



**Township learners' negotiation of conceptions of themselves in  
English Home Language classrooms in two selected ex-Model C schools in  
Johannesburg**

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**by**

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## ABSTRACT

“Language is used not just as a tool for the exchange of information, but as a symbolic system with the power to create and shape symbolic realities, such as values, perceptions and identities through discourse” (Kramsh, 2002, p. 118).

Several attempts have been made to examine how township learners negotiate their identities in language classrooms. McKinney (2007; 2013; 2014) has conducted studies on learners from township contexts in ex-Model C schools. However, her studies have been focused on how township girls in ex-Model C schools negotiate their identity. This study focused on how township learners with a special focus on both boys and girls negotiate conceptions of themselves with the assumption that the township context provides a huge cultural transition for township students into ex-Model C schools, which has significant implications on their conceptions of who they are. Not only does the academic knowledge they acquire in these schools impact on their identities but also the culture in which this knowledge is conveyed has the capacity to influence them. The purpose of this paper was to understand how township learners negotiate their identities in English Home language classrooms found in ex-Model C schools.

This study drew on the post-colonial theory to understand how learners negotiate their identities in an English Home Language (EHL) classroom. Post-colonialism aims at critiquing “colonial domination and the legacies of colonisation” (Loomba, 1998, p. 12). In order to explore the legacy of colonialism in EHL classrooms, this study used Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity as a framework which argues that the mixing of cultures creates a hybrid of expression of culture and belonging which poses a challenge to students’ conceptions of themselves. A qualitative research method was then used to understand learners’ conceptions of themselves.

To understand how learners negotiate who they are, this study used semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select participants that hold

characteristics of living in the township and experience the township culture but encounter white culture in the school context. To analyse the data, participants' responses were profiled in a table to enable coding within responses of each question. This allowed the researcher to identify commonalities amongst the responses of the participants as well as responses that were not common but showed difference in perspective. All key words led to the development of themes.

The major finding revealed that learners want to learn EHL as it comes with economic opportunities; however, learners experienced cultural difference as a hinderance and challenge in learning the subject. The study further revealed that both boys and girls experienced changes in behaviour when learning EHL which included the desire to assimilate in accent and attitude. These results revealed that hybridisation is a threat to African culture and ways of living. Further, hybridisation was only experienced by a group of learners from the township cultures and those groomed in urban contexts did not experience convergence of cultural differences. This study recommends that English should be redefined in the South African context in order to allow South Africans to own the language as theirs rather than the language being the language of the coloniser. Not redefining English poses the risk of losing African culture and development of African languages as learners do not view their African languages and the English language as equal languages. The study also recommends that ex-Model C schools offer both English Home Language (EHL) and First Additional Language (FAL) to enable learners to study their home languages at home language level which will improve the appreciation of African culture amongst the youth.