
Spatialised assemblages and suppressions: the learning ‘positioning’ of Grade 6 students in a township school

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic approaches, this article discusses the learning positioning of four Grade six children who attend school in a township location.¹ By ‘learning positioning’ we refer to the ways in which they are positioned with regard to their approaches to their learning, the learning identities with which they enter their school and classroom, and how the dynamics of the classroom receive and position them as particular types of learners in the school. We observed these children in their lived domains over a period of 10 months, in their homes, environmental navigations and their school and classroom – based learning practices. The article is an attempt to develop fine-grained readings of these positioning practices as they encounter their lived domains. Based on what we label a ‘spatialisation of learning’ lens, we attempt to understand the complex pathways by which they assemble their learning positionings, coming to the conclusion that each embodies active and diverse learning agency within their everyday environments. The article uses mid-range theoretical tools such as ‘discursive practices’, ‘positioning’ and ‘lamination’ to provide a spatial reading of the complex ways learning is set up, managed, navigated and established. We go on to show how their learning positionings are received and mediated in their school classroom, suggesting that as a reductive pedagogical environment the school misrecognises their learning positions, failing to leverage a productive learning environment for these children. This article is meant to throw an analytical spotlight on the relationship between, on the one hand, the social relations of learning constituted across multiple spatial domains and, on the other, the four students’ learning navigations in the space of the classroom, revealing some key dimensions of how children learn in compromised circumstances.

¹ In [South Africa](#), the term [township](#) usually refers to the (often underdeveloped) urban living areas that, from the late 19th century until the end of [Apartheid](#), were reserved for non-whites (black Africans, [Coloureds](#) and [Indians](#)), and were characterised by its predominant mix of working class inhabitants. Townships were usually built on the periphery of towns and cities.

Introduction

This article is a discussion of the learning positioning practices of four children in a deprived township space. Lebo, Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem (pseudonyms) are each engaged in complex social extensions across their various terrains. They live multidimensional lives within their families amidst religious, cultural and other social practices. They establish daily networks as they move across their impoverished township environment. They also find themselves in the same Grade 6 classroom at a primary school in this township. Each of these contexts has a myriad of constitutive dynamics that inform and situate their youthful identifications.

The article is interested in the complex ways in which these children engage with their learning, literacy and broader educational practices. It specifically aims to understand the type of learning identities they take up across their various social spaces, the formative linkages among them, and importantly, their learning identification positioning in their school and classroom. The article does not focus primarily on their actual cognitive learning processes in certain subject domains, although it alludes to some of these. The focus here is on the ways in which the four children's domestic environments and classroom engagements in the light of township living are the constitutive locations for their emergent learning identities. The focus is therefore on the spatial dynamics that co-constitute their learning dispositions and the consequent learning identities that they take up in these spaces, especially in their classroom.

The article is meant as a complement to, and an extension of, work on children's literacy practices at the intersection of school and domestic environments, and provides a bridge into the educational worlds of school children (Prinsloo and Stein, 2004; Ferreira and Janks, 2007; Stein and Slonimsky, 2001; Dixon, Place and Kholowa, 2008). It suggests that these literacy practices are contested activities, involving diverse social interactions. The purpose of this work is to understand the "processes and influences shaping young children's literacy learning in out-of school and school settings across multiple sites" (Prinsloo and Stein, 2004, p.68). The key analytical move here is the suggestion that the learning and literacy practices of school children are transacted across the various domains of their lives and that it is insight into these multi-sited practices that would allow a sharper appreciation of children's school learning and literacy acquisition. We

are interested in this article in understanding how children's learning identifications are generated and positioned in the school in relation to their mobilities across their social domains.

The intention is to present an analysis of how these relations of learning qualitatively position these students in their learning domains. The key argument presented is that their learning positioning practices are constituted in multiple and overlapping socio-spatial assemblages and learning suppressions across these domains. Spatial assemblages refer to the somewhat messy and incoherent 'putting together' processes of various discursive practices and materials in specific domains, and to the way that these practices intersect and overlap to produce the students' specific learning positioning identifications. These assemblages also involve suppressions, which refer to a situation where one type of spatial practice serves as a kind of constraint or suppressor of other positioning practices in the same domain. We refer to this dynamic as a 'lamination' that overlays or serves to suppress other practices. With regard to suppression, the key finding of the narrative analysis discussed below is that the school and specifically classroom laminating practices have come to suppress the four students' learning positioning practice, which is based on complex learning assemblages brought from their domestic environments. Taking on one-dimensional learning positions is a key outcome of these classroom suppressions.

This analysis is based on the qualitative work by both authors in a relatively new urban settlement in Cape Town. We were particularly interested in the social spatial dynamics that constitute school-going in what Fataar labelled a 'township on the move' (2007), a metaphor intended to capture the interaction among the township's everyday networks, discursive materials and human agency in a deeply impoverished terrain. This analysis is based on ethnographic work in and around one school site in the township. The 'unit of analysis' was the four children in their various spatial domains of learning. The investigation entailed participant observation and qualitative work to understand the four children's learning navigations in their domestic, neighbourhood and classroom domains. Inductively analysed, the key themes that emerged from the data across these domains were: 1) the spatial locations of the children; 2) the resources they marshalled for their learning; 3) parental and familial influences on their learning; 4) the networks and peer influences at work in their everyday learning practices; and 5) the link between language use and learning. We use these themes to develop a narrative account of the positioning practices of these children across their domains of learning. But

we first provide a discussion of the theoretical approach we adopted to guide our analysis.

Theoretical considerations: the spatialisation of learning positioning

We proceed from the view that schools are not simply settings with clear boundaries and easily definable practices and intellectual content. Such a bounded view of schools, based on a stance that school-based learning should be understood primarily on the basis of an in-school focus, resonates with much of the literature on educational improvement and effectiveness (see Townsend, 2001; Scheerens, 2000), with its emphasis on functional dynamics in school sites. Although such a view provides explanatory purchase on intra-school life, our position is based on an awareness of the limitations of such a perspective of schools and school learning. Ours is an attempt to understand how political and socio-cultural dynamics shape school practices. We attempt to bring the impact of life outside of school into play in our consideration of life inside schools. Drawing on Nespore (1997, p.xii), our emphasis is on the spatial locations and conceptual entailments involved in viewing schools and student learning as

. . .extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks shaping cities, communities, schools, pedagogies, and teacher and student practices.

The focus here is on learning in schools as understood in relation to a myriad of co-constituting processes in the various sites of people's lives. The classroom is one key venue where such processes play out, affecting students' learning orientations and pedagogical practices. We suggest that the interactive and formative linkages between classroom learning and dynamics outside the school provide greater conceptual purchase on students' educational and learning navigations across space and time. We focus here on the nexus of spatial localisation in one physical environment involving complex learner mobilities in our attempt to understand the dynamics that make up students' learning dispositions across their various spatialities, specifically how such dispositions are positioned in schools and classrooms.

Our theoretical approach is meant to connect students learning relations and positioning to their subjective mobilisations in and across their various living

domains. Emphasising the ‘lived’ dimension of space advocated by theories such as those of LeFebvre (1991/1971) and Massey (1994), we adopt a set of mid-range analytical tools that would enable an analysis of these children’s learning positioning modalities. The emphasis here is on understanding learning across multiple spaces, where complex subjectivities established in mobile extensions across diverse dynamics impact on the nature of such learning. This requires a fully relational perspective trained on how learning and mobility come into being out of a nexus of relations connected to the classroom. Leander, Phillips and Taylor argue that the “simultaneity of multiple locales, and the contact zones between them, become an expanded terrain of examination and evidence concerning learning” (2010, p.336). The particular mobilities of people moving through these intersections, and their affordances via resources, discourses and tools, become a key focus for analysis. Grasping the way that they mobilise, network and put together these learning resources across space in the course of their learning activities is crucial to developing an understanding of their learning trajectories.

With regard to children’s experiences of their neighbourhoods and schools, we draw on Jan Nesor’s (1997) crucial work for understanding what he calls ‘children’s bodies in school space’. Based on two years of ethnographic work in one school in Virginia, USA, he discusses how this school offers children very different experiences of schooling. Nesor’s work shows that despite the ubiquity of popular cultural and outside influences on children’s experiences of social space, schooling is involved in abstracting children from social space and from their own bodies. Through control and disciplining of the body in classroom and school practices – e.g. single-file lines, regulating bowels and bladders, forms of punishments – children undergo a transformation which enables schools to regulate their behaviour.

Nesor suggests that because of such regulation and abstraction, children’s bodies become significant for teachers and children to interpret in racialised, classed and gendered ways. Leander, Phillips and Taylor, 2010 (p.338) comment that it is in contexts such as these that “exuberant classroom activities (e.g. chase games, mock fighting and other energetic behaviour) become all the more marked as ‘unschooled’ through regulation in the classroom”. Nesor’s work raises a number of promising issues for research about the schooled body and learning in space. Similarly, Dixon’s (2011) work offers a novel space oriented reading of young children in a Johannesburg school context, focusing on how their bodies are ‘disciplined’ in the space of a literacy classroom. The discussion presented below is an

attempt to consider how the abstraction of the body in schooled practices – what we refer to as suppression – while not uncontested by the children, takes place in the township school that we studied. We discuss the embodiment of the selected students as they move across their various lived terrains, how they position specific compartments in the light of the subjective attributions of these spaces, and finally how their bodies are positioned in the classroom in the light of the suppressions that accompany their relations of learning.

The final move of this theoretical consideration involves examining the specific practices that constitute learning positioning in the classroom. Here we draw on positioning as a discursive practice to capture how dominant practices and relations of learning are overlaid onto less dominant ones. The metaphor of ‘lamination’ is applied to highlight the workings of such layering. The social positioning of persons is considered by theorists such as Davies and Hunt (1994), Davies and Harre (1990), Holland and Leander (2004), and Leander (2004) as a primary means by which subjects are produced and subjectivity formed. Persons are offered or afforded positions when regimes of power/knowledge ‘call’ on individuals, via authoritative bodies such as a government, sport council, school management team, or classroom situations, to occupy such a position. Given the nature of the power articulated in specific circumstances “the person can either accept the position in whole or part, or try to refuse it” (Holland and Leander, 2004, p.127).

An analysis of positioning in the learning context makes visible the ways in which ascendant and repressed “positionings are discursively achieved not only as ‘normal’ but as the way things are and should be” (Davies and Hunt 1994, p.389). Here the focus is on the relational dynamics of learning, for example, in the home among families, and in classrooms among the teacher and students. The spotlight falls on the nature of the classroom conversation and pedagogical transfer processes, the use and circulation of learning materials, the desk arrangements, the movements of the teacher and students, privileging of student behaviours, the nature of interaction among classroom participants, the students’ bodily compartments and their divisions into higher- and lower-order groups, and the discipline practices of the teachers. These practices are analysed for the ways in which they discursively enact specific learning subjects, which, as Wortham (2006) suggests, has a decisive impact on how students access and utilise their opportunities to learn. These learning positioning practices thus co-constitute the nature and outcome of learning among students.

The metaphor of ‘lamination’ is presented as a way of describing the “social/psychological entities created by positioning” (Holland and Leander, 2004, p.131). Lamination refers to the layering of social practices over each other. Each layer retains its distinctiveness, although, once layered, the emergent practice achieves a different configuration out of the many configurations of social practices that make up an activity. The new layered configuration achieves a kind of thickness over time in coming to define the nature of social practices and relations in a particular site such as a classroom. Episodes of layering produce what might be called a laminate. Holland and Leander explain that laminates create tangible artefacts, associations and behaviours that discursively produce certain associations with a particular social position. Over time these associations can thicken by acquiring more and more layers. They explain that the “person and the category plus the memories and artefacts of past episodes of positioning become virtually laminated onto one another and so come to constitute a hybrid unit in social and emotional life” (p.132). In this article we are concerned with the layering of specific social relations and practices associated with the learning positioning practices of the four selected students, specifically in their classroom. The concepts of positioning and lamination enable us to focus on the layering of such practices, specifically in interactions between the teachers and the students in the classroom space. As a metaphor, lamination provides a tool for understanding how particular learning relations are stabilised or strengthened in the learning positioning practices of the students. It is to an analysis of such positioning practices, what we refer to as learning assemblages, in their home and township spaces that we now turn.

Learning assemblages across the township

The discussion of these four children’s discursive practices concentrates on their spatially transacted social practices, specifically how these practices make up their diverse educational, literacy and learning positioning practices in their domestic and broader township environment. This section provides some insight into the subjective and relational terms upon which they established and took on these positions. It is particularly interested in the impact of their movement inside and across their life spaces, the quality of the relations and networks they established, their mobilisation and interaction with learning and related resources, and their peer and family-based practices. Key to this section is the bodily disciplining they took on as they interacted

with the affordances of their spatial navigations. A focus on the diversity of these bodily expressions allows for comprehending their relational and positional assemblages and how these situated them as particular types of learners. Nesor (1997) uses the notion of ‘bodies in space’ to emphasise the recursive and interactive dynamics between the body and space. We consider how Lebo, Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem engaged their spatialities, i.e. the physical environment and social practices and relations, on the assumption that “bodily dispositions are formed in the flows of human activity in and across specific spatial environments” (Fataar, 2010, p.4). This is then followed by a discussion of the bases on which they engaged with, and shaped, their learning practices and dispositions.

Inhabiting township space

According to Nesor (1997), space cannot be treated as static since it is constantly lived, experienced, reordered by those who move through it. Township spaces like the ones where these children live, cannot be viewed as empty or devoid of any creative and aspirant human activity. It is clearly an impoverished and fractured environment where informality, human flux, informalised flows and survival practices are emblematic. This township is characteristic of what Brenner and Theodore (2002) would describe as a neo-liberal space of deep constraint. These four children established their learning navigations amidst a context of domestic fragility and informalised livelihoods. They nonetheless live productive and viable lives, based on their particular personally productive trajectories.

Despite living in the same locality, their experiences in, and interactions with, their neighbourhood differ. Lebo, for example, could be considered a mobile student since, while she lives in the township, she criss-crosses the city landscape over weekends and holidays to spend time in a more affluent area of the city. Her subjectivity could be regarded as one based on ‘spatial dislocation’ because of her frequent movement out of the township when she accompanies her grandmother to her place of employment as a domestic worker in an affluent part of Cape Town. Lebo lives with her grandmother in a small one-bedroomed house in the township with ten other children. Her periodic immersion over weekends and holidays in an upper-middle class white home, her exposure to the ‘readerly’ culture and semiotics of this environment, and her new friends there led to her developing an apparent

detachment from and disaffection with her ‘place’ of living in the township. Lebo’s ambivalence can be understood in terms of her adopting a middle-class type of aspirant persona, which shows in her disaffection from her culture. Lebo’s exposure to a middle-class environment, its attitudes, beliefs and ways of doing things influence the way her learning practices are informed in this space, as I show below.

In contrast, Shafiek appears to be physically embedded in the township, since his movement is fairly restricted, i.e. he routinely moves between home and school, and home and madrassah (semi-formal afternoon Muslim school). From observations it is clear that his restricted mobility belies what we would describe as his conceptual mobility, which could be attributed to his active engagement with information technology (e.g. cell phone, computer and video games, and educational software). Such conceptual mobility is facilitated by his interaction with ICT-related popular culture, which provides him with a range of rich and adaptive literacy assets, which is similar to Lebo’s, who constructs her engagements on the basis of her access to educational toys and reading material acquired via her cross-city mobility. Nespors (1997, p.169) suggests that these learning practices can be described as “kids-based funds of knowledge”, which they mobilise in their contexts and use to establish viable literacy and learning practices. Shafiek’s proficiency in ICT-based popular culture shapes how his learning practices are negotiated in this constraining environment, while Lebo finds stimulation in the light of her aspirant middle-class interactions on the other side of the city.

Bongiwe can be described as a ‘displaced’ student, with reference to the disposition she assumes in this township. Having moved with her family early on from rural to urban living, and then from one urban location to the family’s current quarters in this township, the impact of her dislocation appears to have a profound influence on how her learning practices are shaped in her township environment and family. Difficulty in establishing spatial routines, making friends and failure to address her feelings of isolation in this township characterise her displacement. Dyers (2009, p.5) captures the relationship between township living and feelings of detachment when she notes that “township life frequently poses severe challenges to aspects such as family cohesion, parental control and the exercise of traditional practices and values”. The difficulties associated with urban living make the rural heartland an idealised place with which students like Bongiwe identify strongly. This enduring link to place of birth ensures the vitality of a child’s mother tongue, which is a key marker of group and individual identity. As a mainly isiXhosa

speaker, Bongiwe experiences the township as a disabling environment, especially since she seems unable to interact productively with the township's linguistic and cultural make up, dominated as it is by Afrikaans in the neighbourhood and school playground, and English in the classroom.

Tasneem's strategic readings of her social context catapult her towards upward mobility. She is aware of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and acts accordingly. She can be regarded as a mobile student who moved between schools and neighbourhoods in Johannesburg and Cape Town until she settled with her mom and an abusive stepfather in this township. She did not show any real attachment to her current place of living. She uses her 'inner resources' to enhance her functioning in this space, with her domestic disaffection a strong motivator. This showed in her tenacious commitment to education. She displayed resiliency in her mobilisation of what Yosso (2005) calls 'aspirational capital' in reference to children's ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. She is forward-looking and purpose-driven, despite suffering from physical and mental abuse amid familial constraints.

The above discussion shows that these students inhabit their social spaces very differently, which has implications for the ways they assemble their learning practices. In the next section we discuss how they went about navigating their lives by establishing various social networks, connections, interactions and practices in the township, all of which result in particular types of learning positioning practices.

Spatialised learning positioning

Following Massey's view that "lived space is constructed through social relations and material practices in light of the material textures of the environment" (Massey, 1994, p.112), we now go on to highlight the multiple networks and processes enacted by the four children out of which they co-constructed their learning iterations. Lebo uses her friendships with Emma on the other side of the city and Jade, in England, with whom she is in email correspondence and who sends her books and other resources, for cultural and educational gain. Lebo is part insider and part outsider of multiple worlds operating at multiple scales (see Helfenbein 2005). It is apparent that these friendships and periodic exposure to middle-class living provide her with

wider social networks and contacts, which benefit her economically (access to money/use of a credit card) and culturally (access to literature and educational products). Devine (2009, p.526) notes that “friendships have their own rules of governance, predicated on forms of recognition that are mediated by gender, social class, ability and ethnic identity”. In order to be affirmed and recognised within her friendship circles, both with those at a distance and those in the township, I suggest that Lebo more or less succeeded in keeping her township and mobile urban identities distinct and functioning in tandem. In other words, she displayed a strategic sense of the need to adapt her identifications to the expectations of each space, adopting specific types relative to her readings of the modes of acceptability operating in the spaces that she finds herself. This is clearly shown by her taking on so-called ‘coloured ways of being’ (mainly through speaking Afrikaans) as a coping strategy in what appears to be the racially unsympathetic environment of her school. Devine terms this strategically adapting sense of self as ‘ethnic self-monitoring’, based on the subject’s attempts to regulate embodied aspects of cultural differences related to things such as accent, dress and body language (p.530). Lebo’s exposure to middle-class urban cultural forms plays a key role in how she assembles her learning positioning in and across her various spaces.

Shafiek is embedded in the township with fairly restricted mobility. It is, however, through his engagement with his popular culture (use of computer and playing video games) that he forms lasting networks that are crucial to his learning and literacy practices. Three networks converges to inform his learning practices: the first is his family-based network (his mother is instrumental in obtaining the video games and providing the space for him to indulge in his popular culture, as is his brother, whose computer skills he emulates); the second is his peer networks (cousins and classmates with whom he shares his computer skills, and knowledge about things like insects and medieval travellers); and the third is his trading networks used to acquire games and computer software. His active engagement within these related networked activities enables him to practice daily his ability to interact and manipulate the sophisticated literacy forms associated with ICTs. It also provides him with opportunities to learn specialised ICT languages as he, for example, masters sophisticated computer games. Shafiek routinely accessed knowledge about school and non-school educational themes via encyclopaedia software programs and website searches, which are unbeknown to his teachers. His is an example of children’s involvement in beneficial interaction with inanimate or non-human elements that are of increasing

importance in their young lives (Nespor, 1997). It is a combination of these non-formal, out-of-school literacy networks and practices that constitute the main driver of Shafiek's learning accomplishments.

Consistent with her categorisation as a marginal and displaced child, Bongiwe lives a fairly secluded life, which causes her to struggle to form the types of social connections that Lebo and Shafiek managed to accumulate. Her social connections mostly revolve around her family, especially her mother who helps her with school work, and her friendship with Lebo (both in and out of school). Her friendship with Lebo is vital. Bongiwe holds Lebo in high esteem. Being from similar cultural and racial backgrounds, Lebo offers her respite from isolation, which in turn helps her cope in school. They also share activities such as compiling scrapbooks from reading materials in order to structure their interactions with each other and give meaning to these encounters (Nespor, 1997). What seems to be central to Bongiwe's learning subjectivity is her positioning as a 'struggling' student, both in her domestic environment and the classroom, mainly because of her speaking isiXhosa in her various domains. This counts against her in this multilingual township. She struggled to gain the necessary linguistic exposure required for functioning in her new township. Unlike Lebo, she struggles with both Afrikaans and English, which places her at a disadvantage on the school playground, where children mostly speak Afrikaans, and in the classroom, where English is the language of instruction. Her lack of linguistic facility works against her ability to establish herself as a flourishing learner in spite of her mother's arduous attempts at facilitating an amenable domestic environment to address her educational shortcomings.

Like Bongiwe, Tasneem has limited social connections. She is private and purpose-driven. Her resilience and tenacious commitment to education, and her constant movement in and out of the township, prevent her from forming enduring connections in the environmental context. The teachers recognised her commitment to her school work and aid her in her quest for upward mobility, which she pursues with diligence. Her forward-looking disposition and bodily discipline are crucial parts of her young life, since they enable her to gain access to, and engage in, culturally self-improving activities and social practices, which would ensure her upward mobility. As a loner, Tasneem finds escapism in her school work, reading novels and other books well above her age level. Whereas Bongiwe struggles to be assimilated into the normative expectations of the school, where her lack of linguistic proficiency plays a crucial role, Tasneem is an example of smooth integration into the functioning

of the school. Speaking English in each of her three domains (home, playground and classroom) and maintaining commitment to a schooled bodily decorum, her learning positioning is congruent with the requirements of normative school behaviour and what is regarded as successful classroom learning.²

Embodied literacy and learning assemblages

We now move on to discuss the multiple learning practices of the four students in their domestic spaces and beyond. Lebo's interaction with her various networks and connections enabled her to engage in a variety of practices that she used productively to enhance her learning in the classroom. By criss-crossing the cityscape she was actively engaged in new spatial terrains that presented her with a rich, interactive and stimulating text. She used her linguistic and communication skills (she speaks isiXhosa, English and colloquial Afrikaans) to navigate her township environment. Her desire to assimilate into a middle-class culture, involving her ability to mobilise cultural and educational resources, appeared to have a positive effect on her aspirations for mobility, but also offered her a broader perspective on life. Lebo is primarily positioned as a multilingual, conceptually mobile and literate student, whose love of reading allows her to feed her desire for a mobile middle-class lifestyle.

² One common dimension, fundamental to the way that these students transcend their spatial positioning, and to the way that their learning practices are informed in the environmental space, is the issue of parental involvement. This warrants discussion since "parents from low socio-economic families are looked down upon and therefore their voices are not heard" (Kralovec and Buell, 2000:79). The research reported on here provides evidence to the contrary. Lebo's grandmother and the parents of Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem, especially their mothers, play crucial roles in their educational practices. They provide learning opportunities in their homes that benefit their children's learning. They 'stay on' their children by monitoring their homework, provide material resources (computer software, games, educational books and toys), engage in their children's school-based activities (taking them to the library, reading with them and helping with tasks and homework assignments) and constantly motivate and encourage them. We observed the intensity of these parents' care about their children's success in learning, providing support and resources in an attempt to cultivate their aspirational capital. The involvement of these parents is seldom recognised, valued or acknowledged by teachers in the institutional space, as is the case with the lack of recognition by the school of role of these parents in their children's education.

Shafiek's interaction with various networks related to his popular culture, his ability to learn through trial and error, and his observational skills inform his learning practices in his domestic environment. He engages conceptually and strategically with a variety of learning resources, which enhances his learning. Drawing on Nespore (1997, p.169), we suggest that his learning disposition is made up of "webs of associations beginning and ending far beyond the boundaries of formal schooling". Engagement in popular youth cultural activities, primarily through ICT use, enhances his knowledgeable ability and translates into hybrid social practices. Shafiek is an active, proficient and intelligent engager in his daily ICT-informed literacy activities.

Bongiwe's involvement in real-world literacy events (religious and economic activities) enables her to live productively in what for her is a culturally alienating environment. She accompanies her mother on missionary religious activities, when she often converses with potential converts in her limited Afrikaans. Despite the fact that she is involved in literacy events in her home, she lacks the agency that Lebo displays. This can be attributed to her detached positioning in this space and the fact that she lacks the social capital (peer and other social contacts) that can provide both instrumental and emotional support to successfully navigate social networks and practices (Yosso, 2005). Her learning subjectivity can be characterised as 'struggling', stymied by the lack of multilingual facility, marked as a struggling learner, who is supported by a caring mother who tries to augment her learning deficits.

In contrast, Tasneem's subjectivity is informed by her linguistic facility in English, which provides her with a congruent home-school navigational capacity and learning persona. She is able to make strategic readings of her social space, and navigates her environment on the basis of these readings. She is raised as a 'resistor' through verbal and non-verbal lessons from her mother, apparently in silent retaliation at her abusive domestic environment. This response is described in Yosso (2005, p.81), who notes that some "mothers teach their daughters to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong and worthy of respect, thus resisting societal messages that belittle and devalue women in society". It is Tasneem's forward-looking and aspirational disposition that affords her opportunities to facilitate her desire for upward mobility. Based on her strategic readings of her social context, she engages mostly in school-orientated learning practices in her home, which provides her with the necessary social skills, more or less in line with the normative discourses of her school.

The analysis of these four students' 'lived realities' in their environmental space shows how they individually inhabit space and draw on various networks, interactions and connections with people and processes to establish their subjective positioning. We provided a consideration of how they transcend their spatial positioning through their engagement with the multiple literacies and educational affordances of their spatial domains. We have shown how their physical locations and mobilities made up the urban itinerant texts for their educational becoming. We also showed how each of them went about assembling their learning positioning in the light of their subjective engagements in their homes, in their human and non-human relations, and through their access to, and use of, educational and linguistic resources. Finally, we suggested that each of the four children developed specific learning practices in their environments which positioned them as specific types of learners on entry into their school and classroom. It is to an analysis of such positioning in the latter environments that this analysis now turns.

Learning suppression in the school and classroom

Whereas the preceding section offered an analysis of the learning positioning of the four children in their domestic and environmental spaces, indicating a range of diverse assemblages, we now present an analysis of their positioning in the school. While this involves equally complex and contesting assemblages, the argument we present here is that the discursive positioning of the children's learning is trumped by institutionally based discourses at the site of the school that amount to a suppression of their rich learning dispositions. The dynamics at the school reworked the children's positioning in such a way that they assumed one-dimensional learning subjectivities emptied of productive and enriching possibilities. These processes position them as particular types of learners to the detriment of their educational success. It is only Tasneem who was able to establish a relatively successful, if one-dimensional, learning position in the classroom. This section draws on two elements of the theoretical framework provided earlier: the first is the notion of 'positioning as a discursive practice', and the second is 'lamination' with reference to discursive layering, both of which are deployed to explain how the children's learning practices are positioned in the school. Being allocated specific bodily positions on an axis of schooled to unruly that confer on them either a 'high' (Tasneem) or 'low' learning status position (Lebo, Shafiek and Bongiwé) is the key outcome of the reductive discursive practices in the classroom.

The school as a homogenising pedagogical site

The school is commonly projected as the normative site for the enactment of all educational reform initiatives authorised on a national scale. It is, however, in our view, not the normative intent of policy reform that gains traction in schools or is even primary in the way that schools establish their functional identities. Our ethnographic work in this township uncovered the primary driver of schooling as being the interplay between the township's socialities, captured in the notion of a 'township on the move' (see Fataar, 2007), on the one hand, and school's institutional processes, on the other. Deprived materiality converges in the four children's township with incessant survivalist human flows to confer on its schools tough and complex social platforms from whence they proceed to establish viable educational processes. This is the world of the school that Lebo, Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem encounter daily. This type of school is described, in the South African context, as 'dysfunctional' (Fataar and Paterson, 2002) or as an 'exposed' site (see Christie 2008). Such schools' institutional identities are framed by having to respond to the myriad social pathologies that accompany their students' school going. Teachers are distracted from their pedagogical tasks by having to respond to challenges associated with the pastoral care or social welfare requirements of their students. In a context where teachers are overwhelmed by students' struggle to survive, they take on one-dimensional professional personas, which can be regarded as strategic responses in tough educational circumstances.

In this particular school the performative persona of the principal plays a crucial role in domesticating the school's functional environment. He succeeded in enacting a range of leadership practices in his engagement with the desperate and often illicit social practices in his neighbourhood, which often seemed intent on destabilising the school, and a myriad of outside services and agencies that converge on his school to play supportive roles. He also transacted a set of management discourses at his school through a combination of flamboyance and verbal posturing. Of primary importance is his command of the foyer and hall space of his school building, whose classrooms are all on the main foyer. He managed to establish a form of surveillance and authority by patrolling this space on a regular basis, giving instructions and advice through a megaphone. This principal's performances, however, stop at the classroom door. He seldom enters the teachers' classrooms or engages in the instructional leadership dimension of his work.

Drawing from our observations, we suggest that he is not aware of the corporal punishment meted out to students in some classes, nor is he exposed to the poor quality of teaching in the classrooms. Based on interviews with some teachers, we suggest that the principal's performative articulations are successful only to the extent that he manages to keep his school afloat in difficult circumstances without any open rebellion, in spite of general distrust by the teachers, But they fail to provide a generative platform for educational improvement at his school.

We observed that there is little productive agency in the teachers' pedagogical encounters with the children inside their classrooms and this in turn has an impact on how these children are positioned as learners in the classroom. The teachers by and large use didactic, 'chalk and talk' pedagogical styles. They rely almost exclusively on the textbook as a teaching resource. Very little happens by way of diverse teaching strategies and experimental methodologies. Fataar (2007) provides a discussion of the qualifications of the teachers at this school. He found that many of them were not trained in the subject areas that they teach, which explains their low level of subject knowledge. Non-teaching activities incessantly interrupt teaching contact time. The four students' learning positioning practices are expressed in a school where their teachers' pedagogies are one-dimensional, discipline is severe and teaching time drastically reduced.

Drawing on our observations we suggest that their learning positioning practices play out primarily in the classroom domain. Davies and Hunt (1994) use the concept of 'marking' to discuss how students who are marginal in such classrooms are portrayed and positioned. Teachers are aware of the differences between the students. While it appears that the teachers don't read their students as homogeneous, what is apparent is that they enact their pedagogical practices in the classroom in a homogenising manner, failing to make distinctions among them. They adopted what can be described as a homogenising pedagogy, in reference to an undifferentiated teaching approach to their students. Where they did differentiate they did so on the basis of crude categories such as 'lazy', 'dumb', 'clever', or 'struggling'. They adopted blunt and unmediated pedagogical styles that largely failed to provide a productive learning platform in their classroom. The homogenising pedagogies of the teachers played a crucial role in how the four students in this study were discursively positioned and how they mediated their learning practices in the classroom.

Students' school and classroom navigations

We now turn to the students' learning navigations in the school and classroom. The constrained spatiality of their classroom positions each of them in a specific way. They in turn navigate their learning relations in the classroom based on their own resources, networks and interactions which they use to work out their trajectories in light of the extant suppressing classroom practices, leading to diverse learning positioning among them. Lebo is positioned as a 'ghost student' (our term) in the classroom. But she challenges this positioning in the school context through her determination to speak colloquial Afrikaans on the playground and English in the classroom. Lebo does periodic translation of the teachers' instructions and explanations, for the other two Xhosa speaking students in the classroom. She possesses what Yosso (2005, p.78) refers to as 'linguistic capital' in reference to her linguistic ability and social skills. She is able to navigate the apparent racialised hostility of the school by assimilating into the dominant culture with relative ease. Blommaert, Collins and Slembronck (2005) notes that multilingualism is not what people have, or don't have, but what their environment enables or disables them from using, which points to a deeper understanding of the use of languages in living contexts such as Lebo's. Armed with linguistic capital, Lebo is able to gain affirmation, by using it to aid her learning. Soudien, (2007) explains that students such as Lebo simply want to blend in, which often leads to alienation from, and ambivalence about, their culture. Lebo also gains affirmation via peer relations practices through conversing with friends and sharing scrapbook ideas. By speaking like the coloured children and playing their games, Lebo was able to signify her willingness to be the same. Her agency lies in her ability to make nuanced readings of her spatial positioning, illustrated by her commitment to Afrikaans and her need to blend in. In the absence of quality teaching in the bounded space of the classroom, Lebo is able to counter her negative positioning in the classroom through her linguistic ability which provides her with a particular form of cultural capital to survive her negative positioning in the classroom, albeit in parallel to her 'lowly positioned' classroom status.

Like Lebo, Shafiek does not allow the institutional space to define him. Because of his recalcitrant behaviour, he is positioned as an 'uncivilized' or 'unruly' body, which impacts on his experiences in the classroom which he appears to experience as a disabling space. Davies and Hunt (1994) note that disruptive students are often marked as problem students, where the problem

is seen to lie in them and is read in terms of their differences from others. These students make the authority relations of the classroom much more visible. Shafiek is disaffected by teacher – led classroom activities. He is continually rebuked by his teachers for his negative behaviour. He seems bored by the learning activities of the classroom, often finishing work quickly and without much care or application. He often finds the Math and Language work boring. Failure to stimulate his learning in the classroom leads him to adopting negative and unruly behaviour. Shafiek manages to transcend this negative positioning in places like the computer room and playground, out of sight of his teachers, where he draws on his ICT proficiency to display to his peers wider interests by sharing inter-religious stories with them, marketing his drawings, and sharing information and computerised skills with his classmates. However, regarded as an unruly student, he is positioned as a low achieving student with disciplinary problems, despite his proficiency in alternative modes of learning via his ICT engagement.

For Bongiwe, the classroom space appears to be a disabling space. She is positioned both as a ‘ghost student’ and as a ‘low-status’ learner, which mark her as a marginal member in the classroom. It appears that she lacks enough confidence and individual agency to transcend her classroom positioning. According to Davies and Hunt (1994, p.389), “being positioned as one who belongs in or is defined in terms of the negative or dependent term, can lock people in repeated patterns of powerlessness”. This feeling of powerlessness is compounded by the way she is treated or viewed by teachers. Rist (2000, in Panofsky, 2003) found that low status students’ lived experiences of schooling differ substantially from that of high status students, especially with regard to their treatment by teachers. Bongiwe never gets called on to participate in activities that could lead to intellectual stimulation. This form of differential treatment is confirmed by one teacher’s reaction, who regarded her as a “‘second language’ student, whose poor academic performance is to be expected” (p.423). Panofsky notes that differential treatment, which translates into differential classroom instruction, is of crucial importance in the development of a student’s identity and agency. It appears from observations, that Bongiwe accepts and lives a positioning as a marginal and low achieving student in the classroom, without the type of parallel learning agency that Lebo and Shafiek display in the non teacher – led domains of school. While the latter two inhabit learning positions that are not wholly defined by their classroom encounters, establishing alternative learning personas out of sight by which they get by, Bongiwe seems to be defined entirely as a low status and marginal learner in the school and classroom.

Tasneem embodies all the qualities of what is regarded as a high-status student in this environment. According to Wilcox (1988, cited in Panofsky, 2003), high-status students are given more opportunities to develop 'self-presentation' skills, such as speaking and presenting before a group, and they receive considerable guidance and praise when doing so (2003). Tasneem reads this space strategically. Her performances in school translate into opportunities that would ensure her upward mobility and may enable her to break free from poverty. Yosso (2005) refers to this type of resilience as based on the exercise of 'aspirational capital'. Most of the developmental opportunities that she receives are as a result of being noticed by her teachers, which is mainly due to the fact that she acts in ways that fit her role as a 'co-operative' student. She is never at the receiving end of the type of dismissive treatment meted out to the other three students in this study. Tasneem is an upwardly mobile student, whose learning practices are marked by her involvement in reading teenage and adult books, writing stories and being involved in school-based organisations. Her diligent attitude to her school work, based on commitment and discipline, allows her to position herself as a successful learner. What is clear is that she is positioned as a competent, high-status student, possessing a 'civilized' or 'schooled' body (Nespor), which informs her learning accomplishments in the classroom.

Conclusion: suppressing laminations in the classroom

This final section is a consideration of the main thread of the argument in this article; i.e. that in viewing learning as an articulated 'moment in space,' as arising out of the dissonant spatialities of these four children's lives, we can better discern how their learning positioning is constituted, the nature of their learning engagements, and the complex ways in which they assemble their learning practices across their lived domains. This better enables an explanation of their learning engagements in their schools and classrooms, which we argue involve institutional and pedagogical practices that serve to suppress their learning capacities, in effect denying or rendering invisible their rich and complex environmental learning navigations. The discursive gap between their learning practices in the home and environment, on the one hand, and the school's educational processes, on the other, seems to be exacerbated as a result of the school's institutional inability to connect with and leverage these students' environmentally generated 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992). This refers to their out-of-school

educational affordances arising from their interactions with literacy and learning events in their everyday lives. These affordances are suppressed in the school and classroom.

As explained above, the institutional dynamics at this school failed to establish a generative pedagogical platform where teachers are productively involved in complex and responsive teaching and learning processes. The teachers are at the spearhead of a range of anxious, one-dimensional pedagogical processes which impact on the way their students access and mobilise their learning navigations. However, while the school's institutional dynamics provide the overarching spatial location for these reductive pedagogical processes it is, in the case of these four students, the learning dynamics in one classroom where they spend most of their learning time with *one teacher* that reveals how the suppression of their learning subjectivities occurs.

The lamination metaphor captures the workings and effects of these teacher-dominated processes. It was clear from observations how this teacher's repeated and routinised classroom behaviour over-determined the learning assemblages and navigations of her students. The teacher positioned herself constantly at the table in the front of the class. She shouted instructions and wrote notes on the board for the students to copy. The students were left unmonitored during the reading period provided at the beginning of the school day ostensibly to improve their literacy levels. Some of them read, while others doodled or pretended to read. At the end of these reading periods the students were simply required to list the books they have completed. There was no active monitoring or engagement with the reading content, nor was such reading factored into the teacher's pedagogical orientations, in effect disconnecting such attempts at reading improvement from the rest of her teaching activities.

She seldom moved between her students to engage them in affirming conversation, choosing to focus only on those students who seemed to be hard-working and diligent learners. For example, she constantly called on Tasneem to run errands and conferred on her and other similarly diligent learners some positive learning reinforcement. Tasneem thrived in this environment as it corresponded with her aspiration to succeed educationally and her ambition to transcend the limitations of this township. Shafiek was at the receiving end of a barrage of negative disciplining comments, which made him utter private comments of disdain for the teacher. Shafiek's classroom

spatiality was fundamentally dissimilar to his richer, domestic literacy navigations, the former creating an unacknowledged and frustrated persona that prevented him from making stronger investments in his classroom learning.

Similarly, Lebo went unacknowledged and unappreciated in the classroom, despite her vital role as a translator of instruction and content. As a ghost student, she was basically left to navigate her own way in this complex, racialised environment. She drew on her conceptually mobile persona, acquired through her cross-spatial networks, to make strategic decisions that facilitated her assimilation into this school's cultural environment, in which her multilingual competence played a major leveraging role in substantiating her learning endeavours in this space. While positioned as a low-status learner in the classroom, unlike Shafiek, she seemed to seriously engage in her school work, despite very little encouragement and support from the teacher. Bongiwe, however, was positioned as a struggling and weak student, mainly because of her lack of linguistic proficiency. Being unable to speak English as the language of instruction in the classroom resulted in her being completely ignored. The teacher never interacted with her. She was left to struggle to understand the teacher's instructions and explanations, which meant that she had to depend on Lebo's translations. Her learning positioning in the classroom was essentially congruent with her environmental learning practices. Like Tasneem, there is a correspondence between her literacy and learning practices in both her home and school. In Bongiwe's case her struggles with her learning in her domestic environment corresponds with her diminished position in the classroom, while for Tasneem her narrow focus on school learning processes takes place in both her home and classroom.

What then seems to be clear is that the teacher-led classroom learning processes were firmly laminated or layered onto the rich, diverse and individualised learning practices of these four children. The resultant laminated configuration approximated a suppressed learning environment, especially as it thickened over time, for the majority of the students in this classroom. This had devastating consequences for their learning navigations and success. But it never managed to entirely suppress the learning subjectivities of the four children whom we studied. Lebo and Shafiek specifically show in their establishment of navigations parallel to their suppression by the teacher that they managed to get by in spite of the teacher's misrecognition of their learning practices. In Bongiwe's case, however, the suppression meant that she was positioned as a struggling – and

possibly failing – student in the context of the learning positioning practices of this classroom.

While the pedagogical practices of teachers such as the one in this classroom requires much more careful analysis, the analysis we provide in this article has highlighted the complex pathways by which children such as Lebo, Shafiek, Bongiwe and Tasneem establish their learning navigations across the socialities of their lives. We have shown how the dissonant spatailities of their various lived domains co-constituted their learning practices and position them as particular types of learners. And finally, we discussed how their learning positions are mediated in the reductive environments of their school and classroom, in which the teachers played a decisive role. This article has hopefully thrown an analytical spotlight on the relationship between, on the one hand, the social relations of learning constituted across multiple spatial domains and, on the other, the four students' learning navigations in the space of the classroom, revealing some key dimensions of how children learn in compromised circumstances.

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