexuality, Islamophobia and xenophobia, corruption, peer pressure and substance abuse which are topics that connected their personal and social experiences with broader societal discourses. The learners crafted stories that were authentic reflections of their

lived realities which were expressed differently across modes in ways that reflect realistic representations (Janks, 2010).

Thus, the use of social literacy practices and genres offered learners the opportunity to engage in literacy practices that mirrored their everyday digital communication, reinforcing the idea that learning does not solely take place within the confines of the classroom (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). This blurred the boundaries between formal and informal learning spaces, fostering an environment where learners could bring their whole selves into their storytelling practices. The multimodal aspect of these stories enabled a dynamic form of communication that could accommodate both the academic demands of the classroom and the more fluid, expressive forms of social interaction. The academic demands of the classroom required learners to adhere to structured guidelines of the activity briefs, demonstrate critical literacy skills, and engage with curriculum-based objectives such as narrative development, coherence, and critical engagement with social issues. These demands were met through the deliberate design of activities that required the learners to analyse and produce texts with depth and purpose. The flexibility and expressive possibilities of multimodal storytelling allowed learners to include personal and social dimensions in their stories that transcended traditional academic boundaries. The fluidity of modes such as written, visual, and performative digital storytelling enabled the learners' to incorporate semiosis through gestures, tone, symbolism, and digital elements that captured emotional nuance and cultural resonance. For example, by transducing a written narrative into a performative piece, the learners could add emotional depth through body language and props, making the story more compelling and relatable to the audience.

The multimodal cross-pollination intervention in this study demonstrated how transducing stories across different modes offered learners an opportunity to experiment with creativity and imagination, challenging the traditional, dominant monomodal and monolingual modes of storytelling that are often prescribed by formal school curricula. Stein (2003) argued that resemiotisation which is the process of transforming meaning across semiotic modes can unleash creativity and reshape knowledge by creating space for learners to engage with diverse resources. This intervention supported that claim by enabling learners to blend formal learning practices with informal and non-dominant practices to provide more culturally grounded modes of storytelling. The transformation of resources across modes not only expanded the narrative possibilities but

also allowed for peer learning and collaboration, as the learners brought their identities, languages, and social realities into the classroom through storytelling.

Redesign is a process of remaking, where one uses available resources to create something new (Kress, 2003). The data shows that each mode in the multimodal intervention required learners to draw on different resources and repertoires to construct meaning. Two resources that played a significant role in the transduction process were the learners' imagination and their use of language. These semiotic resources were either enabled, not capitalised on, or transformed across modes. In both cases, these resources were reimagined in ways that demonstrated the intersection of formal and informal learning contexts, particularly as learners adapted school-based literacy practices to reflect their personal, social, and cultural knowledge through the stories that they told and the ways that they told them such as using localised characters, South African contexts, and incorporating non-dominant language practices and repertoires to add depth and multiple layers of voice to their characters.

Imagination emerged as a key resource that allowed learners to synthesize disparate ideas and create links between modes in dynamic ways. Vygotsky (2004) emphasised that imagination is central to intellectual and emotional development, which is particularly relevant in the language education context. In this study, learners used imagination to creatively transform physical objects and spaces into symbolic resources that enriched their storytelling. For example, in the performative GBV story by Group 2, they used tree branches to represent a knife, and in their story titled Corruption, Group 5 used leaves as symbolic money to stage a robbery. Therefore, *"[r]edesigning a text in another mode opens up new possibilities for meaning-making. Each mode has its own affordances, and learners engage these creatively to produce texts that are richer and more resonant with their experiences"* (Newfield, 2013, p. 165). The reimagined objects in the performative mode transformed mundane materials into powerful tools of meaning-making, illustrating how the learners used imagination to traverse the boundaries between their informal, everyday worlds and the formal classroom setting.

Collaborative reflection and re-imagining as a resource (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) came through strongly across all the groups stories where the learners were able to collaboratively reflect on personal and social realities and re-imagine future possibilities or create counter-stories to

challenge inequalities and issues of power. The realistic nature and events did not always result in positive re-imagining such as in the story by group 1 where it is suggested that the woman was murdered or committed suicide after being raped, or in group 5's story about corruption, the residents of Soweto do not have their voices heard and continue to face a lack of access to resources. However, the use of imagination shows collaborative versatility (Beneke, 2018; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022) where the learners' take risks and show flexibility in telling their stories in ways that highlight the objective and main issues as a form of social consciousness and action.

The use of imagination was especially prominent in the performative stories, where learners embodied their ideas and dispositions, bringing abstract concepts into physical form. The data suggest that performance allowed learners to rethink and recreate existing ideas, blending formal literacy skills with informal, embodied modes of expression. In their story about xenophobia and Islamophobia, group 4 used the character of a taxi driver, represented by a learner sitting on a bench and miming the act of driving with exaggerated gestures of head nods to the loud music that was blaring. This reimagining of characters brought cultural stereotypes into the performance, demonstrating how imagination can be used to replicate and challenge social stereotypes. The learners' ability to physically embody the characters in such imaginative ways allowed them to challenge and play with these norms, at times offering a critical commentary on South African society.

In other cases, some groups relied on the audience's imagination to fill in narrative gaps and interpret the symbolism in their performances. For example, Group 2 in their gender-based violence story, staged a scene where a girl was curled up on the ground, crying. The sparse setting and minimal explanation required the audience to use their imagination to infer what led to this moment. This use of emotional imagination evoked feelings of oppression and injustice, particularly in scenes where learners portrayed themes of gender-based violence and social inequality. The data indicate that these imaginative choices often left the audience in a state of reflection due to underlying emotional techniques, prompting them to question societal norms and their own assumptions.

While multimodality and cross-pollination of storytelling offered great potential to bridge formal and informal learning, the data also revealed challenges in fully integrating the potential of cross-pollination. The challenges faced by Group 2 in their gender-based violence story highlight the complexities of balancing formal and informal literacies within multimodal storytelling. Their performance effectively incorporated informal resources like improvisation, cultural gestures, colloquial language and multilingualism to convey the theme and message of the story, but they did not submit a written story which would usually be required in formal academic settings. This imbalance of submissions highlights the need for targeted scaffolding to help learners translate the richness of informal modes into structured written forms, ensuring writing development across all modes and genres. The tension between fluid, everyday literacies and school-imposed standards reveals the importance of validating learners' dynamic literacies and practices while guiding them to integrate these with academic contexts. Multimodal cross-pollination of storytelling allowed for creative reimagination, but it also exposed tensions between school-imposed literacy standards and the fluid, dynamic literacies and epistemological knowledge and access that learners brought from their everyday lives.

iv. Language as a dynamic resource in multimodal storytelling

Language played a significant role in storytelling and was continuously transformed as the learners transduced their stories across all the different modes. While written narratives relied heavily on formal language to convey meaning, the shift to oral and performative modes allowed for greater fluidity in the use of linguistic and semiotic resources as *"[a] multimodal approach to literacy education recognizes that texts are not just linguistic; they are also visual, spatial, gestural, and aural. Engaging with these multiple modes allows learners to express themselves in ways that go beyond the written word and taps into their diverse semiotic resources"* (Newfield, 2014, p. 29). The multimodal cross-pollination process revealed how the learners' navigated tensions between formal and informal language practices, particularly when shifting between written, oral, and performative modes. For example, in Group 6's story (The sad case of William Shakespeare), William Shakespeare's poverty is introduced in the written narrative through language by emphasising his state of poverty through explicit language by saying "[c]oming from a poor

background … He would be the man to lift the Shakespeare's out of poverty. This put a lot of pressure on poor William." However, his poverty and lack of money is later depicted in the performance through gestures, where William taps his empty pockets to show that he has no money. Vally Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) refer to this as "The language of performance" (6) which relates to physical embodiment in the performative mode to create meaning. This physicalisation of communication and shift to embodiment and symbolism to create meaning through performance provided an additional layer of meaning that was not present in the written story, demonstrating how resemiotisation enabled learners to materialise abstract concepts in a more accessible way that aligned with the mode used. The language of the performance moves beyond words and creates a relationship between language and the body as a form of communication. Thus, in all instances where the stories were transduced across modes, the performative mode did not rely strongly on written or verbal language to create meaning, but rather showed how the body is a tool to create meaning which *"involves the blending of gesture and word, of dance (body movements) and song, so that they become so closely interwoven that it is impossible to speak of one without treating the other" (Scheub 1975:15).*

Language was also transformed in ways that reflected the learners' personal experiences and cultural identities. For example, Quwa's Instagram post offered a visual representation of her conflicting identities, but it was in the group's written story that offered an elaboration on the personal experience of being assaulted. This led her to adopt a protective "rockstar" identity, a stark contrast to the stereotypically feminine roles often imposed on young women. The shift from the Instagram post to the written mode allowed Quwa to develop a more nuanced narrative, moving from visual symbolism to a multilayered exploration of her identity. While the story was mostly a vehicle for unpacking her experience, it also served as a space for the rest of the group to engage with collaborative identities as most of the group had experiences with sexual assault. For Quwa, the process of reshaping and rearticulating her story across modes enabled her to assert a sense of agency in the classroom, blending informal, culturally resonant storytelling with formal academic literacy practices.

The visual Instagram posts did not engage with any forms of multilingualism, but it included linguistic repertoires and discourse associated with social media such as linguistic play of usernames and tagging other accounts using the @ symbol, linking a post using the heart icon, and

the speech/chat bubble to comment of a post. These symbols and contemporary language practices have become a universal language amongst the youth and is a major part of youth culture, particularly on social media. Language usage in the Instagram posts was driven by visual storytelling and contemporary youth cultures and trends that constantly evolve language. Every visual and linguistic component of the post added to creating a narrative that shapes the way that the learners are perceived or want to be perceived, and how their followers interact with them. Without any context of background information, the visual language and discourse of the posts is fluid and ambiguous leaving the audience to construct their own meaning. Quwa and Hassan's Instagram posts contain deeper, profound meanings that relate to the learners' experiences and identities, creating a unique storytelling landscape using diverse contemporary linguistic practices.

Cultural pedagogies should teach the youth to navigate across different communities and the cultural and linguistic discourses of these communities as sources of knowledge and access (Moje and Hinchman, 2004). This exposes learners to diverse ways of being and makes learning more accessible for learners who identify with or belong to these communities. It creates a sense of value and appreciation by foregrounding diverse practices and lived experiences as an asset pedagogy during learning. The multimodal cross-pollination storytelling intervention in this study highlighted the pivotal role that language plays as a resource in the performative mode, where multilingualism and linguistic repertoires were expressed in ways not always fully captured in the written or visual modes. The data demonstrates that learners engaged with oral traditions of storytelling to preserve and express their cultural experiences and languages, which fostered inclusivity and allowed for broader cultural representation. This engagement with multilingualism in performance reflected the dynamic, lived realities of learners, where languages often co-exist and are used fluidly within social interactions.

Almost all the written stories were in standard English, but for some groups the performative mode offered a space for multilingualism and a wider linguistic repertoire to be used through oral modes and dialogue between characters. This is evident in the performances by group 2 (GBV) and group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia) who engage with multilingualism, and group 6 (The sad case of William Shakespeare) who draw on informal, youth language practices. Group 5 (Corruption) was the only group that crafted a performative story and did not make use of a wider range of language opportunities which could be due to the genre of their story or Anglonormative linguistic

ideologies that exist amongst the group. African characters in the written story by group 3 (Tiaan and Sinawe) mimicked South African linguistic practices and included multilingualism in the written mode which showed authenticity in how the characters were portrayed. An example of multilingualism and South African dialect of English is illustrated in the phrases “Ja, Ma?” and “Maak gou!”. Engaging with language in this way made the stories accessible to a South African audience, that the learners and audience could identify and resonate with. Group 3 and 4 were the only groups who included multilingualism in their written stories, but this illustrates that the written mode also has potential for multilingualism and diverse linguistic repertoires to be included, provided that the learners take up these opportunities. Taking up multilingual opportunities across both modes show seamless switching of languages which reflects fluidity and complexity of drawing on multilingual repertoires which was only done by group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia). Since the groups had varying engagement with multilingual resources that is not due to any particular underlying reason, as cited in Warner (2024), Gramling (2021) argues “*that multilingualism may be in need of right-sizing" for the needs and experiences people actually express interest in it*” (45); in educational contexts, multilingualism, as something that can be taught, fostered, or developed would need to account for the norms and discourses through which languages and language learning are viewed, as well as the subjective desires - "*the manifestation of the world-making desires and social needs"- people bring with them into the classroom (48)*” (9).

In most instances across the groups, the performative mode created a space where learners could draw on their diverse linguistic repertoires, using code-switching and translanguaging in a way that mirrored their real-world social language practices. This linguistic flexibility aligned with conversational patterns commonly seen in both face-to-face interactions and digital spaces, where language is fluid and adaptable. Similarly to the written mode which often constrained most groups to standardised language forms, the audio story generated the same use of standard English apart from integrating accents. The audio story suggests a selective engagement with the affordances of the mode rather than an inherent limitation of it. Audio storytelling has the potential to accommodate multiple languages through code-switching or translanguaging practices, yet the learners did not take up these possibilities. This decision raises questions about the learners perceptions of linguistic hierarchy, audience expectations, or group dynamics, which suggest that

their storytelling choices were shaped by social and contextual factors rather than purely by the constraints of the medium. The performative stories enabled them to engage in multilingual dialogue, which added rich layers of meaning and brought cultural depth to their storytelling. For example, Group 4's inclusion of Arabic in their performative story was a critical use of multilingualism that added layers of cultural and linguistic identity to their narrative. While their audio story did not reflect this linguistic diversity, the performative mode allowed them to bring in Osama's identity as an Arabic speaker, which reflected the language of their group leader, Hassan. This use of Arabic was not just an aesthetic choice as it illustrated the interconnectedness of language, society, and belonging, highlighting how language mobilises cultural identities within storytelling. In doing so, the group bridged their formal learning with their personal linguistic resources, showing how language can function as a tool for identity expression and social connection. It was a representation of giving a voice to Osama, who is marginalised in the story, and this only came across in the performative mode, as *"[m]ultimodality is a means of making visible and audible the silenced voices and marginalized identities of learners. It offers the potential for creativity and agency in contexts that traditionally confine learners to restrictive forms of expression"* (Newfield, 2011, p. 87).

Through the stories that were crafted, the learners positioned themselves as agentive (Hull & Katz, 2006) by taking accountability for the social issues and inequalities expressed in their stories, and they claimed an awareness of oppressive systems that exist. They understand the severity of the issues that individuals and communities face and across most of the stories they display very little faith in the government and social systems to rectify issues and take it upon themselves to find solutions and establish notions of voice through their stories as an echo for those suffering. The data reveal that language in the performative mode served as a vehicle for characterisation, adding depth to the characters and enabling learners to engage with inclusive practices by representing diverse voices. The dialogue used in the performances represented a range of identities and social groups, drawn from the learners' experiences or their awareness of broader social dynamics. The linguistic diversity displayed in these performances not only added authenticity to the characters but also served as a form of social commentary, where learners could highlight issues of language, identity, and belonging. This aligns with Gleason's (2019) notion that storytelling across modes

can function as civic engagement, where learners use their narratives to give voice to marginalised groups and challenge dominant societal narratives.

The inclusion of multivoicedness where multiple characters spoke in different languages or registers was particularly significant in how it engaged with critical social consciousness (Canagarajah, 2015; Mendelowitz et al., 2022). Through their performances, learners employed multilingualism to challenge forms of anglonormativity and resist dominant notions of whiteness that often pervade educational spaces (Paris and Alim, 2014, 2017; Bomer, 2017). By representing linguistic diversity, they not only validated their own linguistic practices but also used storytelling as a form of resistance against the marginalisation of non-English languages in formal education. In this way, the performative stories became spaces where voices of minority groups were heard, and where learners could critique social hierarchies through their use of language. For example, when Hassan's group used Arabic in their performance and group 3 used Afrikaans, they resisted the expectation of anglonormativity in the classroom and instead centred their cultural and linguistic identity in the narrative. This not only validated the lived experiences of particular learners in these groups, the use of language also challenged the dominance of English as the sole language of academic discourse.

v. Cross-pollination barriers and limitations

While multimodal cross-pollination allowed learners to explore diverse modes and resources, the data revealed critical limitations, especially when narratives involved deeply personal and traumatic experiences. Among the six groups, only three successfully transduced their stories across written and performative modes, while one group opted solely for performance and avoided written or audio modes. Groups addressing sensitive topics such as rape (Group 1) or conflicts around sexual identity (Group 3) faced notable challenges in fluidly adapting their stories to the performative mode. While they created impactful visual and written narratives, the performative mode proved emotionally taxing due to its embodied nature, which heightened their sense of vulnerability and exposure. Performative storytelling demands a physical representation of the narrative, which, as Stein (2008) and Walsh (2010) highlight, can blur the boundaries between personal reflection and public display, intensifying emotional risks for learners. Field notes and

focus group discussions revealed that learners associated performance with a loss of safety and privacy, making it unsuitable for all stories, particularly those rooted in trauma. These findings highlight the nuanced reality of multimodal storytelling, where the affordances of certain modes may not align with the emotional needs of learners, thus limiting the full potential of cross-pollination when dealing with emotive or sensitive content.

Warner believes that "*Good language teaching – relies on engagement with meaningful language use*" (1). Meaningful language acts should extend beyond solely being for communicative competence and instead focus on what language reveals about "*social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations*" (Kramsch, 20ll, 357). Therefore, Warner (2024) believes that learners should be put in uncomfortable situations to perform and learn as language learning may be challenging and the classroom serves as the safest environment to learn (Warner, 2024). Warner argues this point as a sufficient learning tool, as language learning is often associated with emotions and affective responses. This study shows that language learning that involves affect, emotion and multimodality creates complexities that both enables and limits expression, safety and cross-pollination.

The discomfort with embodied performative storytelling shows the learners' ability to engage across modes is influenced by their sense of personal safety and emotional readiness. While multimodal pedagogy emphasises the value of creativity and representation, it is crucial to consider the cognitive and emotional impact of certain modes, especially when working with stories that engage deeply with personal and social resources. *"As readers of stories, we always make stories our own, rewriting and re-imagining them and assimilating them into the emotional landscape of our own lives"* (Bruner 1986: 37). Even though performative storytelling is a powerful tool to engage with lived realities and social and linguistic resources, it requires careful consideration when dealing with sensitive content as it may not always be the best medium for every learner or story.

In contrast, groups such as Group 4, Group 5 and Group 6 were more successful in transducing their stories into the performative mode due to their ability to maintain a narrative distance from the subject matter. These groups crafted stories that focused on general social issues that affect broader aspects of communities, such as gender-based violence, government corruption,

xenophobia and drug abuse. By not focusing their narratives on deeply personal life experiences, these groups were able to approach performance with a more detached perspective which allowed for a smoother transduction process and greater creative flexibility in bringing their stories to life. For example, Group 2's story about gender-based violence was sophisticated and creative, presenting itself as a documentary trailer (Fieldnotes, 2022). Although the subject matter was serious, the group's ability to approach it from a third-person perspective rather than drawing from personal experiences made the performative mode more accessible.

The third-person perspective that these groups adopted allowed them to engage in performative storytelling without the emotional burden that learners in Groups 1 and 3 experienced. While empathy and affect were still present in their storytelling, the removal of personal emotions facilitated more fluid expression in the performative mode, as learners could craft and present stories without feeling personally vulnerable. This suggests that narrative distance plays a key role in determining whether learners can engage effectively with performative modes. By stepping away from personal identification with the characters or events, the learners were able to employ affect and empathy to a certain extent while still maintaining the necessary emotional distance to transduce their story into performance. Therefore, creativity in storytelling is facilitated by the imaginative process, which can be more effectively mobilised when learners do not feel too personally implicated in the narrative. Here, the performative mode offered fluidity and allowed learners to experiment with social issues, enabling them to bring the story to life without the emotional attachment of personal experiences (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022).

One of the recurring themes in the data is the impact of audience on learners' choices of mode. The groups that struggled with personal stories felt inhibited by the public nature of the performative mode, where their narratives would be subject to direct audience scrutiny. In contrast, groups whose stories were not explicitly based on personal experiences and learners' identities found performance liberating because they could focus on the aesthetic and performative aspects rather than navigating personal emotions. This emphasises the importance of considering audience and context when designing multimodal storytelling interventions, particularly when learners are expected to engage with sensitive or personal narratives.

"Multimodality disrupts traditional power relations in the classroom by allowing for the inclusion of multiple forms of literacy that learners bring from their everyday lives. It challenges the dominance of print and opens up spaces for learners to engage with knowledge in ways that are more meaningful to them" (Newfield, 2011, p. 90). However, despite the potential for multimodal storytelling to disrupt traditional pedagogies, the English curriculum often imposes constraints that limit cross-pollination. The dominance of written forms of storytelling is considered the most legitimate within the context of language education which can discourage learners from fully engaging with modes like digital media or performance, which are less emphasised in the curriculum (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). For example, group 1 and group 5 wrote their stories in standard English, without deviating from conventional accepted writing practices in school contexts. However, disruptions to monomodal traditional approaches are only possible if learners take up this opportunity such as the learners in Group 2 who resisted the written and audio modes, opting instead to create a documentary trailer for their performative story instead of producing a written story to addressed gender-based violence. While their story was visually engaging and effectively conveyed its message, the group rejected the linearity and permanence of print-based storytelling (Stein, 2003). Their preference for performative storytelling, which allowed for more fluidity and creativity, shows how learners can resist the Anglonormative expectations of the curriculum in favour of modes that align with their social and cultural practices (Jewitt, 2008). However, the curriculum's emphasis on traditional literacy and written modes can limit the recognition of multimodal texts as valid and an academically rigorous form of storytelling (Walsh, 2010). While their resistance towards the written and audio modes of storytelling was noted, it highlights a pedagogical barrier as their performative story lacked depth and development which could have benefitted from writing the story in these modes before cross-pollinating it into the performative mode.

The success of multimodal cross-pollination is ultimately contingent upon learners' willingness to engage with the range of modes and resources available to them. As the data indicates, interest, motivation, and social positioning all play significant roles in shaping learners' choices. For instance, while some learners capitalised on opportunities to integrate multilingualism and youth language practices across modes, others were hesitant to engage with certain forms of storytelling due to personal discomfort or emotional vulnerability. The data highlights that learners' ability to

capitalise on multimodal opportunities and existing resources is closely tied to their sense of identity and expression. This is evident in the case of Group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia), where the inclusion of Arabic in their performative story represented a significant act of linguistic and cultural expression (Dagenais et al., 2017). Their use of Arabic not only challenged dominant Anglonormative discourse but also allowed them to engage in a form of cultural resistance through storytelling. Similarly, Group 3's (Tiaan and Sinawe) simultaneous use of English and Afrikaans in their written story exemplifies how learners draw on their linguistic repertoires to create meaning that reflects their pluralistic linguistic identities (Paris and Alim, 2014).

Technical and material limitations also affect learners' ability to engage fully with different modes. In many under-resourced school environments, access to digital tools, art materials, or even performance spaces may be limited, restricting the scope of multimodal cross-pollination (Bezemer & Kress, 2017). For example, Group 5 (Corruption) struggled to find appropriate props, audio-visual tools and lacked the skills to creatively perform their story, which impacted the quality and expressiveness of their stories (Fieldnotes, 2022). The report genre that they used illustrated a rigid and uncreative story which mostly stayed the same with minor transformations. Learners may not always possess the technical literacy required to work with complex digital storytelling tools, creating a barrier to effective multimodal transduction. This lack of access and expertise may result in a preference for simpler, more familiar modes like writing or drawing, even when learners express in their questionnaires (2022) a desire to engage with more innovative modes like video or performance (Kress, 2010). The successful use of resources and repertoires to cross-pollinate stories demonstrate how material conditions and technical digital skills can shape the possibilities for multimodal storytelling.

Chapter 6 - Key findings and reflections

This chapter focuses on the research question: *To what extent do the stories that learners craft illustrate the transformative affordances and limitations of multimodal cross-pollination?* In this chapter, I look at an overview of multimodal shifts and transformations that were made across all six groups to discuss the affordances and limitations of multimodal cross-pollination to storytelling. The findings reveal the complexities involved in transducing stories across different modes, particularly when dealing with topics that have a social nature, are sensitive or include personal subject matter. The discussion included the following categories of analysis:

i. *Storytelling across modes*
ii. *Nuanced learning through multimodal cross-pollination and genre fluidity*
iii. *Multimodal cross-pollination as a bridge between formal and informal learning and resources*
iv. *Language as a dynamic resource in multimodal storytelling*
v. *Cross-pollination barriers and limitations*

Multimodal cross-pollination serves as a critical pedagogical tool that offers multiple entry points for learners, allowing them to engage with content in diverse and meaningful ways. By encouraging learners to transduce their stories across visual, written, and performative modes, educators create opportunities for personalized, differentiated learning that values learners' cultural, linguistic, and social resources. This approach fosters the creation of inclusive and dynamic learning environments where learners assert agency over their learning, critically engage with social issues, and position themselves as active contributors to knowledge construction. As such, multimodal cross-pollination becomes a powerful tool for 21st-century education, enhancing creativity, critical thinking, and agency (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011; Kress, 2010).

Through this cross-pollination, learners were able to craft narratives that reflected their personal identities and social critiques, simultaneously developing a nuanced understanding of how meaning is reshaped across modes. The ability to shift between visual, written/audio, and performative modes allowed for multifaceted storytelling. Some learners used multilingualism,

multivoicedness, and visual modes to deepen character and context development. However, not all learners fully engaged with the affordances of each mode. Particularly when transducing emotionally charged or traumatic personal stories, some groups faced challenges. The embodied nature of the performative mode, for instance, posed emotional risks and discomfort, as performance often turned personal reflections into public displays. This issue highlights the need for scaffolding and support to help learners navigate the complexities of multimodal cross-pollination (Fieldnotes, 2022; Stein, 2008).

The study also shows how multimodal storytelling acts as a bridge between formal and informal literacies, allowing learners to draw on out-of-school languages, imaginations, and cultural resources which was extensively made possible through cross-pollination. By transforming these resources across modes, learners were able to challenge traditional narratives and assert their cultural identities. This demonstrates how multimodal storytelling fosters connections between school-based and out-of-school literacies, enabling learners to resist dominant discourses, represent marginalized voices, and use language as a form of social engagement. However, the data also reveals that learners' linguistic choices varied across modes. For example, when using written and audio modes, learners typically used standard English, overlooking the potential of multilingualism in these formats which is due to their writing choices and is not a limitation of the modes. In contrast, the performative mode revealed the dynamic nature of language in multimodal storytelling, with multilingualism and diverse linguistic repertoires adding depth to characters and foregrounding cultural and social identities. This flexibility in language use allowed learners to critique social hierarchies and engage critically with social and cultural issues.

While multimodal pedagogies challenge the monomodal, Anglonormative curriculum of South African English classrooms, the success of these interventions depends on the flexibility and responsiveness of the curriculum (Dagenais et al., 2017) and the learners' willingness to engage with multimodal and multilingual practices. While multimodality disrupts traditional power relations in the classroom by validating diverse literacy practices, the English curriculum continues to prioritise written storytelling as the most legitimate form of knowledge production. This limits the extent to which learners feel empowered to fully engage with alternative storytelling modes. For instance, some learners adhered strictly to standard English in their writing, while others resisted the dominance of the written mode by opting for performance-based storytelling.

However, the absence of written drafts in some cases resulted in a lack of narrative depth, highlighting the pedagogical challenge of balancing creative freedom with structured storytelling practices. Technical and skills limitations also constrained the possibilities for cross-pollination, affecting the creativity and effectiveness of the stories that were told across modes. Technical and skills limitations of crafting texts in different modes constrained the possibilities for cross-pollination, resulting in varying levels of successful and creative transductions and transformations. These barriers emphasise the importance of providing scaffolding and skills training to ensure all learners can successfully engage in multimodal storytelling, especially in ways that make learners feel safe and supported when dealing with emotionally sensitive content (Walsh, 2010; Jewitt, 2008).

One of the key findings is that multimodal storytelling offers learners creative opportunities to engage with their lived experiences, social identities, and linguistic repertoires. However, the emotional and cognitive demands of certain modes, particularly performative storytelling, can create barriers for learners when stories involve deeply personal or traumatic themes. Groups dealing with sensitive topics, such as rape or conflicts around sexual identity, struggled to transition their narratives into performative modes due to the embodied nature of this mode that resulted in emotional vulnerability that limited the cross-pollination. The physical enactment of such stories heightened learners' vulnerability, reinforcing the idea that the affordances of a mode must align with learners' emotional needs and readiness.

Narrative distance plays a crucial role in creative flexibility. Some groups successfully engaged with the performative mode by creating narrative distance, approaching their stories from a broader social perspective, for example in the stories that addressed issues such as gender-based violence or xenophobia. This allowed them to experiment with different creative elements without feeling personally implicated. By adopting a third-person perspective in most of these stories, the learners navigated the performative mode with less emotional burden, allowing them to focus on aesthetic and structural aspects of storytelling. This suggests that the level of personal identification with a narrative influences learners' ability to engage effectively with different storytelling modes. However, learners dealing with more personal or traumatic stories were often hesitant to perform in front of an audience due to concerns about trauma, privacy and exposure.

The role of audience also emerged as a significant factor in shaping learners' choices. Those working with personal stories felt constrained by the public nature of performative storytelling which exposed their narratives to scrutiny. In contrast, learners who engaged with general social issues found the performative mode liberating, as it allowed them to explore expressive and imaginative storytelling techniques without the emotional weight of personal disclosure. These findings highlight the importance of considering audience and emotional safety when implementing multimodal storytelling in educational settings.

SEVEN

Chapter 7:

CONCLUSION

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By exploring the transformative potential of multimodal storytelling as a pedagogical intervention in a South African Grade 10 English Home Language classroom, this study directly engaged with and answered the research question: *How does the integration of multimodal storytelling in an English language classroom shape learners' engagement with diverse forms of knowledge and resources to create meaningful learning opportunities?* Through the intentional design of multimodal storytelling tasks, the study examined how learners mobilised and transformed their linguistic, cultural, and social resources across multiple semiotic modes, making visible the ways in which meaning making is shaped through fluid, iterative, and dialogic processes.

A key conceptual tool in this study was multimodal cross-pollination (Vally Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022), which extended beyond conventional notions of transduction to foreground the interactive, reciprocal, and transformative nature of learners' engagements with multimodal storytelling. By moving across modes and genres, learners did not simply translate meaning but reconfigured and enriched it, drawing on pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and social resources as they navigated their storytelling processes. The concept of multimodal cross-pollination as developed in this study is indebted to, and situated within, a broader body of South African multimodal scholarship, particularly the work of Stein, Newfield, and Archer. Their research has powerfully demonstrated how meaning-making is deeply embedded in socio-cultural contexts, oriented toward social justice, and shaped through the affordances and constraints of different modes. It has also highlighted how multimodal social semiotics can be applied in collective and collaborative ways across educational settings. While transduction is already understood in this body of work as more than mere translation between modes, multimodal cross-pollination seeks to extend this by emphasising the recursive, iterative, and affective movement of meaning across modes, genres, and social interactions over time. In doing so, it foregrounds not only the transformation of meaning but also the affective, relational, and social work that takes place during collaborative meaning-making. This distinction is aligned with existing theory, and it aims to offer a nuanced conceptual lens that captures the dynamic layering of identities, emotions, and critical perspectives within learner storytelling. Acknowledging this lineage is vital for situating multimodal cross-pollination within the rich and evolving landscape of South African multimodal and critical literacy

research. The study revealed that cross-pollination facilitated deeper engagement by allowing learners to synthesise personal, social, and affective ways of knowing, fostering creative agency and critical reflection on their identities and experiences.

The multimodal storytelling tasks served as a scaffolded and participatory space where learners could remix and reimagine content, moving from visual, to linguistic, audio and performative modes of storytelling. This movement was not linear but recursive and generative, offering multiple entry points for meaning making and ensuring that both dominant and non-dominant resources and repertoires were valued in the classroom. The findings demonstrated that storytelling, when framed through the lens of cross-pollination enabled learners to actively shape their narratives, integrating diverse perspectives and modes in ways that affirmed their cultural, social and linguistic identities while expanding their communicative repertoires. Although the learners were given agency to engage with a range of different modes, not all the groups engaged with moving stories across different modes, and in these instances, cross-pollination does not apply.

Personalised narratives of identity and agency

One of the most striking affordances of the multimodal storytelling intervention was the diverse range of identities that emerged across the stories. Learners navigated and expressed multiple layers of identity, including gender, religious, ethnic, and geographic identities, as well as their positionality as Sowetans. These identities were both explicitly articulated and implicitly embedded within their narratives, reflecting the complex ways in which learners engage with personal and social identity construction.

A significant distinction emerged between identities that learners consciously navigate, and those that are imposed through societal structures and dominant discourses. Learners demonstrated an awareness of these impositions, critically engaging with and at times pushing back against them. This highlights how agency can manifest through recognition and intentional response rather than through unfettered choice. In some stories, learners actively explored gender and sexual identities, positioning their characters within narratives that challenged or reaffirmed societal norms. This was particularly evident in narratives that grappled with non-heteronormative identities, where learners balanced self-expression with the constraints of social and religious expectations.

Conversely, certain characters, such as Osama in the story Xenophobia and Islamophobia (group 4), and the female character in the story *Woman in South Africa (group 1)*, were depicted as bearing identities imposed upon them by external forces. Osama's identity as an outsider, marked by Islamophobia and xenophobia, reflected how broader societal discourses construct and confine individuals within rigid identity categories. Similarly, the woman who was raped in the story written by group 1 was positioned as a victim within a system of patriarchal oppression, emphasising the ways in which identity can be shaped by structural violence and social expectations. Geographic identity, particularly the learners' identities as Sowetans in the story by group 5 (Corruption), also played a critical role in shaping their narratives. In several stories, the setting of South Africa was not merely a backdrop but an active element that influenced the characters' experiences, struggles, and agency. By situating their stories in familiar socio-political landscapes, learners foregrounded their lived experiences and demonstrated how identity is deeply rooted in place-based realities.

The affordances of genre were also a key finding. The multimodal storytelling intervention allowed learners to experiment with different genres, each offering specific possibilities for identity exploration and social critique. Narrative genres, particularly those incorporating elements of personal storytelling, were rich in identity work and emotional engagement. The performative mode, in particular, facilitated an embodied exploration of identity, enabling learners to physically inhabit and express the complexities of their characters' experiences. However, the *report* genre appeared to be a limiting factor in this process. Unlike the other genres, the report genre lacked the same generative potential for identity exploration and the deep engagement with lived experience that characterized the other stories. The learner's perception of the genre such as its structured, factual nature of the report genre may have constrained the learners' ability to infuse personal voice, emotion, and social critique into their storytelling, making it a less effective medium for the kinds of transformative identity work seen in the other narratives. If not for their limited perception of the affordances of this genre, they could have done more with telling their story in the report genre.

For some learners, the storytelling intervention was possibly a catalyst for identity shifts. As they explored narratives that mirrored or contrasted with their own experiences, they may have discovered new ways of viewing themselves or framing their identities (Greene, 1995). The

process of articulating their personal stories allowed them to step outside of socially prescribed roles or stereotypes and presented opportunities to explore different versions of themselves, which is evident in the stories by group 1 (Woman in South Africa), group 3 (Tiaan and Sinawe), group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia) and group 6 (The sad case of William Shakespeare). The diversity of identities that emerged across the stories points to the fluid, intersectional, and contextually situated nature of identity. Learners drew on multiple, overlapping aspects of their identities such as gender, culture, language, and social positioning by demonstrating how identity is never singular but always relational and contingent (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, the multilingual storytelling practices evident in some narratives reflected the learners' negotiation of linguistic identities within a predominantly English-dominated educational context, a dynamic that speaks to the tensions of asserting cultural authenticity within hegemonic frameworks (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

A striking observation was the divergence in the starting points for identity exploration across the different groups. For some groups, personal experience of the learners served as the foundation for their stories, offering a direct and personal lens into their lived realities. Stories like those from Group 1, which focused on "Women in South Africa," drew heavily on the gendered and South African cultural experiences of the group of female learners, highlighting identity as a lived and embodied phenomenon (Butler, 1990). These stories often centred on deeply personal affective engagements, where learners reflected on their experiences of systemic inequality, gender roles, and resilience, intertwining their self-perceptions with broader societal discourses. Alternatively, other groups chose broader societal issues that were not overtly linked to personal experiences, such as gender-based violence and political corruption, and they approached storytelling from a more detached perspective, using their narratives as critical tools to engage with the social injustices and collective histories that shape their world. This approach reflects the construction of what Hall (1996) describes as cultural identities which refers to the learners taking on positions that are rooted in collective histories and shared experiences that extend beyond individual realities.

The learners' stories were deeply intertwined with their identities and social realities, reflecting the overlap between the personal and social/community. This was especially evident in the work produced by group leaders Quwa and Hassan, whose Instagram posts and collaborative stories

demonstrated the inseparability of their lived experiences from their creative outputs. For example, while Quwa's Instagram post appeared decontextualised when looked at in isolation, it became vividly contextualised when viewed alongside her group's story, Woman in South Africa, which addressed the issue of sexual assault. Similarly, Hassan's leadership role in crafting the collaborative story, Xenophobia and Islamophobia highlighted the resilience and complexity of his immigrant identity. Although he initially distanced himself from the story's themes through humour and othering, his contributions and plot of the story carried the weight of his lived experience, showing how storytelling can both expose and shield vulnerability.

Although the Instagram posts and collaborative storytelling activities were not carried out in a simultaneous time frame and were not explicitly connected in terms of the assignment brief, the process revealed how deeply learners' pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and social identities are embedded in their personal lives. Their lived experiences continuously shape how they engage with both academic and creative tasks, making identity central to their participation and expression. The findings and the stories crafted highlight that the learners' pluralistic identities are central and inseparable from their participation and expression within the academic space. Thus, the learners bring their full selves into the classroom, which is rooted in their unique backgrounds, demonstrating that language learning cannot be detached from the multifaceted identities that students inhabit outside of it.

The learner's willingness to engage with the different modes were deeply intertwined with these differing identity expressions. Learners who drew from personal experiences tended to rely on writing elements and modes that include emotive language, vivid imagery, and direct self-representation to convey their narratives. These groups often selected the written mode to tell their stories which evoked a sense of immediacy and vulnerability, reflecting the affective dimensions of their storytelling. In contrast, those who engaged with broader societal issues engaged with storytelling activities across the different modes and incorporated a mix of factual storytelling, dramatisation, and symbolic imagery to provoke critical reflection and empathetic engagement from their audience. This differentiation aligns with Kress's (2010) assertion that multimodal texts are shaped by the communicative intent and cultural resources available to their creators.

Affect emerged as a critical component in shaping how identities were negotiated and expressed. For learners such as those in group 1 (Woman in South Africa) and group 3 (Tiaan and Sinawe), drawing on personal experiences, affect served as both an enabling and constraining force. Emotion can be an enabler or a limitation to cross-pollination of stories as affect is linked to investment and willingness to engage with storytelling in particular modes. The emotional resonance of their narratives empowered them to produce compelling and authentic stories, fostering a sense of agency and self-expression. However, the vulnerability associated with revisiting painful or sensitive experiences sometimes acted as a barrier, limiting their willingness to fully engage or share their stories, particularly in the performative mode. Performative modes can make personal reflections more publicly visible, which may intensify emotional challenges for learners. This duality highlights the intricate relationship between affect and identity, where emotional engagement can simultaneously empower and inhibit expression (Zembylas, 2007). The performative aspect of storytelling further added complexity to this identity work. For learners whose narratives were deeply personal, the act of performing their stories required a delicate negotiation of identity expression and self-disclosure. This often heightened the affective stakes, as the learners had to navigate the vulnerability of sharing personal experiences within a public space. In contrast, learners in group 2 (GBV), group 5 (Corruption), and group 6 (The sad story of William Shakespeare) who focused on societal issues used performance as a distancing mechanism, enabling them to critically engage with their subject matter without the immediate personal exposure. The groups and individuals strategically managed their self-representation and willingness to participate in storytelling across modes based on their content, context and audience.

The act of naming in storytelling carries profound significance and serves as a tool for shaping personalised narratives of identity and agency. Across the stories produced in this study, naming functioned in diverse and layered ways often marking identity, asserting agency, and navigating the tensions between personal and collective narratives. Names of characters and groups of people were not merely labels but carriers of meaning which embodied cultural, historical, and social identities. Through the process of naming, learners were able to simultaneously root their stories in specific socio-cultural contexts, realities and imaginative possibilities, demonstrating how naming operates as a dynamic tool of self-representation and reimagination.

In the collaborative stories of some groups, naming was an act of reclaiming power. By assigning names to characters or groups that resonated with their lived experiences, they asserted ownership over narratives often dominated by external discourses. For example, in the story addressing issues of xenophobia and Islamophobia (group 4), the name Osama became a symbolic marker of identity, resistance, and challenged stereotypes of oppressed and marginalised identities. The same applies to the story of Corruption (group 5) which tells a story about the suffering of *the people of Soweto*. In these instances, naming allowed learners to speak back to power (Govender, 2019) by disrupting dominant narratives and positioning themselves as agents of change.

Alternatively, naming was also used as a strategy to distance oneself from the emotional attachment and risk involved in the narratives. Learners sometimes used names as placeholders or symbolic abstractions, creating a buffer between their personal vulnerabilities and the stories they told. This is evident in the story by group 1, who referred to their main character as "The woman", and group 6, who named the main character of their story "William Shakespeare". This distancing mechanism highlights the strategic choices that the learners made in navigating their positionality. By selecting names that were generic, the learners engaged critically with the issues at hand while maintaining a sense of detachment that enabled them to negotiate the affective stakes of their storytelling.

The storytelling intervention highlights the potential of multimodal pedagogies to create spaces for critical identity work where learners can explore, challenge, and reimagine their identities in relation to both personal and collective narratives. However, it also highlights the challenges within such processes, particularly the interplay of affect, power, and agency. The findings resonate with Greene's (1995) emphasis on the imaginative potential of storytelling to envision new possibilities, while also affirming the need for critical scaffolding to navigate the emotional and structural constraints that shape identity construction. By centring identity as both a process and a product of storytelling, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of multimodal storytelling within diverse educational contexts.

Multimodality as a bridge between lived and academic worlds

In an education system that often marginalises learners' cultural and linguistic resources, this study demonstrated how multimodality can create an inclusive learning environment. The intervention bridged formal school literacy practices with learners' informal, everyday literacies, validating their home languages, cultural symbols, and semiotic resources. Modes and platforms like Instagram offered learners such as Hassan and Quwa a familiar space to experiment with visual and textual representations of their identities. While Hassan's Instagram post leveraged visual elements that subtly represent his experiences, Quwa's post demonstrated a nuanced exploration of authentic and constructed identity, blending personal and symbolic references that resonated across her Instagram post and collaborative stories crafted by her group. A multimodal approach expands the range of texts welcomed into the English classroom. By incorporating everyday multimodal texts and contemporary genres drawn from learners' out-of-school literacy practices and popular culture, educators introduce additional modes that reflect and validate students' lived experiences. Engaging with these texts through their distinct modal affordances allows for a richer, more inclusive learning environment, one that actively draws on and values learners' diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires.

This inclusion of cultural and linguistic resources was particularly evident in the performative mode, where learners incorporated multilingual dialogue and cultural representations, creating narratives that resonated with their lived realities and those of their communities. Group 3's (Tiaan and Sinawe) use of diverse linguistic repertoires in their written story and multilingualism, and Group 4's (Xenophobia and Islamophobia) use of multiple languages in their performative story mirrored the social realities of their community, showing how storytelling can transcend the monolingual norms of traditional academic tasks by challenging traditional dominant linguistic practices in English classrooms. Through the multimodal cross-pollination storytelling intervention, learners were able to use language as a form of resistance. By incorporating diverse linguistic repertoires into their performances, they challenged dominant discourses that often privilege monolingualism or anglonormativity in the classroom. The performative mode, in particular, allowed for a plurality of voices to be heard, creating a dialogic space where learners could engage in critical literacy. This critical engagement was not only about using multiple languages but about using those languages to challenge power structures and give voice to marginalised perspectives.

In a classroom setting where some learners' home languages and cultural practices were often marginalised or excluded (Teacher interview, 2022), the use of multiple modes of storytelling such as visual and performative enabled learners to incorporate their own linguistic varieties, cultural symbols, and personal experiences into their narratives. This recognition of their diverse identities within the classroom not only validated their voices but also enhanced their engagement with the learning material through multilingualism which was enabled by the performative mode. By adding character dialogue in a range of different languages in the performances, it reflected identities and voices of different groups of people which mimicked social representations of real-life contexts (Canagarajah, 2015; Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). Their use of language indicated that to use language effectively in social contexts, learners require more than just knowledge of grammar and syntax, as it also involves understanding how to use language appropriately in various social situations (Hymes, 1972).

The multimodal cross-pollination storytelling intervention provided opportunities for the learners to engage with and mobilise their authentic identities, drawing deeply from their personal, cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. By incorporating various modes of storytelling, the learners were able to integrate diverse aspects of their lived experiences into their narratives. The multilingualism that emerged in the performances was a direct reflection of the learners' social realities, where translanguaging and code-switching are everyday practices. The data indicate that this linguistic fluidity allowed learners to bridge the gap between their informal and formal language practices. By engaging in multilingual storytelling, the learners were able to negotiate their identities within the learning space, validating their cultural and linguistic backgrounds while also critiquing the exclusionary practices often found in their English language classroom. This integration was particularly powerful in enabling learners to move beyond the restrictive confines of traditional academic task, which often prioritise standardised forms of language, writing and communication. Through this intervention, learners could explore and express themselves in ways that acknowledged the pluralistic nature of their identities. The Instagram posts provided a platform to engage with personal identities through the visual mode and was represented through social media discourse. Across all the groups, their collaborative written, audio and performative stories were based on their identities and lived experiences, or on their communities which highlighted how learners brought deeply personal and often marginalised aspects of their lives into

the classroom. These narratives were more than just fictional stories, as they became avenues for learners to articulate who they are and the complexities of their lived and social realities.

The multimodal storytelling tasks in this study was intentionally designed to depart from the conventions of traditional classroom writing activities by providing learners with a wide range of choices and a level of autonomy that is often absent in formal academic settings. Unlike conventional writing tasks that typically follow rigid guidelines and focus primarily on print-based modes of expression, this intervention encouraged learners to experiment with visual, written, audio and performative modes of storytelling. By offering flexibility in the choice of modes, theme, topic, and language use, the task created a space for learners to draw on their unique linguistic, cultural, and social repertoires. This freedom allowed the learners to explore and assert their identities, and also to exercise agency in shaping their narratives, demonstrating that storytelling can transcend the limitations of traditional forms and invite multimodal creativity. However, the positioning of modes by teachers and the learners' perceptions of these modes played a significant role in shaping what was deemed possible or permissible. In reality, teachers often implicitly or explicitly valorise certain modes such as written text—as being more "academic" or legitimate, which can influence learners' choices and the degree of experimentation they feel comfortable engaging in (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). Similarly, learners' prior experiences and comfort levels with particular modes, as well as their understanding of how these modes align with classroom norms can constrain or expand the range of their creative expressions. For example, while group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia) embraced the audio mode as an opportunity to integrate affective and performative elements into their story, the other groups gravitated toward the written mode, perceiving it as a safer and more familiar option for writing in an academic context. This highlights the interplay between pedagogical framing and learner agency, highlighting how the positioning of modes within the classroom influences the boundaries of what learners' feel is permissible, possible, and valued. By disrupting these traditional boundaries through this intervention, this storytelling tasks created a more inclusive and expansive platform for learners to explore different ways of telling their stories.

Thus, multimodality emerged as a crucial tool for fostering an inclusive pedagogy. Each mode of storytelling offered distinct affordances and different pathways to learning. The diverse linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds of the students were fully embraced, as the intervention allowed

for a more holistic approach to language learning. Through the use of multiple modes of storytelling, the intervention catered to students' pluralistic repertoires, enabling them to express themselves in ways that reflected their home and social literacy practices. The inclusion of multimodality helped to create an inclusive learning environment where students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds could actively engage in the learning process by using the resources most familiar and meaningful to them. The integration of personal and cultural identity into academic tasks emphasised that language learning and identity development are not separate but intertwined processes, where the classroom becomes a site for identity negotiation and affirmation (Ladson-Billings, 2001). A key outcome of the multimodal cross-pollination of stories was the increased agency learners experienced in their learning processes. The act of selecting modes, genres and resources that resonated with their personal experiences and preferences gave learners greater control over how they engaged with and represented content. This agency is deeply linked to notions of identity and voice, as learners were able to position themselves within their stories and challenge dominant societal narratives through their multimodal texts (Gee, 2015).

Critical-affective contributions of cross-pollinating multimodal stories

Affect and emotion was pivotal in this multimodal storytelling intervention which became a nexus through which learners engaged with emotion, empathy and criticality. The deeply personal and emotive themes explored by the groups, ranging from gender-based violence to xenophobia and peer pressure revealed how affect operates as both an enabler and constraint to multimodal cross-pollination. In the stories, these themes positioned affect as an emotive and critical dimension of meaning making. The themes in the stories reflected learners lived realities and broader societal issues, allowing them to engage with their stories creatively while critiquing dominant narratives. Affect enabled learners to invest deeply in their narratives, fostering authenticity and social engagement. Emotional resonance also enhanced collaboration, as sharing personal and socially unequal stories evoked empathy and created a safe space for dialogue and the co-construction of nuanced narratives. This emotional connection inspired creative experimentation across most of the groups, as learners leveraged modes such as performance to convey affective depth through multilingual dialogue, tone, gestures, and embodied actions, or visual representations to highlight

symbolic elements. However, the intensity of affect across some groups also introduced constraints. Emotional vulnerability, particularly when grappling with sensitive themes such as rape (group 1), and gender and sexuality (group 3), led learners to withhold aspects of their stories or avoid expressive modes like performance which limited cross-pollination.

Cited in Gachago et al., (2014, 9) *"Freire (2005), holds that one of the main barriers to social justice in education is a culture of silence, resulting from both the marginalisation of certain voices from mainstream society, as well as the unspoken nature of social issues and abuses".* The stories crafted by the six groups were based on themes such as rape; gender-based violence; gender and sexuality; xenophobia and Islamophobia; crime, corruption and a lack of service delivery; and peer pressure and substance abuse. Each story captured the social agenda brief successfully and dealt with issues that either relate to the learner's lives or to the lives of marginalised communities. Even though the stories dealt with different topics, all the stories highlighted the theme of silencing. The recurring theme of silencing in the collaboratively crafted stories reflects the learners' critical engagement with social inequities, identity, and power. These stories explored the theme of silencing in different ways, demonstrating an acute awareness of both local and global injustices. By highlighting silencing as a significant theme across all the stories, the learners challenged systemic inequalities and critiqued the societal power structures that marginalise voices. The storytelling process became an act of resistance, where learners used multimodal tools to reclaim agency and amplify silenced voices through visual, written, audio, and performative modes. They broke silences through the stories that they told, and in some instances, groups used silence to make particular points. For example, Group 1 avoids explicitly stating what happened to the woman, and this silence mirrors the broader silencing of rape victims or suggests the possibility of her death. However, the capacity to break silences was limited for some groups, such as Group 3 (Tiaan and Sinawe), who deliberately withheld details about the relationship and emotions between their characters out of fear of bullying.

Learners' affective attachments to specific modes shaped what they perceived as possible or permissible, with some gravitating toward familiar, less exposing modes like writing, thereby constraining the integration of richer affective elements. Despite these challenges, affect remained pivotal in driving critical-affective engagement (Mendelowitz and Govender, 2024), as learners' emotional connections to their themes allowed them to challenge dominant ideologies and amplify

marginalised perspectives by crafting counter-narratives and telling their stories through a range of diverse resources and repertoires. This dual role of affect highlighted the importance of pedagogical sensitivity, as teachers need to create supportive environments to balance the enabling and constraining dimensions of affective engagement. Ultimately, affect added depth, authenticity, and criticality to the narratives, making the storytelling process a transformative and meaningful learning experience.

The authenticity, urgency and connection created through telling emotive stories created affective responses for the audience which was emotionally gripping as seen in the story by group 1, Woman in South Africa. Alternatively, the humour and sarcasm in the performative mode by Group 4's Xenophobia and Islamophobia story acted as an affective shield, allowing the learners to engage with marginalisation in a way that balanced vulnerability with critical distance. The performative mode, in particular, amplified affect as a means of connecting with audiences, making abstract social critiques visceral and relatable. By embodying their narratives through the performative mode, the learners brought their emotions to the forefront, creating a space where criticality was not merely intellectual but deeply felt. Across the groups, affect functioned as a bridge between personal and societal contexts, allowing learners to interrogate power, silencing, and resistance in ways that were emotionally resonant and critically transformative. Even though there were limitations to cross-pollinating in stories that induced deep affective and emotional responses, just like Warner (2024), I argue for a pedagogy that focuses on learners' subjectivities, including their affective and aesthetic experiences as this provides a space for emotional dimensions in learning. Our studies align by agreeing that the inclusion of affective approaches to education offer hopefulness and fosters an openness to construct new meanings, sensations, and ways of being. Critical affective approaches to language learning favours ongoing reflection on the entanglement of designs, language, critical affect, and multimodal realities.

Collaborative multimodal storytelling as critical praxis

Through a social justice agenda, the intervention enabled learners to reclaim agency through multimodal tools, encouraging them to critique power relations and dominant social discourses. The stories crafted across all the groups in activity 2 were counter-narratives as they each

challenged societal norms and inequalities, which illustrated some form of resistance and active participation in allowing personal and social voices to be heard (Rosario-Ramos & Johnson, 2014). For groups 2, 4, 5 and 6, transducing and cross-pollinating their stories across modes prompted reflection, deepening the narratives' complexity and enhancing the learners' critical engagement. Initially, their written and audio stories effectively conveyed the core messages of their narratives, but when these stories were transduced into the performative mode, the narratives evolved in meaningful ways. As stories were cross-pollinated, the plots became more intricate, the characters more layered, and the language and multimodal resources were adapted to represent diverse social realities. This provided a richer, more dynamic storytelling experience, encouraging learners to experiment with how meaning could be shaped and reshaped across modes. Multimodal cross-pollination enabled elements of storytelling that extended beyond the possibilities of transduction by fostering a collaborative, integrative, and iterative process of meaning making that allowed learners to draw on and combine diverse semiotic resources and perspectives. While transduction involves the transfer of meaning from one mode to another, for example, translating a written text into a visual representation, it often remains a linear or unidirectional process. Multimodal cross-pollination, on the other hand, is inherently dialogic and reciprocal, involving the interplay of multiple modes and the blending of individual and collective contributions to enrich the narrative. This is evident in the shifts from visual, to written/audio stories, followed by the performative mode of storytelling. Thus, creating links and interplay between multiple modes that include threads, identities and experiences.

Offering learners different modes to choose from which enriches storytelling possibilities and highlights the complexities of personal relevance. This study demonstrates how this approach fosters diverse narratives while also posing constraints when stories become too personal or closely tied to audience perception. This multimodal approach acknowledged that students do not solely rely on verbal or written language to communicate but often use a variety of semiotic resources, especially in the digital age. Cross-pollination facilitated the interplay of modes between written, visual, audio, and performative modes which created a multidimensional narrative that leveraged the affordances of each mode. It introduced a fluid and dialogic process where meaning was not fixed but continually reshaped through the interaction of modes, ideas, and perspectives. For example, while visual modes captured symbolic representations of identity, performative modes

introduced embodied expressions and multilingual dialogue, which brought emotional and affective depth to the stories. In cross-pollination, modes did not simply stand alone or replace one another, as in transduction, but interacted with each other and included continual threads and links across the different modes used for storytelling. In most of the stories, it is evident that lived experiences shaped the learner's sense of identities and this emerged across the different modes of storytelling. For example, Quwa's stories included a rockstar identity and struggles with a vulnerable feminine identity due to her personal experiences, and this was evident in the way that she expressed her stories and the resources used to construct meaning. Unlike transduction, which isolates meaning within one mode at a time, cross-pollination fostered a simultaneous and integrative use of modes, allowing learners to experiment with how meaning could evolve and interact across semiotic systems.

Cross-pollination encouraged learners to revise and reimagine their stories iteratively, responding to feedback from peers and the affordances of new modes. This process not only deepened their engagement with the content but also allowed them to critically reflect on how their choices shaped meaning. This process revealed that multimodal storytelling is not merely an expressive activity, but also a critical practice that fosters learners' ability to interrogate societal norms and assert their voices within academic spaces. This act of "speaking back to power" (Govender, 2019) was evident across all the collaborative stories, particularly in the performative modes where learners' embodied/physical expressions brought new layers of meaning to their work.

Cross-pollination allowed learners to integrate not only their individual interpretations but also their peers' insights and semiotic contributions, resulting in richer, more complex plots and characters. For instance, through group collaboration, learners combined their lived experiences and sociocultural understandings to co-construct narratives that reflected shared realities, as seen in multilingual dialogue and culturally embedded themes. This layering of perspectives is less feasible in transduction, which tends to centre around an individual's interpretation. The collaborative storytelling process allowed learners to position themselves within their academic work and through discussion. By working in groups and drawing on shared experiences, the learners found that their voices mattered, and that their personal histories and resources became powerful contributions to their stories. In doing so, they were not merely passive recipients of knowledge, but active creators and shapers of meaning within the classroom. The intervention also

created opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning with one another, which deepened their critical-affective engagement with their stories in an attempt to use this intervention and storytelling as a space to use their voices to challenge social positions of power and inequality.

Collaborative interaction with other group members and their lived experiences prompted learners to re-evaluate their positions within larger social and cultural discourses. By participating in stories that dealt with issues such as foreignness, sexual trauma, gender and sexuality, and marginalisation, the learners were exposed to perspectives that might have differed from their own, encouraging empathy and a deeper understanding of diversity. Emotional responses to language learning can differ based on cultural and individual contexts (Krashen, 1982), but in most instances where stories were cross-pollinated across modes, the plot was developed, characters and conclusions of the stories may have led to learners developing a more nuanced understanding of their own identities, recognising the fluid and socially constructed nature of who they are.

Theoretical synthesis and contribution of multimodal cross-pollination

This study advances the theoretical discourse on multimodal storytelling by introducing and elaborating on the concept of multimodal cross-pollination, which extends beyond traditional notions of transduction. While transduction describes the process of shifting meaning from one mode to another (Kress, 2010), multimodal cross-pollination foregrounds the dynamic, iterative, and affective interplay between modes, enriching meaning-making processes. This study's findings demonstrate how learners transferred meanings across modes and engaged in dialogic modal transformation, where affective, social, and critical dimensions were amplified through the interplay of different semiotic resources.

At its core, multimodal cross-pollination builds on and extends theories of multimodal meaning making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), affect in learning (Boler, 1999), and critical literacy (Janks, 2010) by illustrating how affective engagement, social critique, and modal affordances intersect in powerful ways. The theoretical contribution lies in synthesising these perspectives to show that multimodal storytelling is not merely a representational practice but a critical-affective practice

that fosters agency, criticality, and social awareness. This study highlights three key theoretical insights:

i. Affective engagement as a transformative semiotic resource: While multimodal studies often emphasise cognitive and representational dimensions, this research highlights affect as central to meaning making. Learners' use of different modes allowed them to channel emotions in ways that written or spoken language alone often could not. The success of this affordance was evident particularly in the stories that were cross-pollinated in the performative mode. This aligns with Boler's (1999) argument that emotions are not peripheral but integral to critical engagement, enabling learners to forge deeper personal and social connections through storytelling. A central contribution is the theorisation of affect as a key semiotic dimension, demonstrating that emotional engagement is not merely an outcome of storytelling but an active force shaping learners' agency, participation, and critical engagement. While existing research has examined how multimodal composition supports identity expression, this study foregrounds the ways in which affect interweaves with multimodal meaning-making, allowing learners to construct narratives that are not only reflective of their lived experiences but also deeply connected to their emotions and social realities.

ii. Multimodal storytelling as critical-affective praxis: This study reframes multimodal storytelling as an inherently critical-affective process that moves beyond individual expression to collective meaning making and social critique. Learners did not simply recount personal narratives, and instead, they mobilised their pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and social resources to challenge dominant discourses. This aligns with Janks' (2010) conception of critical literacy, where meaning making is an act of intervention and disruption. By transducing stories across modes, learners engaged in what can be termed affective advocacy which is a form of storytelling where emotions and personalised stories become catalysts for critical consciousness and social justice. Therefore, this study positions multimodal storytelling as a pedagogical tool and also as a means of critical literacy, where learners develop the ability to navigate and critique social realities through affectively charged, multimodal narratives.

iii. From transduction to multimodal cross-pollination: Another significant theoretical contribution is the reconceptualization of storytelling through cross-pollination rather than transduction. While transduction has traditionally been understood as the movement of meaning from one mode to another in a linear process, this study demonstrates that multimodal cross-pollination of storytelling is a dialogic and iterative process in which meaning is reshaped and expanded as learners engage with multiple modes. Rather than simply transferring content between modes, learners adapt, refine, and reimagine their narratives, using different semiotic resources to deepen the complexity of their stories. This modal interplay fosters a more dynamic and participatory approach to storytelling, where meaning is not only transferred but also transformed through collaboration and creative exploration. This study demonstrates that even when learners cross-pollinated stories into only one additional mode, the process was not unidirectional as it involved feedback loops of reinterpretation, collaboration, and refinement. This builds on Kress's (2010) work but moves beyond a structuralist view of mode switching, positioning multimodal storytelling as an emergent, affectively driven, and socially situated practice.

Concluding statements, recommendations and implications for future research

Reflecting on this study, it is evident that remixing stories across diverse modes is a tool to mobilise and sustain a range of cultural, linguistic, and social resources, which is enabled if learners' make a deliberate choice to embrace this opportunity. The stories crafted and the focus group discussion indicated that the shift across modes materialised as a productive journey for all groups, providing a significant platform to grapple with pressing societal issues in need of urgent attention.

While the intervention highlighted the potential of multimodal storytelling, it also revealed challenges. Not all the groups were able to successfully craft stories across all the different modes, and therefore one group did not produce a written/audio story but successfully crafted a performative story and the reason for this is unknown. Group 1 and 3 struggled to transduce their written stories into the performative mode due to the emotionally charged topics and themes, and this indicated that stories that are deeply personal to the learners may sometimes result in a constraint that limits cross-pollinating stories across modes due to issues of emotional safety which

is compromised by the performative mode due to its physical embodied nature. Therefore, while storytelling in this intervention gave all learners opportunities to share their voices and advocate for social justice, this opportunity was not taken up across all the modes of storytelling as some groups struggled to transduce their stories into the performative mode which amplified silencing of marginalised voices who experience gender-based violence, rape and sexual discrimination. The learners in these groups did not feel safe enough to tell their stories due to stigma and having to re-live the trauma (Focus group, 2022). It would have been useful to get more feedback from learners and groups who opted out crafting stories in certain modes and discuss their choices and avoidance of certain modes. It would have been beneficial to interrogate if it was it just poor organisation, time constraints, or laziness? Or does the limited cross-pollination of stories have anything to do with their attitudes to certain modes?

Cross-pollinating stories created limitations for specific groups, revealing the intrinsic challenges when endeavouring to translate their socially conscious stories into embodied performances. The deeply personal nature and vivid embodiment of these stories rendered the performances too realistic. Nevertheless, even when the performative mode was constrained due to the personal nature of topics, there remained at least one mode of storytelling that facilitated engagement with topics of profound personal and social significance, fostering pathways to engage with resources and move towards social consciousness/action. While multimodal cross-pollination of stories enabled capitalising on the affordances of moving across modes, it is important for educators to challenge and rethink the use of multimodality in classroom practice by broadening its scope and understanding how modes position learners in shaping traditional understandings of both pedagogical practice and learner agency. Feedback on drafts and initial multimodal stories would have also been helpful for groups such as group 5 who struggled with cross-pollinating their stories in creative and transformative ways. Groups who opted out of the study would have also benefitted from this. Most groups were successful in finding and using their voices to break issues of silence and bring their chosen social issues to light. All the stories end in tragedy, without hope for the future. However, there are still elements of resilience and establishing voices for marginalised groups through these narratives. This highlights the need for educators to create emotionally safe spaces that support learners in navigating sensitive topics. Additionally, not all groups successfully

transduced their stories across all modes, indicating that varying levels of support and scaffolding may be necessary to ensure equitable participation.

The use of language and engaging with diverse and pluralistic repertoires were rarely taken up by groups in the written mode. This was only evident in the story by group 3 (Tiaan and Sinawe) who explored multilingualism through practices of translanguaging in the written mode by using English and Afrikaans during character dialogue to create a sense of voice and character identities in their story. While this was an effective use of language repertoires in the written mode, the other groups did not fully capitalise on their diverse linguistic resources and wrote their stories in standard English which limited the aims of this study and illustrated that linguistic ideologies are deeply ingrained in the written mode which is regarded as acceptable forms of expression in academic contexts (Vally Essa and Mendelowitz, 2022). However, during the cross-pollination of stories from the written/audio modes to the performative mode, 3 out of the 4 groups of learners who participated in moving their stories across modes engaged fully with their diverse linguistic resources and repertoires by engaging in multilingual practices that reflect social communicative contexts. These findings indicate that engagement with diverse and pluralistic resources are possible to merge academic and personal/social contexts. However, this requires dominant Anglonormative ideologies in English classrooms to be challenged, and educators need to employ pedagogical approaches that encourage multilingual practices. I recommend that the educator encourage the incorporation of multilingual resources and repertoires across a wider range of language lessons and activities to create an inclusive pedagogy that represents the learners' pluralistic linguistic resources and repertoires which bridge the diverse contexts of their lives.

Collaborative storytelling provided a unique opportunity for learners to assert agency, becoming active participants in their learning process by challenging conventional norms about individualised learning within English Language classrooms. Collaborative storytelling often encouraged learners to take ownership of their learning by stepping out of passive roles by contributing their voices, ideas, and experiences to their collaboratively crafted narratives (Field notes, 2022). The learners moved beyond being recipients of knowledge to becoming co-creators of meaning. This active participation allowed them to challenge traditional norms of individualised learning in English Language classrooms which highlighted many affordances of social approaches to learning.

The affordances of multimodal cross-pollination were particularly evident in how collaborative storytelling encouraged layered perspectives, as different group members brought their unique cultural, linguistic, and social experiences into the meaning making process. By working together, learners negotiated interpretations, debated creative choices, and critically engaged with the messages they sought to convey. This process moved beyond individual meaning-making towards a collective construction of knowledge, where stories became richer as they absorbed multiple influences. The multimodal nature of storytelling further amplified these affordances by allowing learners to express ideas through a range of semiotic resources. Collaboration provided opportunities for learners to learn from one another's strengths and knowledge, particularly in navigating multimodal platforms and drawing upon their pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and social resources. The collaborative nature of the intervention enriched the storytelling process, as each participant brought unique perspectives, multiplicity of resources and skills which expanded on communicative and creative possibilities. This peer-supported environment often created a dynamic where learners developed knowledge, skills and cultural capital organically through interaction. Working together allowed learners to negotiate meanings, question assumptions, and reflect on the ways in which language and multimodal elements shape their stories, identities and discourse. This collaborative criticality fostered deeper engagement with the stories being told and encouraged learners to critically examine societal norms and their own positionality in relation to their peers and society.

While the collaborative nature of the intervention offered significant affordances, it also revealed limitations. One key challenge was the unequal participation of learners in some groups, which was often shaped by power dynamics within the group. Factors such as varying levels of linguistic proficiency, digital literacy, confidence, or dominant personalities sometimes resulted in certain voices being overshadowed, limiting the plurality of perspectives that collaboration aims to achieve. For example, in group 4 (Xenophobia and Islamophobia), the group leaders dominant personality resulted in him taking charge of the plot and details of telling their story which limited the participation, ideas and voices of the other group members (Field notes, 2022). Additionally, the negotiation of meanings and decisions within groups occasionally led to conflict or compromises that diluted individual creativity, producing narratives that were less cohesive or less reflective of diverse contributions.

Time constraints posed another limitation, as the process of integrating multimodal elements into collaborative storytelling required more time than individual efforts, often conflicting with the structured timetable of the English lessons and CAPS curriculum document. This resulted in most activities in the intervention having to be spread across several days as it was only possible to teach and have the learners work on their stories during the English language periods allocated on their timetable. The learners had differing access and familiarity with multimodal texts and digital tools, creating disparities in their ability to engage with the multimodal aspects of the intervention. For example, group 2 (GBV) produced a successful cinematic digital video of their performance, while group 5 (Corruption) produced a basic video of their performance which summarised their story in minimally creative ways. Interpersonal dynamics within groups, such as differing levels of commitment or motivation, also presented obstacles, with some learners disengaging or contributing minimally (Field notes, 2022). Therefore, while collaboration offered opportunities for critical, creative and communicative engagement, its success depended heavily on the learner's willingness to collaborate with each other. Reflecting on the intervention, I suggest a need for limited teacher mediation and support to ensure inclusivity, guide interactions, and address imbalances. Without facilitation of an educator during collaborative activities, the intervention risks isolating some learners and reinforcing existing inequities and isolated learning experiences rather than challenging them.

Regarding future study, I am able to make the following recommendations to triangulate my findings and extend the scope of this study so that it can be used across diverse contexts, demographics and topics.

- Firstly, I recommend conducting the same study with a larger group of participants across various school contexts. By incorporating English Home Language learners from a wider demographic and across various school contexts such as urban, rural, private, and public schools, one can explore how factors like socioeconomic background, geographical location, and school resources influence learners' engagement and storytelling processes. This could create opportunities for comparative analysis that enables an exploration of how different school environments, teacher practices, or community influences shape the outcomes of stories that are crafted across different modes.

- While deeply personal and emotive storytelling can be transformative, it also presents challenges, particularly for learners who may feel vulnerable or exposed. To address this limitation, educators should consider scaffolding storytelling activities and create flexible approaches that allows learners to choose their level of emotional engagement. This can include providing alternative modes and genres as options for cross-pollination which are less personal but still meaningful. This will illustrate modal preference and provides flexible freedom of expression that is non-restrictive. Alternatively, learners can get more input on developing and the drafting processes of their multimodal stories to support them in achieving successful outcomes.
- The intervention demonstrated that storytelling and academic contexts are deeply intertwined with learners' pluralistic identities, highlighting the need for English language activities and curricula to actively reflect and engage with these identities. Learners bring rich and diverse cultural, linguistic, and social resources into the classroom which are often sidelined, therefore, incorporating these pluralistic resources into literacy activities allows learners to see their identities valued and legitimised in academic spaces, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing their critical and creative engagement. This creates opportunities to explore and assert identities, as well as bridge home and school contexts.
- With regards to teacher training and curriculum considerations, I recommend rethinking traditional approaches to writing in English classrooms which are often dominated by Anglonormative and print-based conventions, which prioritise standard English and linear written modes. These restrictive practices often marginalise the rich, pluralistic cultural, linguistic, and multimodal resources that learners bring into the classroom. To better align with 21st-century literacy practices, these boundaries must be actively challenged and reimagined to reflect the dynamic use of language across various contexts for communication and the interconnected nature of contemporary communication that includes a range of different modes and genres, including social media and digital literacies. This shift reflects real-world communication practices and allows learners to express themselves more authentically and creatively, drawing on their full range of semiotic resources which can be achieved through cross-pollinating multimodal stories.

In reflecting on the implications of this PhD study, the findings have several key areas of significance within the educational landscape. The study speaks to the importance of curriculum development, particularly in how it can integrate and support multimodal forms of expression and storytelling. As learners engage with various modes of communication, including written, visual, audio and performance, curriculum frameworks can evolve to acknowledge the role of multimodal literacy in fostering learners' identities, critical thinking, and agency. This approach also invites a reconsideration of traditional forms of assessment, encouraging educators to explore alternative and dynamic methods that cater to diverse learner expressions, rather than solely written outputs. The study's insights have a direct bearing on teacher training as well. Educators must be prepared to understand and support the complexities of learners' multimodal practices. Professional development programs should equip teachers with the tools and strategies needed to engage learners in ways that recognise and validate their pluralistic linguistic and cultural repertoires. This would foster a more inclusive, learner centred environment, where teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but facilitators of identity construction and critical engagement through multimodal practices.

From a policy perspective, the study advocates for a shift towards more inclusive educational policies that consider the multiplicity of learner identities and communicative practices. Policymakers could use these findings to push for more flexible and culturally responsive curricula that cater to the diverse needs of students in South Africa and beyond, particularly in contexts where language and culture are central to the learning experience. The broader audience for this research extends beyond academia to include practitioners in education, curriculum designers, and policy influencers who are interested in how multimodal approaches can transform educational practices to include meaningful multimodal expressions of learning. Additionally, community organizations and advocacy groups focused on youth empowerment could apply my multimodal cross-pollination approach to storytelling and these findings to support initiatives that encourage critical storytelling as a means of self-expression and social change.

In conclusion, this study has addressed the research question by highlighting the transformative potential of cross-pollinating multimodal storytelling to engage with learners' diverse cultural, linguistic, and social resources during their learning. By embracing pluralistic identities and fostering critical, creative, and affective engagements, storytelling has proven to be a powerful tool

for promoting agency, criticality, and reflexivity among learners. The findings also highlight the need to address the limitations of such interventions, particularly in navigating the personal and emotional dimensions of storytelling and ensuring equitable participation. As education continues to evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century, this research contributes to reimagining English language classrooms as inclusive, dynamic spaces that reflect the realities of learners' lived experiences. Ultimately, this study advocates for a pedagogical shift that challenges traditional boundaries, embraces fluid identities, and prioritises transformative literacy practices that empower learners to navigate and shape the world around them.

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APPENDIX One

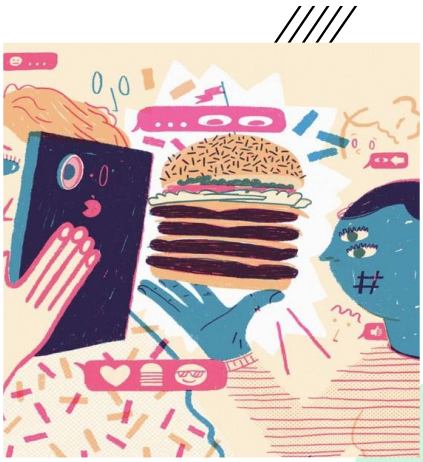
INTERVENTION - POWERPOINT SLIDES

LESSON 1 - 'SHOWING' THE WORLD WHO YOU ARE

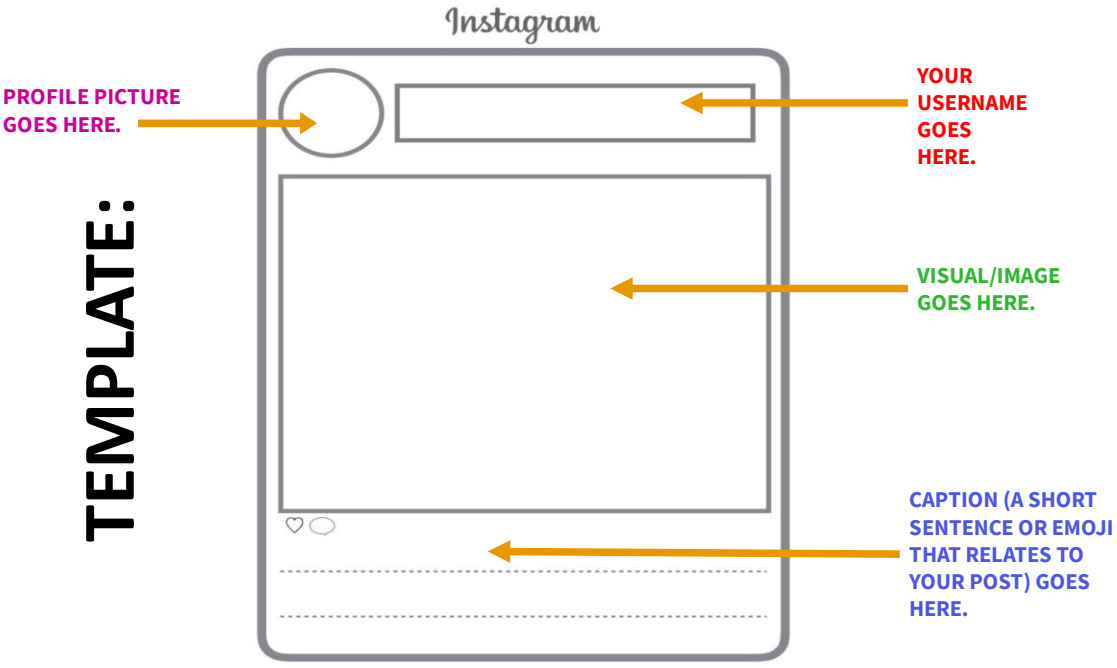
What makes you, YOU?

Using Instagram to show the world who you are.

LESSON 1



TEMPLATE:



WHAT MAKES YOU, YOU?

Work with the person sitting next to you. Both of you should answer all the questions below:

Discuss the following and give examples to support your response (be as DESCRPTIVE as possible):

1. Who are you at home?
   Who are you at school?
   Who are you when you are with your friends and family?
   Who are you when you are with your religious/cultural group? (answer only if it applies to you)
   Who are you with your sport clubs or when you engage with a hobby?
   Who are you on social media?

For example – who are you on social media: I express myself best on **social media**. I have 10K followers on **Instagram**. I post about **fashion**, particularly current trends in **clothing** that celebrities wear that is **creative and bold**. I am a **feminist** and that comes through in my posts because I encourage females to be true to themselves, expressive in their clothing and **confident in their bodies**.

1. Write down at least **5 or more** things that form your **identity**?
   What are the most **important** things that make you who you are?

3. Rank these things and list them from **most important** to **least important**?

4. Ask each other questions about your identities and discuss if you would have assumed these things about your partner?

PART A:

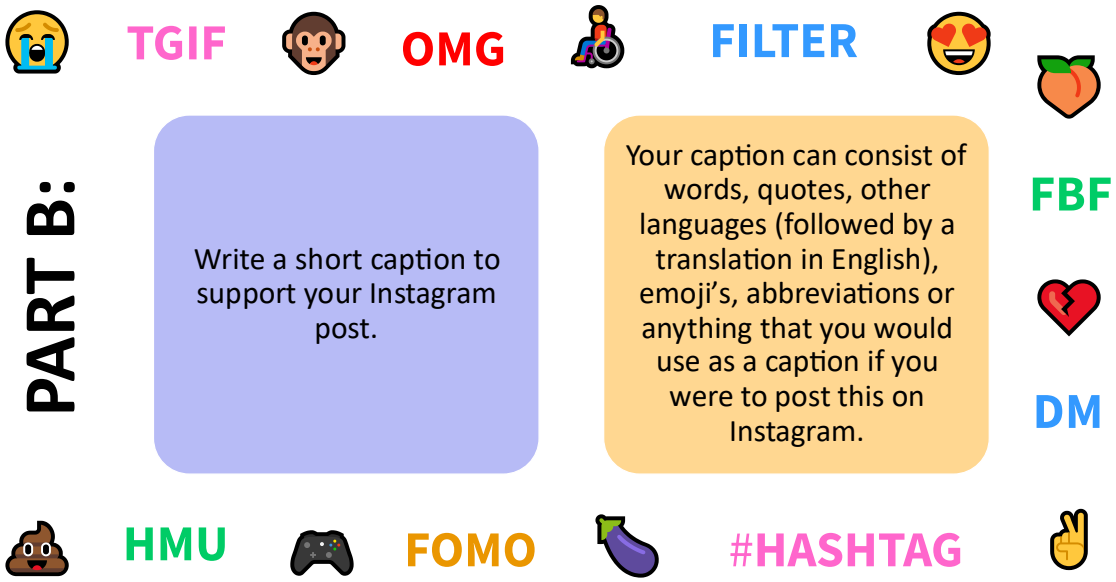
INDIVIDUAL TASK (YOU MUST WORK ALONE).

1.
Use the template provided. Create **ONE Instagram post** to show the world who you are through **pictures, words, emojis** (use whichever is best suited for you or a combination of both).
You may choose to draw, cut and paste pictures, use photographs or do this activity digitally.

2.
For your Instagram post, use the aspects of your identity that you ranked from most important to least important.
Think of it as a **visual story**, showing the world who you are. Be descriptive through visual elements (spacing, colour, font etc…).

3.
Show us: Who are you at home? Who are you on social media? Who are you when you are with your friends or in your communities? Who are you at school?
You must represent at least one community or culture that you belong to.

4.
Your post should be able to convey who you are when people look at it.
Be creative and remember to make this post for your **peers** to see.
You can use **abbreviations**, **slang** and **different languages** in your Instagram post, but add a **translation** below your post or on the next page.



LESSON 2 - MULTIMODAL STORYTELLING TO CREATE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS



What makes a good story?

1. There are different types of storytelling.

(Movies, television, books/novels, writing your own stories, verbally by telling or listening to stories, social media).

2. Think about your most memorable storytelling experience.

What do you think makes a 'good story'?



A good story has:

Themes:
The theme/s of your story is very important. It shapes the **message** that you want to convey.

Setting:
Where does your story take **place**? Does it match your characters and the plot of the story?

Plot:
What is **happening** throughout your story.
It needs to have a **beginning, a middle and an ending** .

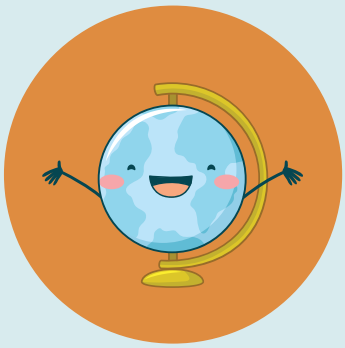
Characters:.
Your characters personality should shine through their words and actions and give us an **insight** into their lives, their minds and who they are. Use language and **dialogue** that captures your character authentically.

Cliffhangers:
Parts of the story that are **mysterious**, **exciting** or **capturing** to have an effect.

Resolution:
The **tension/problem** needs to be **resolved** at the end. Because you're writing for an older audience, it does not have to end with a happy ending. Your ending can even be left for the reader to assume what will happen in the future.

There are so many problems in the world

Our world and our communities are in a mess!



1. What are some problems that upset you?
2. Which issues and problems that we experience are important to you and your community?
3. What do YOU want to do to fix this?

One way to solve problems is through storytelling

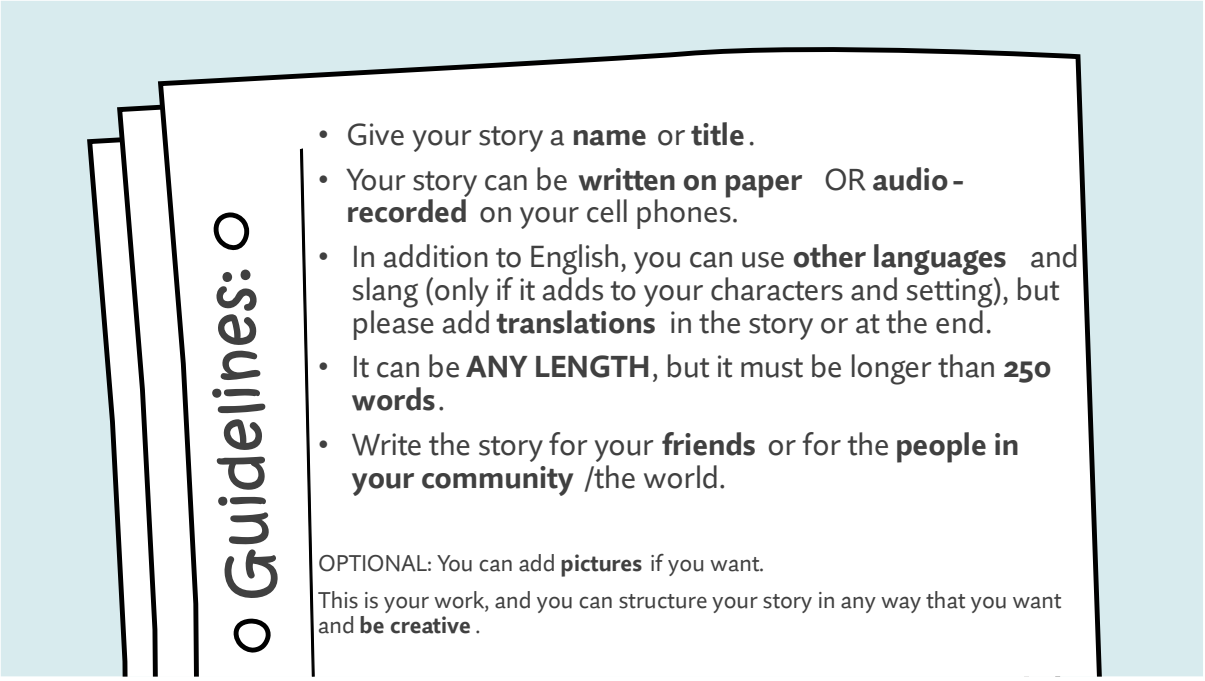


Instructions:

Select a problem or problems that you, your community or our world is facing.

Write a short story that is **powerful and highlights the issue** that you have chosen.

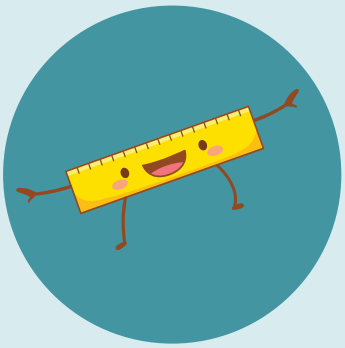
Your story should have an impact on those who read it and make them want to change the problems that you, your community or the world experience.



LESSON 3 - REMIXING STORIES ACROSS MODES



Performing stories



Use your story to craft a performance. It could be a TikTok video, movie trailer or a genre/medium of your choice.

- Select the **most important** information from your story.
- Your trailer/TikTok video does not have to be in the same **sequence** of your story. It could be **snippets of scenes** that are put together.
- **Act out** your performance (movie trailer or TikTok video) to the class OR **record** it and show it to the class.
- It should be **longer than 1 minute** , but not more than 5 minutes.
- We should be able to see what the story is about and some of your **character traits (personality of your characters).**
- You can use **other languages** in addition to English.

APPENDIX Two

INFORMATION & CONSENT FORMS

University of the Witwatersrand,
School of Education

4 April 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission from principal to conduct research

My name is Fatima Vally Essa, and I am a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating using a culturally responsive pedagogy to engage with learners' identities and home literacy practices across multiple types of text. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Belinda Mendelowitz and Dr Ana Ferreira. The aim of this research project is to find out if the current curriculum can be adapted to incorporate learners existing cultural, linguistic, and social resources to build a bridge between home and school knowledge, identities and experiences. I am seeking permission to do research at your school.

As part of this project, I would like to invite one English educator to partake in an interview about their pedagogy and one class of learners (preferably grade 10) to take part in an intervention, to answer a questionnaire regarding their literacy practices and to take part in a focus group discussion. The intervention will involve designing and teaching approximately three English lessons that align with CAPS and will be multimodal and culturally relevant. The designing of lessons and teaching will be done by me either in person or it could be done online and facilitated by the educator, whichever you prefer. The lessons will be conducted over an estimated period of 2 months, but I will be present for only the lessons that are part of this intervention. I will then select approximately 5 - 10 learners from the class to discuss their responses, thoughts and choices made during the lessons and the way that they were taught. With your permission and the permission of the participants, I would like to video record all the lessons, and I would like to audio record the interview with the educator and focus group discussion using a digital device. Only those who provide consent will be recorded. These recordings will be stored in a safe place and only I, the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years.

Participants will be asked to give their written consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the

school) will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated in a thesis and possibly academic journals or book chapters. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study. All research data will be used and analyzed solely by me and it will be destroyed in five years.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your school. The permission letter should be on your school's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study: *Using a culturally sustaining pedagogy to engage with multimodality: Exploring literacy practices in an English Home Language classroom.*

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. The data collected from this research project will be stored in a safe place and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Fatima Vally Essa

Researcher:
fatimavallyessa@gmail.com
071 493 2177

Supervisors:

Dr Belinda Mendelowitz	Dr Ana Ferreira
Belinda.Mendelowitz@wits.ac.za	Ana.Ferreira@wits.ac.za
011 717 3178	011 717 3179

Educator information form

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Fatima Vally Essa, and I am a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating using a culturally responsive pedagogy to engage with learners' identities and home literacy practices across multiple types of text. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Belinda Mendelowitz and Dr Ana Ferreira. The aim of this research project is to find out if the current curriculum can be adapted to incorporate learners existing cultural, linguistic and social resources to build a bridge between home and school knowledge, identities and experiences.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This interview will involve asking you questions about your learners, your teaching style and pedagogy and will take around 30 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored in a safe place and only I, the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years. With your permission, I would also like to observe one of your English lessons to identify your use of resources and teaching methods. This will help me understand the context and teaching style that the learners are accustomed to.

As a form of baseline assessment, I would like to issue questionnaires to your learners to identify aspects of culture and home literacy practices. I would like to conduct an intervention with your learners which will consist of transforming a series of English lessons from the current curriculum to make it culturally responsive and multimodal. Thereafter, I will conduct two focus group discussions with approximately five learners who engage effectively with cultures (heritage and new) and multimodality in their text production.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. The data collected from this research project will be stored in a safe place and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Fatima Vally Essa

Researcher:
Fatima Vally Essa
fatimavallyessa@gmail.com
071 493 2177

Supervisors:

Dr Belinda Mendelowitz
Belinda.Mendelowitz@wits.ac.za
011 717 3178

Dr Ana Ferreira
Ana.Ferreira@wits.ac.za
011 717 3179

Educator consent form

Please fill in the form below. Indicate YES if you agree or NO if you disagree to participate in the project titled Using a culturally sustaining pedagogy to engage with multimodality: Exploring literacy practices in an English Home Language classroom conducted by Fatima Vally Essa.

I, _____ an educator at_____school give my consent for the following:

Permission to review/collect documents/artefacts: I agree that lesson plans, worksheets and all related artefacts can be used for this study.	YES / NO
Permission to be interviewed: I would like to be interviewed for this study. I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked. I agree that all information collected from the interview can be used in any means necessary for the study.	YES / NO
Permission to be audiotaped: I agree to be audiotaped during the interview. I agree that any information collected can be used by the researcher for this study.	YES / NO
Permission for future projects: I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES / NO

Sign_____ Date_____

Parent information form

Dear Parent

My name is Fatima Vally Essa, and I am a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating using a culturally responsive pedagogy to engage with learners' identities and home literacy practices across multiple types of text. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Belinda Mendelowitz and Dr Ana Ferreira. The aim of this research project is to find out if the current curriculum can be adapted to incorporate learners existing cultural, linguistic, and social resources to build a bridge between home and school knowledge, identities and experiences.

As part of this project, I would like to invite your child to take part in an intervention (lessons conducted which align with the curriculum), answer a questionnaire and to take part in a focus group discussion. This activity will involve adapting and teaching approximately five of their English lessons so that they are multimodal and culturally relevant which will be conducted over a period of 2 – 3 months. I will then select approximately 5 - 10 learners from the class to discuss their responses, thoughts and choices made during the lessons and the way that they were taught. With your permission, I would like to video record all the lessons, and if your child is selected, I would like to audio record the focus group discussion using a digital device. These recordings will be stored in a safe place and only I, the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years. Attending the lessons will be compulsory as they comply with the current curriculum and will be part of their formal teaching and learning in the English class. However, if you do not give permission for your child to participate in the above activities, they will not be video/audio recorded and their responses will not be used in any way.

There will be no personal costs to you if your child participates in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if they withdraw from the study. Your

child may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if they do not want to. The processes mentioned above will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your child's name or any identifying information, and the information they give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent their participation in my final research report. If your child experiences any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the lesson, or the group discussion and if possible, resume at another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. The data collected from this research project will be stored in a safe place and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Fatima Vally Essa

fatimavallyessa@gmail.com

071 493 2177

Supervisors:

Dr Belinda Mendelowitz

Belinda.Mendelowitz@wits.ac.za

011 717 3178

Dr Ana Ferreira

Ana.Ferreira@wits.ac.za

011 717 3179

Parent consent form

Please fill in the form below indicating your willingness to allow your child to participate in the research project titled: **Using a culturally sustaining pedagogy to engage with multimodality to explore literacy practices in an English Home language classroom.**

Researcher: Fatima Vally Essa

I, (Full name)_____

the parent of _____

give permission on behalf of my child for the following:

Circle YES if you agree and NO if you disagree.

Permission to participate in the study: I give my child permission to participate in the study.	**YES / NO**
Permission to complete a questionnaire: I agree that my child can fill in a questionnaire for this study and give permission for the information to be used.	**YES / NO**
Permission to review/collect documents/artefacts: I agree that all my child's work produced during this study can be used for presentation within the researcher's study, in any publications, conferences and wherever the researcher requires.	**YES / NO**
Permission to be video recorded during the lessons: I give permission for my child to be video recorded during all lessons conducted for this study. I give permission for their participation to be used however necessary.	**YES / NO**
Permission to participate in a focus group discussion: I give my child permission to participate in a small focus group discussion. I agree that all information shared can be used by the researcher.	**YES / NO**

<u>Permission to be audio recorded during the focus group</u> *<u>(only if your child is selected to participate):</u>* I agree that my child may be audio recorded during the focus group discussion conducted for this study. I give permission for their participation to be used however necessary for the study.	**YES / NO**
<u>Permission for future projects:</u> I agree that the information my child provides may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	**YES / NO**

<u>Informed Consent</u>

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.

Sign_____ Date_____

Learner information form

Dear learner

My name is Fatima Vally Essa, and I am a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project. I want to find out about your out of school reading and writing activities through engaging with you in a series of lessons. In these lessons, you will do a range of different activities that will include writing, visual images, audio (sound) and movement. My supervisors are Dr Belinda Mendelowitz and Dr Ana Ferreira. By doing this research, I am trying to draw on aspects of your life outside of school such as languages, communities, and the types of texts that you engage with and bring it into the classroom and include it in your learning.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to answer a questionnaire about yourself, to be part of a series of lessons that I will teach. This study will be conducted over a period of 2 – 3 months. I will be observing and teaching the lessons, and with your permission I will collect all the work that you produce during these lessons which will be used for my study. I will then select approximately 5 - 10 learners from your class to take part in a group discussion where you can tell me your thoughts about the lessons and how it was taught, discuss your responses, and choices made during the lessons. With your permission, I would like to video record all the lessons, and if you are selected, I would like to audio record the group discussion using a digital device. These recordings will be stored in a safe place and only I will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The processes mentioned above will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any

distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the lesson, or the group discussion or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. The data collected from this research project will be stored in a safe place and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Fatima Vally Essa

fatimavallyessa@gmail.com

071 493 2177

Supervisors:

Dr Belinda Mendelowitz
Belinda.Mendelowitz@wits.ac.za
011 717 3178

Dr Ana Ferreira
Ana.Ferreira@wits.ac.za
011 717 3179

Learner consent form

Please fill in the form below. Indicate YES if you agree or NO if you disagree to participate in the project titled **Using a culturally sustaining pedagogy to engage with multimodality: Exploring literacy practices in an English Home Language classroom** conducted by Fatima Vally Essa.

My name is: _____
I am in grade: _____

Permission to complete a questionnaire: I agree to fill in a questionnaire for this study and give permission for the information to be used.	**YES / NO**
Permission to review/collect documents/artefacts: I agree that all my work produced during this study can be used for presentation within the researcher's study, in any publications, conferences and wherever the researcher requires.	**YES / NO**
Permission to be video recorded during the lessons: I agree to be video recorded during all lessons conducted for this study. I give permission for my participation to be used however necessary for the study.	**YES / NO**
Permission to participate in a focus group discussion: I would like to participate in a small focus group discussion. I agree that all information I share can be used by the researcher.	**YES / NO**
Permission to be audio recorded during the focus group *(only if you are selected to participate):* I agree to be audio recorded during the focus group discussion conducted for this study. I give permission for my participation to be used however necessary for the study.	**YES / NO**
Permission for future projects: I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	**YES / NO**

Sign_____ Date_____

APPENDIX

Three

SEMI-STRUCTURED TEACHER INTERVIEW

Semi-structured interview questions for the educator

Tell me about your learners. Some background

1. How would you describe your approach to teaching?
2. What are the main tools, elements or approaches that you try to incorporate into your lessons?
3. Do you make use of a culturally relevant pedagogy? (Guide the educator if he/she does not know what it is).
4. What are your thoughts about this approach to teaching? Are there any concerns or what interests you about this?
5. Do you allow the learners to draw on home language practices and language repertoires such as code-switching? Let's discuss your thoughts on this.
6. Let us talk about multimodality and your response to using different modes during teaching?
7. Does this happen in the classroom? Which modes are used and how?
8. Is time, resources and cost and issue when it comes to incorporating multimodality? (If yes, explain low-cost multimodality to the educator).
9. Social media genres can be easily incorporated into lessons. What are your thoughts about this? Would you be keen on drawing on social media genres during lessons without using technology in the classroom?
10. You know about your learners' backgrounds, what do you think are some of their interests and do you think there are any other teaching methods that would interest them and aid their learning?

APPENDIX Four

LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire: Getting to know you.

Please read each sentence carefully and answer the questions by giving as much detail as you can. Remember, there is no correct or incorrect answer. Your answers will help me understand more about you.

Please list below the gender, race, and culture that YOU identify with.

NAME:	
GENDER:	
RACE:	
CULTURE:	

1. Languages I speak:

a) At home, I speak:……

b) On the playground, I speak:……..

c) With people in my community, I speak:……..

2. Tick YES if you agree and NO if you disagree with the following statements.

	YES	**NO**
I want to learn using **English**.		
I want to learn using **language I speak with my friends** and **slang**.		
I want to learn using the **other language/s** I speak AND English.		

I want to include aspects of my **culture** into lessons and learn about the cultures my peers belong to.		
I want to have a space to express **who I am** (my identity) and the experiences that I encounter.		

3. Home literacy practices:

a) Do you have devices at home?.....

b) If yes, what devices do you use at home?.....

c) At home, I read……..

d) I read from a……

e) I enjoy watching…….

4. Social media apps I use:

Tick next to the apps that you use and state approximately how much time you spend on each app in a week.

	TICK IF YOU USE:	**AMOUNT OF TIME IN A WEEK:**
Facebook		
Twitter		
WhatsApp		
Telegram		
Instagram		
TikTok		
Pinterest		
YouTube		

What **other** apps do you use and how much **time** do you spend on it weekly? What do you use these apps for?

……..

…….....

……..

……..

……..

5. Resources I want to use during learning at school:

Tick YES if you agree and NO if you disagree with the following statements.

	YES	NO
Written information such as books and worksheets.		
Visual images such as pictures, photographs, posters, and art.		
Sounds such as music or a recording of the work.		
Videos that are related to the lesson.		
Moving around the classroom or space and using my entire body to learn.		
Incorporating social media or similar approaches to it into lesson.		
Using topics that I am interested in.		

6. Some of the topics that I am interested in and would like to include into my English lessons are?

……

……

……

……

……

7. Is there anything else that you would want to be included in your teaching and learning?

……

……

……

……

……

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK!

APPENDIX *Five*

SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WITH LEARNERS

Semi-structured focus group discussion questions

Session 1 questions

1. What was it like to learn using your home languages, cultures and experiences during the process?
2. Did this help you to understand the content better? How else did it benefit your learning?
3. Let's talk about using different modes that I used during teaching and that you used to produce your work (written, visual, audio and kinaesthetic).
    a) How did you feel about the shift from written to other modes?
    b) You had an opportunity to incorporate the reading and writing practices that you engage with at home in the classroom. Did this help you in any way? The aim of this was to use home literacy practices in the classroom so that you could engage with familiar genres and modes.
    c) Was there any benefit in using these modes? Did it make learning more fun, were you able to engage more with the topic, did it help with creativity?
4. Collaboration/group work was important for some of your lessons. Do you think that you would benefit from these kinds of activities if it is used more frequently? Why/why not? (NB: cultural sharing, linguistic sharing etc…)
5. What was the most memorable and most beneficial part of this study for you and why?

Session 2 questions

The second focus group discussion will be based on interrogating the learners work that was produced and question their choices. A set of questions cannot be established until they produce texts. The questions will be along the lines of:

1. Why have you chosen to discuss this topic?
2. Why have you presented your work using this genre?
3. Community engagement and representing 'your' people is important. Tell us more about your piece of work?

4. You have used your home language in this piece of text, explain it to us and tell us how using your home language helped you to express yourself?
5. Discuss the process of taking your text from a written mode to a visual. Was this easy? How was your creativity inspired?